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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

11 MARCH 2014

(19.15 - 21.30)

**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:** Superintendent David Palmer, Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement), Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services) and Yvette Stanley (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department) and Evereth Willis (Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer)

### 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, co-opted member.

The Chair announced that two new parent governor representatives had been appointed – Dennis Popovs (primary schools) and Simon Bennett (secondary and special schools).

### 3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2014 (Agenda Item 3)

Agreed.

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

Councillor Peter Southgate welcomed Superintendent David Palmer who was attending on behalf of the new Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Stuart Macleod, who had taken up the post that day.

David Palmer introduced the report on police numbers, which was intended to explain how numbers and roles had been affected by operational and remit changes over the past two years. He said that it was a complicated picture and that, depending on the definitions used, the overall number of police in Merton has increased by 2 to 8 officers. One member queried the maths and said that he thought the difference was actually zero.

Members of the Commission thanked David Palmer for providing a clear written report and asked questions about police numbers and roles. David Palmer made a number of points in response:

- performance on response rates has increased slightly despite reduction in response team numbers, due to new ways of working
- the reduction in police staff numbers has had an impact on some aspects of the back office such as statistics and communications
- the reduction in the number of PCSOs has had an impact on visibility, based on feedback from public meetings. This may be exacerbated by a change in shift patterns of those officers to be more closely aligned to demand profile, which means a greater presence late at night when there is more crime but this is not as visible to residents
- there has been an increase in the number of officers and hours spent on walking patrol
- the majority of the MSCs (Specials) who have left did so to become regular Police Constables

David Palmer was asked for 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. He said that this was a very positive initiative and that there has been considerable interest and over 100 applications but that it is too early to confirm how many would be suitable for entry into the MPS. He also stated that those recruited through this process would be given opportunity to work in the borough if they wished to.

David Palmer outlined the information provided in the Metropolitan Police Corporate Dashboard (pages 15-35 of the agenda). Members praised the high performance shown by the figures, and asked how they had managed to reduce crime rates in Merton faster than elsewhere. David Palmer explained that crime rates had been tackled by:

- using intelligence to target and co-ordinate resources effectively
- examining what tactics worked and didn't work for different crime types and making adjustments accordingly
- focus on control and management of offenders
- strong partnership working.

## 5. MONITORING THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITIES COMMITMENTS (Agenda Item 5)

Evereth Willis, Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer, introduced the report. She drew the Commission's attention to the actions set out in Appendix 1 and the achievements described in paragraph 2.8 of the report.

Members highlighted the need for disability access work to be carried out at Motspur Park and Raynes Park stations (paragraph 2.9). ACTION: Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer to find out and provide the timetable for this work

Evereth Willis and Yvette Stanley, Director of Children, Schools and families, provided further information in response to questions:

- Moodle is a communication system used in adult education establishments
- there has been good progress on narrowing the educational achievement gap between different groups of pupils (grouped by ethnicity, gender and eligibility for free school meals). Doing so continues to be challenging and work in Merton has drawn on best practice elsewhere and expertise from external organisations.
- harassment and hate crime action (item 1.2.3 in the appendix) was identified for Merton Adult Education due to the high proportion of service users with learning difficulties and other vulnerabilities. The community cohesion strategy identifies hate crime and other actions across a wide range of services.
- "out of court disposal" (item 4.2.1) is a package of support to keep a young offender out of court. Merton is successful at doing this due to a good working relationship with the courts and local police
- Public health has made considerable efforts to inform communities about service such as health champions (item 4.2.2) and ESOL classes (item 4.2.3). There are also specific services commissioned for specific communities and these change in line with demographic changes

Evereth Willis undertook to check whether the 10% target on increasing access to library services among under-represented groups (item 2.1.9) was realistic. ACTION: Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer

A member suggested that measures of success for use of data such as the annual residents survey (item 4.4) and the census (item 4.5) should relate to an actual impact on service delivery rather than just making the information available on the website.

Yvette Stanley undertook to find out whether any providers were willing to honour the day services reduction via direct payments (item 1.2.11) and if not why not. ACTION: Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer

In response to a question, Kim Brown, Joint Head of HR Policy Development, said that it was council policy for staff recruitment panels to comprise at least two people and that refresher training was currently being provided to promote good practice. She undertook to email Councillor Peter McCabe the Council's recruitment policy.  
ACTION: Joint Head of HR Policy Development

## 6. CUSTOMER CONTACT PROGRAMME UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Sophie Ellis, Assistant Director of Business Improvement, briefly introduced the report and provided clarification in response to questions:

- Red Quadrant had been asked to undertake analysis on customer segmentation, customer views, how customer interaction takes place now and how it compares to other councils and how the council might approach customer insight going forward.
- Red Quadrant had provided three options for a possible customer insight function within the organisation (p279) and a decision on the optimum structure would need to be taken in consultation with Members once the technical solution was identified.
- The next steps in the project are to focus on technological change to drive the move to online services, continue the procurement process, implement process and business changes that aren't reliant on technological change and to prioritise areas that will have the greatest impact
- All three shortlisted bidders have indicated that they will continue to detailed solutions phase

Members commented that because the appendices were so long and lacked a guide to content, it had been difficult to assimilate the information within them. A number of members stressed the need for short clear reports for effective scrutiny.

Members noted that the Red Quadrant work demonstrated that 84% of residents were "web ready" and said that it is clear that the case for implementing web based customer interaction is overwhelming. Members expressed concern and some frustration that slow decision making would result in Merton falling behind due to the time that had been taken to implement the customer contact strategy.

A member stressed the need for good data management to underpin any new systems and pointed to examples of where this was currently lacking. Sophie Ellis said that the programme had been designed to contribute to improved data management by introducing "primary datasets" that would feed into and be updated by other systems.

A member said that it would be helpful to have a corporate dashboard of key performance indicators in a format similar to that presented by Superintendent David Palmer for an earlier agenda item at this meeting.

The Commission agreed that it wished to see more progress and prompt action on this project and asked what the vision was for three years hence. Sophie Ellis said that in three years time there would be a series of systems that were integrated, a single set of customer and address databases, improved data quality, electronic document management and on-line transactions that can be accessed by a variety of devices. She said that street scene services would be the first to be implemented because it was clear this was where there was most opportunity and demand. The aim would be a reduction in the proportion of interactions by phone and an increase in on-line transactions.

The Commission asked Sophie Ellis to provide budget information on how much had been spent on the customer contact project to date. ACTION: Assistant Director of Business Improvement

#### 7. MEMBER SURVEY 2014 - ANALYSIS (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Peter Southgate introduced the report and said that he was pleased by the response rate. He drew the Commission's attention to the list of proposed actions set out on page 349.

The Commission RESOLVED to agree the proposed actions with the following amendments:

- that the "mock scrutiny panel" training should be offered to returning councillors as well as new ones (action point 6)
- that the Chair of the commission should write to new councillors rather than to candidates (action point 9)

#### 8. FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP - NOTE OF MEETING ON 27 FEBRUARY 2014 (Agenda Item 8)

The Commission noted the minutes of the task group meeting.

#### 9. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14 (Agenda Item 9)

Agreed.