

Agenda Item 3

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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

19 JANUARY 2023

(7.15 pm - 10.00 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Stuart Neaverson (in the Chair), Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor John Braithwaite, Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor James Williscroft and Councillor Victoria Wilson

Adrian Ash (Interim Director, Environment and Regeneration), John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Mitra Dubet (Future Merton Commissioning Manager), Andrew Kauffman (Head of Parks Services), Roger Kershaw (Interim Executive Director of Finance and Digital), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager) and Calvin McLean (Interim Assistant Director Public Protection)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Gill Manly (with Cllr Slawek [Szczepanski](#) 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 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

4 ACTION LOG (Agenda Item 4)

There were no questions/updates about the Actions Log items.

5 CALL IN: WIMBLEDON CHAMPIONSHIPS TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT ORDER (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Future Merton explained that this item is no longer a 'call-in' - It is a pre-decision scrutiny item. This is due to the timing of the committee cycles and so the original traffic order has lapsed. As the original order has lapsed, the Council will be undertaking a fresh consultation on a new traffic order which consolidates previous orders for the Championships and the amendments from the experimental order. Therefore, the scrutiny report is a pre-decision scrutiny discussion on the

amendments proposed and the purpose of this session is to allow members to explore the rationale for having decided to make the order permanent and to consider any future proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Transport, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, explained the primary reason behind his decision was due to the information and advice received from the Metropolitan Police counter terrorism department. The Cabinet Member referred to the letter from the Metropolitan Police in May 2022 that talks about the borough being visited by an extra 500,000 people over 13 days and the police are very firm in their advice that caution should be taken towards the threat of hostile vehicle attacks.

Also, with regards to the 'presumption in favour of openness', all information is all featured on the Merton website, and we've been in discussions with residents for the last 18 months with a further consultation planned for this year. We have a 21-day consultation period for traffic orders and run pilots and trials before implementing permanently.

In response to questions, both the Cabinet Member and the Head of Future Merton provided further explanations:

- Affected roads receive permits from AELTC.
- A Panel Member suggested the Council consider promoting active travel more as there are many options for walking and cycling.
- AELTC did not receive early sight of consultation responses or given word for word responses and/or objections. Fundamentally the Council is the traffic authority. We have contacted AELTC for assistance and feedback, but we make decisions to achieve the safety of residents during events. The road closures are necessary.
- Village Councillors would like a meeting with the Cabinet Member for Transport and the Head of Future Merton onsite. This was agreed.

Any suggested recommendations are to be sent to the Cabinet Member for Transport.

6 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services described the Council's aim of bringing forward a balanced and sustainable budget. These budget updates, growth proposals and savings proposals before Members tonight are robust, reasonable, and sustainable.

The Interim Director of Finance and Digital gave an overview of the current position that is outlined in the October and December Cabinet papers. The information in the January Cabinet papers will be discussed at the Overview & Scrutiny Commission.

Looking at the December position, you can see at that time we still had a gap in the budget for 23/24 of some £4.3 million. We have since benefited from some gains, in terms of the increased council tax base and the reversal of the government's decision to increase National Insurance for contributions for the social care levy and we also benefited from some good returns from our Pension Fund Investments.

In response to questions:

All public sector workers should be receiving decent pay settlements, given the situation with inflation, but it is a difficult position. The pay settlement that has been agreed, it obviously applies to Merton Council staff, but it is a nationally negotiated position across the local government sector.

We have taken a lot of steps to support our residents with the cost-of-living crisis and we have been clear that we wish to support staff too.

A Panel Member invited the Cabinet Members, whose responsibilities report to this panel, to comment on how the budget proposals set out in this paper reflect their priorities.

- The Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces highlighted the growth bid around sorting out flats above shops. We are proposing to standardise those time bands, bolster the comms for those flats and put on two time-banded collections every single week so that those flats have more collections because they have less space for storage.
- The Cabinet Member for Transport described his strategy throughout the budget is to promote active travel, air quality and have an EV strategy that will get us to 2030.

We are looking at the staffing arrangements for development management building control and they've taken on us as a sizeable number of additional staff um part of in terms of the savings, if we can bring in people within the growth element then we will increase our income in pre-applications in the savings element.

In terms of the overall complaints about fly tipping - the annual figures still remain high in terms of what the public are reporting. The evening economy crew (which is the pilot for this growth bid) is able to mitigate a large number of potential complaints that that may be forthcoming.

Attendance at leisure centres has dramatically increased.

Following the continued commercial success of the annual fireworks event in Wimbledon and Morden Park, with year-on-year increases in the income generated by this event, the Public Space Team feel confident that they can develop further

improvements in income generation during the annual event. The service is conscious that significant increases in the ticket prices does have an impact on communities who enjoy this activity and we have endeavoured to maintain a high-quality offer with acceptable ticket pricing for visitors to keep pace with the cost of external providers and event management.

The Panel had no recommendations to send to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

7 TREE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT (Agenda Item 7)

The item was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces

Through our commitment to a climate action plan, we're trying to increase our tree canopy cover by 20% help mitigate the impacts of climate change

The report outlines the progress from phase one, which is solely focused on Council trees, which we own and can control. Phase two will look at what we can do around privately owned trees.

We will come back to this Panel in February, with a view to taking the strategy to Cabinet in March.

In response to Panel Member questions:

Part of having a robust tree strategy is to try and prevent us getting to the situation where we have trees that are damaging property and subsequent insurance companies requesting tree felling.

When planting new trees, it's important to make sure we've got the investment for the aftercare. We have managed to get external funding to look after the trees for three years after they're planted to make sure that they've got the watering and the tending that they need.

8 IDVERDE (Agenda Item 8)

This item was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Local Environment and Green Spaces, who thanked the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum for their helpful report which gives a great amount of feedback and perspective of what's going on.

Andrew Kauffman, Head of Parks Service, gave an overview of the report and the Chair invited Tony Burton from the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum to speak to his annual report that was circulated around the panel.

"We are pleased to report there has been more activity from Merton Council supporting projects in parks and many constructive dealings with Idverde but there

are still problems with Idverde's performance. Their performance continues to be below par; the annual target has never been met and as a panel you have not been receiving monitoring information on the key performance measures.

There is still no Green Spaces strategy or a timetable or process for its production.

No One-Stop web-based reporting for the public for parks and green spaces.

No quarterly written updates on Idverde's performance.

Idverde do not have enough staff and too many lack the horticultural skills needed to get the basics right. There is a chronic lack of knowledge of the local circumstances of different parks and green spaces and the contract needs much more active and assertive management by Merton Council. Sites need basic management plans.

Our annual review contains a plan of action".

The Cabinet Member responded to the points raised by IMGFS.

In terms of the Green Spaces strategy, there's been a delay and it links to the wider green strategy across London. We're just waiting for that guidance so that we can make sure that we are feeding into a pan London approach.

Fix my street/reporting will be extended to parks and green spaces.

Action: The Assistant Director for Public Space committed to meeting with Chair to agree on how performance will be reported to the Sustainable Communities Panel going forward.

The Head of Parks Services added that the Council are looking to add further green flag sites.

The Panel agreed the following actions:

Action: Request a return to quarterly reporting back to this panel on the performance of Idverde. (Look into including it on the back of the performance monitoring section – e.g.- dashboard overview of the performance).

Action: Add Idverde item to June 2023 agenda.

Action: Add Idverde recommendations to recommendation log.

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

The Chair invited Cllr Aidan Mundy to speak – The Chair of the Planning Committee updated the scrutiny panel on an issue that he and officers have identified affecting the reported performance statistics for development and building control. This means the department has significantly under reported their performance for the last six months and work is ongoing to identify the root cause of the issue. We suspect it's a technical and a process issue and we would like to provide a report to this committee that updates the performance record, sets out the background to the issue and make some suggestions to the panel to reduce the risk of the issue happening again in the future.

CRP044 - Parking Services estimated revenue. We are all aware of the impact of the pandemic and the ongoing behavioural changes of people working from home which has impacted immensely on the revenue.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The work programme was agreed.