

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

28 FEBRUARY 2013

(7.15pm – 10.40pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Stan Anderson (substitute for Judy Saunders) John Dehaney (substitute for Peter McCabe), Iain Dysart, Suzanne Evans, Suzanne Grocott, Richard Hilton, Russell Makin

Co-opted member – Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons, Parent Governor Representative – Secondary Schools

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services, Paul Dale, Interim Assistant Director of Resources, Darren Williams Borough Commander Merton, Sophie Ellis Assistant Director of Business Improvement, Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; Peter McCabe and Judy Saunders.

3 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY

RESOLVED: Minutes were agreed, Councillor Neil Mills requested further information on de-aggregated commercial waste and pest control, also head count numbers in parking proposal for back office and the frontline.

Councillor Makin asked that page eight resolution on Duke of Edinburgh Award CSF06 should be amended to read "to recommend that cabinet should reject this saving until further work is done on an alternative proposal"

Councillors were disappointed not to have received the additional information from the last meeting earlier although do not wish to apportion any blame to scrutiny officers.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Councillor Hilton sought confirmation on who signed off the business case for the Energy ReFit savings circulated by email to the Commission on the 28th February. The Director of Corporate Services agreed to provide more information.

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5 FUTURE OF POLICING IN MERTON

The Borough Commander, Darren Williams reported that Merton is one of the lowest crime boroughs across London.

Over the last few days local officers had police knocked on over 2,500 homes (1 in 35 houses across Merton) to offer home security and crime prevention advice.

The Commission were shown a four minute video on policing achievements in Merton.

The Borough Commander said the video will be used to highlight to officers the fantastic work they have done in 2012 and how it can be continued through the period of austerity. The local priority is to staff the neighbourhood teams. There are a number of short term vacancies but the Metropolitan police are training five thousand recruits over the next three years. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are being trained to become full police officers. All PCSOs in Merton are being trained in crime prevention. All special constables are attached to a ward in Merton. The Borough Commander further reported that Merton Police have set themselves challenging targets for the recruitment of special constables and volunteers.

Merton Police are facing a number of challenges including; improving response to victims. The police need to reduce the number of buildings, Wimbledon and Mitcham police stations will be retained. Safer neighbourhoods bases cost approx £270,000 a year to maintain and are not all accessible to the public.

Merton will not be losing any police officers to neighbouring boroughs. In Mitcham, the majority of crime relates to anti-social behaviour. In the Wimbledon area it is mainly retail crime. Wimbledon is also the centre of night time economy crime.

The Borough Commander is intending to circulate a map of crime hot spots with the aim of encouraging large retailers to do more to prevent crime as well as increasing the number of neighbourhood watches. A future initiative will include the Borough Commander and some police officers cycling around the borough with local residents, as a way of engaging with local communities.

Commission members asked a number of questions including if neighbourhood policing will continue in Cricket Green and if there will be an increased visible presence in Wimbledon because of the high crime rate?

The Borough Commander reported that every neighbourhood team will have one officer and one Police Community Support Officer. Although wards will be policed differently based upon their crime patterns. The allocation of resources will be discussed with senior officers next week.

Commission members expressed gratitude to the Borough Commander for all the work that he and his officers had done. However some concern was expressed about the use of maps to identify crime hotspots as potential burglars could make

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use of this information. Another Commission member shared this concern and asked if there is any evidence that it works?

The Borough Commander has said that the map will not identify individual streets. He went on to say that the use of daily information on crimes across the Borough did seem to be working as Merton were seeing reduction in every crime type except motor vehicle crime. He also said that going forward we do need to develop innovative new solutions to tackle issues together as a community and not just rely on the police.

A Commission member asked how satisfaction with the police service will be measured.

The Borough Commander reported that satisfaction is measured by a survey conducted by an independent company. It is hoped that this survey can be improved as it does not reach all sections of the community.

6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-17

A Commission member asked if the meeting stated in paragraph 1.1 on page 11 took place.

The Chair reported that the situation had since changed and the cabinet member would respond to this meeting by email.

Councillor Richard Hilton circulated advice from the monitoring officer, regarding the legality of the meeting proposed. Councillor Hilton asked the Chair if he had agreed to attend the meeting?

The Chair reported that he never intended it to be a private meeting, the scrutiny officer was asked to minute the discussion, though there was a recognition that it was less than transparent.

Councillor Hilton asked for the minute to show that he was unhappy that the Chair engaged in such a conversation to represent this body having no authority to do so. He was disappointed that the Chair would go down that route, especially as a champion of scrutiny.

The Chair asked Commission members if they had any further consideration of the capital programme budget proposals.

A Commission member asked if the chairs of the scrutiny panels would give an overview of their discussions on the capital programme

The Chair of the Children and Young People Panel reported that they had discussed schools expansion. The Chair of the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel reported that they did not have any major reservations about the capital programme.

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A Commission member queried the highways and regeneration budgets asking if they are standard, as there seems to be a significant reduction every year, are these unspent monies re-profiled or do we start with the same figure?

The Interim Assistant Director of Resources reported that they are standard amounts there is a backlog in highways, we will review future year's allocations. There has been an improvement in the condition of the roads so not carrying forward. The Director for Corporate Resources also reported that when we do the outturn we will look at slippage, re-profiling and report to the cabinet.

Duke of Edinburgh Award

Commission members expressed a range of views about if the Duke of Edinburgh award should be targeted. A Commission member felt that it was valid to target funds at groups most in need especially in a time of austerity. Another Commission member wanted to see funding targeted to those who wouldn't otherwise benefit from this scheme. A Commission member pointed out that the local authority had taken a strong lead on this scheme we could not assume that this would continue for any pupil irrespective of their background. Another Commission member felt that the scheme had been successful and some schools could mentor others. Another Commission member felt that the scheme is benefitting a wide range of pupils and we should encourage it for all and not only target specific groups.

The Chair asked the Commission to vote on the funding being retained but targeted to those pupils who wouldn't otherwise benefit from this kind of activity.

Six members voted in favour and four voted against. The vote was carried. Councillor Hilton asked the minute to show that he voted in favour of the funding being retained.

Councillor Southgate moved a motion to: Accept officers offer to look again at pilot programme developed to extend scope of Duke of Edinburgh Award. This was seconded by Councillor Makin

An amendment was put forward: Officers to look at how best to target funding to those most in need of this kind of programme in the event that the saving is not taken. Councillor Hanna seconded the amendment. Five members voted in favour of this motion. Four members voted against and one member abstained, in which case the motion was passed.

The Commission discussed the funding for the Polka and Attic Theatres. A vote was held on taking the savings for the Polka Theatre five members voted in favour and five voted against, the motion was carried with the Chair's casting vote.

A vote was held on taking the savings for the Attic Theatre

Four members voted in favour, six members voted against this motion, it was not

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carried.

In relation to savings EN44&EN46 The Chair asked Commission members to vote on officers carrying out a review to look at potential for taking savings and not to take savings until review has been completed. Six members voted in favour and four voted against. This vote was carried.

EN46

Some Commission members felt that there needed to be more evidence on usage, it was pointed out that the Sustainable Communities Panel had not seen any evidence.

Councillor Diane Neil Mills moved a motion to ask the Commission to vote against the principle of charging residents to use parks. This was seconded by Councillor Evans. A Commission member pointed out that only the parks in Wimbledon had been targeted. Four members voted in favour, five voted against and the motion was not carried.

In conclusion the Chair said that the Commission do not accept savings EN44&46 as further work needed to be done.

The Commission agreed the following in relation to other savings:

CSF07 – Saving to be taken and further information provided to the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Panel

ASC49 – Further information to go to the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel in due course.

The Commission asked the Cabinet Member to exercise caution in relation to the savings set out in table 20; Councillor Mark Allison said that he would report back to the Commission on implementation.

7. CUSTOMER CONTACT STRATEGY

A Commission member pointed to the list setting out why change is needed and felt that 'the need to reduce financial expenditure' should not be included in the list as this Strategy was needed irrespective of the financial Climate.

A Commission member pointed out that the Director should be the accountable officer for the strategy rather than the Assistant Director for Business Improvement as set out on Page 49.

The Director for Corporate Resources said that she was ultimately responsible and

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is the sponsor and will ensure that this is made clear in the strategy.

Commission members asked a number of questions including how this document will be used to drive performance and customer experience, is the Strategy based on best practice or existing work, the importance of extending internet access and if the bidders day will take place in March?

The Assistant Director for Business Improvement said the strategy is based on existing work and good practice from elsewhere, The Bidders day is likely to take place in April now, the purpose of the event is to stimulate the market and ensure that the approach is right.

A Commission member asked if the council would still proceed with the strategy if we did not have budget pressures, the annual residents' survey highlighted the need to improve customer contact.

Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation reported that the Strategy would continue irrespective of the financial situation, the annual residents' survey highlighted the need to improve customer contact.

At 10.15pm the Commission agreed to suspend standing orders and extend the meeting for ten minutes.

8. NOTES OF THE FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP MEETING 7
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Councillor Iain Dysart said he has submitted questions some of which have not yet been answered

9. UPDATE ON PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION ON THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

This item was noted

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

The Commission agreed that the next time borough commander is invited he should be asked to provide information on:

1. Details of officer deployment given the target on 'officers undertaking other duties'
2. Proposed increase in neighbourhood teams

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Also customer contact programme update to be added to the work programme for 2013/14

THE MEETING ENDED AT 10.25pm.

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