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## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 26 JUNE 2023

(7.15 pm - 9.40 pm)

PRESENT Councillors Councillor Stuart Neaverson (in the Chair), Councillor Daniel Holden, Councillor John Braithwaite, Councillor Michael Brunt, Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Councillor Dan Johnston, Councillor Nick McLean, Councillor Stephen Mercer, Councillor Slawek Szczepanski, Councillor Martin Whelton, Councillor James Williscroft and Councillor Victoria Wilson

Dan Jones (Executive Director, Environment, Civic Pride & Climate), Paul McGarry (FutureMerton Manager) and Lucy Owen (Executive Director of Housing & Sustainable Development)

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Marsie Skeete (Cllr Caroline Charles as substitute).

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

### 3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

Panel members confirmed that these were a true and accurate record of the previous meeting.

Matters arising - Action log to be circulated.

### 4 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair invited the Executive Directors to introduce themselves to the Panel and give an overview of their priorities/challenges and what they would like to achieve in post.

Lucy Owen, Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development.

My priorities are to deliver the new council plan, get underway with building 400 affordable homes, look at regeneration of Morden Town Centre and the borough more widely.

Dan Jones, Executive Director of Environment, Civic Pride and Climate.

Key areas are waste collection, street cleansing, parking, highway maintenance, parks, trading standards, regulatory services, climate agenda, leisure, culture, and libraries.

My priorities will be bringing the street cleansing service back in-house over the next few years, as well as commissioning a new waste collection service and delivering on the Borough of Sport ambition.

## 5 BOROUGH OF SPORT (Agenda Item 5)

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Sport and Heritage, introduced the item.

Being London's Borough of Sport is one of the administrations' priorities. The aim is to ensure that residents, particularly under 16's and over 65s, and those who are from less affluent communities, are more physically active and have access to physical activities at least once a week, and therefore gain the health, social and economic benefits which come from being physically active. This includes sporting activities, walking, cycling, dance – anything that gets residents moving.

In response to questions:

- A bespoke Borough of Sport Get Active portal and activity finder is in development.
- We are currently exploring ideas of installing a running track in Morden.
- In terms of measuring success, measurements will include whether activity is increased borough wide, whether all age groups are involved etc and we will compare and benchmark against London Sport.

Following the proposal of a recommendation for a Facilities Strategy, the Executive Director for Environment, Civic Pride and Climate assured the Panel that the development of a Facilities Strategy has been commissioned and work is underway. This panel supports the development of such a strategy and requested that this be noted formally in the minutes.

**ACTION:** Dan Jones, Executive Director for Environment, Civic Pride and Climate, to investigate whether consultation results can be published.

## 6 ELECTRIC VEHICLE TASK GROUP REPORT (Agenda Item 6)

The Chair invited Cllr Laxmi Attawar, Chair of the Electric Vehicle Charging Task Group, to introduce the report.

Cllr Attawar explained that the task group have made a set of recommendations to help shape the electric vehicle strategy for Merton.

The Cabinet Member for Transport confirmed that on the 19th of June, Cabinet agreed for the recommendations to be rolled into the EV charging strategy.

In response to questions:

The task group met with the Cabinet Member for Transport and Future Merton officers, alongside seeking input from TfL and Gul-E, and looking at practices in other Boroughs.

There will be an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny of the EV strategy.

## 7 COMMUNITY TOILET SCHEME (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Stephen Mercer presented his report and provided an overview of the work undertaken to produce the report, the costs of toilet provision, and the need for a properly funded Community Toilet Scheme.

The Chair invited Julie John from 'More Loos for Merton', supported by Age UK, who explained that More Loos for Merton was established in response to the dire situation in the borough. Julie John drew the Panels attention to Appendix 1 in the report – visits to toilets in the borough.

More Loos for Merton wholeheartedly endorse the reports recommendation and the highlighting of the issue. Council premises should be a beacon and lead by example. We need to bring the voluntary sector on board, work with GLA to make it a statutory duty. This matter affects everybody, not just the old and it can have detrimental effects on health such as dehydration to avoid having to find a toilet. Geographical issue across the borough, Parks/greenspaces also need toilet provision. More Loos for Merton are happy to support by keeping an eye on toilets.

Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Cabinet Member for Civic Pride, congratulated and thanked Cllr Mercer on his report. The current scheme has expired, and we agree it needs to be refreshed. Cllr Stringer also agreed that council buildings need to be included and communications need to be improved but a feasibility study will need to be undertaken to look at this.

A Member asked if street sweeping comes back in house, could the duties include opening public toilets? The Executive Director agreed to look at the feasibility of this suggestion and to look at routes and implications of such.

The Panel moved to vote on the report's recommendations. All Members voted in favour and RESOLVED to send the following recommendations to Cabinet.

Adequate provision of toilets for public use should be recognised as an essential aspect of Merton's public health policy, the fulfilment of which is a matter of civic pride.

Merton should work with London Councils and London Assembly Members to argue that the provision of toilets available for public use should become a statutory duty on local authorities, to be supported by ring-fenced government funding. In addition, it should act in anticipation of a statutory duty, commit funding for such provision and ring-fence it until 2026.

Merton's existing Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) has failed. The CTS should be relaunched and adequately resourced to ensure it is effective and serves a useful purpose.

How should the new Community Toilet Scheme be operated in order to make it successful and enduring? The evidence suggests the following:

- (i) To demonstrate its commitment to Merton, the Council should take the lead by being the first to pledge its assets to the new CTS. Public sector organisations like the NHS should then be asked to pledge their assets, followed by the voluntary sector and not for profit organisations e.g., churches. No payments are proposed.
- (ii) Use case studies from Wimbledon and other London boroughs with successful CTS's to demonstrate the value of toilet provision in attracting customers to town centres as retail and leisure destinations, especially holders of the "grey £" who are otherwise likely to stay at home.
- (iii) The need for toilets in each town centre should be mapped based on footfall and compared with existing provision. A plan should be drawn up to address the shortcomings, using information such as the audit carried out by Age UK in Merton (AUKM) to identify potential members for a new CTS.
- (iv) In seeking candidates for a new CTS for Merton, learn from the membership profile of successful CTS's such as Richmond, and select pubs, supermarkets and larger retailers likely to provide high quality facilities for their customers.
- (v) Examine the strengths and weaknesses of each town centre to decide how best to present the positive case for CTS membership. Payment may be more influential in some town centres than others. The Mitcham Society's Response to the online survey was unfortunately received late but has been considered and is included in the report as an appendix.
- (vi) Employ signage, print and on-line channels to build awareness and usage of the new CTS
- (vii) Payment for enrolling businesses into the CTS can be used selectively and proportionately, to ensure coverage where there would otherwise be gaps
- (viii) It cannot be assumed that the CTS concept is familiar or understood, so a new scheme for Merton will require extensive publicity when it is launched to build awareness. Assurances of hygiene and cleanliness will be needed to win acceptance, especially among the vulnerable groups who have the most to gain from the scheme
- (ix) Given the evidence of commitment of volunteers to improving toilet provision in Merton, the opportunity should be given to involve them in the ongoing monitoring of the standards of toilets maintained by CTS members in Merton. In addition, Councillors should be encouraged to "buy into" the CTS in their own wards by publicising it to their residents and visiting their CTS members. The Council's formal Scrutiny processes can be used to check the development and performance of the new CTS.

Maintain pressure at the highest level, using all levers available to ensure TfL honours its commitment to the feasibility study to restore toilets at Morden station, and press for the reintroduction of provision as a matter of urgency.

Explore the use of the licensing system to make the grant of late-night licences conditional upon access to staff toilets for delivery drivers.

Information published on CTS members must clearly indicate the type of facilities available, particularly in relation to disabled users. As the leader of place and principal driver of the new CTS, the council should review its property assets in Merton to identify one or two realistic potential candidates for accommodating Changing Places Toilets (CPT's), related to the areas of greatest need.

Look for opportunities to amend Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that would encourage businesses to join the CTS when applying for planning permission. Consider the use of CIL funds to provide public toilets in vacant town centre premises where the CTS fails to achieve adequate coverage. Instruct the Planning department to use S106 agreements to ensure more than minimal provision in new developments.

## 8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING (Agenda Item 8)

The Executive Director of Housing and Sustainable Development outlined the slightly different format and narrative and explained that performance monitoring is being looked at corporately and how it can be aligned with the new directorates.

A Member asked why very few fines are being issued for not parking appropriately. Head of Future Merton to speak to Parking Team. Potentially could be down to the need for photographic evidence from a council camera.

Officers looking at whether CRP 044 'parking services' target should be regularised down as it is consistently underperforming .

## 9 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 9)

The work programme was agreed.

## 10 TASK GROUP DISCUSSION (Agenda Item 10)

The Panel discussed suggestions received for task groups. Suggestions included:

- Retrofitting SUDS - This would include a focus on raingardens and look at expanding to other areas, work done in Raynes Park, including on some of the housing estates.
- Accessible streets. A review of how Merton can ensure our streets are inclusive to the needs of all users.

- Living together in close proximity. How can Merton support residents to resolve 'neighbour disputes. Covering all sorts of things relating to SC – environmental health, noise, waste in gardens, abandoned homes and vehicles, anti-social behaviour.

The Panel moved to a vote with 9 votes in favour of a task group on 'Retrofitting in the borough' looking at what we can do as a Council to increase resident awareness about the opportunities, funding, and support available for retrofitting their homes.

There is government funding and other sources available that residents, housing associations and landlords can draw upon for retrofitting but it's very difficult to understand what you can qualify for and what the criteria is.