

Agenda Item 3

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

24 FEBRUARY 2016

(7.15 pm - 9.52 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Abigail Jones (in the Chair), Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Ross Garrod, Councillor John Sargeant, Councillor Imran Uddin, Councillor Daniel Holden and Councillor Janice Howard

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Nick Draper (Cabinet Member for Community and Culture), Councillor Andrew Judge (Cabinet member for Environmental Sustainability and Regeneration) and Councillor Judy Saunders (Cabinet Member for Environmental Cleanliness and Parking)

Anthony Hopkins (Head of Library and Heritage Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager), Christine Parsloe, Cormac Stokes (Head of Street Scene and Waste) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer)

Terry Downes (GMB Shop Steward)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Dean.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Russell Makin declared an interest as a member of the boards of the Wandle Valley Trust and the Mitcham Common Conservators.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Three corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting were noted:

1. Councillor Russell Makin clarified he is a board member of the Wandle Valley Trust and the Mitcham Common Conservators;
2. Councillor Attawar noted that after the meeting it occurred that she would have wanted to declare an interest in Circle Housing Merton Priory and asked it be added to the minutes; and
3. Councillor Attawar's surname is incorrectly spelt and should be amended.

4 MORDEN LEISURE CENTRE: VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

Chris Parsloe provided the panel with a verbal update on current plans for the development of Morden Leisure Centre. It was highlighted that this is a work in progress and subject to change.

External:

- The centre will be located off the A24, further into the park, away from the mature habitat and closer to the College and existing car park;
- Positioning has been carefully considered in relation to the view from Morden Park House, to avoid noise from the A24 and to protect the swimming pool and swimmers from the sun;
- The external design is sympathetic to the park land; and
- The café and toilets have been positioned at the front of the building allowing easy access to all those using the park and not only those using the centre. There is outside shade available encouraging family use.

Internal (downstairs):

- The first stage of development excludes the sports hall. The designs allow for this to be added later. Whilst the initial build will be paid for from council funds, the sports hall requires external fundraising which is on-going;
- The swimming configuration accommodates all needs; there is a 25m, six lane pool and a smaller pool that has a movable floor allowing for a variable depth to support all activities from paddling for toddlers to diving;
- There is vanity screening between the pools allowing for events in the smaller pool not to be over-looked. (Blinds shielding swimmers from upstairs spectators, controlled by staff, also allow privacy for swimmers where required.);
- The village changing rooms approach is not considered suitable for Merton's community. There will be separate men's, women's and group areas (where dads can change with younger daughters etc); and
- The sports hall will be the size of four badminton courts and contain appropriate levels of storage space for the amounts of sports equipment needed.

Disabled users: there is disabled access throughout the centre.

Internal (Upstairs): there is a 100 station fitness suite that has been positioned to overlook the London skyline, some seating allowing sight of the pool, a flexible studio/ community space for activities such as yoga or Zumba, and, once the sports hall is built, there will be a mezzanine level over the storage in the sports hall creating a spinning studio.

In response to member questions, Chris Parsloe provided further clarification:

- The operator, Greenwich Leisure, will provide a shop for the sale of small sports goods on site, such as swim hats, goggles, etc;
- Plans for the leisure centre are targeted to go to the planning committee on 19 May 2016, work will then start on site in September/October 2016 with the planned opening in January 2018;

- Morden Park Pools will be decommissioned thereafter, demolished and the area landscaped;
- Expert advice from those that develop swimming facilities for Sport England has been taken on the development of the new leisure centre. The key requirement is to make this family friendly but also to consider on-going running costs and not just capital spend;
- The centre is focused on allowing family usage as opposed to being a spectator venue. There is some viewing space available but this is not extensive;
- Work is on-going to develop an accompanying pavilion for outside sports with Morden Park Playing Fields Community Trust;
- Full consideration is being given to transport to and from the centre. This is currently being modelled by transport planning consultants in consultation with our highways team and TfL; and
- The pools will be fully accessible and include a pool pod to provide the best possible access/experience for disabled users to enter the pools.

RESOLVED: to thank Chris Parsloe and the rest of the Leisure and Culture team for their work and to invite Chris back to the next meeting (16 March 2016) for a progress update.

5 PERFORMANCE REPORT: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES (Agenda Item 5)

Chris Lee highlighted four key points from the performance report:

1. (CRP 044): revenue estimates for parking services have not and will not be achieved in this municipal year. This was projected to include revenue from the implementation of an automatic number plate recognition scheme which has been delayed. The council has been successful in lifting an injunction brought by the unsuccessful bidder, (although litigation against the council continues over the award of the contract), and is now working with the preferred bidder for the scheme to go live in June 2016;
2. (SP 065): rates of recycling have plateaued. This is a challenge facing all authorities;
3. (CRP 051 / SP 114): the council will achieve its target for processing major planning applications within 13 weeks. However, the Government is seeking to open up planning to the market through the provisions of the Housing and Planning Bill currently before parliament; councils will potentially compete to process planning applications and be able to offer fast track application services under new proposals including increasing fees. Whilst there are lots of unknowns about these changes they also offer opportunities; and
4. (SP024): the council is ahead of its own target for ensuring the occupancy rate of properties it owns which compares favourably with London and national averages.

In response to member questions, the following clarification was given:

- Chris Lee (SP113/SP380): it was confirmed that the backlog of development and building control enforcement cases has reduced during the year but not sufficiently to meet the annual target. Approximately 80% of cases are without merit and there is no ability to check all of them. There continues to be a role for the public in helping to notify the council of building infringements;

- Cormac Stokes (SP065): Bexley is the local authority with the highest level of recycling in London (50+%). Lambeth has seen the biggest increase in the last year (up by 7% from 21% to 28%). All authorities have their own bespoke schemes making it hard to compare and assess why some are more successful than others. Mixing general waste with recycling isn't a solution to green fatigue; such schemes aren't available because this damages items suitable for recycling and diminishes their value. The council's recycling promotions over the past few years mean that close to a third of residents have been spoken to face-to-face. The wheeled bin pilot did see a slight increase in recycling but also an increase in waste which may reflect waste that is usually picked up in street cleaning was going into wheeled bins;
- Cormac Stokes (SP046): the target for income for commercial waste will be exceeded. The billing for January looks low because the phasing of invoicing means invoicing for January actually happened in December;
- Chris Lee - enforcement fines: at the moment there isn't a strong business case for raising the number of enforcement officers and increasing their coverage beyond town centres. Currently, high foot fall areas are covered because of the costs involved. However, the Government is considering increasing fines;
- Chris Lee (SP071): the higher rate of sickness is partly explained by seasonal factors and some is due to long standing health issues. This is being addressed but is likely to continue in the meantime; and
- (SP127): it was unknown if visitor parking permits are included in the five working day issue target. As residents have been reporting difficulties in securing these, Chris Lee will check.

(All codes stated refer to the classifications in the performance report.)

RESOLVED: to note the report.

6 CYCLE ROUTES UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

Having introduced the cycle routes update report, Paul McGarry provided the following clarification in response to member questions:

- Making previously no access roads permeable to cycle routes does not prevent access for emergency services. Large gate barriers are being replaced by trees at the outer edges and locked bollards in the middle. Emergency services have keys to these locked bollards. Paul McGarry will look into issues regarding motor bikes using these permeable routes;
- Merton is too far from the centre of London to be part of the TfL cycle hire scheme. Alternative schemes are currently being explored. Recovered stolen bikes are being put back into use across the borough. Paul McGarry will find out about the uptake of the Council's own schemes to encourage cycle use by staff;
- The Clapham Common to Wimbledon town centre scheme is currently subject to consultation and the recommendations from Sustrans are being considered. Consultation is on-going to make Mitcham better for cyclists. Designs for this are with TfL and awaiting sign-off;

- Success of the cycling strategy is measured through factors such as accident data and modal shifts in transport usage. Whilst not yet complete, it is planned that all the cycle schemes will join-up and achieve the vision for Merton to become Little Holland and easily navigable by bike. It was agreed to review the Big Wins Map at a forthcoming Panel meeting; and
- Access to adult cycle training is best achieved through the website and it is possible to email training requests. Paul McGarry will look into reported difficulties accessing the training.

RESOLVED: to note the report.

7 PHASE C PROCUREMENT PROGRAMME (INCLUDING PARKS, GROUNDS, MAINTENANCE AND WASTE) (Agenda Item 7)

Chris Lee provided a brief update as an introduction to the Phase C procurement programme. The council is now 15 months into the process and it is anticipated it will return to scrutiny in June 2016, (after the evaluation of final tenders and before the preferred bidder recommendation goes to Cabinet for decision in July).

The next stage is to invite final tenders. It was highlighted the key driver of this initiative is financial need; it is no longer financially viable for the council to provide these services by itself and make the required savings. The council is looking to achieve a collaborative arrangement in partnership with three other boroughs to achieve economies of scale. The partners have worked with the market to co-produce solutions.

Terry Downes, a GMB shop steward, was invited to address the meeting and made the following remarks:

- Consideration of this approach started in November 2013, earlier than stated;
- There is concern about the start date of this initiative as it applies to park and grounds maintenance. It is believed that this will be earlier than previously acknowledge (in February 2017), to accommodate horticultural needs. However, this won't allow sufficient time to fulfil requirements to staff transferring under TUPE;
- Questioned whether all the costs of transferring to another provider have been considered. (Is the value of the council's parks and ground maintenance capital assets, estimated at £250,000, included in the current bidding information?);
- Highlighted that there is still no contract specification;
- Reported that engagement with staff through DCC is not enough and that Friends groups are upset and frustrated; and
- Questioned why an in-house solution is not being considered and why the final tender process evaluation methodology detailed in the paper does not include a comparison with the in-house provision and what the in-house team can provide in terms of cost savings.

Terry Downes thanked the Panel for being given the time to make these points.

Members invited Chris Lee to respond to the points raised:

- Fully understands this is an anxious time for staff. Their questions are legitimate and will be answered in the fullness of time. However, currently there is no preferred bidder, final tenders are only just being invited and therefore the transfer of staff is over a year away, only at which point can staff's questions be answered;
- Consideration of this approach has been on-going for a long time; it is the duty of the council to continually look for innovative and more efficient ways to deliver services;
- An earlier start date for the parks and ground maintenance element is being considered because of the demands of the horticultural year. However, the council is very aware of its responsibilities and obligations to trade unions and staff and will fully comply with these. Pensions will need to be considered when the preferred supplier is appointed. It is hoped the contractor will be a Local Government Pension Scheme admitted body;
- The tenders will be compared to the costs of the current in-house provision. Only those that can provide a cost saving below what might be achieved in-house will be considered. The value of plant machinery is known and part of the budget comparison.

In response to questions from members, Chris Lee gave the following clarification:

- An in-house solution has been ruled out; following research it is understood this won't give the economies of scale and cost savings needed and since it would be one borough acting alone, it would also put off external bidders. There is confidence that external bids will exceed any cost saving that can be made internally. There has also been a need to be clear that an external provider will be selected to ensure potential bidders believe this is a real opportunity;
- The specific costs for Merton won't be known until the final bids are provided as this will be based on the final specification, specific asset values and staff that will be transferred; and
- Answers to staff concerns and questions will continue to be provided through DCC meetings to provide clarity as soon as it is possible.

Councillor Judy Saunders asked to address the Panel, Terry Downes and the other members of public attending. She provided her endorsement of the Director and her support for the Phase C proposal. However, she remains concerned about staff welfare and highlighted she is available to hear any concerns and be part of the dialogue.

RESOLVED: to note the report and for Phase C to return to the Panel for pre-decision scrutiny in June 2016

8 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE (Agenda Item 8)

Paul McGarry provided an update presentation on town centre development across the borough:

Wimbledon:

- Crossrail 2: the TfL consultation received 100,000 responses and closed in January 2016. The council provided a cross-party submission to which a formal

response is expected from TfL in March/April including consideration of other station options. TfL has already acknowledged there is need for more consultation in Merton which is now happening;

- Masterplan: the council is planning the development of Wimbledon in anticipation of Crossrail 2, reflecting the growing need for office and retail space. Development of the Masterplan will include community input through a series of thematic workshops; and
- Other developments in process include the Premier Inn Hotel, Pinnacle House and the theatre car park.

In response to a question from a member, Paul McGarry clarified that TfL will be contributing to the costs of the Masterplan development of Wimbledon as part of the Crossrail 2 initiative.

Raynes Park:

- There is less regeneration activity here because of all the work undertaken in the area in 2010 through the enhancement plan;
- Consideration is being given to the links between Crossrail 2 and Network Rail that will happen here;
- The High Street was runner up in the Great British High Street Award following an application by the Raynes Park Association; and
- Positive feedback for Greenspaces, Waste and futureMerton for input leading up to the judges' visit.

Mitcham:

- Rediscover Mitcham development is underway; the first phase of the Market Square and Clock Tower Gardens development is complete and the Majestic Way repaving and cycle lane development is in progress;
- The market is developing; the council is looking to appoint a co-ordinator to promote and ensure this is sustained and grows; and
- Next steps include the refurbishment of Three Kings Pond, a major traffic scheme that is awaiting approval from TfL and the cinema (the council is in talks with developers, an operator and potential restaurant operators).

Colliers Wood:

- The Colliers Wood Tower development is now underway and is set for completion at the end of 2017. A minor amendment to the planning permission is anticipated for decision in April/May 2016 and a pre-application for phase two of the development is in the early stages.
- TfL's highways work is complete, with snagging issues to be addressed;
- Baltic Close housing improvements are underway and should be completed in May 2016; and

- The library has been demolished and the new build has started.

In response to questions from members, Paul McGarry clarified:

- Phase 2 of the Colliers Wood Tower development will be a new planning application rather than another revision to the extant 10 year old scheme. This will consist of residential space for private rental and retail space at ground level. The initial plan for library space is no longer required as this is provided through the new development. However, community health space is needed in the area and is being discussed with the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group;
- The height of any new development will be in line with the council's planning policy; clustering and stepping up to the existing tower; and
- Colliers Wood library will open in summer 2017.

Morden:

- The consultation on the development of Morden town centre closed in November 2015 and the council's vision gained support from around 80% of respondents. Further information will be provided to the Panel when the analysis of data is complete;
- The GLA Housing Zone collaboration with TfL has been drafted with a development partner set to be in place in summer 2016;
- A successful bid has been made to TfL Highways to redesign the High Street and the bus station; and
- Morden Court Parade is set for a restoration back to its Art Deco original frontage. This is difficult as it means dealing with 60 different owners. The plan includes restoration of original balconies but costs to replace windows are prohibitive at this stage.

RESOLVED: to note the update presentation.

9 LIBRARIES ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 9)

Anthony Hopkins provided an introduction. The key achievements of the library services over the past year were stated:

- The school library scheme that gives automatic library membership to all school children in the borough. This is the only active scheme of its kind in England;
- There has been an increase in the number of library volunteers;
- Five out of the six Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the service are being achieved at record levels;
- There has been an increase in the use of Merton's libraries at a time when use of libraries nationally is declining;
- The online offer is being developed; and
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is interested in Merton's library service which is being reflected in the development of national projects.

Key challenges were also outlined:

- The on-going need to realise financial efficiencies;
- Delivery of the Colliers Wood Library development and the conversion of the back space at Wimbledon Library; and
- Supporting more library users to access services digitally.

In response to questions from members, Anthony Hopkins clarified:

- The new library in West Barnes is due to open in 2018; a recommendation on the approach to be taken for the development will be made in March and go for ratification in May 2016. Development is due to start in 2017; and
- Merton's approach to the use of volunteers in libraries has already provided some commercial revenue; the Greater London Assembly commissioned the authority to rollout its approach to councils across London.

RESOLVED: to thank Anthony Hopkins, the whole of the libraries team and library volunteers for the quality of the service being provided and for an excellent annual report.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The Panel agreed:

1. At the next meeting, (16 March 2016), the Environment and Regeneration Department will provide an addendum to the Shared Services report on the Government's proposals for reform of the planning market. This will include consideration of the options available to the council including shared services. It was request that this also be shared with the Commercialisation Task Group.
2. There will be no additional meeting to provide pre-decision scrutiny on the awarding of the construction contract for Morden Leisure Centre which will go to Cabinet on May 2016.

All members were asked to note the topic selection workshop will take place between 7 and 8:30pm on Tuesday 24 May 2016. This will determine the content of the work programme for the next municipal year (including task groups).

Resolved: the work programme was agreed.

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