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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

29 NOVEMBER 2023

(7.15 pm - 8.25 pm)

PRESENT: Councillor Edward Foley (in the Chair), Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Laxmi Attawar, Councillor Billy Hayes, Councillor Usaama Kaweesa, Councillor Paul Kohler, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stuart Neaverson, Councillor John Oliver, Councillor Tony Reiss and Roz Cordner

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Billy Christie, Natasha Irons, Brenda Fraser, Peter McAbe, Stephen Alambritis, Andrew Judge, Eleanor Stringer

Polly Cziok (Executive Director of Innovation & Change), Hannah Doody (Chief Executive), Dan Jones (Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate), Jane McSherry (Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families), John Morgan (Executive Director, Adult Social Care, Integrated Care and Public Health), Asad Mushtaq (Executive Director of Finance & Digital), Lucy Owen (Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development) and Sean Cunniffe

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Agatha Akyigyina (with Cllr Caroline Charles as substitute). Apologies received from co-opted members, Oona Stannard, Becky Cruise, Mansoor Ahmed.

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 were agreed as a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

4 COUNCIL WEBSITE UPDATE (Agenda Item 4)

Sean Cunniffe, Head of Customer Contact, gave an update on the Merton website, one year on, as requested by the Overview & Scrutiny Commission in November 2022.

There is a rise of on-line transactions being performed by residents.

Going forward, we are looking to launch a new recruitment website and there is developmental work on Members Enquiries to mirror the new complaints process.

The website continues to be work a in progress and is continuously reviewed for accuracy and improvements.

5 CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES (Agenda Item 5)

The Chair invited Councillor Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride to outline her priorities.

- Mitcham – Tender is out for a Mitcham Market Manager
- London Borough of Culture
- Keeping our residents safe
- Supporting our communities – Civic pride and investing in neighbourhood's work
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In response to questions

- Women's walk and talk has been very successful. Number of female police officers and council officers' attend.
- Assurance that we will be given an answer as soon as possible re police stations.

The Chair invited Councillor Billy Christie, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services, to outline his priorities.

- Proud of work to support residents during cost-of-living crisis and we will continue this.
- Keen to attract the best and brightest staff to join our workforce. Historically we have a high dependence on agency staff, aiming to recruit to permanent positions.

In response to questions

- Overspend - As an organisation delivering a huge number of services, it is necessary to make amendments over the year along with changing priorities. Budgets do not stay static.
- Dual impact of increase in inflation as well as the huge increase in demand for our services amid the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members for their time.

6 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN (ROUND 1) (Agenda Item 6)

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services gave an overview of the budget plans for 2024/25. Demand for services rising and our limited resources are stretched to the absolute limit. Inflation, cost of living and government funding are all

areas of concern, however we do project a balanced budget that is robust, reasonable, and sustainable.

The Executive Director of Finance & Digital was invited to give an overview of the budget plans for 2024/25. Pay award was significantly more than usual, volatile interest rates, placement costs and accommodation are all pressures that are replicated across London boroughs. Local government finance settlement is due a few days before Christmas.

In January we will begin the second round of scrutiny where we can review these assumptions.

In response to questions:

- We had a set of assumptions for funding, pay award, inflation etc, but these change and this has an effect on our position.
- Flexible use of capital receipts for transformational purposes. Will update on plans for that throughout next budget report.
- Overspend is 8m. Asad happy to spend time with Cllr John Oliver to go through the figures.
- We are halfway through financial year and all departments are taking action to address the overspend. Growth proposals also address underlying budget issues.
- Drawdowns are reported through the monitoring reports.
- There are multiple reasons why a budget changes - Action: Executive of Director of Finance & Digital to provide a table of budget changes.

Appointment of Assistant Director for Finance – business case. Cabinet Member stated the purpose for this growth proposal is to increase senior capacity within the finance department and ensure we can identify efficiencies.

No recommendations to send to Cabinet.

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 7)

The work programme was agreed.

With regards to Civic Pride, Members of the Commission would like to hear more about how this fund impacts the Voluntary Sector Services.