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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 12 NOVEMBER 2013

(19.15 - 21.41)

PRESENT Councillors Russell Makin (in the Chair), Stan Anderson, Samantha George, Ian Munn, Dennis Pearce, John Sargeant, Janice Howard and Miles Windsor

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Judy Saunders, Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking, Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, James McGinlay, Head of Sustainable Communities, Yvonne Tomlin, Head of Community Education, Cormac Stokes, Head of Street Scene and Waste, Sara Williams, FutureMerton, Rebecca Redman, Scrutiny Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 1)

None

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillor Ray Tindle and Councillor David Dean.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 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 noted that James McGinlay had committed at the last meeting to provide information on Rainbow Industrial Estates in response to a question from Councillor Samantha George. James McGinlay agreed to circulate this information after the meeting.

Changes to be made to Minutes (page 3) regarding the misleading nature of the data in relation to it providing averages and the necessity of looking at this in more detail to establish the highs and lows and then discuss again.

The Panel agreed to re-order the agenda as follows:

Item 7 – Business Plan Update 2014-2018

Item 9 – Executive Response and Action Plan – Adult Skills and Employability Task Group

Item 8 – Public Value Review – Street Cleaning

Item 5 – Cycle Routes

Item 6 – Parking (Neighbourhood Shopping Parades Survey Analysis and Proposals)

Item 10 – Performance Monitoring

Item 11 – Work Programme 2013/14

RESOLVED:

James McGinlay to respond to Councillor Samantha George via email.

Panel agreed to take the agenda in the order proposed above.

5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2014-2018 (Agenda Item 7)

Councillor John Sargeant queried the context of the indicative Capital Programme, what was significant and what assumptions had been made in the longer term planning. Should the Panel take a view on these assumptions?

Caroline Holland explained that there was an ongoing call on the revenue programme and that the Capital Programme was dominated by school expansion, primary in the first instance and secondary schools later. Highways, Footways and the Street Lighting Replacement Programme would remain as is.

Regeneration programmes are not planned as far in advance as major schemes and are dependent on funding from others, for example, TfL. For example, the Mini Holland Bid to improve our cycling provision.

Councillor Ian Munn asked for clarity on the settlement funding assessment: RSG and Business Rates and the latest central Government funding projections following the 2013 spending review. Caroline Holland explained that refinements are ongoing and that DCLG had undertaken more work in relation to the Council Tax freeze grant and how this would feed into assumptions and impact on the funds available. The settlement is expected from DCLG early/mid December 2013.

Councillor Samantha George asked about the use of reserves to eliminate the budget gap and what cabinet had agreed, and if there was an easier way to show capital and revenue changes from last year's budget. Caroline Holland explained that no new additional savings for 2014/15 had to be found and that there was a savings target of £1.7 million for 2015/16. This is a significant improvement over other boroughs. Revenue monitoring is undertaken on the Capital programme and schemes are being profiled into later years. Each monitoring report shows profiling each year. There are likely, however, to be some slippages into later years, particularly in CSF. The department are keeping this as up to date as possible. Chris Lee added that changes are made clear in the monitoring reports received by Cabinet and the Scrutiny Financial Monitoring Task Group on a quarterly basis.

Councillor John Sargeant felt that it was important for the Panel to take an annual look at the figures and the key changes to enable the Panels discussion to be more focused. Comparison year on year would be helpful. Furthermore, could the recommendations from last year's budget scrutiny be built into the January report to determine how these have been taken forward?

Councillor Samantha George enquired about the new savings identified for 2016/17 and 2017/18 in the MTFs (page 78 of the report) and when the Panel could have further detail on this. Caroline Holland explained that these new savings were built in to address the budget gap and that these proposals would be brought to December Cabinet and January Scrutiny Panel meetings. In 2014/15 there are no new savings to be found but £1.6 million in savings needs to be found in 2015/16.

Councillor Samantha George asked about leisure centres and savings. Chris Lee explained that there was a £1 million budget for 2014/15 and a substantial budget in 2015/16 available. The department are working to this timetable for the Morden Park Pool scheme and developments will begin in 2015/16.

Councillor Samantha George enquired about the reason for profiling the street lighting replacement programme and enhancement and also about town centre investment.

Chris Lee informed the Panel that this should be treated with caution. Regeneration programmes are match funded and the figures outlined are markers to ensure that funds are available to deliver the scheme. The Mitcham Regeneration scheme is largely dependent upon match funding from TfL. The councils input into is outlined in the capital programme but this can be brought forward or slip to make the best use of alternative funding sources. This applies to all schemes.

Cormac Stokes explained that there were pressures in terms of the standard of street lighting and that replacement was required. There is a fairly urgent street lighting replacement programme over the next year and this is why the monthly figures seem higher. There will be investments in terms of energy efficiency which have been front loaded.

Councillor Miles Windsor asked if new items required for renewable energy in this area were being brought into this budget. Cormac Stokes confirmed this was the case.

Councillor Stan Anderson enquired if there were any plans to reduce street lighting for certain periods. Cormac Stokes confirmed that this wasn't the case. Councillor Russell Makin reminded the Panel that they were due to consider street lighting at a future panel meeting.

Councillor Samantha George asked about equipment for parking and why there was a reduction in 2013/14 in DFG. Chris Lee explained that there was a small budget for parking and display machines and that all other parking is captured as revenue. The DFG is under scrutiny from outside of the council. Demand for this grant has increased. Last year there were 110 applications and this year there are a projected 230 applications. There is therefore a pressure on this grant/budget.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

6 EXECUTIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN - ADULT SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 9)

Sara Williams outlined the Executive Response to the Panels review of adult skills and employability and noted that all the recommendations made had been agreed. Sara Williams noted that there was some cross over in the work of the Panel and the work of the Economic Wellbeing Sub Group.

Councillor Ian Munn asked when outcomes could be reported against the action plan.

Councillor Janice Howard asked if there could be more detail on the key milestones within the action plan.

Councillor James Holmes thanked officers for the plan and agreed that performance monitoring measures were needed and a Member Champion was required to oversee delivery. Councillor James Holmes volunteered for this role.

James McGinlay informed the Panel that the Economic Wellbeing Sub Group met regularly to deliver on a number of the recommendations made by the task group and that the Minutes of these meetings could be circulated to the Panel.

Councillor Samantha George asked about the timescales against the targets within the action plan and noted that one had a November 2013 deadline. Sara Williams explained that in relation to recommendation 9, business rates relief, the department had planned to take this report to Cabinet in November 2013 for decision but that this has been postponed. The timescales for reporting to Cabinet can be shared with the Panel when available.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report and asked that:

- The notes of the meetings of the Economic Wellbeing Sub Group be circulated to all Panel members when available by the E&R Department (every 6 weeks);
- Councillor James Holmes is appointed Member Champion overseeing implementation of the agreed review recommendations.
- A progress report on implementation is brought to the Panel every three months.
- The timescales for reporting to Cabinet on business rates be shared with the Panel when available.

7 PUBLIC VALUE REVIEW - STREET CLEANING (Agenda Item 8)

Cormac Stokes introduced the report and informed the Panel that a number of Members on the Panel contributed to the scope for the review. This report outlined a number of recommendations for decision which cover:

- Improving resilience;
- Improved mobile response;
- Use of apprentices (10 apprentices have already been employed)'
- Reduced levels of sickness and reliance of agency staff (trailing team leaders and increasing supervisory presence);

- Improving performance monitoring (including benchmarking) to increase productivity;
 - Channel shift and reduced paper based systems in the office
- Councillor Janice Howard asked what the long term solution was to rubbish not being collected from the same spot if this is a recurring problem. Cormac Stokes explained that this depends on the issue and location and if some residents remember to put out their rubbish on the correct day. These issues can be investigated. With regard to town centres, time banding has been introduced in Wimbledon and improved enforcement.

Councillor Stan Anderson stated that he was pleased that there had been a reduction in the use of agency staff but what reliance is there on agency staff now. Cormac Stokes explained that agency staff are still employed when needed but that the council aim to minimise this by using mobile response teams.

Councillor Miles Windsor asked if new systems had been implemented if there was to be improved monitoring. Cormac Stokes informed the Panel that the introduction of Senior Team Leaders will improve the levels of on-street performance management and monitoring and that in-cab technology is being investigated, linking directly to back office systems and CRM. However, the council are not looking at this level of technology for solo sweepers. There is an element of GPS tracking around mobile crews.

Councillor Miles Windsor asked about a case recently in the media regarding GPS tracking of staff in another authority and if this was a violation of human rights. Chris Lee added that the department are working alongside the shift corporately in terms of customer contact and utilising GIS technology such as Fix my Street.

Councillor Ian Munn asked for the link to fix my Street to be sent to the Panel after the meeting.

Councillor Dennis Pearce noted the success of solo sweepers and commended this work and asked about surface water and how this was being dealt with. Cormac Stokes explained that a strategy was being developed as part of the Flood and Water Management Act responsibilities. There are new duties for the council to address with respect to surface water drainage.

Councillor Ian Munn stated that it was important to rationalise customer channels and that there may be a reluctance to use CONFIRM or the Member Enquiry system. There needs to be consistency in the use of channels. Customer satisfaction also depends on the visibility of street sweepers as Councillor Ian Munn said he had received concerns from residents regarding the absence of a well-regarded streetsweeper and that residents hoped he would get well soon and be re-instated to duties on their streets,

Cormac Stokes explained that 80% communication is received by Garth Road via email and 2 FTE are needed to re-key this information into CONFIRM. Online systems are being looked at to develop online reporting systems.

Councillor Samantha George proposed the use of Twitter. Chris Lee shared the difficulties with this channel in terms of automating customer comments.

Councillor Samantha George recommended publicising the 'Fix my Street' app. Chris Lee explained that the council had not gone live with this as yet as they do not have the back office systems fully up and running.

Councillor Miles Windsor asked what the timescale was for implementing these systems. Cormac Stokes informed the Panel that a procurement exercise was underway and this will take up to a year. Then services will be prioritised.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

8 CYCLE ROUTES (Agenda Item 5)

James McGinlay introduced the report and explained that the council had been successful in being shortlisted for a share of the Mayor of London's fund to share £100 million with other councils to deliver on their vision for cycling provision in the borough. The council are now in the process of submitting a more detailed proposal for consideration with a deadline of December 2013.

The proposal includes major town centres and changes to bus and cycling provision and implementation of bridges. The majority of the initiatives proposed would be delivered over a 5 year period and this would include outreach to communities that don't cycle. Phase 2 of this application is a live document and is being overseen by a steering group including Members and officers.

There is a briefing to council that is scheduled and a meeting with officers to update on the bid. The council are working with Merton Cycling Campaign in this process and a decision on the success of the bid is expected in February 2014.

Councillor Russell Makin enquired about the Members on the steering group and why this bid had not been seen by the Panel sooner. James McGinlay informed the Panel that Cllrs Judge, Southgate and Howard were on the steering group and that the submission of an expression of interest was made at short notice to ensure the council would be considered at the short listing stage.

Councillor Russell Makin asked what influence the Panel would have regarding phase 2 of the bid. James McGinlay explained that Members views were being sought through briefings and consultation was being undertaken with Merton Chamber of Commerce, Merton Cycling Campaign and Love Wimbledon.

Councillor Janice Howard asked if the whole Wimbledon town centre area would be pedestrianised as part of the proposal. James McGinlay confirmed that this had been ruled out as an option.

Councillor John Sargeant asked if the bid was successful if the council was duty bound to carry out all of the proposals. James McGinlay explained that there is a

large element of ambition in the bid and that some of the proposals are dependent on highways improvements. Consultation would also need to be undertaken and the funds awarded would not cover all costs for delivering the proposals. TfL will be scrutinising this for delivery. There will also be full public consultation and projects may have to be redefined in discussion with the mayor's office.

James McGinlay informed the Panel that there were 6 authorities in the shortlist. Councillor Miles Windsor emphasised the need for cross party working.

Councillor Dennis Pearce noted the potential disruption to traffic. James McGinlay confirmed that there would be modelling as part of implementation in terms of impact on traffic. The term 'Mini Holland' referred to the measures adopted there and the sound evidence base that this works. There will be some disruption but consultation will be undertaken to minimise this. The council wants to make cycling a comparable transport choice. The intended move to modal at 10% target should decrease traffic if this is achieved.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked where bikes would be stored. James McGinlay explained that there would potentially be cycling hubs and other traditional storage solutions in place.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

9 PARKING (NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOPPING PARADES SURVEY ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS) (Agenda Item 6)

Sara Williams introduced the report which detailed the findings of the survey undertaken from March –April 201 in 34 neighbourhood shopping parades. The survey considered cost, availability of space, maximum stay across these parades and responses have shown that each parade has its own specific needs. There is therefore a need to assess each site further independently.

Councillor John Sargeant noted that 20 minutes of free parking was welcomed and that he was concerned about the delay in getting this implemented if further investigation is to be undertaken. Sara Williams explained that the responses varied and therefore this work looking at individual neighbourhoods needed to be undertaken. This work had already begun in some areas and some areas already have parking implemented.

Councillor John Sargeant enquired about the timing for implementation. Chris Lee explained that there had been a healthy response in the areas surveyed and that the department are looking to get this work underway. There is a need to talk to individual businesses and the report identifies that there is no immediate funding to cover all sites, therefore, service costs need to be considered as they are not classified as capital as before.

Councillor Ian Munn stated that monitoring was needed in Mitcham to enable fair access to 20 minute free parking. Councillor Janice Howard noted that signage had not been changed to communicate availability of free parking in Wimbledon.

Councillor Samantha George asked if the plan was to roll out 20 minutes of free parking across all shopping parades. Chris Lee confirmed that this would be rolled out where identified as appropriate for the parade. Implementation would be progressed on a parade by parade basis.

Councillor Dennis Pearce added that the low response rate in some areas may mean that smaller parades feel abandoned. Councillor Ian Munn added that all shopping parades should have 20 minutes of free parking to avoid negative impact on smaller parades. There is also a need to look at standardising tariffs.

Councillor Miles Windsor stated that a parade by parade review was important to ensure clarity on what is important to residents and businesses in those areas. Councillor Judy Saunders added that one size fits all approach would not work with the parades in the borough.

Chris Lee explained that the recommendations relating to standardisation came out of the town centre parking review.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (VERBAL UPDATE) (Agenda Item 10)

Chris Lee informed the Panel that the data presented was to end September 2013. The data has been captured in new performance management software and that the RAG status is still available.

Councillor Ian Munn asked if the loss of income in building control was due to people using private inspectors. Chris Lee confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor John Sargeant asked about waste operations and why there was underperformance and stated that the resources in planning needed to be looked into.

Chris Lee informed the Panel that the department were in the final stages of recruiting two additional planning officers to deal with the high volume of applications for those that charge a fee and require the attention of a planning officer. At present don't get any income and Merton is the most efficient planning authority in London in terms of cost of an application.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if the number of planning applications received was average for this time of year. Chris Lee explained that there was no great difference from year to year and that there was a slight seasonal trend.

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked for clarification on the number of enforcement cases (PI: SP113). Chris Lee advised that 337 cases had been closed and that the target was 300. In relation to new/open cases, there is an ongoing backlog of 600 live planning enforcement cases at any time.

Councillor Samantha George asked about leisure development and for background information on performance (PI: SP314). James McGinlay explained that external funding had been secured for a number of years and those projects were still being delivered. Match funding cannot be recorded until it is drawn down.

Councillor Janice Howard asked about waste operations and the number of days of sickness. Cormac Stokes explained that 6 days is the half year target and that an annual target of 12 days per FTE is a lower target than previous years. There is work underway to manage people through this process and to profile the workforce.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the item.

11 WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14 (Agenda Item 11)

RESOLVED: Noted. Panel also wished to record their congratulations to Christine Parsloe, Leisure and Culture Development Manager, for winning the Guardian Public Servant of the Year Award.