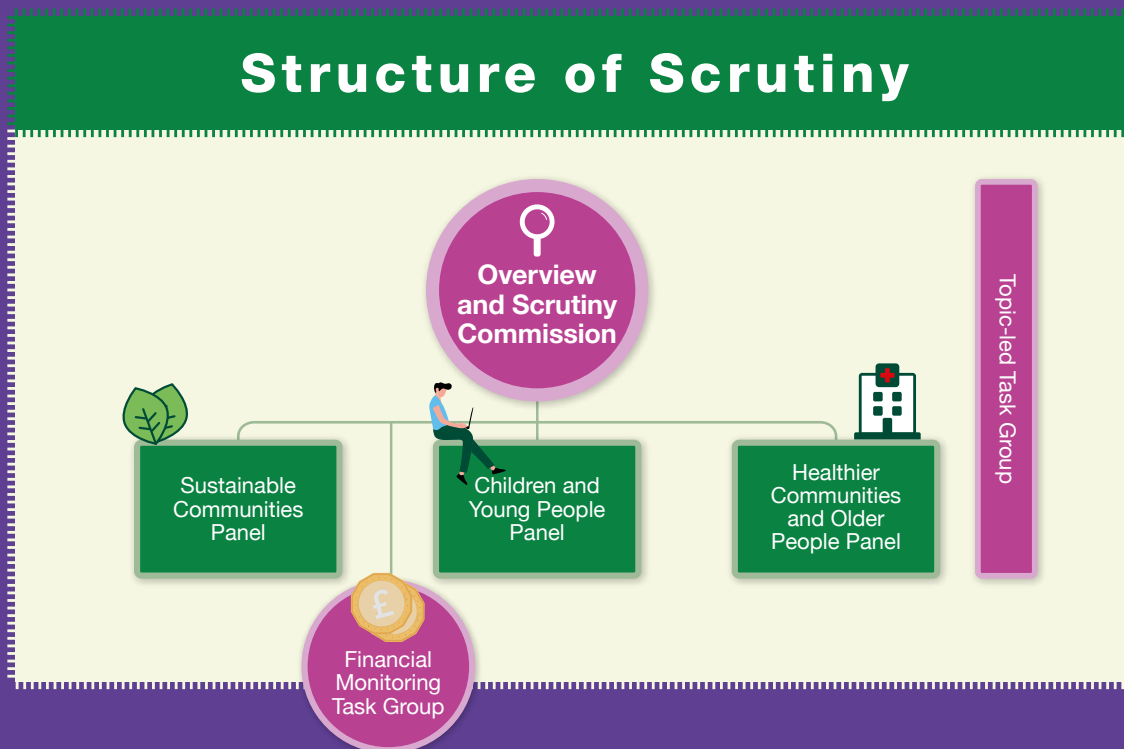


# Scrutiny in Merton

The scrutiny function acts on behalf of the community to improve services and decision-making inside and outside 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

This year, the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** reviewed the work being undertaken to reach net zero emissions. The **Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel** considered preparations for the Care Quality Commission inspection. **The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** scrutinised a recruitment strategy targeted at finding suitable foster carers. The council's **Overview and Scrutiny Commission** met regularly with the Borough Commander to raise matters about crime and safety.

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**Councillor Edward Foley,  
Chair of the Overview and  
Scrutiny Commission, writes...**

Welcome to the latest Annual Scrutiny Report. The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has prioritised a successful tree strategy, committing to 250 replacement street trees annually. This initiative underscores our dedication to environmental sustainability.

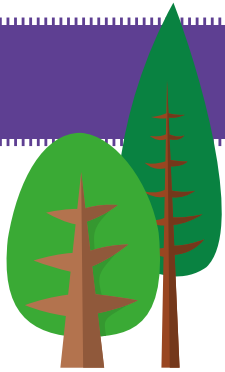
Additionally, becoming London's Borough of Sport remains a key goal, with efforts to ensure residents, especially under 16s, over 65s, and those from less affluent communities, engage in weekly physical activities. The development of the Borough of Sport Get Active portal is a testament to these efforts.



The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has focused on enhancing youth participation in scrutiny, with Young Inspectors playing a pivotal role. Corporate parenting and upgrading local playgrounds are also high on the agenda, with £2m allocated for play parks.

The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel is preparing for a Care Quality Commission inspection, aiming to improve maternity and primary care services. The varied work of the Safer Merton team and the Civic Pride Fund also highlight our commitment to community safety and support.

# Scrutiny in action



Implementing a successful tree strategy has been a key priority for the **Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**. Members heard that the council has made a commitment for 250 replacement street trees per year, and continue to follow this work.

Becoming London's Borough of Sport is one of the administrations' priorities, and panel members continue to support the policy designed to ensure that residents, particularly under 16s and over 65s, and those who are from less affluent communities, become more physically active and have access to physical activities at least once a week. The panel heard that a Borough of Sport online Activity Finder was in development, with many initiatives being explored to increase access to physical activity.

The Chair of the **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** endeavoured to enhance the participation of young people within scrutiny and because of this, our Young Inspectors continue to play a key role in drawing on the experiences of young people across the borough and enabling their voices to be heard.

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel examined the work undertaken regarding corporate parenting. The panel were informed that foster carers are trained to have

cultural awareness and that there is a recruitment strategy targeted at finding suitable foster carers. While progress with apprenticeship opportunities is going well, the role of corporate parenting remains a priority for the scrutiny committee.

Upgrading local playgrounds, based on feedback from local communities, has been of great importance for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. £2m has been set aside for play parks over the next few years.



Investing in parks: Cottenham Park playground has a new climbing frame

**The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel** previewed plans for a Care Quality Commission inspection that could occur at any point over the next two years. The committee heard that prior to the inspection a self-assessment and action plan report will be completed, and any gaps will be highlighted. Learnings from the inspection will be timely actioned appropriately.

Improving the service provided by maternity services is a major concern for the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. A Care Quality Commission report cited a survey that said 50% of patients were dissatisfied with the service received. However, a lot of work, such as setting up a dedicated phone line, has been undertaken since the inspection to address issues raised in the report.



## Task groups

Primary care services in the borough remained a priority for the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The committee discussed new strategies to be implemented and heard about work being undertaken to improve access to health care. For example, the NHS app is being developed and improved to allow residents to book more than one appointment and to make it easier to use for people with disabilities. 90% of appointments are available within two weeks, which meets national targets.

Task groups are set up to examine specific issues of interest or concern. They tend to be time limited and work more flexibly and informally than a panel.



The Children and Young People Panel begun work on *Youth Participation in Local Democracy* and looking at the how to increase engagement in this area. They are due to report their findings later this year.

*Retrofitting* was chosen as the topic for review by the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The focus of the task group was to make recommendations that will help ensure that the council is reaching households with information on services and financial support they can access, whilst also highlighting what savings residents can make and the benefits of retrofitting their homes.

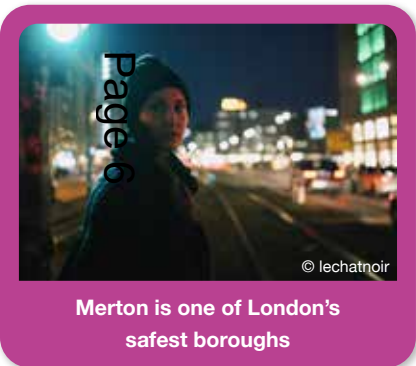
At the time of publishing this annual report, the group's recommendations were scheduled for Cabinet but not yet approved.

Whilst undertaking their standard scrutiny of the quarterly monitoring reports, the **Financial Monitoring Task Group** also took a deep dive into other issues such as the *Community Infrastructure Levy* and the plans to decrease spend on agency workers.

The varied work of the Safer Merton team, including the extensive partnership response to violence against women and girls and the plans for additional interventions to improve safety were presented to the **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**, alongside attendance and additional input from the Borough Commander.

Details of the process and outcome of the *Civic Pride Fund: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector*, which brought together multiple funding pots under one single grants process, were brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for discussion and consideration.

Plans for the development of a night-time strategy were welcomed by Commission members, with a return to the Commission planned once further progress has been made.



Merton is one of London's safest boroughs

## Other topics scrutinised

Climate change

Fly-tipping

Management of green spaces

Proposed council budget savings

Equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy

Housing

Youth services

### Scrutiny in numbers

#### Meetings and members

- ⊕ 24 panel meetings
- ⊕ 44 members
- ⊕ 4 co-optees
- ⊕ 82 items considered
- ⊕ 513 views online

#### Plus

- ⊕ 2 task group reviews
- ⊕ 2 call-ins
- ⊕ 8 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:

- ④ suggest 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**
- ④ attend a meeting open to the public
- ④ request to give information and views in writing or speak at a meeting
- ④ contact your local councillor on how to get involved

You can also view the 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)

