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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

7 JANUARY 2016

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Abigail Jones (in the Chair), Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Ross Garrod, Councillor John Sargeant, Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Janice Howard and Councillor Laxmi Attawar

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Mark Allison (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Nick Draper (Cabinet Member for Community and Culture) and Judy Saunders (Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking)

Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Steve Langley, Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), James McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities), Cormac Stokes (Head of Street Scene and Waste) and Stella Akintan (Democratic Services Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Dean

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Russell Makin declared that he is a board member of the Wandle Valley Trust and the Mitcham Common Conservators.

Councillor Attawar declared her interest as a board member of Circle Housing Merton Priory.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Daniel Holden declared that he was at the last meeting of the panel and this has not been recorded in the minutes

4 VERBAL UPDATE FROM CIRCLE HOUSING AND MERTON PRIORY HOMES (Agenda Item 6)

Simon Gagen, Director of Property Services gave an overview of the latest developments in relation to repairs and maintenance. He reported that the focus is on providing a positive service and good communication with residents. Estate residents have indicated that a visible presence is a priority; therefore surveyors now patrol the estates. An improved surveyor's offer is also being made to leaseholders. It was reported that some repairs can be resolved relatively quickly while others will take longer. A Customer satisfaction survey conducted by an independent company found that it is on an upward trajectory. Customer

Satisfaction is currently at 85% and was 81% last year. The target for satisfaction is 90%. Member enquiries are also decreasing they were 98 last year and 369 in previous years.

Lesley Smith, Assistant Director of Neighbourhood Services reported that they are working to support engagement. A number of themed groups have been established to increase the levels of involvement and give residents the opportunity to provide feedback on service improvement. These cover; neighbourhoods, community safety, anti-social behaviour, CCTV and tenancy fraud. The resident scrutiny panel was shortlisted for the TPAS award. There was also a successful mobile job club which toured Merton.

Paul Quinn Director of Merton Regeneration reported that there has been a positive response to regeneration plans. Consultation with residents will begin this week and a planning application will be submitted in May 2016.

A panel member asked CHMP to outline their three main areas of concern. The Director of Property Services said his main concern is to build upon the current improvement and to build the confidence of residents. The Director of Merton Regeneration reported that budgets are tight in the current climate, it will also be important to keep momentum to ensure the project moves to the house building stage. The Assistant Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined concerns around meeting the needs of customers, it can time to resolve issues and support people to address behaviours.

A panel member highlighted the importance of councillors being involved in the naming of new streets and housing blocks and the need to consider the wider infrastructure. The Director of Merton Regeneration responded that they will take a lead from the council in naming new streets and building.

A panel member sought clarification on the types of tenures of the new properties including numbers of affordable housing and social housing. Also will tenancies be re-let as temporary or permanent accommodation. The Director of Merton Regeneration reported that the regeneration project consisted of new homes and re-housing existing tenants. There are a mixture of leaseholders and tenants as well as houses obtained under early buy backs in which case assured short hold tenancies were used.

A panel member expressed concern that they cannot add any value to the performance data provided. It would be useful to look at issues that require improvement. The panel could usefully consider feedback from the tenancy scrutiny panel. The Director of Property Services added that the panel may also find it useful to consider long standing issues that take additional time to resolve because of their complexity. The panel agreed that these should be included in a future agenda item.

A panel member noted that there had been significant improvements in repairs and considered if this could be attributed to recent mild weather conditions or improvements at CHMP. The panel member said they had submitted two repairs requests over the last two days and it was difficult to believe that CHMP had only received 98 over the last year. There seemed to be a consistent pattern of issues including problems with old boilers. Also Sadler Close has reported issues with mice and cockroaches.

The Director of Property Services reported that there has been additional investment to replace boilers and there is a concerted programme in place to improve repairs, it is also part of the decent homes standard. They are tackling structural issues at Sadler Close such as replacing windows which should deal with those issues. Improvements to communication,

installing new kitchens and bathrooms have all been attributed to improved repair ratings, however the Director emphasised that they cannot afford to be complacent.

A panel member asked what assurance can be given about fraud and overcharging based on the Saville review. The Director of Merton Regeneration said they will use the quantity surveyors to scrutinise the process.

A panel member asked if Circle Housing is merging with Affinity Sutton. The Director of Merton Regeneration said that this has been agreed in principle but the process is still on-going.

RESOLVED

Next six monthly update from Circle Housing and Merton Priory to include feedback from the tenants' scrutiny panel and case studies on resolution of long standing issues.

5 PERFORMANCE REPORT NOVEMBER 2015 (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Environment and Regeneration outlined some key issues within his department; cleanliness and missed collections are always important because they drive customer satisfaction and perception of council performance overall. This indicator is currently green but it was red in earlier in the year due to issue pertaining to vehicle and staff availability. This has been dealt with but there is also a challenge in sustaining this area of performance. The new customer contact project will help as it will mean that messages can be relayed directly to the refuse collection team.

There is heightened interest in CCTV due to counter terrorism and need for security. The council invest in CCTV maintenance and contracts and the Director was pleased to report that CHMP have re-considered their plan to withdraw from their contribution in this area and will continue to be part of the borough wide service.

The cemeteries income indicator is red because thankfully there have been a lower number of deaths and burials than anticipated.

A panel member said there seemed to a specific problem with missed collections from flats with communal bins. The Head of Street Scene and Waste said there can be major access issues in relation to flats; it is a problem that the department are working to resolve.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the performance reports.

6 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2016-2020 (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Corporate Resources reported that a paper went to Cabinet in December outlining the implications of pay, prices, cost of freedom passes as well as an update on the capital programme. Early indications suggest that the Revenue Support Grant will have reduced by £10 million by 2019-2020. We are still awaiting figures on business rate income and some grants, these figures are expected in February although some may be published after the budget has been finalised.

ENV33 – “Development of emissions based charging policy for resident/business permits recognising the damage particularly from diesel engine motor vehicles”. The Director of Environment and Regeneration reported that he will bring an air quality report to Scrutiny in the new municipal year. The department are looking at a number of options for adding additional premiums for diesel cars. Panel members queried how this will work and the Director said the detail is still to be finalised.

ENV35 – “Efficiency measures to reduce domestic residual waste by 1 crew following analysis of waste volumes and spread across the week” This saving includes a financial marker and further detail will be provided to the panel in due course.

EN36 – “Review and removal of neighbourhood recycling centres” A panel member expressed concern that this proposal could result in an increase in fly-tipping if re-cycling centres are removed. The Cabinet member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking said she has received requests from within the community to remove the centres as they encourage people to leave their unwanted goods next to the centres and can become unsightly. A panel member agreed that this had been the experience at a recycling centre in Wimbledon Park and the local community were pleased when it was removed. The Head of Street Scene and Waste said the department will keep levels of fly tipping under review and look at the outcomes from Sutton who have already removed their recycling centres.

EN11 – “Building and Development Control staff reduction deputy area team leader” A panel member expressed concern about losing staff in the planning department given the volume of planning applications.

A panel member expressed concern about the proposed loss of 3.5 posts in housing as set out in the service plan and asked what the implications will be. The Head of Housing Needs and Strategy said that reductions in staffing can be challenging, the emphasis will be on fulfilling statutory obligations and it may take longer to complete an assessment.

Resolved

The Panel noted the budget report

7 COMMERCIAL SERVICES TASK GROUP - DRAFT SCOPING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The terms of reference were agreed by the Panel

8 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN - HOUSING SUPPLY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 8)

The task group chair Councillor Ross Garrod thanked Cabinet Members and officers for their work in implementing the recommendations.

RESOLVED

The Panel noted the Executive response and Action Plan

9 SAVINGS PROPOSALS CONSULTATION PACK (Agenda Item 9)

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The Panel agreed that:

The draft heritage strategy has already been looked at by the panel and should be removed from the work programme.

Councillor James Holmes to be invited to Panel in March when the Climate Change and Green Deal Task Group is discussed.

RESOLVED

The work programme was agreed.