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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

12 FEBRUARY 2020

(7.15 pm - 8.45 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),  
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor John Dehaney,  
Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Paul Kohler,  
Councillor Owen Pritchard, Councillor Nick McLean,  
Councillor Edward Gretton, Councillor Joan Henry and  
Councillor Natasha Irons

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for  
Finance

Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services) and Julia  
Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

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

Apologies were received from 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 22 January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

### 4 YOUTH PARLIAMENT JOINT SCRUTINY OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY - CABINET RESPONSE (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair introduced the report and said that although two of the recommendations had only been partially accepted, that was understandable given that they had been aspirational recommendations. The Chair and two of the other councillors who had been at the meeting with the Youth Parliament representatives said that they had been impressed by the dedication and passion shown by the young people and the articulate way in which they put their views forward.

Members agreed that they wished to continue to involve the Youth Parliament in scrutiny during the next municipal year, with a gender balance if possible. In response to a question, the Head of Democracy Services (Julia Regan) advised that the Youth Parliament are included in the topic suggestion programme, that scrutiny work programmes are shared with them so that they contribute if they wish and that some of the task groups had attended Youth parliament meetings as part of their consultation activity. The Chair suggested that the model used in the 2018 scrutiny of

personal safety whereby the youth parliament representatives presented the findings of their consultation with young people had been particularly productive.

The Commission RESOLVED to:

1. welcome Cabinet’s response to the recommendations arising from the joint scrutiny exercise with the youth parliament,
2. note the ongoing involvement of young people in the climate change working group, and
3. agree that it would not require a further update on the action plan.

5 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2020/24 (Agenda Item 5)

Members agreed to take items 5 and 6 together.

The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, introduced the Business Plan Update report, outlining the content and highlighting the new information that Cabinet had received in January. She drew the Commission’s attention to progress that had been made on balancing the budget and the gaps that remained for future years.

Caroline Holland provided additional information in response to questions about the Medium Term Financial Strategy:

- The Londonwide business rates pool had been beneficial and all the boroughs have signed up to continue next year
- Revenuisation provisions were made in response to a government change in the categorisation of capital expenditure
- The corporate provision for inflation is used to meet the costs of those supplies that increase above the predicted level of inflation
- Officers are looking at a range of options to increase SEND provision in the borough
- The increase in the pension contribution rate relates to the employer contribution.

Savings proposals for Corporate Services

Members asked questions and made comments about individual savings proposals:

<b>Replacement savings</b>	
Previously agreed saving: 2018-19 CS05 – Resources Division reduction in 1FTE	Noted that the changes associated with the new banking system had been complex which is why the anticipated staffing saving has not proved possible to date and a replacement saving has been proposed from the Insurance Fund. Saving AGREED
Proposed replacement: CSREP 20201 (1) – savings in Insurance Fund top-up budget	
<b>Deferred savings</b>	
2019-20 CS18 closure of Gifford House and relocation of SLLP to Civic Centre	Noted that there had been a number of bids for space in the Civic Centre. Also that the Local Development Plan lists

	Gifford House as an area for potential redevelopment. Saving AGREED.
2019-20 CS19 Closure of Chaucer Centre and relocation of operational teams to Civic Centre	Noted that the number of bookings had decreased and income now lower than budgeted for. Saving AGREED.
2019-20 CS15 Policy and Partnerships team, reduction 1FTE	Caroline Holland advised that the cost of these deferred savings would be included in the baseline budget each year until the savings were taken. Saving AGREED.

### Capital programme

Caroline Holland said that there had been no major changes to the capital programme subsequent to the November report. She advised that there may be a need to use some of the corporate capital contingency fund in 2023/24 for repairs to Bishopford Bridge. Members said that they, and residents, would expect the council to negotiate vigorously with the contractor. Caroline Holland said that all avenues were being explored.

### Service plans

Customers, Policy and Improvement – noted that income from Registrars’ event was £655,491 in 2018/19.

Safer Merton – commented that the number of new actionable ASB cases is huge compared to anticipated demand. AGREED to ask the Head of Safer Merton about this when he brings an update report to the Commission’s meeting on 2 April.

### Reference to Cabinet

The Chair encouraged members to make a reference to Cabinet. He proposed that this should note that there had been a better settlement from government than for some years, join with London Councils in calling for a fair funding settlement that will give certainty for the term of the MTFs to 2023/24, note the need to make prudent provision for the “known unknowns”, and, should there be a favourable outcome, to ask Cabinet to reconsider those savings classed as “high risk” on deliverability and reputation, and most likely to have an adverse impact on vulnerable service users.

There was no seconder for this proposal. Members noted that there were quite a number of potential funding streams and grants currently under review and said that they wished to take these in the round rather than making a recommendation based on partial information.

A motion was proposed by Councillor Owen Pritchard and seconded by Councillor Nick McLean to ask Cabinet to keep the Commission informed regarding the outcome of government reviews and decision on a number of funding streams that currently remain uncertain. This would include decisions on business rates, the fair funding review, financing of adult social care, addressing the deficit in the dedicated schools grant and the outcome of the comprehensive spending review. Members voted on the motion and it was passed – 8 members voted in favour and 2 abstained.

The Commission therefore RESOLVED to make the following reference to Cabinet:

“To note that central government is undertaking a number of strategic reviews that will have a direct impact on the funding of Merton Council and therefore asks that Cabinet keep the Commission informed upon the outcome of each one, as and when it arrives, with a view to its impact on the council’s medium term financial strategy.” It is anticipated that Cabinet would provide this information to the Commission through the quarterly financial monitoring reports.

6 BUSINESS PLAN 2020-24 SAVINGS INFORMATION PACK (Agenda Item 6)

7 SCRUTINY OF THE BUSINESS PLAN - COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY PANELS (Agenda Item 7)

Members discussed the content of the report from the Panels, noted that there had been lots of questions asked at the Panel meetings and RESOLVED to forward the comments and recommendations from the Panels to Cabinet.

The Commission also RESOLVED to ask the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel to undertake some scrutiny in the next municipal year of how the uptake and quantity of SEND provision in the borough could be increased and how the costs of the service could be reduced. ACTION: Head of Democracy Services to email Chair of the Panel and Director of Children Schools and Families.

8 REVIEW OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION - ACTION PLAN (Agenda Item 8)

Members discussed the report and noted one factual change in paragraph 2.18 to state that a majority of the working group had agreed on the value of giving some scrutiny leadership roles to the opposition but that this had not been unanimous.

With the exception of the section on sharing of scrutiny chairing roles, the Commission RESOLVED to agree the actions set out in the report and to ask the Head of Democracy Services to draft an action plan in consultation with the Chair. The Head of Democracy Services said that one of the first actions would be to develop a new approach to the topic workshops in order to assist members to prioritise work programme items that would have a clear purpose and outcome.

9 NOTE OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCIAL MONITORING TASK GROUP, 14 JANUARY 2020 (Agenda Item 9)

Noted.

10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The Commission RESOLVED to agree the work programme as set out in the report.

