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## COUNCIL

18 SEPTEMBER 2024

(7.15 pm - 10.10 pm)

### PRESENT

(in the Chair), Councillor Slawek Szczepanski,  
Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina,  
Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,  
Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Hina Bokhari,  
Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Billy Christie,  
Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah,  
Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Edward Foley,  
Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Joan Henry,  
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor  
Sally Kenny, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Paul Kohler,  
Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Peter McCabe,  
Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean,  
Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Dennis Pearce,  
Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Martin Whelton,  
Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim, Councillor John Braithwaite,  
Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Caroline Charles,  
Councillor Eleanor Cox, Councillor Klaar Dresselaers,  
Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Kirsten Galea,  
Councillor Ross Garrod, Councillor Jil Hall,  
Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Susie Hicks,  
Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Andrew Judge,  
Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Samantha MacArthur,  
Councillor Gill Manly, Councillor Stephen Mercer,  
Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Councillor John Oliver,  
Councillor Robert Page, Councillor Michael Paterson,  
Councillor Tony Reiss, Councillor Matthew Willis,  
Councillor Max Austin, Councillor Victoria Wilson, Ofeimu and  
Syeda

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Skeete and Councillor Williscroft.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Page declared an interest in Item 12 and that they would not vote on that item if a vote took place.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 are agreed as an accurate record.

#### 4 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader spoke on the fire on Faraday Road, thanking the London Fire Brigade and the Police for their response. The Leader also spoke to pass on best wishes to Councillor Williscroft and to thank members cross-party for their wishes. The Leader then provided a number of updates on Galpins Road, GCSE and A Level results from Merton Schools, the Grenfell report, the success of Team GB Athletes and the Big Sports Day.

The Mayor provided a brief update on upcoming events including Silver Sunday, Afternoon Tea at the All England Lawn Tennis club and the Christmas Dinner.

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

#### 5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 5)

The responses to the written public questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the questioners in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'public questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

#### 6 COUNCILLORS' ORDINARY PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 6)

The responses to the written member ordinary priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'member ordinary priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

#### 7a STRATEGIC THEME: MAIN REPORT (Agenda Item 7a)

The Strategic Theme report on Nurturing Civic Pride with a focus on those priorities which affect young people in particular that fantastic educational provision and support gives children the best start and equips residents of all ages with the skills and qualifications to succeed and that residents across Merton will be supported through the cost of living emergency was moved by Councillor Kenny and seconded by Councillor Kaweesa.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 as set out in agenda item 16 was moved Councillor MacArthur and seconded by Councillor Bokhari. The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 was moved by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Flack.

Councillors Ofeimu, Fairclough, Charles, Hayes and Oliver also spoke on the item.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 26, Against – 28, Not Voting – 1.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 27, Against – 28, Not Voting – 0.

The substantive report was then put to the vote and agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Theme report is agreed.

#### 7b STRATEGIC THEME: COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7b)

The responses to the written member strategic theme priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'member strategic theme priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

It was also noted that a copy of the remaining Member questions and responses will be published after the meeting, in line with Constitutional requirements.

#### 7c STRATEGIC THEME: MOTIONS (Agenda Item 7c)

No Strategic Theme Motions were submitted.

#### 8 NOTICE OF MOTION - LABOUR MOTION (Agenda Item 8)

The motion was moved by Councillor Bhim and seconded by Councillor Syeda.

The Liberal Democrat amendment 1 as set out in agenda item 17 was moved by Councillor Dresselaers and seconded by Councillor Fairclough.

The Liberal Democrat amendment 2 as set out in agenda item 17 was moved by Councillor MacArthur and seconded by Councillor Fairclough.

Councillors Austin, Charles, Howard, Foley, McLean and Neaverson spoke on the item.

The Liberal Democrat amendment 1 was put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 17, votes against: 36, not voting: 2.

The Liberal Democrat amendment 2 was put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 17, votes against: 36, not voting: 2.

The substantive motion was then put to a vote and was carried – votes in favour: 38, votes against: 0, not voting: 17.

RESOLVED:

Council notes:

- Honesty in politics is critical to maintaining public trust in democracy, and in today's digital age, social media platforms have become key in public discourse and political engagement.
- Social media has facilitated a new method of communicating with residents, allowing information to be disseminated rapidly and to broad audiences.
- Social media is also a powerful and influential tool for local community engagement to and from elected members.
- Councillors and social media companies must do all they can to prevent the spread of misinformation and protect residents and Councillors from exposure to harassment, abuse or personal attacks online.
- Social media content posted or reposted by Councillors should be free from defamatory or discriminatory language and avoid any form of harassment or bullying of residents and Councillors.
- The detrimental effect of a locally toxic social media environment on the willingness of talented, qualified and committed individuals to stand for election.
- The responsibility of all Councillors to lead by example in their usage of social media.

Council condemns:

- The use of anonymous online social media accounts by Councillors or potential Councillor candidates to specifically target other Councillors or other elected members in public office.
- The sharing or resharing of social media posts from unaccountable, anonymous online accounts, which may target local people or locally elected members.
- The former anonymous online account @HammondWatch on the social media platform X

Council resolves to:

- Advocate for greater accountability and transparency from social media companies in addressing the spread of harmful content and abuse.
- Hold to the highest professional standard when using social media.
- Avoid promoting anonymous social media accounts without a clear or identifiable link to an organisation or individual.
- Avoid sharing social media content that may toxify or undermine the integrity of the local political climate in Merton.
- Uphold the '*Social Media Guidance for Councillors*' based on the Nolan Principles of Public Life, first resolved by Council in 2020, and to introduce training for councillors in accordance with this guidance.

9 NOTICE OF MOTION - CONSERVATIVE MOTION (Agenda Item 9)

The motion was moved by Councillor McLean and seconded by Councillor Cox.

The Merton Park Ward Independent Residents group amendment as set out in agenda item 17 was moved by Councillor Mercer and seconded by Councillor Foley.

Councillors Charles, Willis and Christie spoke on the item.

The Merton Park Ward Independent Residents group amendment was put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 2, votes against: 51, not voting: 1.

The substantive motion was then put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 25, votes against: 28, not voting: 1.

10 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 10)

The report was moved by Councillor Whelton and seconded by Councillor Wilson.

RESOLVED:

A To note the Annual Report of the Standards and General Purposes Committee for 2023/24, which was approved by the Committee on the 18 July 2024.

B To note the progress on the appointment of an 'independent member' (audit) to be co-opted onto the Standards and General Purposes Committee for the purposes of providing advice on the audit functions of the Committee.

11 ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT (Agenda Item 11)

The report was moved by Councillor Foley and seconded by Councillor Johnston.

Councillor Kohler spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council is invited to note and comment on the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

12 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY ANNUAL REVIEW 2023/24 (Agenda Item 12)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Garrod.

Councillor Oliver spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That Council note the update on the Merton Treasury management activity during 2023- 24 and details any difference in activity from the Treasury management strategy approved in March 2023

13 CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND RELATED MATTERS (Agenda Item 13)

The report was moved by Councillor Bhim and seconded by Councillor Stringer.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council notes the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated authority since the last meeting of the Council

B. That Council approves the changes to Committees and outside bodies detailed at 4.2 of the report

14 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 14)

There were no petitions submitted to the meeting.

15 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda Item 15)

That the Strategic Theme for the next ordinary meeting of the Council, being held on 20 November 2024, shall be Building a Sustainable Future with a focus on Empowering communities through innovation and inclusion.