

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

7 JULY 2016

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Hamish Badenoch, Mike Brunt, John Dehaney, Abigail Jones, Oonagh Moulton, Dennis Pearce and David Williams

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes, Denis Popovs and Geoffrey Newman

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis (Leader of the Council)

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), John Dimmer (Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnership), Neil Thurlow, Community Safety Manager, Cassie Newman (London CRC), Adam Kerr (National Probation Service) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Sally Kenny (substituted by Councillor Agatha Akyigyina) and from co-opted member Colin Powell.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, highlighted some of the achievements of the past year, in line with the July principles; including improvement in school standards, creation of new school places, expansion of the South London Legal Partnership, savings from the South London Waste Partnership and the establishment of a partnership with South Thames College and Groundwork to provide adult education services. Councillor Alambritis said that the council would respect the Brexit vote and would work with London Councils, the Local Government Association and the Mayor of London on this and other issues of mutual interest, including Crossrail2.

Councillor Alambritis praised the professionalism and dedication of staff. He outlined key projects for the year ahead, including the new leisure centre, planned improvements to a number of town centres, a range of celebratory events for residents, continued cross-party working to address race hate, the refugee crisis and Crossrail2 as well as supporting St Helier Hospital and bringing AFC Wimbledon back to Plough Lane. He said that he had asked officers to undertake a consultation with residents in the autumn on the level of council tax through My Merton and online on the council's website.

The Chief Executive, Ged Curran, drew the Commission's attention to the challenges ahead for the health sector and the pressures both for the NHS and the Council in relation to meeting the adult social care needs of residents; the pressure on temporary accommodation; outsourcing of a large section of waste and parks services; challenges posed by the transfer of business rates income to local government that would bring new responsibilities with it in order to be fiscally neutral.

In response to a question about the recommendation by Professor Steve Leach in 2006 that scrutiny chairs should be allocated in a politically proportionate way, the Chief Executive said that scrutiny best practice should be viewed in the wider context of holding the executive to account and ensuring that proper checks and balances were in place to give the opposition a voice and that how this is done is a decision for the administration. The Leader said that he is keen that the leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group should continue to chair the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. He added that he is committed to engaging with the opposition and is in ongoing discussion with them on a range of issues.

The Leader and Chief Executive provided additional information in response to questions:

- There is no provision for a sports hall to be added to the new leisure centre at present. It may be possible to find sources of funding elsewhere in future.
- The Leader will be talking to the Mayor of London's advisor on the impact of Crossrail2 and will also be responding to Crossrail2's consultation on the issue.
- There are a number of strands of work on the London's Best Council initiative but it has been difficult to establish metrics as, following the abolition of the Audit Commission, there is no longer a set of comparative data to draw on
- The contract for waste services includes penalties for poor performance. The key to success will be establishing a positive working relationship with clear expectations plus praise for good performance and swift action for poor performance.
- Noted need to promote successful schools
- Leader will continue to take up issues of poor performance with Circle Housing Merton Priory

In response to a question about the council's efficiency programme, the Leader and Chief Executive assured Commission members that the policy and strategy was being led by Cabinet and that the target operating models would be signed off by the relevant Cabinet members.

The Chief Executive undertook to provide Commission members with an update on work being done locally to ensure that private rented properties are kept in good condition. ACTION: Chief Executive

5 MERTON PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy & Partnerships, introduced the report. He and the Chief Executive, Ged Curran provided further information in response to questions and comments from members of the Commission:

- agreed that the information taken from the 2014/15 Annual Residents Survey (p13) is too out of date. In particular, will review the data given on concern over lack of jobs.
- there will be an Annual Residents Survey this autumn and results will be available in January or February.
- Bridging the gap remains a key ambition for the Merton Partnership
- The council's partner organisations are still committed to the Merton Partnership despite facing their own resource constraints. The focus is working together on shared priorities. The streamlining of the Partnership's structure has been helpful and the last conference was attended by 120 people.

John Dimmer undertook to provide the following information to members of the Commission:

- The number of affordable homes that have been provided
- What work is being done by the Merton Partnership in relation to the increase in reported incidents of race hate since the Referendum – the Chief Executive said that a joint statement had been issued and that the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities was part of a joint task group with the Police.
- An update on the findings and outcome of the apprenticeship review

6 REHABILITATION STRATEGIES (Agenda Item 6)

Neil Thurlow, Community Safety Manager, introduced Cassie Newman, Head of Stakeholders and Partnerships London CRC and Adam Kerr, Head of Croydon, Merton, Sutton and Sex Offender Treatment Unit, National Probation Service.

Cassie Newman said that there were 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), including one for London. The London contract is held by MTC Novo which is a joint venture between MTC (an American company) and Amey (the facilities management company) and a number of third sector companies.

CRCs manage offenders at low or medium risk. The National Probation Service manages high risk offenders. CRCs work with an age and gender based cohort model on the basis of priority of need with the main aim to reduce reoffending. The London CRC is currently working with 482 cases in Merton. A more detailed profile of cases will be available from mid July.

In response to a question Cassie Newman reassured members that the changing number of breaches being brought to court was not caused by the financial penalty clauses in the contract but was rather the result of staff getting used to new ways of working plus new IT systems. Adam Kerr said that he anticipated that breaches would return to previous levels shortly and he undertook to provide members with Merton data on breaches. ACTION: Adam Kerr, National Probation Service

In response to further questions Cassie Newman explained that the RAG level for an individual offender would move from red to green before being removed from the scheme. In relation to vulnerable adults, she said that there were a number of pathways designed to divert them from entering the criminal justice system. Those who do enter the criminal justice system receive psychological interventions to support them.

Adam Kerr said that the National Probation Service was the public sector arm of the probation service. It has 7 divisions, of which one is London. There are 12 clusters within London – Merton is in a cluster with Sutton and Croydon. There are 207 high risk offenders in the cluster of which 25% are aged 30-39, 22% aged 18-24 and 9% are women. 82 offenders come under the Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to manage the most difficult offenders. Merton's MAPPA arrangements have been rated as "good" by the National Probation Service.

Adam Kerr added that the National Probation Service had experienced a period of "churn" initially but is now settling down and is engaged in positive partnership working in Merton.

In response to a question Cassie Newman and Adam Kerr said that positive working relationships and local knowledge have overcome the logistical difficulties of working with organisations that have different geographical boundaries.

The Chair thanked the officers for their report and said that it would be helpful to have data in due course showing what progress has been made with offenders in Merton. ACTION: Community Safety Manager to advise when data is available

TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

Members welcomed the report and RESOLVED to forward it to Cabinet for approval and implementation of the recommendations.

8 ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL SCRUTINY SURVEY 2016 (Agenda Item 8)

Members discussed the findings of the annual survey, agreed that an online survey would be helpful in future years and RESOLVED to agree the action points listed in the report and set out in Appendix 3.

9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17 (Agenda Item 9)

Members of the Commission:

- agreed the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year as set out in Appendix 1
- appointed Councillors Hamish Badenoch, Mike Brunt, Jeff Hanna, Dennis Pearce, Peter Southgate and David Williams to the financial monitoring task group
- agreed that the meetings of the financial monitoring task group should start at 7.15pm in future
- agreed to defer discussion of suggestions for a task group review to the next meeting of the Commission
- noted that the Standards and General Purposes Committee has requested a report on member training at its next meeting.

10 DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS TO ASK THE BOROUGH COMMANDER AT THE COMMISSION'S MEETING ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2016 (Agenda Item 10)

RESOLVED that members should send suggested questions to the Head of Democracy Services by email.