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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 JUNE 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor John Braithwaite,
Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Anthony Fairclough,
Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Gill Manly,
Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Martin Whelton,
Councillor James Williscroft and Councillor Victoria Wilson

Charles Baker (Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager),
John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and
Commissioning) and John Morgan (Interim Director, Community
& Housing)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Stuart Neaverson.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising;

The Panel would like to reinstate the action log in order to monitor the progress of recommendations and actions.

A Panel Member suggested, post-election, minutes should be sent to ex Cllrs for accuracy (Scrutiny Officer to pass this feedback to Democratic Services Team).

4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited Cllr Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development to speak about his priorities for the coming year.

We aim to become an exemplary housing borough, delivering beautiful well-designed low-carbon and truly affordable homes. We will use the land that the Council owns already, and perhaps land that we can assemble, to build homes for social rent and shared ownership and other intermediate forms of ownership of the highest quality.

We aim to set up a housing partnership with housing providers local colleges and firms to promote the retrofit of homes using the London retrofit model aiming, to

share expertise on how to access grant funding, build capacity retrofit and renewable energy technologies and look to establish apprenticeships in green industries.

We are continuing participation in the warmer homes program with grants for home improvements for both homeowners and renters.

In terms of housing needs, we want to maintain the position of having low numbers of homeless households in temporary accommodation and to continue to develop and expand rough sleeper services and work with partners to ensure low numbers of reported rough sleepers in the borough and that rough sleepers get the support they need.

I have been asked to undertake the role of tenant's champion making representations on behalf of tenants and signposting them to agencies who can give legal advice.

I am keen to introduce selective licensing and an empty home scheme.

In response to Panel members questions:

- We'll do our best to approve more affordable housing, seeking to influence developers at an early stage to deliver affordable housing on their sites. We are also seeking to build homes on our own and/or with other housing providers.
- In relation to selective landlord licensing, a paper is anticipated around autumn time.
- With regards to expanding the provision of electrical vehicle charging, currently planning policy only stipulates ten percent of parking spaces need to be EV compatible and we've yet to see what the inspectors will permit in terms of our local development policy. If it proves to be inadequate, then we might have to consider some separate planning measure as the months unfold.
- There's been a considerable backlog in the past with planning enforcement cases and we need to work through that backlog as rapidly as possible and as an administration we'll do our utmost to put sufficient resources in.

The Chair invited Cllr Natasha Irons, Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate to speak about her priorities going forward:

Waste and our relationship with Veolia - In the short term we'll be focusing on the delivery of the action plan that was in response to the service improvement notice.

The action plan includes looking at the additional night-time economy staff, tackling the scourge of green sacks and some issues around the fix my street tool.

We are looking at reprofiling some of the street sweeping schedules and we will be looking at having neighbourhood environment officers who will know the wards that they work and will understand where all the hot spots are and will be visible to residents.

Focusing on the fly tipping strategy, a massive priority for me is our treatment of flats above shops and being more focused on communications and engagement.

In the long term that will this municipal year we will need to review our arrangement and our relationship with our waste contractor and consider next steps and officers have been charged with providing us with all options.

A source of pride and a source of joy for me and for most of us is our **parks and our green spaces**.

In the short term:

We're on track to plant over 3000 trees this year.

Phase one of our tree strategy is soon to be published. Phase one is focused on council-owned trees, because we didn't have any management plans for that in place so we're rectifying that and then in phase two we'll look at trees on private property and our policies around that.

We are upgrading our paddling pools so hopefully this summer most of our paddling pools will be upgraded and then

Soon we will launch our trial of alternative methods for weeds killer such as foam or manual extraction, to see how much it costs and see what the practicalities of that are.

In the medium to long term, we'll be looking at um upgrading our play parks and our multi-use games areas and developing a green spaces strategy and biodiversity strategy.

Moving on to the **climate** emergency, I'm committed to delivering on our election pledge around having an environmental impact assessment on our new policies and looking at how green bonds can play a part in Merton's financing of green initiatives. Retrofitting and cutting our emissions from buildings is a huge priority. We know it's going to cost something like £2.7 billion pounds to retrofit every single building in Merton. Now we can't fund that ourselves, but we do have the power to convene people around the table to see what we can do.

In response to questions from Members of the Panel:

- As part of the fly tipping action plan and strategy, we have plans for more cameras and to review the types of signage we have.
- Agreed to look at whether water refill stations could be installed in the parks
- There are several neighbourhood recycling centres - we don't have them everywhere due to the misuse of them for fly tipping.
- South London Waste Partnership are reviewing all of the recycling centres across the partner boroughs to try and make them more accessible
- Birmingham introduced mobile recycling centres which we are looking at
- We are working through the various 'fix my street' reporting issues.

5 FLY TIPPING STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN - PRESENTATION (Agenda Item 5)

A presentation was given by the Assistant Director for Public Space, John Bosley, and Charles Baker, Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director provided further detail.

We are working to improve our relationships with our housing association providers across the borough and tackling the management of communal waste across the borough. We have plans to meet with providers over the course of the year to improve these aspects where we can.

With regards to publicly naming and shaming people in the press for fly tipping - if you are formally prosecuted through the court system, we will take every opportunity

to name and shame correctly. However, we are not allowed to do the same for the issuing of fixed penalty notes. Once a fixed penalty notice is paid off; your responsibility is expunged therefore we can report on the numbers but not on the actual people.

Of the 7,300 FPN's - just in excess of 6000 were issued for littering offenses and the remainder was for activities around fly tipping.

Keen to explore other ways of turning fly tipping hot spots into something beautiful i.e., you put a planter, or you put bike racks or something else that is more useful to the community to signify this is not where you put your rubbish

The Panel moved to discuss recommendations.

Considering lack of access to disposal facilities is a driver, the Panel RESOLVED that *"This panel requests Cabinet consider ways of bringing the collection of waste closer to the community i.e., community skips"*.

The recommendation was seconded, and all Members voted in favour.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 6)

The AD for Public Space commented on a couple of the performance indicators listed.

CRP097 or SP065 - percentage household waste recycled and composted. Looking at an analysis of where we sit from a London wide perspective, in 2020/21 we were ranked six out of the 33 London boroughs in terms of performance. We are quite high performing in terms of the recycling, but we still have an aspirational target that we want to achieve.

CRP124 which is the percentage of street reports rectified within the contract standard time is an area of focus and something that we're addressing through our service improvement plan.

In terms of our leisure activity over the last period, we have seen a positive improvement to SP349 - 14- to 25-year-old fitness centre participation. Target of 15,816 (we're almost at 19,000).

A Panel Member asked why CRP121 is an annual reading and when the latest data can be expected? The AD of Public Space agreed to ask colleagues in regulatory services and report back.

Waste management and cleansing performance management - Outcomes have been improving we've had we're in the region of 91 to 92 percent of inspected streets being at a grade b or are higher upon inspection

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was agreed with two additions:

- Update to the 'support for renters' item - Note that the recommendations from the February 2022 Panel are to be included.

- Add a written report on affordable housing to February 2023 meeting agenda.

AOB:

Task Group

Panel Members discussed the two options for a task group - how we can turbo charge the roll out of EV charging points or looking at the retrofitting of homes.

Moved to a vote. 8 Members voted in favour of EV charging and 2 Members voted in favour of retrofitting.

Site Visits

The Chair requested the Panel submit any ideas for site visits or expert witnesses appropriate to the agenda.

Following discussions this evening, A Panel Member suggested a site visit to Willow Lane. The AD for Public Space added that officers would be happy to attend a site visit and it is worth noting that we've done our first section of cleansing in the area and we do have others planned in terms of the undergrowth but we have to do countryside assessments to make sure there's no nesting birds etc before we actually undertake more detailed work. The Cabinet Member and officers will provide further background information to the committee prior to a visit.