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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 3 SEPTEMBER 2019

(7.15 pm - 10.05 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Natasha Irons (in the Chair),
Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Anthony Fairclough,
Councillor David Dean, Councillor Aidan Mundy,
Councillor Owen Pritchard and Councillor Geraldine Stanford

Charles Baker (Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager),
John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and
Commissioning), Cathryn James (Interim Assistant Director,
Public Protection) and Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Butler (with Cllr Fraser is substituting).

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.

4 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 4)

Cabinet member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture - Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah

- Expand library services to include online support and a customer app.
- Heritage 25th anniversary events
- Monitoring idverde performance/greenspaces
- Increasing income through park events
- Open water swimming (information gathering stage)

In response to Panel Member questions, the Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture clarified;

- The events at Eastern Electrics are still being investigated by Police and other agencies as part of post event analysis.
- E-books and magazines will be available to download on the Library app

ACTIONS:

- i. Ask Idverde to provide plans for each park (March 2020 agenda) if these are part of the contract specification.
- ii. Request total cost to subsidise tennis for free for the borough

Cabinet member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport - Cllr Martin Whelton

- Morden regeneration – Brexit uncertainty has had an impact but we are going to market in the spring
- Delivery of 2000 new homes
- Cabinet agreed civil penalties
- Introduction of selective licensing scheme
- Housing strategy
- Ravensbury regeneration – High Path is the next stage

In response to Panel Member questions, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport clarified;

- Redevelopment of Benedict Wharf is desired – Plans for 600 homes. Ongoing supporting infrastructure and community facilities are important.
- Previous there was a low number of prosecutions over licensing due to resourcing issues. The introduction of civil penalties gives us a range of tools now.
- GDPR concerns – Many Councils don't publish (including Wandsworth and Sutton). We have taken advice from the Information Commissioner.
- Blue badges, crossovers – We have taken further consultation which will be provided to Cabinet.

Cabinet member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment - Cllr Tobin Byers

- Air Quality & Climate change – Air Quality action plan, tackling idling cars, clean air zone
- Cross Party Climate work - Decarbonise Council by 2030 and borough by 2050.
- Waste and cleanliness of the borough – patchy performance, need to address challenges such as communal collections, prevent and deter fly tipping.
- Forthcoming review of street bins
- Make reporting easier for fly tips
- Monitoring Veolia's commitment to the improvement plan

In response to Panel Member questions, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Health and the Environment clarified;

- With regards to the Veolia contract - There were insufficient resources and the break clause is in 2025.
- Any contract not performing requires more monitoring so the Assistant Director for Public Space is looking at a restructure of the team to increase capacity.

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

Director of Environment and Regeneration introduced the report.
The Chair invited residents to share their experiences of the service.

Sarah Cheetham (Resident): Area is plagued with litter. Rubbish and broken glass encourages a minority to further add to it. Endless reporting has done nothing. Local groups are working to litter pick. What are the Council going to do?

James Leek (Wimbledon Union Res Association): More consultation is required. It would be helpful for Residents Associations to receive a structure of staff so they know who to contact. Online reporting needs to be improved. Telephone reporting is inadequate. More information is needed

with regards to the side waste policy. Residents Associations are a huge resource and should be included in consultation work, including the upcoming work on street litter bins.

Mark Gale (Resident): I met with Scott Edgell on 09.08.19 yet drains are still blocked, collections missed, bins are overflowing, street cleaning bags aren't collected and there are fly posters all over the borough.

Dan Goode (Merton Matters): The instinct of the borough was that outsourcing the waste service was a bad idea. Maintaining standards and providing profit to a private company while tax payers plug the gaps. There are residents that already pay for the service giving free labour to help clean it.

In response Scott Edgell, General Manager for Veolia, replied;

- There is a forthcoming plan to address the side waste policy
- Huge success in recycling rates
- 12% reduction in waste
- Christmas trees are only collected for two weeks after Christmas
- We are working with the Local Authority on enforcement

The Chair introduced the themes to be covered today which are bin collections, street cleaning and fly tipping, website and reporting issues, and finally misc. issues including communication, staff motivation, contract and performance monitoring.

In response to Panel Member questions about **bin collections**, Scott Edgell clarified;

- Solutions for estates (including Eastfields) are being discussed. We are encouraging a culture of recycling
- Side roads need more attention
- I will speak to staff and crews to remind them they should not skip properties
- Looking at producing guides with the Local Authority on recycling
- Small blocks of flats have been assessed and work completed
- The huge increase in recycling rates means more resources are required

The Director of Environment and Regeneration and the Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager also explained;

- The cost of procurement was largely covered by a government grant
- Garden waste subscriptions have increased from 6000 to 9000 and we continue to grow the customer base

In response to Panel Member questions about **street cleaning and fly tipping**, Scott Edgell replied

- The system continues to learn from location data of street bins and fly tipping hot spots.
- There are plans to improve in the east including Longthornton and Pollards Hill wards
- In Merton we have two Environmental Managers, two foremen and a Contract Manager. Between them they undertake regular drive rounds and checks on staff.
- Veolia plan to publish rotas to show work schedules and frequencies
- SE will question staff who drive the mechanical road sweepers about travelling down the middle of the road
- Pavements and gutters will be addressed

In response to Panel Member questions about **website and reporting issues**, Scott Edgell, the Director of Environment and Regeneration and the Assistant Director of Public Space clarified;

- Echo and Council CRM are fully integrated
- Twitter is not the best mechanism for reporting issues. Doing so, takes resources away from the contract. There are multiple channels we could utilise, such as love clean streets, but all would require integration into the CRM system. The upcoming Cleaner Merton programme will be looking into the use of Information Technology.
- The Council will be moving to Microsoft 365 later this year.
- With regards to the image capacity restriction, we are investigating the technical implications of the move to Microsoft 365 – We will be visiting neighbouring Local Authorities who use Veolia and Microsoft 365
- Councillors are welcome to visit the Veolia site

RESOLVED

Panel resolved (eight votes for, none against) to make the following reference to Cabinet;

The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel welcomes this opportunity to comment on the waste, recycling and street cleaning service and to raise issues for consideration by Cabinet.

The Panel recommended that Merton's large estates each receive a review on how the new collection service is working. If required due to under performance in service delivery or when requested by local ward members, an action plan shall be prepared that includes a review of the service delivered with recommended improvements, timelines for improvement implementation, resident engagement and a communication plan to support the any service modifications. The Panel recommended that HMO's and flats above shops each receive a review on how the new collection service is working. If required due to under performance in service delivery or when requested by local ward members, an action plan shall be prepared that includes a review of the service delivered with recommended improvements, timelines for improvement implementation, resident engagement and a communication plan to support the any service modifications.

The Panel would welcome the opportunity to feed into the upcoming estate modelling work between Clarion and Officers on how the estates can be improved. The panel requests that one Panel Member be invited to the future Clarion meetings to input and feedback on this work. Alternatively, the Panel would encourage Veolia to formally comment on the designs and challenges they have, possible mitigations and writing back to the committee with an update.

The Panel requested that they receive an outline of what the planned web reporting improvements are, including the benefits of implementing Microsoft Office 365, and a date of when this work will be finalised. The Panel requests that this report encompasses all user journeys and considers a single point of access for reporting all public space issues irrespective of which contractor is responsible.

The Panel recommends to Cabinet that the Council should consider developing an “always on” approach to communication. Providing clear and understandable information to all our residents which focuses on why we should recycle, how to use the bins/coloured bags, collection days, examples of street grading and how to report issues. This information could be included as a Council Tax insert, My Merton article, promotion through the council’s social media channels and a New Resident webpage on the council’s website. The Panel recommended that Cabinet investigate the option of a ward by ward deep clean to get the Borough back to an acceptable base line.

The Panel requested that Cabinet receive evidence of the Improvement Plan being prepared by Veolia The Panel also request that Cabinet consider sharing the plans with the Sustainable Communities Panel for further scrutiny input.

The Panel recommend that Veolia publish their rotas and schedules online in order to promote both transparency and our capacity to hold them to account.

The Panel also requested that Veolia return to the Sustainable Communities Panel in six months in order to carry out a review of the progress achieved.

The Assistant Director of Public Space introduced the report which is focused on delivering improvements, all of which are underpinned by the action plan.

In response to a Panel Member question, the Assistant Director of Public Space and the Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager answered;

- Opportunistic fly tips can be combatted through education
- We are working on a revised specification for Kingdom. The original contract was procured four years ago. The climate has changed since so we require an expanded remit. New contractor will be asked to liaise with Safer Merton.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 7)

A Panel member asked if there was any update on Planning Enforcement cases?

The Director of Environment and Regeneration explained the Council is committed to reducing the planning enforcement backlog by end of this year. One additional planning enforcement officer has started in their role and another is currently being recruited.

SP025 Debt owed- Arrows shows improvement. Historically our void rate has been better than target.

8 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

Work programme agreed.

It was noted that the October and February agendas have been swapped around.

This change has been made to ensure that the representatives required can attend both meetings and allow enough time for proper exploration of the topics in each.