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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

26 NOVEMBER 2013

(19.15 - 21.55)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Iain Dysart, Samantha George, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Logie Lohendran, Russell Makin, Diane Neil Mills and Dennis Pearce

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mark Allison and Edith Macauley

John Dimmer (Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnership), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Darren Williams (Borough Commander) 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 the co-opted members Peter Connellan, Jo Sullivan-Lyons and Colin Powell.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2013 (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: to agree the minutes.

As a matter arising from the minutes, Councillor Peter Southgate said he was pleased to announce that the Commission's referral to Cabinet on the control of noise nuisance had resulted in a decision by Cabinet on 21 October 2013 agreeing to a six month pilot to extend the out of hours service to Friday nights, for which a budget of £12,000 has been allocated.

4 POLICING IN MERTON - BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 4)

The Borough Commander, Darren Williams, drew the Commission's attention to the information that he had provided in response to requests at the previous meeting and subsequently (published alongside these minutes) and the weekly updates that are published on-line. He said that crime figures continued to be low and public satisfaction with the police high. He added that Merton is the only borough where satisfaction levels amongst black and ethnic minority groups are similar to white groups.

Darren Williams announced that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community at the Baitul Futuh Mosque in Morden have offered to sponsor 50 new police recruits by paying the £1000 qualification fee for the CPK certificate that new recruits are required to gain prior to starting work. He expects this to lead to a much better match between the demographic profiles of police officers and the local community. He added that recruits from black and ethnic minority groups will have a mentor and a black and ethnic minority officer working with them for a period of two years.

In response to questions about the number of police officers in Merton, Darren Williams said that the figures for November 2012 and figures post-implementation of the Local Policing Model are not like for like comparisons because some functions have changed, for example, emergency response control rooms and custody arrangements operate differently now. He added that the Metropolitan Police has made budget savings by reducing its building costs and reducing the number of senior officers so that they have been able locally to increase the number of junior officers.

Darren Williams explained that how officers are deployed within the borough is reviewed three times a day so the police can respond to crime patterns and incidents as they arise. He said that it would be helpful to have sponsorship from local businesses in Wimbledon Town Centre to fund an extra unit there. Kensington and Chelsea have a similar arrangement.

The Commission thanked Darren Williams and his officers for all their hard work, as reflected in continuing low crime rates and high performance on other measures.

5 CIVIL UNREST - CABINET'S ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 5)

Questions were raised about the implementation of two of the recommendations:

Recommendation 3

The Commission wished to clarify whether the standard operating procedures and guidance for staff have actually been given to staff or whether they are still being drafted. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to contact relevant officer and then email Commission members

Recommendation 11

A task group member said that the task group had hoped that all schools would invite a school based police officer (or another police officer) to talk to pupils about stop and search. ACTION: The Director of Children, Schools and Families undertook to send an update on which schools are participating and any reasons for non-participation.

RESOLVED: That, as the recommendations of the task group have now been implemented (subject to the receipt of additional information requested), there will be no further progress reports to the Commission.

6 POLICY AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS IN RESPONSE TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships (John Dimmer) and the Director of Children, Schools and Families (Yvette Stanley), outlined the main points in the report:

- the predicted population growth will have implications for all council services and for borough infrastructure
- three key shifts in the age profile of the borough are predicted to be a growth in the 0-19 population, decrease of ages 20-35 and increase in those aged 65+
- Merton will become increasingly diverse, though still less so than the London average. The child population will continue to be more diverse than the adult population
- population size will increase most in the poorest and more diverse wards, mainly in the east of the borough
- number of households will increase
- service implications are set out in charts within the report
- demographic and legislative changes will result in increased financial pressures for the council

In response to a question about why the number of children was increasing whilst the number of those of childbearing age (20-35) was reducing, Yvette Stanley said that a number of factors would contribute to this including that the population was increasingly mobile, with larger families moving into the borough. Also, people are having children over a longer period of time, not just between ages of 20 and 35. She added that it is assumed that the number of births will stabilise at 3,500 per year but this may change depending on the demographic profile of those moving into the borough.

Yvette Stanley said there had been a significant expansion in primary school places in the east of the borough already and there is scope for further expansion to meet need.

Further information was given in response to questions about migration and nationality:

- there are no projected figures available on the impact of the relaxation of EU working restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, either in terms of numbers or where in the UK they would be likely to settle
- experience shows that an influx from a particular country is often followed by a reduction in numbers due to relocation elsewhere in the London, UK or abroad
- historically, inward and outward migration has been evenly matched in Merton
- figure 4.4 (BAME population growth) and figure 4.8 (countries of birth) appear to be contradictory because people from eastern Europe are classified as part of the White community
- country of birth data was obtained from the census but Scotland should not have been included in figure 4.8. ACTION: Head of Policy Strategy and

Partnerships undertook to redo the figures and provide percentages for data in figure 4.8

- the customer contact programme is considering the format and content of information to be provided to new residents of the borough

The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, responded to questions about the financial challenges facing the council. She has had discussion with other London treasurers regarding innovative ways of responding to financial pressures and finding further efficiencies. She said that the council has weighted savings targets and pursued back office efficiencies in order to protect the front line services as much as possible. Yvette Stanley added that the Children, Schools and Families department has re-profiled services to shift resources towards the most vulnerable service users.

Caroline Holland said that the Medium Term Financial Strategy had taken into account the additional council tax income from a predicted increase in number of households. John Dimmer added that the number is a forecasted range and that 3,000 new homes are planned at present so the actual total is unlikely to be as high as 12,000. Caroline Holland said that the impact on council tax of conversions from houses to flats will depend on the council tax band applied to those properties. She added that the council will need to monitor the impact of conversions from shops to domestic dwellings. Increased mobility will make in-year council tax collections rate vary more than at present.

Caroline Holland said that no assumptions had been made at present regarding the cost of the council tax benefit scheme beyond 2015/16, pending a decision by council on the content of the scheme.

Councillor Samantha George requested a list of the sites shown in figure 7.8 and more detailed data on the decline in car ownership (page 73). ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to contact the relevant officers

A member raised concerns about the potential for vulnerable children in highly mobile families to “slip through the cracks”. Yvette Stanley explained the transfer arrangements for children who are subject to Child protection Plans. She said that the biggest challenge is posed by families who move very frequently and are not on the radar of statutory services.

In response to questions on specific details within the report, officers undertook to:

- find out whether there is evidence to show that restricting car parking provision on new housing developments reduces car ownership
- clarify the policy basis for car parking controls
- check the basis of government data in figure 5.2 as the key appears counter-intuitive to the reader

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to contact the relevant officers

RESOLVED:

1. To recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels each examine the sections of the report that are relevant to their remit, bearing in mind their

existing work programme, and to use the information as a context for the budget scrutiny discussion in January

2. That the report should be used as a context for identifying potential scrutiny topics and for discussion at the topic workshops in June 2014

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

7 BUSINESS PLAN 2014-18 (Agenda Item 7)

8. Scrutiny of the Business Plan 2014-18: comments and recommendations from the overview and scrutiny panels

9. Note of the meeting of the financial monitoring task group, 29 October 2013

The Commission agreed to take agenda items 7, 8 and 9 together.

Capital programme

The Chair suggested that the Commission's report to Cabinet should highlight pertinent points made by the financial monitoring task group:

- The task group recommended that councillors' needs should be taken into account in the provision of any document management solution (Document Management and Customer Contact Programme). Cabinet to note that the Director of Corporate Services had agreed to consult with councillors and Councillor Diane Neil Mills volunteered to take part
- The task group suggested that the appointment of an asbestos compliance officer be brought forward (item KSR45/CG03 in the risk register)
- The task group remarked that the capital programme overall is still quite large in comparison with actual spend in previous years

The Chair also suggested that the Commission should forward its discussion on making provision for growth in adult social care in response to demographic and legislative changes. The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, assured the Commission that the 2014/15 budget already contained net growth in that area and said that further modelling work would need to take place in relation to subsequent years for all services, for which additional information that was not currently available would be necessary.

RESOLVED: To forward to Cabinet the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the financial monitoring task group's discussion of the Business Plan 2014-18

Medium term financial strategy

A member raised concerns about the increase in the Housing Benefits budget and asked that a report be provided to give more detail on this, including the financial implications for the Council and information on tenant numbers by housing tenure. She also asked that the Commission be provided with information about the funding arrangements relating to Free Schools.

In response to a question about the service plan timetable, Caroline Holland said that the interim service plans would be submitted to Cabinet on 17 February and to Budget Council on 5 March 2014. She said that there would be no new budget savings for 2014/15 and that the new service plans would inform saving plans for 2015/16 onwards.

A number of members raised concern that the service plans would not be available as contextual information for the final round of budget scrutiny meetings in January. Members asked whether draft service plans could be made available to those meetings (on existing or revised dates to accommodate this). ACTION: Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democracy Services

RESOLVED:

1. To express concern to Cabinet about the lack of service planning information to inform the development of the budget
2. To forward the above discussion points on housing benefits and free schools to Cabinet

Note of the meeting of the financial monitoring task group, 29 October 2013

Members of the task group referred to the additional information that had been provided to them by email in response to questions raised at the meeting on 29 October 2013. The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, undertook to ensure that the information on assumed interest rates would be made available. In response to a question, Caroline Holland added that the Transfer Payments set out in the period 6 financial monitoring report related mainly to an adjustment to take account of increasing rent levels for recipients of Housing benefits. Task group members agreed to discuss further at the next task group meeting.

Task group members expressed regret that the additional information had not been published with the agenda and requested that the information be sent to all members of the Commission. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services.

RESOLVED: That any questions raised and information requested by the financial monitoring task group that are pertinent to an agenda item of the Commission will be included in the Commission's published agenda papers

The Chair explained that the task group had discussed a range of options for the local council tax benefit scheme, had recognised that any decision on these would be a political one and therefore a matter for the Cabinet rather than scrutiny. He praised the modelling work provided to the task group by the Head of Revenues and Benefits. Caroline Holland added that the Band D modelling information, requested by the task group, would be available shortly.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14 (Agenda Item 10)

RESOLVED:

1. to agree the work programme subject to reviewing the date of the 30 April meeting at Commission's meeting in January.

2. to ask the Director of Corporate Services to identify when interim service plans would be available for scrutiny and, if necessary, to ask the Head of Democracy Services to identify revised budget scrutiny meeting dates to accommodate this.
- ACTION:** Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democracy Services