

Agenda Item 3

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

13 JULY 2022

(7.15 pm - 9.10 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Edward Foley (in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Gill Manly, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Mansoor Ahmad, Cruise and Dr Stannard

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Ross Garrod (Leader), Councillor Billy Christie Hannah Doody (Chief Executive) and Tracy Swan (Manager Property, Planning & Procurement)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Tony Reiss (Cllr John Oliver as substitute) and from co-opted Member Roz Cordner.

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 a true and accurate record.

Matters arising:

Lis Chapple data was sent to members on 22 March 2022. Details below:

The split of officers and staff is as follows:

- Current posts allocated to South West BCU - 1474 - this is 1344 officers and 130 staff
- Current numbers of people in South West BCU as at 17/3/22 - 1569 - this is 1453 officers and 116 staff (we are awaiting more PCSOs to be posted to us)

4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited Cllr Ross Garrod, Leader of the Council, to share his priorities.

The Council has been built on solid foundations and I want to use this opportunity to pay testament to my predecessors but now, as custodian of the position of Leader which I'm fortunate to be in, it's my responsibility along with the Chief Executive and the whole council to build on this, using all my energy and enthusiasm, to make Merton a better place to live and work.

As you'd expect with a new administration there's a fresh vision and a new approach and the guiding principle for the administration is that the council is responsive to the needs of our residents and reactive to the challenges we face as a borough, whilst also delivering excellent services. It will be a Council embedded in the community making residents part of that decision-making process and bringing services closer to them.

Our priority as an administration is to rebuild pride in Merton and that's pride in our people, in our services and in our place and I want people to feel proud to live and work in this borough. We want to nurture that sense of loving where you live and work and this will include how we can improve our town centres and high streets and getting on with the regeneration of Morden town centre. It also means having to take difficult decisions to keep our streets clean and the Cabinet is due to decide the future of our waste contract later this year.

The second priority is building on a sustainable future. I want Merton to be recognised as the easiest place to own or hire an electric car or bike, positively encouraging our residents to use sustainable transport. I want to see a shift in planning so that we can get good quality energy efficient developments built right across the borough but also be a champion for the greater provision of genuinely affordable properties.

Thirdly I want this borough to build on its sporting heritage and for it to be recognized as the borough of sport. We've got some amazing local sporting facilities and clubs and we'd like to explore how we can all work together to create a bigger voice for Merton in sports funding, driving investment into the borough and into grassroots sports. This will promote healthier lifestyles, greater sporting opportunities and will provide a legacy for our residents.

There is a lot of hard work ahead and this administration is committed to delivering a borough that all our residents can be proud of.

In response to Commission Members questions:

There's been many years of ambition to regenerate Morden but we've all seen the challenges that TFL face so we're going to explore how we can deliver Morden town centre in piecemeal and in stages rather than one big bang and hopefully that will spur investment and will spur other organisations that have an interest in the town centre to get on board also.

Turning to Mitcham - you'll see in the local plan that there are some suggestions around the future use around Majestic Way and that development on the left-hand side, so I do think there will be some interesting proposals later down the line with regard to Mitcham regeneration.

We recently announced an additional £2million to the climate fund and we are currently looking at ways of how we can use that money in alignment with the climate action plan.

Action: Cllr Garrod agreed to share the figures on what's been spent already

A key priority for me in this administration is seeing how we can increase supply of affordable properties and that's why I've tasked my Cabinet Member for housing and sustainable development to review all the assets that the Council owns to see what land we can use towards providing affordable properties to our residents.

We have put an additional two million pounds aside for our cost-of-living fund. This will be used in the autumn and winter periods, after consultation with our voluntary sector and organisations such as housing associations who are on the front line listening to residents' challenges and are going to feed back to the council to see how we can best target that two million pounds to maximise the effect

In addition to the two million pounds fund, we've also put together a cost-of-living hub on our website for residents or anybody in the public really to access information about grants and support.

Building on that, we're also running three cost-of-living events at our libraries. We recently had a successful one in Morden Library last Saturday that about 200 people attended to get advice and support from council services and voluntary organisations. The next event is this Saturday in Mitcham Library and then the following Saturday in Wimbledon Library. We're also going to be writing to our most vulnerable residents around eligibility for future grants around energy efficiency.

With regards to the borough of sport ambition, firstly, I'd like to put on record that the Friends of Wimbledon Park do a fantastic job at looking after our parks. In terms of our investment in our sporting infrastructure, there is a paper before cabinet on Monday that outlines the investment that we are putting into our sport and infrastructure including tennis courts and other facilities. We will also need to put together a blueprint to really embed the borough of sport within our borough and that will be work that will be going on over the next coming months and years.

All England Club - What is the attitude of the leader with regards to that asset of the council?

My understanding is that it forms part of a potential planning application and therefore I do not wish to pass any judgment on that or influence the planning process with my personal views.

The Chair invited Hannah Doody, Chief Executive, to share her priorities.

I am incredibly proud of the partnership work that takes place in our borough, particularly during the Covid recovery and the Ukraine crisis (we currently we have 258 Ukrainian citizens registered on the homes for Ukraine scheme).

Merton has recently been rated by Ofsted as outstanding.

Looking forward, there are big policy changes coming down the line and we're already starting some background work around the care reform, the children's social care paper and we will also have building and control reforms following Grenfell.

In response to Commission Members questions:

Climate change is a priority, a responsibility but also a culture shift. Changing culture must come from the top down and needs to be embedded in all our policies, whether it's a new library, our high streets or affordable housing. Councillors were assured that staff are committed to working with the new administration in tackling and delivering on the promises of climate change.

Planning decisions are a matter for planning committees however one of the key priorities that I have been involved in with the Leader, is around the EV infrastructure and looking at rapid charging stations across the borough.

The Chief Executive formally acknowledged the fantastic foster carers we have in Merton. We are an incredibly lucky borough with the quality and care our foster carers give. As we all know Covid impacted recruitment and we have now gone back at that recruitment campaign with a vigour, and it is starting to show results.

We have now recruited two young carers to the Corporate Parenting board, who shared their experiences with us last month.

We have a five-year plan with regards to our Dedicated Schools Grant. The recovery plan is based on two key issues - one is that the social care reform comes, and we get those funding allocations. The second is issue is one we don't have control over, but it's something that it must be monitored as part of the plan, and that is the increase or decrease in the number of children with special educational needs. We are working very closely with schools around how we manage children at an early age and using those preventative measures within our education environments.

The five-year plan went through real rigour, and it certainly would not have been signed off by the DfE if it wasn't robust enough to deliver. Yes, you must have a plan b but looking forward its important to focus our energy and effort into getting on with the agreed plan and being committed to delivering that plan.

In relation to the Veolia contract, we are meeting regularly with Veolia to monitor the service improvement notice. My ambitions going forward is that it's multifactorial - there is a big education piece around resident behaviour with regards to waste disposal, work in engagement and continuously talking to residents and a continued responsibility to continue to hold Veolia to account.

When can we expect updated stats for the new wards data
Action: Chief Exec to check with officers (see john email re ward data)

Regular meetings are held with Clarion management along with regular visits onto the estate and continued monitoring of their responses to resident queries, complaints, and repairs.

AELTC - The council will take independent advice and make sure the correct processes are followed both with regards to planning process and the covenant.

Initial report on Peel House car park is due imminently. The Cabinet Member and officers will be able to give a further brief on next steps once that report comes through.

5 CHAS PROPOSALS (Agenda Item 5)

These minutes are exempt from publication.

6 IDENTIFY QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair asked Members to submit their questions for the Borough Commander who will be attending on 7 September. The deadline is 19 August 2022.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was agreed.

Members RESOLVED to re-establish the Financial Monitoring Task Group for this year.