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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 4 MAY 2021

(7.15 pm - 9.10 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Daniel Holden (in the Chair),
Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor David Dean,
Councillor Nick Draper, Councillor Anthony Fairclough,
Councillor Geraldine Stanford and Councillor Dave Ward

John Bosley (Assistant Director Public Space Contracts and Commissioning), Anthony Hopkins (Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration) and James McGinlay (Assistant Director for Sustainable Communities)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Aidan Mundy (Councillor Pauline Cowper as sub).

Councillor Daniel Holden took the role of Chair.

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.

The Chair welcomed a new member of the committee – Councillor Dave Ward.

4 IDVERDE - VERBAL UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair welcomed Richard Burton from Idverde to the meeting.

The Assistant Director of Public Space gave a presentation to feedback on the progress made against the recommendations from September 2020 Panel.

There have been challenges over the last six months which have impacted the service. The Government guidance and restrictions that have been imposed including lockdowns and tier four restrictions have meant we've had to turn off and on different aspects of our parks and green spaces which has caused a further strain on what was our business's normal model in terms of the work undertaken.

Due to the social distancing requirements there have been operational modifications that we've also had to make within the service as a whole i.e. limited number of vehicles and resources, reduced number of operatives in those vehicles doing work.

The AD for Public Space answered Panel Members follow up questions;

With regards to increased littering in parks during busier seasons, we will be looking at ways we can provide more local storage for collected litter and we have also included some improved local signage asking park users to take their litter home with them.

Communications is an identified weakness - we do need to improve upon that and as part of a restructure we will be putting in place a coordinated role which will help in terms of dealing with our street champions and our friends groups and also making sure we keep people informed.

The AD for Public Spaces extended an invite to the Panel to undertake site visits to a sample of green spaces in Merton to understand how the service is monitored.

Action: AD of Public Space and Scrutiny Officer to organise.

Following discussions, the Panel RESOLVED that both Idverde's Annual Report and the IMGSF Annual Report return to the Sustainable Communities Panel once they are signed off.

5 MERTON ADULT EDUCATION - ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education presented the academic year report covering the period from August 2019 to July 2020.

- The service was inspected by Ofsted and achieved a good overall outcome across all grading areas.
- We've been successful in applying for over £540k which is now being invested into looking at the future job market, the future skill needs of residents and adjusting the curriculum provision as a result of that

In response to Panel Members questions;

We'll be investing more in core skills around maths, english and digital literacy and job-ready skills

We've got quite a significant creative arts element within the provision and you'll see from the report that the satisfaction levels of the learners experience means that they really do enjoy the courses and what they're undertaking

We've received feedback from learners that they're interested in courses around construction and building skills so we're looking to commission some new provision in the next academic year.

With regards to key performance indicators, there's a summary of the main KPI's in the report and underneath those sit another tranche of 40-50 separate indicators that support the evidence base around how we're achieving on our objectives. We take those indicators down to a further granular level, particularly around the 8/9 different providers we commission per year, to look at the differences and trends within those.

6 LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE - ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education presented the annual libraries and heritage service report.

In response to Panel Members questions;

Last year we had 304 active volunteers in our libraries. Numbers have dropped at the moment but what we are starting to see as we recover is a lot of our volunteers are returning and doing new things in terms of online provision and online activities.

With regards to the savings proposal for a staff less environment during off-peak hours - At the moment there's a basic security guard provision, which is supplemented by volunteers and other staff when available, during the lowest demand hours. The savings proposal will seek to remove the security guard provision during those hours.

Using your card and pin number to access the library is increasingly common place technology in public libraries across England and there are a good handful of London boroughs that have already implemented this and we're learning from them around kind of any issues and how they've resolved them. There are many different kinds of CCTV and surveillance systems to monitor safety and a lot of instructions for customers if there are any issues.

The saving isn't due to be implemented until till next April so we're using this time to trial and test to ensure that we iron out any issues prior to that time.

7 GLL LEISURE (Agenda Item 7)

The AD of Public Spaces gave a brief update in terms of the impacts of Covid on GLL and the plans for recovering the business following the lifted restrictions.

After re-opening our leisure centres that have been closed for a significant period, we've had some encouraging signs in terms of memberships and use by our residents, which is travelling in a positive direction.

Referencing section four in the report, Members can see the terms of the agreement and the degree of financial support we have provided Gll during this difficult period. The timetable and summary of the actions provides further assurance that we will be receiving these monies back over the longer contract period.

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

A Panel Member queried why some data sets says 'data only'.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration clarified that some indicators are set in order to collect data for information purposes only rather than setting a target i.e. planning application volume is an interesting indicator to monitor it's a barometer of economic development activity in the borough but it's not appropriate to set a target necessarily because it's more a fluctuation of the economy rather than one that we want to influence either way.

9 TOPIC SUGGESTIONS FOR 2021/22 (Agenda Item 9)

Members suggested looking at;

- Transport measures/ school streets
- Outdoor sporting provision

