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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 22 FEBRUARY 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Aidan Mundy (in the Chair),
Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Nick Draper,
Councillor Anthony Fairclough and Councillor Dave Ward

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Elliot Brunton, Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager), James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities) and John Morgan (Interim Director, Community & Housing)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Geraldine Stanford (Cllr Pauline Cowper as substitute) and Cllr David Dean (Cllr Nigel Benbow as substitute).

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4 ACTIONS LOG (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited comments from Panel Members.

In response to questions the Head of Future Merton reported that in regards to HGV's, it has been agreed to provide residents with a resident control scheme which will be available from Monday 28th February

The Chair asked for an update on the Green Spaces Strategy.

The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning said a number of initiatives will feed into this work including the tree strategy and surveying of parks infrastructure to inform parks strategy.

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Environment and Regeneration gave an overview of the report, highlighting that;

The blue badge inspection target was hindered by Covid. This is now back on track and it is expected to achieve target by end of March.

The leisure centres target is red, there has been some significant improvement in leisure centre users and it is expected it to continue to improve as we move out of Covid restrictions.

CRP 124 – reduction in % street reports rectified in time: There has been an overall deterioration in street cleaning which is being addressed with Veolia.

The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning, said the council has issued a service improvement notice to Veolia who will respond with an action plan and a timetable for completion of works.

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces said it was clear the service has deteriorated. Veolia now have the opportunity to address this in a formal manner, which is the right thing for the council to do. Council has invested in street cleaning and we look forward to hearing Veolia's action plan in addressing our concerns

In response to questions, the Cabinet member reported that Veolia now have 10 working days to respond with an action plan and an agreed timetable. We will be keeping a close on proposals and holding them to account

A Panel member said that given there has been a big drop in people's perceptions on street cleansing had the contractual variation of £1 million investment to ensure Veolia to meet standards been beneficial

The Director of Environment and Regeneration said the investment was seen as necessary to sustain performance, next 12 months is critical to determine whether to renew contract or re- commission the service.

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces said the investment meant Merton enjoyed a better service than neighbouring boroughs during pandemic.

The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning added there had been an improvement in street cleaning reported in the resident survey

A panel member said there had been challenges with bin collection near blocks of flats and the fix my streets app

The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning said the waste manager is discussing these issues with Veolia. There had been issues over the Christmas period because of driver shortage due to Covid. There are plans to improve the fix my street app functionality as there is an ease of accessibility on reporting issues.

Chair said he had been in discussion with the Cabinet Member about additions to the Fix my Street App.

In response to a question on outdoor events in parks the Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning there need to be a better definition of this indicator as it includes a wide range of events.

In regards to a question on collection of recycling in communal blocks and change in the target, The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning said during the Christmas period there is more waste and lower recycling performance. There has also been an increase in residual waste due to Covid.

RESOLVED

The Assistant Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning will check with the service provider and circulate a short update to the panel by email

6 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT (Agenda Item 6)

This item was moved to 8 March 2022 due to the amount of large items on the agenda.

7 DESIGN REVIEW PANEL (Agenda Item 7)

The Urban Designer and DRP lead gave an overview of the report

Panel members were interested in the impact of daytime meetings on ward Councillors attendance and how to include local resident involvement.

In response to questions the Urban Designer and DRP lead said the RAG rating aims for an even number of stages so you cannot opt for the middle one.

A Panel Member commented that the DRP should be free from democratic involvement it is a technical meeting. There are opportunities for Councillors to be involved but the purpose of the DRP is to look at the design of a proposed development

The Head of Regeneration said the function of the DRP is to advise, the report draws from good practice across the country. The aim is for the panel to be supportive and challenging in pre-application process. There are mechanisms in place to inform councillors about activity in their ward.

The Panel moved to a vote on the recommendations listed in the report
There were six votes in favour of recommendations and one voted against.
Recommendations agreed by the Panel

The Panel asked for an update in in one year.

8 SMART CITIES (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Future Merton gave an overview of the report

In response to a question it was confirmed that the technology can monitor the footfall in parks.

The Head of Future Merton said the technology uses 4G data, air quality sensors are in place, there is a role to determine how to analyse and make use of and use data,

there are no plans to put a team in place to fulfil this role. The new data will play an important role in service planning process

The Chair moved the following recommendation

Ask that a feasibility study in what other councils do and how they organise themselves in relation to smart cities and its link to business planning as we don't want to miss an opportunity

The recommendation was agreed by the panel

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The work programme was agreed.

10 TENANTS CHAMPION (Agenda Item 10)

The Chair and Councillor Draper introduced the report.

In response to questions Councillor Draper highlighted that The emphasis in Merton was to focus on repairs, which differed slightly from the Richmond tenants champion role. Learning from Richmond took place by looking at their website. Most repairs are addressed very quickly and those that are not are drawn to councillor's attention. Cllr Draper worked with Clarion to follow the user journey and develop the process. Councillor Draper said we need an officer to fulfil the role rather than a councillor or volunteer. It was difficult to quantify the number of hours spent on the role but he believes this is a full-time job. A panel member said this needs to be properly resourced. It should be a councillor champion with officer support.

The Interim Director of Community and Housing thanked councillors for the report. He said there are housing regulated providers and a statutory complaints process. Majority of landlords are good and the housing enforcement team work with the challenging ones.

Councillor Whelton thanked Councillor Draper and said there were worrying case studies with commendable support given to tenants. The council is considering implementing a selected landlord licencing scheme for better regulation.

The Panel thanked Councillor Draper for his work

The Panel moved to a vote on the recommendations listed in the report

A. Review full time equivalent support to the Housing Enforcement Team with the purpose of recruiting a minimum of one additional officer. This enacts the recommendation of our Tenant's Champion. To be completed by end of calendar year 2022.

There were six votes in favour of recommendation A.

Recommendation A was agreed by the Panel

The Panel moved to a vote on an amended recommendation B worded as follows:
B: Following confirmation from officers that the one year trial and other conditions of the original full council motion have been met cabinet should decide to either resource or discontinue the tenants champion scheme
There were six votes in favour of recommendation B.
Recommendation B was agreed by the Panel

C: By end of 2022 review and update as required Merton's Housing Enforcement Policy 2019-2024 to enable clarity of scope, escalation and resolution for officer's responsibility to inspect and audit repairs reported by tenants of registered providers i.e. housing associations operating in the borough.
Note: This maybe through stronger dialogue or an audit of referred casework. A similar arrangement exists under Mitcham and Morden MP and Clarion Housing.
There were two votes in favour of recommendation C and two against, three abstentions.
Recommendation C was agreed with the Chair's casting vote.

D: As part of the panels performance monitoring item report quarterly metrics on numbers of (i) private and social housing condition complaints (ii) inspections and category 1 vs category 2 hazards identified (iii) other metrics as appropriate to support the Housing Enforcement team convey the full scope of their work and responsibilities
There were two votes in favour of recommendation D, three votes against and two abstentions.
Recommendation D was not agreed by the Panel

E: Identify and report back to scrutiny options to engage local housing sector for the purposes of Merton's house building and housing enforcement policies e.g. MERHAG II
There were two votes in favour of recommendation E and five abstentions.
Recommendation E was agreed by the Panel

F: Commission an internal and external communications strategy that will (i) promote the aims and objectives of Merton's Housing enforcement policy to both social and private tenant's in an accessible and engaging format, (ii) streamline reporting of risks due to poor housing conditions (iii) targets and shares learnings with appropriate stakeholders to reduce common issues experienced by tenant's and increase confidence
There were two votes in favour of recommendation F and five abstentions.
Recommendation F was agreed by the Panel

11 CLARION UPDATE (Agenda Item 11)

Vicky Bonner gave an overview of the report

A panel member asked for feedback on the task and finish groups
Clarion – resident engagement days – Merton community panel have been involved and helped to shape future work. Feedback on outcomes have been achieved,

lessons learnt report, a full action plan with quick wins and longer-term strategies.
Further task and finish groups will be generated as a result of this.
Vicky Bonner – doing one event and learning from it and then doing the next event.

The Chair thanked Clarion for their report