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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 26 FEBRUARY 2019

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Laxmi Attawar (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Ben Butler, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Nick McLean and
Councillor Anthony Fairclough

Jason Andrews (Environmental Health Pollution Manager),
Charles Baker (Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager),
Anita Cacchioli, Cathryn James (Interim Assistant Director,
Public Protection), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager), James
McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities) and
Ben Stephens (Head of Parking Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies received

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 agreed.

4 WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANING: PERFORMANCE UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

At the invitation of the Chair, residents shared their experiences of the waste collection and street cleaning in the Merton borough.

Rudi Leoni: Transparency is needed. Merton have refused to publish the deductions and performance of Veolia. FOI exists to protect public funds. IT is still being used as an excuse. Deductions are still being negotiated. Missed collections are still being marked as complete.

Chris Larkman: Good news is streets are cleaner since the introduction of the wheelie bins. Bad news is the end of roads where there are flats, the rubbish is much worse.

Mark Gale: The system doesn't work. In October road sweepers were halved. The Merton website for reporting issues crashes constantly and Veolia claim not to have received many reports. Surgical needles were left for four days in St Helier.

Mike Nash: We have had to pay someone privately to deal with weeds that are over a meter high. What happened to the weed killers, we used to have them? I have filmed the dust cart driving down the road and then turning straight back around and sent this to my Councillor.

James Leek: I have already circulated fifteen to council officers. Larger households have overflowing bins. The waste is getting better but the streets are bad. Need more humans with brooms. Drains are blocked. Online reporting systems need to be improved.

Michael Marks: Toilet breaks for staff aren't adequate as crews often relieve themselves in the alleyway. Recycling boxes are too small. Bins are overflowing.

Tom Walsh: Sustainable Merton are looking forward to working with Merton. We employ fifty community champions. Last year we ran a plastic free Merton campaign. Subsequently a lot of companies changed their usage of single use plastics. Heading towards a zero waste society should be the Council's goal. The Council should double their effort to lobby government to address this. And a ban on single use plastics should be part of the licence granted for public events.

Marie Davinson: Millions of pounds of resident money to implement the new wheelie bin system, yet there has been no improvement with regards to the amount of litter and fly tips left on our streets. There are many issues: Fly tip hotspots need better monitoring, investigation and enforcement. Leaves blocking drains, confusion over collection days which is not helped when old signs displaying the former collection day are left up in streets months after the change of day, Street bins are not being emptied frequently enough. It seems that the only time action is taken is when a resident or councillor speak directly with a Veolia manager. Are Merton Council's own procedures the blockage in the system?

Frequently the same problem has to be reported numerous times. Do Veolia even receive these reports? They certainly don't appear to have access to location details from Merton's SRQ numbers.

Dan Goode: Shocking fall in street cleanliness, Keep Britain Tidy stresses that a littered environment encourages more litter. Residents endlessly report waste, there is tacit support from Councillors.

The Chair asked Scott Edgell (General Manager, Veolia) to respond to the points raised.

Scott Edgell commented;

- I agree there is a problem with flats and it is not uncommon. Though it is important to mention that there have been a number of issues with residents presenting their waste at the wrong time which has increased the problem.
- The use of the Bushey road alleyway as a toilet is completely unacceptable and I will be investigating.
- We will be inspecting the weeds. We have already increased the sprays from two to three and the whole service is under review, including whether the chemicals in use are effective enough.

The Chair reminded the Panel before we proceed to questions that the scrutiny of the contract is being performed by the Financial Monitoring Task Group.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness, Mike Brunt, requested to introduce Scott Edgell formally to the Panel.

“I welcome the opportunity to bring this to Scrutiny. Last time we were here it was on the point of roll out. 68,000 households now have a new refuse service. Three quarters of those have a new collection day. There was a shortfall of delivery of containers and we failed in delivering on time. We addressed these issues swiftly in partnership with Veolia.

Each month over half a million containers are emptied. We have had a 58% increase in food waste recycling. A 20% increase in garden waste and an almost doubled amount of assisted collections. We are dealing with an unprecedented growth in fly tipping, which is an epidemic across the country. We have taken on additional inspectors to manage this and we are working on a better I.T system as we are aware residents would like feedback after reporting an issue.

Chris Lee concurred that the service isn't where we want it to be but the direction of travel is heading the right way. We have only published a limited amount of performance data so far, because we cannot publish financial deductions when they are unresolved as this is commercially sensitive. We are not satisfied with the online reporting system, but we expect it to improve over the coming months. We are working with Veolia re; enforcement and plan to focus our attention on those households that need extra attention

It isn't as simple as it may seem to catch the perpetrators of fly tipping and tracking down and bringing these people to law is beyond the capacity of other London boroughs also.

The Chair asked the panel members for any questions of clarification. In response to member questions, Scott Edgell clarified the following;

- A panel member asked how Veolia management train the front line staff? What feedback do staff give to management? Scott Edgell responded that training is important to Veolia. All employees are given a full induction on safety, manual handling, vehicles and the role and expectations. With regards to feedback, Echo is our main system. Frontline staff provide us with a lot of feedback. We also have two environmental managers who check on the standards of work.
- The relationship works well between the Environmental managers, Neighbourhood Client Officers and Contract Manager. They have a daily AM call and debrief at the end of the day. We don't offer incentives to staff to report issues. Staff are expected to do the job correctly and have a team ethic.
- We would like to have consistent crews on the same routes, but due to leave and training that is not always possible.
- I apologise to those residents who didn't receive their bins on time. We didn't do enough to manage expectations, but the roll out was not shambolic.
- A panel member asked when improvements in IT will materialise. Chris Lee answered that the integration of CRM to Echo is nearly complete.
- Agreed that bags left on the street encourages further fly tipping. We are asking managers to do ride-alongs with crews, we regularly review social media and we have designed new pick up points.

- A panel member asked whether the Council will review charging for bulky waste collections. Residents are expected to drive to Garth road, but at the same time, discouraged to drive. Mike Brunt explained that he has had conversations with other Local Authorities to analyse whether the charge has any effect on fly tipping. The boroughs have reported they have seen no reduction regardless of whether they have set a fee or not.
- There is a split responsibility between ID Verde and Veolia for street verges.
- We haven't changed the collection for communal properties, they have always received a weekly collection

RESOLVED

Scott Edgell was thanked for his attendance and agreed to return in six months with an update.

5 DIESEL LEVY IMPLEMENTATION (Agenda Item 5)

Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, summarised the report. There are no figures at present as this is the paper that triggers the evidence gathering. Broadly speaking the aims are policy objectives are fewer cars and fewer polluting cars. We intend to look at other Local Authorities and what they have done, what bringing in a new IT system would allow us to do, conduct desktop research, and ascertain whether our policies have had any impact on levels of diesel car ownership in comparison with the national change.

The chair invited questions from the Panel Members.

A Panel member queried cashless parking and the impact it would have on elderly groups who prefer to put cash in a meter. Will any meters have card facilities? Ben Stephens, Head of Parking Services, replied that technology is changing rapidly and we are constantly looking at different offers. We are aware some residents prefer using cash and in the high usage areas we may keep some meters as cash parking.

A panel member proposed a recommendation that the terms of reference be extended.

RESOLVED

That the following reference be provided to Cabinet with regards to the Diesel Levy Implementation.

“The Panel recommends to Cabinet that they consider whether to extend/clarify the terms of reference for the diesel levy review and the review into emissions based charging in other councils to examine whether there is any evidence of the *type* of behavioral change that these schemes drive. I.e. there might not be a fall in overall applications for permits, but over time there might be a trend for permits e.g. for less polluting vehicles, even though overall permit numbers remain broadly the same”.

6 AIR QUALITY UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

Chris Lee introduced the report.

A panel member asked whether the mini ULEZ would still be introduced as it is not featured in the report. Jason Andrews, Environmental Health Manager, explained that we are still in the process of scoping the report and we are committed to looking at it from April 2019.

RESOLVED

The panel recommends that that the Air Quality Task Group returns in a year's time.

7 ELECTRIC CARS (Agenda Item 7)

Paul McGarry, Head of futureMerton, introduced the report and explained this work is part of the Air Quality Task Groups' action plan.

We are currently finalising the third Local Implementation Plan to deliver the Mayors Transport Strategy.

There are currently 70 publically available charging points across the borough. We will be rolling out another 31 next month. The charging points take 3-4 hours to fully charge a vehicle. TFL are also rolling out rapid charging points. These are more aimed at taxis as they charge in 20 minutes.

After hearing questions from the Panel, Paul McGarry clarified the following points;

- When deciding on the siting of the charging points, we chose high profile locations to get residents more aware of the facility. We also obtained data from the DVLA which showed the west of the borough have more electric vehicles. Feedback about resident support also helps decide where to place charging points.
- As part of the LIP3, we are investigating partnering up with an electric bike hire company but there is no date set for this as yet.
- Vehicles can stay charging overnight, though there is a limit and Source London would notice if a car was parked for days.

The Chair thanked officers for attending

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

Cllr Nick Mclean, performance monitoring lead for the Panel, made the following comments:

- Housing needs - The service has seen a 62% increase in cases as a result of the Housing Reduction Act but there has been no negative impact on performance.
- Library visitor figures (SP480) are below the target but numbers are up on last year.

Chris Lee highlighted the following items:

- Regulatory services – On target
- Score of 5 for parks quality management system. Quality of ID Verde parks maintenance.

A Panel member asked why CRP44 – Parking services is 1.6 million over target. Chris Lee clarified that it is only published on an annual basis and remains high due to drivers continuing to fail to comply with rules and regulations (stopping in yellow boxes, driving in bus lanes etc.).

A panel member requested clarification on SP067 Municipal - 5% of waste sent to landfill – where does the rest go? Chris Lee explained that the ash goes to landfill and the rest to the incinerator at Beddington Lane.

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel noted the remainder of the work plan for the rest of the municipal year.

Members were reminded that the opening of the Morden Leisure Centre will be on the 30th March 2019 if anyone would like to attend.

10 HIGHWAYS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (Agenda Item 10)

Meeting was held as part two.

Gary Marshall, Infrastructure Manager, answered the Panel Members questions of clarification.