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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

21 FEBRUARY 2018

(7.20 pm - 9.30 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Abigail Jones (in the Chair), Daniel Holden, Stan Anderson, Kelly Braund, Michael Bull, David Chung, Russell Makin and John Sargeant

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Nick Draper (Cabinet member for Community and Culture), Ross Garrod (Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking), John Hill (Assistant Director for Public Protection), Anthony Hopkins (Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education Services), Graeme Kane (Assistant Director of Public Space, Contracting and Commissioning), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities), John Morgan (Assistant Director, Adult Social Care) and Annette Wiles (Scrutiny Officer) and Scott Edgell (General Manager of Veolia Environmental Services UK)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (10 AND 16 JANUARY 2018) (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of both 10 and 16 January 2018 meetings were agreed as true and accurate. It was highlighted that information on the *Prevent* duty and how this relates to adult learning needs to be provided to Panel members (which has happened subsequent to the meeting).

### **Matters arising**

Members took the opportunity to provide verbal feedback on their recent visit to Merton College to look at the adult education provision. It was noted that the visit had been interesting and worthwhile and that it had been beneficial to see the provision first hand. Members who had not been able to attend were encouraged to participate in future visits.

### 4 UPDATE REPORT: NEW WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE (Agenda Item 4)

Graeme Kane, Assistant Director, Public Spaces, Contracting and Commissioning, introduced the item:

- The change to the waste collection service, that will be implemented in October 2018, is probably the biggest seen in Merton and will necessarily involve considerable effort to ensure this goes as smoothly as possible;
- The flow chart in Appendix A (page 27) provides an overview of all of the workstreams involved in the rollout. This demonstrates the complexity of the work with IT, logistics, communications, vehicles and depots all featured. This chart also provides an overview of the governance arrangements;
- Section 6 (page 23) of the officer report provides key dates and timeframes. This is only a snapshot of the project plan which is extensive and outlines all the dependencies involved in getting the rollout right;
- The project team continues to be in learning mode. This includes paying due regard to the experience of the rollout in Sutton. It was noted that whilst this also required significant changes to the existing waste service, these were different to those that will apply in Merton; food waste collections were added but wheeled bins were already in use. The scrutiny review of the rollout in Sutton has been carefully considered in partnership with Veolia and the other members of the South London Waste Partnership (SLWP). A response to the recommendations made is contained in Appendix B (page 29); and
- Highlighted that this is a big service change and that as a result it is unlikely implementation will be completely without issue but that it is the job of the project team to mitigate against these as much as possible.

In response to member questions, Graeme Kane and Scott Edgell, General Manager of Veolia Environmental Services UK, clarified:

- (Graeme Kane) Communications is a distinct workstream with a dedicated project team that includes Veolia and other members of the SWLP. This meets fortnightly. The fact that a new waste service will be rolled out in October is already being promoted to residents. It has already been featured several times in *MyMerton*, the team has attended community forums and the new service is featured on the Merton website. Gratitude was expressed to members for their continued role in helping promote the new service to residents. More detail on the nature of the new service will be communicated to residents closer to rollout. This will include a bespoke information pack;
- (Graeme Kane) Consideration is already being given to how to work with local groups and individuals able to support the rollout. Meetings are taking place with organisations such as Sustainable Merton;
- (Scott Edgell) Agreed that it is important to consider use of online video for rollout of information to residents. Noted that the communications team is already reflecting WRAP's best practice to ensure use of graphics that will communicate the requirements of the new service and overcome any language barriers; it is key to the success of the project that residents understand the need to remove any containments. Agreed the waste fleet itself might be used to advertise the forthcoming service change;
- (Scott Edgell) Whilst there were issues experienced with the rollout of the new service in Sutton, performance has returned to that experienced previously. Additionally, recycling rates in Sutton have risen from around 30% to 52%, making Sutton joint first amongst London boroughs from recycling. Believes the

rollout will be better in Merton because the significantly longer lead-in time is allowing preparation to happen. This includes putting the vehicle fleet in place and addressing issues around productivity;

- (Scott Edgell) Work is already underway to identify those who require additional assistance with their waste collections owing to their physical or medical circumstances eg: the elderly or the frail. Merton already has an Assisted Collection scheme in place and has provided property details to Veolia of those already listed who are now being assessed. Property types and locations are also being considered to see which need different containers where wheeled bins aren't suitable. Noted that the identification of steps is key as can preclude the use of wheeled bins in some circumstances;
- (Scott Edgell) If it is determined that a property is suitable for wheeled bin collections, this can be challenged by the resident but only on grounds of safety. Aesthetic considerations are not a valid basis for challenging this decision;
- (Graeme Kane) There won't be a specific process set out for challenging decisions taken about containers. However, all communications will feature contact details with any resident able to contact the waste team;
- (Scott Edgell) Having learned from the rollout in Sutton, the implementation of the new service will happen at different times for communal flats and kerbside collections;
- (Graeme Kane) ICT integration and the development of online functionality to underpin the service including the new service rollout is continuing with most elements now in place (a benefit of the longer lead-in time). Work continues to finesse this and make it more user-friendly. Residents were thanked for their continued use of the online system and for providing feedback;
- (Scott Edgell) There is an eight week plan for delivery of the wheeled bins with one week of contingency. Learning has been taken from the Sutton experience with more time provided. They will include packs providing details of the new service. It will be made clear to residents when they can start to use their bins. Discussions about the disposal of existing bins that are currently in use are ongoing.
- (Scott Edgell) Issues with the call centre during service rollout in Sutton were caused by requests for 30,000 additional boxes which won't be an issue in Merton. It was also noted that discussions are already taking place with Sutton to learn from its experience of offering a call centre during service rollout;
- (Graeme Kane) The waste team has been working closely with the Business Improvement Team around the development of the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The objective is to be able to offer residents a range of options for reporting waste issues through the new system. Most of the integrations have been completed with functionality around bulky waste still in development. Work is continually ongoing to make the system as easy to use as possible;
- (Scott Edgell) The contract between Veolia and Merton contains clear service levels that have to be maintained. This means additional resources will be provided to sustain service levels during the new service rollout. It has been decided to base the new rounds on existing patterns to minimise the change for residents;

- (Graeme Kane) Given the extent of the change involved in the new service, it is important to get it right and to reflect on whether the new service provides the right waste solution for Merton. Therefore, whether the wheeled bin is the right solution for dry recyclables is being considered. Keeping this separate from other particulates is very important which is problematic when operatives can't see what is inside the wheeled bin before it is tipped. This needs to be fully considered before the new service rollout; and
- (Scott Edgell) Whilst there is some standardisation across the boroughs participating in the SLWP around the colour of containers and the use of wheeled bins, there is also some differentiation. This reflects how each borough is evolving its service at a different pace and how each is learning from the other. Therefore is it right to consider a box solution for dry recycling given contaminants such as nappies are sometimes being incorrectly placed in wheeled bins used for dry recycling (which can't be seen before tipping). However, the impact of this solution on productivity also needs to be considered.

**RESOLVED:** The Panel resolved to receive a further update on the new service rollout in the new municipal year (precise timing to be agreed as part of the scrutiny topic suggestion process).

## 5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANING (Agenda Item 5)

The Panel received a representation from Marie Davinson of the Battles Area Resident Association (BARA) on Veolia's performance. This highlighted issues with missed collections, street litter, the return of bins to properties, the collection of green sacks, leaf collections, the clearance of gutters and fly tipping. Concern was also expressed about the new service rollout, the amount of containers involved and how those living in different property types, especially flats, will cope with these.

Graeme Kane, Assistant Director for Public Spaces, Contracts and Commissioning, went on to introduce the officer report:

- This is a further update on Veolia's performance under the contract as requested by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel through its reference to Cabinet;
- Currently, performance is not where it should be. Merton officers and Veolia are working to address performance issues;
- Highlighted the ongoing campaign to reduce the number of fly tips. Adverts focusing on the fines for fly tipping are being featured on banners on highway railings and caged vehicles etc. Social media is also being used and LBM enforcement officers and those working through the Kingdom contract are issuing fines (in total, 2,697 fines were issued between July 2017 and January 2018). The Council is now also naming and shaming those who haven't paid their fixed penalty notices following court action; and
- There is awareness of difficulties with the online reporting of issues in the same locality. This is being addressed.

Scott Edgell, General Manager of Veolia Environmental Services UK, also responded to the BARA representation:

- Thanks given for the feedback which was highlighted as valuable;
- Staff are currently being trained to ensure box/bin returns;
- Until the new service is rolled-out, additionally resources and some changes will be needed specifically to address litter issues caused by black bags and foxes. Once the wheeled bin/containerised solution is implemented, these issues should be mitigated;
- Merton is a leafy borough. Staff are being trained to sweep and not litter pick. Noted that parked cars can make it difficult to sweep some areas;
- Offered to meet with BARA residents and look at the gutter issue that has been identified; and
- Working to get the frequency by which litter bins are emptied correct but this isn't yet quite right especially for those at bus stops.

Marie Davinson agreed that there had been some improvement in performance over the last couple of weeks.

In response to member questions, Graeme Kane and Scott Edgell clarified:

- (Scott Edgell) Collections from flats do pose a challenge but the number of missed collections from communal flats is not increasing. Currently, collections from flats that are scheduled for the evenings are encountering difficulties because of parked cars which restrict access to sites. There are between 20 – 30 collections from flats that are affected in this way and need to be rescheduled for earlier in the day when parked cars are less of an issue. Veolia is also making vehicles available that are able to access these more challenging sites (they are smaller). This issue with collections from flats was exacerbated over Christmas simply because of the typical increase in waste presented at this time of year (on average waste increases by 30%). There had also been issues with staff schedules over the Christmas period from which Veolia has learnt;
- (Scott Edgell) Changes are being implemented now to address performance issues. The kerbside collection teams are being reconfigured and a new team is being built following one team being dismissed for fraud. The phasing of street cleansing is being reconfigured and additional staff provided. Whilst reported issues are up this reflects that IT systems have been successfully integrated and that a clearer picture of Merton's waste needs is being built. However, this means that reactive work is currently dominating and not leaving enough time for planned work;
- (Scott Edgell) In the interim, prior to the rollout of the new service, street cleansing teams will work alongside kerbside collections rather than Veolia's preferred approach of street cleansers working within dedicated villages (so they get to know their area better). Noted that this is already allowing progress to be made in the east of the borough;
- (Scott Edgell) Prior to the start of the contract, there were 109 street cleansers working in the borough. Now these are down to the mid-70s. However, Veolia also uses more mechanical approaches to street cleansing which can cover three to four times the distance of an individual sweeper although this can be limited by

parked cars. Veolia's approach to street cleansing has been independently reviewed (both frequency and methodology) with the judgement that this is probably about right;

- (Scott Edgell) Difficulties in Nelson Road as reported by Cllr Neep were initially addressed by Veolia staff but these were too considerable to be remedied completely in one day. There was then a breakdown in communication. Offered to do more to address if required;
- (Graeme Kane) Financial deductions will be made against Veolia as it is not achieving the contractually required performance. The value of these deductions is being calculated;
- (Scott Edgell) Merton provided Veolia with comprehensive data sets. Given the amount of data, there were some slight errors;
- (Graeme Kane) The figures quoted in points 2.19 and 3.7 measure different things. The figure quoted in 2.19 is for formal complaints where a resident believes something has gone wrong. Whereas 3.7 is the number of recorded service requests (anything from a fly tip to a dead animal on street being reported);
- (Scott Edgell) The contract between Merton and Veolia is for an initial eight year period with the option to extend by 8 years and then a further 8 years;
- (Graeme Kane) The Love Clean Streets and Love My Street Apps work by sending through an email to the street cleansing team that then has to be manually entered into the Council's systems to be accessed by Veolia. It is therefore preferable that this is initially entered by the resident directly through the Council website. Chris Lee, Director for Environment and Regeneration, added that whilst there is no plan for the Council to develop its own app, the mobile version of the Council website is being developed to feature a mapping tool that will link straight into the ECHO system in refuse collection vehicles;
- (Scott Edgell) The Veolia social media team has just appointed a dedicated person for the SWLP. Whilst the 'mucky Merton' hashtag is an important tool, emphasised the importance of properly reporting through the Council website.
- (Graeme Kane) The Council is using a variety of means to address fly tipping including enforcement officers, cameras and mobile cameras, CCTV identification of vehicles and individuals and the issuing of fixed penalty notices. Active resident engagement is also ongoing through letters, door knocking etc. Whilst some residents are fly tipping knowingly, in other cases it might simply be a case of collection days not being known. Posters to raise awareness of fines for fly tipping are put up in known fly tipping locations. Councillors were asked to inform of other areas where fly tipping happens frequently;
- (Scott Edgell) The build up of leaves and detritus will be dealt with through deep cleansing using mechanical sweepers. These can be difficult to use where cars are parked and/or gritting has taken place. This will therefore have to be planned with residents being asked to move vehicles in advance;
- (Scott Edgell) Highlighted that Kingston is a very similar borough to Merton where Veolia is successfully using the same approach to waste under the same management team and with the same vehicles etc. Confident that the same success is possible in Merton but need more time to go through the process of getting the contract better established; and

- (Scott Edgell) Between 20,000 to 26,000 additional food waste caddies need to be delivered to maximise food waste recycling in Merton. Residents need to be further encouraged to recycle food waste and therefore a new advertising campaign is planned.

## 6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

Anthony Hopkins, the Head of the Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service, introduced the item highlighting key projects;

- The new libraries operating model has been established since May 2017 and is achieving the required savings whilst retaining all library sites and existing opening hours;
- The new library at Colliers Wood is now open and based on the need for additional stock to be provided is proving a success;
- The arts space at Mitcham Library is open and provided cultural activities for young people;
- The high school library membership scheme is well established;
- The Merton and the First World War memories project is an example of the heritage projects now being achieved in partnership with Merton's libraries;
- Merton's libraries are also now being successfully integrated with other services such as Adult Learning, meaning that provision is now available through libraries; and
- There is a focus on digital skills through Merton's libraries with a particular focus on assisted digital support. Training will be provided to staff and volunteers so that they can help library users.

In response to member questions, Anthony Hopkins clarified:

- Library fees are reviewed annually. The policy in Trafford where no fines are now charged for overdue library books is based on information from abroad where this approach led to increased usage with no impact on book losses. Whilst there is interest in the impact of this policy in Trafford, library fines make a contribution to the library's budget;
- The new library's website is a joint procurement project with 17 other London boroughs which will enhance functionality. There will be a limited amount of downtime for the service whilst the change is being implemented. However, this will be limited and any service disruption will be planned and notification provided in advance;
- The number of library volunteers shows some seasonal variation – numbers are always higher in the summer. The new recruitment campaign for library volunteers is focused on new volunteer roles reflecting the new operating model rather than simply increasing numbers. There will be a volunteer celebration event on 9 March where the contribution of around 150 library volunteers will be recognised and celebrated;
- All Merton's libraries are assessed for access by older and disabled users. Whilst the default approach is to encourage users to self serve this is only where this is reasonable with support being given to those that need it; and

- All Merton's libraries have completed work to make them more dementia friendly including completing environmental assessments in addition to training staff and volunteers as Dementia Friends.

**RESOLVED:** Members resolved to thank and congratulate officers for the annual report and the success of the new Colliers Wood Library.

## 7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: DEPARTMENTAL DATA SET REVIEW (Agenda Item 7)

Chris Lee, Director for Environment and Regeneration, provided an introduction to the item highlighting that this wouldn't focus of waste as this had been covered elsewhere on the agenda:

- (SP041) Service requests replied to in five working days: this is only just below the target demonstrating that despite there now being a high volume of requests, these are being met;
- (SP066/067/065) Waste volumes: residential waste per household was below the maximum threshold in December and is only just above the maximum for the year to date. Municipal solid waste sent to landfill is doing better than the target and household waste recycled and composted is improving and doing better than at the same point last year. There has also been an unexpected expenditure dividend. The new Energy from Waste (EFW) facility at Beddington Lane is being tested with a lower gate fee providing a £150K one off benefit; and
- (SP024) % vacancy rate of property owned by the Council: this is low and significantly better than the target. The debt owned by Council tenants is also better than target although not reflected in the provided figures since billing dates and payment terms affect the report. This shows how the Council is working to maximise the benefit of its assets.

Cllr Holden, in his capacity as performance monitoring lead for the Panel, highlighted the following points as a result of his meeting with officers:

- Library visitor numbers are slightly down but are expected to increase;
- The library partnerships target figure will be removed and updated to something more meaningful as a KPI;
- The income from libraries has jumped up recently;
- Adult Learning enrolments were just under the target last year but are anticipated to increase during this municipal year. It was noted that these figures need to be annualised (rather than reported quarterly) to make them more meaningful;
- Parking permits issued in five working days are likely to be further affected by increasing CPZs and the ongoing impact of the diesel surcharge;
- The PATAS KPIs are being revised and will only feature the cases won in the future;
- Leisure income has been affected by the closure of the Ridgeway Stables;
- Visitor numbers to the Polka Theatre have been affected by an unpopular show;
- Building control applications and income are both down. However, it is thought unlikely that the Council will lose its responsibility for this service; and



- The share of building control cases being retained by the Council has increased which it is thought might be the result of investigations into the Grenfell fire.

In response to member questions, officers clarified:

- (Chris Lee) The decrease in household waste is not as a result of missed bin collections. These are marginal and are caught up so have no impact on overall volumes;
- (John Hill, Assistant Director Public Protection) The focus of food premises inspections is on those deemed high risk;
- (Chris Lee) The business case for the payment of fixed penalty notices is based on a rate of around 61/62% (which means the costs of the Kingdom contract are all covered with no additional cost passed onto the Council). The payment rate has increased over time. This reflects policies such as prosecution of those that don't pay and publicly naming those where prosecutions are successful. However, this has to be balanced against the costs of prosecution and the knowledge that some give false addresses or do not have the money to pay fines;
- (John Hill) The cost of the free Christmas Parking initiative to the Council is around £60K per annum; and
- (Chris Lee) The contract with Capital to address the backlog of building control enforcement cases is just about to start. Highlighted the difficulties of staff recruitment in development control.

## 8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: PROGRESS AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOUSING SUPPLY GROUP (Agenda Item 8)

James McGinlay, Assistant Director Sustainable Communities, introduced the item:

- The housing team is to be applauded for Merton having the lowest homelessness figures in London (184 households in temporary accommodation);
- Currently, the Council is consulting on viability assessments. This is in line with the policy of the Mayor of London with viability assessments being made publicly available. A report will go to Cabinet once the consultation is complete;
- As the local plan is reviewed, suggestions are being sought from landowners, residents and any interested parties regarding sites that will have their designation changed and allow for small scale developments; and
- Progress is being made in putting in place the staff for the Local Authority Property Company. Initial designs and planning applications will be forthcoming in the autumn.

In response to a member question, it was clarified that Merton has learnt from other local authorities on their approaches to viability assessments. Officers will review the affordable housing threshold as necessary.

It was noted by the Panel that recommendation 12 was to be reviewed and not removed. James McGinlay to action.

**RESOLVED:** It was resolved that the Panel will receive one final update on the task group report and recommendations in the new municipal year. This should include a covering report summarising the impact of the report and elaborating on the action taken to achieve the recommendations.

## 9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel noted the remainder of the work plan for the rest of the municipal year.

Members were reminded to complete the annual scrutiny survey by the deadline of Friday 9 March 2018. It was highlighted that the preference is for this to be completed online.