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CABINET

19 FEBRUARY 2024

(7.15 pm - 8.40 pm)

PRESENT Councillors (in the Chair), Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Natasha Irons, Councillor Andrew Judge, Councillor Sally Kenny and Councillor Peter McCabe

IN ATTENDANCE Zara Bishop (Communications Manager), Polly Cziok (Executive Director of Innovation & Change), Hannah Doody (Chief Executive), Dan Jones (Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate), Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families), John Morgan (Executive Director, Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health), Asad Mushtaq (Executive Director of Finance & Digital) and John Scarborough (Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership)

ATTENDING ONLINE Lucy Owen (Executive Director Housing and Sustainable Development), Aileen Buckton (Independent Chair), Catherine Dunn (Merton Safeguarding Adults Board Manager), Sarah Slater (Policy & Partnerships Manager)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Ross Garrod, Leader of the Council.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Alambritis declared that they had an interest in Item 13 and would leave the room for that section of the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes and the exempt minute of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 MERTON SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD (MSAB) ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 (Agenda Item 4)

At the request of the Chair, the Independent Chair of the Board presented the report, noting this was a statutory report and the work undertaken had been outlined and also highlighted the work of the multi-agency partnership, noting a network of safeguarding champions had now been developed which included 30-40 people who were ambassadors in promoting safeguarding. There was a strong focus on training and learning and examples of these were outlined within the report.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and the Independent Chair advised that in comparison to other Boroughs Merton had a particularly strong record of making safeguarding personal which was reflected in the enquiry data. They were confident that learning had been embedded across a number of agencies.

RESOLVED:

A. That Cabinet noted the content of the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB) Annual Report for the period 2022-23.

5 MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT
(Agenda Item 5)

At the invitation of the Chair, the Independent Chair of the Partnership presented the report noting the ongoing focus was ensuring the voice of the child was paramount. A new governance structure had been put in place and it was important to test this was working with the structure outlined within the report. A lot of emphasis was on learning and development and learning had come from local reviews and children safeguarding reviews across London and national reviews, with a move towards multi agency training.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services thanked the Independent Chair for her work and noted that strong leadership and partnership was evident in the work that was done.

The Executive Director Children, Lifelong Learning and Families noted that there were different sorts of training and there was focus on how to share practice.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, the Independent Chair and Cabinet Member advised that training programmes were ongoing and would raise issues for new members of staff.

The Chair thanked the Independent Chair and officers for their work and report.

RESOLVED:

A. That Cabinet noted the content of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) Annual Report for the period 2022-23

6 BUDGET 2024/25 AND MTFS 2024-28 (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services presented the report which included a balanced budget for the financial year 2024/25 and would be considered by Full Council the next month. The Cabinet Member expressed their thanks to the Executive Director and officers for their work preparing the report and stated it was a robust balanced budget which delivered on priorities. A number of savings were proposed alongside growth and investment into services.

The Executive Director Finance and Digital thanked officers and members for their work on the budget.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member advised that Merton was maintaining a good financial position and that decisions had been taken considering future financial sustainability to maintain services. Cabinet Members spoke on the Budget for their respective portfolio areas.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet considers and agrees the response to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
2. That the Cabinet resolved that, having considered all of the information in this report and noted the positive assurance statement given by the Executive Director, Finance and Digital based on the proposed Council Tax strategy, the maximum Council Tax in 2024/25, equating to a Band D Council Tax of £1,521.98, which is an increase of below 5% be approved and recommended to Council for approval.
3. That the Cabinet considered all of the latest information and the comments from the scrutiny process, and makes recommendations to Council as appropriate
4. That Cabinet resolved that the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 including the General Fund Budget and Council Tax Strategy for 2024/25, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024-28 as submitted, along with the draft Equality Assessments (EAs), be approved and recommended to Council for approval subject to any proposed amendments agreed at this meeting;
5. That the Cabinet resolved that, having considered all of the latest information and the comments from the scrutiny process, the Capital Investment Programme (as detailed in Annex 3 to the Capital Strategy); the Treasury Management Strategy, including the detailed recommendations in that Section, incorporating the Prudential Indicators and the Capital Strategy as submitted and reported upon be approved and recommended to Council for approval, subject to any proposed amendments agreed at this meeting;
6. That Cabinet noted that the GLA precept will not be agreed by the London Assembly until the 22 February 2024, but the provisional figure has been incorporated into the draft MTFS
7. That Cabinet requested officers to review the savings proposals agreed and where possible bring them forward to the earliest possible implementation date
8. That Cabinet noted that there may be minor amendments to figures and words in this report as a result of new information being received after the deadline for dispatch and that this will be amended for the report to Council in March.
9. That Cabinet considered and approved the Risk Management Strategy.

10. That Cabinet resolved that the Council's Strategy for the Flexible Use of Capital Receipts 2022/23, as detailed in page 28-29 of the Capital Strategy be approved and recommended to Council for approval subject to any proposed amendments agreed at this meeting.

7 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services presented the report noting that the net position for the current financial year was much closer to a balanced one and thanked officers for their work. It was noted that there were still clear pressures on departmental budgets.

The Executive Director advised that departmental spend controls were having an impact.

RESOLVED:

- A. That Cabinet noted the financial reporting data for Quarter 3 (period 9), December 2023, relating to revenue budgetary control, showing a forecast net adverse variance at 31st December on service expenditure of £1.185m when corporate and funding items are included.
- B. That Cabinet noted the contents of Section 5 and appendices 5a to 5c and approve the adjustments to the Capital Programme in the 4 Tables [here](#).
- C. That Cabinet noted the adjustments to the Capital Programme in the table [here](#).
- D. That Cabinet approve the 15 revenue civic pride investing in neighbourhoods and climate action fund bids below as contained in Appendix 5d and summarised in the Table [here](#):

8 FEES & CHARGES REPORT (Agenda Item 8)

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services as part of agenda Item 6.

RESOLVED:

- A. That Cabinet approved the proposed fee changes outlined in appendix 1 and appendix 2

9 REVIEW OF PARKING CHARGES (Agenda Item 9)

The Cabinet Member for Transport presented the report, thanking officers and the Executive Director for their work and the report which recommended changes to reflect inflationary pressures noting that these had last been reviewed in January 2020.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, the Cabinet Member advised that amendments had been made having taken account of feedback from the initial consultation including reducing the charge for carer permits. In relation to the supplement this would be expected to be applicable to less than 1000 petrol vehicles.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet agreed to:

- A. Consider the outcome of informal consultation, set out in Section 4 of this report, on the proposed revisions to parking charges set out in this report.
- B. Authorise officers to proceed to formal statutory consultation on the Traffic Management Orders required to implement the proposed revised charges for parking recommended in this report.
- C. Delegate authority to the Director of Environment, Civic Pride and Climate, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to finalise the Traffic Management Orders and the necessary statutory consultation documentation, to consider the outcome of formal consultation, and any operational matters relating to the implementation of the proposals set out in the report.
- D. Subject to the statutory consultation process, Members agree to approve the proposed charges set out in this report, in respect of:
 - Revised charges for Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) Permits, as set out in paragraphs 2.10-2.17
 - Revisions to charges for electric vehicle permits, as set out in paragraphs 2.18-2.20
 - A reduction in the charge for Visitor Permits, as set out in paragraphs 2.21-2.24
 - Introduction of a £10 charge for Carer Permits, as set out in paragraph 2.25
 - Revised charges for CPZ visitors' day/half-day parking, as set out in paragraphs 2.26-2.29
 - Introduction of a £150 supplement on Permits for high CO2-emission vehicles, as set out in paragraphs 2.30-2.33
 - Revised charges for on-street parking, as set out in paragraphs 2.34-2.36
 - Revised car park (off-street) charges, as set out in paragraphs 2.37-2.38
- E. Officers will undertake within 6 months a review of the eligibility criteria, charging policy and gatekeeping protocols in respect of the Carer permit offer, taking account of the approaches taken by other relevant London boroughs, to be considered by Cabinet.

10 PARKS AND GREENSPACES SERVICE (Agenda Item 10)

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change presented the report, outlining the recommendation to agree a short extension with the current provider under the current contract. Future options for the service would be thoroughly assessed.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet:

- A. Noted the potential options for the future delivery of the service and the estimated costs.
- B. Agreed to an extension of the existing contract with idverde by 21 months (till 31 October 2026) to facilitate detailed consideration of all options for the future delivery of the Parks and Greenspace service.
- C. Noted the delegated authority (as per the Contract Award decision 4 July 2016) to the Executive Director - Environment, Civic Pride and Climate (ECPC), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change (LEGSCC), to complete negotiations and finalise a contract extension agreement with idverde, in accordance with the terms set out in this report.
- D. Noted the requirement to give both idverde and the London Borough of Sutton (as a joint procurer) notice of any intention not to renew the existing contract for a term of a further eight years – subject to this being waived by the parties

11 CLIMATE DELIVERY PLAN - YEAR 4 (Agenda Item 11)

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change presented the report, thanking officers for their work. The report summarised extensive work to decarbonise the Borough and Council and set out the previous twelve months and a summary of progress. The Cabinet Member highlighted a number of initiatives within the report including installation of EV charging points, the Tree Strategy, converting street lights with LEDs, securing bronze carbon literacy and noted that in the upcoming year a HEEL scheme would be launched in conjunction with a retrofit road map and there would be work on decarbonising the fleet.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, the Cabinet Member advised that a tool would be piloted to assess the carbon impact of decisions made and Schools had certain things they had to do in terms of the climate agenda and lots was being done on this.

RESOLVED:

- A. That Cabinet adopted the Climate Delivery Plan – Year 4.
- B. That delegated authority was given to the Executive Director for Environment, Civic Pride & Climate in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate to make minor amendments to the Climate Delivery Plan – Year 4

12 “CIVIC PRIDE INVESTING IN NEIGHBOURHOODS FUND” AND “COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION FUND” BID APPROVALS, AND ALLOCATION OF FUNDING TO DELIVER THE “COUNCILLORS’ WARD ALLOCATION SCHEME” (Agenda Item 12)

The Cabinet Member for Civic Pride presented the report which outlined how just over £1m would be spent. A range of ideas had been attracted and the Climate Action Funding was being launched at the same time. The Cabinet Member thanked all applicants for their submissions and officers who had assessed the bids. 25 new projects would be able to be funded and top up funding provided to previously some supported projects as detailed within the report.

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Greenspaces and Climate Change outlined some of the projects and thanked all for the bids.

RESOLVED :

That Cabinet agreed:

1. To allocate £882,210 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy and £166,000 Community Climate Action Funding, in line with Merton Council's approved criteria, to recommended bids summarised in Appendix A covering: a) 25 bids received through the 2023 Civic Pride - Investing in Neighbourhoods and Community Climate Action Funds bidding round; and
b) two top-up allocations of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Funding to successful bids from the 2021 and 2022 bidding rounds.
2. To approve the award of funding being subject to:
 - a) any conditions shown against each bid recommended for approval in Appendix B; and
 - b) due diligence being carried out to ascertain the appropriateness of grants under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and other relevant powers and policies applicable to the award of funding by the council to external organisations.
3. To delegate authority to the Executive Director, Housing and Sustainable Development in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Civic Pride to make any amendments to Civic Pride Investing in Neighbourhoods funding bid amounts recommended for approval, in line with Merton Council's approved criteria;
4. To allocate £370,000 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Funding to support the implementation the Councillors' Ward Allocation Scheme from April 2024 to March 2026.

13 COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES AND SECOND HOMES PREMIUM (Agenda Item 13)

The Cabinet Member for Transport left the room for this item having declared an interest.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services then presented the report noting that they wanted homes to be used and they wished to discourage homes being left empty, with changes in legislation now permitting the changes proposed within the report. The Council would encourage landlords to use properties in a socially responsible way.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care spoke on the important of the issue.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet recommended that Full Council determines that:

1. For any dwelling within the area of the Council if, on any day, there is no resident of that dwelling and it is substantially unfurnished, the following shall apply:

- the discount in s11(2)(a) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (LGFA) shall not apply to that dwelling; and
- the amount of council tax payable in respect of that dwelling and that day shall be increased by 100 percent, where the dwelling has been empty for more than 1 year on 1 April 2024.

2. Where a dwelling within the area of the Council, if on any day there is no resident, and it is furnished:

- the discount in s11(2)(a) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (LGFA) shall not apply to that dwelling; and
- the amount of council tax payable in respect of that dwelling and that day shall be increased by an amount up to 100 percent, with effect from 1 April 2025.

14 RESPONSE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S TASK GROUP REPORT - REVIEW OF EATING DISORDERS AND SELF-HARM AFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MERTON (Agenda Item 14)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services presented the report thanking Councillor Kirby and colleagues for their diligent work on it as well as officers for their work.

The Executive Director Children, Lifelong Learning and Families noted that there were lots of actions being taken forward through CAHMS and the Mental Health Forum.

RESOLVED:

A. That Cabinet noted the information contained in the report

15 CIVIC CENTRE – INSTALLATION SERVICES AND PROJECT MANAGMENT OF A VARIABLE REFRIGERANT FLOW (VRF) SYSTEM AND ELECTRICAL INTAKE WORKS (Agenda Item 15)

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development presented the report advising that the boilers within the Civic Centre were 42 years old and a consultant had been engaged on a feasibility study with the best option identified to replace the boilers with a VRF system. Funds had also been set aside for electrical works.

RESOLVED:

A That Cabinet approved that a contract is entered into for the provision of a new VRF system at the Civic Centre, along with remedial works to the electrical power network with the preferred bidder listed in Appendix A

16 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 16)

The meeting proceeded entirely in public and therefore this item was not required.