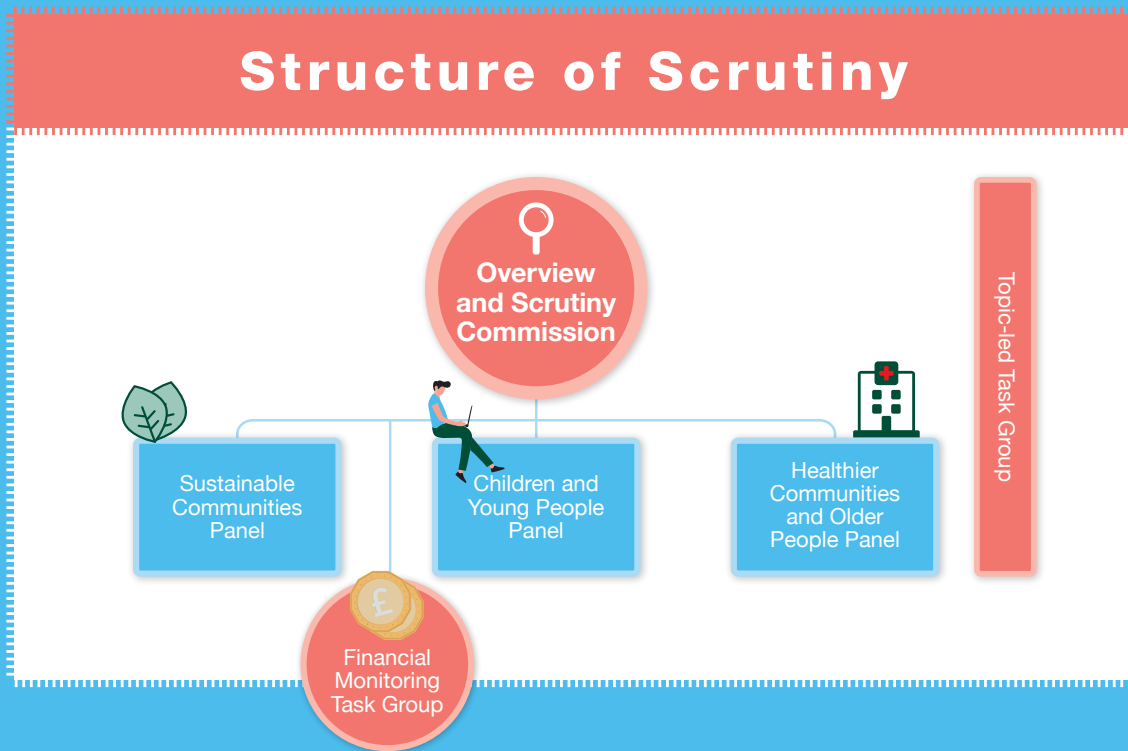


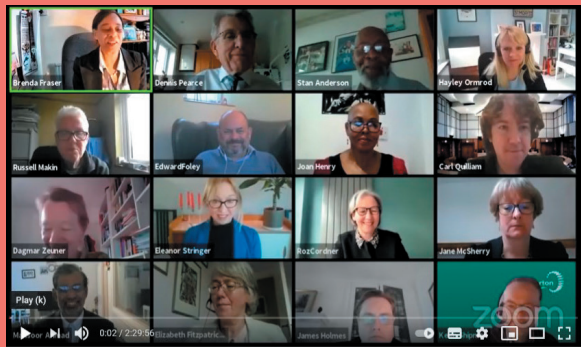
Scrutiny in Merton

The scrutiny function acts on behalf of the community to improve services and decision-making inside and outside of the council. It does this through in-depth reviews, evidence sessions on a topic or questions to service providers, Cabinet members or partners.



Scrutiny's impact 2020-21

The scrutiny year started with the formation of a concise improvement plan, in response to the review undertaken by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2019. This laid the foundation for Scrutiny to be clear on the outcomes it wanted to achieve going forward and the impact it was making for local residents. This action plan continues to be embedded in the work of Scrutiny in Merton to model best practice.



Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

2020 was a year like no other with the emergence of the global pandemic COVID-19. With the United Kingdom quickly being moved into extreme lockdown procedures, Scrutiny in Merton was swift in response and

one of the first London Authorities to resume. Online meetings were established, hosted via the Zoom platform, with the Overview and Scrutiny Commission being operational from June 2020. These meetings were live and streamed public engagement using the council's YouTube channel.

Scrutiny's role was essential in providing the ability for panel members to check, challenge and celebrate the efforts of the council and its partners in responding to the pandemic. Through regular briefings and intelligence updates, scrutiny

panels monitored accomplishments in key areas across worst impacted or vulnerable residents. Panels continuously scrutinised the financial impact on the voluntary sector alongside the distribution of small business grants, testing and vaccination rates, local contingency planning for further outbreaks, cases in care homes, access to other health services including mental health, domestic abuse rates and education attainment as well as ensuring Merton's response to reducing child poverty through the provision of free school meals. Housing services were also questioned to ensure essential services and repairs continued to be delivered.

This approach positioned the council to apply the national strategy of Build Back Better swiftly at the local level. Merton was one of the quickest boroughs to disperse £30m of business grants to local businesses and minimised the financial impact on the voluntary and community sector through additional discretionary funds. Merton reported fewer cases and deaths in care homes compared to other local authorities and very successfully managed the enhanced testing programme in Pollards Hill.

The Overview and Scrutiny Chairs would like to offer their sincere thanks to officers, partners, community organisations and residents for their role in managing Merton's tremendous response to the pandemic. ➔

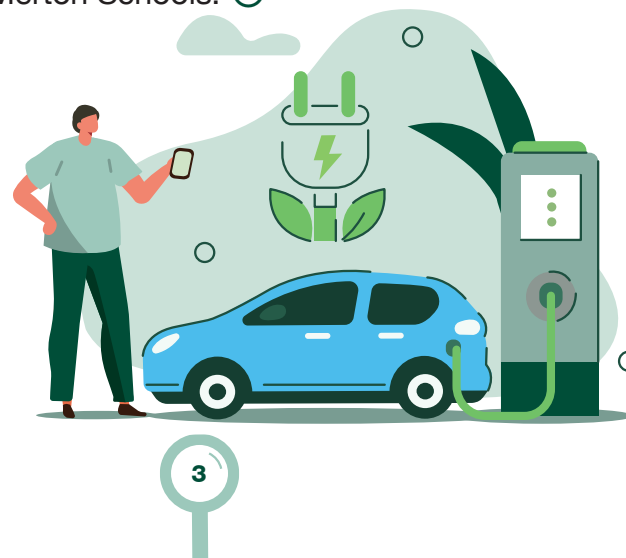


Scrutiny in action

Merton's Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) was presented to the **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**, with particular interest from the panel on the approach being adopted and the areas it would cover. As a result of Scrutiny input and recommendation, Cabinet agreed further analysis and consultation be carried out to assess either further expansion of the proposed PSPO and/or separate PSPOs for the areas of Morden Town Centre, Wimbledon Town Centre and other wards of concern.



The proposed expansion of the School Streets scheme was examined by the **Sustainable Communities Panel** as part of an ongoing consultation process. A School Street is a road with restricted access to vehicles at school drop-off and pick-up times. The reduction of vehicle traffic supports children who walk, cycle and scoot into school helping them to lead healthier and more active lives. Considering resident contributions and feedback, the panel made recommendations to expand the scheme to all schools in the borough which brought the total from 3 to 29. Merton now has the highest number of School Streets in London. Officers will report back to the panel on plans to implement School Streets or a School Street type approach to the remaining Merton Schools. ➔



Other topics scrutinised

- ➔ Climate change
- ➔ Local policing and crime
- ➔ Merton's Design Review Panel
- ➔ Management of green spaces
- ➔ Merger of South West London Clinical Commissioning Groups
- ➔ Safeguarding adults
- ➔ Expansion of Merton Medical Education Services
- ➔ Proposed council budget savings



Scrutiny challenge decisions that would impact communities

An NHS proposal to reconfigure acute services at St. Helier Hospital, potentially re-locating the accident and emergency department and children's services was investigated by the **Healthier Communities and Older People Panel**. After careful analysis of the proposal, the majority of the panel felt strongly that this would have a detrimental impact on communities who are already socio-economically disadvantaged. Action was taken by the panel to write directly to the Secretary of State to ask him to reconsider the decision. Although the decision to proceed with the original proposal was upheld, many panel members continue to have grave concerns. This demonstrates the essential role that scrutiny plays in challenging decisions that councillors feel threaten the delivery of essential services and equality of provision to Merton's residents. The Chair and Vice Chair continue to scrutinise the plans through the South West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The **Children and Young People Panel** have taken an active and sustained interest in the establishment of the Harris Academy Wimbledon. Continuously scrutinising progress and particularly seeking clear assurances that pupils were suitably catered for whilst temporary arrangements in other buildings were in place. The new school successfully opened in November 2020 and is the first new state secondary school in Merton for over a generation.



Ensuring pupils' wellbeing is important to Scrutiny

Scrutiny in numbers

Meetings and members

- ➔ 26 panel meetings
- ➔ 36 members
- ➔ 4 co-optees
- ➔ 82 items considered
- ➔ 22 partner and local organisations who attended
- ➔ 2,866 YouTube views averaging 110 views per meeting

Plus

- ➔ 2 call-ins
- ➔ 10 scrutiny referrals/recommendations to Cabinet including budget

Task group reviews

- ➔ 1 review
- ➔ 7 meetings, engagements or workshops
- ➔ 26* presenters or witnesses

At the time of publishing this annual report, recommendations were not as yet finalised for reporting.

*as at 15 June 2021

In-depth reviews: 2020–21 task groups

In response to the organisational resourcing pressures of COVID-19, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission reduced the number of in-depth reviews to one during the municipal year 2020–21.

| task | action | outcome |
|--|---|--|
| <p>The topic selected was the <i>Repurposing of Merton's High Streets</i>. A task group was convened and members agreed to focus on five high streets across the borough: Morden, Mitcham, Raynes Park, Wimbledon and South Wimbledon.</p> | <p>Using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis approach, a series of virtual workshops were initially arranged with ward councillors to capture early intelligence and form the basis of the SWOT for further discussion. A second series of virtual workshops are, at the time of writing this report, being established with wider stakeholders and resident groups.</p> | <p>These workshops will continue to utilise the SWOT approach, drawing out more of the opportunities and possibilities for future use in each of the five high streets. This task group aims to complete its inquiries by the end of July 2021, with recommendations to Cabinet in September 2021.</p> |



Ways to get involved:

There are a number of ways you can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the council by:

- ➔ suggesting an issue or topic for scrutiny to look at merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny/get-involved or by writing, emailing or phoning the Scrutiny Team on **020 8545 3864**
- ➔ attending a meeting open to the public
- ➔ requesting to give information and views in writing or speaking at a meeting
- ➔ contacting your local councillor on how to get involved

You can also view our scrutiny pages on our website, which include meeting dates, agendas and panel membership, via merton.gov.uk/scrutiny or by contacting the Scrutiny Team on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

