



# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18

London Borough of Merton

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## Foreword

In December 2017, the Select Committee for the Department of Communities and Local Government published its report into the effectiveness of scrutiny in local government. It makes interesting reading (and not just for the positive reference to pre-decision scrutiny undertaken by Merton's Children and Young People panel into the site proposal for a new secondary school on p.9). The Committee concluded that the *organisational culture of the council* is the main determinant of whether scrutiny is effective or not, and adds: "In extreme cases, ineffective scrutiny can contribute to severe service failures" - witness the excessive death rate at Mid Staffs, and child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.

The DCLG report provides a benchmark against which to assess the effectiveness of scrutiny here in Merton, and in this annual report you can read about what we have been doing:

1. The Commission investigated difficulties with the recruitment and retention of teachers (at the request of headteachers), and visited the Merton Refuge to see for themselves the help and support given to victims of domestic abuse.
2. The Children and Young People panel contributed to the achievement of a very successful outcome to the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services.
3. The Healthier Communities and Older People panel kept up their scrutiny of our health partners (Epsom & St Helier NHS Trust, Merton CCG, and St George's and SW London Mental Health Trust) and contributed to improved outcomes for their patients eg. with traumatic brain injuries.
4. The Sustainable Communities panel established a task group to investigate air quality, and robustly scrutinised the quality of services provided by Veolia and Clarion.

We have experimented with different ways of conducting scrutiny this year, by bringing in expert witnesses, paying site visits and conducting "deep dive" enquiries to understand how individual services work in detail.

No doubt there is more we could do, for example to attract greater public involvement in scrutiny reviews where appropriate. We will be reviewing the DCLG report in more detail next year to see what we can learn from it. But to go back to its starting point, I think we can be confident that the *organisational culture of the council* is conducive to effective scrutiny here in Merton.

For that we have to thank our hard working scrutiny team, headed up by Julia Regan and ably supported by Stella Akintan and Annette Wiles. They manage to work harmoniously with members, officers and other stakeholders to achieve effective outcomes for our residents – which is what good scrutiny is all about.

**Councillor Peter Southgate**  
**Chair, Overview & 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:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

More information about Scrutiny at Merton can be found at

<https://www2.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/scrutiny.htm>

or by phoning the scrutiny team on 020 8545 3864 or emailing [scrutiny@merton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk).

## Scrutiny achievements 2014-2018

Councillors involved in scrutiny have indicated that they have found this to be a rewarding and influential role, as highlighted from feedback from our last survey (2018) of scrutiny councillors, co-opted members and Cabinet members:

*“I believe the overview and scrutiny function gives me the opportunity to learn from others by way of practice, policy, communication and link working, also an opportunity to identify where changes need to be made and practice and habits need to be changed.”*

*“The Task Groups are very good and enable in depth discussion on potential policy direction.”*

*“Cabinet continues to be responsive to suggestions from scrutiny when reviewing the budget”*

Scrutiny has resulted in real changes in policies, service provision and council budgets over the last four years. Some of the highlights are set out below:

### **Improvements to local services**

Over the last four years scrutiny has made recommendations that have had a significant impact on services provided by the council, its partners and other external organisations:

#### Care leaver accommodation

The recommendation of the Sustainable Communities Panel that a *House of Multiple Occupation* be piloted as an alternative option for care leaver accommodation has now been realised. This resulted from the Panel taking a workshop approach to focus exclusively on the issue of housing and specifically care leaver accommodation working in partnership with members of the Children and Young People Panel.

#### Energy Supply Company updates

Council officers continue to pursue the scrutiny task group recommendation that Merton should establish an energy supply company (ESCO). Discussions are ongoing with a housing scheme provider and as part of these setting up an ESCO is still being explored. It has been established that the business case for an ESCO is dependent on having a housing development opportunity as well as the necessary level of demand for energy and heating. Proving the business case therefore cannot be achieved until the development is more advanced.

#### Type Two Diabetes

The task group review on tackling type two diabetes in the South Asian community led to culturally appropriate services being provided for this group. This includes education sessions and ensuring NHS health checks are provided at a younger age.

The task group review also raised the profile of this important issue. This has contributed to the Health and Wellbeing Board identifying tackling type two diabetes as a priority area.

#### Brain injury

The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered the services available for people who had experienced traumatic brain injury. It became apparent during the scrutiny process that Merton had lower provision than its neighbours, which led to a decision by the Merton Clinical Commissioning Group to provide additional services in the Borough.

#### Childhood immunisations

A cross cutting scrutiny review on improving the rates of childhood immunisations in the 0-5 age group has led to successful outcomes. The review was conducted because Sutton and Merton had the worst immunisations rates in London and key partners including NHS England, the local authorities and the clinical commissioning groups did not have a joint approach to tackling this issue but worked in silos. As a result of the recommendations arising from the review and the positive manner in which they were received a strong partnership approach with regular meetings and a joint action plan was in place and overall there has been an increase in immunisations rates amongst the 0-5 age group

#### **Holding external bodies to account**

The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is pleased that it successfully managed to scrutinise two key external bodies during this municipal year: Clarion Housing and Veolia UK. Merton transferred its social housing stock to Clarion in 2010 which was subject to an agreement lasting five years. Now that this has concluded, there is no obligation on Clarion to continue to participate in Merton's scrutiny process. Therefore, the Panel is pleased that it secured the commitment to attend this year and in future years.

Merton's waste, recycling and street cleaning services are now provided through the South London Waste Partnership by Veolia UK. It was therefore important that when faced with performance issues it was willing to participate in the scrutiny process with its representative having appeared at two of the Panel's meetings. A Veolia manager also attended and answered questions at the Commission's call-in meeting on the size of the residual waste containers.

## **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**

### Recruitment and retention of teachers

The task group was set up in order to investigate the difficulties that schools in Merton were experiencing with the recruitment and retention of teachers and how Merton Council and its partners could assist with this. The task group heard from local headteachers, newly qualified teachers and council officers as well as examining information about teacher recruitment and retention nationally.

The task group noted that good school performance has a positive impact on both recruitment and retention and were therefore encouraged by evidence of sustained improvement in performance in Merton schools and the high proportion of schools that have been rated "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted.

The task group found that the council already has appropriate systems and structures in place for teacher recruitment. It has made recommendations aimed at using these more effectively and promoting them more widely to headteachers. Similarly, there is a range of benefits already on offer to teachers, so the task group has made recommendations to re-invigorate their promotion as well as encouraging governing bodies to organise activities that would promote staff health and wellbeing.

The cost of local accommodation was found to be a key factor affecting both recruitment and retention. The task group has made a number of recommendations that are intended to improve teachers' experience of the private rented sector, including the proposed introduction of an interest free loan to assist teachers with payment of rent deposits.

### Shared and outsourced services

The Commission has continued to receive reports on progress made by Cabinet in responding to recommendations made by the scrutiny review of shared and outsourced services. The recommendations were intended to stimulate a more consistent and rigorous approach to selecting delivery models and challenging officers on the most appropriate model for each service.

The Commission has welcomed progress made on identifying different service models for a number of services and on the development of a draft toolkit and business case pro-forma. Members expressed disappointment that more had not been done to bring proposals for large or strategically important outsourced services

to scrutiny at an early stage when there was still time to have some influence on their development.

### **Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny**

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive attended to set out their priorities for 2017/18, pressures on services and on housing supply in London and the financial challenges facing the council. The Commission asked them questions on issues including emergency procedures and building safety, commercial activity undertaken and planned by the council and how service performance was being addressed with Clarion.

The Commission commented on the annual report from Merton Partnership, particularly in relationship to use of the government's apprenticeship levy, SEN funding and the night time economy. Members suggested that all priority areas in the action plan should have measurable targets and a full set of data. A presentation on the findings of the residents' survey 2017 showed a positive shift against many of the measures. A notable concern was street cleanliness. Members agreed that they wished to see the survey continue on a biennial basis.

The Commission was pleased to hear that significant progress had been made against wide-ranging objectives in the council's equality and community cohesion strategy action plan. It will continue to review the action plan on an annual basis.

The Commission has continued to receive updates on the customer contact programme and has been pleased with the increased level of use of online services. The Commission noted the delay in completion and the budget overspend. Members were assured that various Apps for reporting streetscene issues could still be used. Members were informed of the commercial discussions with the supplier and the options that were being considered for ongoing support and hosting for the technology.

The Commission was pleased to hear that the Registration Services had received positive feedback from the General Register Office. Members also welcomed the completion of works at Morden Park House that would enable the council to maximise income from its use for ceremonial and other functions.

### **Scrutiny of crime and disorder**

The Borough Commander attended twice during the year to present the latest figures on crime and answer questions about policing in the borough. The Commission expressed concern about the 4.1% increase in total notifiable crimes in March and noted that the context for this was one of crime reduction previously since 2011 and a low base compared to other boroughs.



Questions to the Borough Commander have focused on operational changes and how the new 4-borough Borough Command Unit would work. Members also asked questions about safeguarding, knife crime, Traveller encampments and the Eastern Electrics festival in Morden Park.

The Commission sent a response to the MOPAC Public Access and Engagement Strategy in order to express its support for the retention of a front office in Wimbledon, agreeing the need to debate the best way to resource policing in the borough but questioning the wisdom of such large cuts to police budgets at a time of increasing terrorism and civil unrest.

The Manager of Merton Refuge outlined the services and support provided by the Refuge. The Commission also received a report setting out progress that had been made on tackling violence against women and girls, including domestic violence. Members who subsequently visited the Refuge to speak to service users, their children and staff were impressed by the facilities and services provided.

Safer Merton and Merton Centre for Independent Living provided an update on the hate crime strategy and associated action plan. The Commission resolved to continue to support the partnership work on hate crime and requested a more detailed analysis of next year's figures.

#### **Call-in**

One call-in request was received by the Commission in 2017/18:

#### Residual waste container size

The Commission heard a call-in further to pre decision scrutiny on this issue by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel, in January 2018. Cabinet's decision was that the standard size of wheeled bins for both residual waste and paper/card should be 180 litres, with 240 litre and 140 litre alternatives to be an option for larger and smaller households respectively.

The call-in signatories and invited witnesses raised considerations relating to consultation processes, resident views, the consideration of different options and the assisted collection scheme. Commission members expressed varying views about whether the proposals were sufficiently flexible and whether consultation specifically on size should have been undertaken. The Commission voted to uphold Cabinet's decision.

## **Finance and performance monitoring**

The financial monitoring task group has continued to monitor quarterly financial management 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 asset management, the Wimbledon tennis championship, the council's approach to commercialisation, and the service and financial position of the council's CHAS company.

## **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 examined progress made with savings that had been agreed in previous years and commented on the size of the capital budget, given that it was underspent in the past.

The Commission made a recommendation to Cabinet in November 2017 in relation to the proposed use of reserves to balance the budget, the predicted shortfall in savings from previous years, the vacancy rate and use of agency staff, and the longstanding and persistent pressures in adult social care as well as the unfunded costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those with no recourse to public funds.

A further recommendation was made to Cabinet in January 2018 noting the substantial budget gap predicted for 2020/21 and beyond, recommending that officers should be encouraged to be entrepreneurial and pursue innovative solutions (subject to an acceptable level of risk), and that Cabinet recognize the importance of effective and appropriately planned project management to ensure projects are achieved on time and maximize potential savings from those projects.

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Areas of responsibility:** scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people. This includes education, children's social care, child protection and youth services.

**Councillor Dennis Pearce, Panel Chair:** "It has been a pleasure this year to scrutinise a service that has received such a positive outcome from its Ofsted inspection and it is good to note that the cross party working of this Panel was complimented as part of Ofsted's report. It is also important to note that this year we have worked in partnership with the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to bring attention to the issue of care leaver accommodation, reflecting that this is an issue that needs to be addressed across Departments. It is important to acknowledge this valuable way of working. We have also continued to grow in our role of scrutinising child and family health and wellbeing. This remains new to the remit of the Panel but one in which we are growing in confidence".

## Scrutiny reviews

### Prevent task group

The decision to form this task group was set against the background of the four terror attacks that happened between March and June 2017; the Panel wanted to reassure itself that Merton's schools are successfully implementing the duty and doing everything possible to prevent Merton's young people from becoming radicalised and doing so in a way that doesn't cause stigmatisation of individuals or communities. Recommendations include looking at the role of the wider Merton community in helping prevent radicalisation amongst Merton's young people and Merton's schools continuing to share their best practice to support each other in fulfilling the duty. The report will be presented to Cabinet in the new municipal year before the action plan comes to the Panel.

### Care leaver accommodation

Members of the Children and Young People Panel were pleased to support the work of their colleagues on the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel when it took an in-depth look at accommodation for care leavers. It is evident that there are issues that sit across Panels and it is beneficial for us to work collectively and in partnership with officers from several departments across the Council. The officer response to the detailed reference that resulted from the workshop was welcomed by the Panel and has already resulted in a *House of Multiple Occupation* being piloted to provide alternative accommodation for care leavers.

### Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts

This task group reported in February 2017 with the action plan for the implementation of the recommendations being presented to the Panel this year. Members have asked officers to clarify why it is not possible to ensure through standard terms that contractors and service providers offer apprenticeships for Merton residents. A further review of progress against the recommendations is due within six months.

## Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

### **Ofsted inspection**

The Panel dedicated a whole meeting to looking at the outcome of the Ofsted single framework inspection and comparing this to the performance of other London boroughs. This emphasised that Merton is in the top 10 of local authorities nationally for its provision of children's services. Highlights include that managers and social workers know their children well, Merton's systematic model and approach to safeguarding is regarded as robust by Ofsted, the approach to care proceedings is credited with being the best out of the boroughs using the South West London courts and the adoption service receiving a rare outstanding judgement.

With the help of Kathy Bundred, Children's Improvement Adviser for the Local Government Association, Merton's success was quantified and highlighted as one of a small number of authorities judged to be doing well in the provision of children's services. The session also focused on features of authorities with children's services judged good or higher providing the Panel with a framework for future scrutiny of the service.

### **Harris Wimbledon Secondary Academy**

Following its reference to Cabinet in July 2016 on the new secondary school, the Panel has continued to work with officers to review progress on the delivery of Harris Wimbledon and to understand the associated issues. This has been achieved through regular updates from the Cabinet Member for Education, information in the Department Update Report, member questions asked through matters arising and through a dedicated item. Members have focused on admission criteria, demand for the new school and how the needs of Merton Abbey Primary are being accommodated through the shared use of the site. Members resolved to ask Cabinet to seek formal written reassurance from the Elim Church that under its management Merton Hall lettings will enable the venue to remain for the use of all the community and will be fully compliant with equality legislation. It was reported to the Panel, at its meeting in January 2018, that Elim had confirmed in writing it will be offering the church site to the local community for groups and individuals to hire when it is available and that there would be no restriction on those groups accessing services, meetings and clubs etc. No bookings will be taken that conflict with the Constitution of Elim's charity.

### **Merton Safeguarding Children Board**

The Panel received the annual report of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB). Members used the session to understand how the board will sustain its focus on improvement, what support is provided to young people with a custodial sentence, what is being done to address knife crime and how the service ensures the child's voice is heard.

### **Corporate parenting**

The corporate parenting annual report was received by the Panel with the focus on improving placement stability for Merton's very complex young people highlighted along with the challenge of child sexual exploitation.

## **Health and wellbeing strategies for children and families**

Officers from Public Health and colleagues from the Clinical Commissioning Group provided the Panel with an update report on health and wellbeing strategies for children and families. This focused on activity to address and progress being made on childhood obesity as well as looking at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Members sought to understand satisfaction with the CAMHS service. This is a new area of responsibility for the Panel and one in which it is growing in confidence. During this year, training has been provided for Panel members on those areas of the public health strategy that relate to children and young people.

## **Think Family**

The Panel benefited from a briefing on the *Think Family* initiative which recognises and promotes the importance of a whole-family approach, working across children's and adult's services.

## **Performance monitoring**

### **Performance monitoring data**

The Panel has continued to review progress against a basket of agreed key targets (Key Performance Indicators) with Councillor Mike Brunt continuing in the role of performance monitoring lead for the Panel. However, access to this data has been limited this year by the implementation of the new Mosaic information management system by the Children, Schools and Families Department. This situation has been carefully monitored by the performance monitoring lead and the Panel. Data started to become available again for the last Panel meeting of this municipal year.

### **Education, Health and Care Plans**

Having carefully monitored performance in provision of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the Panel requested a deep dive session to improve its understanding of why the 20 week statutory target wasn't being met and what further work was in hand to improve performance. This established that whilst the target wasn't being met, the number of tribunals had notably decreased and that performance was on track to transfer all existing SEN statement to EHCPs by March 2018. The Panel also learned how the EHCP process was being streamlined to achieve the 20 week target including getting requests to the assessment panel quicker. At its final meeting of the year, it was noted that good progress had been made in transferring SEN statements to EHCPs (with only 20 outstanding). Also, between March 2017 and March 2018, there had been an increase in the number of plans being achieved in the 20 week timescale from 19% to 37%.

### **Schools annual report**

The Panel took its annual schools report, dedicating almost an entire meeting to look in depth at the performance of Merton's schools from September 2016 to August 2017. This covered achievement at each stage of education in addition to looking at attendance, exclusions and elective home education. It was highlighted that 93% of Merton's schools are now judged good or outstanding with 95% of Merton's pupils attending good or outstanding schools. Based on its key stage 4 results, Merton is

placed first in England, above both London and national averages whilst progress in maths and reading at Key Stage 2 places Merton 10<sup>th</sup> in the country. School attendance has improved (moving Merton from 10<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> nationally) and numbers of those not in education, employment or training are very low. Members noted the need to focus on the achievement of pupils in receipt of SEN support at all stages of education whilst officers were questioned on elective home education given this has increase by 174% over the last decade.

### **Financial monitoring**

Members used the two budget and business planning sessions this year to explore how the costs of Harris Wimbledon will be covered, look at how budgetary pressures are monitored, explore how efficiencies are being achieved by keeping staff sickness and the use of agency staff to the lowest possible level and discussed additional opportunities for the Children, Schools and Families Department to generate income.

The Panel resolved that it wishes to receive financial information on a more regular basis through the Department update report. This is to allow any significant financial items to be understood earlier (to be picked up in the next municipal year through the work programme). The Panel passed a reference on the budget and business plan: 'Recognising the excellent progress already made by the Children, Schools and Families Department in revenue generation, officers should explore additional opportunities for revenue generation in the same way as they are exploring opportunities for cost savings'.

### **Call-in**

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2017/18.

## 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 *“The role of this Panel is crucial in bringing democratic accountability to the local health economy. Over the past year this panel played an important role in speaking up on behalf of local people and most importantly seen changes to local services as a result.”*

### Responding to local issues

#### **South West London and St Georges Mental Health Trust - proposed change to diagnostic autism spectrum disorder service.**

The Chief Executive of South West London and St Georges Mental Health Trust attended the Panel to address public concerns that they would no longer provide diagnostic Autism Spectrum Disorder Services for children. The Panel were informed that there had been a significant increase in the demand for this service therefore it was under review but no immediate changes would be made to the current provision.

#### **Personal Independent Payment process**

The Chief Executive of Merton Centre for Independent Living (Merton CiL) and Merton and Lambeth Citizens advice reported a number of re-occurring issues when supporting people through the Personal Independent Payments process (PIP) . This included

- Many medical centres are inaccessible for wheelchair users or those with limited mobility.
- There are no assessment Centres in Merton therefore people are required to travel out of the borough.
- Many people are struggling to complete the application forms especially vulnerable people and those with mental health issues.

The Partnership Support Manager from DWP accepted the Panel’s concerns and reported that service had been contracted out to the Independent Assessment Service, home visits are available for those who are not able to get assessment centres. After a robust discussion it was agreed that a meeting will be held with the chair and vice chair, independent assessment teams client champions, Merton CiL, Merton and Lambeth Citizens Advice and Adults First carers organisation to address these issues. The outcomes from the meeting which is due to be held in May will be reported back to the panel.

#### **Merton Clinical Commissioning Group – changes to some services**

Last year Merton Clinical Commissioning Group (MCCG) consulted with the Panel about proposed changes to some services. It was reported that they were facing significant financial challenges meant that they had to review current provision. Proposed changes included ending availability of gluten free products on prescription. The Panel expressed concern about plans to restrict the provision of IVF services and asked MCCG to conduct a full 90 day consultation. However having consulted with scrutiny committees across South West London MCCG decided not to go ahead with the proposal.

## **Financial Monitoring**

### **Budget and Business Plan 2017-18**

The Panel considered the budget for 2017-18. The Chief Executive of Merton Centre for Independent Living (Merton CIL) addressed the Panel in regards to the Adult Social Care Budget. She expressed concern that not all the proposals had been subject to consultation. The Director for Community and Housing reported that many of the draft savings were still under review and a consultation would take place if significant service changes were proposed.

## **Scrutiny of key partners**

### **South West London and St Georges NHS Trust – update following CQC inspection**

The Acting Medical Director from South West London and St Georges NHS Trust attended the Panel to discuss progress with making improvements since the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection rated the Trust as Inadequate. The Panel were informed that significant progress had been made. The Panel asked a number of questions about specific services as well as areas of concerns expressed by their residents. The Panel were satisfied that the Trust were addressing the issues raised by the CQC inspection

### **Epsom and St Helier University NHS – 2020-2030 vision**

Epsom and St Helier University NHS Trust attended the Panel to discuss their vision for 2020-2030. The Trust highlighted that there are significant challenges with their current estate which is spread across two sites and requires significant rebuilding and regeneration. The Panel were keen to emphasise their support for maintaining all services on the St Helier site.

### **Services for people who have experienced traumatic brain injury**



The Panel considered the services Merton provide for people who need support and rehabilitation after an incidence of brain injury. The Panel met with clinicians at St George's Neuro-rehabilitation Centre, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, Merton Safeguarding Adults Manager and the Assistant Director for Adult Social Care. The Panel were informed that while there were areas of good practice, provision for Merton residents was lower than neighbouring boroughs, especially within the psychological services. As a result of the scrutiny by this Panel, MCCG agreed to increase service provision in the borough.

## Scrutiny reviews

### **Tackling Loneliness in Merton**

The Panel commissioned a review to look at how to tackle loneliness amongst older people. The topic was suggested by the school council at Abbotsbury Primary School.

The task group met with the British Red Cross, Libraries Manager, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, Street Pastors, Voluntary Sector Organisations and Adult Social Care colleagues. The task group found that there are services available but it can be difficult to identify people who are lonely. Recommendations sought to try and raise the profile of this issue across existing strategies and to develop an agreed list of organisations that people who are facing loneliness can be referred to. The Panel were pleased that all the recommendations were implemented by March 2018. They have also asked for a further update in six months time to consider the impact of the changes that have been made.

### **Tackling Type Two Diabetes in the South Asian Community**

The Panel conducted a task group review looking at how to reduce the high levels of type two diabetes in the South Asian community, of which there is a higher prevalence than in other ethnic groups. Since this task group has been completed, the Health and Wellbeing Board has identified type two diabetes as a priority. The Panel received an update on the progress with implementing the recommendations and were pleased to find that there has been significant progress and a range of projects will be taking place in the community as part of the wider strategic framework for diabetes.

### **Scrutiny Review of Homeshare Schemes**

The Panel commissioned a task group to consider if a Homeshare scheme would be beneficial in the borough. Homeshare brokers a relationship between older people who have a spare room with a younger person who will give around ten hours of support with tasks around the home. The task group found that although Homeshare schemes exist in Merton, they do not have any links or referral arrangements with the council.

A Homeshare scheme could help to address some of the council's priorities such as tackling loneliness amongst older people and access to housing for young people. The task group found if there are stringent safeguarding measures in place, a scheme of this nature could be beneficial for Merton residents. Adult Social Care was asked to lead on taking this work forward.



## Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Areas of responsibility:** scrutiny of issues relating to housing, environmental sustainability, culture, enterprise and skills, libraries and transport.

**Councillor Abby Jones, Panel Chair:** “It has been another extremely busy year for the Sustainable Communities Panel to such an extent that it has necessitated our adding two further meetings to our schedule. However, I am pleased that as I come to the end of my time as chair, this Panel has achieved some notable successes. It was brave of the Panel to devote so much time to looking at the issue of care leaver accommodation but this has paid off; a pilot scheme using a *House of Multiple Occupation* to offer care leavers a different type of accommodation has been achieved. Additionally, at a time when more and more council services are being contracted out to external bodies, we have continued to effectively scrutinise both Clarion Housing and Veolia UK. In this year, we have also successfully piloted some new ways of working; using Twitter for resident engagement and working cross party to plan some items and more effectively use the time available to us. Both approaches have proved profitable and the Panel should consider how it uses these in the future”.

**Graeme Kane, Assistant Director, Public Spaces, Contracts and Commissioning:** “Participation in the scrutiny process has been valuable for the Public Space team this year. It has afforded us the opportunity to engage with residents on the performance of the new waste and street cleaning contract, to listen to concerns and to allow us to explain the action being taken and demonstrate how this is beginning to improve the service. It has also given us the opportunity to engage with Councillors in the run up to introducing the new waste and recycling service, to consult on key aspects such as the size of wheeled bins, demonstrate the thorough preparation that is underway to rollout the new service and hear Councillors’ own ideas on aspects of the rollout such as how this can best be communicated to residents”.

## Scrutiny reviews

### **Air Quality Task Group**

This task group focused on air quality issues around building sites and fed into the review of the Council’s air quality action plan. Recommendations include that the Sustainable Communities Panel conduct pre-decision scrutiny of the scope of any review of parking levies which are a key way to influence decisions about vehicle purchases. The action plan to achieve the task group’s recommendations will be reviewed every six months.

### **Crossover Task Group**

This task group was focused on a topic of great interest to Merton residents as it sought to balance the risks to flooding and street scene caused by crossovers with

the desire of residents to park close to their properties at a time when the number of Controlled Parking Zones is growing. A recommendation is to address parking stress in controlled areas by limiting the number of annual permits issued per bay. Once this is reached no further crossovers should be allowed. Cabinet has requested to see the action plan before it comes to the Panel meaning this is now scheduled for the June 2018 meeting.

### **Commercialisation Task Group**

This task group initially reported in November 2016 with the Panel now taking updates on progress against the recommendations. Panel members noted the review of the Council's property portfolio that has been commissioned, progress on the redevelopment of Morden town center and the advice received that the development of an energy supply company can only be realised alongside a major housing development.

### **Housing Supply Task Group**

This task group reported in September 2015. However, given its importance, the Panel has continued to receive regular updates on progress against the recommendations taking two this year at a six month interval. Panel members noted the consultation being conducted on designation change to allow for small scale developments and the progress being made with the Local Authority Property Company. The Panel has requested to receive a summative and final report on this task group during the next municipal year.

## **Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny**

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

### **Care leaver accommodation**

At its meeting in September 2017, the Panel took the decision to use a workshop approach to focus exclusively on the issue of housing and specifically care leaver accommodation. Working in partnership with members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, an introductory presentation from officers on housing and homelessness was provided before participants were split into two workshops to focus on:

- the issues care leavers face with accommodation (supported by Grenfell Housing and Training that works with care leavers and supports them in their accommodation needs); and
- different approaches to care leaver accommodation (supported by Paul Chadwick, the former Director of Children's Services at Croydon).

This resulted in a detailed reference to Cabinet focusing on issues such as increasing the range of independent accommodation options, piloting the use of *Houses of Multiple Occupation*, the 'lead tenant model', greater use of the *Shared Lives* model and exploration of *Housing First*. The Panel was pleased to learn recently that a *House of Multiple Occupation* is now being piloted for care leaver accommodation.

### **New waste and recycling service**

Prior to the rollout of the new waste and recycling service in October 2018, the Panel has been involved in scrutinising key aspects of the service (including the decision on the size of wheeled bin to be used) and the planning being undertaken to realise the change in service delivery. Given the degree of change involved, the Panel has resolved to receive a further update on the new service prior to rollout in the next municipal year.

### **Morden redevelopment**

The Panel received a briefing on the Morden redevelopment from officers and Transport for London. This resulted in a reference to Cabinet recommending that Merton Council should maintain sufficient control of the project. Panel members believe that merely retaining planning authority status, without an active share in the Joint Venture itself, would not be sufficient.

During this year, the Panel has also looked at Public Space Protection Orders, facilities for physical activity in playgrounds, plans to conduct a consultation on the local plan and safety issues arising from the Grenfell Tower fire and their implications for all high rise buildings in Merton.

## **Performance monitoring**

### **Performance monitoring data**

The Panel has continued to review progress against agreed key targets (Key Performance Indicators) for both the Environment and Regeneration and the Community and Housing Departments. This forms a key part of every meeting.

Additionally, this year the Panel has appointed a lead member for performance monitoring for the first time (Councillor Holden). Regular pre-meets have been held between the performance lead and officers to allow further time to be given to the scrutiny of the data and for key points to then be highlighted at the subsequent Panel meeting. This has worked well, allowing for greater discussion and understanding of the data that is presented.

### **Waste, recycling and street cleaning**

Monitoring the performance of the waste, recycling and street cleaning contract has formed a key part of the Panel's work this year. At its meeting in November 2017, considerable time was devoted to looking at performance under the contract six months after it commenced. Following a number of submissions and representations from Merton residents, the Panel resolved a reference to Cabinet which sought its support for the Panel to sustain its scrutiny of performance under the contract. This was gained and the Panel has received detailed updates on performance at each of its meetings for the remainder of the municipal year. There has been further input from residents and the direct involvement of Veolia representatives allowing the Panel to highlight key concerns and look at how these are being addressed.

### **Clarion Housing**

The Panel was pleased that Merton's largest social housing provider returned this year to answer questions on repairs and estates regeneration. As happened previously, the opportunity was taken to seek questions from all Councillors and not just Panel members. These were sent to Clarion in advance with its responses being published in the agenda pack. This allowed the Panel to explore a number of issues in much greater depth than might otherwise have been the case. It also showed, as reflected in member case loads, that there has been a welcome improvement in Clarion's performance on repairs.

### **Adult learning**

The Panel scrutinised the performance of the adult learning service which has been inspected by Ofsted receiving a requires improvement judgement despite being on an upward trajectory. The Panel resolved to look more at the *Prevent* duty to understand the requirements given this had been highlighted in Ofsted's recommendations.

### **Libraries and heritage annual report**

Another strong annual report from libraries and heritage gave Panel members the opportunity to thank and congratulate officers and to specifically highlight the opening of the new Colliers Wood Library. It was also noted that the required savings are being achieved whilst all library sites and existing opening hours have been retained.

### **Automatic number plate recognition**

Introduced to the borough in 2016, the Panel heard how there has been a 200% increase in the number moving motoring contraventions caught as a result of ANPR. The rate of appeals lodged since has also halved. This is because for each contravention captured an evidence package is provided which can be shared with the driver making it much more difficult to appeal. Members were also interested to hear how it is intended to trial the use of ANPR outside schools to see if this can enforce parking restrictions.

### **Planning enforcement**

Members received a detailed update on the performance of planning enforcement learning that the backlog of cases has again built-up. Officers explained their plans to change working practices in order to address this backlog including beginning work with Capita to provide additional resource. Longer term plans include utilising technology to improve productivity. Panel members resolved to receive trend data on the number of planning enforcement cases that are more than six months old.

### **Town centre regeneration**

The Panel was pleased to receive its annual presentation highlighting all that has been achieved in delivering work to date on the programme of town centre regeneration. The Panel congratulated officers on the success of these schemes, particularly Mitcham and Colliers Wood.

During this year, the Panel has also received updates on the Christmas Parking Scheme (to be reviewed during the next municipal year) the Eastern Electric event and the Local Authority Property Company.

## **Financial monitoring**

The Panel used the two sessions on budget and business planning to focus on the reasons why planned savings haven't been realised, how the resulting funding gap is going to be addressed, new savings proposals, opportunities to increase commercial income from the regulatory service and to question officers on the content of the service plans.

## **Scrutiny of external bodies**

The Panel is pleased that during this year it successfully managed to scrutinise two key external bodies: Clarion Housing and Veolia UK. Merton transferred its social housing stock to Clarion in 2010 which was subject to an agreement lasting five years. Now that this has concluded, there is no obligation on Clarion to continue to participate in Merton's scrutiny process. Therefore, it was a notable success that a commitment to attend this year and in future years was gained.

Merton's waste, recycling and street cleaning services are now provided through the South London Waste Partnership by Veolia UK. It was therefore important that when faced with performance issues it was willing to participate in the scrutiny process with its representatives having appeared at two Panel meetings.

## **Different approaches**

During the municipal year the Panel has piloted a number of different approaches to support it in achieving effective scrutiny. Keen to reach out and engage Merton residents in the scrutiny process, Panel members have taken to social media (Twitter) to promote upcoming items at scrutiny and to encourage resident involvement. This was specifically used at the November 2017 meeting for the item on Veolia's performance resulting in numerous submissions from residents which were used to inform Panel members and support their questioning of both officers from the Public Space team and the Veolia representative. Additionally, it resulted in a higher level of residents attending the meeting and representations to the Panel on Veolia's performance.

Following the visit to the Communities and Local Government Committee in December 2016, this year the Panel piloted cross party planning of session to maximise impact. This was specifically used at the November 2017 meeting for the item on Clarion Housing and enabled the Panel to use the available time more effectively. This resulted in a more systematic approach, allowing a broader breadth of questioning to be achieved.



## Visits

### Veolia ride-along

Conducted by Councillor Sargeant in June 2017, this was undertaken to identify issues to be addressed in preparing for the new service rollout in Merton in autumn 2018. The ride-along took place in Kingston and involved the Councillor talking to two waste teams and riding along with a third. The success of real time reporting and monitoring of the Veolia on-board computer (the Echo system) was noted as was the adaptation in the service provided for the 5% of residents requiring assistance. As a result of the visit, Councillor Sargeant highlighted that planning for the new service rollout as key. The Panel scrutinised plans for the new service rollout at its meeting in February 2018 with the intention that this will return to the Panel early in the new municipal year.

### Merton College Adult Learning

The Panel had been involved in scrutinising the then plans to change both the venue and commissioning model for Merton's adult learning. In January 2018, Councillors Anderson, Holden, Jones and Makin visited Merton College to see the service for themselves following these changes. Members noted the quality of the facilities available, the breadth of provision and the level of participation.

## Call-in

The Panel has heard two call-ins during this municipal year:

Call-in	Outcome
Proposal for improving parking facilities in selected borough parks	The Panel resolved to accept all proposals within the report and asked the Cabinet Member to conduct a review in 12 months to ensure the changes are delivering the intended outcomes. This recommendation has been accepted by the Cabinet Member (due October 2018 onwards).
Decision to award the construction works for Merton Hall	The Panel resolved not to refer the decision back to Cabinet and therefore the decision was upheld and took immediate effect.

## 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](mailto: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>

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