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Merton Council

Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Date: 11 November 2020

Time: 7.15 pm

Venue: This meeting will be a virtual meeting and therefore will not take place in a physical location, in accordance with s78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

AGENDA

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2	Declarations of pecuniary interest	
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4	Budget/Business Plan scrutiny (round 1) To follow	
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Overview and Scrutiny Commission membership

Councillors:

Peter Southgate (Chair)
Peter McCabe (Vice-Chair)
John Dehaney
Brenda Fraser
Paul Kohler
Owen Pritchard
Nick McLean
Edward Gretton
Joan Henry
Natasha Irons

Substitute Members:

David Williams MBE JP
Thomas Barlow
Edward Foley
Ben Butler
David Chung
Simon McGrath

Co-opted Representatives

Mansoor Ahmad, Parent Governor
Representative - Secondary and Special
Sectors
Colin Powell, Church of England diocese

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. For further advice please speak with the Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people. From May 2008, the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and Panels have been restructured and the Panels renamed to reflect the Local Area Agreement strategic themes.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

For more information, please contact the Scrutiny Team on 020 8545 3864 or by e-mail on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

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Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

9 SEPTEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 9.15 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor John Dehaney,
Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Paul Kohler,
Councillor Owen Pritchard, Councillor Nick McLean,
Councillor Edward Gretton, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor Natasha Irons and Mansoor Ahmad

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors

Matt Burrows (Head of Communications and Customer Experience), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services) and Kiran Vagarwal (Interim Head of Community Safety)

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)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

4 BCU COMMANDER - CRIME AND POLICING IN MERTON (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair welcomed the new Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Elisabeth Chapple, to the meeting.

The Borough Commander gave a brief introduction and responded to Panel Member questions, concerns and priorities as below:

With regards to surge capability, we use a Cluster Strategy;

- Dedicated Ward Officers are able to bid for extra resources to address priorities.
- Clusters of wards/neighbouring wards work together – if staff member off sick or has adjusted duties.

In terms of proactivity, crime prevention and community engagement;

- We currently have 23 vacancies for Dedicated Ward Officers and it's important we bring that figure down and work on this has already begun..
- The public attitude survey asks whether 'local communities know who their local officers are'. The scores are always low at around 14-20%. Therefore we plan to increase marketing on who local officers are and how you can contact them, plus other avenues for contact if that officer is unavailable.
- Have invested highly in the Violence Suppression Unit and the Burglary and Robbery teams.
- This BCU isn't making the best use of the resources available to it at present, particularly from a central perspective such as evidence based policing. I plan to strengthen those links more in the SW BCU.
- We are putting into place a community engagement plan. Also we are trying to have Ward Panels virtually and working on different options to bring the panels back to physical meetings.

The Police are trying to address and tackle low level nuisance on a multi-agency basis, particularly with Councils. We know this issue greatly affects how safe residents feel in their homes and we are increasing our work with community protection warnings and notices as well as an ASBO early intervention scheme. Please ask residents to keep reporting these consistent issues so we can aim to have the resources required in the most affected areas.

Our long held ambition is that the Metropolitan Police should be representative of the community it serves which is 40% BAME and 50% women.

Looking at the stop and search statistics;

- Although we stop a higher number of white children in comparison to black children, when you look at that in terms of the population, it is disproportionate. Since this issue has been highlighted, these disproportionate figures are slightly coming down.
- Officers are better reflecting on the strength of the intelligence they are receiving. We also need to educate our communities on evidenced based policing - what did you see, distinguishing features etc.
- There is still a KPI of volume on stop and searches. However that metric will be replaced by a different measure going forward.

In lines with the Mayors strategy, we have been asked to set a 60% carbon reduction target. We are making a shift towards electric cars and when refurbishing buildings, we will look to install solar power, increase electric charging points in the yard.

Continuity of leadership is important to me. My personal intention is to remain in post for at least three years.

The Chair thanked the Borough Commander for a valuable session.

5 SAFER MERTON UPDATE (Agenda Item 5)

The Community Safety Manager outlined the report on Community Resilience which includes three areas: Hate Crime, Neighbourhood Watch and the Merton Safer Neighbourhood Board.

The Community Safety Manager highlighted a few key points for each area;

Hate Crime

- There has been a steady increase in overall hate crime since April this year. Predominant area arising has been racially motivated hate crime.
- The Hate Crime advice surgery has continued a sustained service throughout lockdown.
- Hate crime awareness week is 10-17 October 2020.

Neighbourhood Watch

- Neighbourhood Watch currently at 22,000 members across the BCU with 478 co-ordinators.
- Work closely with police and familiar with areas where we would like to increase and expand the membership.
- Merton is one of the few boroughs that run a junior Neighbourhood Watch.

Merton Safer Neighbourhood Board

- Community engagement is funded through MOPAC
- At 2.26 we have listed six projects we were looking to commission, unfortunately there is a pause on this discretionary funding.

In response to Panel Member questions the Community Safety Manager clarified;

There is under reporting amongst the community with regards to hate crime. We aim to increase reporting through more publicity and third party reporting. Looking at the increased figure of 359 reports compared to the previous year's 330, it is hard to conclude whether more incidents occurred or whether there was an increase in confidence of reporting.

Neighbourhood Watch is extremely effective. Not only does it provide eyes and ears in the wards but it is useful for pushing out messages at a street based level.

As part of hate crime awareness week, a session on bystander training will be delivered on 15 October by the Chair of the Hate Crime Strategy Group.

VAWG and Domestic Abuse

- Decision made to extend strategy and delivery plan until March 2021.
- In response to Panel Member questions the Community Safety Manager clarified;
- Dealings with brothels is one of our priorities over the next 12 months
- One stop shop is running as a virtual service. Capacity will need to be considered as to whether it could run as both a face to face and virtual offering.
- Updates on Ask Angela and misogyny as a hate crime will be provided to the Panel.

6 COVID-19 UPDATE -COMMUNICATIONS (Agenda Item 6)

The Interim Head of Customer Experience & Communications summarised the report and responded to Panel Member questions;

The Council uses three main digital channels to reach target groups on social media, which are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Instagram tends to reach youngest audience. We also use local press and outdoor media.

It is a challenge for local authorities to reach the 20-29 year old demographic. Most tools at our disposal have a limited reach.

Low traffic neighbourhoods will be promoted on digital media, My Merton, weekly bulletins etc.

We implemented weekly Councillor bulletins during March and we will look to extend this regular update as a channel to communicate to all Councillors.

With a limited amount of occupancy within the Civic Centre and other Council buildings, the majority of staff are working from home. Feedback from staff has been positive and our communication has been very strong.

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 11 November 2020

Wards: All

Subject: Voluntary and community sector capacity

Lead officer: Hannah Doody, Director of Community and Housing

Lead member: Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Contact officer: Lysanne Eddy, lysanne.eddy@merton.gov.uk; 020 8545 3882

Recommendations:

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the update on current voluntary and community sector capacity in Merton and the council's proposed short and long term strategy for supporting the sector.
-

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the current picture around voluntary and community sector capacity in Merton and sets out the Council's proposed short and long term strategy for supporting the sector in Merton.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Merton benefits from a vibrant and active voluntary and community sector (VCS). According to latest available figures, there are over 650 VCS organisations in the borough working to address the needs of Merton residents.
- 2.2 Over the past five years the council has provided funding of over £60 million to the voluntary sector and in 2019-20 increased the level of funding for the second year in a row. This demonstrates the Council's continued recognition of the vital role that the voluntary sector plays in the borough and the services that it provides.
- 2.3 In 2019/20 support totalled £10,041,217 in grants, commissioned services, notional funding and discretionary rate relief. A number of funded organisations are providing services in some of the more deprived areas of Merton, as part of the council's priority to bridge the economic gap between the east and west of the borough.
- 2.4 In October 2018, the Council launched an expanded Strategic Partner Funding Programme 2019-22 based on a commissioning approach, comprising of five elements:
- information and advice
 - voluntary sector infrastructure support
 - wellbeing services
 - a carers' service, and
 - Healthwatch Merton

Each element had a separate funding pot and there was no reduction in funding. A total of 15 voluntary organisations received funding through the Strategic Partner programme, with funding totalling £3,858,059 for 2019-22.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1 Local voluntary and community sector organisations have played a vital role in helping Merton's communities to deal with the impact of Covid-19. Their specialist knowledge and expertise has been crucial in helping to address the urgent and emerging needs of Merton residents throughout the Covid crisis. This help has ranged from health and social care support through to assistance for those affected by the enormous socio-economic consequences of Covid-19.
- 3.2 The voluntary and community sector is often uniquely positioned to respond to local challenges, as evidenced through the key role it has played in mobilising the Merton COVID-19 Community Response Hub. The service has been widely acclaimed for its rapid mobilisation, collaborative approach and impact on residents. The running of the service has now been transferred entirely to the voluntary sector.
- 3.3 The response to the pandemic has also seen thousands of new volunteers mobilised to support vulnerable households. It is clear from feedback that the VCS response in Merton has been larger and faster than many other London boroughs linked to the council's long-standing commitment to working in partnership with the sector. There is a notable opportunity to capture and grow this new community resource linked to the Council's Recovery and Modernisation Programme.
- 3.4 However, just as the sector has seen increasing need for and demands on its services, it is at the same time experiencing significant financial and service delivery pressures as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis.
- 3.5 At a national level, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) estimated that charities lost out on around £4bn worth of income in the first 12 weeks since the start of the crisis. In particular VCS organisations lost income due cancellation of fundraising events, a loss of trading income, and lower investment income¹.
- 3.6 There are indications that the local VCS in Merton, including strategic partners, are continuing to face a significant loss of income, which is likely to lead to a reduction in what it can deliver for Merton communities. An impact survey conducted by Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) in May, along with further focused interviews with representative VCS organisations during September, found that a large majority of respondents had incurred significant impact on their finances and services and that there is a great deal of uncertainty around longer term sustainability.

Furthermore, 14% of May respondents felt that their organisation could face closure as a result of the pandemic. A number of these were smaller organisations and/or organisations led by or serving BAME communities.
- 3.7 Merton Council also conducted a light touch survey of its grant funded organisations in early May to gain a better understanding of the financial

¹ <https://publications.ncvo.org.uk/impact-covid-19-voluntary-sector/>

impact of Covid-19. The reported losses incurred were in line with the MVSC survey. At the same time, 62% of organisations responding had seen increases in expenditure. Central reserves for all organisations were limited at most to between 3-6 months, while some had no reserves.

- 3.8 There is also evidence of a large increase in service demand linked to Covid and lockdown. For example, Merton's largest advice provider Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth, is experiencing a significant jump in advice demand across Merton as a result of Covid-19.
- 3.9 Merton Council has stepped in to provide additional support to the sector since the early days of the Covid crisis. Council funded organisations were advised to contact their commissioner to discuss diverting current grant funding to Covid-19 work or extra requests for funding.
- 3.10 Additional grant funding was provided to two key advice services to cover extra staffing costs to meet large increase in demand. Discrete new services were also commissioned to respond to current need, such as the Age UK Merton At Home Food and Welfare Service.
- 3.11 Merton Council also signed up to a London Funders [joint statement](#) pledging to offer support to voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups affected by the coronavirus outbreak.
- 3.12 The Council also donated an initial £50,000 to the dedicated Merton Giving Coronavirus Fund launched in April. Fundraising from the local business community was also matched with contributions from other funders including Wimbledon Foundation and Clarion.
- 3.13 To date this fund has provided £210,640 of financial support to organisations working locally that are delivering Covid-19 front line services or whose operations have been impacted by Covid. It is targeted towards smaller organisations and a representative proportion of successful bids have been from BAME led organisations/those supporting BAME communities. A total of 75 organisations have received funding through 81 grants.
- 3.14 Phase 1 bidding paused in September and it is anticipated that Phase 2 will launch in mid-November, subject to final confirmation of Big Lottery funding. An additional £50k has been allocated by the Council from the Defra Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant for Food and Essential Supplies and a further £30k from the Council's winter pressures budget.

4. A VCS recovery package for Merton

- 4.1 The indications from the local surveys and case studies are that the sector is continuing to see significant financial and service delivery pressures as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis and some organisations may face imminent closure. This is of significant strategic concern to the council as a sizeable and unmanaged contraction of the VCS would impair both the borough's short term ability to respond to Covid-19 and our longer term 'Merton the Place' ambition to create more self-reliant and supportive communities.
- 4.2 The Council has been working to develop a short term and long term approach to take us through the immediate crisis and to help create a more sustainable and effective VCS going forward.

4.3 The short term strategy agreed by the Council's Management Team is to support the sector to live within the resources available to it, including a managed contraction in scope and organisations where appropriate. This will need to be informed by a much more detailed understanding of the current state of the local sector including the available assets and the challenges and capacity issues faced going forward and the impact on specific types of organisations and the communities they serve.

4.4 The longer term strategy is to create a more sustainable funding position, building on successful models including the Community Response Hub and social prescribing, with the potential focus on creating a community help prevention model. Once further exploratory work has been undertaken, we will bring this back to Overview and Scrutiny in mid-2021 for further input.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 There are no alternative options as this report is for information and update only.

6. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

6.1 This paper is informed by the results of a VCS impact survey conducted by MVSC in and a council survey undertaken with grant funded organisations, as well as more recent case studies.

6.2 A range of stakeholders will be engaged as part of the proposed next stages of support for the VCS.

7. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None specific to this report.

8. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None specific to this report.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None specific to this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None specific to this report.

10.2 The proposals outlined in this document work in conjunction with wider recovery plans for the Council.

11. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

11.1 None for the purposes of this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 25/02/2019
<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=714>

12.2 Key Decision Report - Strategic Partner Programme 2019/22 18/12/2018
<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=687>

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 11 November 2020

Subject: Financial Monitoring Task Group recommendation to OSC

Lead officer: Rosie Mckeever, Scrutiny Officer

Lead member: Councillor Stephen Crowe, Chair of FMTG

Contact officer: Rosie Mckeever, Scrutiny Officer

Recommendations:

- A. For the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to note and comment on the contents of the report.
 - B. That, whilst acknowledging the severe financial pressure facing the Council due to the Covid crisis, the Cabinet is asked to review the appropriateness and fairness of the Disability Related Expenditure disregard of £10 per week, which has remained unchanged for many years.
-

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At the FMTG meeting on 5 March 2020, Mr Michael Turner, Policy & Strategy Manager for the Merton Centre for Independent Living (MCIL) presented a paper entitled 'Charges for Adult Social Care'.
- 1.2 Michael Turner made a number of recommendations but particularly stressed that MCIL regarded the current Disability Related Expenditure disregard of £10 per week as insufficient. The figure is too low, it does not reflect the true cost of extra items that are required and has not been reviewed for ten years.
- 1.3 The FMTG unanimously resolved to make a recommendation to the OSC on the matter of the Disability Related Expenditure disregard.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1 Local Authorities have discretionary powers to charge adults receiving care services under section 14 of the Care Act 2014.
- 2.2 Councils are required to carry out a financial assessment to work out what an individual can afford. This policy will be used when calculating an individual's contribution to their social care package, including their personal budget allocation or traditional social services.
- 2.3 An allowance of £10 is made for Disability Related Expenditure for customers in receipt of disability benefits such as Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance (care component) who submit on the financial assessment form that they incur disability related expenses.
- 2.4 Disability Related Expenditure is considered as a necessary additional expense to meet needs that are not being met by the Council that a person incurs due to a disability or condition (extra heating, laundry, prescriptions, disability related equipment etc.)

- 2.5 Merton's current policy is that individuals who report DRE are eligible for a £10 per week disregard in respect of their financial contribution towards their care. However, if the individual feels that their DRE is more than £10 per week then they are entitled to submit a claim for the higher amount with appropriate supporting evidence which is then assessed on a case by case basis.
- 2.6 Looking at the Merton data from 6 April to 4 October 2020;
- 2.7 There were 1765 customers financially assessed for non-residential care services
- 2.8 762 of these customers received a DRE allowance.
- 650 received the standard DRE of £10.
 - 112 received a DRE over £10 after requesting their DRE be assessed individually.
 - The majority of the 112 customers received a DRE allowance of £15 - £45.
 - However, 7 customers received a DRE of over £100, with the highest being £190.
- 2.9 Looking briefly at a snapshot of other Local Authorities;
- 2.10 A survey undertaken by NAFAO in September this year asked Local Authorities what type of DRE they applied for non-residential financial assessments. There were 41 respondents to the survey;
- 2.11 11 Local Authorities offer a standard DRE ranging from £10 to £20. The most frequent figure, given by 6 of the councils, was £10. The average was £12.
- 2.12 The remaining 30 councils grant bespoke allowances based on the receipts provided during the financial assessment process.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Continue with the present £10 disregard. However, this fails to acknowledge increases in the cost of living in the 10 years since the disregard was last reviewed.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. See background papers – MCIL briefing 'Charges for Adult Social Care'

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. None

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. None for the purpose of this report though if the recommendation is progressed, there will be financial implications. An increase in the DRE allowance would impact on the income received from customer contributions. Further details would need to be sought from the Financial Assessments Team, Debt Recovery and the Director of Corporate Services.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None for the purpose of this report

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. None for the purpose of this report.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

9.1. None for the purpose of this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None for the purpose of this report.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. Merton CIL briefing for the Financial Monitoring Task Group - 'Charges for Adult Social Care'

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