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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

6 JULY 2017

(7.15 pm - 9.55 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Brenda Fraser, Abigail Jones, Sally Kenny, Dennis Pearce, Oonagh Moulton, Michael Bull and Suzanne Grocott

Co-opted Members Mansoor Ahmad and Helen Forbes

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis (Leader of the Council)

Judith Banjoko, Manager, Merton Refuge
Erica Jenkins, Director of Supported Housing, Merton Refuge

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), John Dimmer (Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnership), Sophie Ellis (Assistant Director of Business Improvement), Neil Thurlow (Safer Merton Manager) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Hamish Badenoch (substituted by Councillor Michael Bull), Councillor David Williams (substituted by Councillor Suzanne Grocott) and co-opted member Colin Powell.

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 an accurate record of the meeting.

4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2017/18 (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, said that one of the top priorities of the council was to keep residents safe and that the council has an ongoing duty to residents in properties transferred to Clarion. The Leader has therefore been working with council officers and partners, including the Police and Fire services, to reassure residents and ensure that all safety requirements have been met.

The Leader outlined other key priorities, including children's services, education, new housing in the borough, lobbying on Crossrail2, regeneration in the town centres,

safeguarding services at Epsom and St Helier Hospital and identifying opportunities for shared services with other councils. He said that the main challenges for the year ahead would include public health, mental health, impact of Brexit on council services, uncertainty regarding business rates retention and adult skills training to meet the needs of local employers.

The Chief Executive, Ged Curran, drew the Commission's attention to the extent of the challenges facing the council in relation to care for the elderly, uncertainty in regard to the funding regime for local government, pressures on the housing supply in London, impact of housing costs on retention of teachers, community cohesion and financial pressures on the NHS. He said that the council was addressing these challenges through work with partners and with the Local Government Association. He stressed that finding new sources of funding would be challenging and would require the council to participate in more commercial activities that would have an element of risk. He said that the Target Operating Model would be refreshed this autumn and would then be paused in the spring to enable manifesto commitments to be addressed after the council elections in May.

The Leader and Chief Executive provided additional information in response to questions:

- The results of the Annual Residents Survey are broadly positive – residents are satisfied with services, think Merton is a good place to live and there were high scores on community cohesion indicators. Some concerns were raised about difficulties in contacting the council, mainly in relation to parking and planning services, and these will be addressed.
- Emergency procedures in Merton are robust and exercises carried out regularly to test them – a full exercise is planned for the autumn. Around 30 council officers have been providing support to Kensington and Chelsea and to Camden.
- The council carries out checks on care homes prior to placing people there.
- A change in national policy would be required to have a significant impact on the provision of social housing. In the meantime the council is doing what it can to increase provision when new housing developments are agreed as well as building a small number through the Local Authority Property Company.
- The council continues to explore new ways of making savings through commercial activities such as investing in commercial premises or running care homes, whilst being mindful of advice from the Treasury cautioning councils against overstretching financially.
- The Leader, Chief Executive and relevant cabinet member and officers meet regularly with Clarion to review service performance and other pertinent issues.

- The Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy will be an active and fully implemented document supported by partnership working, including with faith groups.

The Leader said that the Cabinet Member for Community and Culture is keen for the council to submit a bid to the Mayor of London to become a borough of culture. Commission members indicated that they would back this bid.

The Chief Executive undertook to find out what arrangements had been made to check the YMCA buildings in Longthornton ward for fire safety. ACTION: Chief Executive

5 MERTON PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, introduced the draft report and invited comments and suggested changes from members of the Commission. He and the Chief Executive, Ged Curran, provided additional information in response to questions:

- The new government levy will provide an opportunity for the council to develop its approach to apprenticeships.
- The council monitors how schools spend their SEN funding and has found that schools are actually using additional resources for SEN provision as the targeted resources have been insufficient to meet need.
- The night time economy is the key factor relating to non-domestic violence. Wimbledon town centre is part of a local alcohol action Home Office pilot and this has reduced the number of alcohol related violent incidents.
- It is intended to roll out the Ask Angela initiative to all venues.

Members suggested that all the priority areas should have measurable targets and a full set of data, with explanation for any data that is not yet available. Members also commented that the section “Keeping Merton Moving: sustainable communities and transport partnership” was thin on detail compared to the other sections. This was acknowledged by the Chief Executive and is something that the council will look to improve going forward.

6 SHARED SERVICES AND OUTSOURCED SERVICES IN MERTON TASK GROUP - ACTION PLAN UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

In response to a request from the Chair, the Chief Executive, Ged Curran, provided some examples of progress made in relation to exploring new models of service delivery:

- Residential nursing care – have explored potential sites for purchase and considered provision of some care outside the borough
- Developmental control and planning is at the last stage of shared service discussions, currently on hold due to new regulations coming into effect
- Registrars service – discussions underway regarding potential for a shared service, but Merton is the cheapest provider so this may not be beneficial financially and, if that was the case, would not proceed
- Wandsworth Council seeking to join the shared regulatory service with Richmond
- Adoption services – pan London service being explored and it is anticipated that this would yield efficiencies in terms of service delivery
- Waste and parks services have now been transferred to external providers

In response to a question regarding the potential for partnering with local authorities beyond South West London, Ged Curran said that a study by the Local Government Association found that the success of shared services was correlated with proximity. He said that the development of commercial services may provide more scope to work with authorities further afield - for example the digital courtroom developed by the South London Legal Partnership has been sold to around half the London boroughs and is in the process of selling to Liverpool and Birmingham.

In response to questions about the development and review of the Target Operating Model (TOM), the Assistant Director of Business Improvement, Sophie Ellis, said that the TOMs were reviewed every two years and the process takes 4-5 months. The last set were published in spring 2016. The action plans are monitored regularly by the departmental management teams. The next review will start in September or October and the draft TOMs will be refined shortly after the council elections in May. The final documents will be published.

7 SAFER MERTON - CHALLENGES, SUCCESSES AND FUTURE WORK STREAMS (Agenda Item 7)

The Manager of Merton Refuge, Judith Banjoko, outlined the services and support provided by the Refuge. She said that the model of support takes direct account of the woman's needs and views and that connecting them to other services in the borough and having a children's support worker are key parts of the approach. Outcomes are measured on a star chart – for adults this includes safety, accommodation, physical and emotional wellbeing, money, drugs and alcohol and offending; for children this includes health, behaviour, safety, education and relationship with mum.

The Refuge aims to move women on within 9-12 months. Erica Jenkins, Director of Supported Housing at Merton Refuge, said that accessing safe and affordable housing options was challenging in London. Merton Refuge is part of a housing association and therefore can offer properties through that route from time to time.

The Chair thanked Judith Banjoko and Erica James for an informative discussion. Judith Banjoko and Erica James invited members of the Commission to visit the Refuge.

Neil Thurlow, Safer Merton Manager, briefly introduced the Safer Merton report, drawing members' attention to progress made on violence against women and girls, domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. He provided additional information in response to questions:

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- There has not been an increase in the number of brothels in neighbouring boroughs. In Merton there is no link between location of brothels and particular ethnic groups or parts of the borough.
- School-based police officers have taken part on educational campaigns and awareness of VAWG issues

Anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- The vast majority of public contact with the ASB team is by email
- Mediation has limited powers and is designed to bring neighbours together to agree future behaviours.
- There are 3 CCTV cameras that can be deployed, with agreement of the Locations Board, for 2-6 months in areas where there is persistent ASB or low level crime

The Chair thanked Neil Thurlow for the report and said it would be helpful to have an update at a future meeting of the Commission.

8 ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL MEMBER SCRUTINY SURVEY 2017 (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair introduced the report and said that he was pleased with the improved response rate and with the increased satisfaction with scrutiny this year. He drew Members' attention to the list of proposed actions set out in Appendix 3.

Members endorsed the report, agreed that the results were a good reflection of scrutiny over the past year, and noted the high satisfaction rating for the performance of the scrutiny team. Members noted the points made about scrutiny being most effective when there is a cross-party approach, as well as the comment regarding the length of meetings.

RESOLVED: that the Commission agrees the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny (set out in Appendix 3)

9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18 (Agenda Item 9)

Members noted the work on recruitment and retention that has already been done by the Standards and General Purposes Committee and discussed whether a scrutiny task group review could add value and be completed in time to report back to the Commission's meeting on 31 January. It was agreed that further exploratory work should be done by the Chair and the Head of Democracy Services in consultation with the Director of Children Schools and Families, and taking headteachers' views into account. The Commission will receive a report on this work at its meeting on 20 September so that it can decide whether to establish a task group.

RESOLVED: that the Commission

1. Agrees the draft work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year as set out in Appendix 1;
2. Appoints Councillors Hamish Badenoch, Stephen Crowe (subject to his agreement), Suzanne Grocott, Peter Southgate and David Williams (subject to his agreement) to the financial monitoring task group;
3. Invites other members to apply to join the financial monitoring task group
ACTION: Head of Democracy Services;
4. Requests the Chair and the Head of Democracy Services to do further exploratory work and report back to the Commission at its meeting in September on the viability of a task group review of recruitment and retention in schools.