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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 NOVEMBER 2018

(7.15 pm - 10.20 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Laxmi Attawar (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Stan Anderson,
Councillor Ben Butler, Councillor Joan Henry,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Nick McLean and
Councillor Anthony Fairclough

Anita Cacchioli, Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration) Pat DeJesus (Waste Engagement and
Enforcement Officer), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager),
James McGinlay (Managing Director of Merantun Development
Limited) and Doug Napier (Leisure and Culture Greenspaces
Manager) Stella Akintan (Scrutiny Officer)

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 interests

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

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

The Chair said there were two issues arising from the last meeting:

The Director of Environment and Regeneration was asked to provide an update on Christmas parking. He reported that Members expressed concern about the benefits of the scheme, therefore the provision had been reduced which represents a saving for the council. The saving will show in the budget savings in January and the changes will be operation from this year.

Councillor Russell Makin said he and Councillor James Holmes had met with officers to discuss the recommendations from the climate change task group and they were satisfied that officers had completed the work. This Panel would be kept updated on any further developments.

4 SINGLE USE PLASTICS SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE ON TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda Item 11)

Councillor Aidan Mundy gave an overview of the first meeting in which the following draft terms of reference were agreed:

- 1) Review the council's procurement of single use plastics.
- 2) How behaviour change amongst council staff and visitors in council buildings can be promoted
- 3) Consider as a pilot how local businesses in Morden town centre can be encouraged to reduce single use plastics.

A panel member asked for recommendation three to be changed from 'reduce' to 'stop'. Cllr Mundy reported that commercial alternatives to non-recyclable plastics are still being developed and it is important to be realistic about what the task group can achieve.

In response to questions Councillor Mundy confirmed that the task group will be speaking to a wide range of witnesses as part of the review and will be meeting experts within the council at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

The task group were thanked for their work

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: GROUNDS MAINTENANCE (Agenda Item 8)

The Panel received a presentation from Richard Burton, id Verde, setting out challenges and successes over the last 18 months.

The Chair invited Tony Burton from the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum to address the Panel. He reported that the organisation was set up in 2016 in response to outsourcing of the contract, they offer a community perspective and wanted to raise three main issues:

- Basic horticultural skills are lacking, shards of glass caused by mowers are not cleared. A high staff turnover leads to lack of basic knowledge of the parks. Idverde are slow in responding to concerns and complaints by local groups
- Merton council are asked to enforce the contract with idverde more vigourously.
- Idverde are asked to take responsibility for the shortcomings within the service and make improvements.

The Leisure and Culture Greenspaces Manager gave an overview of the report which is focused on the performance of the contract. The main areas of underperformance have been grass cutting and litter clearance. Id Verde also need to consider how it deploys staff seasonally.

A panel member asked if there are enough staff to monitor both contracts given the demand on staff generated by the Waste service change. Id Verde reported additional staff have and are been employed to support the roll out of the Veolia contract.

A panel member asked where to direct their enquiries it was reported there is a dedicated enquiry line which will be shared with councillors. ACTION: Leisure and Culture Greenspaces Manager

In response to questions from the Panel it was reported that:

There had been health and safety concerns related to the quality of children's playground inspections. Furthermore a training exercise was carried out in relation to water safety testing as the council needed to be satisfied that all Id Verde staff were competent.

Fees and charges are a council decision, with advice taken from id Verde

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their report.

6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2019-2023 (Agenda Item 4)

The Director of Environment and Regeneration reported that there are no savings for the department in this round. Proposals will go to Cabinet in December and will be presented at the scrutiny panels in January.

A panel member asked why there has been a large increase in taxi card concessionary fares. It was reported the Director of Corporate Services will respond to this query. ACTION: Director of Corporate Services.

The Panel discussed and commented on the report and RESOLVED that:

“This Panel recommends to Cabinet to consider increasing the capital spend on street trees and other associated landscaping by 10% to help improve the Borough's air quality offset by reducing equivalent spend on fleet vehicles. “

In introducing the motion, Councillor Daniel Holden said the purpose of the motion is to meet aspirations of Mayor of London which is to reduce the number of vehicles and increase trees to improve air quality.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Russell Makin.

The Panel took a recorded vote on the motion. 4 members voted in favour (Councillors Laxmi Attawar, Nick McLean, Daniel Holden and Russell Makin); 2 voted

against (Councillors Ben Butler and Joan Henry) and there were 2 abstentions (Councillors Anthony Fairclough and Stan Anderson).

The Director of Environment and Regeneration said increasing revenue on trees could be beneficial but there is a revenue cost for maintenance so it is important to take a balanced approach. Fleet vehicles are the cheapest way of taking children to school, The department is working towards reducing transport cost by investing in clean and efficient vehicles.

RESOLVED

The motion to be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

7 THE WORK OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT TEAM (Agenda Item 5)

A panel member raised concern that there seemed to be a reluctance to use covert operations. The Enforcement & Community Waste Partnerships Manager reported that we need to manage the resources available but overall Merton get good results.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Regeneration thanked the team for their hard work and client officers for finding the identity of culprits in rubbish bags which is an unpleasant task. Merton has a successful conviction rate and we need people to come forward as witnesses to fly tipping to help modify poor behaviour.

Councillor McLean thanked officers for their work and offered to join staff on an environmental enforcement visit ACTION: The Enforcement & Community Waste Partnerships Manager

A panel member asked if there are other opportunities to identify culprits in order to deter others. The Enforcement & Community Waste Partnerships Manager reported information is publicised after a court appearance.

A Panel asked about the impact of school education, it was reported that staff accompany pupils on litter picks and they are educated on the impact of dropping litter.

A panel member asked if volunteers can be trained to work alongside the enforcement team. The Enforcement & Community Waste Partnerships Manager reported there are street champions who do litter picks and are the eyes and ears of the community.

8 MORDEN REDEVELOPMENT - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of futureMerton gave an overview of the presentation and reported that recommendations will be presented at scrutiny in Spring 2019. The aim is to go to the market and seek a development partner. Early 2019 procurement process will begin, this will be 12 month process with the aim to have a partner by 2020 and begin building works by 2021.

A panel member asked if detailed site plans had been discussed how this would impact on the Local Plan. It was reported that this has not been discussed with development partners

A panel member said it is a challenging time for high streets how are we selecting the appropriate retail outlets.it was reported that there is no criteria for retail yet. Successful high street consist of a mix of outlets creating a flexible space.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation

9 MERANTUN - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

The Managing Director of Merantun Development Limited gave an overview of the presentation.

A panel member asked if there were any delays in the commencement of activities, it was reported that the revenue stream had slipped by six months but a contingency had been built in.

A panel member asked if there would be liaison with the planning committee and others in the council on design. The Managing Director of Merantun Development Limited reported that design is an important part of the final product and there will be pre-application meetings and consultation with residents. The business model stands on quality of final product.

A panel member asked if there is a conflict with Clarion. The Director of Environment and Regeneration said there is potential for interest in the same sites. The Council will assess what Merantun can deliver and what can be sold on the private market to ensure the council tax payer gets the best return.

In response to questions it was reported that Merantun can buy sites in the future depending on the business case.

A Panel member asked if alternative car parking spaces will be provided for users of the nursery and GP surgery. The Managing Director of Merantun Development Limited said there will be a transport analysis as part of planning application. This area has always been earmarked for development in the Local Plan. There is a requirement to provide transport information but not to provide alternative parking options.

RESOLVED

The Chair thanked the Managing Director of Merantun Development Limited for his report.

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

Councillor McLean, performance monitoring lead for the Panel gave an overview of his concerns including:

Housing needs figures(– as noted at the last meeting, the service is seeing an increase in clients as a result of the Housing Reduction Act but this hasn't impacted on performance. Officers are continuing to monitor closely.

Library visitor figures (SP480) are still below the challenging target but numbers are up 20,000 on last year.

Regulatory services (SP041), % service requests responded to within 5 days. Under-performance is exacerbated by the inclusion of complaints and member enquiries alongside. Recommend that these are removed from the measure next year to achieve a better understanding of service request performance.

Street cleaning inspections (CRP048), % sites below standard continues to be below target and missed refuse collection (CRP093) figures are still higher than target – these are of concern to residents and will continue to be scrutinised by the Panel.

Fly tipping has increased (CRP094), partly due to actual increase and partly due to better reporting

Resident survey satisfaction measures – recommend that more challenging targets are set – current targets are 72% satisfaction with recycling facilities, 73% with refuse collection and 76% with parks

The Director of Environment and Regeneration said Veolia performance is challenging and the contract is being monitored closely. Merton is also learning lessons from other areas. Good results are expected in the future including an increase in recycling.

Panel members raised concerns about the service roll-out and queried if repeated issues including bins not being returned to properties, issues in flats and missed collections can be monitored and measured. The Interim Assistant Director of Public Space reported they are aware of the situation, there are some challenges as the system embeds, improvements are being made as the number of complaints are in decline

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Street Cleanliness said he meets regularly with Veolia to oversee the rollout. It was reported that there had been systems failure resulting in a backlog in delivering containers. The rollout has run smoothly for the vast majority of the borough.

A panel member said he would like to see higher more aspirational targets and an increase in targets in some areas. The Director of Environment and Regeneration said aspirational targets need to be set alongside extra resources to ensure they are realistic. Current targets are based on historical trends and benchmarked against comparable boroughs.

After some discussion about the remits of setting more challenging targets the Chair said targets should be realistic and it is recommended this is monitored and could be reconsidered when the Panel looks at the service plans in January.

RESOLVED

11 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS (Agenda Item 10)

A panel member raised concerns about the Public Spaces Protection Order specifically Article 2c on dog fouling and the potential for being fined for not having a device or means to remove faeces. It was thought that articles 2A and 2B were sufficient sanctions and 2C would not be required. Panel Members were asked if they shared these concerns. Panel Members confirmed they were happy with the document and did not have any further concerns.

A panel member noted that people could only walk four dogs at a time and had consideration be given to those who have more dogs. The Greenspaces Manager said that whereas some people may have more dogs, a reasonable limit needed to be set and four was the accepted maximum that emerged from the consultation.

A panel member asked when the new protection order will be advertised and implemented. The Greenspaces Manager said there would be a period of grace to educate people before the changes come into full effect.

RESOLVED

Panel supported implementation of the Public Space Protection Order and initiatives to implement new dog controls in the borough.

12 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 12)

The Chair reported that the Panel had received a reference from Council to consider the following issue:

Council resolves to ask that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel looks at undertaking a report as part of its work programme which highlights key accessibility issues at local stations, but also outlining collective actions that Merton could take to help to improve access. It also asks that it invites key witnesses from Transport for London, Network Rail and South West Trains to the panel if a report is brought".

As a result the Panel agreed to hold an additional meeting in April to consider accessibility at local stations. This meeting will also consider a number of other items from the work programme, to alleviate the pressure on the agenda. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

The Panel also agreed to ask for a report on homelessness in March 2019 to include the following:

Update on the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and also looking at Merton's support for renters given homelessness is affected significantly by the end of tenancies. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

RESOLVED

The Panel to hold an additional meeting in April 2019 and include support for renters in the homelessness reduction report for March 2019.