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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

4 JULY 2019

(7.15 pm - 9.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),  
Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Paul Kohler,  
Councillor Owen Pritchard, Councillor Nick McLean,  
Councillor Edward Gretton, Councillor Natasha Irons,  
Helen Forbes, Councillor Ben Butler and Councillor David Chung

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council  
  
Ged Curran (Chief Executive), John Dimmer (Head of Policy,  
Strategy and Partnerships) and Julia Regan (Head of  
Democracy Services)

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Peter McCabe (substituted by Councillor Ben Butler), Councillor John Dehaney (substituted by Councillor David Chung), Councillor Joan Henry and co-opted members Emma Lemon and 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 of the meeting held on 24 April 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

### 4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2019/20 (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, said that councils across the country are experiencing financial difficulties and that targets set for new and affordable housing were also key challenges for the council. He drew the Commission's attention to recent service improvements that had been made for the benefit of residents, including a new adult social care centre, a new secondary school opening in September 2020; as well as positive external feedback on libraries, schools and childrens' services. Recycling rates have increased and the council is holding providers to account in relation to residents concerns about refuse collection and street cleaning. Practical plans are in place for health and social care services to work together at a local level and the council has a good working relationship with the Clinical Commissioning Group. The council is trying to respond to residents' concerns

about air quality whilst understanding the needs of motorists - the imperative is to take steps to improve air quality.

In relation to housing, the Leader said that regeneration and new building in the borough will help to deliver 6000 new units over 10 years, but that this is still below the Mayor of London's ambitious target. The council is assisting residents in private rented accommodation through the prosecution of bad landlords and the creation of a landlord licensing scheme. EU residents are receiving assistance to apply for settled status and the council has offered to house 50 unaccompanied asylum seeking children over the next ten years.

The Chief Executive, Ged Curran, re-iterated the scale of the financial challenge facing the council and said that the most likely outcome of the delay in the government's spending review and the fair funding review would be a one year spending settlement which would make longer term financial planning difficult. Appropriate strategic decisions would be needed to find the most effective and efficient way of meeting need and providing services. This would include reducing costs, increasing income, reducing demand through client self-service and encouraging and developing local communities to work together to help themselves.

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

- Each council department has income targets and many contracts require the contractor to supplement revenue through raising income. The income target in the council's budget is one that officers are confident they can meet. A balance must be struck between resident need and income generation (events in parks and night time economy given as examples). The council is also exploring opportunities to maximise use of its capital resources.
- Research in 2007/8 on the best way to encourage economic development in Mitcham found that the intensification of housing in the town centre followed by better transport links were key to this. Until there is a higher level of housing occupancy (which local residents have not supported) businesses will not be attracted to the area – Morden has similar issues.
- It is anticipated that by the end of this year the council will be able to start the procurement of a major developer for the regeneration of Morden town centre. The project has received cross party consensus and support from the Mayor of London and from Transport for London.
- Cross party motions to Council have been helpful and other opportunities for the political groups to work together on issues of interest to residents will be considered.
- The council is working hard to protect the most vulnerable residents, including through the investment of an additional £9million in adult social care and the exemption of care leavers from council tax. Financial pressures mean that a level of unmet need remains at present.
- Communication with residents is also subject to resource constraints but there is scope to improve the use of social media without increasing resources. Written communication through My Merton remains an important channel of

communication, particularly for residents who don't use digital communications, and the Residents Survey showed that it is widely read.

- Morden town centre regeneration will provide an opportunity to deliver social housing, working with housing associations and other partners.

In response to a question about the council organisational charts on the intranet, Ged Curran undertook to ensure that these were updated.

ACTION: Chief Executive

Members thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for their input and said that they may ask the Deputy Leader for an update when he attends for the budget scrutiny items in November and January. ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

## 5 MERTON PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, John Dimmer, introduced the report. He said that partnership working is very important to Merton, has been successful and has won a number of awards. The Merton Partnership is the framework and work is delivered through four thematic networks as set out in the report. Its work is scrutinised through the annual report and the performance framework.

The Commission was invited to comment on the draft annual report so that its views could be taken into account in the final version. Members commented on the absence of information and targets on housing – John Dimmer said he would raise this with the Sustainable Communities network. ACTION: Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

In response to a question about why there was not more information on council services, John Dimmer explained that this detail is contained in council strategies and that the Merton Partnership report reflects the discussions and priorities of the partnership rather than solely the council.

John Dimmer provided additional information in response to questions:

- The results of the children's survey will be used as evidence in drawing up the renewed Children and Young People's Plan this year. The survey shows that young people care about their local area and that their level of volunteering is twice that of adults. John Dimmer undertook to find out when the survey results will be published. ACTION: Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships
- The work on social capital shows that this varies by ward and is high in some of the more economically deprived wards. Social capital will be a key theme for the renewed Sustainable Communities Plan and the ward data will be shared with councillors in due course. ACTION: Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

The Chair thanked John Dimmer for the report and noted that the Commission would be scrutinising the draft Sustainable Communities Plan 2019-25 at its meeting on 13 November.

6 ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL MEMBER SCRUTINY SURVEY 2019 (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair, Councillor Peter Southgate, introduced the report and recommended that the Commission use the forthcoming review by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, coupled with new statutory guidance, as an opportunity to address the findings and identify ways to further improve scrutiny in Merton.

Members of the Commission discussed the level of resourcing for overview and scrutiny, how chairs are appointed and how members could use scrutiny differently, perhaps through changing the balance of resourcing between Panels and task groups.

RESOLVED: that the Commission agree the action points set out in the report and will discuss further at its meeting on 11 September 2019 as part of the discussion of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's review findings.

7 ROAD SAFETY AROUND SCHOOLS - REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (Agenda Item 7)

The task group chair, Helen Forbes, introduced the report, outlined the work of the task group and asked the Commission to approve and endorse the report for submission to Cabinet.

Members discussed the report and asked whether the task group had looked at cycling infrastructure. Helen Forbes said that had not been a part of its remit and was a separate issue to be considered elsewhere.

Members agreed that it would be helpful to send the parent information sheet (recommendation 6) to private schools so that they could use it as a resource too.

RESOLVED:

- 1) to amend recommendation 6 so that the information sheet is sent to all schools in the borough, including private schools
- 2) to endorse and forward the report to Cabinet for approval and implementation of the recommendations. This will be presented to Cabinet by Helen Forbes on 15 July 2019

8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20 (Agenda Item 8)

The Commission considered the report and RESOLVED:

- 1) To agree the proposed work programme as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, with the addition of the Sustainable Communities Plan at the meeting on 13 November 2019 and the addition of a report on modern day slavery on 18 March 2020 (to focus on how council officers involved in procurement are made aware of and act in relation to this issue)

- 2) To re-establish the financial monitoring task group for the municipal year 2019/20 and to appoint Councillors Nigel Benbow, Stephen Crowe, Ed Gretton, Paul Kohler, Owen Pritchard and Peter Southgate to the task group.
- 3) To establish a task group review of commercialisation, revenue generation and income maximisation, with terms of reference as set out in paragraph 4.8 of the report. To appoint Councillors Paul Kohler, Owen Pritchard and Peter Southgate to the task group (Councillor Sally Kenny agreed to be a reserve member if other members did not come forward).
- 4) That the Head of Democracy Services will email Commission members the details of Centre for Public Scrutiny and London Scrutiny Network training and other events; and will share the slides from an LGA course on local government finance that Councillor Paul Kohler attended recently.

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services

## 9 DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 9)

The Commission discussed its approach to asking questions of the BCU Borough Commander and RESOLVED:

- 1) To send written questions to her in advance of the meetings so that responses could be published as part of the agenda.
- 2) To agree two or three areas for detailed questioning at the meeting, focussing on the impact of the four borough merger on policing levels; an update on police estate matters following the internal review of the location of the parade ground; an update on MOPAC decision making on the location of the Merton front office police station.
- 3) To have a pre-meeting on the day of the Commission's meeting to discuss the approach to be taken to questioning.