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## HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

10 JANUARY 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.54 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina (in the Chair), Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Max Austin, Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Eleanor Cox, Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Slawek Szczepanski and Councillor Martin Whelton

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Billy Christie (Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services) Councillor Peter McCabe Cabinet Member for (Health and Social Care)

Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer), Keith Burns (Assistant Director, Commissioning), John Morgan (Executive Director, Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health), Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director, Public Health) and Mark Creelman (Place Executive (Merton and Wandsworth))

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

Apologies for absence were received from Diane Griffin, Co-opted Member

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

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests

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

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

### 4 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2023-2027 (Agenda Item 4)

The Cabinet Member for Finance thanked the chair for an opportunity to say a few words on the October and December Cabinet meetings including £3million in revenue growth and proposed savings. The Cabinet Member said he believes the budget is robust reasonable and sustainable and welcomed questions from the Panel.

The Interim Executive Director for Finance and Digital gave an overview of the report, highlighting a gap of £4.3 million in 2023/2024 rising to £20.8 million. The council also benefitted from £1.4 million increase in the council tax base.

A panel member asked how council tax increases will affect savings to be considered. The Interim Executive Director for Finance and Digital said the additional council tax equates to £1.1million per 1% increase in council tax. Cabinet will consider further savings on 16<sup>th</sup> January as there is still a have a budget gap, extra savings will be required.

A panel member asked about the delayed adult social care grant care reforms and how much extra given to the Council and how this can help to balance the budget. The Interim Executive Director for Finance and Digital reported they are still awaiting confirmation, but extra money carries additional burdens which are yet to be confirmed.

The Assistant Director, Commissioning gave an overview of saving CH112, A panel member said local residents are concerned about the loss to the community if Eastway services closes.

A panel member said Eastway provides a much needed service for dementia sufferers and a respite for carers. The dementia hub does not provide the same service. They would like to retain Eastway as £180,000 savings will not make a huge difference to residents. The service change will mean service users will have to travel across the borough it is important to think about community care and retain vital services. Councillor Gould proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to ask Cabinet to hold further discussions to look at ways to retain Eastway Services.

A panel member asked about the proposed closing date. The Assistant Director, Commissioning said there is not a fixed closure date as they will be working with service users to secure a suitable alternative provision.

The Interim Director of Community and Housing said the dementia hub is a centre for excellence, although it is a building-based model it could be replicated in homes and libraries and therefore can spread this approach across the borough. Not everyone is well enough to travel to current services.

A panel member asked why it is called a modern offer for people with dementia when people are taken away from their community and asked if there will there be activities within the Dementia Hub

The Assistant Director, Commissioning said there will be a range of activities in the new provision, Eastway is a borough wide provision and serves residents beyond the local vicinity.

The Interim Director of Community and Housing said the number of people using the facility has declined over the last few years. The department wish to work with Alzheimer's Society to provide an excellent service for the future, and to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of people who are frail.

The Cabinet Member said he had personal experience of the decline of person with dementia. He is confident that the proposals will meet the needs of the carers. The dementia hub is a centre of excellence.

Councillor Jenifer Gould proposed that Eastway is referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to ask the Cabinet to provide assurances that respite care will continue at the same level.

This was seconded by Councillor Simon McGrath

Those who voted in favour:

Councillor Jenifer Gould  
Councillor Simon McGrath  
Councillor Max Austin  
Councillor Eleanor Cox

Those who voted against:

Councillor Agatha Akyigyina  
Councillor Laxmi Attawar  
Councillor Martin Whelton  
Councillor Caroline Charles  
Councillor Slawek Szczepanski

The proposal was not carried

The Director of Public Health gave an overview of the saving CH113 and said the public health grant is ringfenced with stringent conditions, this saving will reprofile the grant to areas with a public health benefit.

A panel member expressed concern that no detail had been provided on £330,000 level of reduction

The Interim Director of Community and Housing said the £330,000 will be moved to fund the civic pride programme. Working with organisations such as Merton and Morden Guild and Friends of St Helier.

A Panel member highlighted that the savings will be scrutinised by the Financial Monitoring Task Group throughout the year.

The Director of Public Health said it will only be available for public health purposes with a focus on prevention and improving population health.

The Cabinet Member said additional information regarding the projects to be funded will be provided at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on the 25<sup>th</sup> January.

The Assistant Director, Commissioning gave an overview of the saving CH114.

A Panel member asked why this facility is being closed when it is rated good by the Care Quality Commission. The Assistant Director, Commissioning said unless the building is unsafe CQC do not include it in the rating, but better care be provided in independent settings.

The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care gave an overview of saving CH116. A panel member expressed concern about the safety of carers. This proposal will result in

increasing independence using new types of equipment. It is not about removing care but improving outcomes for residents

The chair thanked the officers for savings overviews

#### RESOLVED

The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel agree the saving CH113 in principle. This is on the basis that the public health team provide additional information on the detail of the proposal to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

### 5 GP AND HOSPITAL ACCESS IN MERTON (Agenda Item 5)

The Executive Director gave an overview of the presentation and provided an update on the current position in local health services. He reported that elective procedures are robust and doing well in addressing the backlog. Some areas of challenge and this is being dealt with. Southwest London has the fewest long waits in London all less than 2 years, cancer performance is good but some challenges remain.

The Executive Director reported there is a pilot running additional breast screening activity in Merton following requests at this scrutiny meeting

The Executive Director gave an overview of the pressures at A&E and reported there are contingencies in place during times of strike action.

A panel member asked about the breast cancer challenges and recovery plan. The Executive Director said there are strong cancer reliance services, however screening remains a challenge. It was reported there are plans to improve MRI services.

A panel member said residents have raised concerns about long wait for blood tests at the Nelson and if patients can be prioritised. The Executive Director said the Nelson is a victim of its own success as it has received a large amount of GP referrals.

In response to a question on excess deaths, the Director of Public Health reported that the Office of National Statistics reviewed this based on a five year average. By the beginning of December 2022 excess deaths had risen by 9% then 35% within a two-week interval. A breakdown of the causes is still to be provided.

#### RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Executive Director for the Merton breast screening pilot which came about as a result of discussions at this Panel. A further update was requested in due course.

### 6 SAFEGUARDING ADULTS ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The interim Director of Community and Housing said they are recruiting an interim independent chair of the panel as the current chair recovers from a period of illness.

The Assistant Director of Adult Care gave an overview of the report  
A panel member asked if they are working with the Oliver McGowan Campaign. The Interim Business Manager, Merton Safeguarding Adults Board said this has been raised at the learning and development sub group and will be taken forward.

#### RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report

#### 7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

A panel member highlighted the importance of report on suicide due at the next meeting to include information on demographics, age groups, rates amongst women and prevention work.