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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

9 NOVEMBER 2022

(7.15 pm - 8.35 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Edward Foley (in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Gill Manly, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Mansoor Ahmad, Dr Stannard and Roz Cordner

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Tony Reiss (Cllr John Oliver as substitute).

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting except for one amendment as below.

Whilst the BCU area was experiencing reduced burglaries, this did not include Merton.

4 BUDGET UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

The item was introduced by Roger Kershaw, Interim Executive Director of Finance and Digital who gave a brief update on the business plan.

The Draft business plan report in front of Members reflects the standstill position on the budget which is the beginning of the budget process.

The gap to fill for 23/24 was recorded at £4.23 million and that's rising cumulatively to £21.2 million in 26/27. There are a number of unknowns that will affect that gap and these will be included in future reports to the Commission where Members will receive a lot more detail (scheduled for January).

We are awaiting the results of the triannual evaluation of our pension fund and details of the local government settlement.

Another impact will be the inflationary pressures that we're currently facing with CPI and RPI moving to double digits.

In response to questions:

With regards to the Government mandating for defibrillators in all schools – The Dedicated Schools Grant will be ring fenced to schools to allow for this so we will await that announcement.

Triannual evaluation of the pension fund - our actuaries will assess the value of our investments and they will also look at our future liabilities and they will determine whether we're in surplus or deficit.

Each 1% increase in council tax generally returns about £1 million in credit to the authority.

Only a small number of employees that are affected by that the London Living Wage uplift which will equate to about £16,000 on the council's budget.

The Chair thanked the Interim Executive Director of Finance and Digital for attending.

5 COUNCIL WEBSITE (Agenda Item 5)

The item was introduced by Sean Cunniffe, Head of Customer Contact.

Websites generally fall into three categories - I.T solution, information communication tool or transactional. In 2016 Merton took the decision to redesign the website so that we could increase the online transactions, while still retaining the information and the communication facilities.

Analysis at the time showed that a face-to-face transaction would cost us more than £5 per transaction, a telephone interaction around £1.50 but an online transaction would cost only 0.45p.

We aim to review each page on the website at least once a year and we do receive regular feedback and comments from users which are investigated and implemented when appropriate.

Our current performance on digital take-up has exceeded the target and will improve even further because we've added further integrated services such as 'fix my street'

Looking at the two appendices - appendix a is the Google analytics that help us determine how the users are accessing the website and appendix B shows the results of a recent user survey however the number of returns was a little disappointing.

In response to Commission Members questions, the Head of Customer Contact provided further information:

Parking system is managed by Ringo. It is a proprietary system, so it is not managed by our website or our web team. There is a level of disquiet over that system and the lack of usability associated with it and I will pass on Members concerns to the parking team.

We don't generally receive many responses to our surveys but 59 responses was a very low turnout for the website user survey. We heavily rely on the comments and complaints received on the feedback forms (around 400 monthly).

A Member suggested adding a pop-up box when users access/exit the website to request feedback and rate their experience. However, the website is used for a multitude of different things and the onus now is on people signing up to receive electronic communications from the council so there is already a pop-up screen in use, and we don't wish to overload the user too much. Once that piece of work is concluded, the suggestion could be investigated.

Customer contact programme underway to look at improving the experience of customers and extending the range of services that they can access on the website. One of the options we are exploring is a single sign-on. We hope to report back on this work early in the next year.

We are continuously making improvements and changes to the website, for example transactions are currently processed through a form called TK dialogues and we will be moving over seamlessly to a Microsoft product which will be a fundamentally better product.

The Chair thanked the Head of Customer Contact for attending.

6 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Stephen Mercer suggested a rapporteur review of the community toilet scheme in Merton. Reasoning being that although the council does have a community toilet scheme that allows businesses to receive a reduction in their business rates in return for allowing members of the public to use their toilets, but the sign up is extremely low.

This project could potentially cross-cut due to including protective characteristics and the Chair of the Sustainable Communities has an item on disability access that could include an update on this work.

The Commission agreed that this investigation would be a worthwhile exercise.

Members agreed to move the next meeting date from the 18th January to the 25th January to allow receipt of all the Panels budget references.

The work program was agreed.

