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HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND OLDER PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

11 FEBRUARY 2015

(19.15 - 20.30)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter McCabe (in the Chair), Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender, Councillor Pauline Cowper, Councillor Mary Curtin, Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Suzanne Grocott, Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Abdul Latif
Co-opted members Myrtle Agutter and Saleem Sheikh

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Gilli Lewis-Lavender and Marsie Skeete

Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services), Simon Williams (Director, Community & Housing Department) and Dr Kay Eilbert (Director of Public Health)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from co-opted member Hayley James.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 14 JANUARY 2015 (Agenda Item 3)

Councillor Suzanne Grocott requested that changes be made to the minutes in relation to the budget and business plan item to provide further detail on comments made during the discussion.

The Chair called for a vote to accept the draft minutes – 4 members voted in favour and 3 against.

RESOLVED: that the draft published minutes be agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 14 JANUARY 2015 (Agenda Item 4)

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY AND UPDATE FROM THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD (Agenda Item 5)

The Director of Public Health, Kay Eilbert, introduced the report on the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board. She drew the panel's attention to the expanded focus that now takes in health inequalities, prevention and integration. She highlighted the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) as a key tool for using limited resources more effectively.

Kay Eilbert gave a presentation on the Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy. She highlighted the agreement that inequalities between the east and west of the borough are unfair and unacceptable and that all residents should have opportunities for a "Good Life". The slides set out what a "Good Life" would entail. Subsequent slides set out further detail on the five themes and proposed outcomes that will be detailed in the annual action plans.

In response to a question about the timescale and budget for tackling health inequalities, Kay Eilbert said that it is a long term project with limited resources that would require people to work differently, more in partnership.

The Chair invited Panel members to comment on the three questions posed by Kay Eilbert:

- Does the Panel support the focus on prevention and to develop ways to use council levers such as planning and licensing to influence health in positive ways?
- What barriers do you think we need to address?
- What opportunities do we have to take this forward?

Panel members supported the focus on prevention. They would like to see positive actions taken to encourage healthy behaviour (such as teaching people to cook healthy meals) rather than just telling people to stop doing things.

Panel members suggested that education, and in particular early years, should be top of the list of priorities for promoting good health. Employment and housing should also be priorities due to their impact on health. Transport policy should also be addressed.

The Chair said that much had been achieved by successive governments to reduce smoking rates and that this should be celebrated as it will save lives and have a particular impact on people on low incomes. He suggested that the council should support efforts to further reduce smoking rates through actions such as trading standard checks on underage sales.

The Chair said that there were numerous barriers, including finance and ingrained attitudes. He added that opportunities would be limited as the council shrinks in size so there is a need to be creative and to continue to work in partnership with others.

RESOLVED: to thank the Director for her presentation and to endorse the direction of the health and wellbeing strategy.

Item 6)

The Director of Community and Housing, Simon Williams, introduced the report. He drew the Panel's attention to a matter of accuracy, that the petition had been organised by a collection of local people and not by Merton Centre for Independent Living as stated in the report. He also reported that a further 28 signatures had been added to the petition since it was formally handed to him on 2 February, and he drew the Panel's attention to the actual petition on the table which was there to read.

Simon Williams said that a summary of responses was set out on the report. He recognised that the savings proposals were difficult and may have a profound impact on peoples' lives and he thanked the respondents for having been so courteous and constructive. He said that feedback on the equality impact assessment had been taken on board and a revised equality impact assessment had been tabled at this meeting and would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 16 February.

Simon Williams said that comments regarding the consultation process had been helpful and he would make sure that future consultations had wider time frames if at all possible and would relate to the budget setting timetable.

The Chair invited two speakers to make comments on the adult social care consultation results:

Roy Benjamin, a local resident

Roy Benjamin expressed concern that undue weight had been attached to financial considerations and not enough to the impact that the proposals would have on peoples' lives. He cited other services on which the council was proposing to spend money and said that some of these, such as a new swimming pool, would be inaccessible to disabled people if their care budgets were cut.

Roy Benjamin asked that the adult social care savings be considered in relation to alternative savings that the council could make. He stressed that the impact of cuts to care budgets would leave people isolated at home, becoming depressed and possibly suicidal.

Lyla Adwan-Kamara, Manager, Merton Centre for Independent Living

Lyla Adwan-Kamara said that nearly 700 people had participated in the consultation (including those who signed the petition). She urged the Panel to listen to the views expressed and engage in open dialogue regarding these.

Lyla Adwan-Kamara said that respondents saw the proposals as a moral issue, were accusing the council of prioritising other services and failing to understand the likely impact or the difficulties already faced by service users. She said that the proposals were likely to reduce independence, reduce wellbeing and increase isolation and were therefore contrary to the July principles. She cited the annual residents survey results as further evidence that the council is failing disabled people.

Lyla Adwan-Kamara added that Merton CIL had worked hard to engage with officers and councillors and would like to continue with a more open dialogue.

In discussion, all members thanked the speakers and expressed concern about the impact that the proposed savings may have on disabled people, including social isolation, increased burden on carers and entry to residential care at an earlier stage.

Councillors Brian Lewis-Lavender, Suzanne Grocott and Abdul Latif urged Cabinet to reconsider and to postpone or identify alternative savings from elsewhere in the council's budget, such as reserves or corporate provisions. A motion was proposed and seconded to request Cabinet to withdraw savings proposal C13 in the light of the results of the recent consultation. A vote was taken – 3 members voted in favour and 5 against – and the motion fell.

Councillors Sally Kenny, Pauline Cowper and Brenda Fraser said that they were troubled by the savings proposal, that they had been listening and talking to residents and would prefer not to make cuts but were constrained by the legal requirement to balance the council's budget.

Co-opted member, Myrtle Agutter said that older people had not been sufficiently consulted and there had been no effort to reach older peoples' groups, therefore the results do not reflect their strength of feeling. She said that these are severe and savage cuts and she urged Cabinet to reconsider.

Co-opted member Saleem Sheikh added that he could see that Cabinet was in a difficult position and asked whether there was any leeway.

In response to questions about how the Better Care Fund would impact locally, the Director of Community and Housing said that the overall fund for Merton was £12m, much of which had to be mainly used for schemes that would benefit the NHS. Around £6m would be used to protect adult social care services, which is a wide definition and includes the need to spend new money on functions such as the Care Act and 7 day working. Much of this is from consolidating existing budgets so that the real impact in 2015/16 would be an additional £1.6m, which has already been taken into account in drawing up the savings proposals.

The Chair said that he had been involved in discussions to protect the most vulnerable people and to prioritise the needs of older and disabled people and children. He expressed regret at having to make these savings and reminded the Panel that not increasing council tax had been an election pledge.

The Panel RESOLVED to make the notes of its meeting available to Cabinet through a reference to its meeting on 16 February 2015.

7 WORK PROGRAMME 2014-15 (Agenda Item 7)

RESOLVED: to agree the work programme as published.

