

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

28 APRIL 2021

(7.15 pm - 8.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Brenda Fraser,
Councillor Edward Gretton, Councillor Paul Kohler,
Councillor Nick McLean, Mansoor Ahmad,
Councillor Billy Christie and Councillor David Chung

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors

David Keppler (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Chris Lee
(Director of Environment and Regeneration) and Evereth Willis
(Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Aidan Mundy (Cllr John Dehaney as sub), Cllr Ben Butler (Cllr David Chung as sub) and Roz Corder (Co-opted Member).

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:

During the item on Universal Credit at the last meeting Councillor McCabe queried the number of 25 Kick Start employees that the Council were looking to take on. Further investigation outside of the meeting revealed that currently there are 46 placement opportunities that have been identified.

4 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (Agenda Item 4)

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented a report on Universal Credit.

A Commission Member asked whether it is feasible for the data to include information on the typical duration of claims. I.e. x percentage of persons might be on universal credit for a period of less than 12 months or some 36 months plus.

Action: Head of R&B to contact the CAB and job centre to request if data is available, with a view to returning to the Commission in around six months' time.

For future updates on Universal Credit, the Manager of Mitcham Job Centre and a CAB representative will be invited to attend.

5 EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY - TO FOLLOW (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair welcomed Evereth Willis, Equalities & Community Cohesion Officer, to the meeting of the Commission.

Key points included;

- The great work by the Council and Voluntary Sector at the start of the pandemic in setting up the Community Response Hub.
- We have been chosen as a pilot site for the Workforce Race Equality Standards. This is a national standard that's usually for adults and children social care but we're using the principles corporately across the council.
- Work on the refreshed strategy is underway and will be presented to the Commission prior to Cabinet.

In response to Commission Member questions, the Equalities Lead provided further information;

The additional functionality for name blind recruitment was considered when replacing the HR system and it hasn't been ruled out. However the HR data shows that in terms of shortlisting and longlisting, the Council is reflecting the community it serves. The data on recruitment shows the problem in terms of recruiting BAME staff is at the interview phase (where name blind recruitment would have no impact). Effort is being put to ensure that, as far as possible, particularly for senior positions where the disparity, black members of staff on the interview panel. CMT are seeking to put this practice into place.

Domestic Violence – The Safer Merton team are looking at how we can further improve our domestic violence arrangements in light of the bill passed.

With regards to step free access at stations;

- Raynes Park - Too difficult for Network Rail to deal with, unless or until Crossrail 2 comes along.
- Motspur Park – Has been added to the Network Rail list
- Haydons Road – Director of E&R will reply outside the meeting
- Wimbledon Park – Has been given planning consent but is contingent on TFL's financial deal.

Asylum Seekers – The Council is in favour of the lift the ban campaign. A report to Cabinet on this matter is expected shortly.

Action: Clarification on NEET figures to be provided. Detail would need to come from Liz Hammond.

Recovery and Modernisation Programme – Director of E&R agreed to share details of the Recovery and Modernisation programme at a future meeting.

The Chair commented on the need for more actions to be measured, which was further endorsed by the Commission.

The Commission RESOLVED to request that a progress report be received in six months' time.

6 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF COUNCILLORS AND SENIOR MANAGERS (Agenda Item 6)

The Commission discussed the report provided.

A Commission Member asked why there is such an imbalance in terms of the gender split between council staff and council managers. The significant majority of our staff are women and yet just slightly more than half the managers are men. Are we simply failing to recruit women managers at the proportion that we are recruiting women staff members?

Do the HR department or the council as a whole have any actual concrete targets around the recruitment of gender and ethnicity?

Action: Scrutiny Officer to follow up with HR.

7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT - UNAVAILABLE (Agenda Item 7)

This report was unavailable and will be carried over to the first meeting of the next municipal year

8 MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair invited comments on the results of the Member Survey.

Although the number of completed forms returned was low, satisfaction with the scrutiny function appears to remain consistent as in previous years.

Members expressed ideas on how to improve the process, such as seeking responses from a wider range of stakeholders for responses and adding more open ended questions.