



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16

London Borough of Merton

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2015/16

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Foreword

Local government continues to face severe financial challenges in delivering services to residents, and these inevitably affect the scope of scrutiny and what can be achieved with limited resources. We have responded by trying to ensure the topics and issues selected for scrutiny are as relevant as possible to the challenges confronting the council, while retaining our independence from the executive.

Nothing could be more relevant to the council than the determination of its budget, and scrutiny made Cabinet fully aware of the concerns of service users over proposed cuts in adult social care. Cabinet responded by setting up a £1.3m Savings Mitigation Fund for 2016/17 to help the most vulnerable users, and agreed to consult on levying a precept for adult social care in future.

This is the latest example of scrutiny making a real difference to the budget setting process in Merton, and it sets us apart from other London boroughs where scrutiny has very little influence on the budget.

We have also chosen topics for investigation that are highly relevant to the financial pressures facing the council. The Commission is looking into shared and outsourced services, and whether there is scope to do more; while Sustainable Communities is investigating the potential for commercialising services to generate additional revenues. The Commission maintains a watching brief for the voluntary sector, because we realise how crucial it is in supporting vulnerable communities in Merton. We depend more and more on our partners in the voluntary sector for the social cohesion of the borough.

For the first time I can remember, there were no call-ins in 2015/16. Does this mean we have perfected the use of pre-decision scrutiny?

Perfect in every respect is our small but hard working officer team, and on behalf of all members involved in scrutiny I would like to thank Julia Regan, Stella Akintan, Annette Wiles (from January 2016) and Rebecca Redman (until December 2015) for their unwavering commitment to making scrutiny in Merton amongst the best in London.

Councillor Peter Southgate
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission

What is overview and scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Merton operates a Leader and Cabinet model, where the Cabinet makes the executive decisions of the authority on behalf of local residents.

Overview and Scrutiny's main roles are:

- holding the Cabinet to account
- improving and developing council policies
- examining decisions before they are implemented
- engaging with members of the public
- monitoring performance of the council and its partners

Scrutiny can look into services provided by other agencies and other matters of importance to the people of the borough. Scrutiny has legal powers to monitor and hold to account local health services (Health and Social Care Act 2001) and to scrutinise crime reduction and community safety issues (Police and Justice Act 2006).

Principles

Overview and Scrutiny at Merton is:

- open to the public
- informed by methodically gathered evidence
- based on careful deliberation and discussion
- conducted in an appropriate manner

How Overview and Scrutiny works in Merton

Merton Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Commission, which acts as a coordinating body supporting three Overview and Scrutiny Panels with individual areas of responsibility:

- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Sustainable Communities

Commission and Panel meetings take place throughout the year and members of the public are welcome to attend. Dates, agendas and minutes for these meetings can be found on the council website: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm>.

More information about Scrutiny at Merton can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny.htm> or by phoning the scrutiny team on 020 8545 3864 or emailing scrutiny@merton.gov.uk.

Scrutiny achievements 2015-2016

We were very pleased that so many members of the public and local organisations have been involved in scrutiny this year, sending in suggestions of issues to scrutinise, attending meetings and taking part in task group reviews.

The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has been able to draw on representations made by individuals and organisations representing adult social care users and carers in order to impact on the council's decision making in respect of adult social care savings:

- The Panel examined the results of the consultation and was addressed by speakers from Adults First, Carers Partnership Group, Merton Centre for Independent Living and South Thames Crossroads, an individual service user and a carer. The speakers all expressed concern at the proposed savings in adult social care and gave examples of the impact that these would have on vulnerable older people and disabled service users and their carers.
- The Panel therefore asked Cabinet to reconsider a number of the proposed adult social care savings. Cabinet responded to this by agreeing to continue the funding for the service provided by Crossroads into 2016/17 and undertook to work with them to re-focus their service from 2017.
- Cabinet further responded to the Panel, and to a recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to consider levying an adult social care precept, by setting up a Savings Mitigation Fund of £1.3m to enable it to offset the effects on the most vulnerable people in the borough

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission, mindful of the difficult financial decisions facing the council, scrutinised how an adult social care precept would work, the basis on which the local government settlement was made and assumptions behind the council tax collection rate. Cabinet, in putting forward budget proposals to Council, took into account the Commission's recommendations to review the assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Strategy on inflation and on the council tax revenue base.

It has been a busy year in which scrutiny councillors have carried out four in-depth task group reviews, details of which can be found under the relevant Panel headings:

- Shared and outsourced services – Overview and Scrutiny Commission
- Supporting vulnerable young people into employment – Children and Young People Panel
- Diabetes - Healthier Communities and Older People Panel
- Commercial services - Sustainable Communities Panel

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is responsible for the scrutiny of cross cutting and strategic issues, crime and disorder and issues relating to the council's "corporate capacity". The Commission acts as a coordinating body in supporting the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels and has responsibility for developing and keeping scrutiny under review.

Scrutiny reviews

Shared and outsourced services

The Commission established these two task group reviews to examine how different models of service delivery work and made recommendations to stimulate a more consistent and rigorous approach to selecting delivery models and challenging officers on the most appropriate model for each service. A combined report will be received by the Commission in July 2016.

Immunisation of children aged 0-5

The Commission received the report of this cross-cutting review and agreed to forward it to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The review made recommendations aimed at increasing uptake rates in local communities. The review was welcomed by the Board and recommendations will be implemented through an action plan that will be monitored by the Commission.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive attended to set out their priorities for 2015/16 and the financial challenges facing the council. The Commission asked them questions on issues including public health, Crossrail 2 and Merton's ambition to be the best council in London.

The Commission received a presentation setting out the current framework for the delivery of enforcement activity, reviewed the establishment of a shared service and recommended that the council continue to explore new ways of delivering these services and, subject to the availability of alternative sources of funding, consider having additional officers to carry out enforcement work.

The Commission has continued to scrutinise the customer contact programme by receiving updates at critical points in the project. The most recent update contained information on the new website, customer accounts, technological infrastructure and redesigned business processes.

The second annual update on volunteering was welcomed by the Commission who praised Merton Voluntary Service Council and council officers for the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy.

The Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council attended in March 2016 to

discuss funding of the voluntary sector. He highlighted the benefits that voluntary organisations bring in terms of service delivery and the ability to attract additional external funding to the borough. The Commission recorded its thanks and support of the voluntary sector.

The Commission was impressed by the excellent work in implementation of the equalities strategy that had been carried out over the past year, particularly in relation to raising the achievement of Bangladeshi and Asian-Other pupils.

Policing in Merton

The Commission has examined crime data and was pleased that crime rates continue to remain low in Merton and are on a par or better than most neighbouring boroughs. It has questioned the Borough Commander on two occasions and welcomed the approach taken to the deployment of police officers within the borough.

The Chair of Merton Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group provided data on how stop and search operates in Merton, answered questions about how they monitor complaints and described their work with young people.

The council's anti social behavior service was examined and its work was praised. The Commission requested an update with more detailed trend analysis next year.

Call-in

No call-in requests were received by the Commission in 2015/16.

Finance and performance monitoring

The financial monitoring sub-group has continued to monitor quarterly reports. In particular, it has scrutinised the forecast overspend, capital programme and lack of progress on achieving savings in some service areas. It has scrutinised a number of areas in depth including staffing vacancies, commercial waste, transport services, council tax recovery and estate management.

Scrutiny of the budget

The draft business plan, medium term financial strategy and proposed budget savings proposals were examined in detail, alongside equality impact assessments for each of the savings. The Commission recommended that Cabinet should bring forward elements of the energy invest to save initiatives where feasible.

The Commission scrutinised how an adult social care precept would work, the basis on which the local government settlement was made and assumptions behind the council tax collection rate. The outcome of this is reported in the achievements section on page 5 of this report.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people. This includes education, children's social care, child protection and youth services.

Councillor Katy Neep, Panel Chair said – “ During this year, my first as chair, we've looked at different ways of working to make sure scrutiny of Merton's services for children and young people is as effective as possible. Importantly, we are starting to leverage in external expertise to help us inform and improve the quality of our scrutiny work.”

Scrutiny reviews

The Panel set-up a task group to look at support for more vulnerable school leavers to move into employment. This has specifically focused on the progression of those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and young people in or leaving care. The task group has examined what support is provided for these groups and what is already planned to provide additional support. The task group is in the process of hearing from stakeholders; young people and those that care and work with them, as well as local employers and the council's own apprenticeships team. The Panel will produce a report of its findings and recommendations in later this year.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

At its first meeting of the municipal year (June to May), the Panel received presentations from those delivering services to children and young people on the key challenges being faced and the priorities for the year ahead. These included:

- School expansion;
- Continuing the focus on school standards;
- Changes to care proceedings and adoptions; and
- Reducing the time taken for children being adopted.

Throughout the year, the Panel has considered a number of strategic issues including:

- The post adoption support offer;
- Child sexual exploitation;
- Female Genital Mutilation;
- The 'Prevent' Agenda and tackling radicalisation; and
- School admission arrangements for summer born children.

Performance monitoring

At each of its meetings, the Panel receives a performance monitoring report from the Department for Children Schools and Families (CSF). This reviews progress against agreed targets or Key Performance Indicators and is supported by an update report on developments affecting the Department.

The Panel also receives an annual report to provide greater detail on performance measures relating to education, including test and examination results, information on absence and persistent absence from schools, exclusions, children with *SEND* and as well as the progress of Looked-After Children and those that are 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET).

Members also received progress updates on the following:

- The work of the Corporate Parenting Board including the participation of Looked-After Children and those leaving care;
- The Transforming Families Programme;
- The provision and take-up of apprenticeships through the council;
- The take-up of free schools meals and the associated link to claiming Pupil Premium funding;
- Child protection meetings;
- Support for homeless families; and
- The operation of the Schools Standards Committee.

External expertise

Nick Berbiers, Head Young People's Services at The Who Cares? Trust presented to the panel on scrutiny of the corporate parenting role. Nick focused on the key issues for authorities in fulfilling this role and what scrutiny of corporate parenting should look like. To support this, Nick also provided examples of best practice in corporate parenting. Panel Members then participated in two workshops, giving them the opportunity to have detailed discussions of Merton's services for Looked-After Children.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2016/2017 in November 2015 and January 2016. This included understanding how proposed cost savings to the budget for the CFS Department would be distributed; how many families would be affected by a withdrawal of services and how the department works with colleagues in the voluntary sector to access alternative funding.

Call In

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2015/16.

Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to health, public health and adult social care. This includes promoting good health and healthy lifestyles, mental health issues, and reducing health inequalities for people of all ages.

Councillor Peter McCabe said “This year our role in engaging with local people and reflecting the concerns of the public has been stronger than ever before. We have had representation from local organisations, service users, carers and the public, who have attended the panel and shared their personal experiences of local services. It is this input which has helped shape our recommendations to the Council, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS Trusts. “

Responding to local issues

As is typical with health scrutiny, a number of local issues arose that were time sensitive and required an urgent response. Flexibility is built into the agendas so the Panel can deal with issues of this nature as they arise.

Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust

The Chief Executive and Director of Communications at Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust attended scrutiny to outline proposals for their Estates Strategy. The Panel were informed that the current hospital sites are old, not fit for purpose and generating high maintenance costs. As a result the Trust will be consulting with all stakeholders to develop proposals for the future and find out people’s priorities for a twenty-first century hospital. An update on this process was given to the March meeting and the Panel were told that the Trust will now begin consultation on the criteria that should be used and they hoped to have developed an option for a preferred hospital site by June. The Panel made it clear that they will be supporting the local community who want to retain a district general hospital on the St Helier site.

Transfer of 0-5 Healthy child services to Public Health Merton

In September, the Panel conducted pre-decision scrutiny on the process of transferring services for children aged 0-5, including school nurses and health visitors to the public health team at the council. The Panel were keen to ensure that service users would not experience an adverse change in the services they receive. The Consultant in Public Health informed the Panel that the transfer will result in an integrated seamless 0-19 children’s service and the transfer would not result in any additional financial costs to the council.

Change of location for Urogynaecology Subspecialty Service.

The Panel were contacted by patient representatives in relation to moving a Urogynaecology clinic from St George's University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to Croydon University Hospital. The public were concerned about the lack of consultation and the additional burden caused by the extra travelling time. Senior representatives attended the Panel in February and apologised for the flaws in the consultation. They stated that they were still seeking views and final decision was yet to be made. The clinic was moved to Croydon due to safety concerns and the Trust is considering the options to make it viable for the future. The Panel unanimously resolved to ask the Trust to re-open the clinic at St George's University Hospital as a priority.

Closure of Mental Health 'step down' accommodation

The Service Director for South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust attended the Panel to discuss the reasons for the closure of mental health 'step down' accommodation. This raised significant concern amongst the public, given the support this type of supportive accommodation provides to this vulnerable group. There were also concerns that the voluntary sector may not have been sufficiently consulted to ensure that alternative provision was put in place to support this work. The Service Director informed the Panel that the accommodation was not fit for purpose, as it is not suitable for mixed gender accommodation and does not have en-suite bathrooms. Approximately £650,000 has been ring fenced for step down mental health services which will provide more services than the current provision with Norfolk Lodge. However concern was expressed that the ring fenced funding was not set at the level that it should be.

The Panel recommended that there should be full consultation on the long term plans for step down accommodation. Also there needs to be clarification on what level of provision will be available for this service.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Prevention agenda

The Panel is committed to the prevention agenda and emphasis is placed upon this in all issues that are scrutinised. Councillors believe that preventing illness before it occurs is preferable for the individual and reduces the financial burden on the NHS. The Director of Public Health, Consultant in Public Health, a healthy Schools Development Manager and the Head of Merton's Live Well programme attended the Panel to talk about the work that had been taking place to support local residents to be as healthy as possible. Programmes include smoking cessation, healthy weight and alcohol consumption awareness.

The Director of Public Health said that it can be difficult to make a case for prevention as the evidence of its success is the absence of ill health and there is a significant period before the benefit of prevention programmes become apparent.

Members asked about the role of the planning departments in public health considerations and how to support GP's. They were informed that the Public health team are leading on a wide range of initiatives such as holding locality meetings with

GP's where issues around prevention are discussed. Public Health can also provide evidence to planning committees about the links between unhealthy food outlets and proximity to schools. The Panel requested further updates on the work to imbed prevention.

Making Merton a Dementia Friendly Borough

Community Dementia nurses, Transport for London and Merton Public Health Team attended the panel to discuss this issue. The panel found that a wide range of initiatives are in place to help residents in Merton who have dementia. Merton also has a flagship dementia hub which provides a wide range of support to those with a diagnosis and their carers. The panel found there are a number of organisations working to support this group however the work may benefit from being integrated and resources pooled together. The panel asked for a further update in six months time.

Scrutiny reviews

Preventing incontinence amongst women of child bearing age

In 2012/3 the Panel conducted a review on how to reduce the number of people affected by incontinence. The review adopted a preventative approach and focussed on women of child bearing age with the view to prevent it occurring in older age where it is more prevalent. The panel received an update from a senior Commissioner at Merton Clinical Commissioning Group on their progress with implementing the recommendations.

Panel members asked what changes had been made to date and what success in this area will look like. The Senior Commissioner reported that the review has raised the profile of this issue and the foundations have been laid for implementing many of the recommendations. The panel felt that senior officers should be responsible for implementing the recommendations and asked for continence issues to be included in the reporting requirements to their clinical reference groups. The panel also asked for further clarification about their timetable for implementing the recommendations.

Preventing type two diabetes in the South Asian Community

This year a task group review has focussed on how to prevent type two diabetes in the South Asian community as this group are six times more likely to be diagnosed with the condition than their white counterparts. The task group has spoken to a wide range of witnesses including the South Asian Health Foundation, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and Asian Elderly. The final report and recommendations will be considered by the Panel in June 2016.

Call In

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2015/16.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to housing, environmental sustainability, culture, enterprise and skills, libraries and transport.

Councillor Abby Jones, Panel Chair said “The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel continues to play a strong role in scrutinising issues before they are subject to council decision; through this we ensure the Council is making the best possible decisions for residents.”

Scrutiny reviews

Housing Supply Task Group

The Panel has completed its Task Group review examining how to increase the supply of affordable housing in Merton. This involved looking at other Local Authority good practice, engaging stakeholders such as Housing Associations, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the NHS. Research and guidance was gathered from organisations such as Shelter, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the National Housing Federation.

Recommendations included that a report is presented to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in anticipation of the proposed ‘Pay to Stay’ policy. This should consider how residents might be incentivised to move to alternative forms of affordable housing, to free up much needed social housing. Also that Cabinet work with the private rented sector to encourage landlords to let properties to residents on the Housing Register and in receipt of Housing Benefit.

All the recommendations were accepted by Cabinet. The Panel received an update in January 2016. The Task Group chair was pleased with the progress to date.

Commercial Services task group

The Panel has agreed to set up a Task Group looking at the Council’s approach to commercial services and areas that can be commercialised to generate revenue. It will focus on opportunities within FutureMerton, property, leisure and culture departments.

The review will look at what the Council has achieved to date in pursuing commercial opportunities and how to further utilise Council assets to develop commercial services. Work will also focus on identifying the risks and governance arrangements required to enable the Council to charge for services. The review will identify the barriers to maximising commercial income within the Council, including culture, skills systems and processes.

The Task Group will look at good practice and determine what models have been successfully taken forward in the private and public sectors and how Merton might benefit from lessons learned. The review will conclude its work in September 2016.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Panel has undertaken pre-decision scrutiny on a range of strategic issues and Council priorities. This includes:

Community and Housing Department Priorities: the Panel reviewed the priorities for community and housing as set for the next four years.

Merton Adult Education: prior to going to Cabinet for decision, the Panel reviewed proposals to move to a commissioning model for the provision of adult education services. Commenting on the proposals to Cabinet, the Panel recommended considering all options including maintaining the Whately Avenue site and ensuring user groups are appropriately consulted during the commissioning process.

Morden Leisure Centre: The Panel has continued to be involved in the development of Morden Leisure Centre including monitoring the appointment of relevant experts, understanding how the Centre will relate to other local community providers, checking how residents are being consulted on the development and reviewing designs from first concept stage.

Phase C procurement programme (including parks, grounds, maintenance and waste): progress on establishing the procurement programme has been monitored by the Panel including hearing representations from staff and unions. Phase C will return to the Panel for pre-decision scrutiny in June 2016.

Tourism strategy: the Panel received a report and briefing on the development of Merton's tourism strategy in anticipation of the review being conducted by the GLA that is anticipated in 2016.

Wheeled Bins Pilot: the results of a pilot scheme involving over a thousand properties in the Lavender Fields ward were presented to the Panel and the opportunity was given for residents to express their views on the scheme. As a result, the Panel made a reference to Cabinet recommending the need for a more detailed analysis of costs and projected savings prior to any decision being made. The Panel also made a number of recommendations about the rollout of the scheme should this decision be made including considering the needs of disabled residents.

Planning: the panel has started its scrutiny of proposals to expand the Council's shared services to include the planning function. This is being considered alongside the Government's proposals to commercialise local government planning.

Performance monitoring

The Panel regularly undertakes a performance monitoring role by reviewing outcomes against agreed key targets (Key Performance Indicators) and making recommendations to the appropriate service:

Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP): CHMP manages nearly 9,500 homes across Merton on behalf of the council. As part of its on-going monitoring of CHMP's performance, this year the Panel has focused on the repairs and maintenance service provided to residents. The Panel received regular performance updates including resident satisfaction ratings and met with CHMP every six months. During the next municipal year, the Panel plans to engage with the Tenants' Scrutiny Panel and examine case studies on the resolution of long standing issues.

Cycle routes: The Panel has monitored the development of cycle routes working towards the vision of making the borough into Little Holland.

Libraries annual report: a significant success for Merton, the Panel continued to monitor the performance of the library service which this year saw five out of the six Key Performance Indicators being achieved at record levels.

Outcomes of Task Group reviews: The Panel continued to oversee the delivery of the recommendations and action plans resulting from the following Task Group reviews:

- Adults Skills and Employability; and
- Climate Change and Green Deal (with the support of the Member Champion, Councillor James Homes).

Town regeneration: the Panel monitored progress with the implementation of actions plans resulting from earlier reviews. The impact of the proposals for Crossrail 2 on Wimbledon and Raynes Park are a key focus for scrutiny going forward.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2016/2017 in November 2015 and January 2016, including receiving reports from the Directors of Corporate Services and Environment and Regeneration.

Call In

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2015/16.

Get involved

The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process and councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

Getting involved in scrutiny is one of the best ways to influence decision making at the council, as councillors will hear your experiences first hand. There are a number of ways you can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the council:

Suggesting an issue for scrutiny

The council's website contains an online form which can be used to make suggestions on issues and topics for future scrutiny:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/scrutiny/scrutiny-getinvolved.htm>

Suggestions may also be made in writing, by email or by phone to the Scrutiny Team – contact details overleaf.

All suggestions received will be discussed by the relevant scrutiny Panel and the person who made the suggestion will be contacted to let them know what has happened to it.

Attending meetings

All scrutiny meetings are open to the public except where confidential information has to be discussed. A list of meeting dates and agenda items can be found on the council's website. <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm>

If you would like to attend a meeting simply come along to the meeting venue or, if you want more information, contact the Scrutiny Team – details overleaf.

Providing information and views

Members of the public can send in written views or speak on issues that are under discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission or one of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Information on current task group reviews and any deadlines for submission on information can be found on <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny> or by contacting the Scrutiny Team – details overleaf.

Contact the Scrutiny Team

The Scrutiny Team provides independent and professional support and advice to the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the three standing Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

You can contact the Scrutiny Team using one of the following methods: -

In writing:

Scrutiny Team
Corporate Services
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX

By emailing:

scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

By phoning:

Julia Regan – Head of Democracy Services
020 8545 3864

Stella Akintan –Scrutiny Officer
020 8545 3390

Annette Wiles – Scrutiny Officer
020 8545 4035

For further information about overview and scrutiny at Merton please access our web pages using the following address <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny>