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CABINET

28 APRIL 2020

(6.30 pm - 7.50 pm)

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

ALSO PRESENT: 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), Louise Round (Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership and Monitoring Officer), Matt Burrows (Head of Communications and Customer Experience) and Louise Fleming (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

No apologies were received.

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 23 March 2020 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first virtual meeting of Cabinet which was being broadcast on YouTube.

The Chair expressed pride at the work done to keep people safe and to support the most vulnerable in Merton and extended his condolences to the families of the 64 Merton residents who had lost their lives to Covid-19.

Merton had almost 3000 vulnerable residents classified at most at risk under Operation Shield and the Council had contacted each one to ensure they were supported and cared for.

The Chair thanked teams from Finance and Business Rates for diligently supporting the borough's local small businesses. The Council was in the top 3 boroughs in London for the percentage of grants distributed to local businesses in Merton to help them through the crisis.

At the invitation of the Chair, the Chief Executive placed on record his thanks for the work of all the staff in Merton to keep services going in these very difficult circumstances. He also summarised the organisational framework, both in Merton and regionally, as referenced in the report.

The Chair invited contributions from the Cabinet Members as follows:

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment thanked the Director of Community & Housing and the Director of Public Health and their respective teams for their exceptional responses. He gave an update on hospital discharges, capacity and bed availability in care homes, PPE and access to testing.

On the agreement of the Chair, he read out a message from the South West London CCG on the NHS COVID-19 response.

The statement paid tribute to all health and care colleagues who were working tirelessly on the frontline to respond to COVID-19, who had shown exceptional resilience and commitment every day by caring for the patients who totally relied on their expertise, compassion and professionalism. It also described how the four hospitals which served Merton residents – Croydon, Epsom St Helier, Kingston and St George's were collaborating closely, along with other service providers and GP practices, to ensure there was an effective and consistent approach to patient care.

The Director of Community and Housing outlined the 21 Care homes in the borough receiving daily contact from the Council and Merton had mobilised an oversight group with NHS colleagues, public health and care home representatives. The purpose of this group was to ensure homes with cases of Covid-19 received wrap-around support and an immediate response service, including support with infection control measures and use of PPE.

The Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Partnerships and Community Safety thanked the Borough Commander and Police Team for keeping the community safe. She also expressed thanks to MVSC and the volunteer sector.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance further highlighted the work of the voluntary sector including, AGE UK, FISH, Wimbledon Guild, Wimbledon Food Bank, Commonsense Community Development Trust, Dons for Action and Merton Mutual Aid.

He also drew the Cabinets attention to the extent of work being done to tackle hardship in the borough.

With a growing number of residents facing financial hardship, the Council had launched additional support for those on low incomes –reducing council tax bills for those who need financial support the most (adults who already qualify for council tax support). This would take £200 off the balance of their bills this year.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that the Council had distributed £23.5million in grants to over 90% of Merton small businesses.

The Cabinet Member for Schools and Adult Education remarked on the many compliments she had received about the Merton Council Team for the support given to Head Teachers and Schools in this period. She also reported on good news from the Merton team responsible for supporting Merton's vulnerable young people to find employment. They had successfully found paid roles for some of the borough's most disadvantaged teenagers.

The Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities commented on the work of Safer Merton who were monitoring domestic violence reports in the borough. The One Stop Shop was still open remotely and Members were working with Officers to encourage and enable vulnerable people to report cases. This included increasing social media communications about the support available and ways to make reporting easier for vulnerable people.

The Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture thanked Merton staff for their hard work under these difficult circumstances to keep the borough's parks and green spaces open.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport thanked officers in housing needs, future Merton, highways and parking for their work during these challenging times. There had been a rise in rough sleepers in the borough, bringing the figure to 41. 35 had been placed in accommodation with offers made to the remaining 6, which had been declined. Outreach teams were continuing to work with those rough sleepers and to date there had been no reported cases of Covid-19 among them. It was noted that the Council had been able to issue a large number of free parking permits to NHS and social care staff to carry out their essential support. In response to questions from Cabinet Members, the Cabinet Member advised that the Council was working with its partners to ensure that victims of domestic abuse were rehoused and that vulnerable people were protected.

The Chair thanked all those present for their contributions.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet notes the steps taken by the Council in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

5 CHANGES TO CABINET PORTFOLIOS (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair thanked Councillor Eleanor Stringer for taking on the role of Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education; and thanked Cllr Kelly Braund for her work over the last two years as the previous Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cabinet notes the changes to the appointments to the Cabinet including their respective portfolios (Appendix A); and
2. That the Cabinet appointments will be reported to the next available Council meeting for noting and to recommend that the Council's Constitution is updated accordingly.