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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

14 JULY 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.20 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Ben Butler,
Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Brenda Fraser,
Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Aidan Mundy,
Mansoor Ahmad, Roz Corder, Councillor Sally Kenny and
Councillor Thomas Barlow

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mark Allison,
Frank Dick (Interim Head of Recovery), Hannah Doody (Chief
Executive) and Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Nick McLean (Cllr David Williams as sub).

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 as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising:

Scrutiny Officer circulated the notes from Chris Lee about step free access at Haydon's road and the data from HR on recruitment prior to the meeting.

4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2021/22 (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair welcomed and congratulated our new Chief Executive Hannah Doody. Both the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council were asked to set out their priorities for Merton in the year ahead.

Leader:

Bridging the gap/levelling up is my top priority.

I recognise that there is still not enough BAME senior managers and that's something I certainly want us to make progress on.

As Leader I have;

- Ensured free school meals continued to be provided
- Re-adopted one of the country's most generous council tax rebate schemes for low-income households
- During the pandemic I helped start a food bank service and implemented the Merton Together initiative, which brings communities together with the Council and voluntary sector to get support to where it's most needed.
- Introduced the Your Merton consultation, which is the biggest community conversation in Merton's history

Chief Exec:

We are still responding to a pandemic so focusing on driving the vaccination rates up in Merton will continue to be a priority.

Alongside this, my priorities will be;

- Comprehensive Spending Review
- Levelling up and improving opportunities
- The Social Care Reform
- Upcoming Children's Services reviews
- Young people's mental health - we're seeing a large surge in demand
- Housing and planning reform
- The work of Your Merton – Understanding that engagement and what really matters to our residents.

In response to Commission Members questions,

- With regards to the Clarion repairs and maintenance issues, the Chief Executive will be undertaking visits to all the Clarion estates with Claire Miller, Clarion CEO. Our power is incredibly limited so resolving these issues has to be about negotiation and working together with Clarion which I will continue to build on.
- Discussions around how to address the challenge of housing supply and increasing the provision of affordable housing in a borough where you've got real site and land challenges are ongoing. We've got to figure out our assets and figure out what we could do with them as our starting point.
- We will use resources like Merton College and the apprenticeship levy to build up skills and employment opportunities for young people of the borough who are leaving school and university.
- A Commission Members concerns were echoed by the Chief Executive who confirmed our school and social work communities have growing concerns about children and young people's mental health in Merton. Merton is served

very well by the Southwest London and St George's Mental Health Trust. There is also access to advice, information and online coping therapies and strategies. Unfortunately we have seen cutbacks to mental health services and resources for a number of years so there is an issue around access to beds and where those beds are if young people need admission. Myself (Chief Executive) and the Leader are talking to our NHS colleagues this week to discuss the backlog of care in the community and mental health but our focus can't just be in the hospitals, it's got to be about our mental health for our young people in our community as well.

- A Commission Member commented on the rise of HMO's in the borough. The Leader agreed it is a growing concern, over the last 16 months in particular, and whilst we do take action against bad landlords when they're identified, proof and evidence render it a hard process.
- The Leader has been working with Thames Water to address the blocked drains and flooding issues. It's clear they need to improve their infrastructure and we've written to them today explaining we feel they need to do more for our residents.
- The Chief Executive thanked Members for promoting and encouraging vaccinations and also wanted to recognize the hard work of those teams under the leadership of Director of Public Health.

5 RECOVERY AND MODERNISATION PROGRAMME - PRESENTATION (Agenda Item 5)

Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, and Frank Dick, Interim Recovery Manager presented some slides on the origins of the program, which date back to the internal review LGA peer challenge. Both of those reviews informed us about what the council needed to do, particularly around technology, to improve customer contact and the use of digital solutions to improve the efficiency of the organisation as a whole.

The program has these three broad connected objectives;

- Developing and embedding the opportunities and benefits already evident through the experience of responding to the pandemic;
- Reimagining, rethinking and redesigning operating models to...
- Deliver substantial improvements, efficiencies and savings

The pandemic has brought about an awareness of the fact that we can work very differently, not least the working arrangements around staff working from home. Using technology differently and our developing relationship with the voluntary sector has informed a lot of the work that we have within this program.

The immediate shift to hybrid working tested our digital capacity and over the last fifteen months has tested our approach to staff management and health and well-

being, but it has also delivered significant benefits in terms of work-life balance and also the opportunity to realise savings as we reduce our footprint. Not just savings financially but savings in terms of carbon and our commitment to the climate change emergency.

The Chair thanked Chris Lee and Frank Dick for their presentation.

6 IDENTIFY QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 6)

The Borough Commander will be joining us in September.

Please can all Members submit your questions by the end of this month so we can reasonably request written answers from the Borough Commander.

A Commission member requested a reminder of the deadline to the group offices - Scrutiny Officer to action.

7 DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 21/22 (Agenda Item 7)

The Chair requested the Commission is given the opportunity to scrutinize the results of the 'Your Merton' consultation.

Scrutiny Officer confirmed discussions have been held with the policy team – the results of your Merton are still being collated and will proceed to LSG in September. Current provisional date of November for presentation to the Commission.