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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 1 SEPTEMBER 2020

(7.15 pm - 10.10 pm)

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

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager), James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities), Doug Napier (Leisure and Culture Greenspaces Manager) and Charles Baker (Waste Strategy and Commissioning Manager)

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

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 2)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

The Chair requested an amendment to the previous meetings minutes (this discussion was previously scheduled for Marchs cancelled meeting). The minutes were incorrectly published before discussions with the Head of Democracy Services had concluded with regards to the re-vote that was taken therefore tonight's minutes need to reflect this.

A motion that 'recommends Cabinet consider the full Equality Impact of their proposals across the borough by looking at the available data on car vehicle ownership by area to see if it impacts the Equality Assessment' was voted on and recorded as defeated but procedure was followed incorrectly in this instance. The recommendation stands and the Cabinet paper can be read in full here: <https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s32143/Reference%20from%20scrutiny%20-%20Diesel%20Levy%20for%20Cabinet%2023.03.20.pdf>

Panel RESOLVED to agree this amendment for the minutes.

### **Matters arising:**

Parking Services provided feedback on the recommendations as follows;

Recommendation 1: “This Panel recommends that Cabinet look at the available evidence with the intention of putting a greater focus on incentives to encourage and support residents to change vehicles to less polluting types, including looking at examples from other boroughs’.

Response: We continue to investigate other initiatives. However we have identified Brent Council who have implemented a ‘Permit surrender scheme’.

Recommendation 2: “This Panel recommends that Cabinet consider the full Equality Impact of their proposals across the borough by looking at the available data on car vehicle ownership by area to see if it impacts the Equality Assessment”

Response: Information on Car ownership at London and Borough wide level is reasonably readily available and was used as part of the report. However there is only marginal difference in car ownership in terms of vehicle type (diesel/petrol) and emission bands within the borough. Therefore, there is no obvious impact on the Equality Assessment, however we will continue to assess the impact.

#### 4 IDVERDE (Agenda Item 4)

Representatives from Idverde (Richard Burton, Martyn Bradley and Zsolt Takacs) were welcomed and introduced to the Panel.

The Greenspaces Manager summarised the report.

The Chair invited public speakers to share their views on the performance of the service.

Tony Burton – Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum:

- Merton’s Greenspaces are an essential public service.
- Although we have had constructive dealings with idverde, performance is below par with the target exceeded in just 4 of the 14 months.
- Not enough staff. Too few staff have basic horticultural knowledge.
- Contract needs more active and assertive management.
- Scrutiny need to be upskilled for large scale contracts.
- A more regularly updated performance dashboard needs to be requested - weekly/monthly and annually.

Alison Cousins – John Innes Society:

- Our comments overall are positive though there have been some issues of careless mowing – bark stripped off young trees and saplings, rose bushes ruined.
- However, staff are easy to contact and make every effort to make friends group’s lives easier with hoses and equipment etc.
- Thanked Idverde staff for helping Friend’s groups to clear litter from illegal raves. It is very much appreciated.
- Kendor Gardens has also benefited from the Community Payback Teams.

Philomena Kennedy – Battles Area Residents Association:

Grass areas and hedges well maintained but there is a lack of attention to other areas

- Gates locked too late at night. Problems with drinking parties, littering and ASB. Damage is being done to the park at this time.
- Toilets facilities not open or maintained. People using greenery as a toilet, railings still not painted. Swing gates not fixed. Potholes in tarmac.
- Repairs in children's play area still not performed.
- Haydon's Road is much less maintained than other areas.

Richard Burton, General Manager for Idverde, responded:

- Started with 79 FTEs, currently employing 101 FTE's.
- We do ensure staff are adequately trained.
- As a business, we are always looking at how we can better our service and reduce our carbon footprint. We are looking to use more carbon friendly equipment.

Following Panel member questions and responses from the Assistant Director for Public Space and the Greenspaces Manager, the Panel discussed recommendations.

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 Idverde Grounds Maintenance service and to raise issues for consideration by Cabinet.

The Panel would welcome the opportunity to undertake further process mapping work on the inspection and reporting methodology within the contract. In order to fully understand how the performance data is created and reported, the Panel requests further information, including but not limited to;

- Contract specifications / classification for different types of greens spaces.
  - Directory of standards/management plans for different classifications of green spaces
  - Findings represented by type
- a) **Types inspected in direct proportion to square meterage of that type within the borough.**
- b) **Details on how the average is created**
- c) **Ratio of inspections for those 'below standard' to how many are 'random'. Ideally there needs to be a 'random' to**

**‘re-inspection’ ratio that forces those areas that have ‘failed’ to be re-inspected within a shorter amount of time.**

Additionally, alongside this information, the Panel would like to undertake site visits to a sample of green spaces in Merton, with details of the reporting pro forma used by Client Officers when inspecting.

The Panel recommended that the Council’s Tree Strategy is reviewed and updated to include how new trees are established and how all trees are maintained.

The Panel recommends that the Council create an overarching Green Spaces strategy in line with the Council’s climate commitment and with a focus on community wellbeing.

The Panel recommends to Cabinet that the Council should consider developing a ‘One Stop Shop’ web based reporting system to make it easier for our residents to report any issues relating to parks, waste and public spaces in one place and bring an update on this to the Sustainable Communities Panel.

Further to this, a recommendation to display signage in parks informing residents on how to report issues and express their views would enable the Council to be fully aware of the resident experience of our green spaces.

The Panel recommended that a quarterly stakeholder meeting be held, made up of groups included within the independent greenspaces forum and other like-minded organisations.

For both Idverde’s Annual Report and the Independent Green Spaces Forum annual report to come to the Sustainable Communities Panel.

The Panel requested quarterly written updates from Officers providing information and feedback on how the recommendations are being met and evidence that the service is improving. This work should also be underpinned by amending the data included within the performance monitoring framework to include both a monthly and quarterly measure.

Additionally the Panel also requested that Idverde return to the Sustainable Communities Panel in one year in order to carry out a review of the progress achieved.

## **5 WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANING (Agenda Item 5)**

The Waste, Strategy and Commissioning Manager presented the report and formally acknowledged the commitment and professionalism shown by Veolia staff in delivering the service in these unprecedented times (general waste has increased by 12%)

Panel Member questions were answered by the Waste, Strategy and Commissioning Manager, Assistant Director of Public Spaces and the Veolia General Manager:

The last twelve months have seen a steady improvement in performance, however we acknowledge there is still room for improvement in managing individual crews' performance.

There are two current strategies to manage fly tipping at shopping parades and flats above shops. The Fly tipping Strategy and a 'flats above shops' strategy. Both strategies build on ongoing and live communications to a transient population in terms of informing and engaging, including reminders of collection days. This is further supported by our enforcement teams who provide further information and engagement.

With regards to flash flooding, we have a regular gulley schedule that's managed by Veolia. They undertake a cyclical cleansing schedule at different rates per location type (i.e. town centres - 4 times a year. Resident areas - bi annually). Reactive maintenance and ad hoc requests are managed as required.

Performance improvement plans follow a standard process. We are seeing a slow improvement trend with complaints having decreased for the recycling crew.

We are one of the leading authorities in respect of enforcing littering offences and fly tipping issues.

## 6 BISHOPSFORD ROAD BRIDGE: VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Future Merton gave an update alongside a short presentation.

For clarity throughout this project we will continue to use 'Bishopsford Road Bridge' although we do recognise it has previously been called Mitcham Bridge. There has been a suggestion to hold a competition to rename the bridge.

## 7 CLIMATE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN: VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 7)

The Director of Environment and Regeneration gave a brief update and highlighted a few points:

- Climate Change action plan - To be presented to Council in November
- Development of implementation group – identifying external funding and tapping into grassroots support.
- Developing actions and initiatives – tree planting, transport strategy and other actions are already being embedded in Council policy.

Implementation group will be co-chaired by representative from the Council and member of the public. There will be a public call to seek those that are interested in working with the body.

## 8 COVID-19 TRANSPORT STRATEGY (Agenda Item 8)

The Head of Future Merton gave a short presentation to the Panel.

The Chair invited Luke McCarthy, Chair of Merton Residents' Transport Group, to input to the agenda item.

- Fantastic ambition from the council but delivery has been quite slow.
- Schemes have been watered down.
- We have concerns around school streets (3 dropped out, some don't address correct point where children are dropped off), originally 10 LTNs planned (now less and smaller than planned), cycling initiatives not fully delivered.
- Good to see CIL funding but Council need to explore other funding.
- Better communication with residents needed.

A Panel member proposed that the panel should receive a copy of the council's communications plan around school streets and low traffic neighbourhoods and comment on it in the near future.

## 9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 9)

The Panel looked at the key areas in the performance monitoring information.

## 10 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 10)

The work programme was agreed.