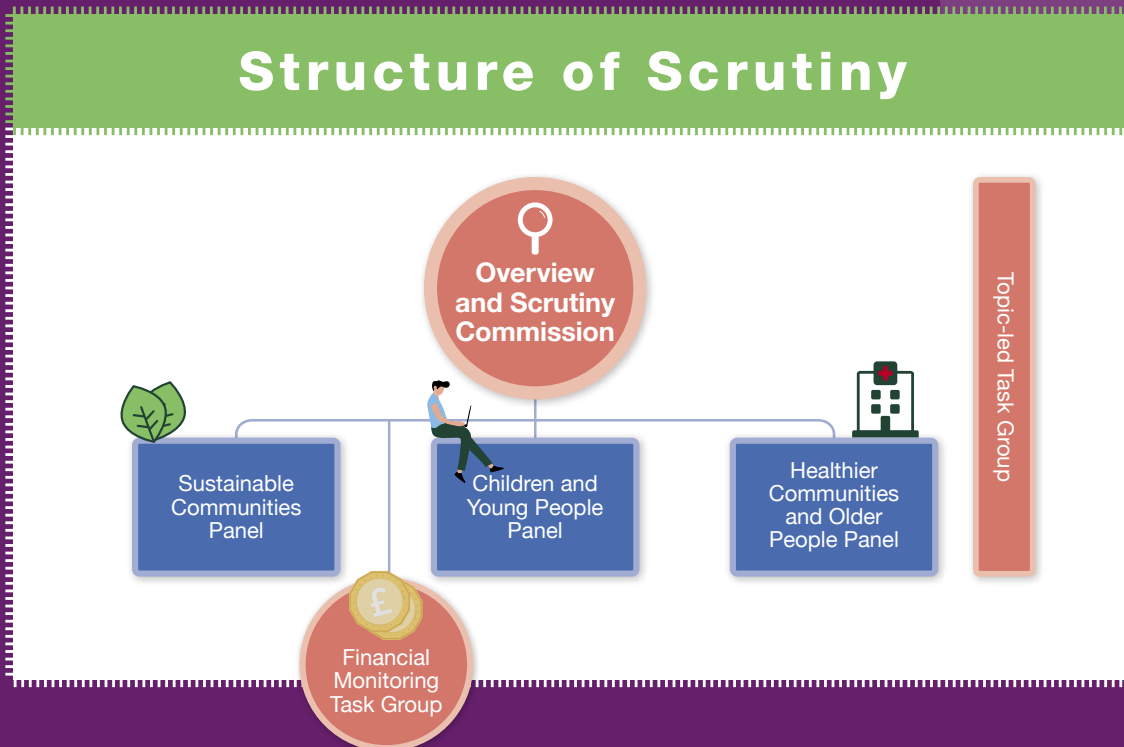


# Scrutiny in Merton

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-gathering sessions on a topic or questions to service providers, Cabinet members or partners.

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## Foreword

Scrutiny is at the heart of the decision-making process in Merton and is a forum for councillors to discuss complex local issues. This past year, the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** has helped shape the future of the borough's waste collection services. The **Overview and Scrutiny Commission** assembled a working group to review options for the future of CHAS 2013 Ltd. The **Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** has overseen a review of day care opportunities, to ensure a variety of activities are available for vulnerable residents. The **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** held a special session to understand their role as corporate parents and to review current service provision for looked after children.



Councillor Edward Foley, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, said: *"It has been a busy year for scrutiny. New councillors have become acquainted with their role in holding decision makers to account. We have welcomed residents to scrutiny meetings, visited services and held budget scrutiny training sessions. Thanks to commitment from councillors, we have run more task groups this year than ever before. I have met with Chairs and Vice Chairs to map out continuous improvement for the function."*

## Scrutiny in action

Merton's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy (VAWG) was presented to the **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**, along with plans to obtain white ribbon accreditation, in order to demonstrate the Council's commitment to engaging with



men and boys to end violence against women and girls. Commission members supported this work by placing a strong focus on the safety of women and girls in their agendas this municipal year. The Borough Commander and Safer Merton officers were in regular attendance at meetings. Merton Council has since achieved White Ribbon accredited status, and will make changes to communications, HR policies, employee development, training, and overall organisational culture.

The Chair of the **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** led on a plan to enhance the participation of young people within scrutiny. As a result, a young inspector has been appointed to the Commission and each of the Panels for a one-year pilot scheme. The Young Inspectors will draw on the experiences of young people across the borough and enable their voices to be heard. Merton Young Inspector Lola Kareem ➔



said: *“Being a Young Inspector on the scrutiny panel has been an innovative experience as this has allowed me to ensure young people’s views are heard within these settings and by decision-makers. As a Young Inspector sitting on the Healthier Communities and Older People Panel, I have been able to hear about the initiatives being delivered for our older residents and challenge our decision-makers to ensure these services are also reaching younger residents”*

Following a presentation on the fly-tipping strategy, members of the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** made a cross party recommendation that Cabinet look at ways to involve the community to develop plans on the collection of waste. May 2023 saw the first two pilots of ‘Garth Road on the Road’, a pop-up tip for residents who live in Pollards Hill, and another in the St Helier and Ravensbury area, to dispose of their excess household rubbish, recycling, green waste, and bulky items.

Improving the uptake of breast screening is a major concern for the **Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**. NHS colleagues were asked to provide simple messages on the importance of screening which councillors can then share with the community.

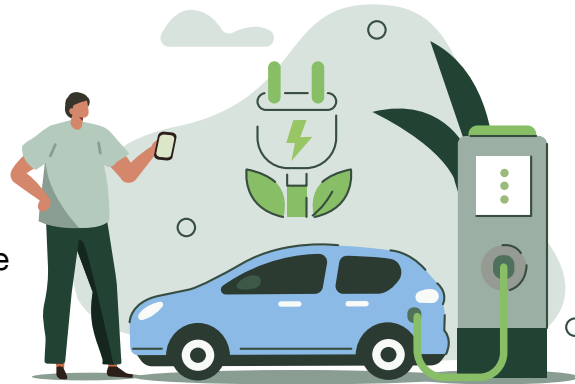


Improving services at St Helier hospital has been a focus this year. Councillors visited services in August 2022 and the Chief Executive of Epsom and St Helier attended the Panel in September 2022

Panel members continue to advocate for an accessible breast screening clinic within the borough. This will support vulnerable people and make it easier for residents to get to.

In September 2022 the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to undertake a scrutiny review of **Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging in Merton**. The EV Task Group considered the current progress of the EV charger rollout and the anticipated future demands and helped to shape the Council’s upcoming Electric Vehicle Strategy. The strategy will set out Merton’s vision and policy, and estimate the infrastructure needed in the coming years and consider how this work could be implemented. Delivery will include spreading a range of charging types

and speeds as evenly as possible throughout the borough, how to manage street cluttering and possible solutions to cable channels on pavements. At the time of publishing this annual report, the group's recommendations were scheduled for Cabinet but not yet approved.



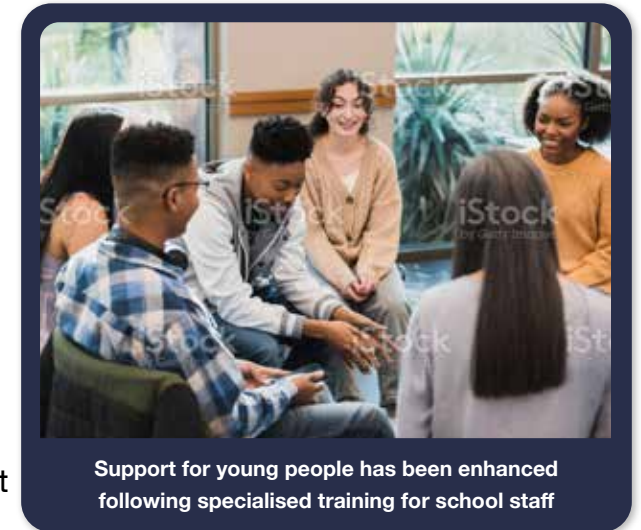
A review on **Youth Funding** is looking at the role of Young People's Foundations as a vehicle to attract funding sources. Task Group members have met with council officers, the voluntary sector, and examined work taking place in other local authorities. They are due to report their findings later this year.

A review on **Employment Opportunities for People with Autism** is looking at the role of the council as a community leader in providing employment for neuro diverse people. The review will report later this year.

This year, two additional councillor-led task groups were conducted with reduced officer support. This has increased activity within the function and provided more opportunities to put forward recommendations on issues of public concern.

A review looking at **community toilets** has received over 900 responses to a public survey. Recommendations are currently being drawn up. The review on **Reducing Eating Disorders and Self Harm amongst Young People** has completed. Recommendations focussed on training for professionals and promoting support services. Councillors have been pleased outcomes from previous reviews.

The majority of the recommendations from a **Children's Mental Health Task Group** have been implemented including specialised training for school governors, expansion of mental health first aid training to schools, collaborative work between youth parliament and young inspectors to improve communication material. A pilot social prescribing scheme for children and young people is in place.



Support for young people has been enhanced following specialised training for school staff

The recommendations from a **High Street Task Group** led to a council funding pot of £50,000 to procure culture led projects across the borough.



## Other topics scrutinised

Children's  
mental health

Long  
Covid

Suicide  
prevention

Flooding

Discussions  
with Borough  
Commander

Child healthy  
weight  
programme

Tackling  
climate  
change

Housing  
support

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### Scrutiny in numbers

#### Meetings and members

- ⊕ 24 panel meetings
- ⊕ 40 members
- ⊕ 4 co-optees
- ⊕ 76 items considered
- ⊕ 2,475 views on YouTube

#### Plus

- ⊕ 3 task group reviews
- ⊕ 2 call-ins
- ⊕ 11 scrutiny referrals/recommendations to Cabinet

## 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](https://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 4035**
- ➔ 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](https://merton.gov.uk/scrutiny) or by contacting the Scrutiny Team on [scrutiny@merton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk)

