

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

15 SEPTEMBER 2015

(7.15 pm - 8.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Hamish Badenoch,
Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Suzanne Grocott,
Councillor Jeff Hanna, Councillor Abigail Jones,
Councillor Oonagh Moulton, Councillor Katy Neep,
Denis Popovs and Geoffrey Newman

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement), John Hill (Head of Public Protection and Development, ENVR) and Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted members Peter Connellan and Colin Powell.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

None

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The Commission agreed the minutes as a true record of the meeting

4 VISION, KEY PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2015/16 - PRESENTATION BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader said the scrutiny function continues to provide a forum to generate unity on difficult decisions and provide a sense of purpose. It is important that the council is not only perceived by our residents as an administrator of cuts but that they recognise we carry out a wide range of important duties including protecting vulnerable people. The council continues to build upon the July Principles which were set out in 2011. There have been a number of successes including:

All libraries have remained open and two new ones are in development;

Children's centres have remained open

We have met the demand for school places, especially primary school.

The council conducted a consultation regarding the allocation of an £11 million budget for a new swimming pool. The consultation allowed residents to make suggestions about how the money should be spent which highlighted the challenge of balancing limited resources.

The council continues to look at opportunities for shared services based on the memorandum of understanding with Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Croydon. We are proud of the legal shared service where Merton is the lead. We are also part of the South London Partnership which is working on devolution opportunities.

The Merton 2015 programme is moving forward we are now moving towards the Best Council in London by 2020.

The Chief Executive said he wished to reflect on the role of the council as leader of place. It is to lead communities and reflect ambitions of community in time of great change, although local government is still to find clarity from central government on a number of key issues including; how we care for vulnerable members of society such as they young, sick and the elderly. Also how do we tackle the weaknesses in the economy in order to generate medium and higher income jobs. The UK's place in the world is contentious with no certainty on our place in the EU and NATO. We are still to develop and determine how to implement capital infrastructure plans. There are pressures on social care, school places and housing stock. The cost pressures mean that it will be hard to sustain the level of services with the current budget envelope. There are opportunities in town centres with emerging plans for Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood

Merton 2015 has been successful and we will finish in a strong position, with the highest ever level of resident satisfaction and a significant number of awards received across our service areas. However the staff survey highlighted that some staff have said that the council is surviving rather than being inspirational so we have launched the 2020 programme which will have clear objectives by October.

A Commission member asked how we will determine that Merton is the best council and if there will be independent verification. The Chief Executive said we will develop key performance indicators for services. We will also use softer measures such resident and user satisfaction data.

A Commission member asked if any other council will be aspiring to the best in London and will be using the same criteria. The Chief Executive said there is a danger of this and we will need to apply rigorous criteria. However to be the best should be our ambition and that is what our residents expect of us. The Leader added that it is a goal, ambition and direction of travel.

In response to questions on achieving the best council, the Chief Executive reported that it is difficult to disseminate messages to residents throughout the borough because of legal constraints however councillors and the Merton Partnership can play an important role in helping us to do this. The vision was developed to bring together the different parts of the council who are delivering services in difficult circumstances, with the aim of engaging all parts of the council to be the best.

A Commission member asked what contribution Merton will make to devolved powers. The Leader said the South London Partnership provides a legal vehicle which is required for councils to make decisions on areas such as transport as no individual council will get devolved powers.

A commission member asked about the impact of the summer budget on local government and if we are lobbying central government about the impact it is having on local services. The Chief Executive said we will not have clarity about the budget until November or December when figures are broken down to local authority level. The Leader said they are lobbying government through London Councils and The Local Government Association.

A Commission member asked how we embed public health across local authority services. The Chief Executive said public health has brought a number of new skill sets to the council including in depth data analysis to support policy, a social model of health which incorporates the wider determinants of health. The Leader said we had a peer review looking at the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the outcomes were very positive in helping us to continue to embed health.

In response to questions on bringing private land back into public use, progress with Y cube and reducing temporary accommodation, the Chief Executive reported that we spend the majority of our capital resources on schools and therefore do not have the means to buy public land. Although Merton has the lowest level of temporary accommodation in London we are still under pressure to meet housing demand. The Leader reported that Y-cube flats have delivered a small number of units and we are looking at other available units in the borough.

A Commission member asked what opportunities and challenges CrossRail 2 will bring to the local authority. The Chief Executive said Merton will be a hub which will provide the borough with a direct link into central London. There will be major structural changes in Wimbledon which will impact houses and businesses.

5 ENFORCEMENT (Agenda Item 5)

A presentation was given by the Head of Public Protection outlining the current framework for the delivery of all enforcement services across the E&R Directorate. The presentation outlined the existing pressures and the limitations on the ability to enforce, but also highlighted new initiatives that are currently being implemented or explored in respect of how we will deliver enforcement services in the future.

A Commission member said they are concerned about private properties falling into disrepair and queried the availability of guidance leaflets that councillors can give to offenders. Also, in regards to enforcement of planning legislation are the council retrieving the full cost from offenders.

The Head of Public Protection said there are four officers in Planning and Enforcement who deal with, amongst other issues, matters relating to dilapidated buildings. There is a significant amount of information on-line which provides advice on all enforcement services including those delivered by planning enforcement.

The Directorate are currently exploring initiatives such as generic enforcement roles so that other officers have the ability to serve enforcement notices across a wide service area. Successful initiatives include the establishment of the Shared Regulatory Service with Richmond Council. This has improved resilience and skills base amongst officers.

RESOLVED

The Enforcement Review Task Group to develop training/support sessions for members with a particular emphasis on planning enforcement.

The Directorate to continue it's work in exploring new initiatives regarding delivery of all enforcement services with a particular emphasis on identifying opportunities for generic enforcement roles.

The Directorate to explore the possibility of creating additional enforcement posts through alternative sources of funding. The example given by the Head of Public Protection was the funding of an officer post in Trading Standards through monies recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act.

6 CUSTOMER CONTACT PROGRAMME UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

The Assistant Director of Business Improvement gave an overview of the report.

A commission member asked for clarification that the budget envelope has remained the same and it was confirmed that it has.

A Commission member asked for the progress regarding customer data and if the master set of customers will include children. The Assistant Director of Business Improvement said the team will also give some consideration to the needs of those such as looked after children. The technology has the ability to include and protect sensitive data but officers will need to consider carefully issues such as confidentiality.

Commission members asked if we will be designing the Merton website by looking at other areas. The Assistant Director of Business Improvement confirmed that we will be looking at the work of other boroughs without being overly reliant on it.

A commission member asked if any savings from the customer contact programme have been factored in to the medium term financial strategy. The Director of Corporate Services said some savings had been identified and more were expected in the future.

RESOLVED

The Commission thanked officers for attending the meeting and presenting the report.

7 TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

RESOLVED

The Commission agreed the terms of reference for the new task group

8 FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP - MINUTES OF MEETING ON 22.07.15 (Agenda Item 8)

The Commission noted the work of the financial monitoring task group

9 WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16 (Agenda Item 9)

Noted