

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 6 July 2017

Wards: All

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2017/18

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Lead member: Cllr Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

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Recommendations:

That members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- i) Consider the proposed work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year, and agree issues and items for inclusion (see draft in Appendix 1);
 - ii) Discuss and comment on how they wish to draw on external experts this year and how the quality of evidence provided to scrutiny meetings could be improved.
 - iii) Appoint members to the financial monitoring task group, to meet on 25 July and three further dates (in November 2017, March 2018 and July 2018) to be determined by the task group;
 - iv) Consider whether they wish to establish a task group review this year;
 - v) Consider whether they wish to make visits to local sites; and
 - vi) Identify any training and support needs.
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to support and advise Members to determine their work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year.
- 1.2 This report sets out the following information to assist Members in this process:
 - a) The principles of effective scrutiny and the criteria against which work programme items should be considered;
 - b) The roles and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - c) The findings of the consultation programme undertaken with councillors and co-opted members, senior management, voluntary and community sector organisations, partner organisations and Merton residents;
 - d) A summary of discussion by councillors and co-opted members at a topic selection workshop held on 26 June 2017; and
 - e) Support available to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to determine, develop and deliver its 2017/18 work programme.

2. Determining the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Annual Work Programme

- 2.1 Members are required to determine their work programme for the 2017/18 municipal year to give focus and structure to scrutiny activity to ensure that it effectively and efficiently supports and challenges the decision-making processes of the Council, and partner organisations, for the benefit of the people of Merton.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has specific roles relating to budget and business plan scrutiny and to performance monitoring that should automatically be built into their work programmes.
- 2.3 Since 2012/13, the Commission has agreed each year to establish a financial monitoring task group to lead on the scrutiny of financial monitoring information on behalf of the Commission, with the following terms of reference:
- To carry out scrutiny of the Council's financial monitoring information on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To advise on other agenda items as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To report minutes of its meetings back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To send via the Commission any recommendations or references to Cabinet, Council or other decision making bodies.
- 2.4 The Commission, at its meeting on 28 March 2017, resolved to re-establish this task group for the 2017/18 municipal year. The Commission is therefore requested to appoint members to the group. It is proposed that the task group will meet four times during 2017/18 to enable the financial monitoring information to be examined on a quarterly basis as well as scrutinising a small number of budget areas in-depth and reporting back any recommendations to the Commission. The meetings will be held in public and the agenda and minutes will be published on the Council's website, alongside those of the Commission.
- 2.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission may choose to scrutinise a range of issues through a combination of pre-decision scrutiny items, policy development, performance monitoring, information updates and follow up to previous scrutiny work. Any call-in work will be programmed into the provisional call-in dates identified in the corporate calendar as required.
- 2.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has six scheduled meetings over the course of 2017/18, including the scheduled budget meeting (representing a maximum of 18 hours of scrutiny per year – assuming 3 hours per meeting). Members will therefore need to be selective in their choice of items for the work programme.

Principles guiding the development of the scrutiny work programme

- 2.7 The following key principles of effective scrutiny should be considered when the Commission determines its work programme:
- **Be selective** – There is a need to prioritise so that high priority issues are scrutinised given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time available. Members should consider what can realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what the session is intended to achieve.

- **Add value with scrutiny** – Items should have the potential to ‘add value’ to the work of the council and its partners. If it is not clear what the intended outcomes or impact of a review will be then Members should consider if there are issues of a higher priority that could be scrutinised instead.
- **Be ambitious** – The Commission should not shy away from carrying out scrutiny of issues that are of local concern, whether or not they are the primary responsibility of the council. The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to do anything to promote economic, social and environmental well being of local communities. Subsequent Acts have conferred specific powers to scrutinise health services, crime and disorder issues and to hold partner organisations to account.
- **Be flexible** – Members are reminded that there needs to be a degree of flexibility in their work programme to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration/comment during the year and accommodate any developmental or additional work that falls within the remit of this Commission. For example Members may wish to questions officers regarding the declining performance of a service or may choose to respond to a Councillor Call for Action request.
- **Think about the timing** – Members should ensure that the scrutiny activity is timely and that, where appropriate, their findings and recommendations inform wider corporate developments or policy development cycles at a time when they can have most impact. Members should seek to avoid duplication of work carried out elsewhere.

Models for carrying out scrutiny work

2.8 There are a number of means by which the Overview and Scrutiny Commission can deliver its work programme. Members should consider which of the following options is most appropriate to undertake each of the items they have selected for inclusion in the work programme:

Item on a scheduled meeting agenda/ hold an extra meeting of the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Commission can agree to add an item to the agenda for a meeting and call Cabinet Members/ Officers/Partners to the meeting to respond to questioning on the matter ■ A variation of this model could be a one-day seminar-scrutiny of issues that, although important, do not merit setting up a ‘task-and-finish’ group.
Task Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A small group of Members meet outside of the scheduled meetings to gather information on the subject area, visit other local authorities/sites, speak to service users, expert witnesses and/or Officers/Partners. The Task Group can then report back to the Commission with their findings to endorse the submission of their recommendations to Cabinet/Council ■ This is the method usually used to carry out policy reviews
Commission asks for a report then takes a view on action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Commission may need more information before taking a view on whether to carry out a full review so asks for a report – either from the service department or from the Scrutiny Team – to give them more details.

Meeting with service Officer/Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Member (or small group of Members) has a meeting with service officers/Partners to discuss concerns or raise queries. ■ If the Member is not satisfied with the outcome or believes that the Commission needs to have a more in-depth review of the matter s/he takes it back to the Commission for discussion
Individual Members doing some initial research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A member with a specific concern carries out some research to gain more information on the matter and then brings his/her findings to the attention of the Commission if s/he still has concerns.

2.9 Note that, in order to keep agendas to a manageable size, and to focus on items to which the Commission can make a direct contribution, the Commission may choose to take some “information only” items outside of Commission meetings, for example by email.

Support available for scrutiny activity

2.10 The Overview and Scrutiny function has dedicated scrutiny support from the Scrutiny Team to:

- Work with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission to manage the work programme and coordinate the agenda, including advising officers and partner organisations on information required and guidance for witnesses submitting evidence to a scrutiny review;
- Provide support for scrutiny members through briefing papers, background material, training and development seminars, etc;
- Facilitate and manage the work of the task and finish groups, including research, arranging site visits, inviting and briefing witnesses and drafting review reports on behalf on the Chair; and
- Promote the scrutiny function across the organisation and externally.

2.11 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission will need to assess how they can best utilise the available support from the Scrutiny Team to deliver their work programme for 2017/18.

2.12 The Commission is also invited to comment upon any briefing, training and support that is needed to enable Members to undertake their work programme. Members may also wish to undertake visits to local services in order to familiarise themselves with these. Such visits should be made with the knowledge of the Chair and will be organised by the Scrutiny Team.

2.13 This year, in response to the results of the scrutiny annual survey, the Scrutiny Team will also explore with chairs and vice chairs the use of external experts and the quality of evidence provided to Panels to understand what else might be done to meet members’ needs. In order to progress this, it is recommended that the Panel spend some time discussing this as part of the development of the work programme if these issues have not already been addressed at the topic workshop.

3. Selecting items for the Scrutiny Work Programme

3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission sets its own agenda within the scope of its terms of reference. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertakes a coordinating role to ensure that any gaps or overlap in the scrutiny work programme are dealt with in a joined-up way.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has the following remit: -

- Formal crime & disorder scrutiny
- Safer communities: the role of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, safer neighbourhood teams, anti-social behaviour, drugs & alcohol treatment, domestic violence and road safety
- Stronger communities: community leadership, voluntary & community sector, public involvement & consultation; community cohesion, service delivery diversity & equalities
- Cross-cutting & strategic matters, inc. scrutiny of the budget & business plan and the approach to partnership arrangements
- Corporate capacity issues – communications, legal, human resources, IT, customer service
- The performance monitoring framework
- Financial monitoring
- Responsibility for keeping scrutiny under review

3.1 The Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for issues to scrutinise either as agenda items or task group reviews. Suggestions have been received from members of the public, councillors and partner organisations including the police, NHS and Merton Voluntary Service Council. Other issues of public concern have been identified through the Annual Residents Survey. Issues that have been raised repeatedly at Community Forums have also been included. The Scrutiny Team has consulted departmental management teams in order to identify forthcoming issues on which the Commission could contribute to the policymaking process.

3.2 A description of all the suggestions received is set out in Appendix 2.

3.3 The councillors who attended a “topic selection” workshop on 26 June 2017 discussed these suggestions. Suggestions were prioritised at the workshop using the criteria listed in Appendix 3. In particular, participants sought to identify issues that related to the Council’s strategic priorities or where there was underperformance; issues of public interest or concern and issues where scrutiny could make a difference.

3.4 A note of the workshop discussion relating to the remit of the Commission is set out in Appendix 4.

3.5 Appendix 1 contains a draft work programme that has been drawn up, taking the workshop discussion into account, for the consideration of the Commission. The Commission is requested to discuss this draft and agree any changes that it wishes to make.

4. Task group reviews

- 4.1 The topic workshop discussions identified recruitment of key workers as a priority areas for task group review, building on the work done by the Standards and General Purposes Committee. Draft proposals for the scope and terms of reference for such a review will be brought to the Commission's meeting on 6 July by the Chair and Head of Democracy Services.
- 4.2 The Commission will be asked to consider these draft proposals and decide whether it wishes to establish a task group review on the recruitment of key workers. The Commission may choose to establish a task group to examine another issue or it may choose not to establish a task group during 2017/18.
- 4.3 Whatever course of action the Commission decides to take, it is asked to be mindful that any task group will need to report back to the Commission at its meeting on 31 January 2018 so that it can be referred to Cabinet in March 2018.

5. Public involvement

- 5.1 Scrutiny provides extensive opportunities for community involvement and democratic accountability. Engagement with service users and with the general public can help to improve the quality, legitimacy and long-term viability of recommendations made by the Commission.
- 5.2 Service users and the public bring different perspectives, experiences and solutions to scrutiny, particularly if "seldom heard" groups such as young people, disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic communities and people from lesbian gay bisexual and transgender communities are included.
- 5.3 This engagement will help the Commission to understand the service user's perspective on individual services and on co-ordination between services. Views can be heard directly through written or oral evidence or heard indirectly through making use of existing sources of information, for example from surveys. From time to time the Commission/Task Group may wish to carry out engagement activities of its own, by holding discussion groups or sending questionnaires on particular issues of interest.
- 5.4 Much can be learnt from best practice already developed in Merton and elsewhere. The Scrutiny Team will be able to help the Commission to identify the range of stakeholders from which it may wish to seek views and the best way to engage with particular groups within the community.

6. Training and visits

Training

- 6.1 The annual member survey asked what scrutiny related training and development opportunities councillors and co-opted members would like to have provided in the coming year.
- 6.2 Twenty one respondents agreed that they had a need for training and development opportunities in at least one of the core areas specified in the questionnaire:
- chairing and agenda management (14 respondents)
 - questioning skills (12)
 - how to monitor performance and interpret data (15)

- finance/budget scrutiny (12)

6.3 The report of the annual member survey, elsewhere on this agenda, contains two recommendations on training:

- That the Head of Democracy Services will, in discussion with HR (which has responsibility for member development and training) ensure that appropriate training sessions are offered on all the areas identified by the survey.
- The Head of Democracy Services will ensure the promotion of member training opportunities in a timely way to maximise the take-up.

6.4 The Commission is asked to consider whether there are other training needs and to provide comments on how the training needs identified by the annual member survey could be met.

Visits

6.5 Commission members are asked to identify any visits that they would find helpful to provide a context for scrutinising service delivery or policy changes.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

7.1 A number of issues highlighted in this report recommend that Commission members take into account certain considerations when setting their work programme. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is free to determine its work programme as it sees fit. Members may therefore choose to identify a work programme that does not take into account these considerations. This is not advised as ignoring the issues raised would either conflict with good practice and/or principles endorsed in the Review of Scrutiny, or could mean that adequate support would not be available to carry out the work identified for the work programme.

7.2 A range of suggestions from the public, partner organisations, officers and Members for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme are set out in the appendices, together with a suggested approach to determining which to include in the work programme. Members may choose to respond differently. However, in doing so, Members should be clear about expected outcomes, how realistic expectations are and the impact of their decision on their wider work programme and support time. Members are also free to incorporate into their work programme any other issues they think should be subject to scrutiny over the course of the year, with the same considerations in mind.

8. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

8.1 To assist Members to identify priorities for inclusion in the Commission's work programme, the Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for possible scrutiny reviews from a number of sources:

- a. Letter to partner organisations and to a range of local resident groups, voluntary and community organisations, including those involved in the Inter-Faith Forum and members of the Lesbian Gay and Transgender Forum;
- b. Councillors have put forward suggestions by raising issues in scrutiny meetings and via the Overview and Scrutiny Member Survey 2017; and
- c. Officers have been consulted via discussion at departmental management team meetings and through an item in the Staff Bulletin.

9. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the financial, resource and property issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific financial, resource and property implications.

10. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Overview and scrutiny bodies operate within the provisions set out in the Local Government Act 2000, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 10.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the legal and statutory issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific legal and statutory implications.

11. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engagement. The reviews will involve work to consult local residents, community and voluntary sector groups, businesses, hard to reach groups, partner organisations etc and the views gathered will be fed into the review.
- 11.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police and Justice Act 2006, all Council departments must have regard to the impact of services on crime, including anti-social behaviour and drugs. Scrutiny review reports will therefore highlight any implications arising from the reviews relating to crime and disorder as necessary.

13. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific risk management and health and safety implications.

14. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- 14.1 Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Commission draft work programme 2017/18
- 14.2 Appendix 2 – Summary of topics relating to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission's remit suggested for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme
- 14.3 Appendix 3 – Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 26 June 2017

14.4 Appendix 4 – Notes from discussion of topics relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Scrutiny Topic Selection Workshop on 26 June 2017

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1 None

Draft work programme 2017/18**Meeting date – 6 July 2017**

Item/Issue
Leader and Chief Executive – vision, key priorities & challenges for 2017/8
Merton Partnership annual report
Embedding challenge in models of service delivery
Report from Safer Merton
Analysis of annual members' scrutiny survey

Meeting date – 20 September 2017

Annual Residents Survey - presentation
Customer contact programme - update
Discussion of questions for the Borough Commander

Meeting date – 15 November 2017

Borough Commander – policing in Merton
Budget scrutiny round 1

Meeting date 25 January 2018 – scrutiny of the budget**Meeting date 31 January 2018**

Customer contact programme update
Registrars service
Shared and outsourced services task group – update on action plan
Final report of Commission's 2017-18 task group
Discussion of questions for the Borough Commander

Meeting date 21 March 2018

Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-20 – action plan
Hate crime strategy – progress report & discussion with community organisations
Borough Commander – policing in Merton
Overview and scrutiny annual report

Description of topic suggestions received in relation to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2017/18

The following topics were suggested by residents, local groups, councillors and officers, for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, for their 2017/18 work programme.

POLICING IN MERTON

Who suggested this issue?

In previous years the Commission has received regular updates on crime and policing from the borough commander as a standing item.

Summary of the issue:

In 2016/17, the Commission has questioned the Borough Commander on two occasions, examined crime data and scrutinised the deployment of police officers in the borough. The Commission also discussed the Mayor of London's policing priorities with the London Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth.

What could Scrutiny do?

It is recommended that the Commission should continue to invite the Borough Commander to attend twice yearly. Identifying questions in advance of the meeting has worked well in the past year and it is recommended to continue this approach.

The Safer Merton Manager has suggested that the Commission requests updates on the proposed One Met Model (relating to the reduced number of borough command units) and the rollout of actions from the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan 2017-21.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Who suggested this issue?

A local resident has suggested that scrutiny look at how to tackle recreational drug use and drinking in large groups in local parks and public benches such as in the Motspur Park/West Barnes area. The resident is concerned about the impact this has on park users, especially families.

Summary of the issue

The Police are responsible for tackling drinking and drug taking in public places, working in conjunction with Safer Merton. Add comment about what work is being done/measures taken and, if applicable, that it is a priority area.

What could scrutiny do?

Next time the Borough Commander attends a meeting of the Commission he could be questioned about what action is being taken to deal with these issues. The resident who made the suggestion would be invited to attend and contribute .

Alternatively, the Commission could establish a task group borough-wide review of street drinking and drug use. These are complex issues that affect services provided and/or commissioned by all directorates within the council as well as relating to policing of the borough.

HATE CRIME

Who suggested this issue?

The Director of the Commonsense Trust has suggested that the Commission examine the recent increase in hate crime against EU nationals and other ethnic minorities. This has been brought to her attention by organisations such as the Polish Family Association. She has suggested that scrutiny could assess the scale of this problem, examine Merton's response and identify potential areas for improvement and for joint working with local organisations.

A second suggestion on hate crime was received by a councillor who has suggested that the Commission review homophobic hate crime.

Summary of the issue

Hate crime is any incident, which may or may not constitute a criminal offence, that is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's race, religion or belief, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability. A hate crime may also be committed against a person by association, such as against the parent of a disabled child or the partner of someone of a different ethnicity. Hate crimes are now also recognised as a form of abuse in relation to safeguarding adults at risk; this stems from the introduction of the Care Act 2014 and the revised London procedures that were launched in 2016

Hate crime in Merton has increased since 2012 at a faster rate than the Metropolitan Police Service area as a whole. Racially aggravated offences make up the largest proportion of hate crimes committed in Merton – 76% of the total.

The Merton Partnership has recently launched the 2017-2021 hate crime strategy, which aims to develop a victim-oriented, multi-agency approach to tackling all forms of hate crime across the borough. The associated hate crime strategic plan 2017 – 2021 will initially be overseen by the Safer Stronger Executive Board.

What could Scrutiny do?

It is recommended that the Commission receives a progress report on the hate crime strategic plan towards the end of the municipal year. This should include the latest available local data on hate crime. It is recommended that the partner organisations that were involved in the development of the strategy (Victim Support, Merton CIL, Merton LGBT+ forum, MVSC, Merton Polish Family Association and the Police) be invited to attend and contribute to this item.

SAFER MERTON UPDATE

The Commission has already agreed to receive a report at its meeting in July 2017 that will include updates on:

- anti social behaviour
- violence against women and girls
- services for women and children in refuges

In response to a suggestion from a councillor that the Commission review male domestic violence, the Safer Merton report will also include facts and figures on male domestic violence in Merton.

CUSTOMER CONTACT PROGRAMME

Summary of the issue:

The Commission has scrutinised the development and implementation of this important programme over a number of years. The programme's key objective is to improve the way the council interacts with its customers, in line with the Customer Contact Strategy agreed in 2013, to improve customers' experiences as well as increase efficiency.

What could scrutiny do?

It is recommended that the Commission should continue to receive regular progress updates in 2017/18.

OUTSOURCED AND SHARED SERVICES TASK GROUP REVIEW

Summary of the issue

The Commission received the initial action plan for implementation of the task group's recommendations in March 2017.

One of the recommendations was that the Chief Executive should be invited to attend a meeting of the Commission annually to report on how challenge has been embedded in the choice of the most appropriate delivery model for each service. He has been invited to do so at the Commission's meeting on 6 July 2017.

What could scrutiny do?

It is recommended that a further action plan update be received in November 2017 or March 2018.

COMMISSIONING OF COUNCIL SERVICES

Who suggested this issue?

Two suggestions have been received:

1. The CEO of Merton Centre for Independent Living has suggested that the Commission examine how local residents could be involved in the commissioning of council services. She has cited Hammersmith & Fulham as an interesting example of how this could be approached.
2. A local resident has suggested that a review of commissioning could examine the criteria used to evaluate/analyse tenders issued by the Council to ensure that we get maximum benefit for the local community and optimise the opportunities to address what she perceives as a general lack of trust in local government. She has suggested that including social value criteria in tenders could lead to an increase in local jobs, apprenticeships, local purchasing and promote local cohesion. The Council would be proactive in investing locally, supporting young people and addressing the impact of cuts imposed by central government. She has also suggested looking at Preston Council as a good example of a 'think locally' approach to commissioning.

Note – last year Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage Group suggested that scrutiny examine how decisions to contract out key services are made, especially to ensure effective and transparent consideration of other options and appropriate community involvement.

The Council's Procurement Strategy 2013-16 and the Council's Business Plan 2017-21 aims to ensure that procurement activities are undertaken efficiently and economically whilst contributing to the realisation of the economic, social and environmental benefits for the borough. It is based on the development of the principles and good practice established through the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government.

http://www.merton.gov.uk/merton_2015_ps_procurement_strategy_final.pdf

<https://www.local.gov.uk/national-procurement-strategy>

The Strategy is supported by the Council's Contract Standing Orders (Part 4G of the Council's Constitution) which set out the regulations to be followed by council employees when engaged in procurement activities on behalf of the council:

<http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s2592/Part%204G.pdf>

The Council is also in the process of drafting a Social Value Toolkit to assist Commissioners with driving greater local value from the services they deliver to the wider community.

What could scrutiny do?

There is some overlap with the work done by the shared and outsourced services and also some overlap with the suggestion that the Commission examine the recruitment of key workers (see below).

If the Commission wishes to focus on procurement, it could receive a report setting out what is being done to improve the council's performance on procurement, its approach to social value and to getting a balance between reducing the number of supplier and engaging more with local businesses and voluntary or community organisations.

Alternatively the Commission may wish to set up a task group or ask the financial monitoring task group to investigate current performance and future plans and make recommendations on how to improve the council's performance on procurement.

The Commission could also follow up on previous information received of difficulties in recruiting procurement officers and review what is being done to address this. Alternatively this could be done as part of a wider piece of work on the recruitment of key workers as suggested below. The Head of Commercial Services has recommended the wider piece of work since the recruitment issues are not unique to procurement officers and it runs parallel to a planned redesign of the team.

RECRUITMENT OF KEY WORKERS

Who suggested this issue?

Difficulties with the recruitment and retention of teachers was drawn to the attention of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel's attention by the headteacher of Priory Primary School, speaking on behalf of all headteachers in Merton.

Difficulties experienced in recruiting in a number of other key worker and specialist areas has also been highlighted to the financial monitoring task group during its discussions of council spend on agency and temporary staff and as part of its task group review of shared and outsourced services.

What could scrutiny do?

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at its meeting in February 2017, discussed whether to review the recruitment and retention of teachers. The Panel, mindful that this had been subject to a task group review in 2014, suggested that the Commission could establish a task group to look more widely at the recruitment of all council key workers where there have been difficulties in filling permanent vacancies.

MY MERTON

Who suggested this issue?

A local resident has suggested that the council should stop production of My Merton as part of its budget savings and use the money to pay for other services.

Summary of the issue

My Merton, the official magazine of Merton Council, is published quarterly and distributed free to more than 80,000 households across the borough. It is also published in digital format on the council's website, where site visitors can also view previous editions.

In November 2014 the Overview and Scrutiny Commission scrutinised information on the cost (at the time, overall cost was £15k per issue) and distribution methods of My Merton. It found that costs had been reduced by reducing the number of issues and were partly offset by income from advertising. It also heard that My Merton is well regarded by the public as indicated by the Annual Residents Survey.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive an update report on costs and alternatives to My Merton if members thought that this should be a priority for inclusion in the Commission's 2017/18 work programme.

CONSULTATION

Who suggested this issue?

The Corporate Services Departmental Management Team suggested that the Commission could receive a report to examine what are the best mechanisms for the council to use when conducting large scale public consultation.

Summary of the issue

In March 2017 the Commission received a report on consultation and community engagement in response to a request made at Council on 23 November 2016. This report provided information on Merton Partnership's community engagement strategy, the online consultation hub, residents survey, community forums and the e-petition system.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive a report on the methods available and associated costs to the council for large scale consultations if members thought that this should be a priority for inclusion in the Commission's 2017/18 work programme.

REGISTRARS SERVICE

Who suggested this item?

The Corporate Services Departmental Management Team suggested that the Commission could receive a report to update it on recent developments in the registrar's service.

Summary of the issue

The registrars service includes:

- registration of all births, deaths and stillbirths in Merton Registration district
- custody of the registers relating to births, deaths and marriages from the Merton district since 1837 and can, on request, issue copies of the entries.
- conduct and register all civil marriage ceremonies and all civil partnership registrations occurring within the Merton Registration district.
- support to clergy and authorised persons registering marriage throughout Merton registration district.
- a nationality checking service for prospective new British citizens from anywhere in the UK.
- conduct all citizenship ceremonies in the Merton Registration district.
- conduct Naming Ceremonies and Renewal of Vow Ceremonies.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive an update report at one of its meetings.

MONITORING THE EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY COHESION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2017-21

Summary of the issue:

In previous years the Commission has received an annual update on implementation of the Council's Equality Strategy Action Plan.

In March 2017 the Commission made comments on the new draft Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy that has brought together the former Equality Strategy and the Community Cohesion Strategy.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive a progress report on implementation of the new action plan.

FINANCIAL MONITORING:

At its meeting on 28 March 2017 the Commission resolved to re-establish the financial monitoring task group in 2017/18 and ask it to carry out in-depth work ("deep dives") on a small number of service areas as well as continuing to receive quarterly financial monitoring reports.

COUNCIL TAX

Who suggested this issue?

A local resident asked that the Commission consider a report on the level of council tax and what residents get for their money. This should include a comparison table showing what other boroughs charge and what their residents get.

Summary of the issue

All councils are required by law to publish information about the level of council tax and details of spending on council services. This is published on Merton council's website:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/advice-benefits/counciltax/ctax-guide.htm>

What could Scrutiny do?

The Commission may decide that it would be helpful to examine comparative data published by other councils. If so, it is recommended that the Commission's financial monitoring task group could receive the report at one of its meetings.

BUSINESS RATES

Who suggested this issue?

A Cabinet Member has suggested that scrutiny could examine the government's business rate retention proposals.

Summary of the issue

In October 2015, the Government announced its intention that proposals whereby local authorities will be able to keep 100 per cent of the business rates they raise locally - a fundamental change to in the way local government is financed.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has consulted widely and worked with the Local Government Association on the various elements of the proposals, including on what additional responsibilities would be funded through business rates retention.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive a report, either separately or as part of the business plan report in November, on the proposals and what the implications would be for the council's medium term financial strategy. Alternatively, the commission could delegate consideration of this issue to the financial monitoring task group.

BUDGET SCRUTINY

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has a constitutional duty to coordinate the scrutiny responses on the business plan and budget formulation.

It is recommended that, as in previous years, the Commission should put aside some time in its meeting in November and prepare to devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny.

The Chief Executive Officer of Merton Centre for Independent Living has expressed an interest in working with the Commission to explore how to make budget-setting and the MTFs more accessible and based on consultation. If the Commission wished to take this further, it is suggested that initial work could be carried out by the financial monitoring task group in order to identify the parameters and scope of the exercise.

ANNUAL REPORTS RECEIVED BY THE COMMISSION IN PAST YEARS:

- Analysis of the annual member survey on the scrutiny function
- Overview and Scrutiny annual report

Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 26 June 2017

The purpose of the workshop is to identify priority issues for consideration as agenda items or in-depth reviews by the Scrutiny Commission. The final decision on this will then be made by the Commission at their first meeting.

All the issues that have been suggested to date by councillors, officers, partner organisations and residents are outlined in the supporting papers.

Further suggestions may emerge from discussion at the workshop.

Points to consider when selecting a topic:

- Is the issue strategic, significant and specific?
- Is it an area of underperformance?
- Will the scrutiny activity add value to the Council's and/or its partners' overall performance?
- Is it likely to lead to effective, tangible outcomes?
- Is it an issue of community concern and will it engage the public?
- Does this issue have a potential impact for one or more section(s) of the population?
- Will this work duplicate other work already underway, planned or done recently?
- Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?
- Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?

Note of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission topic selection meeting on 26 June 2017

Attendees:

Councillors Peter Southgate (Chair), John Dehaney, Brenda Fraser, Abigail Jones, Sally Kenny, Brian Lewis-Lavender, Gilli Lewis-Lavender, Dennis Pearce and David Williams.

Co-opted member Mansoor Ahmad

Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services

John Hill, Head of Public Protection

Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services (note taker)

Apologies:

Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Policing in Merton

AGREED to continue to invite the Borough Commander to attend twice yearly and to continue to send questions to him in advance of the meeting. AGREED to ask him for an update on the One Met Model (consultation regarding the configuration of the proposed Borough Command Units) and the rollout of actions from the Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan 2017-21.

Members were recommended to request a police "ride-along" if they had not previously done so.

Drugs and alcohol

AGREED to ask the Borough Commander about how drinking and drug taking in public places is being tackled by the police.

Discussed the feasibility of carrying out a scrutiny task group review of street drinking and drug use and concluded that there would not be sufficient time in the coming municipal year to address such complex issues.

AGREED that the Sustainable Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel would invite members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to attend its discussion on Public Space Protection Orders on 5 September.

Hate crime

Noted that hate crime in Merton has increased since 2012 at a faster rate than the London area as a whole.

AGREED that members should read the recently launched Hate Crime Strategy 2017-21 and that the Commission would receive a progress report on this later in the year. AGREED to invite partner organisations to attend and contribute to this item. This will include organisations involved in the development of the strategy as well as those experiencing hate crime first hand. SUGGESTED that this meeting should be held in a community venue such as Vestry Hall.

Councillor Macauley said that the Joint Consultative Committee would be looking at the issue at its next meeting and hearing from a number of community groups.

Safer Merton update

NOTED that the Commission would be receiving a report from safer Merton at its meeting on 6 July 2017.

Customer contact programme

AGREED that the Commission should continue to receive regular progress updates in 2017/18. Members would like these updates to include information on how successful the new website has been in terms of content being uploaded in a timely manner, level of uptake and customer feedback on aspects of the website including user friendliness and effectiveness of the search facility. Members also asked whether the new website would add anything to the way in which the council consulted with residents.

Annual Residents Survey

AGREED to add a presentation on the survey results to the 2017/18 work programme.

Outsourced and shared services task group review

NOTED that the Chief Executive would be providing an update to the Commission at its meeting on 6 July.

AGREED to receive a further action plan update in November 2017 or March 2018.

Commissioning of council services

NOTED that aspects of this have been included in the work of the outsourced and shared services task group. Noted also that there is some overlap with the suggestion that the Commission examine the recruitment of key workers.

Recruitment of key workers

Councillor Pearce said that this issue had been drawn to the attention of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny panel by a headteacher talking about the difficulties schools were experiencing with recruitment and retention of all categories of staff, particularly teachers. He added that recruitment and retention been a long standing issue for the council in relation to social workers. Other members stated that there was an issue across public sector services in London, including GPs and police officers.

Members noted that the Standards and General Purposes Committee had received a number of reports about the number of interim and agency staff employed by the council and actions being taken to address this. The Director of Corporate Services added that the Corporate Management Team had been looking at the Merton offer to staff as part of its response to the most recent staff survey. She said that much of the offer was similar to that provided by other London boroughs.

AGREED that the Chair and the Head of Democracy Services would bring draft proposals to the Commission's meeting on 6 July so that the Commission could decide whether it wishes to carry out a review of recruitment and retention. Any scrutiny work would build on what has already been done by the Standards and General Purposes Committee.

My Merton

AGREED that this was not a priority for inclusion in the 2017/18 work programme as information on the cost and distribution methods had been scrutinised in November 2014.

Consultation

AGREED that this was not a priority for inclusion in the 2017/18 work programme as the Commission had received a thorough report on these issues in March 2017. SUGGESTED that this might be timely for consideration during 2018/19.

Registrars Service

AGREED to receive an update report on development in marketing, potential for expanding the service and the works being carried out in the courtyard and garden.

Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy

AGREED to receive an annual progress report on implementation of the action plan for the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy.

Financial Monitoring

AGREED that the Commission should re-establish the financial monitoring task group and ask it to continue to carry out in-depth work ("deep dives") on a small number of service areas as well as continuing to receive quarterly financial monitoring reports.

Council tax

Noted that information on how council tax is spent is already published on the website. Noted also that the level of council tax is extensively discussed as part of the budget setting process.

AGREED that this was not a priority for inclusion in the 2017/18 work programme.

Business rates

AGREED to take no further action on this at present as the relevant legislation had not been included in the Queen's Speech.

Budget scrutiny

AGREED that the Commission should continue to put time aside at its November meeting and devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny.

Annual reports

AGREED that the Commission should continue to receive the analysis of the Members' survey and the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

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