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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 FEBRUARY 2024

(7.15 pm – 9.38 pm)

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

ALSO PRESENT Lucy Owen (Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable
Development, Environment and Regeneration), Dan Jones
(Executive Director of Environment, Civic Pride and Climate,
Environment and Regeneration), Councillor Natasha Irons
(Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and
Climate Change), Barbara, John Bosely (Assistant
Director of Public Space Contract and Commissioning,
Environment and Regeneration), Tony Burton (.....)

PRESENT ONLINE Taki Hussain (Young Inspector), Councillor Andrew Judge,
Andrew Kauffman (Head of Parks Services, Environment and
Regeneration)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Stephen Mercer.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 ACTION LOG (Agenda Item 4)

Members agreed to archive completed actions in the log.
Members also discussed and agreed that further details were to be added to the Idverde log.

5 CLIMATE CHANGE AND NET ZERO PROGRESS (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change to present the report.

In response to question, the following was stated:

- To improve the overall RAG ratings on the workstream, they were trying to deliver everything that was within their control. An issue they had was trying to stop people from buying things that was not recycled and to get people to retrofit their homes to help decarbonise housing stock. Areas for improvement was lobbying for funding, helping people with sustainable travel and getting people to throw away fewer things. They remained confident that all that can be done in their power was being done.
- Not seen anything to suggest that electric vehicles were becoming less popular. They were not at saturation point but would continue to monitor.
- Budget savings on retro fittings had not yet been launched although they still planned to. They were currently recruiting for someone to lead on the Green Economy within the borough and continued to look for funding. Funding was received from the South London Partnership for the retro fit scheme summit and further schemes were scheduled for launch.
- They were proud of the Community Climate Action Group fund. Many of the action groups were grassroots and the gateway into climate action.
- Energy Matters go into schools to teach climate literacy and give teachers training. They struggled to recruit more people to the group and encouraged members and officers to share information with their networks. With the community fund it was easier for people to bid for things, they were in a good place in the borough.
- Gas would continue to be used for a while longer. The pipes dug up were leaking and needed replacing. The challenge was to get the rest of the infrastructure ready to decarbonise properties.
- Home energy efficiency scheme was due to launch in March and a training session was taking place next week. The scheme was a low interest rate loan scheme for residents and small scale landmarks in the borough. Councillors were encouraged to go along to the training.
- Recruitment was still an issue with a demand for more officers. They tried different approaches and needed to keep going. The recruitment website was launched and the rebranding made Merton more attractive.
- The team worked closely with Clarion and they have attended some of the Merton partnership committees, they do not doubt Clarions commitment to the borough.
- The launch of the decision making tool was an opportunity to increase participation in the staff survey. The accreditations and training being rolled out was hoped to help.

A special thanks were given to the Climate Team for all their work.

6 WASTE AND STREET CLEANING - PRESENTATION (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change, John Bosely and Tony Burton to present the report.

In response to question, the following was stated:

- The inhouse monitoring system was a three strand process. There would be the client team, the service provider and the street cleansing services. Mechanisms were put in place to ensure things were done in a mature and sustained way. This will be reported on at the Partnership Meeting three times per year where they can obtain improvement plans and actions. They will also use tools such as Fix My Streets and independent surveys to help them to further understand.
- Wheelie bins were made to last a long time. Sometimes the lids will break so they needed to have a mechanism in place to fix this as well as wheels. The Council would fund new containers but there was an optional service element and they would discuss how they could best deliver this.
- Flats above shops would be addressed in the same way as explained for wheelie bins.
- Communications were happening in areas taking place in relation to Garth Road to help understand the uptake. The most attended sessions were in areas such as Pollards Hill and Colliers Wood. Going forward, they planned to publish ahead of time. Public rights of way were included and after its launch it would be worthwhile bringing back to committee to talk about the period of adjustments and areas they were trying to tweak. They planned to do some pre decision scrutiny before they picked a bidder, following the procurement process.
- Whilst they recognised that street cleaning was seasonal, local knowledge would help to identify the best street cleaning schedule. The vast majority of the work will be structured, regular and supported by emergency backups. Between now and September they will think about how to best engage with Councillors for their local knowledge.
- Further liaising will take place to see what else can be done to provide toilet facilities for cleaners and operatives.
- Merton were doing well in terms of temporary accommodation compared to London and it should be noted that they were meeting their target which increased last year. Numbers were increasing in Merton and London, a paper will be going to Cabinet which will provide more detailed information.
- The parking service figure was not a target.

Thanks were given to officers for all their hard work.

7 IDVERDE (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair invited Tony Burton (Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum) to present the report.

The Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change informed the committee that papers were not shared ahead of the meeting and apologised for not having the opportunity to read the report ahead of the meeting.

There was a shared passion for green spaces in the borough and acknowledgement of the points raised around communication, which was due to resources challenges as opposed to anything else. The next step in the process was to further review ways to improve communication going forward.

At present, they explored bringing the booking system back to the Council which would provide more flexibility and scope.

There was appreciation for the input and contribution provided to the service by the Friends Groups.

Andrew Kauffman (Head of Parks Services) shared that Greenspaces was a small and passionate team. It was important to manage expectation however, agreed that communication could be improved.

With sight of the report, they could now provide a more detailed summary. They planned to share the Q3 report with Sustainable Communities and would continue to do so each quarter, noting particular areas of focus.

In response to question, the following was stated:

- Fix My Street was in the final integration stage and required map integration. The recent integration was around fly tipping and they planned to open this up within the next three months, but this would depend on the availability of the IT service team who would lead on this.
- Specific issues impacting Lynmouth Gardens Park and the river should be raised with officers in the Park Development Team who would be happy to arrange an onsite meeting.
- A structured form of conversations would help with communication.
- An example of good practice was that they were getting better at not cutting grass. There were good projects and relationships which was sometimes due to members of Idverde having a personal affinity with the location. Mulch was also doing well.
- Reporting with Idverde was done at a management level with most of the enquiries coming through the SLWP enquiries log which was recorded monthly. Action points were picked up at each monthly meeting and were then reviewed twice per month, which allowed for jobs to be closed down each month.
- Playgrounds were part of the larger Playground Capital Project. A link for this could be shared.
- There was commitment for more structured meetings.
- They received a £1.75million grant to upgrade parks and the initial focus was on the parks that needed it most. There were still funds available within the budget which was part of a longer heads of terms arrangement held in perpetuity.

- A key element linked to the Civic Pride funds was how much the team enjoyed the working relationships with the friends of parks.
- Officers were liaising with the Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development, Environment and Regeneration in regard to Mitcham War Memorial. Advice was sought from the Boroughs Conservation Officer.
- Concerns of allotment allocations were being addressed, particularly around loopholes which allowed some individuals to get spaces ahead of time. Residents were offered alternative allotments where available and the loopholes have been closed pending review.
- The Executive Director for Environment, Civic Pride and Climate informed members that they were in a period of reflection on the performance of contracts which will be brought back to Cabinet in the near future.
- The Q1 and Q2 report could be provided to allow for a comparison to Q3.
- There was not a definitive list of Friends Groups but there was a lot of community level communication.

The Executive Director for Environment, Civic Pride and Climate informed members that they were in a period of reflection in relation to the performance of contracts and this will be brought back to Cabinet in the near future. There was a commitment to liaise with residents.

Plans had to be made based on the available budget and resources. The work of Andrew and his two members of staff has been phenomenal. They recognised that they could always do better and the report was helpful in identifying how this could be done.

It would be useful for officers to have reports in advance to allow them to reflect ahead of committee.

A recommendation was raised to address concerns of attendance at the Independent Green Spaces meeting. The Cabinet Member for Local Environment, Green Spaces and Climate Change suggested for members to attend the meeting to avoid potential duplication. Engaging with friends groups was good and would help with building the overarching strategy.

Andrew Kauffman added that it was important to look at how they managed the different components. The Friend and likeminded groups were a good way unless they could get a representative from the Schools Forum. The Green Spaces Strategy and the Scoping Project will be of key importance.

Based on the discussion, the recommendation was withdrawn.

A recommendation was raised for best endeavours to repair Mitcham War Memorial.

Andrew Kauffman informed members of ongoing conversations with the Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development, Environment and Regeneration. They now received answers to their questions from Stonewest which will be shared with Tony and the Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development, Environment and Regeneration tomorrow. A conservation architect had been brought in to support. It was agreed to provide updates as part of the quarterly report.

Based on the discussion, the recommendation was withdrawn.

RESOLVED: That recommendations A and B were agreed.

8 FLY-TIPPING ACTION PLAN (Agenda Item 8)

Item moved to 21 March 2024 meeting.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

No points raised.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

This was agreed by Members.