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COUNCIL

7 FEBRUARY 2024

(7.15 pm - 10.03 pm)

PRESENT (in the Chair), Councillor Gill Manly, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Thomas Barlow, Councillor Hina Bokhari, Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Billy Christie, Councillor Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Edward Foley, Councillor Brenda Fraser, Councillor Jenifer Gould, Councillor Joan Henry, Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor Andrew Howard, Councillor Natasha Irons, Councillor Sally Kenny, Councillor Linda Kirby, Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Edith Macauley, Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Aidan Mundy, Councillor Dennis Pearce, Councillor Marsie Skeete, Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor Helena Dollimore, Councillor James Williscroft, Councillor Sheri-Ann Bhim, Councillor John Braithwaite, Councillor Michael Butcher, Councillor Caroline Charles, Councillor Eleanor Cox, Councillor Klaar Dresselaers, Councillor Chessie Flack, Councillor Kirsten Galea, Councillor Ross Garrod, Councillor Jil Hall, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Susie Hicks, Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Andrew Judge, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Samantha MacArthur, Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Councillor John Oliver, Councillor Robert Page, Councillor Michael Paterson, Councillor Tony Reiss, Councillor Slawek Szczepanski, Councillor Matthew Willis, Councillor Max Austin and Councillor Victoria Wilson

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

At the start of the meeting, Councillors Akyigyina, Kirby, Fairclough, McLean and Foley spoke following the death of Honorary Alderman John Dehaney in November 2023.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

Councillor Page declared an interest in Item 11 noting that the report referenced their employer and would therefore not be voting on that item.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the two meetings held on 15 November 2023 are agreed as an accurate record.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE MAYOR, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader spoke on Honorary Alderman John Dehaney, Holocaust Memorial Day, provided an update on Galpins Road and The Study Prep School and on child saver accounts.

The Mayor provided an update on their previous and upcoming events and activities.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 5)

The responses to the written public questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the questioners in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'public questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

6 COUNCILLORS' ORDINARY PRIORITY QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 6)

The responses to the written member ordinary priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'member ordinary priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

7a STRATEGIC THEME: MAIN REPORT (Agenda Item 7a)

The Strategic Theme report on Building a Sustainable Future was moved by Councillor McCabe and seconded by Councillor Fraser.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 as set out in agenda item 16 was moved by Councillor McGrath and seconded by Councillor Bokhari.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 as set out in agenda item 16 was moved by Councillor Gould and seconded by Councillor Willis.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 3 as set out in agenda item 16 was moved by Councillor Hicks and seconded by Councillor Hall.

Councillors Kaweesa, Flack, Austin, Charles and Fairclough also spoke on the item.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 1 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 20, Against – 36, Not Voting – 1.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 2 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 27, Against - 29, Not Voting – 1.

The Liberal Democrat Amendment 3 was put to the vote and fell: Votes For – 27, Against – 29, Not Voting – 1.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Theme report is agreed.

7b STRATEGIC THEME: COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS (Agenda Item 7b)

The responses to the written member strategic theme priority questions were circulated prior to the meeting. The Mayor then invited each of the members in turn to ask (if they wished) a further question to the Cabinet Member. A copy of the supplementary questions and responses will be included in the 'member strategic theme priority questions to Cabinet Members' published document.

It was also noted that a copy of the remaining Member questions and responses will be published after the meeting, in line with Constitutional requirements.

7c STRATEGIC THEME: MOTION (Agenda Item 7c)

The motion was moved by Councillor Akyigyina and seconded by Councillor Brunt.

Councillor Mundy declared an interest in the item as they worked at St Thomas Hospital and therefore would not be voting on the item.

The Liberal Democrat amendment as set out in agenda item 19 was moved by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Page.

Councillors Cox and Kohler spoke on the item.

The Labour OR Conservative OR cross-party amendment was put to a vote and fell – votes in favour: 27, votes against: 29, not voting: 1.

The substantive motion was then put to a vote and was carried – votes in favour: 56, votes against: 0, not voting: 1.

RESOLVED:

Council notes:

- Equal access to local health services in Merton is vital to Building a Sustainable Future for all residents in Merton, including younger people.

- Young people in Merton should not experience inequalities in the accessibility of health services for any reason, including based on the type of health condition experienced or treatment required.
- The provision, quality, and accessibility of services for physical and mental health conditions are of equal importance to each other in Building a Sustainable Future.
- Reduced access to cancer services in Merton could cause negative, knock-on implications on the mental health and broader wellbeing of young people living with cancer in the borough.
- NHS England's shortlisting of the Evelina Hospital and St George's Hospital as options for the location of the new Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre for south London, Kent, Medway, Surrey, Sussex and Brighton and Hove, and the Council's firm predilection for children's cancer services to remain at St George's Hospital.
- NHS England's preference for services to be relocated to the Evelina Hospital, and the detrimental impact this would have on patients and parents in Merton and across the region.
- The shared view of patients, parents, and employees at St George's and affected local authorities in south west London that it would be significantly more sustainable, practical, and cost-effective to retain children's cancer care services at St George's.
- The experienced and excellent delivery of specialist cancer care at St George's Hospital for over 25 years, and the dedicated work of nurses, doctors and hospital staff in providing care to this vulnerable group of patients.
- The capital cost of St George's is estimated at £31 million compared to £44 million in transferring the service to the Evelina Hospital.
- Relocating services to the Evelina Hospital in central London would make it harder for parents and children to access treatment and reduce travel options and accessibility for patients.
- Services at St Georges are not stand-alone; specialist staff work across a variety of trauma cases. Therefore, the move of services to the Evelina Hospital may lead to cuts in funding, staff and vital services in south west London and Surrey.
- That one in four children with cancer will have neurooncological cancer that may require urgent neurosurgery, which is available 24/7 at St George's.
- The essential provision of experienced neurosurgeons at St George's Hospital and the lack of specialist neurological care at the Evelina Hospital, meaning ill children will be transported to Kings College Hospital in Denmark Hill.

Council welcomes:

- The unprecedented support from neighbouring local authorities across Southwest London in campaigning for the consolidation of the Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre at St George's Hospital.
- The work of the Chair of the Healthier Communities and Older People's Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Councillors and Council officers for their advocacy to the NHS Regional Medical Director and NHS England.
- Local cross-party commitments, coordinated by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride, to campaign to protect children's cancer services at St George's.

Council resolves to:

- Write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to urge her to enable St George's to become the Children's Cancer Principal Treatment Centre for south London, Kent, Medway, Surrey, and Sussex and Brighton and Hove.
- Continue working in partnership with other local authorities, patients, families, and hospital staff across the region to protect children's cancer services.

8 NOTICE OF MOTION - LABOUR MOTION (Agenda Item 8)

The motion was moved by Councillor Stringer and seconded by Councillor Macauley.

Councillors McLean, Bokhari and Irons spoke on the item.

The motion was then put to a vote and was carried – votes in favour: 49, votes against: 7, abstentions: 1.

RESOLVED:

Council notes:

- Merton is proud to be a diverse borough and to have a workforce that is making great strides towards being truly reflective of the communities we serve.
- Merton's diverse communities and employees have played a vital role in shaping our borough's identity and are a key part of the vibrant culture and neighbourhoods that make Merton the fantastic place it is today.
- That our diverse ethnic communities have distinct characteristics histories, cultures and identities that should not be homogenised. We have created an 'Inclusive Language Guide' for staff through the continued collaboration with our staff networks and communities, and we are aiming to develop more appropriate terminology to describe the borough's diverse communities.
- The impact of the government's policies and rhetoric on the rise in racism and hate crime during the last 14 years and the impact this has had on Merton's communities and employees.
- That Merton Council and its partners can play an important role in eliminating racism, both within the workplace and within our communities and neighbourhoods. • The need for all Councils to embed racial equality considerations in the decisions we make.
- That our most recent Equality Diversity and Inclusion survey showed that only 52% of staff feel comfortable talking about race at work, and that 7% of respondents have personally experienced, and/or witnessed a colleague experience, a form of racism whilst working for Merton Council.

Council welcomes:

- The zero-tolerance approach to racism, bullying, and harassment adopted by our organisation, but recognises that more work needs to be done.
 - The publishing of our Hate Crime and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies, and the priority of this administration to instil civic pride through reducing inequality, tackling discrimination, and promoting and celebrating diversity across our borough.
- Our commitment to having dedicated safe spaces for open and meaningful discussions about Equality Diversity and Inclusion topics, issues, and concerns.

- The work of our Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities and our Faith and Belief forums to advise on strategic policies, including the local concerns of ethnic minority communities, and our work to eliminate discriminatory practices and racial prejudice in the delivery of Council services and shape inclusive services that are culturally sensitive.
- The Race Equality Network's (REN) continued work to develop and build initiatives across the council, including advising in the procurement of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training for leadership and their active support on all recruitment panels for managerial roles and above.
- The launch of new staff networks, for underrepresented groups, as well as the Aspiring Leaders Program, which aims to nurture career progression and provide skills and training for staff aspiring to leadership roles.

Council believes that:

- Our signature of UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter demonstrates Merton's ongoing commitment to being an explicitly anti-racist organisation and employer. We are committed to being proactively anti-racist, not just non-racist.

Council resolves to:

- Sign UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter and work with UNISON to introduce the commitments contained within the Charter.

9 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25 (Agenda Item 9)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Henry.

Councillors McLean and Oliver spoke on the item.

The report was put to a vote and carried – Votes For – 49, Against – 7, Not Voting – 1.

RESOLVED:

1. That the updating revisions for the 2024/25 council tax support scheme detailed in the report be agreed, in order to maintain low council tax charges for those on lower incomes and other vulnerable residents.
2. That Council agreed the proposed revisions to the 2024/25 scheme

10 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-26 (Agenda Item 10)

The report was moved by Councillor Stringer and seconded by Councillor Szczepanski.

Councillor Page spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council endorsed and adopted the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2026 and the supporting action plan.

11 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEARLY REPORT (Agenda Item 11)

The report was moved by Councillor Christie and seconded by Councillor Whelton.

Councillor Oliver spoke on the item.

The report was put to a vote and was carried: Votes for – 38, against – 16, not voting – 3.

RESOLVED:

A. That Council noted the update on Treasury Management performance for the half year to 30 September 2023

B. That Council delegated authority to the Executive Director of Finance and Digital (S151 officer) to make short term treasury investment decisions not otherwise currently authorised by the Council's Treasury Management Strategy based on current market conditions/interest rates movements and funds availability to maximise the investment returns.

C. That Council noted that the Annual Treasury Management Strategy for FY2024/25 will be presented to the Council in March 2024.

12 VARIATION TO MERTON COMMUNITY PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE (Agenda Item 12)

The report was moved by Councillor Judge and seconded by Councillor Neaverson.

Councillor Fairclough spoke on the report.

RESOLVED:

A. That members agreed to the proposed variation to the Merton Community Panel Terms of Reference.

B. That members delegated authority to the Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development to agree any future variations to the Terms of Reference in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development.

13 REVIEW OF PROPORTIONALITY AND CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 13)

The report was formally moved by Councillor Bhim and formally seconded by Councillor Brunt.

Councillor Fairclough spoke on the item.

RESOLVED:

That Council:

- A. Approved the allocation of seats to political groups as detailed in Appendix A to the report
- B. Approved the appointment of nominations to those seats as detailed in Appendices B, C and D
- C. Appointed the Tenants Champion as detailed in Appendix D
- D. Noted the changes to the membership of Committees that were approved under delegated authority since the last meeting of Council.

14 PETITIONS (Agenda Item 14)

The report was formally moved by Councillor Garrod and formally seconded by Councillor Stringer.

RESOLVED

That Council

1. Notes the update on the petition received at the last meeting,
2. Accepts receipt of a petition presented by Councillors Kaweesa and Butcher entitled "Yes I agree that the Windmill Inn, 40 Commonsides West, Mitcham CR4 4HA should become an asset of community value"

15 BUSINESS FOR THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda Item 15)

That the Strategic Theme for the next ordinary meeting of the Council, being held on 17 July 2024, shall be "Nurturing civic pride, with a focus on Town centres will attract more footfall, events and investment, becoming better places to visit, do business and live".