

Agenda Item 3

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 2 SEPTEMBER 2021

(7.15 pm - 11.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Aidan Mundy (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Laxmi Attawar,
Councillor David Dean, Councillor Nick Draper and
Councillor Anthony Fairclough

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Cathryn James (Interim Assistant Director, Public Protection), Steve Langley (Head of Housing Needs and Strategy), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager) and James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Dave Ward (with Cllr Ben Butler as substitute) and Cllr Geraldine Stanford (with Cllr Pauline Cowper as substitute).

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 of the previous meeting were agreed.

4 ACTIONS LOG (Agenda Item 4)

The actions log brings together our actions and recommendations into one place so that we can keep track of them and enables us to attend to multiple items in a single year.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration and the Head of Housing Needs provided further updates

Emissions-based charging - Will come back to Cabinet and scrutiny in due course with an update on the implementation date. We haven't got a timeline that we can share with Members at present.

Idverde - With regards to the development of any green spaces strategy, there are a number of strategies and policies that the Council has that cover this area and we want to make sure that we're not duplicating and adding further burdens to an already heavy workload or confusing stakeholders but ensuring that what we do add value and provide clarity.

Support for Clarion tenants web pages – Updates have included private tenant housing association tenants' rights, who's responsible for what, how and when and useful contacts. We should be able to launch the web page within the next two weeks.

Panel Members suggested adding two more columns to the action log;

- Whether Cabinet have or have not agreed to these recommendations
- Timeline column with space included to describe why there isn't a timeline, why it is delayed and suggest new timelines.

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 5)

Follow up questions about the performance monitoring information were answered by the Director of Environment and Regeneration and the Assistant Director of Public Spaces;

The business recovery plan for leisure centres is working well. Our current membership levels are approaching pre-covid levels and we anticipate to be in a position where we are receiving the guaranteed income model from October to November of this year.

Increases in missed collections occur during summer holiday periods where you have new or interim operatives working on the collection rounds. The national driver's shortage has affected us somewhat but it hasn't impacted us as significantly as other regional authorities. Historically, not just within the council but nationally, there is a natural increase over the summer.

A complete collection service for fly tips would be a project which would require a lot of thought and planning in terms of overall cost. From broad information that we have, I would project that collection costs associated with such an activity would range from £600,000 to £900,000 pounds per annum. In addition to that we would also have a correlated impact in increasing the amount of waste that is collected. Some of that waste may be associated to construction/demolition waste which would need to be treated through landfill so could potentially cause an increase of between a half a million to a million pounds in terms of our waste disposal costs. So that would be in the order of anywhere to £1.5 to £2million per year in order to undertake that work at that degree.

6 FLOODING ISSUES (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair thanked officers for the report on flooding

The Director of Environment and Regeneration reassured the Panel that these matters are being taken up at the highest level with Thames Water by both the Leader and the Chief Executive.

Thames Water have commissioned an independent review of the flooding events in July and the Director of E&R agreed to share this review with the Sustainable Communities Panel once received and urged the Panel to invite Thames Water to a future meeting to also talk to that review.

7 CLARION PERFORMANCE UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

Items seven, eight and nine were taken together.

The Chair again welcomed Michelle Reynolds, Chief Operating Officer for Clarion, Vicky Bonner, Director of Housing and John Ferman, Regional Director.

The representatives from Clarion provided a progress update on the Eastfields Estate.

Since 25th June, we have completed 601 repairs on the Eastfields estate. Alongside this work we have been carrying out a communal decorations programme and surveying and treating any infestations. We continue to offer an Eastfields repairs email address and have staff attending our on-site office to keep a visible presence on the estate.

Decent homes - the 2010 stock transfer agreement included a commitment to bring homes up to a decent home standard. This means that a home needs to be in a reasonable state of repair, have reasonably modern facilities and services and also provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The Regulator of Social Housing and Clarion's predecessor Circle Housing agreed to a waiver on the decent homes on some properties in Merton. However even where there is a waiver in place, we continue to provide a full day-to-day repair service, a boiler replacement program on all properties and where components such as kitchens and bathrooms do fail and/or are beyond economic repair they are replaced so all health and safety commitments and requirements are met and all adaptation requirements are met.

Community engagement work continues and going forward we will be talking to our Merton community panel, our residents associations, Members and officers about developing a comprehensive community engagement plan to take us forward over the next 12 to 18 months.

This will include door knocking in a systematic way across our homes in Merton, community days where we're looking at communal repairs needed and also continuing to have that focus on reminding and writing out to all of our residents about how to report repairs and encouraging residents to report them through the different channels.

Panel members asked some further questions of clarification which were answered as follows;

- Clarion have committed to publishing their 'lessons learned' externally by the end of this month.
- Work in progress and total job numbers has increased because as we've attended to properties, further complex repairs have been identified. Therefore in some cases one job potentially has turned into 10 or 12 jobs.
- We do have challenges currently that are recognized across the sector in terms of resource and materials.
- We have proactive work on the communal works - we undertake estate inspections regularly.
- The void standard on all of our properties is exactly the same whether it be in Merton, Bromley or anywhere else. It's written down, it's quite extensive and we give it to our contractors and they work to that void standard.
- Our intention is to send resident letters out across Merton by the end of September and it will cover the internal complaints procedure for Clarion but also the escalation through to the Housing Ombudsman as well.

8 REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING - LETTER OF ACTIONS (Agenda Item 8)

Taken with Item 7.

9 TENANTS' CHAMPION - DISCUSSION ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor Nick Draper introduced himself as the Tenants Champion for Merton. The Tenants Champion role was established to support both tenants and leaseholders who rent or lease their properties from a housing association and also private renters in the borough, by giving someone for residents to contact if they had long running, unresolved complaints with their landlord.

Cllr Draper advised he will be seeking a discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and the Climate Emergency to agree on the terms of reference and success criteria for the role. Once the Cabinet Member has agreed and instructed, feedback will be provided to the Panel

The Tenants Champion also agreed to;

- Write a formal report for the Panel meeting in February 2022.
- Investigate Richmond Councils long running Tenants Champion, along with the Cabinet Member and Chair of the Panel, to see what has made the role successful and whether there is any learning to take on board.

10 HOUSING UPDATE: EVICTION BAN (Agenda Item 10)

The Head of Housing Needs presented the report and outlined Merton's current position from a housing needs standpoint.

- As of 27th August, Merton has no known rough sleepers within the borough, which is all down to the hard work of officers.
- The Council went from recording the biggest cause of homelessness as 'assured short hold tenancies coming to an end' to the biggest cause being 'rough sleeping and evictions from family, friends or domestic abuse'.
- We have not seen a huge impact in numbers from the eviction ban being lifted on the 1st June. Currently there are roughly 206 households in temporary accommodation, which is an increase of about eight pre the eviction ban being lifted.

In response to further questions from the Panel Members, the Head of Housing Needs explained;

- Faith in action who for many years have supported rough sleepers at their offices in the Salvation Army along Kingston Road where anybody that makes a claim of rough sleeping receives clothes, food and a hot shower etc.
- Capital Lettings was pulled together by the London council's housing directors meeting in an attempt to increase supply in the private rented sector and indeed reduce homelessness. There's roughly 24 London boroughs who have now signed up to the scheme

The Panel RESOLVED to seek an update report on the Capital Lettings scheme in the next municipal year

11 SUPPORT TO DELIVER CLARION'S ESTATE REGENERATION PROGRAMME INCLUDING THE STOCK TRANSFER AGREEMENT AND NOMINATIONS - PRESENTATION (Agenda Item 11)

The group moved to a private session to discuss the exempt reports containing commercially sensitive information. The following paragraph of Part 4b Section 10 of the constitution applies in respect of information within the reports and are therefore exempt from publication:

"Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information)".

To RESOLVE that the public are excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following report on the grounds that it is exempt from disclosure for the reasons stated in the report.

12 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 12)

The work programme was agreed.

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