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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 25 FEBRUARY 2015

(19.15 – 21:15)

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), James McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities), Paul Walshe (Parking Services Manager), Mitra Dubet (Network Improvement and Renewal Manager), John Hill (Head of Public Protection), Cormac Stokes (Head of Street Scene and Waste), Anthony Hopkins (Head of Libraries and Heritage Services), Mario Lecordier (Traffic and Highways Services Manager), Rebecca Redman (Scrutiny Officer), Councillor Nick Draper (Cabinet Member for Community and Culture), Councillor Andrew Judge (Cabinet Member for Environmental Regeneration and Sustainability), Councillor Judy Saunders (Cabinet Member for Parking and Environmental Cleanliness)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor David Dean.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2015

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

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Panel agreed to reorder the agenda to the following:

Item 5 – Town Centre Parking and Parking at Neighbourhood Shopping
Parades

Item 8 – Progress Update: Action Plan (Climate Change and Green Deal Task
Group)

Item 6 – Library and Heritage Service Annual Report 2014/15

Item 7 – Town Centre Regeneration Update – Verbal Presentation

Item 9 – Performance Monitoring (including focus on waste management and
street scene)

Item 10 – work programme

5. TOWN CENTRE PARKING AND PARKING AT NEIGHBOURHOOD

SHOPPING PARADES – ACTION PLANS

Paul Walshe introduced the report which updated on progress with implementation of the action plan resulting from the earlier reviews of town centre parking and parking at neighbourhood shopping parades. Paul Walshe informed the Panel that implementation has been on going and that cashless parking is one initiative that has been particularly popular. Paul also advised that the council are currently considering options for roll out of electronic signage in Wimbledon town centre.

Councillor Imran Uddin asked if the intention was to lower parking charges through the introduction of this new structure. Paul Walshe explained that the revised charges were the linear hourly rate for parking which were slightly higher than the hourly rate at present. 20 minute parking slots are being used as a base upon which to model the rates and in some areas tariffs will go up.

Chris Lee added that parking charges in town centres would be higher than outer areas. Councillor Stan Anderson asked if cashless and cash options were still available to customers. Paul Walshe explained that this was the case. John Hill explained that the council would continue to offer customers freedom of choice in the way that they pay for parking.

Councillor Janice Howard explained her concerns regarding the increase of each tariff and asked what consideration had been given to smaller businesses and the potential impact increased charges would have on their customer base. She expressed her concerns that residents may be pushed into larger stores with free parking. Councillor Andrew Judge explained that it was important to acknowledge that short stopping times are needed to shop in smaller businesses and 20 minutes of free parking has been offered to support this.

Chris Lee informed the Panel that a decision had been taken by full council as part of the budget setting in previous years to increase charges by 10% beginning in 2015/ 2016. This is incorporated into a simplified structure.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked how the 341 on street bays would be rolled out, if this would be undertaken on a staggered basis and what the expected completion date was for this work. Paul Walshe explained that no new charges had yet been implemented and that once agreed, would be rolled out over a 4 week cycle. The council are authorised to charge the new tariffs from April 1st 2015 but this will not happen overnight and requires a phased roll out. The payment for parking using mobile technology will also be implemented alongside this. John Hill added that the ability to pay with mobile phones has been implemented in town centre car parks already.

Councillor Andrew Judge explained that signage would be agreed and a decision made as to how to pursue this in due course.

Paul Walshe explained that initial discussions had also been held with private car park owners and partnership options explained. The associated costs of this model and benefits to the council would also need to be determined. John Hill stated that the department would continue to speak to private car park owners in an attempt to work in partnership to improve the range of parking services on offer to the customer.

Mitra Dubet explained that there are 34 designated shopping parades in the borough and that the department have contacted individual business units to determine need. Many are also in controlled parking zones and therefore need to balance the needs of residents, visitors and businesses. Some bays have also been changed to different functions. Dialogue has been underway with residents and businesses and site visits have been undertaken during operational hours to determine need, available space and where residents need access.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if any changes to parking bays from permit to shared use would need to be the subject of public consultation. Mitra Dubet explained that this was the case and statutory consultation was required.

Councillor Abdul Latif asked if underused loading bays could be used to allow residents to park. Mitra Dubet explained that this was happening in Raynes Park and that loading space had been created and agreement reached with local businesses on parking post delivery times and off peak hours.

Councillor John Sargeant stated that it was important that the council publicised widely that free parking is available but that residents are still required to take a ticket.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

6. PROGRESS UPDATE – ACTION PLAN (CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN DEAL TASK GROUP)

As Member Champion, Councillor James Holmes provided the Panel with an update on progress with delivery of the action plan resulting from the task group review of climate change and the green deal.

Councillor James Holmes explained to the Panel that he had recently met with Tara Butler (Future Merton) to discuss progress and any barriers to delivery, outlining which recommendations have been successfully taken forward or implemented. Councillor James Holmes acknowledged the interdependency of certain recommendations taking place in a chronological order before, for example, the ESCO model could be fully established.

Councillor James Holmes reported that difficulty had arisen in securing legal advice to move towards the ESCO model. Therefore the implementation of a number of recommendations had been delayed. Councillor James Holmes explained that there was reduced capacity within the Future Merton team also

to deliver the action plan.

James McGinlay added that funding had been received from the Department for Energy and Climate Change and a brief developed for release in Spring 2015, as well the installation of solar PV on school buildings, which provides a quarter of the energy required by schools. Merton is also ranked 8th across London for energy efficiency in schools and the roll out of Solar PV. £200,000 has also been secured for further activities relating to the Green Deal and is targeted at advising businesses on energy efficiency.

James McGinlay explained that the council are working with Merton Chamber of Commerce and also with local schools to raise awareness of energy efficiency measures. Councillor Andrew Judge explained that preliminary conversations had been held with climate change officers at the GLA and that there is potential for district heat networks to be established through the regeneration of the High Path Estate. In addition, Sutton Council has established an ESCO and there may be opportunities to work in partnership if this is felt to be beneficial for both parties. There are also opportunities in Pollards Hill through the refurbishment of properties by Moat and in Figges Marsh by CHMP.

Councillor Imran Uddin asked if any discussions had taken place with Sutton Council yet on their ESCO model. James McGinlay explained that officers met with their counterparts in Sutton Council recently and a mechanism and business case would need to be considered in terms of the benefits of working in partnership. It is also important to note that Sutton have established an ESCO but that this is not yet fully up and running. Therefore discussions are in the early stages and Merton needs to develop a business case for an ESCO.

Councillor Russell Makin proposed that officers seek further advice from officers at Peterborough Council who the task group engaged during their review.

Councillor James Holmes urged officers to keep this on the agenda and that the Panel keep a watching brief on developments.

RESOLVED: Panel requested that an update be received every 6 months on delivery of the action plan.

7. LIBRARY AND HERITAGE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15

Anthony Hopkins introduced the report and highlighted some of the key work streams for the service over the last year and achievements including:

- Increase in satisfaction identified through public library users survey and annual residents survey in the highest quartile;
- On going efficiencies made in the way that the service is delivered
- Updated technology resulting from a grant received from the GLA

- which would ensure faster wifi speeds in libraries;
- E-books and a library app now available;
- Further development of library sites;
- The schools libraries programme ensured every child in the borough is a member of a library;
- Expectations of the volunteer programme have been exceeded and there are now 533 volunteers in libraries;
- Heritage lottery funding secured of £8 million

Anthony Hopkins explained that on going and future challenges would be:

- Delivery of future major projects;
- Meeting demand and ensuring that the library service is responsive and continues to deliver a high quality service;
- Income and reduced budgets.

Councillor Ross Garrod wished to express thanks to volunteers and library staff and asked what can be achieved with the service given the reduced budgets. Councillor Ross Garrod also noted that digital literacy was an issue for a number of residents and asked if demand for help from staff could be met in libraries. Councillor Ross Garrod asked if libraries signpost people with digital literacy requirements to community organisations that might support them to develop these skills.

Anthony Hopkins confirmed that this support was provided on site and one to one or group training also provided. The team are working with the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure residents are appropriately signposted and are developing this further. Emphasis is also being placed on the universal offer and the role of volunteers is changing which means that there is work to be done to ensure staff and volunteers correctly signpost residents. A training programme on this and other skills required is to be delivered shortly.

Councillor Abigail Jones expressed her thanks to the department and congratulated them on the innovative and positive developments that had been made to the library service. Councillor Abigail Jones noted that e-books appeal to certain demographics and asked how the use of libraries was being encouraged amongst these groups. Anthony Hopkins explained that the library service run annual campaigns and work with local groups to promote the available resources in libraries, as well as through library ambassadors. The service has a finite budget for publicity and marketing but the council are working regionally and nationally with partners on this.

Councillor Imran Uddin asked about signposting residents to other organisations such as the mosque and to what extent the council works with these organisations. Anthony Hopkins explained to the Panel that the library service work with 48 organisations and signpost individuals to a range of services, including the mosque.

Councillor Nick Draper urged all councillors to promote the library service and to spread the good practice at Merton, particularly to celebrate the work of staff and volunteers, and would encourage councillors to become volunteers themselves in their local libraries. Councillor Nick Draper praised Anthony Hopkins and his team for their work.

Councillor Russell Makin passed on the Panels thanks to Anthony Hopkins.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the report.

8. TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION – PERFORMANCE MONITORING

James McGinlay gave a presentation on development and progress in the regeneration schemes in the town centres in Merton, covering Morden, Raynes Park, Wimbledon, Colliers Wood and Mitcham (presentation attached).

Councillor John Sargeant asked for information on the Crossrail 2 development to be shared with the business community to alleviate their concerns. James McGinlay confirmed that the council have been liaising with the owners of centre court, with the business community and Love Wimbledon.

Councillor Andrew Judge informed the Panel that £344,000 funding had been received for developments on South Park Rd to enhance the cycle route from Clapham Common to Merton and there would be a number of interventions and measures put in place to enhance safety. There is no funding for these measures as yet but future bids would be made to make improvements in this area.

Councillor Stan Anderson enquired about the clock tower in Mitcham and asked if it would be returned to its original location. James McGinlay confirmed that it would be relocated as part of the Rediscover Mitcham project.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked when a decision would be known publicly on the Sidthorpe Car Park site, about the proposed bus lane in Mitcham and if there was an update on where the health centre in Mitcham would be located. James McGinlay explained that a decision regarding the Sibthorpe Road car park would be known publicly by March 2015, that dialogue was on going with TfL to clarify the major project scheme and that negotiations were in their final stages. TfL need to consider the competing needs of both pedestrians and traffic and that it can take up to six months for TfL to do their own checks.

James McGinlay added that Wilson Hospital was the preferred location.

Councillor Abigail Jones asked what was planned for the vacant building next to Colliers Wood tube. James McGinlay agreed to check this with planning and get back to the Panel.

Councillor Abdul Latif asked about the final decision on the cladding for the tower in Colliers Wood. James McGinlay explained that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Applications committee have delegated authority to approve this.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked if the tower in Colliers Wood was privately owned. James McGinlay confirmed that the building was privately owned.

Councillor Nick Draper informed the Panel that a new build was planned for Colliers Wood and Abbey which included residential accommodation.

James McGinlay added that planned development in Colliers Wood was within the councils Local Plan. The redesign of the town centre is subject to master planning, which would involve residents and the business community, from summer 2015 onwards.

Councillor John Sargeant asked what the delivery mechanism would be for this programme of work in Morden and what would happen over the next year. James McGinlay explained that the council would be looking to assemble land and demonstrate to residents the potential of Morden and what it could look like. The council needs to be clear on how the scheme is to be delivered and of its financial viability, as well as working with the community. James McGinlay added that the council has a role as a planning authority and enabler in land assembly and will be looking at the residential and commercial offer and appropriate developers.

Councillor John Sargeant asked for more specific timescales for delivery and how stakeholders were briefed. James McGinlay explained that it was a case of making sure all the necessary checks and arrangements were in place and of increasing the control the Local Authority has over the development. The council are aiming to address the potential blockages in delivery to speed up the process when work starts. Stakeholders, including ward Councillors and the business and residential community receive briefings and newsletters and that this work was underway.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if there were plans for Tramlink to pass through Sutton. James McGinlay explained that the council have been working with Sutton and TfL to consult on proposed routes. There is also the potential for a route into South Wimbledon and TfL are looking into this. Councillor Abigail Jones stated that the proposal for a Tramlink in South Wimbledon was not wanted by residents. James McGinlay reinforced that this proposal was in its infancy and that whilst this had been communicated, TfL wish to undertake their own consultation on this.

James McGinlay stated that information on cycle routes and development would be brought back at a later stage to the panel when there was more clarity on what was bring taken forward.

RESOLVED: Panel agreed to add cycle routes to its list of topic suggestions for consideration as part of their 2015/16 work programme.

9. PERFORMANCE REPORT - VERBAL UPDATE

Chris Lee introduced the report and highlighted underperformance relating to waste and the total waste volumes collected and recycled or sent to landfill. Chris Lee explained that this was due to an increase in waste nationally, regionally and in Merton. This has had a knock on effect on cleanliness and resident satisfaction.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked about the increase in the rate of sickness across all departments and asked about the health of council employees, number of days lost from service and if there was an underlying issue causing this.

Chris Lee explained that sickness is actually reducing in the department and it stands at 10.02 days per FTE per annum. This is an improvement on previous year's performance. The council target is 8 days sickness and Environment and Regeneration are not the poorest performing department on this. This is because manual staff operate in all weathers; however, it is on a downward trajectory but will remain a high priority for the department. The council apply policy and procedure rigorously to this matter.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked if sickness levels were down to staff morale. Chris Lee stated that this was not the case and that the department drill into the reasons for sickness regularly. Sickness levels in this team are usually down to stress, colds and muscular skeletal issues.

Councillor Abdul Latif asked about the policy on addressing traveller communities taking up residence in parks and green spaces and how this might be prevented. Chris Lee informed the Panel that the council act swiftly to remove any unauthorised occupants on green spaces and in parks. The council work with partners such as the police and the use of the Criminal Justice Act means that Police now have certain powers that can be utilised to generate court orders and ensure removal more quickly.

Chris Lee added that the council must first undertake an appropriate assessment and make any health or welfare judgements and then apply to the court to act as quickly as possible.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if this procedure had to be followed if a traveller community had been moved and then occupied another site in the borough. Chris Lee confirmed that this was the case and that the council would apply this to each site. Councillor Imran Uddin asked if there wasn't a

period of leave and return linked to any court order which meant that it could be enforced on other sites.

James McGinlay informed the Panel that he had been working with colleagues in the police to address this issue and that a fuller proposal will be in place in March 2015.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the performance report.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

RESOLVED: Panel agreed the removal of the following items on the agenda for its March 2015 meeting:

- Arts and Green Spaces
- Outlets in Town Centres
- CHMP update

Rebecca Redman agreed to present a proposal to the Panel at their June 2015 meeting on how they might approach performance management going forward.

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