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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 4 JULY 2017

(7.17 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Abigail Jones (in the Chair), Daniel Holden, Stan Anderson, David Chung, John Sargeant, Laxmi Attawar, Mike Brunt and Abdul Latif

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Nick Draper (Cabinet member for Community and Culture), Martin Whelton (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing), Hilina Asrress (Senior Public Health Principal), John Hill (Assistant Director for Public Protection), Graeme Kane (Assistant Director of Public Space, Contracting and Commissioning), James McGinlay (Assistance Director for Sustainable Communities), Doug Napier (Leisure and Culture Greenspaces Manager) and Simon Williams (Director, Community & Housing Department)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Bull and Cllr Makin (with Cllr Abdul Latif and Cllr Attawar respectively substituting). Cllr Brunt substituted for the Labour vacancy. Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, also sent his apologies.

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 of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising

John Hill, Assistant Director for Public Protection, provided the following updates:

- Idling: the Council has been talking to a number of other boroughs that have already taken action to reduce car idling. This research has established that rather than initially proceeding to enforcement, which is seen as a hard line approach, advisory notices are given out for the first three months. It has been agreed to follow the same approach which will be progressed through the forthcoming Air Quality Action Plan; and
- Lobbying of central government for national measures to support the removal of diesel vehicles from roads: this is being pursued through the pan-London advisory body and there is no further update to provide currently.

4 MERTON'S RESPONSE TO THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE - UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 4)

Simon Williams, Director of Community and Housing, provided members with an overview of the objectives the Council is seeking to achieve through its response to the Grenfell Tower fire, further to the written communications sent out to all Councillors:

1. Provide mutual aid to affected areas: currently, affected areas are the Grenfell Tower and the London Borough of Camden. Staff who have volunteered to help at rest centres in both locations were highlighted and thanked. Steve Langley, Head of Housing Need and Strategy, was specifically mentioned as he is currently assisting with the Grenfell rehousing response;
2. Reassure residents: whilst the Council doesn't hold any housing stock, it has written to all social housing providers to seek clarification that all accommodation is free from cladding containing aluminium composite material (ACM), that providers are doing a detailed review of other fire risks in these buildings, and that they have responded to DCLG as instructed. All landlords of private residential housing blocks that are six storeys and over have also been written to seeking the same reassurances. Most social housing providers have responded whilst the Council is still waiting to hear from some private landlords. All information gained has been collated into a database and shared with the local borough commander of London Fire Brigade and
3. Communication: to ensure that all Councillors and the boroughs MPs are briefed on the Council's response to the Grenfell Tower fire. It is planned that briefings will continue to be provided weekly. From this week, these communications along with the overall council response will be co-ordinated by Caroline Holland, Director for Corporate Services.

In response to member questions, Simon Williams clarified:

- Owners of the Brown and Root tower have confirmed that its cladding is made from glass and not aluminium. It also has sprinklers fitted and has passed the fire safety requirements;
- As a chain, Premier Inn is looking at the fire safety of all its accommodation across the country. No concerns have arisen at this stage in Merton;
- There is one medium rise property in Merton that has cladding on the first two floors (Plough Lane). The managing agents are having the cladding tested this week;
- The authority is with the Fire Brigade to issue or refuse a fire safety certificate;
- Clarion, the largest social housing provider in the borough, has conducted a further fire safety inspection of all its housing in the borough in partnership with the Fire Brigade;
- Insulation used between floors and units in the conversion of any buildings in the borough (for example, the Brown and Root Tower and the telephone exchange building in Walpole Road), would have been subject to building control and a fire safety inspection at the time of development. It will be for the Grenfell public enquiry to consider whether standards in these areas need to change and if so what retrofitted modifications would be appropriate will need to be considered;
- Merton has been able to respond as needed with mutual aid. Rest centres are scaling down and as a result the need for mutual aid is decreasing. Skilled housing managers are now required which is why Steve Langley is currently

assisting. The focus is on devising policies and procedures in order to prioritise those most in need;

- The promise is to rehome in the borough and as Merton isn't neighbouring, it is unlikely that any of those affected will come here;
- It is difficult to speculate on possible changes to the fire regulations. This will be for the public enquiry to determine. The fire at Grenfell Tower has sadly brought home that fire safety must be paramount;
- The Council urgently clarified that the advice from the Fire Brigade to 'stay put' in your dwelling and not evacuate remains in place. This is to prevent potential harm from smoke inhalation and to ensure the Fire Brigade's access to the building is not impeded. Consideration of this advice will be part of the public enquiry; and
- Some landlords have committed already to install sprinkler systems. This would be possible. One issue to consider is the financial contribution that leaseholders would have to make towards the costs and the required consultation.

James McGinley, Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities, also clarified:

- Fire safety for new developments is part of building regulations and can be conducted by private inspectors. The onus is on the land/property owner to ensure that this is in place; and
- The Brown and Root Tower has one staircase and it is understood that this complies with fire safety regulations. Confirmation is awaited from the property owner.

RESOLVED: to record the Panel's thanks to and best wishes for Simon Williams, who will shortly be retiring from the Council.

5 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 5)

Cllr Draper, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, presented his priorities for the year:

- Greenspaces: introduction of public space protection orders (to regulate dogs and BBQs in public spaces), a focus on rubbish and getting residents to take this with them, getting the best from the new greenspaces contractor (Idverde) including their relationship with friends groups, and building on the *Eastern Electric* event to use Merton's greenspaces to generate additional income;
- Leisure: the completion of the leisure centre and working with contractors GLL to make the centre as profitable as possible;
- Libraries: opening the new library at Colliers Wood, continuing to improve the use of the Wimbledon Library arts space and establishing another in Mitcham Library to maximise business and arts opportunities. Noted Merton has the most cost efficient library service in London;
- Merton Adult Education: aspiring to achieve an outstanding Ofsted rating. The service will work with other colleges and aims to maximise the value of the apprenticeship levy to improve enrolments and increase income;

- Regulated Services: finalise the expansion of the service to include Wandsworth and underpin this with a shared IT system. The enlarged service can then be used to gain additional income; and
- Heritage: use the Cannons and Chapter House projects to create a tourism industry in Merton as a way of providing additional income.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified (with support from relevant officers):

- Resource is limited to support bidding for the Mayor of London's Borough of Culture. However, this might be possible if done with local partners. This will be explored;
- The dog control strategy is well established but this is less the case for the use of BBQs in public spaces. There is need for a public consultation; and
- Ensuring that the *Eastern Electric* event is safe and secure for attendees and residents is the key objective. Work is on-going with *SaferMerton* and the police to ensure a safe event that is well monitored. The Council has worked with the organisers who are much experienced and professional in their approach, supporting modifications to ensure safety such as tweaking the opening hours. Enforcement teams will be heavily involved to ensure noise, health and safety and food hygiene standards are all maintained. It was noted that the police have also designated this as a London-wide event meaning there is a bigger pool of officers on which it can draw for support. The police will lead on addressing any drug use the event.

Cllr Whelton, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing, presented his priorities for the year:

- Street management: noted that his remit also includes street management and that there will be a number of consultations forthcoming regarding the extension of CPZ restrictions to Sundays and evenings and the introduction of waiting restrictions (with residents' consent);
- Housing: the key focus in on fire safety. Highlighted residents' concerns resulting from the Grenfell Tower fire;
- Regeneration: this will realise an investment of £42m with the local plan enquiry reporting in the autumn. Noted the need to develop more affordable housing given that on average those purchasing a house for the first time are now nearly 40 years old. Also, highlighted that despite usage being low, Merton still has recourse to temporary accommodation. Called for a cross-party approach to regeneration in order to achieve a transformational approach; and
- Crossrail2: noted the value of cross party support and also disappointment that there has been no further progress with Crossrail2; the next phase consultation is awaited.

In response to member questions, the Cabinet Member clarified:

- The Council undertakes outreach work with those that are homeless in the borough and noted his disappointment that numbers are growing. Any antisocial behaviour will be addressed by community safety and/or the police;

- Clear that whilst the Council supports Crossrail2 this is not at any cost. Initial proposals were unacceptable as detrimental to Wimbledon which is why the Council has made a number of alternative proposals such as a tunnel under Wimbledon etc. Discussions will continue with Crossrail2 and the Mayor of London. Noted the potential for this to be an initiative that takes many years to realise and that currently, development is only in the very early stages. However, the Council is already engaging with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and *LoveWimbledon* to consider how to mitigate any potential disruption to local businesses and residents; and
- Workshops were held early in the year to consult on the Wimbledon Masterplan. However, further consultation has been delayed by the General Election. The Masterplan is linked to Crossrail2 but needs to go ahead regardless. The key objective of the plan is to maintain the town centre and businesses, to improve and better exploit the Wimbledon brand name.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 6)

Simon Williams, Director of Community and Housing, highlighted that the department had recently conducted its in year performance monitoring. This showed success in keeping down the use of temporary accommodation. Library income collection appears to be down but this is thought to have resulted from the implementation of the new finance system and some misallocation of funds. Currently, it is too early to be conclusive about the new approach to Adult Education (commissioning). A full report will be brought to the Panel early in the New Year.

The Assistant Directors from Environment and Regeneration took it in turns to highlight a performance monitoring measure from their area of responsibility:

- John Hill, Assistant Director for Public Protection: highlighted that the number of parking permits issued against the target of five working days fell from the usual 90% to 40% in April and May. This is as a result of a one-off event: the introduction of the diesel levy which has required the automated permit issuing process to be reconfigured. Until this was achieved, the process wasn't automated causing the drop in performance. Now that the automated system has been reconfigured, performance is improving with 70% of parking permits being issued in the five day target;
- James McGinlay, Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities: highlighted the number of planning enforcement cases closed. Whilst the backlog was cleared last year, staff leaving means that there are now only 1.5 FTE remaining to deal with enforcement cases pending recruitment of the vacant posts. This is being addressed by vigilantly monitoring of cases enabling the team to still perform well against the backlog; and
- Graeme Kane, Assistant Director for Public Spaces: highlighted the increase in fly tipping. Reported that this isn't because there has been an increase but that this has resulted from the improvement in data capture and reporting of tips. Under the Veolia contract, all teams have access to an in cab reporting system that allows data to be captured in real time increasing accuracy. Proposed that there is a need for this target measure to be reconsidered to ensure that it is meaningful.

In response to questions, the Assistant Directors clarified:

- John Hill:
 - It hadn't been possible to better anticipate the change required to the automatic system for purchasing parking permits because it wasn't clear until very recently whether or not the diesel levy was going to go ahead;
 - How air pollution is monitored is in the process of being reviewed. This will ensure that how particulate measures are reported is accurate;
 - The PATAS figures aren't quite accurate in the report. These should read 59% won, 25% lost and 16% not contested. To provide a better understanding of PATAS cases, it was highlighted that on average every year 150,000 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) are issued. Of these 788 were contested last year, 462 were won, 196 lost and 130 not contested. This illustrates the very small number of PCNs that are lost or not contested; and
 - Use of portable cameras to capture evidence of fly tipping is in its early stages with evidence of positive results.
- Graeme Kane:
 - Whilst there hasn't been a noticeable increase in the number of bulky waste collections missed, agreed residents are currently waiting for longer than liked for a collection (4 – 5 weeks). Highlighted work is ongoing with Veolia to return this to the desired two week timeframe; and
 - Enforcement teams are undertaking activity to prevent fly tipping which includes fining where tippers are identified. Other activity includes writing to residents to encourage them to dispose of their rubbish through legitimate means and visits to commercial premises to provide reminders that it is a legal requirement to have a waste contract in place and to check this has been set-up.
- James McGinlay:
 - Difficulties with the building control staffing levels are the result of an aging workforce – this is replicated across London. Merton is therefore losing staff to neighbouring boroughs and the private sector. Work is ongoing with HR to consider remuneration and a recruitment process is underway.

7 FACILITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS - UPDATE REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Officers, Doug Napier (Greenspaces Manager) and Hilina Asrress (Senior Public Health Principal) presented their paper to members highlighting that only 11.8% of 15 year olds in Merton are meeting the daily guidelines for physical activity and are sedentary on average for 7 hours a day. Only a quarter of adults are physically active in Merton. Childhood obesity is both a national and local priority. The National Childhood Measurement Programme has been used to establish that there are 4,500 overweight children in the borough with children in the east more likely to be affected than those in the west.

According to the Public Health Outcomes Framework, with 42 separate playgrounds, Merton ranks 17th lowest in London for the utilisation of outdoor space for health and

exercise purposes. Investment in Merton's playgrounds has been affected by saving pressures. The annual revenue budget is currently around £40K or about £1K per site per annum. Just replacing one play unit (a double timber multi-play unit) recently cost £40K. Provision also includes outdoor gyms, table tennis and paddling pools/water jets.

Public Health and Greenspaces intend to work more closely together to increase utilisation of children's playgrounds and open spaces in Merton (based on evidence and best practice as well as resident feedback).

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- Schools are a key in addressing childhood obesity and increasing physical activity in young people. Work is on-going with Merton's schools to encourage them to participate in the Healthy Schools Programme;
- An example of working in partnership with schools is the newly opened scooter park at Poplar Primary School;
- Financing for playgrounds comes from the capital investment programme, Section 106 money and external sources (the scooter park at Poplar Schools was crowd-funded);
- It was agreed that there is some error in the table listing the location of Merton's greenspaces; and
- Whilst there is some misconception that playgrounds in the west of the borough receive more funding, it was highlighted that there are as many playgrounds in the east of the borough and investment in play equipment and the resulting play values is equitable across the borough.

RESOLVED: The Panel thanked the officers from Public Health and Greenspaces for working together to produce an interesting and thoughtful paper.

8 SOUTH LONDON WASTE PARTNERSHIP: PHASE C (Agenda Item 8)

Update report

Graeme Kane, Assistant Director, Public Space, Contracting and Commissioning, provided an introduction to his update report. Highlighted that two significant services have now been contracted out with accompanying big expectations on staff with changes to culture, equipment and working practices. The Council is now benefitting from Veolia's commercial knowledge, technical solutions and equipment in addition to the financial savings which will be realised through the contract. The commitment from both sides to make the contract work is impressive. Whilst only in its early stages, things are going well. Inevitably there are some issues with the current focus on missed bin collections and the speed of fly tip removal. The Idverde greenspaces contract is also operating well especially given this is a challenging time of year. Cutting of grass and verges has been excellent and the contractor is staying on top of litter picking. Thanks were given to the team (especially Doug Napier) for starting the contract early (February 2017) to allow it to become embedded before the growing season.

Ride along

Cllr Sargeant gave a verbal report on his ride along with a Veolia rubbish collection team. He explained that he had requested this in order to identify issues to be addressed in preparing for the new service being rolled-out in Merton in 2018. He noted his dislike of wheeled bins and his concern about the need for the new service to be flexible and accommodate those who may struggle to present their rubbish for collection under the requirements of the new service. The Cllr was nevertheless pleased to report how well run he found the service.

The ride along took place in Kingston (and not Sutton as originally requested) on 6 June 2017. The Cllr initially attended health & safety and management briefings. He met and questioned two teams on their rounds and then rode along with a third. The team was very friendly, energetic and with high morale, perhaps selected as one of the best teams in the service.

The Echo system is key to a successful, flexible service. This comprises an on-board computer that is connected wirelessly to the depot, allowing performance to be reported and monitored in real time. Veolia and Kingston meet every three months to review this in detail. The information it provides is sufficiently comprehensive that it is possible to drill down to look at the service provided to individual households and any specific issues such as where the household is not correctly sorting waste and recycling. The technical solution allows photographic evidence to be captured of bins not presented for collection. The driver has to sign-off each street in real time before the crew moves on.

The Cllr noted that the service caters for the 5% of residents requiring assistance. Again, the driver has to acknowledge that this has been provided in each individual case before a street can be signed-off.

Kingston offers 180, 240 and 360 litre wheeled bins although it is considered an error that the largest of the three was offered. This is because it sends the wrong message, implying that it is acceptable to generate larger amounts of waste. Wheeled bins have to be presented at the edge of the property for collection but the Cllr saw that some bins are left in the street when returned which is an issue. It was noted that the configuration of lorries means it would be possible to throw in some black sacks.

Kingston has seen a 1-2% increase in recycling since the start of the contract on top of a rate (c.45%) that was already a little higher than Merton.

The Cllr highlighted some lessons learned as a result of his experience:

- Planning prior to the start of the service is key; the comparison was made with what is happening in other boroughs that didn't allow for this planning time;
- Even in Kingston, where the rollout of the new service seems to have gone well, bins were missed at the start. Planning needs to be put in place to address this; and
- The new system depends critically on the calibre and motivation of every collection team.

Cllr Sargeant expressed his thanks to the Assistant Director and his team for organising the ride along which he enjoyed.

In response to member questions, Graeme Kane clarified:

- Veolia's Echo IT system is already operational within Merton; he can log in from his desk to review real time data and explore issues down to the level of individual households. It is also linked to Merton's website and gives residents a personalised service allowing them to review data relevant to their collection. However, this isn't fully integrated as yet. This specifically relates to fly tipping. The system can record where these exist but can't capture in real time when these are addressed and currently this data isn't pulled into the CRM to capture response times;
- Communications to residents about recycling contamination at individual properties aren't yet fully operational but will happen as part of the new service. This will include notifications to individual households where recycling isn't being correctly sorted;
- Apologised for the difficulties experienced with renewal payments for garden waste collections. Currently, these number around 8,000 and are paid for using a mix of direct debits, credit and debit card payments. There is frustration that it isn't possible to offer online payment with residents having to call the contact centre. This has been mitigated in part by opening the contact centre for additional hours and contact centre staff calling back residents where required. The option of including payment for garden waste as part of the council tax collection will be explored;
- Focus is on missed garden waste collections especially where this is repeated. The data now available allows this to be addressed;
- For households generating very small amounts of waste, it is possible for this to be included in a neighbour's collection. However, whilst there is nothing to prevent this happening, this sort of arrangement would need to be put in place by the individual households involved. Obviously, for those households that will struggle to present their wheeled bin, assistance is available;
- The policy for presenting bins at the edge of the property (anything that is within an arm's length of the edge is permitted) remains the same but the practice has improved. Acknowledged this will need to be reinforced through on-going communications to residents; and
- Accepted Cllr Chung's offer to look at and consider a range of solutions for shopping parade bins that appear insufficient for the waste needs of fast food outlets. Some options were highlighted: additional bins, fines for those individuals/businesses involved, getting crews to focus on these etc

9 SETTING THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2017/18 (Agenda Item 9)

Cllr Holden volunteered to act as the performance monitoring lead for the Panel. It was agreed that the Panel would undertake visits to South Thames College and Colliers Wood Library. How to involve more residents in the work of the Panel would

be given further consideration. It was noted that the work programme, as outlined in the report, is very full and that the Panel should be cautious about adding to it further although space will be found for items where needed.

RESOLVED: To accept the work programme as outlined in the report and as agreed at the topic suggestion workshop.

10 TASK GROUP - SCOPING (Agenda Item 10)

Members noted that many crossovers are redundant but remain in place and are trip hazards. Also, that there appears to be inconsistency in how crossovers are allowed causing conflict amongst neighbours. Whether or not the Council is losing revenue from crossovers because they are installed without permission was also questioned.

RESOLVED: To undertake a task group review of crossovers to be completed for presentation to Cabinet at its meeting in March 2018.