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CABINET

24 FEBRUARY 2020

(7.15 pm - 8.09 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Stephen Alambritis (in the Chair), Mark Allison, Laxmi Attawar, Kelly Braund, Tobin Byers, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Edith Macauley MBE, Eleanor Stringer and Martin Whelton

Co-opted Members

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Thomas Barlow, Daniel Holden, Hayley Ormrod and Peter Southgate (Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group)

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), Hannah Doody (Director of Community and Housing), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Rachael Wardell (Director, Children, Schools & Families Department), Tara Butler (Programme Manager - Strategic Policy and Research), Alan Gibbs (Policy and Research Officer, Opposition Group), Christine Parsloe (Leisure and Culture Development Manager), David Keppler (Head of Revenues and Benefits) and Roger Kershaw (Assistant Director of Resources)

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 interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 REFERENCE FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION – PRE DECISION SCRUTINY OF THE BUSINESS PLAN 2020-24 (Agenda Item 4)

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission presented the reference report and outlined the discussions which had taken place as part of the second round of budget scrutiny.

The savings had been questioned closely and it was felt that they were necessary and deliverable. It was noted that there was still a degree of uncertainty around the business rates retention, the Government's fair funding review, their plans for the funding of adult social care and the Department of Education's response to the Council's DSG recovery plan. The Commission had requested that it be kept updated of any developments via the quarterly monitoring reports. If the DfE's response was favourable it could be transformational for the Council's revenue budget and the Cabinet was asked to consider whether any surplus could be used to address the savings which had been identified as higher risk. He concluded by thanking the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Director of Corporate Services for their contribution to the budget scrutiny process.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance thanked Councillor Southgate and all the scrutiny panels and officers involved, highlighting the considerable work which had gone into the budget process. He welcomed the comments made by the Commission, particularly on the uncertainty around the funding announcements from the Government. He agreed that the Commission and Panels should be kept updated via the regular financial monitoring reports and noted the view of the scrutiny members that the Council should keep its options open in respect of reversing any savings, as in some instances savings could help to deliver a better service for residents.

The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that Members would be kept updated via the regular monitoring reports and asked that Members be mindful of the uncertainty around the timetable for the Government's announcements on future funding.

The Chair thanked all those present and the Scrutiny Members for their contributions.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendation made by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission (set out in paragraph 2.4 of the Cabinet report) and the outcomes of consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (set out in Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report) be taken into account when taking decisions relating to the Business Plan 2020-24.

5 MERTON'S STRATEGY FOR MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND/OR DISABILITIES (SEND) (Agenda Item 5)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services presented the report which set out the approach of the Council and its partners to delivering services for children and young people with special educational needs. She outlined the aspirations and outcomes which were in line with those in the Children and Young People Plan. She thanked the Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education and the officers involved for their hard work in developing the strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety welcomed the partnership approach set out in the report in this important area.

RESOLVED:

That the publication in March 2020 of the Merton's Strategy for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN and/ or disabilities age 0-25 (2020-23). 'The Merton SEND Strategy' – Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report be approved.

6 THE CANONS, MITCHAM - LANDSCAPE & BUILDING CONTRACTS
(Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Commerce, Culture and Leisure presented the report which set out the procurement process for the delivery of the Canons "People for Parks" project.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration drew Members' attention to the updated exempt appendix setting out the total price for both the landscape and building contracts and the aggregate figure which was well within the budget set aside, allowing some for contingencies. Subject to the contracts being awarded it was hoped that work would begin in late spring, early summer.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council award Lot 1 - Landscape Contract to Tenderer D under the terms set out in the exempt appendices.
2. That the Council award Lot 2 - Building Contract to Tenderer E under the terms set out in the exempt appendices.

7 WIMBLEDON PARK LAKE – OUTDOOR SWIMMING PROPOSAL (Agenda Item 7)

The item was withdrawn at the request of the Chair to allow officers to consider additional safety concerns raised and planning implications relating to the Grade II listed status, and a report would be brought back to a future meeting.

8 BISHOPSFORD ROAD BRIDGE - PREFERRED OPTION (Agenda Item 8)

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport presented the report which set out a range of options, costs and a timetable for reopening the bridge as quickly and as safely as possible.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration recognised the significant impact of the loss of the bridge and reassured Members that officers were working extremely hard and as fast as possible behind the scenes to bring the bridge back into use. The recommendations in the report would see a new bridge being built as quickly as possible.

The Chair welcomed the report and highlighted the discussions which had taken place with his fellow ward Members and residents, TfL, utilities companies and local businesses to mitigate the impact and provide support.

RESOLVED:

3. That Cabinet continues to recognise the urgency and importance of reopening Bishopsford Road Bridge and reaffirms its commitment to holding special meetings where necessary.
4. That Cabinet selects the demolition of the existing structure and the erection of a new bridge [options 5 or 6] as the preferred option from a number of options explored to reopen the bridge.

9 AWARD OF MICROSOFT ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT (Agenda Item 9)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out the procurement process for the provision of the Microsoft Enterprise agreement.

RESOLVED:

That a three-year contract be awarded for the provision of Microsoft Enterprise Licences to Supplier B, to be appointed as the Microsoft Large Account Reseller partner (LAR) for London Borough of Merton.

10 LOCAL BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF AND RETAIL DISCOUNT SCHEMES 2020/21 (Agenda Item 10)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out proposals for discretionary rate relief and retail discount schemes. The process for determining who receives relief would be fair and would enable local businesses to thrive.

The Chair welcomed the recommendations which would benefit small businesses in Merton, including around 30 pubs, and that the rate relief would be allocated automatically.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Local Discretionary Business Rate Relief Scheme for 2020/21 be agreed.
2. That the new Retail Discount Scheme for 2020/21 be agreed.

11 FINANCIAL MONITORING DECEMBER 2019 (Agenda Item 11)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out the Council's financial position at December 2019. He thanked the officers involved in monitoring and upholding rigorous processes. A variance of 0.3% had been forecast, which was very close to the budget position. The progress made in respect of the savings was appreciated; and a few amendments to the capital programme were recommended.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that the report would also be reported to the Financial Monitoring Task Group for consideration.

RESOLVED:

1. That the financial reporting data for month 9, December 2019, relating to revenue budgetary control, showing a forecast net favourable variance at year-end of £1,710k, -0.3% of gross budget be noted.
2. That the contents of Section 4 and the amendments to the Capital Programme contained in Appendix 5b of the Cabinet report be noted.

12 BUSINESS PLAN 2020-24 (Agenda Item 12)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out the proposed budget for 2020-24, and reiterated the points made in his response to Councillor Southgate at item 4. He thanked all those involved in the production of the business plan and welcomed the financially disciplined approach with business-like decisions taken at an early stage and the great deal of progress made against the savings target. He highlighted the uncertainty which had impacted the early stage of this year's budget process and the small amount of growth proposed, which was in response to some areas in Children's Services having struggled to come in on budget. The Council tax being proposed was 1.99% from Merton and a 2% Adult Social Care precept and it was noted that virtually all councils were raising their council tax by a similar amount. The Government's financial settlement may have been slightly more generous than previous years but would not prevent the Council having to make further savings. The modest savings proposed had been scrutinised and the Scrutiny Panels and Commission were satisfied with the approach taken. A gap was still forecast by the end of the period, which had reduced to £9m and a balanced budget was being proposed for the next year and a minimum reserve level for contingencies. He felt that the budget proposed would provide the best outcome for residents and make the borough a great place for families.

The Director of Corporate Services drew Members' attention to page 47 which included the cost of replacing Bishopsford Bridge, which would go to Council for approval in March. The report also included a review of the current position with the DfE and the DSG deficit. She thanked colleagues for their work on the business plan and advised the Cabinet that she was satisfied to sign it off for Council approval as the Council's s151 officer.

The Chair thanked everyone involved in the production of the business plan which would contribute to bridging the gap between the east and west of the Borough and contribute to making Merton a great place for families. He noted that a balanced budget was recommended but acknowledged that there was still work to be done.

RESOLVED:

1. That the response to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission be agreed;
2. That having considered all of the information in this report and noted the positive assurance statement given by the Director of Corporate Services

based on the proposed Council Tax strategy, the maximum Council Tax in 2020/21, equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,276.92, which is an increase of below 4% be approved and recommended to Council for approval.

3. That all of the latest information and the comments from the scrutiny process be considered, and recommendations to Council be made as appropriate
4. That the Business Plan 2020-24 including the General Fund Budget and Council Tax Strategy for 2020/21, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2020-24 as submitted, along with the draft Equality Assessments (EAs), be approved and recommended to Council for approval subject to any proposed amendments agreed at this meeting;
5. That having considered all of the latest information and the comments from the scrutiny process, the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 1 to the Capital Strategy); the Treasury Management Strategy (Section 5), including the detailed recommendations in that Section, incorporating the Prudential Indicators and the Capital Strategy (Section 4) as submitted and reported upon be approved and recommended to Council for approval, subject to any proposed amendments agreed at this meeting;
6. That it be noted that the GLA precept will not be agreed by the London Assembly until 24 February 2020, but the provisional figure has been incorporated into the draft MTFS.
7. That officers be requested to review the savings proposals agreed and where possible bring them forward to the earliest possible implementation date
8. That it be noted that there may be minor amendments to figures in this report as a result of new information being received after the deadline for dispatch and that this will be amended for the report to Council in March.
9. That Risk Management Strategy be approved.

14 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 14)

Cabinet agreed to note the information contained in the exempt appendices without making reference to it as part of the discussion and therefore the meeting remained in public.

15 WIMBLEDON PARK LAKE - OUTDOOR SWIMMING PROPOSAL: EXEMPT APPENDICES (Agenda Item 15)

The item was withdrawn.

16 AWARD OF MICROSOFT ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT - EXEMPT APPENDIX (Agenda Item 16)

Cabinet noted the information contained in the exempt appendix and did not refer to it as part of the discussion. The decision is set out under item 9 above.

17 THE CANONS MITCHAM LANDSCAPE AND BUILDING CONTRACTS - EXEMPT APPENDICES (Agenda Item 17)

Cabinet noted the information contained in the exempt appendices, including the revised appendix, and did not refer to it as part of the discussion. The decision is set out under item 6 above.