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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 16 SEPTEMBER 2014

(19.15 - 21:25)

PRESENT

Councillor Russell Makin (in the Chair),
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor Daniel Holden
(substitute for David Dean), Councillor Ross Garrod,
Councillor Abigail Jones, Councillor Imran Uddin,
Councillor John Sargeant, Councillor Janice Howard,
Councillor Abdul Latif (observing)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Environmental
Regeneration and Sustainability

James McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities), Paul
McGarry (Future Merton Manager), Cormac Stokes (Head of
Street Scene and Waste), Damian Hemmings (Climate
Change Officer), Sara Williams (Regeneration, Investment and
Renewal Officer), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration), John Hill (Head of Public Protection), Councillor David Dean.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24TH JUNE 2014

Panel agreed the Minutes as a true record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

None.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN DEAL TASK GROUP – EXECUTIVE RESPONSE AND ACTION PLAN

Damian Hemmings outlined the action plan to deliver the agreed
recommendations resulting from the task group review of climate change and
the green deal, undertaken by the Panel as part of their 2013/14 work
programme. The Panel were informed that the implementation of the
recommendations was sequential.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked about the source of funding for implementation of recommendation 4. Damian Hemmings confirmed that it would be part grant funded and part match funded.

Councillor Janice Howard asked about energy improvements in homes supplied by CHMP. Damian Hemmings explained that the provision and proposals for energy improvements in housing stock differs between providers. The council is looking at where there is scope for renewable energy generation in discussion with CHMP.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked if consultation would be undertaken with residents in relation to recommendation 4. Damian Hemmings stated that this would happen in due course but that the council are looking at the legal framework in the first instance as this is a longer term programme of work.

Damian Hemmings explained that the council look at a range of energy improvements but that Solar PV is the council's main focus because it is the lowest maintenance/most effective technology at present. In addition, the council is exploring district heating networks.

Councillor Daniel Holden asked how many buildings had CHP. Damian Hemmings informed the Panel that heat mapping had been undertaken and that Morden and Colliers Wood had been identified as key areas to take this forward. Members heard that there is also CHP in the civic centre.

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed to receive an update every 6 months on progress with delivery of the action plan.

6. FEEDBACK ON ATTENDANCE AT YOUTH PARLIAMENT (15TH SEPTEMBER 2014)

Members were unable to attend the meeting of the Youth Parliament.

RESOLVED: It was agreed that Members would attend the next available meeting of the Youth Parliament to feedback on the items selected for the Panels work programme.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Cormac Stokes provided the Panel with the July Performance Report. Members asked questions on the following indicators:

Councillor Russell Makin asked if there was a backlog regarding SP384. Cormac Stokes confirmed that John Hill was responsible for this area and that he would ask for a response to be forwarded to the Panel.

Councillor Abigail Jones asked if the TMT issues and delivery of parking permits had been addressed. Cormac Stokes agreed to ask Paul Walsh to provide a response to the Panel.

Councillor John Sargeant asked if the improvement in recycling (SP065) was an indicator that the economy was recovering and if the 39% target was high enough. Cormac Stokes explained that this was not indicative of recovery and that 39% was set as a proportion of overall waste collected. Furthermore that steady levels of recycling were being maintained. Councillor Andrew Judge added that the levels of recycling of household waste were better in Merton than in other boroughs in London. However recycling figures have reached a plateau. The Council are working with the London Recycling Board to identify different ways of promoting recycling.

Councillor Imran Uddin asked about the income from planning applications. James McGinlay explained that the income from building and development control is separate to planning. Furthermore, a number of planning applications are made through prior approval and the council do not receive an income for this. There is a need for further work on marketing to increase income by building control as they share the market with the private sector.

Councillor Abigail Jones asked if there had been an increase in fly tipping. Cormac Stokes explained that there was an increase in fly tipping through the summer months. There was a similar increase this time last year. The council are trying to reduce waiting times for collecting household bulky waste to discourage fly tipping.

Councillor Abdul Latif asked about the issues concerning private and public land and fly tipping and the jurisdiction of the council in terms of collection. Cormac Stokes explained that he would expect the council to pick up waste on the public highway.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked about sickness levels in the waste service. Cormac Stokes explained that this was a major problem in front line services. This is being dealt with in the best way possible through council's procedures.

Councillor Daniel Holden asked if resources were appropriately allocated in terms of dealing with the volume of planning applications. James McGinlay confirmed this to be the case.

Councillor Daniel Holden asked about the levels of waste being sent to landfill and costs (SP067). Cormac Stokes explained that all residual waste was dealt with through a contract under partnership. The energy recovery facility generates the same costs to the council as landfill. It is down to the contractor in terms of where this waste is sent.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the performance report.

8. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

RESOLVED: The Panel agreed to remove the Welfare Reform Act from the work programme and to attend the 25 November 2014 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to hear the financial resilience item.

9. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Sara Williams introduced the report and talked through the six components for growth that now made up the strategy, which would be delivered over a 3 year period.

Councillor Russell Makin asked about the provision to develop housing estates on sites previously used for business. James McGinlay explained that all developments still have to go through the planning development process and that all applications are assessed against the Council's planning policies.

Councillor Imran Uddin asked what discretion the council can exercise in judging whether or not these applications meet the relevant criteria. James McGinlay explained that applications are assessed against the Council's development management policies and there is little scope for the council on changing the criteria they are assessed against.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked what improvements had been made to shop fronts/parades as stated within the strategy. Sara Williams explained that one of the main improvements had been around lighting as it made people feel safer in those areas. There has also been painting and art work put up to make these areas more aesthetically pleasing. Councillor Ross Garrod added that there were still homeless people sleeping overnight in the car park behind Iceland and that there were still some issues regarding cleanliness and overflowing bins and safety in that area.

James McGinlay added that the council recognise this and are taking a cross departmental approach to talking to businesses about some of these issues along with partners, for example, the police and housing associations. The Panel heard that a meeting was scheduled with partners to discuss these problems and agree a way forward.

Councillor Abigail Jones asked what consultation had been undertaken as part of the refresh of the strategy and to advertise this. Sara Williams confirmed that the department had run a campaign online and placed hard copies of documents in libraries and other public buildings. Paul McGarry added that a lot of work had been done as part of the shop front improvement programme and that there was a high uptake on Merton High Street on some of the improvements. The council are trying to take a place based approach to this work.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked if there was a way of measuring the direct work of the council in terms of the investment secured or people employed as a result of delivery of the plan. Councillor Ross Garrod added that there may be other factors that have resulted in reduced unemployment and asked how the

council were identifying these to determine the extent of value for money of certain initiatives being rolled out.

Sara Williams explained that the council works closely with the job centre but that cost benefit analysis is not undertaken. Sara Williams also agreed to circulate the most recent unemployment figures.

RESOLVED: The Panel noted the report and asked for a progress update in 6 months time.

10. INWARD INVESTMENT STRATEGY

This was an exempt agenda item; however, none of the following discussion includes exempt information contained within that report.

Paul McGarry welcomed comments on the draft inward investment strategy before its consideration by Cabinet in October 2014. The strategy aimed to carry out activities that would promote the borough as a great place for businesses to locate. Research was commissioned from Colliers International to look at the opportunities for the borough and how the council might capitalise on the Wimbledon brand to support economic buoyancy in the borough. The council also consulted on what attracted investors to the borough. This strategy is also linked to the council's regeneration and economic growth programmes which the council aims to bring together. Cabinet will agree the strategy and the funding to support its delivery in October 2014.

Councillor Andrew Judge noted the location issues associated with attracting investment. However, there was a comprehensive regeneration of Morden town centre planned and an improved retail offer was part of this. There were also opportunities to capitalise on Merton Abbey Mills and the Wimbledon School of Arts to expand the creative sector in Merton. A number of graduates for example were looking to start creative businesses in the borough and Merton should facilitate this.

Councillor Andrew Judge also raised the opportunities presented by Cross rail 2 for Merton to attract investment.

Councillor Abigail Jones expressed her concerns about the focus on Wimbledon in the strategy and asked if other areas had been considered. Paul McGarry explained that there is a demand for office space in Wimbledon but that they will also look at other areas and how to attract investment.

Councillor John Sargeant asked if the actions to deliver the strategy had been shared with residents in Wimbledon and if the impact of attracting investment on the quality of residential areas in the town centre had been considered. Furthermore, had officers considered how to manage the potential disruption this might cause?

James McGinlay confirmed that the council had spoken to the business community. There was also a Future Wimbledon Conference and Future Merton Competition to raise awareness, consult and seek ideas.

Paul McGarry added that delivery of the regeneration programme also impacted as the council do not own a lot of the land that could be used and that consultation is underway to find out what the appetite is for such development. For example, a recent consultation programme asked what Wimbledon should look like and responses have just been received which will raise debate about plans for the area and inform planning.

Councillor Andrew Judge added that the master planning phase would take place after the competition. Wimbledon also had other selling points such as being very well connected in terms of transport links that they would wish to highlight.

Councillor Janice Howard added that investment should also be made into improving the road network as we cannot assume people will get on public transport. James McGinlay agreed that the council would need to look at this and the supporting infrastructure when looking at attracting investment.

Councillor Ross Garrod added that he was excited about the proposals and asked if timescales for the programme would be impacted by waiting on the outcome of the crossrail decision. Councillor Ross Garrod also asked what scope there was for the council to encourage and allow more office developments.

Paul McGarry explained that the council did not need to wait for the Crossrail decision and that there have been discussions with landowners to identify sites for office developments.

James McGinlay added that Merton council is an enabler and as planning authority they need to determine what the right kind of developments is. Plans will inevitably change and once the council has engaged with prospective investors, they need to be clear that they will follow through on them. The council also competes with other boroughs and central London in terms of attracting investment.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if the council had any say on crossrail 2. James McGinlay confirmed that the council have been consulted on route options.

Councillor Daniel Holden asked how many sites would be protected linked to the Crossrail 2 development and stated that the council should be careful not to let office space encroach on residential areas.

Paul McGarry explained that north of Wimbledon station had been safeguarded.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

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