

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION  
30 APRIL 2013

(7.15pm – 10.10pm)

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

Co-opted members – Dr Jo Sullivan Lyons and Colin Powell.

ALSO PRESENT: Caroline Holland , Director of Corporate Services; Kris Witherington, Community Engagement Manager; Annalise Elliott, Head of Safer Merton; Ben Sherlock, Graduate Trainee; Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 1)

None.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Russell Makin.

3 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 28 FEBRUARY

RESOLVED: Minutes were agreed with the following amendments:

- Add Councillor Diane Neil Mills and Councillor Jeff Hanna to the list of those present
- Business Plan Update – add that the Chair of the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel continues to have overarching concern about the level of cuts given the continued underspend.
- Duke of Edinburgh Award – amend to show that Councillors Evans, Grocott and Diane Neil Mills also voted in favour of the funding being retained
- Add sentence at end of paragraph relating to Polka Theatre – “Councillors Evans, Grocott, Hilton and Neil-Mills asked that their names be recorded in the minutes as having voted against the funding cut”
- Grammatical changes as notified by Councillor Evans

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services, confirmed that all outstanding information requests had been received, with the exception of staffing information which should be ready in a couple of weeks.

5 CENSUS DATA - PRESENTATION

The Commission received a presentation from Kris Witherington, Community Engagement Manager. The presentation is published with the minutes of this

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meeting.

Kris Witherington outlined headline findings from the census data received to date:

- increase in population since 2001 – population density is now above average for London. Large growth in Wimbledon Park and Trinity wards, decrease in Hillside and Wimbledon Village wards
- younger population – mean age fallen from 37 in 2001 to 34 in 2011
- more diverse population - 16% fall in White British population, 6% rise in Other White population (predominantly Polish and South African)
- housing changes - 8% increase in flats and 6% decrease in terraced houses
- owner occupation levels still above London average but there has been a 67% increase in private rented accommodation (particularly around transport hubs)
- decline in car ownership, also particularly around transport hubs
- significant differences in the level of educational qualifications in different parts of the borough
- a decrease in economic activity – caused by increase in economically inactive (retired people and those looking after home or family) rather than an increase in unemployment
- Merton is a comparatively healthy borough but has significant geographical differences.

Members commented that the census information was extremely interesting and that it would be helpful to have numbers as well as percentage figures. They also said that some of the geographical differences are more subtle than a simple east/west divide and that this should be reflected in future presentations and reports.

Members said that they would also like to have some analysis of what is driving the demographic changes and how this will impact on council policies and service delivery. The Chair said that these issues would be discussed at the scrutiny work planning session for councillors and co-opted members on 9 May. The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, added that the service reviews would take demographic changes into account.

In response to a question about whether inequalities were decreasing or increasing within the borough, Kris Witherington said that the new Community Plan would have some of that information and that once all the census data has been received, there will be analysis of changes in inequalities.

Kris Witherington explained that although the 2011 census figures show a decline in the number of households since 2001, this is probably due to the 2001 figure being inaccurate. He assured the Commission that the 2011 figures could be relied on due to the 93% response rate in Merton (compared to 87% in 2001). In response to a question, he added that census information is compared with data from other sources in order to validate the data and draw out policy implications.

Kris Witherington said that the mid-year population provided by the Greater

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London Authority (GLA) should be used in preference to those provided by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) because the GLA models predict population movements and changes in housing in a more nuanced and realistic way. These concerns had been discussed with ONS.

In response to a question about the impact that the use of the ONS figures in the government's grant formula, Caroline Holland said that officers are keeping an eye on this but that it has become less of an issue due to other changes made to the formula.

### 6 REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY FORUMS 2012/13

The Community Engagement Manager, Kris Witherington, introduced the report, drawing the Commission's attention to the impact that publicity for forum meetings has had on attendance in Wimbledon. Attendance at Colliers Wood has increased but is still relatively low due to attendance by representatives of residents associations who then report back to a wider membership.

Kris Witherington made a number of points in response to questions about petitions:

- Information about petitions, including e-petitions, is available on the Council's website: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/petitions>
- If an e-petition applies to a particular ward, the ward councillors will be notified of the petition
- Anyone can start a petition. The petition must call on the council or other body to take action (or not). Maximum time limit for completion is 12 weeks.
- The route that petitions take will depend on their subject and whether they relate to a wider consultation taking place

In response to a question about the annual residents' survey, Kris Witherington explained that 6 boroughs currently participate. However, the London comparative data is provided by a pan-London survey of 1000 London residents rather than the results from those 6 boroughs. Kris Witherington is in discussion with other boroughs and with the Local Government Association in order to keep up-to-date with approaches taken elsewhere and to assess best approach for Merton in future.

During discussion about the merits of having a residents' panel, Kris Witherington said that these are quite expensive and there is a need to balance cost against output. The previous panel was not maintained and this reduced the response rate considerably.

### 7. OPEN DATA AND TRANSPARENCY AGENDA

The Director of Corporate Services, Caroline Holland, introduced the report and said that in future the number of page views would be broken down to distinguish between internal and external hits.

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A member of the Commission expressed surprise that the list of property assets was not available as he had been provided with this information in the past. Caroline Holland undertook to investigate and ensure that it is published by the end of May 2013. She added that it would be two or three months before the council's organisational chart would be published. ACTION: Head of Information Governance

This member also expressed concern that more of the data requested through FOI requests has not been published on the council's website. Caroline Holland said that the issue was ensuring the right format is used and that the information is kept up-to-date in order to be meaningful. The member suggested that officers should publish what was to hand immediately and then work on amending the format to meet the government's requirements.

Several members reported problems with opening the data files on the website. Caroline Holland undertook to investigate and rectify. ACTION: Head of Information Governance

In response to a question about how the "open data" is publicised, Caroline Holland undertook to review use of My Merton and other means of publicity. She added that data is already shared with partner organisations. ACTION: Head of Information Governance

### 8. HOME OFFICE PEER REVIEW AND GANG CALL-IN

The Head of Safer Merton, Annalise Elliott, introduced the report and said that Merton had been identified for a peer review because of a high-profile case involving a Merton resident and not because there is a gang problem within the borough. Informal feedback from the review is that there is strong leadership and effective partnership working.

Annalise Elliott offered to make the peer review report available to the Commission once the final document has been received from the Home Office. Councillor Jeff Hanna, Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, said that the Panel would be discussing the report at its meeting on 4 July 2013 so it could be emailed to Commission members at that point.

In response to questions, Annalise Elliott provided further detail about the gang call-in:

- participants were selected by youth offending panels
- the event was aimed at young people who were not already heavily involved in gangs and could therefore be influenced to make positive changes to their lives
- attendance was not compulsory but participants were heavily encouraged to attend and Merton attendees were offered access to various services as an inducement
- feedback from the event will result in some changes to style and delivery of

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some of the presentations and steps will be taken to ensure, if provided jointly, that both boroughs make the same offer to attendees

- the event was funded by Merton Priory Homes so the cost to the Council was minimal

A member said that, due to the potential for head injury, he thought that the boxing initiative shouldn't be offered as an inducement to attend a gang call-in.

A member said that she had seen evidence that gang call-ins could be counter-productive and that there is minimal evidence of the effectiveness of the approach. Annalise Elliott said that the effectiveness of the call-in would be reviewed in six and twelve months time. She added that the Home Office regarded the Merton and Wandsworth call-in as successful and had asked for it to be written up as an example of good practice.

A member asked whether the call-in was just reaching out to those who were already prepared to make changes. A number of members asked whether the messages could be conveyed to a wider group of young people, for example through a DVD that could be made available to schools.

### RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Commission should receive the six and twelve month gang call-in review reports. These should include numbers as well as percentage figures.
- 2) That the Head of Safer Merton should report to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel regarding the cost of providing a DVD for schools
- 3) That the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel should receives the Home Office peer review report on gangs and youth violence in Merton at its meeting on 4 July 2013

## 9. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING IN MERTON

Councillor Peter Southgate, as chair of the task group review, introduced the report and thanked task group members for their hard work.

Members discussed the report and agreed to make a number of changes.

### RESOLVED:

- 1) To amend recommendation 4 to include the offer of an opportunity to gain an accredited qualification in community volunteering
- 2) To amend recommendation 12 by replacing "feasibility" with "desirability"
- 3) To delete recommendation 16
- 4) To forward the review report to Cabinet for approval and implementation of the recommendations.

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10. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

RESOLVED to present the Annual Report to Council at its meeting on 10 July 2013, with an amendment to the final paragraph on page 6 to insert the words “whilst awaiting the final outcome” after “front line”

11. MEMBER SURVEY 2013 – ANALYSIS

Members discussed the report.

The Chair of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel said that the Panel has combined its “information only” items into a single update item on its agenda. The update report covers 4-7 topics, takes 5 minutes to discuss and enables members to ask brief follow-up questions and thank officers. It also enables items to be identified as appropriate for future scrutiny.

A member suggested that some opportunities had been missed for pre-decision scrutiny of items prior to consideration by Cabinet. The Head of Democracy Services said that the following mechanisms were available to help scrutiny members identify which items to select for pre-decision scrutiny:

- Presentation by Cabinet Member(s) and Directors at first formal scrutiny meeting each year
- Informal meetings between Scrutiny Chairs, Vice Chairs, Cabinet Members and Directors
- List of forward plan items on the scrutiny work programme report at each meeting

RESOLVED:

- 1) To replace the action point on agendas with “ that the Commission and Panels continue to review agendas to ensure they are not too full”
- 2) That the Head of Democracy Services should review the target on agendas

12. FINANCIAL MONITORING SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

RESOLVED:

- 1) to note the minutes of the task group meeting
- 2) 2) to ask the Director of Corporate Services to provide information and clarification of the VAT regulations relating to the Council

13. PLANNING THE COMMISSION’S 2013/14 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

- 1) To invite the Council’s Leader and Chief Executive and the Borough Commander to the meeting on 16 July

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- 2) To receive an update at the meeting on 16 July from Cabinet on progress made with the implementation of the recommendations of the civil unrest task group review