

# **Overview & Scrutiny**

## **Annual Report**



***May 2003 – May 2004***

This report is also available on our Intranet  
or our website at [merton.gov.uk](http://merton.gov.uk)

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# 1 Foreword by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission



May 2004

The overarching aim of Scrutiny is to ensure, together with the Executive, that the Council provides the best possible service to its communities. Overview and Scrutiny contributes to that aim by:

- Holding the Executive to account by monitoring decision making; calling-in decisions before they are enacted where there are concerns about the impact of the decision; and undertaking pre- and post-decision scrutiny of items on the Forward Plan.
- Monitoring the performance of services and the progress of the Council on its Journey to Excellence by scrutinising performance reports, and asking for more detailed explanations about areas of under-performance.
- Pro-actively reviewing Council policies and services, and making recommendations for improvements.

Overview and Scrutiny acts as a 'Critical Friend', making constructive criticisms where necessary. We are mindful of the ultimate aim to represent our communities by making a difference to their lives. We are at our best when there is public interest and involvement in our work.

The Council has determined to become an 'excellent' authority by 2006 – to be achieved through a Journey to Excellence. Scrutiny has a major part to play in making this happen. Our work programme in the coming year will reflect that. Our role will be to challenge the performance of the authority and identify how changes can be brought about. We need to make sure that the Council's Journey to Excellence is mapped out in the right way that it is heading in the right direction, is on track and arrives on time.

Like other local authorities, we are still developing scrutiny, learning the lessons from our experience and trying to learn from the experiences of others. Each year we have reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of our work over the previous year, and this report highlights both our achievements and those areas we have identified for improvement.

Regards,

Cllr Ian Munn  
Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Commission

*If you have any comments or suggestions about this report or about scrutiny in Merton, please send them to [scrutiny@merton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk) or to the address at the end of this Report.*

# **Part A: Progress over the year**

# 1 Reports from the Scrutiny Chairs



## Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Merton's Overview and Scrutiny Commission has played an important role. It has become more focused to reflect the Council's priorities, but also to challenge our Council's performance over the last year. The Commission established five panels to assist it in its work:

- Life Chances Panel
- Regeneration and the Public Realm Panel
- The Way We Work Panel
- Street Management Panel
- Borough Development Plan

Work was delegated to the appropriate panels and each responded positively, each panel providing a progress report to the Commission. The priorities of the authority enabled the panels to work more collaboratively as many of the issues of concern were reflected in the overlapping remits of the Panels

At the Commission, members tackled some major issues. Just a few of those key issues for scrutiny on which we sent recommendations to decision-makers were:

- Housing Services Review;
- Data Protection and Freedom of Information Act;
- Customer Services and Development Department Backlog
- Wimbledon Theatre;
- Audit Commission Annual Letter.

The Commission also played a key role in Best Value, in particular approving the Domiciliary Care Services Stage 6 summary report and implementation plan.

As Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission I did have a concern over the process for seeking my approval to a decision being taken as urgent, and therefore excluded from call-in. The Opposition Party were not informed at the same time that I was consulted. I have asked all decision makers to re-instate this practice, especially as Councillor Williams would need to make the decision as my Vice-Chair if I were not available. I have asked for the Constitution to be changed.

In the coming year we aim to build on the experiences of 2003-4 set out in this Report. One particular area for development will be the budget process. Plans

are in place to develop better methods for budget scrutiny for 2004/5. These are included in Part B of this report. Our aim is to make scrutiny in Merton better throughout the year by improving communication and encouraging engagement through greater accountability.

Cllr Ian Munn

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission (2003-4)



### **Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

The remit for this Panel has meant that a number of very important issues have needed to be discussed including social services provision and housing management restructuring. The remit of the Panel has allowed each of these issues to be reviewed in a more comprehensive and focused way in line with the priorities of the authority.

Over the year the Panel has conducted a major cross cutting review of the effectiveness of equalities monitoring in making a positive impact on service delivery. The review made various recommendations and identified areas of good practice for sharing across all departments. The recommendations will be monitored through the Corporate Equality Programme.

The Panel has scrutinised a number of policy issues including the Draft Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan. Education Development Plan, Pupil numbers and Places, the Schools Reorganisation Project, Inclusion and the Continuum of Learning, Every Child Matters (Green Paper), Admission Criteria and Admission Arrangements.

Other areas of work included:

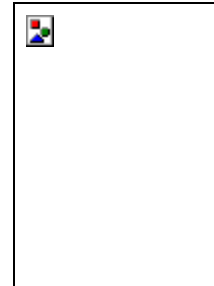
- Policy Review on Recruitment and Retention in Schools - Information on Recruitment of Overseas Teachers
- Progress Towards Achieving Corporate Equality Targets
- Merton Adult Education Three Year Development Plan 2003-2006
- Development of Partnering Contracts
- The Merton Early Years and Childcare Strategy 2004-2006
- Admission arrangements to Merton Community Schools 2005/6 and Establishment of Coordinated Admission Scheme.

To my Councillor colleagues I extend my appreciation for their support and the critical manner in which they have conducted themselves, especially with regard to the increased remit of the panel. My thanks to co-optees, Directors and officers for their dedication and hard work in providing information for the Panel.

Scrutiny continues to be an evolving and learning process and we must strive to make it contribute effectively to strengthening the democratic processes. Scrutiny panels work best when they secure the full involvement of all members and Cabinet portfolio holders in the scrutiny process. Finally, we need to enhance scrutiny by finding further ways of engaging the public, to ensure that we represent the views of our communities.

Councillor David Chung,  
Chair Life Chances Panel Overview and Scrutiny Panel (2003-04)





## **Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Issues relating to the public realm, such as safety and the local environment, tend to be highlighted as many of the main concerns of local residents. Those living in some of the more deprived wards of the Borough are keen to see regeneration improve their local surroundings. Because of this, the decisions scrutinised by the Regeneration and the Public Realm Panel have the potential to have huge impacts on the quality of life for Merton residents.

Some of the key issues that the panel scrutinised and provided recommendations on throughout 2003-4 have included:

- Security in parks and open spaces
- Medium Term Waste Management Strategy
- Town Centre Action Plans
- The new Patchworking arrangements for recycling and refuse collection.

In addition, the Panel undertook a policy review looking at 'Smarter, Clutter Free Streets. The review process provided good opportunities for the panel to get out and about. We carried out some interesting research such as wearing special goggles to understand the problems faced by people who have sight problems. Panel members talked to many members of the local community whilst conducting this policy review, and I think it has been a good example of how a scrutiny process can engage with the public.

I would like to thank the members of the public and other organisations who have taken the time to talk to the panel. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Regeneration and Public Realm Panel members for their dedication over the last year.

Cllr Andy Coles  
Chair Regeneration and Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel (2003-04)



## **The Way We Work Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Over the year, the panel examined a number of issues, which included the monitoring of two policy reviews – one review of the leasing of commercial property and another on the Council's consultation strategy. In addition, a review of Satellite One Stop Shops was undertaken.

Other key issues scrutinised by the panel over the year included:

- Corporate Budgetary Control 2003/4
- The monitoring of the use of Agency Staff
- Access to Customer Services
- Performance Management
- The possible relocation of Morden Post Office into Merton Link
- Complaints: Policy and Performance
- Corporate Procurement to meet national Procurement Strategy
- Contract Procedures and Monitoring Arrangements
- Final Report on the Best Value Review on Office Accommodation
- Corporate Equality Programme 2003-2006
- The cost of External Legal Advice For Education PFI
- Use of Consultants

Over the year, the panel invited a number of witnesses to provide evidence and some Cabinet members. The need to engage and increase resident participation in meeting attendance and participation will be a great priority for the following year. The Panel will also need to concentrate on more focused and concise feedback against performance to action plans for previous policy reviews.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all panel members for their contributions over the year. I would also like to thank those from other organisations who helped the panel in its work, including witnesses from other boroughs who participated in the policy review on One Stop Satellite Shops.

Cllr Leighton Veale  
Chair, Way We Work Overview and Scrutiny Panel (2003-2004)



## **Street Management Panel**

The Street Management Panel has considered a number of issues over the last year. These have included:

- CPZ Schemes in Wimbledon Town Centre, Wimbledon Park and Collier Wood
- Safer Routes to Schools
- Wimbledon Hill Bus Priority Scheme
- Review of Highways Maintenance and Proposed Public Service Agreement Bid
- Cannon Hill Lane and parking restrictions at junctions.
- Wimbledon town Centre – cycling and Walking Project
- Road Accident Casualty Data and Best Value Performance Indicators 99
- Mitcham Town Centre – Accident Remedial measures
- Business Planning Process 2003/2006
- Disabled Bays – Review of Current Criteria
- 2004-2005 Borough Spending Plan

Following changes made last year, Policy reviews were removed from the Panels remit, however subsequent changes have again been made which have re-instated Policy Reviews. When the change was made it was too late to embark on a review in the Municipal year.

I believe that the Panel effectively engaged with the public and we heard many representations over the past year both on Controlled Parking Zones and especially in relation to proposals for a bus priority scheme on Wimbledon Hill, which was finally resolved last year after many years debate. We also had a major issues relating to Cannon Hill Lane and parking restrictions on road junctions. The Panel has scrutinized many decisions over the past year and has on many occasions changed the recommendations after taking into account the views of the public. Likewise items that have gone through the Panel have been subjected to the call-in process when the Cabinet Member subsequently overturned the Panel's representations.

At the end of the Municipal year, I stood down after two years as Chair of Street Management. I have enjoyed my time as Chair even if at times meeting have been difficult and I would like to express my thanks to officers for the help and support they have given me as Chair of Street Management.

Cllr Martin Whelton  
Chair of Street Management Panel (2003-2004)

## **2 New initiatives and experimentation**

### **Implementing Recommendation from 2002- 03 Annual Report**

Last year's Annual Report set out six recommendations to improve the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Some of these recommendations have been successful, but more work is needed to ensure that Scrutiny in Merton is really effective.

- 1 Items that are 'for information' are no longer allowed onto agendas. Agenda items will only be accepted if they contain issues that scrutiny members can make recommendations on. This is now starting to be successfully implemented.
- 2 Criteria have been set for agenda items so scrutiny members focus on the important things and don't get distracted with issues that are not priority. These criteria are restated in Part B of this report. This has reduced the number of items on some agendas, but some meetings are still too long, with too many heavy items to scrutinise in one meeting.
- 3 There are tighter criteria for scrutiny reviews for the same reason, these too are set out in Part B of this report. These were applied to 2003-4 selection of reviews and will be applied to this coming year's selection process.
- 4 Members have sought to develop better ways of engaging and involving the public in scrutiny. Last year Scrutiny Panels engaged over 100 members of the public. Scrutiny reviews, such as the Smarter, Clutter Free Streets review, have seen Members 'go to the public', and are beginning to find new and exciting ways of making the scrutiny process relevant to our communities.
- 5 It was recommended that during scrutiny meetings, members would focus to a greater extent on the number and weight of the recommendations. There is still work to be done to ensure that scrutiny discussions are outcome orientated, offering constructive recommendations.
- 6 It was recommended that scrutiny members would independently seek information in between meetings. The use of task groups to track new service initiatives have proved useful, for example the new Patchworking scheme. However, there is still more potential to reduce agenda items, or have more information with which to scrutinise agenda items, by asking officers questions outside of meetings.

### **Other Improvements and Initiatives**

- In this last year, our policy reviews have been more focussed in their relationship to the Journey to Excellence, to other inspection programmes, and in their scope and delivery.
- The use of shorter and sharper reviews including specific identification of resource and cost implications for recommendations that came from reviews have enabled the scrutiny process to become more focused and relevant.

- The benefits of task group work for reviews were much appreciated this year and included the ability for more effective cross panel working as well as the use of lead members for particular aspects of reviews. Greater use has also been made of site visits by members and witness interviews to gain a more qualitative assessment of current service delivery and potential for improvement.
- The work of the Scrutiny Panels has enabled Members to work in collaboration with officers within the Authority and with our partners. The review undertaken on Access to Welfare Benefits illustrates where the members not only the benefits of greater cross panel working and officer engagement, but also from forging better links with relevant partners such as the CAB and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- The smaller number of scrutiny panels has forced a sharper focus on to what is important to consider. However, this is an area for improvement – the Life Chances Panel with its very wide remit found it difficult to avoid a large number of agenda items.
- The introduction of a ‘Scrutiny Newsletter’ has allowed us to have regular updates on the work of the Panels, and has been a useful tool for promoting the work of Scrutiny throughout the Council.
- Finally, we have started the new health scrutiny well and established relationships across the network of local providers. The Health Scrutiny process has increased the amount of engagement with partner organisations and authorities. This has included the Overview and Scrutiny Commission playing a vital and active role in the network of health organisations and local authorities responsible for health care provision in the area. We have commented critically on the proposals for the Clinical Services Review of hospital provision and on the site selection criteria being considered by local health providers.

The emergence of patient and public involvement in health through Patients Forums and Patients Advocacy will continue to develop in 2004/5. However, we recognise this is a huge agenda and we shall need to be disciplined to ensure we follow a manageable work programme which addresses what is important to improve the health of our residents. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertook this health role in this first year underpinning its importance but this has since been reviewed.

### **3 Action on scrutiny reviews**

The Overview & Scrutiny panels undertook a number of reviews during the year. As a result of previous reviews becoming extended a deliberate timeframe has now been established for reviews this year of 5–6 months as a maximum from start to finish, to ensure they did not exceed the municipal year or lose their significance. Reviews were undertaken as ‘task and finish’ projects and undertaken sequentially by each panel. This fast turnaround of a review meant that momentum was maintained during the review and members were soon able to see the effects of their work; the review of the disproportionate number of ethnic minority exclusion undertaken by the Equalities and Social Inclusion Panel and the review of SEN Transport arrangements had a progress report updating achievements against the recommendations and the action plan. The improvement in the turnaround of reviews and presentation to the Commission for approval has been of significant benefit to the scrutiny process and members of the commission should be acknowledged for the hard work they have undertaken and the proactive nature of this work.

#### **Neighbourhood Access to Services Including Satellite One Stop Shops (The Way We Work Panel)**

This review was carried out to examine whether there was a need for satellite one stop shops in Merton in order to make access to services for residents easier. It was requested by the Cabinet member for Customer Services. Assessment was made of good practice in one stop shop provision from other boroughs. Interviews were conducted of users of the services within Merton to assess their perception of current service delivery and the potential benefits gained from establishing one stop shops.

The review did not reject satellite one stop shops, but concluded that it was not yet time to consider them in Merton. The Panel felt that Merton Link needed to have more time to develop, including consideration of staying open late one night or opening on Saturday morning. They did recommend that the library service should market more the help in filling in welfare benefits forms, as is available from Pollards Hill Library. Cabinet accepted most of the recommendations, but decided to consider satellite one stop shops sooner if circumstances allowed.

The review was agreed at 14 June 2004 Cabinet

#### **Effectiveness of Equality Monitoring and Analysis in Making a Positive Impact on Service Delivery to Residents (Life Chances Panel)**

This review was undertaken as a result of concerns from inspections regarding poor monitoring within the organisation. The development of the corporate Performance Management Framework and the human resources management information system PAHRIS, are corporate tools being used by the Council to improve the monitoring process.

This extensive review looked at what happened within every department of the Council. It concluded that a large amount of data was collected, often externally driven, but it was not being put to good use internally to inform service delivery and planning. The recommendations were concerned with producing quality data, providing skill training, sharing data and sharing good monitoring practice. If implemented this should improve corporate monitoring and contribute to the

achievement of at least Level 3 of the Equality Standard (the Council's 2006 target).

The review was agreed 14 June 2004 Cabinet

### **Smatter, Clutter-free Streets (Regeneration and the Public Realm Panel)**

The Panel decided to undertake this review as part of its work programme for the municipal year. Task group members took evidence from the ward survey, voluntary organisations and visited all parts of the borough to assess the problems and what could be done to improve the street environment.

The recommendations defined how to improve the design and use of materials and construction for streets. They covered street design, enforcement re pavement parking, A-boards and illegal advertising, and consistency of signage. They were designed to make streets and pavements accessible and practical for everybody who uses them, and having economic impact by making Merton more attractive to businesses and people.

The report will be forwarded to Cabinet in November with a costings analysis for the recommendations made.

### **Health Issues as they relate to School Absenteeism (Health Commission)**

Terms of reference for this review were agreed in September 2003, a draft report has been prepared with the recommendations still to be finalised. Although the review has been put on hold to allow health Members to focus on the major health service reconfiguration of the Clinical Services Review this report will be presented to the Commission in September 2004.

### **Access to Welfare Benefits (Equalities and Social Inclusion Panel)**

The recommendations from this review sought to improve the take up of benefits and to work with others to achieve this. The recommendations included a new team of welfare benefit assessors seconded/located in Citizens Advice Bureau, take-up campaigns, increased marketing including Council Tax benefits for people with disabilities, more general and specialised training for Council and voluntary organisations, establishing one service point in Council for benefits with customer services, and creating a single form for all benefits.

This report was presented to the Commission in November 2003. The Action Plan from the review was presented to the Commission on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2004. It was agreed by Cabinet 26 April 2004.

### **Employment Patterns in Social Services (Care Services and Housing Management Panel and Life Chances Panel)**

This policy review was initially undertaken by the Care Services and Housing Management Panel but due to the nature of the subject under review has been taken into the work programme for this municipal year. The recommendations included specific proposals which might improve social worker recruitment, including flexible working options, and student social work placements.

An interim report was submitted to the Commission in May 2003 and went to Cabinet in June 2003. The final report was received by Commission in

November 2003 and went to Cabinet in 12 January 2004, where most of the recommendations were approved, including those cited above.

### **Pupil Numbers and Pupil Places (Education and Life Long Learning Panel and Life Chances Panel)**

This policy review was undertaken by the Education and Lifelong Learning Panel but progress on the review is now being monitored by the Life Chances Panel. This review arose from concerns about procedures for allocation of places, the possible effect on school places arising from the Schools Re-organisation Project, and the issue of Merton pupils being educated outside the Borough. The review recommendations sought to make the process more user friendly, to ensure the involvement of parents, and to seek to find out where students go when they leave the Authority's education system and why.

The final report was presented to the Commission in November 2003 and to Cabinet in 12 January 2004. The Education Department provided a report on current actions in March. The findings of this review will be made available for the Life Chances Panel to consider as part of the Council's review of post 16 students.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Staff In Schools (Education and Lifelong Learning Panel and Life Chances Panel)**

This policy review began in March 2003 and was conducted by the Education and Lifelong Learning Panel. The need for the review arose from shortages of qualified staff and of ethnic minority staff in schools, the need to recruit from overseas, and the redeployment of existing teaching staff through the recent schools re-organisation scheme. Recommendations included tracking progress of newly qualified teachers and providing a networking system to support them, encouraging exit interviews, prioritising staff for affordable housing, and implementing strategies for recruiting ethnic minority staff.

The final report was submitted to Commission in November 2003 and to Cabinet in 12 January 2004. The action plan for the recommendations has been presented to the Life Chances Panel for monitoring.

## **4 Budget Scrutiny**

The process of scrutiny of the budget for 2003/4 changed from the previous year. Scrutiny Members had a more defined role in budget scrutiny, ensuring that the budget:

- Was right for Merton;
- Fitted within the policy framework;
- Reflected the needs of local people;
- Reflected the Council's corporate objectives
- Was legal;
- Was affordable.

Early briefings were given to panel members by the Director of Corporate Resources. Each panel met to consider budgetary proposals in areas of their remit. Their recommendations were then taken to a special budget meeting for Commission so that they could be discussed and reviewed together. This



allowed the budgetary process to be faster and more focused to reflect the move towards corporate priorities and the 3year business plan for the authority.

Once again the Commission has reviewed our performance on the budgetary process and evaluation of the process has suggested that there will be a need for continual improvement.

## **5 Health scrutiny**

In January 2003, the Commission agreed to continue management of health scrutiny and consider relevant issues at dedicated meetings of the Commission. Five meetings a year of a Health Commission meetings were timetabled and work got underway soon after.

In the first meeting, members agreed to a protocol that described the purpose of health scrutiny as to:

- scrutinise issues that relate to the health of the people of Merton;
- work with others including residents to develop policies to improve the health of local people;
- examine whether local people from all sections of our communities have equal access to health provision and services;
- act as a vehicle to drive the health concerns or needs of local people and engage local people in the matters that affect their health;
- act as a 'critical friend' to the whole health system – including any of the Council's services that impact on health;
- evaluate and review the effectiveness our work.

The protocol also set out general principles for health scrutiny to:

- work in a way that displays shared responsibility, openness and accessibility, cooperation and accountability;
- create and maintain a positive and constructive relationship with local organisations that have an effect on the Borough's health;
- work in an inclusive way and hold all formal meetings in public;
- not duplicate work or responsibility of other bodies;
- as in all scrutiny processes, we will not work in a party political way;
- use the media responsibly.

The chief executives of Epsom and St Helier NHS Trust and of Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust came to a meeting of the (Health) Commission on 22 January 2003 to explain the proposed Clinical Services Strategy. A set of recommendations followed from the Commission in March 2003 and was sent to our NHS colleagues, outlining acceptance in principle to the proposals. Work on scrutinising the Clinical Services Strategy is considerable and ongoing and will be progressed through a Joint Health Scrutiny Committee including Sutton and Surrey County Council Members.

Our approach to health scrutiny has been very collaborative. We intend to build on this and develop other aspects of our role. We have been learning with others including neighbouring borough, Sutton; regular health scrutiny network meetings take place with LB Sutton, South West London Strategic Health Authority (and previously with Merton & Sutton Community Health Council until CHC abolition in December 2003). In these early stages of health scrutiny

development, our work has inevitably been rather reactive: processes have now been established for a more pro-active approach through the setting of a work programme.

# **Part B: Taking Scrutiny Forward**

# 1 The Way Forward

As scrutiny experience develops we continue to build on our successes and seek to develop other aspects of scrutiny. We will continue to learn lessons from scrutiny elsewhere in the country and are linked into the London scrutiny network for both Members and officers. There is no 'one size fits all' for scrutiny and we shall pick the structures and practices to suit Merton needs. A guide produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny explains that effective public scrutineers:

- Provide 'critical friend' challenge to executives as well as external authorities and agencies
- Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
- Should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public
- Should make an impact on the delivery of public services

For 2004-5, Overview and Scrutiny have already identified new structures to ensure that the role of Scrutiny is as focused as necessary. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has reduced its membership to 10 Councillors, to provide a clearer focus. There are now 6 Overview and Scrutiny Panels to assist the commission in its work, including the formation of a dedicated Health and Community Care Panel. Panels for 2004-5 are:

- Life Chances
- Health and Community Care Services
- Way We Work
- Regeneration and the Public Realm
- Street Management
- Borough Development

To ensure that Merton continues to develop scrutiny to be a successful 'critical friend', we are:

- a. continuing to implement our own best practice protocols for agenda items and reviews.
- b. pro-actively identifying our own areas for improvement through Scrutiny Development Evenings.
- c. listening to the concerns of the auditors about our involvement in supporting the performance management functions of the Council.

## **a. Best Practice Protocols**

On 29 July 2003, it was agreed that the following proposals would be implemented:

*Agenda items must reflect the agreed criteria:*

- A weakness identified by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment
- An issue of major concern of residents identified by ward or residents survey or complaints or serious service breakdowns
- A priority identified in the Best Value Performance Plan
- A red light issue on key performance targets (from indicators identified as key to achieving corporate or scrutiny priorities)

- In context with the rest of the work of the authority (to avoid duplication and overlap)
- An opportunity for substantial savings or service improvements or way of working that will have a tangible or significant impact on social, economic or environmental well-being of residents
- Priority must be given to items that will have a direct impact on achieving our corporate priorities as set out in our journey to excellence

*Subjects for policy reviews must only be agreed if they have all the agreed attributes:*

- Clearly contributes to the Council's corporate objectives
- The issues discussed are to be significant in terms of their effects on communities and groups of service users living or working in an area comprising one or more wards or electoral divisions in Merton Council
- Does not replicate another review carried out by Merton
- Is specific in aim
- Carries an opportunity for improved performance
- Is achievable in timescale and resources available and agreed by the Commission (5-6 months maximum start to finish)
- Is capable of achieving tangible results
- Is carried out wherever possible in a way that engages the public
- Is balanced in terms of the departments involved and in terms of client groups affected
- Each Panel shall carry out reviews sequentially – ie. one may not start until another has finished
- Is led by either a member of or group of panel members as appropriate to the scale of the review

## **b. Scrutiny Development Evenings**

Two scrutiny development evenings were held earlier in the year and the outcome was considered at a meeting of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission with the Chairs of each Scrutiny Panel and other scrutiny Members. Issues for scrutiny to address were identified and these have been endorsed at a meeting on 15 June of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission with the new Scrutiny Panel Chairs. We agreed that, to be more effective, scrutiny must:

- Be more focused
- Be more challenging
- Do less, but in more depth
- Look at the bigger picture, not just the detail
- Be more pro-active and think ahead
- Be clear about its performance management role
- Improve how it engages the public

It is expected that throughout 2004-5, Scrutiny members will continue to identify areas for improvement and new ways forward. Scrutiny Development Evenings, facilitated learning sessions, identifying best practice from other boroughs, and possibly even scrutiny reviews of scrutiny will provide Merton scrutiny with good opportunities for improvement. At the same time, Overview and Scrutiny Commission have asked the Scrutiny Team to develop a better system for the

early identification of inspections, strategy reviews, and major service changes and initiatives. This will reduce the reliance of Overview and Scrutiny on the Forward Plan, and allow scrutiny to work more pro-actively.

### **c. Performance Management**

This was a key area identified by our CPA as needing more work and is also a matter specifically for scrutiny councillors. Scrutiny has looked at areas of under-performance identified from different sources, including their own experiences as ward councillors, their specialist service knowledge, and concerns raised by Cabinet members and inspectors. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission also looks at the Council's regular performance monitoring reports and remedial action plans for 'red' targets.

In February, the Audit Commission took stock of Merton's progress in implementing the new performance management system. They concluded that the new framework was sound and fit for purpose but needed to be embedded in the organisation. They also concluded that existing arrangements do not adequately distinguish between the role of scrutiny and of Cabinet in monitoring and challenging poor performance.

The Audit Commission suggested that scrutiny panels make their best contribution to performance management when they conduct detailed reviews of under-performing areas, as with the recent review of housing benefits. Scrutiny consider it is a legitimate role of theirs to examine the same performance monitoring reports as Cabinet in order to hold the Executive to account, but will review its role in the light of the audit comments. From this, Scrutiny will look at trying to minimise duplication with Cabinet monitoring and focus more on areas where performance should improve.

## **2 Recommendations for the Way Forward 2004-5**

The following recommendations have been identified for agreement to take Scrutiny forward in 2004-5:

- 1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission must agree a deliverable work programme for the Panels which is matched to resources and timetabled to take forward the outcomes of inspections;**
- 2 Chair and Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission will work together on programme management of the Commission;**
- 3 Chairs of the Commission and of the Panels will agree all items for their agendas and may reject reports if they are not considered to be well and clearly written;**
- 4 Chairs of Commission and Scrutiny Panels will meet regularly with Cabinet colleagues and with Directors responsible for their Panel's remit and report back to each meeting of their Panel;**
- 5 Cabinet Members , as appropriate, will be requested to attend Commission and Panel meetings;**

- 6 The use of co-optees will be reviewed by each Panel and different methods of involving the Public in scrutiny to be considered;**
- 7 Overview and Scrutiny Commission will develop and agree a clearer role in Performance Management;**
- 8 Capacity building funds will be requested and a scrutiny learning and development programme developed reflecting the issues identified at the scrutiny development evenings. The programme may include skills training on chairing meetings, 'challenging', and analysing data; methods for community engagement; best practice for performance management; and also opportunities to learn from scrutiny 'good practice' elsewhere;**
- 9 The 2004/5 scrutiny review programme should be monitored and reviewed to ensure evaluations against the following key tests:**
  - Were the recommendations made practical (affordable, deliverable to detailed timescales, matched to council priorities)?**
  - Have the proposals actually been listened to and accepted by Cabinet?**
  - Have the recommendations been implemented?**
  - Have implemented recommendations been successful?**

## Appendix A: Overview and Scrutiny Panels 2003-2004

Between 2003 and 2004, the Merton Council's scrutiny function has been carried out by the Commission and the following panels:

- Life Chances Panel
- The Way We Work
- Regeneration and the Public Realm
- Street Management
- Borough Development Panel

The panels were established by the Council and were constituted as sub-committees of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. The Commission continued to provide the function of Health Scrutiny. The Panels focused on:

- Providing recommendations before a decision is made.
- Policy development through carrying out a policy review
- Policy reviews were undertaken through informal task group meetings to avoid overloading the panel meetings.

The remits for the new panels, were set out in the Constitution and are described below, with the membership of the Panels presented in a table.

- **Life Chances Panel**

This Panel was set up to be responsible for the following matters:

1. Equal opportunities, diversity and social inclusion.
2. Opportunities and lifelong learning
3. Care Services
4. Leisure
5. Tackling poverty
6. Housing need, provision and management
7. Libraries
8. Sport
9. The arts
10. Opportunities for young people

The Membership for the Panel is tabled below:

Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel			
	Labour	Conservative:	Merton Park Indep
(12 seats)	Cllr David Chung (Chair) Cllr Joe Abrams Cllr Nick Draper Cllr Sheila Knight Cllr Edith Macauley Cllr George Reynolds	Cllr Samantha George (Vice Chair) Cllr Margaret Brierly Cllr Oonagh Moulton Cllr Debbie Shears Cllr Andrew Shellhorn	Cllr Jillian Ashton



- **Regeneration and the Public Realm**

The remit for this Panel was to provide the Overview and Scrutiny function for the following matters:

1. Environment, economic and social wellbeing
2. Inward investment and economic development
3. Partnerships
4. Community Safety
5. Environmental health and trading standards
6. Neighbourhood renewal
7. Councils land and property management and development
8. Parks management
9. Heritage and tourism
10. Street cleaning
11. Street trading
12. Waste minimisation and recycling
13. Waste management

The membership for this Panel is tabled below:

Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel			
	Labour	Conservative:	Merton Park Indep
(8 seats)	Cllr Andy Coles (Chair) Cllr Stephen Alambritis Cllr Many Dunn Cllr Dennis Pearce	Cllr Stephen Hammond (Vice Chair) Cllr Tariq Ahmad Cllr Matt Bird Cllr Dot Kilsby	

- **The Way We Work**

This Panel had the following issues as it's remit in relation to Overview and Scrutiny role in relation to the following matters:

1. Performance management
2. Innovation
3. Financial management
4. Human resources management
5. Equalities as it relates to staffing
6. Corporate communications and how the public see us
7. Customer focus
8. Customer access to council services
9. Information technology and e-government

The Membership for this Panel is as follows:

The Way We Work Overview and Scrutiny Panel			
	Labour	Conservative:	Merton Park Indep
(8 seats)	Cllr Leighton Veale (Chair) Cllr Joe Abrams Cllr John Cole Cllr John Dehaney	Cllr John Bowcott (Vice Chair) Cllr Gilli Lewis-Lavender Cllr Chris McLaughlin Cllr David Simpson	

- **Street Management**

To perform the Overview and Scrutiny role in relation to the following matters:

1. Traffic management
2. The provision and enforcement of parking.
3. Local transport and transport planning
4. Highway maintenance

The Membership for this Panel is as follows:

Street Management Overview and Scrutiny Panel			
	Labour	Conservative:	Merton Park Indep
(7 seats)	Cllr Martin Whelton (Chair) Cllr Mick Fitzgerald Cllr Philip Jones Cllr Mike Tilcock	Cllr William Brierly (Vice Chair) Cllr Fiona Bruce Cllr Corinna Edge	

- **Borough Development Plan**

This Panel began as the Unitary Development Plan Panel but after discussion it was agreed to amend the name and remit of the Panel to the following perform the overview and scrutiny role in relation to the following matters:

1. Plans and alterations, which together compromise the Development Plan.
2. Strategic (ie London –wide) transport and transport planning
3. Supplementary planning guidance

The Membership for this Panel is as follows:

Borough Development Plan Overview and Scrutiny Panel			
	Labour	Conservative:	Merton Park Indep
(6 seats)	Cllr Philip Jones (Chair) Cllr Ian Munn Cllr Dennis Pearce	Cllr Maurice Groves (Vice Chair) Cllr Leslie Mutch	Cllr Peter Southgate

(It was agreed that the Borough Development Panel would commence from 2004 –2005 municipal year).

Panels have continued to agree items from the Forward Plan for pre-decision scrutiny, as long as the item reflects the remit of the Panel, Members have been encouraged to attend other panel meetings if they wish to contribute to a forward plan item being discussed. Each panel had one meeting scheduled per cycle in the calendar of meetings.

The Commission and the panels are non-decision making and have the following functions:

- Influence and challenge decision-making;
- Review and contribute to developing council policy;
- Monitor and assess progress of council performance.
- Commission and panels hold the Cabinet to account for their decisions, both prior and post the decision being taken.
- Use the Call-In process if it is perceived to comply with the specific criteria set out in the Constitution.

## Appendix B: Scrutiny Team at July 2004

The Scrutiny Team is part of the Policy and Performance Division in the Chief Executive's Department. We are located on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor and our contact details are:

		<u>Ext</u>
Diane Bailey	Head of Policy and Performance	3963
Tracey Bedford	Scrutiny and Performance Manager	3662
Barbara Jarvis	Scrutiny Officer	3390
Fauzia Ashraf-Malik	Scrutiny Officer	4685