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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 27 NOVEMBER 2023

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Stuart Neaverson (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor John Braithwaite,
Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Anthony Fairclough,
Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Slawek Szczepanski,
Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor James Williscroft,
Councillor Victoria Wilson and Councillor Nick McLean

Dan Jones (Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate) and Lucy Owen (Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies received from Cllr Dan Johnston with Cllr Caroline Charles as substitute. Cllr Marsie Skeete also sent apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Panel members confirmed that these were a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

4 ACTION LOG (Agenda Item 4)

The Executive Director of Environment, Civic Pride and Climate will follow up on the waste updates. Following the meeting, the below updates were received and will be added to the Action Log:

Street sweeping schedules - As part of the new service, we shall publish the street cleansing service delivery schedules on the council's website, starting in April 2025.

Contract specifications - The service specification has been completed for the recycling & waste service. We are currently developing the detailed street cleansing service specification, incorporating feedback and will be able to present this to the Panel in Q1 of 2024.

Ward-based dashboards for identifying fly tip hot spots - The performance team have recruited a performance officer due to a vacancy and now are able to deliver this information on a Quarterly basis from Q4 2023/24.

Net Zero work -The waste and street environment team are currently undertaking a review, assisted by The Carbon Trust, of the future transport needs and we will deliver a plan to decarbonise the vehicle fleet to meet the 2030 Net Zero target.

Greenspaces and other outstanding actions – Scrutiny Officer to chase.
Following the meeting, the below updates were received and will be added to the Action Log:

Greenspaces Strategy - In line with the GLA Local Nature Recovery Strategy adopted in April 2023, we begun an initial scoping phase for the Merton Parks and Open Space Strategy. Internal partner consultation on the proposal is planned to be completed in Spring 2024. Currently, no funding has been secured for the implementation of the strategy. However, Parks for London is assisting with the scoping process.

Idverde quarterly performance updates - The Divisional Performance Team, in collaboration with the Head of Parks, has developed a comprehensive quarterly performance report. This report, encompassing service performance indicators and project updates related to parks and Idverde's performance, will be presented at the next Sustainable Communities Panel meeting for regular review and discussion.

Community Energy - Community energy is led by community and voluntary sector organisations, not the council. To support this the council has:
Extensive community engagement, including a climate action newsletter circulated to +10,000 signed up; a Canons Sustainable Summer Fair with multiple participants, voluntary and community sector organisations; a Green Schools Network and outreach across the borough.
Dedicated £166,000 for community groups, residents associations and other people and organisations to the council's Community Climate Action Fund.

Bike sheds - The council has TFL funding to provide c20 additional bike hangars; currently subject to procuring a new supplier

5 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 5)

The Cabinet Member for Sport & Heritage gave an update on current projects.

In response to questions from Panel Members:

- Wimbledon event for 300 young people. All concerns have been addressed with police input, but Cllr Holden is welcome to meet with Libraries Manager to discuss concerns (only one toilet, broken glass bottles).
- No budget for public toilets.

- Budget for borough of sport – Original budget was £544k, further money received from Health, but we do need to encourage funding.
- There is a Young Inspector on the Borough of Sport advisory group.
- Free swimming has been very popular with our younger people (between July and October there were around 2,200 swimmers).

6 MERTON'S HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS - REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE STANDARDS (Agenda Item 6)

Steve Nunn, Executive Director for Growth at MOAT gave a short presentation.

Cllr Aidan Mundy spoke on the issues in his ward and raised the following points:

- Voids standing for several months. How can these be turned around?
- Close working with housing team is needed, especially for high risk cases.
- What more can be done to proactively address mould in properties (particularly the older ones) other than dehumidifiers, trickle vents. Moat - We look at mechanical ventilation.

In response to questions:

- Anti-Social Behaviour – specialist team deals with this; residents report issues directly to them.
- Overcrowding – Local authority has nomination rights into our properties. We will work closely with the Council with regards to who is housed in the new Pollards Hill homes.
- Considering a hybrid model for performance rather than outsourcing.
- Fuel poverty – hardship fund that we use to focus on residents in need. Historically undersubscribed but has grown in the past two years.

Tony Almond, Head of Property for Wandle, gave a short presentation.

The Panel welcomed a public speaker, Caroline Muller-Carpenter.

Caroline raised an issue regarding a historic commitment by Wandle to replace boundary wall in her ward (due to be completed by March 2022). To date, nothing has been done. Tony Almond committed to respond to Caroline within two weeks.

In response to questions from Members:

- Tony to link with Cllr Caroline Charles, Tenants Champion, to organise a site inspection/Cllr walk around.
- Abbey Parade - fly tipping. This issue will be looked at.
- Fuel poverty – Helping Hand fund is managed by Wandle's resident support team.

7 CLARION HOUSING: ESTATE REGENERATION (Agenda Item 7)

This item was moved to January meeting.

8 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 8)

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services gave an overview of the budget plans for 2024/25. Inflation, cost of living and government funding are all areas of concern, however we do project a balanced budget that is robust, reasonable, and sustainable.

The Executive Director of Finance & Digital set out initial proposals. Significant changes are the pay award was significantly more than usual, inflation is down but has been significantly high all year, volatile interest rates.

Members considered draft savings proposals and growth proposals within the report. In response to questions:

- 40% of last year's savings achieved. Constant discussion with Directors and Budget Holders to achieve more than 40% of savings this year.
- Services require investment, frustrating that we cannot do this at present.
- Local government settlement – one-year settlements are unhelpful and very challenging.
- In terms of core spending power – with inflation pressures in social services, the increases are not enough to cover this. Executive Director to circulate more detail on core spending power to members of the panel.
- Proposing small savings in comparison to other London boroughs.

Members considered the Capital Programme:

- Car park upgrades – Action: DJ to update Cllr Holden via email.
- Capital programme heavily scrutinised with wider management with regards to capacity to deliver on these projects.
- Replacement trees are in either tree strategy budget or street tree planting programme.
- Wimbledon remodel of water sports facility. Currently have poor facilities.
- £29m in capital programme for tranche zero (first 100 homes). Cabinet expressed that £100m would be needed to achieve the house building scale desired. Cannot give precise details of how much exactly will be needed.
- Walking & Cycling strategy – earmarked money for some strategies, will also utilise TfL for LIP programme and section 106 for funding.

Growth proposals:

- Reductions in LIP funding has impacted on our ability to fund improvements schemes we would like to do.
- The retendering of refuse collection and in house street cleaning – how much more will we be paying for the new arrangements? Close to going to market, so currently working with assumptions and current rates of staff costs and fuel.

Savings proposals:

- Heritage role deletion –work will be spread across the team. Will offer development opportunities to team members.

The Panel moved to discuss recommendations.

Cllr Anthony Fairclough proposed that as part of the Borough of Sport ambitions, infrastructure really needs to be a part of that therefore we “Recommend Cabinet consider, as part of the MTFS, including toilet facilities and running water on its playing pitches”. The recommendation was seconded by Cllr Nick Mclean. Votes for, 6. Votes against, 6. Chair used his casting vote.

Motion fell.

Cllr Victoria Wilson proposed that “Cabinet to consider additional funding to accelerate the street trees programme”.

The recommendation was seconded by Cllr Daniel Holden.

Votes for, 6. Votes against, 6. Chair used his casting vote.

Motion fell.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

- There is a plan to deal with blocks of flats – looking at new contract in terms of how we might improve recycling and contamination rates. Improved facilities, more bins, increased collections as well as behaviour change.
- Rise in gyms – Dan Jones to see if GLL has had a drop in membership.
- Mitcham market and events – tender for Market Manager is out.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The work programme was agreed.