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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 16 OCTOBER 2013

(19.15 - 21.50)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Russell Makin (in the Chair),
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Samantha George,
Councillor Dennis Pearce, Councillor John Sargeant,
Councillor Ray Tindle, Councillor Ian Munn and
Councillor David Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental
Sustainability and Regeneration, Councillor Phillip Jones
(substitute for Councillor Stan Anderson), Chris Lee, Director of
Environment and Regeneration, James McGinlay, Head of
Sustainable Communities, Richard Lancaster, Future Merton
Programme Manager, Mitra Dubet, Network Improvement and
Renewal Manager, Cormac Stokes, Head of Street Scene and
Waste, Doug Napier, Leisure and Culture Greenspaces
Manager, Lester Sonden, Sutton and East Surrey Water,
Anthony Ferrar, Sutton and East Surrey Water, Stuart Hyslop,
Sutton and East Surrey Water, Rebecca Redman, Scrutiny
Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

None.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 JUNE 2013 (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: Panel agreed the Minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda Item 4)

Councillor Russell Makin asked about Fields in Trust. Chris Lee confirmed that all legal documentation had been completed for Figges Marsh. He also confirmed that the London Road Fields in Trust application was not going ahead at this stage due to a gap in the Councils documentation necessary to complete the deed of dedication.

Councillor John Sargeant enquired when information on parking (including residential permits) would be coming to the Panel. Rebecca Redman confirmed that the item on Parking and shopping parades is scheduled for the

November 2013 meeting although this did not include residential visitor parking permits as there was no pre decision scrutiny scheduled on this issue.

5. PRESENTATION: SUTTON AND EAST SURREY WATER DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2015-2020 (Agenda Item 5)

Representatives, Lester Sonden, Stuart Hyslop and Anthony Ferrar, from Sutton and East Surrey Water provided a presentation to the Panel on the business, services provided, customer base, priorities and objectives, draft Business plan and resources (see attached presentation).

Lester Sonden and Anthony Ferrar sought the Panels views on the objectives within the Draft Business Plan and the proposed increase in charges of £7 per household per annum by 2020

Councillor John Sargeant asked about the scale of the consultation undertaken and if the £20 million investment would result in loss of profit in the long term. Anthony Ferrar explained that consultation had been undertaken with 600 domestic and 200 business customers. This involved a group that was representative of the socio- economic make up of the area and the outcomes of this consultation will shape the business plan. The proposals made in the business plan will also be subject to scrutiny by an external regulator. Anthony Ferrar added that a reasonable predictable return was expected.

Councillor Phillip Jones asked about security of supply and if the percentage of the supply coming from ground sources was sustainable. Lester Sonden explained that large additional resources couldn't be developed in this area but that the company was building greater resilience so additional water could be pumped into the northern part of its supply area from the southern part if required. At present the company does not have any concerns regarding water resources. Also a long term plan for sustainability is in place.

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked about lining improvements to pipes. Lester Sonden confirmed that this is not used.

Councillor Ray Tindle asked about water poverty. Anthony Ferrar explained that a social tariff was proposed given that water poverty is increasing; however, at present the company did not have a large number of customers who could not pay their bill. Under the scheme bills would reduce by 50% for those who were eligible. Subsidies would be made available to customers, linked to an assessment against eligibility criteria.

Councillor Phillip Jones enquired if any work had been undertaken to determine who may be affected and how they could be targeted. Anthony Ferrar said some initial work had been undertaken but more would have to be done if the proposal is implemented.

Lester Sonden explained that long term, it was proposed to introduce a compulsory metering programme. Currently, the company is metering domestic properties on change of occupancy.

Councillor David Dean enquired about smart meters. Lester Sonden explained that smart meters were helpful to detect leakage and so prohibit potential for higher bills because issues have not been identified. A form of smart metering is being trialled by the company.

Councillor Ray Tindle enquired about potential threats to the operation of the water works sites and what plans were in place to mitigate this risk. Lester Sonden explained that risk management plans were in place and that CCTV was in operation on the sites.

Anthony Ferrar asked if Members supported the proposals. The Panel agreed that there was a need to protect the vulnerable, consider more effective use of meters and ensure that there was a commitment to the planned improvements in the business plan.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the presentation.

6. SCRUTINY REVIEW - 20 MPH LIMITS / ZONES UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Chris Lee introduced the report and explained that this was the first of possibly a number of reports to come to the Panel. He stated that research is still in early stages and evidence is emerging to show a slightly confusing picture from the studies undertaken. Chris Lee noted that the police do not treat enforcement of these zones/limits as a priority.

Councillor Dennis Pearce enquired about the height of signage and if the cost of implementation of these zones was justified by a 0.9% reduction in the average speed. Furthermore, if the speed limits/zones are not enforced, what other methods for slowing traffic could be employed.

Richard Lancaster explained that the 0.9% figure reflected the information gathered from benchmarking from research undertaken in Portsmouth. The council only hold 1 year of data post implementation and therefore this information needs to be treated with caution.

Mitra Dubet explained that the signage meets the requirements and standards set and that it is suitable for residential roads. Other traffic calming measures are available but have their own problems associated with them. Historically 20 mph zones were introduced in areas with traffic calming measures and 20mph speed Limits where speeds were low. The effectiveness of a lower speed is linked to physical measures as well as driver behaviour.

Councillor Ian Munn added that there was difficulty with the visibility of signage.

Mitra Dubet explained that there was a difference between zones and limits and that the council have received complaints that there are too many signs, not that they are not visible.

Councillor John Sargeant explained that this data was misleading. Data listed presented average figures and this was not helpful in terms of establishing the highs and lows. Until we have this information this cannot be judged.

Councillor David Dean added that there was inconsistency around the borough in terms of limits. This should be looked at on all side roads and if they should be 20mph zones should be determined. Residents should be consulted on implementation also and any traffic calming measures should not be a hindrance for residents.

Councillor Phillip Jones argued that there was a need for better signage at Wandle Road and that there have been frequent complaints on the Wandle Road site due to the speed cushions there.

Councillor Dennis Pearce added that areas should be targeted without using cushions.

Councillor Ian Munn asked about air pollution on roads with traffic calming measures.

Councillor Samantha George stated that she did not feel the report met the requirements of the Panel in that the data was misleading and the outcomes further to council motion on 20mph zones are not included.

Richard Lancaster explained that zones are self enforcing as they include traffic calming measures and limits are not supported by traffic calming measures. The research presented is inconclusive as there is only 1 years worth of data available at present. There is a need for further data to determine the impact. There is clear evidence, however, that zones have an impact on speed.

Councillor John Sargeant added that whilst zones would be effective, there was a need for more in other areas and that there should be a campaign around behavioural change in drivers. More analysis was required and should be presented to a future meeting for discussion.

Councillor Russell Makin requested that a more detailed report be brought to a future Panel meeting for discussion.

Councillor Andrew Judge added that this was an important topic for discussion but that it should be noted that certain roads made the implementation of traffic calming measures difficult. Enforcement is needed in some zones but the council has no powers to do so and the police in Merton have put less resource into this.

RESOLVED: That a follow up report on 20mph zones/limits be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE GREEN DEAL TASK GROUP SCOPING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor Russell Makin presented the draft Scoping Report for the Panels Task Group review of Climate Change and the Green Deal and sought the Panels comments and endorsement.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed the scope for the Task Group Review.

8. UPDATE OF PROGRESS ON ACTION PLAN FROM SCRUTINY REVIEW ON TREES (Agenda Item 8)

Doug Napier outlined developments to date further to the Panels Task Group Review of Trees and how the agreed recommendations made by the Task Group have been implemented. Doug Napier informed the Panel that one of the most important outcomes from the review has been the greater co-operation between departments in the authority, in particular in terms of the work of Highways and Green Spaces.

Councillor Ian Munn expressed concerns about the survival of chestnut trees due to moth problems. Doug Napier explained that the leaf miner moth was being monitored and this has been a problem over 8 years. This type of moth may not necessarily be good for trees in the long term. There is no prescriptive treatment, but unlike Oak Reccessionary Moth, there is no negative impact upon resident's health.

Councillor Ray Tindle enquired if the council monitored the contract regarding tree maintenance and if failure to maintain trees to the agreed standard resulted in a penalty clause.

Doug Napier outlined that Merton Council had increased its maintenance and watering in 2013 and also undertook monitoring and that there had been a 97% survival rate for young trees this year.

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked if a three year cycle of inspection was frequent enough. Doug Napier explained that there needed to be a careful balance between need and resources.

Councillor David Dean enquired about the council's planting strategy in relation to different species. Doug Napier commented that the council had improved in its planning of planting different species. There was an on-going issues with Lime Trees but that local character and maintenance issues are considered when planting trees, as well as creating themes in streets. A Tree Strategy has been one of the key outcomes of the task group review.

Councillor Samantha George asked how the council financed tree planting and maintenance had been undertaken (as a recommendation that was made by the task group and agreed by Cabinet). Chris Lee confirmed that the treatment of funding of tree planting and maintenance is properly governed and that a capital budget of £60,000 per annum was allotted to tree planting and supplements this by bidding for investment and funding, for example, the mayor of London Tree Planting fund, when and where available.

Councillor Dennis Pearce noted that he felt there was a reduction in the number of volunteers for tree planting.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

9. UPDATE ON SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL TASK GROUP REVIEWS (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor John Sargeant asked about ways of promoting the re-use of items of bulky waste (as one of the recommendations made by the Efficient Household Waste Management Task Group).

Cormac Stokes confirmed that discussions were on-going and that options were being explored. There has been an increase in the level of recycling from bulky waste but there is a preference for re-use.

Councillor Ian Munn added that the data in the update was quite dated and therefore not as useful as it could be to enable effective scrutiny.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

10. PRESENTATION: TOWN CENTRE PLANNING/REGENERATION (Agenda Item 10)

Panel received a presentation on the recent development in town centre regeneration in the main town centres in Merton: Mitcham, Morden, Colliers Wood, Raynes Park and Wimbledon (see attached presentation).

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked what particular developments resulted in the council winning the National Transport Award and also where buses would be relocated should developments at Morden Underground Station go ahead.

James McGinlay informed the Panel that this was awarded for the improvements at Wimbledon Station and also that the redevelopment at Morden Underground station did not provide for the relocation of buses and that this was the subject of on-going discussions with TfL.

Councillor Ian Munn enquired about the impact on the proposed regeneration by government changes in planning controls and what interest there might be

in allowing shops to be turned into residential units. James McGinlay explained that the council had asked central government for exemption in Wimbledon and some other estates to this option and that this request had been unsuccessful. The council has received a large number of applications had been received for permission for development rights. In order for development to sell properties there would need to be a quality threshold to enable them to sell and that this would have an impact on the street scene. Consultation would be undertaken in the event of an application being fully considered.

Councillor David Dean noted that there was an anticipated loss of 20-30% of retail disappearing in the coming years and that housing might be a potential use and meet clear housing need in the borough. Councillor David Dean added that quality was important as was addressing issues of overcrowding, lifestyle and that density was not necessarily the answer.

Councillor Samantha George asked about Rainbow Industrial Estates and if consultation had been undertaken. James McGinlay agreed to check this information and report back to the Panel.

RESOLVED: Panel thanked James McGinlay for the presentation. James McGinlay committed to making a copy of the recently published Merton Business Directory available to all Members of the Panel.

11. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (VERBAL UPDATE) (Agenda Item 11)

Chris Lee introduced the list of performance indicators and highlighted areas of underperformance against the target and offered explanations as to the reasons for failing to meet a number of the targets in the last quarter. Chris Lee advised that the September performance data was due to be published shortly.

Councillor David Dean enquired about the annual tonnage of waste and if this figure had declined over the last 5 years. Cormac Stokes informed the Panel that it was 874 kgs and that the figures for the past 5 years were not available because this was a new measure so the council did not hold comparable data.

Councillor David Dean asked about improvements in the waste service and highlighted that he had received positive feedback from his constituents about the service. Councillor Samantha George enquired about the percentage of CCTV cameras that were operational and who was responsible for ensuring that they remained so and why the target had not been reached. Chris Lee explained that CCTV was switched off in some areas due to the very hot weather under the advice of the maintenance company for the cameras/servers. The potential risk of not having CCTV in some areas at that time was managed in liaison with the police.

Councillor Dennis Pearce noted that the resident's survey showed 51% still have concerns regarding crime. Chris Lee explained that this was a complex

area and that the relationship between fear and actual crime was a difficult one.

Councillor John Sargeant commented on the reduction in staffing in the planning department and the number of planning applications and the potential reputational risk to the council if the team were put under strain. Chris Lee explained that the council have reacted and responded to the downturn in performance by investing in capacity in the short term.

Councillor Ian Munn proposed that the council research the impact of the change in policy regarding pre application advice fees.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the performance information.