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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

8 JULY 2014

(19.15 - 21.10)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor John Dehaney, Councillor Brenda Fraser,
Councillor Suzanne Grocott, Councillor Jeff Hanna,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Oonagh Moulton and
Councillor Dennis Pearce.
Co-opted members Simon Bennett, Peter Connellan and
Denis Popovs

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council

Ged Curran (Chief Executive) and Julia Regan (Head of
Democracy Services)

1. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST - SEE NOTE OVERLEAF (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Colin Powell, Councillor Peter McCabe (substituted by Councillor Peter Walker) and Councillor Hamish Badenoch (substituted by Councillor David Williams).

The Chair welcomed co-opted member Simon Bennett to his first meeting of the Commission.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 APRIL 2014 (Agenda Item 3)

Agreed.

There were no matters arising.

4. VISION, KEY PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2014/15 - PRESENTATION BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, and the Chief Executive, Ged Curran, addressed the meeting to set out the Council's priorities for Merton in 2014/2015 and beyond.

The Leader stressed that continuity was at the heart of the Council's plans for the next four years. The July 2011 principles continue to provide a strategic framework –

maintaining statutory services whilst protecting services for vulnerable elderly residents and children, clean streets, low council tax and good local schools. He reiterated the Council's commitment to keep accident and emergency and maternity services at St Helier Hospital. Health and wellbeing is high on the Council's agenda and the work to bridge the life expectancy gap between residents in the east and west of the borough would continue. He said that good partnership working would continue and the Council would continue seek opportunities to be entrepreneurial and to duplicate, where applicable, successful initiatives from other places.

The Leader and the Chief Executive both referred to the financial pressures facing the council and cited an article by Professor Tony Travers, Director of the London School of Economics' London Group, in which he predicted that London council budgets would be 50% smaller in 2020 than they were in 2010, regardless of the outcome of the 2015 general election. The Chief Executive said that some of that has been factored in to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and there will be adjustments made after the 2015 election. He stressed that Merton is actually in a relatively good position.

The Chief Executive outlined some of the challenges facing the service departments:

- pressure on school places caused by growing number of children resident in the borough. This will result in significant capital expenditure in 4-5 years time.
- discretionary services such as early years and youth services, which work on the well established principle of early intervention, are in danger of being squeezed
- transfer of responsibility for health provision to 0-5 year olds from the Clinical Commissioning Group to the Council in 2015
- difficulties in recruiting senior, experienced social workers
- provision of affordable housing is problematic in all housing sectors and is a particular challenge for London
- number of homeless people is likely to increase
- changes to the framework for provision of adult social care and support to older people will result in major changes to the Council's systems and processes
- completion of the four borough energy to waste plant will lead to significant financial savings – still some uncertainty, awaiting judicial review at present
- council will be considering ways of collaborating with other boroughs on other services such as waste collection in order to continue to drive out efficiencies and make cost savings

- parking and transport management remain challenging, particularly in terms of balancing the needs of various groups
- there will be development and investment in volunteering, particularly for environmental services

In response to questions about whether the long term work on bridging the gap in life expectancy has been successful, the Leader said that the focus was on increasing life expectancy in the east of the borough. He said that the transfer of the public health function to the Council had provided opportunities to tackle obesity, smoking and other factors that impact on life expectancy. The Chief Executive added that the other major factor impacting on life expectancy is poverty and this in turn is impacted by worklessness, which has been successfully tackled in Merton through a combination of work by the Council and its partners and also by economic growth. The Chief Executive said that although each intervention helps to increase life expectancy, there is a population turnover and new residents move in to the borough with low life expectancy and they in turn will need help.

In response to a question about the asset management strategy, the Chief Executive said that Merton has few assets in comparison with other authorities and so its focus has been on attracting private investment and working with partners. Assets can only be sold once and so the Council has to be sure it is the right time and the right use to maximise the opportunity.

The Leader made a number of further points in response to questions:

- money has been set aside for Morden Park Pool and there will be public consultation on a new pool
- the weekly refuse collection will continue
- around 2000 extra primary school places were provided over the last four years and a similar number will be provided over the next four years by expanding existing good schools throughout the borough
- there are aspirations for each of the town centres, with Rayne's Park serving as a model of success, begun by the Conservative Administration and continued under Labour
- Merton is a London Living Wage authority
- he undertook to consider the costs and benefits of the provision of a welcome pack for new residents
- the possible regeneration of 3 estates by Circle Housing Merton Priory will create an extra 1000 properties

- the shopfront grant available to small businesses has to be matched by the business and there are other conditions to ensure that public money is spent responsibly
- successful court action is publicised in local media in order to support enforcement activity

The Chief Executive responded to questions about the council's transformation programme, saying that the programme was ongoing (including the customer contact work and other projects) and that there was still scope for further efficiency savings. He confirmed that around 50% of the predicted savings from the energy to waste plant had been included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In response to a question about what the Local Government Association was doing to lobby in relation to tax rates and council tax banding, the Chief Executive said that the focus of lobbying was on devolving resources to local government rather than changing tax levels. He undertook to send Commission members the text of a speech made on this subject today by the LGA Chair. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

In response to a question about what the Council was doing to save St Helier Hospital, the Leader said that they would learn from the approach taken by Lewisham. The Chief Executive added that newly issued guidance on health scrutiny made it clear that there was a role for councils to represent residents' views to health providers and commissioners.

RESOLVED: The Commission thanked the Leader and the Chief Executive for attending and giving thorough responses to its questions.

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15 (Agenda Item 5)

Members agreed that the draft work programme set out on page 16 was an accurate reflection of recommendations made at the topic workshop meeting on 12 June 2014.

The Chair said that he and the Head of Democracy Services (Julia Regan) had met the new Borough Commander and he had agreed to attend as scheduled on the draft work programme and to provide information in advance of the meeting so that it could be included in the agenda pack.

RESOLVED: to agree the work programme for 2014/15 set out on page 16.

Members agreed that they wished to continue the work of the financial monitoring task group.

RESOLVED: to re-establish the financial monitoring task group, with the following terms of reference:

- To carry out scrutiny of the Council's financial monitoring information on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
- To advise on other agenda items as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
- To report minutes of its meetings back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
- To send via the Commission any recommendations or references to Cabinet, Council or other decision making bodies.

RESOLVED: to appoint Councillors Suzanne Grocott, Dennis Pearce and Peter Southgate to the financial monitoring task group. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to contact Councillors Hamish Badenoch and Peter McCabe to find out if they wish to join the task group.

RESOLVED: that the Head of Democracy Services should arrange a visit to the CCTV control room for those members who have not previously visited. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services in consultation with the CCTV Manager

Members discussed training needs for the coming year and RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Head of Democracy Services should draft a training programme for 2014/15 based on the training needs identified in paragraph 6.2 of the report
 - 2) That this training programme should include the performance monitoring and corporate parenting training identified by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 3 July 2014
 - 3) That the Mock Panel exercise should be based on a successful scrutiny review carried out by another authority
 - 4) That the dates of parliamentary training sessions and London Scrutiny network training events should be circulated to members once they have been received by the Head of Democracy Services
6. DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS TO ASK THE BOROUGH COMMANDER AT COMMISSION MEETING ON 7 OCTOBER 2014 (Agenda Item 6)

Members discussed and agreed to submit the following questions to the Borough Commander for a response when he attends the Commission meeting on 7 October 2014:

- What are his views on how the Controlled Drinking Zone (CDZ) is working and what could be done to improve it. Note - the context for this question is that members have received complaints from residents regarding continued street drinking. There was discussion about whether signage could be developed that would be easily understandable to the public.

Members noted that a report on the CDZ was received by Licensing Committee on 12 June 2014 and requested a copy of the report. There may be further questions once members have read the report. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to circulate report.

- Please provide the most recent detailed data on crime rates in the format provided by Superintendent David Palmer to the March 2014 meeting of the Commission. If possible, include information on what percentage of crime is committed in each of the three districts and what percentage of police manpower is allocated to each.
- Is most crime committed within 200m of Wimbledon Broadway? Would he like to see a town centre police team to focus on that area?
- Given the need to make significant financial savings, what is the value of each of the two largest police stations in the borough?
- What is the plan for the buildings that the police have vacated?
- How is the new neighbourhood policing model working? Is it an effective model? Please base these responses on evidence and state what evidence has been used to support your views.
- Where and how are officers being deployed across the borough?
- How frequently are officers pulled out of the borough and for what reasons?
- The Commission will receive a report on the review of CCTV at its meeting in October. What enhancements would the Borough Commander like to see made to the CCTV system?
- Please provide an update on the sponsorship offer by the Baitul Futuh Mosque to pay the qualification fee for 50 local people for the certificate of policing knowledge certificate that new recruits are required to gain prior to starting work with the police. How many of those recruits will be deployed in Merton?
- What support is provided to schools to combat crime in schools and what statistics are available regarding the level of crime in schools?

The Head of Democracy Services, Julia Regan, undertook to send members the link to the Metropolitan Police crime figures website so that they could look at ward level statistics. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services