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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 NOVEMBER 2016

(7.15 pm - 9.05 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Abigail Jones (in the Chair), Daniel Holden, Stan Anderson, Michael Bull, David Chung, Russell Makin, John Sargeant and Imran Uddin

Co-opted Members

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Nick Draper (Cabinet member for Community and Culture), Ross Garrod (Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking), Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing), John Hill (Head of Public Protection and Development, ENVR), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Cormac Stokes (Head of Street Scene and Waste), Simon Williams (Director, Community & Housing Department) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer), Cypren Edmunds (Chair of the High Path Community Association), Jackie Andrews, (Director of Housing South, Circle Housing), Jane Bolton (Head of Housing, Circle Housing), Simon Gagen (Head of Reactive Repairs, Circle Housing), Glen Jackson (Head of Planned Repairs, Circle Housing) and Paul Quinn (Director of Regeneration, Circle Housing)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

It was agreed that the minutes of item 6 (Pre-decision scrutiny: diesel premium report) will be forwarded for information to the relevant Cabinet Member. Also, the Chair will attend the Cabinet meeting at which this will be discussed to highlight the points that were raised by the members of the Panel.

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 CIRCLE HOUSING MERTON PRIORY: QUESTIONS REGARDING REPAIRS AND REGENERATION (Agenda Item 4)

The following representatives of Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP) attended the meeting to answer questions regarding repairs and regeneration:

- Jackie Andrews, Director of Housing (South)
- Jane Bolton, Head of Housing
- Simon Gagen, Head of Reactive Repairs
- Glen Jackson, Head of Planned Repairs
- Paul Quinn, Director of Regeneration

Jackie Andrews provided an introduction saying that CHMP has recently met with Simon Williams, the Director of Community and Housing, and that it has been acknowledged performance is improving, trends are positive but there is more work to do to get the organisation to consistently be where it needs to be.

Cypren Edmunds, Chair of the High Path Community Association, was invited to address the Panel. He expressed his unhappiness with CHMP particularly its approach to repairs and consultations. He highlighted that the housing shortage in London means tenants are tied to the area and that with hindsight he wishes an ability to return to Council ownership had been built into the transfer agreement.

In response to member questions, CHMP clarified:

Regeneration:

- The regeneration of estates in Merton will provide a 12% increase in the number of comfortable and affordable homes available;
- It is guaranteed that all new homes will be at least the same size as those they are replacing with the majority actually being larger (some by up to 30%);
- Over crowding of current homes will be addressed based on need through rehousing. Where this is acute this may mean that more than one replacement home is needed. How this is determined will be addressed in consultation with each family;
- Over occupancy will also be addressed but this isn't a significant issue. Homes will be allocated based on the number of bedrooms needed plus one. Any tenant wishing to downsize should contact housing management at CHMP; and
- All existing tenants and homeowners who wish to take-up the opportunity of a new home will be able to do so. This is as stated in the CHMP offer made on 27 May 2016.

Repairs

- CMHP representatives committed to seek further information subsequent to the meeting on what was released in response to the Savills report into whistleblowing and to make this available to members. CHMP advised that clear lessons had been learned from the investigation; processes, systems and structures had been improved with evidence now forthcoming that this is having the required results. CHMP advised that these changes will support residents to have more confidence in it and is the basis for developing a better service;

- Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenants Act prohibits major repairs being undertaken unilaterally; landlords must specify what works are proposed and the level of cost. Tenants must be consulted on these proposals. CHMP acknowledged that in some cases (for example, the Watermeads Estate) this consultation has not been conducted adequately to address tenants' concerns (and in the case of the Watermeads estate resulted in both the scope of the major works and the associated costs being reduced). CHMP committed to looking at the consultation at Morden House as raised by Councillor Sargeant. He described tenants as feeling the consultation was a *fait accompli* and resistance useless. Councillor Pearce highlighted that his intervention and questioning of the need for major works had resulted in some being cancelled. CHMP acknowledged that some works had been changed with a resulting decrease in costs but that in some cases, these works are the best option to ensure an extended life for property;
- Frustrations caused by high staff turnover on major repairs were acknowledged, (Councillors reported this makes addressing tenants' concerns difficult and lengthy). CHMP advised that the recent restructure had ensured stability and would improve cross-team working meaning the formal processes involved and the personal contact needed would be addressed;
- CHMP's contract with Keepmoat will continue post the merger. Once the merger is completed this will be in the fourth year of a five year contract (that will end in February 2018) and will be reviewed by the newly merged organisation as it's thought new forms of contract will be needed. Residents will be consulted;
- The 13% decline since April 2016 in the number of repairs appointments made and kept was explained by CHMP as a resulting from anomalies in the recording system. For example, if CHMP is early for an appointment, this is recorded as late;
- Every appointment is limited to a two hour slot. If a repair takes longer than two hours, this is captured in the system by the setting of subsequent appointments;
- It was agreed that Simon Gagen, the Head of Reactive Repairs would contact Councillor Makin after the meeting for a visit to Phipps Bridge and Cherry Tree estates; and
- Glen Jackson, Head of Planned Repairs, committed to look into installing anti-slip on the concrete steps at Hatfield Mead and to update the Panel.

Governance and merger

- CHMP confirmed there will be one community Panel for the Merton area. It won't be part of the governance structure but will be linked to the landlord board;
- It was agreed that CHMP will review the use of LEAF funding to date in 16/17 to ensure this has been correctly allocated. Councillors expressed concern that Ravensbury Estate has not received its full allocation and that this has instead been spent on other estates;
- CHMP informed the Panel that following its merger with Affinity Sutton, the new Group will be called *Clarion*. A separate commercial company called *Latimer* is also being formed which will focus on development, social value and asset management; and

- CHMP highlighted its belief that the forthcoming merger with Affinity Sutton will provide benefit for both organisations; CHMP is better at income collection and dealing with void properties, whereas Affinity Sutton can provide greater expertise in customer relationship management. The merger will allow the number of new homes built to be trebled and for patch sizes to be reduced and a better service provided by making this more local.

5 ELECTED MEMBER PORTFOLIO PRIORITIES: CABINET MEMBERS FOR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE AND CLEANLINESS AND PARKING (Agenda Item 5)

Councillor Nick Draper, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, highlighted his top ten portfolio priorities:

- Developing a friends strategy for Merton's greenspaces;
- Building of the new Morden Leisure Centre;
- Getting residents to think differently about their rubbish, especially when using Merton's amenities (ie: parks and paddling pools) so that they take this home with them;
- The solvency and survival of Merton's libraries;
- Ensuring that the new arrangements for Merton's provision of Adult Education provide life chances for all;
- Making cemeteries more profitable;
- The creation of big events that provide additional income for Merton;
- Ensuring the long term solvency of Merton's Adult Education against a background of budget reductions from central government;
- Expanding the regulatory shared service to include Wandsworth; and
- Delivering a cost neutral tourism and heritage strategy for the borough.

Additionally, Councillor Draper highlighted a number of other focuses: the development of a long term volunteer strategy for Merton's libraries, ensuring that Merton's sporting strategies are sufficiently flexible to support all, staff morale, equalisation of the regulatory shared service, promoting Merton's new arts space, ensuring the budget is maintained by having a firm grasp on what we are paying and supporting the Merton Partnership.

Councillor Ross Garrod, Cabinet Member for Cleanliness and Parking, highlighted his portfolio priorities:

- The implementation of the Viola/Phase C contract (the South London Waste Partnership contract for waste collection and related environment services). Currently, spending time with community groups such as the Friends of St Heliers, Merton Age UK and Merton CIL. Focus is now on a smooth transition with the Cabinet Member keeping a watchful eye with a willingness to enforce the terms of the contract where needed;
- Raising awareness of enforcement and the potential of receiving a £400 fine in order to encourage residents to not drop litter. Has recently been out on trips with waste teams to look at fly tipping;

- Keeping traffic flowing and specifically addressing unsafe parking outside schools; and
- Continuing to look innovatively at Merton's budget and funding cuts.

In response to member questions, the following responses were received from Cabinet Members:

- It cannot be guaranteed that events will not make a loss. The park event in the summer had been working towards a breakeven but this couldn't be guaranteed and so it was agreed to cancel. Events are now being planned a lot further in advance and being developed in partnership. It was agreed it is possible for Merton to hire out its facilities to an event organiser with the necessary expertise. This will allow the council to realise the financial benefits of holding events whilst diminishing the risk of losses;
- Whilst fines for littering are featured on the council's website, work is now on-going to get these featured in local media to help raised awareness amongst residents; and
- Enforcement officers are focused on town centres. Positioning these outside the magistrate's court in Alexander Road will be explored.

6 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 6)

It was highlighted that whilst future savings will be required, there weren't any currently for this Panel to review and that at the moment, there is not a gap in the budget until 2019/20. Proposals will go to the Cabinet meeting in December and subsequently be reviewed by the Panel.

In response to member questions, it was clarified:

- The £27,000 net shortfall in savings to be added to the Community and Housing Savings Target is unlikely to come from housing and it's probably too early in the new arrangements for this to be provided by Adult Education. Cost savings are being considered from libraries.

7 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY: PLANNING SHARED SERVICE (Agenda Item 7)

Chris Lee, Director for Environment and Regeneration, explained that a detailed feasibility study into a planning shared service had been conducted. This found that there is no business case or appetite for such a service at this time. Rather it is being recommended that smaller steps be taken starting with smart sharing and consideration of further integration around building control.

It was confirmed that the anticipated planning bill was one of the considerations feeding into the feasibility study. James McGinlay, Head of Sustainable Communities, highlighted that a white paper is anticipated in December 2016 which currently isn't thought likely to be as far reaching as was original suggested.

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

Chris Lee highlighted three items on the performance report for the Environment and Regeneration Department:

- Parking services: currently below target as there has been some initial teething problems with the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system. Performance of the system is now improving and will be subject to focused scrutiny at the January 2017 meeting;
- Reported fly tipping has reduced. This doesn't reflect that fly tipping itself is lessening but that waste services is getting better at picking this up before it is reported; and
- It has been previously reported that the performance indicators for planning were not accurate. This has been addressed; they are now accurate and ahead of targets.

9 COMMERCIALISATION TASK GROUP: DRAFT FINAL REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

The report and recommendations of the Commercialisation Task Group were accepted including that progress with setting up an energy supply company should be accelerated. Additionally, it was agreed that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel should consider annually how the council is realising commercial opportunities.

Members of the task group expressed their thanks to Stella Akintan, the scrutiny officer who supported its work. Additionally, the Panel thanked the task group for its work and report.

RESOLVED: to accept the report and recommendations of the Commercialisation Task Group

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The following items were noted with regard to the Panel's work programme:

- A meeting of the Public Transport Liaison Committee is being organised by the Sustainable Communities team for February 2017. A date will be confirmed shortly;
- Following a request from Councillor Holden, a briefing paper will be provided to the Panel on car clubs operating in the borough at the February 2017 meeting;
- The Wimbledon master plan will come to the Panel for its consideration towards the end of the financial year and before it progresses to Cabinet;
- Members were encouraged to take advantage of the forthcoming scrutiny training opportunities; and
- The proposed boundary changes are being considered by the Standards and General Purposes Committee.