

Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

7 MARCH 2017

(7.15 pm - 8.55 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Hamish Badenoch, John Dehaney, Abigail Jones, Sally Kenny, Dennis Pearce, Oonagh Moulton, David Williams and Mike Brunt

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad and Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Edith Macauley MBE (Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities)

Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement), Evereth Willis, Kris Witherington (Consultation & Community Engagement Manager) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted member Colin Powell.

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 an accurate record of the meeting.

4 CABINET RESPONSE TO THE SHARED AND OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 5)

Commission members expressed disappointment at the changes proposed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in relation to recommendations 2 and 5. Members regarded CMT's proposals as a dilution of the task group's intentions and stressed that during its deliberations, the task group had already modified its recommendations in response to representations made by the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Finance.

The Assistant Director of Business Improvement, Sophie Ellis, said that CMT had asked her to convey its thanks to the task group for a comprehensive report that provided insight into the challenges facing the authority.

Sophie Ellis explained that CMT's intentions in proposing an amended approach to recommendation 2 had been to avoid developing a process-driven template that might stifle innovation and creativity. CMT thought that the provision of questions and

guidance to be addressed in a flexible template would be more likely to deliver the outcome that the task group wanted. In relation to recommendation 5, CMT had been unsure that a mandatory appraisal objective would deliver the desired result, which, as the report had stated, needed to ensure the right skills and information was available to managers. With this in mind an alternative proposal had been put forward that centred on the leadership development programme and the improved TOM (target operating model) process.

The Chair said that the Commission would be inviting the Chief Executive to attend its meeting on 7 July 2017 to present a report as outlined in recommendation 7 of the task group's report. He added that the Commission would continue to monitor delivery of the action plan on a six monthly basis, as is usual with task group reports.

5 EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY 2017-20 (Agenda Item 4)

The Equality and Community Cohesion Officer, Evereth Willis, outlined the content of the new draft equality and community cohesion strategy and the associated action plan. Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Equalities and Engagement, described the consultation process that had been undertaken and said that the draft document had been brought to the Commission as part of the consultation process. She said that she would welcome any additional points and comments that Commission members wished to make.

In response to a question, Evereth Willis said that the action plan was shorter than the plan for the previous strategy and that each action was linked to a service plan, therefore she was confident that the plan would be deliverable. The action plan will be monitored by a corporate group lead by the Director of Children, Schools and Families and will also be brought to the Commission annually.

Commission members commented that they were pleased to see specific actions and performance measures set out in the action plan, though there were notable gaps in the draft. Evereth Willis assured members that the gaps would be plugged in the final document and that the action plan would be a "live document" that would be actively used by the council and its partners.

Commission members discussed whether the aim of narrowing the gap between the east and the west of the borough would ever be achievable and urged officers to focus on improving the life chances of the most deprived communities.

In response to a question Evereth Willis undertook to find out the position on earmarked reserves in relation to apprenticeships and report back to Commission members. ACTION: Equality and Community Cohesion Officer

RESOLVED: the Commission requested that the following changes be made to the draft strategy:

- To amend objective 2, key activity point 5 “ continue to raise the issue of step free access at train stations such as Motspur Park and Raynes Park stations as opportunities arise” to include Wimbledon Park station because the same issues apply;
- To add more detail on the work planned in relation to hate crime – objective 5, key activity point 1;
- That the action plan should be fully populated with performance measures.

6 FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP - MINUTES OF MEETING ON 20 FEBRUARY (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Hamish Badenoch, Chair of the Financial Monitoring Task Group, drew the Commission’s attention to the task group’s discussion of the budgets for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and no recourse to public funds (NRPF) which highlighted that the shortfall in government grant was not being addressed in setting the budget for these areas.

RESOLVED: to note the minutes of the meeting of the financial monitoring task group held on 20 February 2017.

7 REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CO-OPTED MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair introduced this report and proposed that the Commission should seek expert speakers on particular subjects as they arise rather than recruiting a voluntary co-opted member as it would be unlikely for one person to be able to cover all aspects of the Commission’s terms of reference. There was general agreement to this proposal and it was agreed that experts could include people from community organisations or service users who could add value to a meeting.

Councillor Dennis Pearce, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, added that the Panel had taken a similar approach and its experience had been that a long lead-in time to find expert speakers was desirable and therefore advised planning several meetings ahead.

RESOLVED: to consider requirements for expert witnesses as part of the Commission’s topic workshop on 23 May. The Head of Democracy Services will include suggestions in the agenda pack for this meeting.

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

8 DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 8)

RESOLVED to ask the Acting Borough Commander the following questions at the Commission’s meeting on 28 March:

- Against a framework proposal for 12 forces to cover the 32 Greater London boroughs, what are the options under consideration for a sub-regional

amalgamation of police forces to include Merton and where have proposals got to?

- What are the planned arrangements for the deployment of dedicated ward officers in Merton and how close are they to implementation borough wide?
- How is the new ward model working and how is it impacted by reductions in the total number of police officers?
- The Acting Borough Commander is asked to comment on recent spikes in domestic burglary and theft of motor cycles (especially mopeds) and bicycles
- Could the Acting Borough Commander ensure that officers' shifts match local events in the borough that need policing support – such as Armed Forces Day. How could the Council assist in ensuring police awareness of such events?
- What is the remit of school police officers and what do they do?
- What is the trend in Merton for internet based crime i.e. identity theft, on line scams, how is it recorded and how should residents report such crimes?

9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

RESOLVED to agree the proposed work programme for the Commission's meeting on 28 March 2017 with the following changes:

- addition of a presentation on the proposed local authority property company so that the Commission would have an opportunity to input and comment prior to this being taken to Council;
- deferral to 7 July 2017 of the report from Safer Merton (on violence against women and girls, services for women in refuges, and anti-social behaviour).

10 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (Agenda Item 10)

The Community Engagement Manager, Kris Witherington, introduced the report that had been provided in response to a request made at Council on 23 November 2016.

Kris Witherington said that implementation of the Get Involved Strategy, a joint approach to community engagement by the council and its partners, had become more challenging in recent years due to rapid organisational change, new government guidance and increased public expectations particularly in regard to digital communication. The council's Community Engagement team (2FTE) advises services on best practice, maintains the consultation infrastructure and delivers corporate consultation activity.

Kris Witherington provided additional information in response to questions:

- the Gunning principals are not a statutory requirement but rather a set of standards used by the courts in assessing whether consultations were appropriate

- officers take advice from the Consultation and Engagement Team and from the South London Legal Partnership to determine whether a consultation is legally required
- there is dialogue with faith organisations, including through the Faith and Belief Forum. Merton Voluntary Service Council has a database that can be used to assist communication and consultation.
- some Community Forums have greater attendance than others and attendance will also vary according to topicality of issues
- Community Forums are a valuable mechanism for community engagement but other mechanisms should also be deployed
- the new residents survey will provide a new baseline but there will be some comparability with previous surveys . It may be possible to carry these out jointly with neighbouring boroughs in future
- the council's online portal is used for partner organisations too, for example it currently hosts the boundary review plus a consultation by Transport for London
- the use of e-petitions has decreased significantly in Merton, probably due to increased use of national petitions

RESOLVED: to thank Kris Witherington for the report and additional information provided.

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