

Agenda Item 3

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CABINET

9 NOVEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 8.15 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Stephen Alambritis (in the Chair), Mark Allison, Laxmi Attawar, Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Edith Macauley MBE, Eleanor Stringer and Martin Whelton

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Natasha Irons, Nick McLean (Leader of the Conservative Group) and Peter Southgate (Leader of the Merton Park Ward Independent Residents Group)

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), Hannah Doody (Director of Community and Housing), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Matt Burrows (Head of Communications and Customer Experience), Fabiola Hickson (Manager business improvement law), David Keppler (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Jane McSherry (Assistant Director of Education), Octavia Lamb (Policy and Research Officer (Labour Group)) and Louise Fleming (Democracy Services Manager)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

No apologies were received.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2020 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 REFERENCE TO CABINET FROM THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PANEL ON THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE PERFORMANCE (Agenda Item 4)

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Natasha Irons, Chair of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel presented the report which set out recommendations following a performance update on the idverde grounds maintenance service received at the meeting of the Panel on 1 September. Councillor Irons gave an overview of the discussion and outlined the recommendations of the Panel for Cabinet to take into consideration when making decisions relating to the service.

The Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture thanked Councillor Irons and the Scrutiny Panel for their contributions and advised that she had met with officers to discuss the recommendations and they were currently working up a timeline for delivery and would update the Panel in due course. The Cabinet Member welcomed the efforts of the parks maintenance staff during the pandemic.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration welcomed the report and recommendations, which were currently being worked on and a further report would be brought to Cabinet for consideration in due course.

The Chair thanked all for their contributions.

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, as set out in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.18 of the Cabinet report, be taken into account when making decisions on the Idverde grounds maintenance service.

5 ALLOCATION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD CIL FUNDING (Agenda Item 5)

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport presented the report which set out recommendations for allocation of CIL funding to three urgent projects, two of which were to support community organisations with the impact of Covid-19 and the third to fund improvements to Morden Town Centre which would contribute to the regeneration and recovery of the area. Delegated authority was also sought to allocate up to £20,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to the purchase of IT equipment including devices and other items to support school pupils across the Borough in accessing internet-based learning from home required due to Covid-19, in line with Cabinet's agreed Neighbourhood Fund criteria.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance welcomed the report and the local campaign to highlight the lack of access to electronic learning equipment for some children in more deprived parts of the borough. He welcomed the use of the money for this purpose which supported the Council's objective to bridge the gap and ensure fair access to education. He thanked the Cabinet Member and the officers for their work.

The Chair thanked all for their contributions and welcomed the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the allocation of Neighbourhood CIL funding towards two urgent projects to support impacts of Covid-19 upon community facilities namely £49,650 to Carers Support Merton for promoting digital equality for carers and £45,000 to the Citizens Advice Merton and Lambeth to cover an additional Debt Advisor or General Advisor dedicated to Merton to address capacity challenges be approved.
2. That the allocation of £300,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding towards Morden Town Centre improvements be approved.

3. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing to allocate up to £20,000 Neighbourhood CIL funding to the purchasing of IT equipment including devices and other items to support school pupils across the borough in accessing internet based learning from home required due to Covid, in line with Cabinet's agreed Neighbourhood Fund criteria.

6 MELROSE SCHOOL EXPANSION - APPOINTMENT OF CONSTRUCTOR
(Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Schools and Adult Education presented the report which proposed the appointment of a constructor for the expansion of Melrose School which would increase capacity for the provision of education to children with social, emotional and mental health needs. The Cabinet noted the information contained in the exempt appendix.

The Chair welcomed the report and thanked all for their work.

RESOLVED:

That the Council award the contract for the school expansion construction works for Melrose School as outlined in the confidential appendix 1.

7 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22 (Agenda Item 7)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out a scheme for council tax support for 2021/22 and thanked the officers involved in administering the scheme. He restated the Council's intention to continue the scheme to support low income households, despite it no longer being funded by the Government.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that paragraph 6.4 of the report set out the increase in cost of the scheme due to the impact of Covid-19.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Schools and Adult Education welcomed the report and thanked the Leader and officers involved in addressing food poverty during the school holidays and thanked the schools and charities for their support, with particular thanks to O'Halloran & O'Brien, a Morden based construction company, who had made a generous donation towards the cost of providing food vouchers for vulnerable families.

The Chair echoed the comments made by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Schools and Adult Education and thanked all for their contributions and welcomed the report.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the uprating revisions for the 2021/22 council tax support scheme detailed in the report be agreed, in order to maintain low council tax charges for those on lower incomes and other vulnerable residents.
- B. That Cabinet recommends to Council that it adopts the proposed revisions to the 2021/22 scheme.

8 BUSINESS PLAN 2021-25 (Agenda Item 8)

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance presented items 8 and 9 together. He thanked all the officers involved in the reports and in his time as Cabinet Member for Finance.

He gave an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances and highlighted as a result the deficit of £10.7m, which represented more than 10% variance. If Covid-19 had not happened, the Council would have seen a £3.5m surplus this year. The financial monitoring report also showed a deficit of £27m in the Dedicated Schools Grant, due to the lack of financial support from the Government. He advised the Cabinet that if the Government did not fund local services in the way that they had promised to do at the start of the pandemic, the Council would face difficult choices as it would be facing a budget gap of £14m. The package of savings presented at this stage for consideration by scrutiny were the non-Covid related savings, those which would have been required anyway. If further cuts to services were required in addition to these, it would be due to the Government not properly funding the pandemic response provided by the Council.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader for his work as Cabinet Member for Finance and the officers involved in the reports.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that there had been some improvements in income just prior to the second national lockdown and that there could be changes in the figures in the next financial monitoring report. The local authority financial settlement announcements from the Government were likely to be late in December, which would leave little time for officers to work through what the gaps might be going forward. The savings would be presented to scrutiny and the equality assessments would be reported to Cabinet in December along with any further adjustments for consideration by scrutiny in the new year.

The Chair thanked the Director for her contribution.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the proposed new savings to meet the non-Covid gap be agreed, and referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission; and that these savings be ratified at a future Cabinet meeting, with the draft Equality Assessments (EAs) subject to scrutiny comments.
- B. That it be noted that any proposed amendments to previously approved savings previously agreed (replacements and deferrals) will be reported to the Cabinet meeting in December.

- C. That the decision in principle to continue with the Business Rate Pool for 2021/22 be noted.
- D. That the summary of the COVID-19 Impact, along with details of funding received to date, at Appendix 2 be noted.

9 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2020/21 - SEPTEMBER 2020 (Agenda Item 9)

The detailed minute for this item is set out under item 8 above.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the financial reporting data for month 6, September 2020, relating to revenue budgetary control, showing a forecast net adverse variance at year-end of £10.7m be noted.
- B. That the contents of section 4 of the report be noted and the adjustments to the Capital Programme in Appendix 5b be approved.
That the contents of Section 4 and Appendix 5b of the report be noted and the amendments to the Programme contained in the Table below be approved:

	Budget 2020-21	Budget 2021-22	Budget 2023- 24	Narrative
Corporate Services	£	£	£	
Invest to Save	(140,000)			Budget relinquished as struggling to spend
Community and Housing				
Disabled Facilities Grant	(187,000)		187,000	Re-profiled Budget
Children, Schools and Families				
Melrose Primary SEMH annexe 16	35,950	89,050		Virement from Harris Wimb & Fur. SEN Prov
Melrose S'dary SEMH 14 Places		125,000		Virement from Harris Wimb
Harris Academy Wimbledon		(150,000)		Virement to Prim & Sec SEMH
Further SEN Provision	(35,950)	(64,050)		Virement to Secondary SEMH
Environment and Regeneration				
Culverts	(258,120)	258,120		Budget re-profile to match projected spend
Merton Lost Rivers	(100,000)		100,000	Budget re-profile to match projected spend
Beddington Lane Cycle Scheme	104,000			Additional TfL Grant added to Section 106 Funding
ANPR	486,000			SCIL Funded Scheme

Cameras Supporting Enforcement of School Streets				
Street Lighting Wimbledon	150,000	670,000		SCIL Funded Scheme
Haydons Road Public Realm Improvements	50,000	350,000		SCIL Funded Scheme
Rowan Park Community Facility Match Funding	150,000			SCIL Funded Scheme
Bishopsford Bridge	802,800	512,000		SCIL Funded Scheme
Cycle Lane&Roadway Bishopsford Bridge	20,000	130,000		SCIL Funded Scheme
Morden Town Centre Improvements	100,000	200,000		NCIL Funded Scheme
Crown Creative Knowledge Rxchange	150,000			SCIL Funded Scheme
Total	1,327,680	2,120,120	287,000	

- C. That finance officers will continue to work with budget managers to identify further re-profiling and savings throughout the approved capital programme 2020-24.

10 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 10)

The Cabinet agreed not to refer to the exempt information contained in item 11 and therefore the meeting remained in public.

11 MELROSE SCHOOL EXPANSION - APPOINTMENT OF CONSTRUCTOR EXEMPT APPENDIX (Agenda Item 11)

The Cabinet noted the information contained in the exempt appendix. The decision is set out under item 6 above.

The Chief Executive and Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance paid tribute to the Leader of the Council on his last Cabinet meeting before stepping down as Leader on 18 November 2020.