

Merton Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Date: Tuesday 8 January 2013
Time: 7.15 p.m.
Venue: Committee Rooms B and C,
Merton Civic Centre, London Road,
Morden SM4 5DX

AGENDA

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**This is a public meeting – members of the public are very welcome to attend.
The meeting room will be open to members of the public from 7.00 p.m.**

For more information about the work of this and other overview and scrutiny panels, please contact Julia Regan, Democracy Services Manager, on 020 8545 3864 or e-mail julia.regan@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

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Overview and Scrutiny Commission Membership

Full Members:

Councillor Peter Southgate (Chair)
Councillor Peter McCabe (Vice Chair)
Councillor Iain Dysart
Councillor Suzanne Evans
Councillor Suzanne Grocott
Councillor Jeff Hanna
Councillor Richard Hilton
Councillor Russell Makin
Councillor Diane Neil Mills
Councillor Judy Saunders

Substitute Members:

Councillor John Dehaney
Councillor Samantha George
Councillor Mary-Jane Jeanes
Councillor Ian Munn
Councillor Henry Nelles
Councillor John Sargeant

Co-opted Members

Amanda Stuart Fisher
Colin Powell
Vacancy
Dr Jo Sullivan-Lyons

Note 1

Members are reminded of the need to have regard to the items published with this agenda and, where necessary to declare at this meeting any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (as defined in the The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012) in any matter to be considered at the meeting. If a pecuniary interest is declared they should withdraw from the meeting room during the whole of the consideration of that matter and must not participate in any vote on that matter. If members consider they should not participate because of a non pecuniary interest which may give rise to a perception of bias, they should declare this, withdraw and not participate in consideration of the item. For further advice please speak with the Council's Assistant Director of Corporate Governance.

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny describes the way Merton's scrutiny councillors hold the Council's Executive (the Cabinet) to account to make sure that they take the right decisions for the Borough. Scrutiny panels also carry out reviews of Council services or issues to identify ways the Council can improve or develop new policy to meet the needs of local people.

Scrutiny's work falls into four broad areas:

- ⇒ **Call-in:** If three (non-executive) councillors feel that a decision made by the Cabinet is inappropriate they can 'call the decision in' after it has been made to prevent the decision taking immediate effect. They can then interview the Cabinet Member or Council Officers and make recommendations to the decision-maker suggesting improvements.
- ⇒ **Policy Reviews:** The panels carry out detailed, evidence-based assessments of Council services or issues that affect the lives of local people. At the end of the review the panels issue a report setting out their findings and recommendations for improvement and present it to Cabinet and other partner agencies. During the reviews, panels will gather information, evidence and opinions from Council officers, external bodies and organisations and members of the public to help them understand the key issues relating to the review topic.
- ⇒ **One-Off Reviews:** Panels often want to have a quick, one-off review of a topic and will ask Council officers to come and speak to them about a particular service or issue before making recommendations to the Cabinet.
- ⇒ **Scrutiny of Council Documents:** Panels also examine key Council documents, such as the budget, the Business Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan.

Scrutiny panels need the help of local people, partners and community groups to make sure that Merton delivers effective services. If you think there is something that scrutiny should look at, or have views on current reviews being carried out by scrutiny, let us know.

For more information, please contact the Scrutiny Team on 020 8545 3390 or by e-mail on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny .

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(7.15pm – 10.15pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe (Vice Chair), Iain Dysart, Suzanne Evans, Suzanne Grocott, Jeff Hanna, Richard Hilton, Russell Makin, Diane Neil Mills and Judy Saunders

Co-opted member – Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons (Parent Governor Representative – Secondary Schools)

ALSO PRESENT: Darren Williams, Borough Commander

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

Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance

Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Yvette Stanley (Director of Children Schools and Families), Evereth Willis (Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer), Helen Cook (Head of Access and Assessment), Kim Brown (Joint Head of HR Policy Development), Annalise Elliott (Head of Safer Merton), Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Colin Powell (co-opted member). The Chair announced that Anna Juster (co-opted member) had resigned and he thanked her for her hard work on behalf of the Commission.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Richard Hilton.

3 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 17 July 2012 (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED : That the minutes be agreed, with the addition of the a factual corrections on page 4 to replace “the 2011 census shows a 10,000+ reduction in the number of residents since 2001” with “the 2011 census shows the population of Merton to be 199,700 and not 210,000 as previously estimated by the Office of National Statistics”.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES (Agenda item 4)

Members requested workforce numbers from 2009 to date.

ACTION: Caroline Holland (Director of Corporate Services)

5 DISCUSSION WITH THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda item 5)

The Borough Commander, Darren Williams, was invited to talk about the future of policing in Merton. He drew the Commission's attention to the crime figures in the report and for 2009-2012 and said that the latest data, post March 2012, showed reductions in all categories except theft from motor vehicles. He said that Merton has some of the highest crime reductions rates in London. The TNO (Total Notifiable Offence) detection rates were currently second highest across London and Merton has the fastest response to 999 calls of any borough in South London.

Darren Williams said that the Metropolitan Police has to make savings of £517m by 2014/15. Budgets are devolved to the individual boroughs but Borough Commanders have not been set bespoke savings based on a percentage of their overall budget.

Borough Commanders have been asked to consult with partners on public access issues to help inform MPS Management Board in their discussions with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime. These include proposed changes in line with the One Met Model (a briefing paper on this was laid round at the meeting and will be published with these minutes).

Feedback from these engagements have indicated that significant savings could be realised from real estate, removing officers from non-operational roles and onto the front line, streamlining back-office support services (possibly in conjunction with Sutton) and reducing the number of police cars (with more officers travelling on foot and on buses).

Darren Williams would like to have police officers present at times in the Civic Centre and in libraries and children's centres as well as other Public buildings regularly visited by the public. Commission members welcomed these proposals as long as opening hours would be convenient for all sections of the community, including those who work. Members emphasised that they would not wish to see Wimbledon or Mitcham Police station closed. Darren Williams is in discussion with the Council over potential locations for Police Officers and the financial implications of this. Police Officers are already based in the Civic Centre as part of Safer Merton.

In response to a question about whether a merger with Sutton under one Borough Commander was likely, Darren Williams said that no final decisions had been made on any element of the One Met Model. When pushed on this issue he said that he supported the sharing of services with Sutton Borough as this would result in more police constables on the beat. When asked about his personal views on comments in the press about sharing of Borough Commanders he stated that he had given his views and did not feel it appropriate for to comment further. This was supported by the Chair

Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities, said that she has written to the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime to make it clear that the Council wishes to retain its borough commander post and to keep both police stations open.

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In response to a question about the lack of enforcement powers for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), Darren Williams said that there had been no move to change their powers and that is why it is proposed to fill police community officer vacancies with uniformed police officers (POs) rather than PCSOs so that the low level anti-social behaviour that is of concern to the public can be tackled. He added that each secondary school would have a nominated schools police officer (shared with other schools) – the Commission welcomed this and asked that this change be widely communicated.

A member asked how the proposals would impact on the commitment to reduce crime, including serious youth violence and knife crime. Darren Williams explained how gang activity had been successfully tackled on the Phipps Bridge Estate and that this, combined with police engagement with young people and a more targeted approach to “stop and search” had contributed to a reduction in crime and increase in engagement with young people, particularly young black males. He added that he had been pleasantly surprised by how willing police officers and local business and community groups had been to volunteer time, premises and services to contribute to youth activities and engagement.

In response to a question about the role of special constables, Darren Williams said that there are 97 in the borough and that there would be scope to use more volunteers for back office roles in order to free up police officers to work in the front line.

Councillor Jeff Hanna laid round suggested resolutions for discussion. Members agreed to all of the these, with an amendment to his third resolution which read “Welcomes the proposed uplift of police officer numbers in Safer Neighbourhood Teams, provided that this assumes for Merton a base of 120 officers across the Borough, including PCSOs, reflecting the current 1,2,3 model for each of 20 wards.” After discussion on whether to include a reference to the 1,2,3 model as a base, it was agreed that, in order to achieve a consensual recommendation from the Commission, the recommendation should be amended to read “Welcomes the proposed uplift of police officer numbers in Safer Neighbourhood Teams “

RESOLVED: That the Commission

1. notes the One Met Model briefing paper provided by the Borough Commander;
2. supports the movement of officers from non-operational roles onto the front line;
3. welcomes the proposed uplift of police officer numbers in Safer Neighbourhood Teams;
4. welcomes changes to shift patterns which reflect demand in the evenings and at weekends;
5. welcomes the proposed increase in numbers of public order officers;
6. notes the proposed sharing of some support services between Boroughs, whilst registering serious concern at any proposal to merge Merton Police Service with that

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of any other Borough, valuing the partnership working that a Borough Service provides;

7. supports a review of public access points and remote police buildings, as a means of securing savings, subject to relocated access points being convenient to residents, both the locations and the times of opening;

8. would express serious concern at any proposal to close either Wimbledon and Mitcham Police Stations, seeing these as essential to serving the needs of the surrounding communities;

9. requests the Chair of the Commission to convey these views to the Metropolitan Police Service Management Board and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime at the earliest opportunity;

10. requests a further update from the Borough Commander to members of the Commission, by email, as soon as possible following 11 December 2012.

The Commission also RESOLVED:

1. to invite the Borough Commander to the Commission's meeting on 28 February in order to provide an update on policing in Merton;

2. to formally thank the Borough Commander and all his officers for their hard work and achievements in relation to reducing crime rates.

6 BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE 2013-17) (Agenda item 6)

7 SCRUTINY OF THE BUSINESS PLAN (Agenda item 7)

8 FINANCIAL MONITORING SCRUTINY TASK GROUP (Agenda item 11)

The Commission agreed to take these three items together.

The Director of Corporate Services introduced the Business Plan Update and said that this report, received by Cabinet on 22 October, contained proposals for closing the 2013/14 budget gap, set out savings targets for subsequent years, updated some of the assumptions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and set out more detail on the capital programme than previously (in response to comments made during the budget scrutiny process last year). The Cabinet member for Finance added that significant savings had already been agreed last year in respect of 2012/13 and subsequent years.

A Commission member welcomed the inclusion of a glossary of technical terms. The Director said that this had been requested by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel and would be included in future reports.

Some Commission members noted the large cost of replacing the windows in the Civic Centre and asked whether remaining in the Civic Centre was a viable option given the declining workforce numbers. The Director of Corporate Services outlined the extent of the work involved and said that costs were indicative at this stage and

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that the project would be tendered to ensure value for money is achieved. She also assured the Commission that the long term accommodation needs of the workforce and other options for use of the Civic Centre had been considered. Flexible and mobile working was being rolled out to make best use of the available space and to move staff in from other properties thus releasing those properties for alternative uses or disposal.

The Commission discussed the information relating to staff costs and vacant posts. The Director of Corporate Services said that each vacant post was reviewed to determine whether there was a business case for filling it with either a permanent or temporary replacement.

The Commission expressed concern about the lack of detailed information and recommended that Cabinet ensure that data on actual and planned staff numbers should be known, taken into account and made available for the purposes of budget setting and scrutiny.

The Commission recommended that Cabinet:

- thoroughly examine the procurement costs in relation to large capital projects with a view to identifying savings, particularly on unit costs.
- review those savings that had previously been agreed by Council but have not been taken, in order to see if it might still be possible to make those savings in addition to identified alternative savings.

The Commission noted that each of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels had examined the budget and business plan proposals relating to the service areas within their remit. The Commission agreed to forward to Cabinet the comments and recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

The Commission also agreed to refer to Cabinet the recommendations made by the financial monitoring scrutiny task group:

- the task group discussed the September 2012 financial monitoring report and noted the predicted overspend on the payroll service provided by Agilisys. The task group expressed concern about the cost and time taken to resolve difficulties associated with introducing the new system and the consequent lack of accessible information on staff numbers, vacancies and structure charts.
- the task group questioned the size and use of the contingency budget and whether, given the low level of spend on this in previous years, it is necessary. Members suggested that it could be reduced as an alternative to making savings elsewhere.
- the task group expressed concern about the number of schemes in the capital programme that were slipped forward into future years and wondered whether some of these should be removed from the capital programme instead if there was no prospect of undertaking the work in the foreseeable future.

RESOLVED:

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- (1) to forward to Cabinet the comments and recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels on the budget and business plan proposals within their remits;
- (2) To forward to cabinet the recommendations made by the financial monitoring scrutiny task group;
- (3) To refer to Cabinet the comments and recommendations made by the Commission in respect of the savings proposals for Safer Merton and Corporate Services and the overall budget.

9 CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME 2010-13 AND DRAFT EQUALITY STRATEGY 2013-17 (Agenda item 8)

Evereth Willis (Equalities and Community Cohesion Officer) introduced the report and summarised progress made over the past year, drawing the Commission's attention to the action plan for the Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-13. She also outlined the content and requested comments on the draft Equality Strategy for 2013-17.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities highlighted the themes of the draft strategy – promoting community cohesion, celebrating diversity, improving engagement, tackling inequality and supporting workforce development.

Commission members made a number of comments about the 2010-13 action plan, including that it would have been helpful to have set out the rationale for focussing on certain characteristics. Evereth Willis explained that those characteristics were determined by legislation.

Commission members made a number of suggestions aimed at improving the draft strategy:

- that legal responsibilities should be set out clearly
- that terminology should be reviewed to explain the different strands of work with different groups to enable equal access and that this should be evidence and not based on assumptions about those groups
- re-wording in paragraph 6.4 to replace “improve perceptions” with “improve experiences”

10 LOCAL MULTI AGENCY PROBLEM SOLVING REVIEW (Agenda item 9)

Annalise Elliott (Head of Safer Merton) introduced the report, which described how the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving groups (LMAPs) operate in Merton. She made a number of points in response to questions:

- the whole borough is covered by three LMAPs – mirroring the three police

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sectors in Wimbledon, Mitcham and Morden.

- the membership at each LMAP meeting varies in size depending on the agenda – there is a core membership of 5 or 6 with a wide range of other people invited as required
- the agenda is compiled by the chair, based on suggestions made by LMAP members.
- the rough sleepers who were moved on from Peel House car park have left the borough. They were given information about available support.

Councillor Peter Southgate said that in his experience as an LMAP member, the feedback from councillor LMAP members to other councillors works well but it is not clear how many of the agenda suggestions originate with other councillors.

RESOLVED:

That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission should remind all councillors that they can suggest items for LMAP meetings and that these should be sent to the LMAP councillor representative.

11 CIVIL UNREST TASK GROUP – CABINET RESPONSE (Agenda item 10)

The Chair observed that progress to date on the task group's recommendations is of a preliminary nature and that responses are still awaited from the police.

Annalise Elliott (Head of Safer Merton) provided further information on progress made:

- recommendation 3 – action will be complete by January 2013
- recommendation 4 - Merton Chamber of Commerce will be the conduit for business contact lists and the Council's Strategy, Policy and Partnership's team will maintain contact lists for community leaders
- recommendation 6 – would be expensive so officers will set out pre-existing work that addresses the same objectives to some extent.
- recommendation 8 – the stop and search approach has been reviewed.

In response to a question about whether there was a recommendation asking Cabinet to consider the role of central government, and whether the relevant Minister should be lobbied to review the need for such a service, Annalise Elliott undertook to check. ACTION: Head of Safer Merton

RESOLVED: to receive a further progress update at the Commission's meeting on 30 April 2013.

12 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING (Agenda item 12)

The Commission was asked to consider and approve the terms of reference for the

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volunteering scrutiny task group. A member suggested that the task group consider the role of special constables as an untapped resource, bearing in mind the comments made earlier on in the meeting by the Borough Commander about the potential for volunteers working on back office duties thus releasing police officers to the front line, and his comments on how willing local people, businesses and other organisations had been to volunteer their time.

RESOLVED: The Commission approved the task group's terms of reference as set out in the report.

13 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 (Agenda item 138)

RESOLVED: That the Commission approve the work programme for 2012/13 as set out in the report, with the report on the Merton translation service brought forward to the meeting on 8 January if possible.

ACTION: Head of Democracy Services