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CABINET

7 DECEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 7.52 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Mark Allison (in the Chair),
Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Tobin Byers,
Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Councillor Natasha Irons,
Councillor Rebecca Lanning, Councillor Owen Pritchard,
Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer and
Councillor Martin Whelton

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate

Ged Curran (Chief Executive), Hannah Doody (Director of Community and Housing), Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Louise Round (Managing Director, South London Legal Partnership and Monitoring Officer), Matt Burrows (Head of Communications and Customer Experience), David Keppler (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Octavia Lamb (Policy and Research Officer (Labour Group)) and Louise Fleming (Democracy Services Manager)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

No apologies were received.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2020 are agreed as an accurate record.

The Chair advised that item 5 would be taken first, with items 4, 6 and 7 being considered together. For ease of reference the minutes are listed below in the order they appeared in the agenda.

4 REFERENCE FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION - BUSINESS PLAN 2021-25 (Agenda Item 4)

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission presented the report which set out the reference from the Commission in relation to the Business Plan 2021-25. He acknowledged the difficult circumstances in which the report had been written and the number of late stage

announcements. He set out the proposed savings which the Commission had concerns about and asked that the Cabinet proceed with caution and urged the Cabinet to continue to press for compensation from the Government for the costs incurred by protecting residents during the pandemic. He thanked the Director of Corporate Services and looked forward to looking at the second round of savings.

The Chair thanked Councillor Southgate and agreed with his comments regarding compensation from the Government.

The Cabinet Member for Finance echoed the thanks made to officers and to the Chair and Commission Members for their oversight and comments and addressed the comments made during his presentation of the Business Plan item.

RESOLVED:

That the reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission set out in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.13 of the report be taken into account when making decisions on the Business Plan 2021-25.

5 LOCAL RESTRICTIONS BUSINESS SUPPORT GRANT SCHEME (Agenda Item 5)

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out proposals for a local restrictions business support grant scheme over two phases. He thanked the officers involved in drafting the scheme and the Chairs of MVSC and Merton Chamber of Commerce who had agreed to sit on the panel with Council officers to administer the scheme. A review would be undertaken at the end of phase one which would inform the criteria for phase two which would come back to Cabinet for a separate decision.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that dates had already been set up in January to process the applications.

The Chair echoed the thanks and welcomed the recognition by central government for the Council's efforts in distributing money quickly to local businesses earlier on in the pandemic.

RESOLVED:

That the Additional Restrictions Grant Policy for Phase one be agreed.

6 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2020/21 - OCTOBER 2020 (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out the Council's financial monitoring information for month 7, thanking officers for their efforts in controlling the budgets and highlighting the key issues for Cabinet's consideration. The forecast net adverse variance had reduced slightly due to the receipt of £3.6m of funding from the Government, which was welcomed although the net cost of Covid

was still £12.5m and therefore it was important to keep pressing for full reimbursement from the Government. Another area of concern was the Dedicated Schools Grant and the Government needed to properly fund this also. It was clear that the pandemic had impacted most areas of the Council and this would need to be closely monitored in light of ongoing uncertainty.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that there had been adverse variances, particularly in Environment and Regeneration, and there could be further implications for income streams depending on what tiers the Borough was placed in by the Government. Officers were in the process of making their claim for this and the results would likely be known in February.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the financial reporting data for month 7, October 2020, relating to revenue budgetary control, showing a forecast net adverse variance at year-end of £8.2m be noted.
- B. That the contents of section 4 of the report be noted and the adjustments to the Capital Programme in Appendix 5b be approved.
That the contents of Section 4 and Appendix 5b of the report be noted and the amendments to the Programme contained in the Table below be approved:

	Budget 2020-21	Budget 2021-22	Budget 2022-23	Narrative
<u>Corporate Services</u>	£	£	£	
Customer Contact	(217,800)	217,800		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Planning and Public Protection	(340,710)	340,710		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Invest to Save General	(198,140)	198,140		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Housing Company	(6,000,000)		6,000,000	Reprofiled in line with projected spend
<u>Children, Schools and Families</u>				
Links Capital Maintenance	(137,000)	137,000		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Unallocated Capital Maintenance	(694,250)	605,360		Three virements and Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Perseid Capital Maintenance	(106,840)	106,840		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Melrose SEMH	77,440	997,560		Primary/Secondary SEMH Merged and reprofiled on this Scheme
Melrose Primary SEMH (Merging Schemes)	(200,000)	(875,000)		Primary/Secondary SEMH Merged with Scheme above
<u>Environment</u>				

and Regeneration				
Haydons Road Shop Front Improvements	(481,580)	481,580		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Wimbledon Park Lake Safety	(150,000)	150,000		Reprofiled in line with projected spend
Leisure Centres Plant and Machinery	(240,000)	160,000		Reprofiled in line with projected spend & £80k Relinquished
Total	(8,688,880)	2,519,990	6,000,000	

- C. That finance officers will continue to work with budget managers to identify further re-profiling and savings throughout the approved capital programme 2020-24.
- D. That £129,000 from the Outstanding Council Programme Board (OCPB) Reserve as part of the Recovery and Modernisation Programme - for an interim CSF Change Programme Manager (£79,000) and MVSC transformational resource (£50,000) be approved. This is in addition to £40,000 already drawn down from the same reserve to fund an external IT review.

7 BUSINESS PLAN 2021-25 (Agenda Item 7)

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the report which set out the draft Business Plan 2021-25 and thanked the Chair and Members of the Commission for their response and their flexibility. He welcomed the endorsement of the approach to separate the last of the “austerity” cuts from those savings the Council may be forced to make as a result of Covid. The Council would not know the extent of the savings to be made until just before Christmas when the financial settlement would be announced.

The Cabinet Member addressed the savings raised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in his presentation and advised that the Equality Analyses of those savings were now available. There were no new savings proposed in the business plan due to strategy to separate out Covid and non-Covid savings, however there were draft Equality Analyses for all savings appended to the Plan. Officers were still assessing the impact of the recent Government spending review. The overall gap had reduced to just under £12m however this would have a significant impact on services if the Council was required to make those savings and the Council would await the final settlement figure due just before Christmas. There had been a slight change in the timetable to reflect that further savings would not be known until that final settlement figure had been announced and therefore additional meetings of both scrutiny and Cabinet had been scheduled to ensure full oversight.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his presentation and the officers involved.

The Director of Corporate Services advised that further detail was expected with the financial settlement and the assumptions would be revised with further work carried out on the impacts of any savings proposed. Further advice was awaited on the public sector pay freeze and which staff would be affected.

The Chair echoed the comments and emphasised that Council officers should be paid the same as other public sector workers in recognition of their work on the front line in the pandemic.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education welcomed the discussion on the proposed savings at the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel and advised that the impact on partners would be looked at but residents must be prioritised and the emphasis should be maintaining and protecting services to vulnerable parents and children.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health recognised that the proposed savings could cause concern and hoped that the Equality Analyses helped to address some of those concerns. The review of day centre provision would be subject to consultation and an assessment of need and the dementia service would be recommissioned with less of a focus on a physical building and more on how the service can best be delivered in the community, with more of a focus on outreach, subject to consultation.

The Director of Community and Housing advised that the children centres saving was proposed for 2022/23 which would give time to review the buildings and service offer; and the income generating capacity of those buildings. In respect of the day centres, there had been a decline in take-up and there was a need to review how those services are delivered across the community. In respect of in-house provision for those with learning difficulties, there was potential to deliver the services in a different way and officers were keen to engage strategic partners.

The Chair thanked all for their contributions and reiterated the Cabinet's commitment to proper scrutiny and the provision of Equality Analyses as requested.

RESOLVED:

1. That the draft deferred savings/income proposals (Appendix 4) put forward by officers be agreed and referred to the Overview and Scrutiny panels and Commission in January 2021 for consideration and comment.
2. That the savings and the associated draft equalities analyses for the savings noted in November (Appendices 3 and 5) be agreed.
3. That the draft Capital Programme 2021-2025 be agreed and referred to the Overview and Scrutiny panels and Commission in January 2021 for consideration and comment.
4. That the proposed Council Tax Base for 2021/22 set out in paragraph 2.6 and Appendix 1 be agreed.