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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

16 MARCH 2016

(7.15 pm - 8.35 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Abigail Jones (in the Chair),  
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Ross Garrod,  
Councillor Imran Uddin, Councillor David Dean,  
Councillor Janice Howard and Councillor John Dehaney

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Andrew Judge (Cabinet Member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration), John Hill (Head of Public Protection), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Damian Hemmings (Climate Change Officer), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager), James McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities), Christine Parsloe (Leisure and Culture Development Manager) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer).

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Russell Makin and John Sargeant.

Councillors Nick Draper and Judy Saunders, respectively the Cabinet members for Community and Culture and Environmental Cleanliness and Parking, also sent their apologies.

### 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 of the previous meeting were approved subject to the following amendment; item 6 (page 4 of the agenda pack) should make clear that it is Merton's element of the Clapham Common to Wimbledon cycle route to which reference is being made.

### 4 MORDEN LEISURE CENTRE: VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

A brief update on the Morden Leisure Centre development was given by Christine Parsloe, Leisure and Culture Development Manager.

The Planning Application has been submitted to London Borough of Merton's Planning Department. Those organisations with which there is a statutory obligation

to consult have already been engaged in pre-planning discussions. These are the Greater London Assembly (GLA), Merton's Planning Department and Sport England.

Additionally, the design has been considered from the perspective of preventing crime by the Crime Prevention Officer and Merton Centre for Independent Living has been consulted in relation to access for those with disabilities.

Meetings have been held with all companies short-listed to undertake the construction contract. The deadline for return of the Stage 1 tenders is 8 April 2016. The date for Cabinet to agree which construction company will undertake the construction has been set and is on the forward plan (18 May 2016).

Additionally, work is now underway to amend the contract with Greenwich Leisure, the organisation that currently operates the Morden Park Pools site and will run the new centre.

In response to member questions, Christine Parsloe provided the following clarification:

- It isn't possible to state how many organisations have expressed an interest in tendering. However, in issuing the tender, it was stated that five companies would be taken through to Stage 1 should sufficient numbers be forthcoming and based on the quality of prequalification questionnaires; and
- The land swap (from the current Morden Park Pools site to that of the new development) will require approval by the GLA. This isn't thought likely to be problematic; it's virtually a straight swap with the new building being slightly smaller than the current. The demolition of the Morden Park Pool and re-landscaping of that site is part of the planning application.

**RESOLVED:** To note the verbal update provided.

## 5 SHARED SERVICES REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, introduced the Shared Services report highlighting this covers three areas:

- An update on existing shared services;
- An overview of what areas might be suitable for an expansion of shared services; and
- Information on the Government's proposals for commercialisation of planning, which is already being considered as a future shared service at Merton.

In response to questions from Panel members, Chris Lee clarified:

### Planning shared service:

- Consultation with staff regarding the option of a staff mutual has not been formal but there has been no interest expressed. Also, a single team could not offer the required level of cost savings;

- Kingston and Sutton have different operating models for the proposed shared service and an earlier launch date because they started this process earlier – Merton’s involvement has happened later;
- Provision for withdrawing from the shared service would be included in the agreement;
- The overhead per member of staff will be clarified. The business case is due in September 2016. This is the point at which a detailed understanding will be gained of the likely cost saving;
- Whilst the Government’s proposal for commercialising the planning process hadn’t been anticipated, it is still intended to proceed with developing a shared service because this will lower costs and provide service resilience.

Government’s proposed commercialisation of the planning service:

- Currently, this is a proposal that the Government is seeking to explore through a number of pilots. There is a lack of detail which learning from the pilots will seek to address;
- The commercialisation of the service would mean any council or any private company could be contracted directly by the developer to write a planning report but the council would retain responsibility for the planning decision; and
- Merton is yet to agree what stance it will take in the consultation response on the pilots. A draft can be shared with Panel members for their feedback.

Panel members expressed their concerns about the Government’s proposal to commercialise the planning service:

- Where reports are no longer prepared by the council, there will potentially be no source of income for the council to cover its costs;
- Potential for duplication of cost as reports are reviewed by Council staff;
- Unclear where Prior Approval applications / Permitted development applications would be dealt with since these carry no fee;
- With developers paying for their own report writers, there is a risk that reports won’t be impartial and therefore will undermine trust in the planning process;
- External providers may give a different level of service (potentially to make this cost effective) and this may not be sufficient to enable councils to make well-informed decisions which leaves them exposed;
- There is potential for commercial providers to focus on larger developments where higher fees can be charged;
- One approach would be for the Government to set the level of fees; and
- Analysis shows that delays in development aren’t caused by local authorities that are in the main reaching all their targets for processing planning applications. Largely, delays are down to developers that either don’t want to build what they have permission for or are holding onto land in the hope that this will increase in value. These proposals will not have the desired effect.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report and feed into the draft of the council’s consultation response when this is available.

## 6 COMMERCIALISATION TASK GROUP: UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

No members of the Task Group were present at the meeting to talk to the report provided. It was agreed questions regarding the Task Group will be emailed direct.

As outlined in point 10.1 of the report, Panel members resolved to give the Task Group permission to co-opt.

**RESOLVED:** To note the report and give the Task Group permission to co-opt.

## 7 CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN DEAL TASK GROUP: PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Damian Hemmings, Climate Change Officer, introduced the updated Task Group action plan highlighting that the majority of recommendations are now complete or are deemed complete. The latter have been influenced by changes to the feed-in tariff for solar PV and the withdrawal of the Green Deal meaning that the original recommendations can no longer be fulfilled as intended.

In response to Panel member questions, Damian Hemmings clarified:

- The changes to solar PV feed-in tariffs (a reduction in value and an end to any guarantee that the tariff available on sign-up will be sustained) means the business case for expanding solar PV needs to be re-examined. To make this cost effective, off-setting energy costs and/or power purchase agreements will need to be included in the business case. As a result, future solar PV installations are only likely on council owned buildings or schools. This is reinforced by the complexities involved in charging for electricity on non-council owned sites;
- There are currently 34 solar PV systems already installed which as they are on previous, much more favourable feed-in tariff schemes, means they will provide a positive return; and
- Work will be on-going until 2017 to explore the feasibility and technicalities of setting up a local energy services company. External funding has been secured and use of waste heat will be one of the options explored.

Paul McGarry, FutureMerton Manager, clarified that it isn't possible for Merton to specify that solar PV is a requirement of all new developments. Merton would have to successfully argue why its policy should be different from that for the rest of London and England. Therefore, the focus tends to be on working with developers to stop need rather than generating energy.

**RESOLVED:** With most of the recommendations from the Task Group now complete, it was agreed that those outstanding around developing an energy services company be referred to the Commercialisation Task Group for its consideration.

## 8 ADULT SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY TASK GROUP: IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

The final report of the Adult Skills and Employability Task Group was published in June 2013 since when progress against the Task Group's recommendations has been reviewed by the Panel on several occasions. James McGinlay, Head of Sustainable Communities, highlighted that the recommendations of this Task Group have become part of day-to-day working practice for the department and that Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, is about to undertake a review of adult employability as part of a pan-London review. It was therefore recommended that the Panel continue to monitor progress against the recommendations of this Task Group through the minutes of the Economic Wellbeing Group.

**RESOLVED:** To monitor progress against the recommendations of this Task Group through the minutes of the Economic Wellbeing Group.

## 9 SCRUTINY TOPIC SUGGESTIONS (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel was given the opportunity to consider its work programme for next year. This will be reviewed in more detail at a workshop to be held at 7pm on Tuesday 24 May 2016. The work programme will be agreed at the Panel's first meeting of the municipal year (June 2016).

There were no points made on what has and hasn't worked with this year's work programme. A number of topics were suggested for scrutiny review during the forthcoming year:

- Development of CrossRail 2;
- Merger of Circle House and Affinity Sutton;
- Consistency of services and the Panel's lack of ability to influence the quality of services where these are outsourced;
- The future of Morden Park Pool;
- Auditing the trees in Merton;
- Improving air quality. This was thought likely to emerge from activity to discourage the use of diesel vehicles. An initial business case for this work is likely to be available in late summer/early autumn; and
- Sustaining and enhancing green infrastructure generally and in conjunction with the masterplanning activity underway to support the regeneration of town centres.

**RESOLVED:** For the Chair to meet with the Directors of Environment and Regeneration and Community and Housing prior to the workshop on 25 May 2016.