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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

5 JULY 2023

(7.15 pm - 8.55 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Edward Foley (in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Councillor John Oliver, Councillor Tony Reiss, Mansoor Ahmad, Becky Cruise, Dr Stannard and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors

Polly Cziok (Executive Director of Innovation & Change), Dan Jones (Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate), Calvin McLean (Interim Assistant Director Public Protection), Asad Mushtaq (Executive Director of Finance & Digital) and Katy Saunders (Safer Merton Business Support)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Kohler and Cllr Billy Hayes.

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 of the previous meeting.

4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited the Executive Directors to introduce themselves to the Commission and give an overview of their priorities/challenges and what they would like to achieve in post.

Asad Mushtaq, **Executive Director for Finance and Digital**, covering accountancy, ICT, digital, commercial, and transactional services. Key priority is financial sustainability.

In response to questions from Commission Members, the Executive Director for Finance and Digital added:

My first impressions are that the Council is well run and ambitious.

I think the profile needs to be raised, not just on a London level but nationally, and we can certainly transform in some key areas, such as being more commercial in terms of varying our revenue and becoming more resilient.

The financial monitoring task group will be important and a critical piece for me in terms of understanding how scrutiny works. I will work with the Scrutiny commission over the next year to make sure Members have the necessary budget training internally, and potentially some independent advice as well, in terms of upskilling Members to ask the right questions.

With regards to the website, there's a wider piece of work planned around how we enable our residents to interact with us and a key area of that is accessibility, including digital deprivation and the use and functionality of the website. We want to provide a good digital offering to our residents and businesses.

Dan Jones, **Executive Director of Environment, Civic Pride and Climate.**

Key areas are waste collection, street cleansing, parking, highway maintenance, parks, regulatory services, leisure, culture, and libraries. As well as some areas that will be covered by this committee including community safety, CCTV and violence against women and girls.

My priorities will be the 'Borough of Sport' and bringing the street cleansing service back in-house over the next few years, as well as commissioning a new waste collection service and trying to deliver on the climate emergency agenda.

In response to Commission Member questions:

Street lighting - the energy efficient bulbs/ LED lights do save a significant amount of money but there are challenges in certain areas where the lighting is perceived to be not as good as it was before. The best thing to do with those, in my experience, is take them on a case-by-case basis. It might be there are contributing factors, such as overhanging branches that are cutting out light, or the general environment doesn't reflect back as well as it could in certain areas. There have been numerous occasions when I've looked at street lighting from a community safety aspect particularly around alleyways, parks and routes from town centres to public transport interchanges used late at night that are not as well-lit as they could be. In those cases, we have worked with community safety colleagues, the police and parks colleagues to see if we can improve those, which might mean changing the lighting from high to low or low to high depending on the situations or putting in different types of lighting. I am happy to take them on a case-by-case basis also when Members or residents raise them.

It is difficult for people who live in flats above shops to dispose of their waste if they don't have container areas at the back of their properties to keep waste outside their homes. Time-banded collections work quite well in these cases (residents are told what time and day they can put their waste out for collection) however having transient populations make this a challenge. Education and working with the

landlords and agents in terms of making sure that the messages get across to tenants are complied with is important and if that fails then you end up with enforcement. We are looking at increasing our enforcement in certain areas where there is deliberate fly tipping, and this includes domestic and commercial waste.

The ED agreed to investigate and respond separately to a Cllr question “Following the large-scale failing of all the lights, have all the lights now been replaced?”

Polly Cziok, **Executive Director of Innovation and Change.**

Department covers a range of the corporate services, including communications and consultation, HR, policy and strategy, legal and governance and also customer services.

My biggest initial focus will be around HR and our workforce. We are currently too heavily reliant on agency staff and need to recruit a permanent workforce.

In response to questions, the Executive Director of Innovation and Change provided further explanation:

Working jointly with the Executive Director of Finance and Digital on a properly organised corporate transformation program.

With regards to recruitment, we need to:

- Do more to reach out to Merton residents as a hugely untapped recruitment resource.
- Be better at providing opportunities to local young people.
- Develop the recruitment brand and look at our family friendly policies and those policy reviews that might attract people to work for us.
- Move to targeting our graduate program at local people, in particular our care experienced local people.

A real priority will be driving down agency spending and recruiting people into permanent roles because that's important for the council's financial sustainability but it's also important for the stability of the organisation.

5 PSPO SIGNAGE (Agenda Item 5)

The item was introduced by the Community Safety Team Manager.

The borough wide Public Space Protection Order was agreed by Cabinet, and we agreed to bring the signage to the Commission. The signs will be erected from the 10 July onwards and are designed around the ethos of making Merton a responsible drinking Borough as well as covering our legal requirements to make sure that we discharge the order correctly.

In response to comments and questions

- Legal team advised on the wording of the signs.

- Kingdom Officers will be giving out leaflets, which are written in plain English and clearly explain what the PSPO is.
- Street drinkers will be given a leaflet about a drug and alcohol and treatment service provider in Merton and how they can refer themselves to get some additional support.
- Members will have an opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the PSPO later in the year. Safer Merton to return on 6 September 2023 with summer feedback and results.

A Member raised the irony that at a meeting in which we're going to be praising the process of scrutiny, we are given an item to scrutinise that is un-scrutinisable.

6 ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

Members agreed they would like to see more public engagement at scrutiny meetings. Scrutiny to look at how we promote these meetings and encourage members of the public to get involved.

Young Inspectors feedback to be included in the annual report.

Investigate whether online version can include hyperlinks to reports.

Members agreed the Annual Report for 2022/23.

7 IDENTIFY QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 7)

Please send to Scrutiny Officer by 24 July.

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

The work programme was agreed.

The Financial Monitoring Task Group was re-established for 2023/24.