

Merton Council Overview and Scrutiny Commission



Date: 8 July 2014

Time: 19:15

Venue: Committee rooms B & C - Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

AGENDA

Page Number

1. Declarations of pecuniary interest - see note overleaf
2. Apologies for absence
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 April 2014 1 - 6
4. Vision, key priorities and challenges for 2014/15 - presentation by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive
5. Overview and Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2014/15 7 - 36
6. Discussion of questions to ask the Borough Commander at Commission meeting on 7 October 2014

**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 telephone 020 8545 3864 or e-mail scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

Press enquiries: press@merton.gov.uk or telephone 020 8545 3483 or 4093

Email alerts: Get notified when agendas are published
www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm?view=emailer

Overview and Scrutiny Commission membership

Councillors:

Peter Southgate (Chair)
Peter McCabe (Vice-Chair)
Hamish Badenoch
John Dehaney
Brenda Fraser
Suzanne Grocott
Jeff Hanna
Russell Makin
Oonagh Moulton
Dennis Pearce

Substitute Members:

Abigail Jones
Katy Neep
John Sargeant
David Simpson CBE
David Williams

Co-opted Representatives

Simon Bennett, Secondary and Special
School Parent Governor Representative
Peter Connellan, Roman Catholic diocese
Denis Popovs, Primary School Parent
Governor Representative
Colin Powell, Church of England diocese

Note on declarations of interest

Members are advised to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest 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 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 3864 or by e-mail on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk. Alternatively, visit www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny

All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the committee/panel. To find out the date of the next meeting please check the calendar of events at your local library or online at www.merton.gov.uk/committee.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

7 APRIL 2014

(19.15 - 20.45)

PRESENT: Councillor Peter Southgate (in the Chair),
Councillor Peter McCabe, Councillor Iain Dysart,
Councillor Samantha George, Councillor Suzanne Grocott,
Councillor Jeff Hanna, Councillor Logie Lohendran,
Councillor Russell Makin, Councillor Diane Neil Mills and
Councillor Dennis Pearce
Co-opted member Denis Popovs

ALSO PRESENT: Christine Bidwell (Head of Investigations), Hayley James
(Merton Volunteer Service Council), Julia Regan (Head of
Democracy Services) and Simon Williams (Director, Community
& Housing Department)

1. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST - SEE NOTE OVERLEAF (Agenda Item 1)

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 2)

Apologies received from co-opted member Colin Powell.

The Chair welcomed new co-opted member Denis Popovs to his first meeting of the Commission and offered to meet him separately to outline how scrutiny works in Merton and the contribution that he could make.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2014 (Agenda Item 3)

Agreed.

4. SINGLE FRAUD INVESTIGATION SERVICE (Agenda Item 4)

The Chair said that an additional sheet had been circulated (attached to the minutes) in response to questions that he had raised.

Christine Bidwell, Head of Investigations, introduced the report. She said that the team currently investigate welfare benefit fraud, council tax fraud and corporate fraud (listed in paragraph 2.1). The team has recently merged with the Internal Audit in order to share resources and pool expertise. The government is setting up a Single Fraud Investigation Service into which local authority staff who work solely or primarily on welfare benefit fraud (housing benefits at present and subsequently universal credit) will be transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Each local authority has been asked to identify how many staff would be in scope for transfer to DWP.

Christine Bidwell made further points in response to questions:

- the council receives a grant for administering housing benefit, an element of which is used for investigation of fraud. It is expected that, after the first year, the grant will be cut but, at this point in time, it is not known by how much
- there isn't sufficient information at the moment to model the financial impact of the changes
- one of the challenges is to make sure there will be sufficient remaining staff to deal with corporate fraud
- some fraud is quite sophisticated and is becoming more so

Councillor Samantha George said that she had sat on the Benefit Sanctions Panel in the past and had been struck by the variability of outcome for different councils, with some councils pursuing fraud less vigorously than Merton. She was therefore not surprised that the government had sought to centralise this function.

Members stressed the importance of continuing to receive local information about welfare benefit fraud to inform proceedings on council tax and corporate fraud cases. They also wondered how councillors would convey their view on individual cases known to them through ward casework and how queries would be likely to be dealt with via DWP. Christine Bidwell said that there would be a mechanism for sharing knowledge and extracting data but the detail is not known at this stage.

Members highlighted the need to retain sufficient experienced investigators to carry out the level of work that the council wished to pursue on corporate fraud cases. For example, blue badge fraud is an area that is important to local residents as they are angered by abuse of the system. They also noted the concern expressed in the report that the council could be left vulnerable to fraud if a significant number of investigators are transferred to DWP.

Members wished to continue to monitor to make sure that the council did not lose out financially compared to other councils.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the Head of Democracy Services should summarise the concerns raised at the meeting and send these to the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance and the Cabinet Member for Finance with the Commission's recommendation that these be forwarded to the DWP as part of the council's response on plans for the transfer of staff.

- 2) To recommend that the cabinet member for Finance should quickly determine the council's strategy in relation to the number of staff to be transferred to DWP

5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14 (Agenda Item 5)

Commission members discussed the presentation made by Doctor Freeman, Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group at the last meeting of the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Members agreed that this item should be included in the Annual Report.

Members noted that further details of the Clinical Commissioning Group's five year strategy will be available in June. They agreed that the Healthier Communities Panel should scrutinise this when it becomes available and, if necessary, move its meeting date in order to do so.

Members discussed the resolution of Council on 5 February in relation to St Helier Hospital and agreed that the Chair of the Healthier Communities and Older People Panel (rather than the Commission) should consider whether he wished to write to Dr Freeman to draw his attention to that resolution.

RESOLVED: to approve the Annual Report subject to the following changes:

- 1) An update on the scrutiny of policing from the Commission's 11 March 2014 meeting
- 2) Inclusion of the discussion of the Single Fraud Investigation Service at Commission's meeting on 7 April 2014
- 3) Inclusion of a paragraph about St Helier Hospital in the Healthier Communities and Older People Panel's section of the report

6. PLANNING THE COMMISSION'S 2014/15 WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 6)

Members agreed that having the Leader and Chief Executive to the July meeting and the Borough Commander to the meetings in September and March had worked well.

Members had found the census report useful and agreed that it would be important to continue to scrutinise the implications that changing demographics would have on policy and service provision.

RESOLVED:

- 1) to recommend that the incoming Commission repeat the pattern of inviting the Leader and Chief Executive to the July meeting and the Borough Commander to the meetings in October and March in 2014/15.

- 2) to recommend that the Commission and all the Panels should scrutinise how the service departments are using census and other data to identify implications for their service area.

7. UPDATE ON RESPONSE TO VOLUNTEERING SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT (Agenda Item 7)

Simon Williams, Director of Community and Housing, introduced the report and welcomed the Commission's continued interest which is adding impetus to volunteering work. He provided a summary of recent volunteering initiatives by each of the council departments:

Environment and Regeneration

- Dig Merton
- Street Champions

Community and Housing

- Neighbour to Neighbour – puts people in touch with each other to provide support in an informal way – exploring synergies between this scheme, street champions and neighbourhood watch
- Out and About – volunteers take people with learning disabilities out to an activity that they both enjoy
- Age UK – volunteers visit selected care homes to assess the quality of care and make recommendations for improvement
- Merton Memories Project relied heavily on support from volunteers

Children, Schools and Families

- Volunteering networks have been set up in a number of primary schools including Morden, The Priory, Merton Park, St Peter and St Pauls.

Corporate Services

- Financial Capability – volunteers to help people manage their money – being piloted in May/June
- Customer Contact project – exploring ways in which volunteers can support this project in the longer term

Simon Williams welcomed the suggestions made by a member of the Commission for the involvement of other groups in some of the projects. In response to a question he said that the Council had arranged for DBS checks to be carried out at reduced cost for voluntary sector organisations. Also, once volunteers are registered with the DBS update service, they can give a reference number to organisations so they can check the DBS information, again reducing cost.

Members commented and asked questions about progress on some of the task group's recommendations set out in the appendix to the report:

Recommendation 5

A member challenged the response and asked if a "light touch" way could be found to implement the recommendation so that volunteers making a significant contribution to council services could receive reduced prices for some library and leisure services. Simon Williams said that administrative costs would be incurred in measuring a "significant contribution". Hayley James added the ongoing monitoring of who is still volunteering to be entitled to the incentive would incur an administration cost also. Simon Williams will be taking a report to the Council's Management Team (CMT) suggesting that a volunteer recognition certificate could be issued (at a total cost of £1000), to coincide with National Volunteers' Week as a first step towards what incentives might be offered.

Recommendation 7

In response to a question, Hayley James (Merton Voluntary Service Council) said that those volunteers who already used social media were generally happy to use it to talk about their volunteering and those who didn't use it chose not to do so.

Recommendation 11

A member asked how easy it is to get information published in My Merton. Simon Williams said that editorial space is limited and is "hard fought for". He will be asking CMT to identify the promotion of volunteer opportunities as a priority for editorial space. He confirmed that, if editorial space was provided, it would be free of charge.

In response to a question about the merger of Merton Voluntary Service Council and Volunteer Centre Merton, Simon Williams said that the trustees of both organisations are fully committed and see the benefits of the merger. It is on track to be completed by the end of June.

The Chair thanked Simon Williams and Hayley James for the updates and said that the Commission was keen to see the project continuing to make progress and would provide whatever support it could.

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 8 July 2014

Wards: All

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2014/15

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

Lead member: Cllr Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Contact officer: Julia Regan: Julia.regan@merton.gov.uk 020 8545 3864

Recommendations:

That members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- i) Consider their work programme for the 2014/15 municipal year, and agree issues and items for inclusion;
 - ii) Appoint members to the financial monitoring task group, to meet on 22 July, 5 November, 26 February and a later date to be determined by the task group;
 - iii) Agree on an issue for in-depth scrutiny by a task group and appoint members to the task group;
 - iv) Consider whether they wish to make visits to local sites; and
 - v) Identify any training and support needs.
-

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to support and advise Members to determine their work programme for the 2014/15 municipal year.

1.2 This report sets out the following information to assist Members in this process:

- a) The principles of effective scrutiny and the criteria against which work programme items should be considered;
- b) The roles and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
- c) The findings of the consultation programme undertaken with councillors and co-opted members, senior management, voluntary and community sector organisations, partner organisations and Merton residents;
- d) A summary of discussion by councillors and co-opted members at a topic selection workshop held on 12 June 2014; and
- e) Support available to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to determine, develop and deliver its 2014/15 work programme.

2. Determining the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Annual Work Programme

2.1 Members are required to determine their work programme for the 2014/15 municipal year to give focus and structure to scrutiny activity to ensure that it effectively and efficiently supports and challenges the decision-making processes of the Council, and partner organisations, for the benefit of the people of Merton.

- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has specific roles relating to budget and business plan scrutiny and to performance monitoring that should automatically be built into their work programmes.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 26 April 2012, the Commission agreed to establish a financial monitoring task group to lead on the scrutiny of financial monitoring information on behalf of the Commission, with the following terms of reference:
- To carry out scrutiny of the Council's financial monitoring information on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To advise on other agenda items as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To report minutes of its meetings back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
 - To send via the Commission any recommendations or references to Cabinet, Council or other decision making bodies.
- 2.4 This task group was re-established for the 2013/14 municipal year and, at the scrutiny topic workshop on 12 June 2014, members recommended that the Commission re-establish this task group. The Commission is therefore requested to appoint members to the group. It is proposed that the task group will meet four times during 2014/15 to enable the financial monitoring information to be examined on a quarterly basis. The meetings will be held in public and the agenda and minutes will be published on the Council's website, alongside those of the Commission.
- 2.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission may choose to scrutinise a range of issues through a combination of pre-decision scrutiny items, policy development, performance monitoring, information updates and follow up to previous scrutiny work. Any call-in work will be programmed into the provisional call-in dates identified in the corporate calendar as required.
- 2.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has six scheduled meetings over the course of 2014/15, including the scheduled budget meeting (representing a maximum of 18 hours of scrutiny per year – assuming 3 hours per meeting). Members will therefore need to be selective in their choice of items for the work programme.

Principles guiding the development of the scrutiny work programme

2.7 The following key principles of effective scrutiny should be considered when the Commission determines its work programme:

- **Be selective** – There is a need to prioritise so that high priority issues are scrutinised given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time available. Members should consider what can realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what the session is intended to achieve.
- **Add value with scrutiny** – Items should have the potential to ‘add value’ to the work of the council and its partners. If it is not clear what the intended outcomes or impact of a review will be then Members should consider if there are issues of a higher priority that could be scrutinised instead.
- **Be ambitious** – The Commission should not shy away from carrying out scrutiny of issues that are of local concern, whether or not they are the primary responsibility of the council. The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to do anything to promote economic, social and environmental well being of local communities. Subsequent Acts have conferred specific powers to scrutinise health services, crime and disorder issues and to hold partner organisations to account.
- **Be flexible** – Members are reminded that there needs to be a degree of flexibility in their work programme to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration/comment during the year and accommodate any developmental or additional work that falls within the remit of this Commission. For example Members may wish to questions officers regarding the declining performance of a service or may choose to respond to a Councillor Call for Action request.
- **Think about the timing** – Members should ensure that the scrutiny activity is timely and that, where appropriate, their findings and recommendations inform wider corporate developments or policy development cycles at a time when they can have most impact. Members should seek to avoid duplication of work carried out elsewhere.

Models for carrying out scrutiny work

2.8 There are a number of means by which the Overview and Scrutiny Commission can deliver its work programme. Members should consider which of the following options is most appropriate to undertake each of the items they have selected for inclusion in the work programme:

Item on a scheduled meeting agenda/ hold an extra meeting of the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The Commission can agree to add an item to the agenda for a meeting and call Cabinet Members/ Officers/Partners to the meeting to respond to questioning on the matter■ A variation of this model could be a one-day seminar-scrutiny of issues that, although important, do not merit setting up a ‘task-and-finish’ group.
Task Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ A small group of Members meet outside of the scheduled meetings to gather information on the subject area, visit other local authorities/sites, speak to service users, expert witnesses and/or Officers/Partners. The Task Group can then report back to the Commission with their findings to endorse the submission of their recommendations to

	<p>Cabinet/Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This is the method usually used to carry out policy reviews
Commission asks for a report then takes a view on action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Commission may need more information before taking a view on whether to carry out a full review so asks for a report – either from the service department or from the Scrutiny Team – to give them more details.
Meeting with service Officer/Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Member (or small group of Members) has a meeting with service officers/Partners to discuss concerns or raise queries. ■ If the Member is not satisfied with the outcome or believes that the Commission needs to have a more in-depth review of the matter s/he takes it back to the Commission for discussion
Individual Members doing some initial research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A member with a specific concern carries out some research to gain more information on the matter and then brings his/her findings to the attention of the Commission if s/he still has concerns.

2.9 Note that, in order to keep agendas to a manageable size, and to focus on items to which the Commission can make a direct contribution, the Commission may choose to take some “information only” items outside of Commission meetings, for example by email.

Support available for scrutiny activity

2.10 The Overview and Scrutiny function has dedicated scrutiny support from the Scrutiny Team to:

- Work with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission to manage the work programme and coordinate the agenda, including advising officers and partner organisations on information required and guidance for witnesses submitting evidence to a scrutiny review;
- Provide support for scrutiny members through briefing papers, background material, training and development seminars, etc;
- Facilitate and manage the work of the task and finish groups, including research, arranging site visits, inviting and briefing witnesses and drafting review reports on behalf on the Chair; and
- Promote the scrutiny function across the organisation and externally.

2.11 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission will need to assess how they can best utilise the available support from the Scrutiny Team to deliver their work programme for 2014/15.

2.12 The Commission is also invited to comment upon any briefing, training and support that is needed to enable Members to undertake their work programme. Members may also wish to undertake visits to local services in order to familiarise themselves with these. Such visits should be made with the knowledge of the Chair and will be organised by the Scrutiny Team.

2.13 The Scrutiny Team will take the Overview and Scrutiny Commission’s views on board in developing the support that is provided.

3. Selecting items for the Scrutiny Work Programme

3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission sets its own agenda within the scope of its terms of reference. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertakes a coordinating role to ensure that any gaps or overlap in the scrutiny work programme are dealt with in a joined-up way.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has the following remit: -

- Formal crime & disorder scrutiny
- Safer communities: the role of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, safer neighbourhood teams, anti-social behaviour, drugs & alcohol treatment, domestic violence and road safety
- Stronger communities: community leadership, voluntary & community sector, public involvement & consultation; community cohesion, service delivery diversity & equalities
- Cross-cutting & strategic matters, inc. scrutiny of the budget & business plan and the approach to partnership arrangements
- Corporate capacity issues – communications, legal, human resources, IT, customer service
- The performance monitoring framework
- Financial monitoring
- Responsibility for keeping scrutiny under review

3.1 The Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for issues to scrutinise either as agenda items or task group reviews. Suggestions have been received from members of the public, councillors and partner organisations including the police, NHS Sutton and Merton and Merton Voluntary Service Council. Other issues of public concern have been identified through the Annual Residents Survey. Issues that have been raised repeatedly at Community Forums have also been included. The Scrutiny Team has consulted departmental management teams in order to identify forthcoming issues on which the Commission could contribute to the policymaking process.

3.2 A description of all the suggestions received is set out in Appendix 2.

3.3 The councillors who attended a “topic selection” workshop on 12 June 2014 discussed these suggestions. Suggestions were prioritised at the workshop using the criteria listed in Appendix 3. In particular, participants sought to identify issues that related to the Council’s strategic priorities or where there was underperformance; issues of public interest or concern and issues where scrutiny could make a difference.

3.4 A note of the workshop discussion relating to the remit of the Commission is set out in Appendix 4.

3.5 Appendix 1 contains a draft work programme that has been drawn up, taking the workshop discussion into account, for the consideration of the Commission. The Commission is requested to discuss this draft and agree any changes that it wishes to make.

4. Task group reviews

- 4.1 The Commission is invited to select an issue for in-depth scrutiny and establish a task group in order to carry out the review. The task group will subsequently meet to scope the review and draft the terms of reference that will be reported back to the next Commission meeting for approval.

5. Public involvement

- 5.1 Scrutiny provides extensive opportunities for community involvement and democratic accountability. Engagement with service users and with the general public can help to improve the quality, legitimacy and long-term viability of recommendations made by the Commission.
- 5.2 Service users and the public bring different perspectives, experiences and solutions to scrutiny, particularly if “seldom heard” groups such as young people, disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic communities and people from lesbian gay bisexual and transgender communities are included.
- 5.3 This engagement will help the Commission to understand the service user’s perspective on individual services and on co-ordination between services. Views can be heard directly through written or oral evidence or heard indirectly through making use of existing sources of information, for example from surveys. From time to time the Commission/Task Group may wish to carry out engagement activities of its own, by holding discussion groups or sending questionnaires on particular issues of interest.
- 5.4 Much can be learnt from best practice already developed in Merton and elsewhere. The Scrutiny Team will be able to help the Commission to identify the range of stakeholders from which it may wish to seek views and the best way to engage with particular groups within the community.

6. Training and visits

Training

- 6.1 24 councillors attended an “introduction to overview and scrutiny” training session delivered as part of the induction programme for new councillors. Feedback from this session indicated that participants found it useful. Particular praise was given to the input from scrutiny chairs, a former cabinet member and a co-opted member, as well as the group exercise which gave participants a flavour of scrutiny.
- 6.2 Participants were asked to identify scrutiny training needs for the year ahead. These are set out in the table overleaf, alongside suggested training/development opportunities:

Training Need	Training/Development opportunity
More in-depth look at the roles in scrutiny	Training Session: Chairing and leadership Skills (3) Individual mentoring Training Session: Analysis and Questioning Skills (5)
More on the outcomes from previous scrutiny reviews to know what kinds of things can be achieved	Progress Update: to Panels on outcomes from previous 4 years task group reviews as time didn't allow at the training session Training Session: Chairing Scrutiny for positive outcomes (2)
More focus on the Panel format/processes	Workshop: Mock Scrutiny Panel
Analysing the Budget/Financial information	Training Session: Budget Scrutiny (3)
More information on external scrutiny	Training Session: Scrutinising the work of partners (including health scrutiny) (3)
Understanding the Policy Context - How the council delivers services (procurement)	Training Session: Scrutinising procurement effectively (2)
Understanding the Policy Context - Localism Agenda	Training Session: Preparing overview and scrutiny for localism (3)

6.3 The Commission is asked to consider and agree a programme of scrutiny training for 2014/15 to include:

- chairing and leadership in scrutiny
- analysis and questioning skills (through mock Panel?)
- budget scrutiny (late October)
- scrutinising the work of partners (invite partners to contribute)
- understanding the policy context

Visits

6.4 At the topic workshop, attendees requested that a visit be arranged to the CCTV control centre so that Commission members who hadn't visited previously could gain an understanding of how it works. This visit will be arranged by the Head of Democracy Services in consultation with the CCTV Manager.

6.5 Commission members are asked to identify any other visits that they would find helpful to provide a context for scrutinising service delivery or policy changes.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1 A number of issues highlighted in this report recommend that Commission members take into account certain considerations when setting their work programme for 2014/15. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is free to determine its work programme as it sees fit. Members may therefore choose to identify a work programme that does not take into account these considerations. This is not advised as ignoring the issues raised would either conflict with good practice and/or principles endorsed in the Review of Scrutiny, or could mean that adequate support would not be available to carry out the work identified for the work programme.
- 7.2 A range of suggestions from the public, partner organisations, officers and Members for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme are set out in the appendices, together with a suggested approach to determining which to include in the work programme. Members may choose to respond differently. However, in doing so, Members should be clear about expected outcomes, how realistic expectations are and the impact of their decision on their wider work programme and support time. Members are also free to incorporate into their work programme any other issues they think should be subject to scrutiny over the course of the year, with the same considerations in mind.

8. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 8.1 To assist Members to identify priorities for inclusion in the Commission's work programme, the Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for possible scrutiny reviews from a number of sources:
- a. Members of the public have been approached using the following tools: articles in the local press, My Merton and Merton Together, request for suggestions from all councillors and co-opted members, letter to partner organisations and to a range of local voluntary and community organisations, including those involved in the Inter-Faith Forum and members of the Lesbian Gay and Transgender Forum;
 - b. Councillors have put forward suggestions by raising issues in scrutiny meetings, via the Overview and Scrutiny Member Survey 2014, and by contacting the Scrutiny Team direct; and
 - c. Officers have been consulted via discussion at departmental management team meetings.

9. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the financial, resource and property issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific financial, resource and property implications.

10. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Overview and scrutiny bodies operate within the provisions set out in the Local Government Act 2000, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 10.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the legal and statutory issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific legal and statutory implications.

- 11. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**
- 11.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engagement. The reviews will involve work to consult local residents, community and voluntary sector groups, businesses, hard to reach groups, partner organisations etc and the views gathered will be fed into the review.
- 11.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications.
- 12. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**
- 12.1 In line with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police and Justice Act 2006, all Council departments must have regard to the impact of services on crime, including anti-social behaviour and drugs. Scrutiny review reports will therefore highlight any implications arising from the reviews relating to crime and disorder as necessary.
- 13. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 13.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific risk management and health and safety implications.
- 14. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- 14.1 Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Commission draft work programme 2014/15
- 14.2 Appendix 2 – Summary of topics relating to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission’s remit suggested for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme
- 14.3 Appendix 3 – Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 12 June 2014
- 14.4 Appendix 4 – Notes from discussion of topics relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Scrutiny Topic Selection Workshop on 12 June 2014
- 15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**
- 15.1 None

Draft work programme 2014/15**Meeting date – 8 July 2014**

Item/Issue
Leader and Chief Executive – vision, key priorities & challenges for 2014/5
Development of Commission's work programme 2014/15
Discussion of questions for the Borough Commander – with note & docs from last meeting

Meeting date – 7 October 2014

Borough Commander – policing in Merton
Customer contact programme - update
CCTV review – report from external consultant
Community engagement in scrutiny – review of co-options and expert witnesses
Note of meeting of financial monitoring task group

Meeting date – 25 November 2014

Budget scrutiny round 1 – incl. Safer Merton service plan
Financial resilience project
Domestic violence audit – review findings and outcome
My Merton – distribution and readership
Note of meeting of financial monitoring task group

Meeting date 29 January 2015 – scrutiny of the budget**Meeting date 10 March 2015**

Customer contact programme update
Monitoring the Council's equalities commitments
Analysis of annual members' scrutiny survey
Discussion of questions for the Borough Commander
Note of meeting of financial monitoring task group

Meeting date 25 March 2015

Borough Commander – policing in Merton
Rehabilitation strategies
Volunteering update
Overview and scrutiny annual report

Description of topic suggestions received in relation to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

POLICING IN MERTON

Who suggested this issue?

In previous years the Commission has received regular updates on crime and policing from the borough commander as a standing item. A scrutiny councillor has suggested that the topic of building and mending communities could be examined. The youth parliament expressed interest in the fear of crime but this has previously been the subject of a scrutiny task group review.

Summary of the issue:

The Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan 2013-16 sets out the crime reduction strategy for London for the next four years.

This includes the implementation of a Local Policing Model that will transform policing to deliver more police on the streets, and a shift in focus towards the frontline, with the intention that they should be better equipped, better trained and better deployed and so more able to act directly for and with the public.

By reforming the back office, including reducing the number of senior officers and supervisors, releasing under-utilised assets and reducing overheads, MOPAC will fulfil the Mayor's commitment to keep police numbers high despite a reduced budget.

The Plan intends to increase the number of police officers in every borough and guarantees that each borough will be led by a dedicated borough commander.

The Plan pledges to improve public access by bringing the police to the public in new ways, such as guaranteeing that every victim of crime is offered a visit and opening up more of the local policing estate to the public, whilst co-locating contact points in public buildings such as libraries, hospitals and council offices.

The Borough Commander has attended on three occasions to answer questions about crime and policing in Merton. He has been asked to provide a breakdown of all officers in the Borough as at 2011, both neighbourhood teams and other officers, setting out what teams they were attached to, how many in each team, with a one line summary of the role of each team, and with an equivalent breakdown for the year now started, and one for 2015. This information will help the Commission to understand exactly what changes are taking place.

What could Scrutiny do?

It is suggested that the Commission continue to invite the Borough Commander to meetings to give updates on the implications for Merton of the Police and Crime Plan 2013-16.

It is suggested that he is asked to provide crime and policing data in the format given to the commission's meeting in April 2014.

The Commission could ask the Borough Commander to attend meetings in October and March.

REHABILITATION STRATEGIES

Who suggested this issue?

The Environment and Regeneration Departmental Management Team suggested that scrutiny investigate how ideas contained in the government's Transforming Rehabilitation initiative will be implemented locally.

Summary of the issue

The principles of the transforming rehabilitation initiative have been taken forward by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014. The Act advocates opening up the market to a diverse range of new rehabilitation providers, such as the voluntary and private sectors, and payment by results. Ideas include opening the majority of probation services to competition.

The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) team incorporating the Prolific and Other Priority Offenders (PPO) team within Safer Merton manage this work through a multiagency team including the Metropolitan Police, Probation, drug services and others.

The IOM works with Police and Probation intelligence and information to identify and work with the relevant offenders. Work starts prior to their release from prison and then into the community where the IOM team visit offenders at home, work with them to support their change in behaviour and ensure swift return to custody should they choose not to engage in the development of a crime free lifestyle.

Scrutiny of Prolific and Other Priority Offenders as part of the work of the civil unrest task group in 2013/14 resulted in the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime allocating £23,000 to commission a service for offenders aged 19-25 to help prevent re-offending.

Commissioning will be managed by the Ministry of Justice, with specifications informed by local delivery requirements and regional contracts. The aspiration is to generate economies of scale and deliver savings.

There will be more scope for providers to innovate, with payment by results as an incentive to focus on rehabilitating offenders. It is expected that there will be an increased use of mentors, and practical 'life management' issues will give offenders the skills they need to cope.

Despite the suggested changes the public sector will still directly manage high risk offenders who pose the highest risk of harm to society and individuals. Lower level risk offenders will be managed by private agencies.

What could Scrutiny do?

The Commission could receive an agenda report or undertake a to assess the local implications of the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 and the action being taken locally, with a view to suggesting improved ways of working and better utilisation of resources across the partnership.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Who suggested this issue?

A resident stated they would like Scrutiny to investigate antisocial behaviour around betting shops near Tooting station. A resident suggested the lighting in parks/areas in Merton should be investigated due to safety concerns.

Summary of the issue:

ASB is defined, in law, as causing 'harassment, alarm or distress' this can take many forms. The legislation is being updated later this year and will require local areas to undertake different actions in regards to ASB as well as removing/amending some of the current tools that ASB currently use. By April 2015 there will be a requirement around community remedies in regards to ASB and community triggers for offences. This is to bring ownership of ASB back to the communities that are victims of it.

Within the council, Safer Merton is responsible for developing strategies for tackling this issue, in partnership with the Metropolitan Police, fire service and local housing associations to tackle persistent problems affecting people in Merton. Housing Associations have specific legislation that only they can use against their tenants. Other council departments tackle elements of ASB through their legislation (for example licencing and noise nuisance).

The Merton Annual Residents' Survey indicated that overall concerns with anti-social behaviour fell in 2013, with 44% of people surveyed stating that they are either very worried or fairly worried about the issue, compared with 45% in 2012, 51% in 2011, and 48% in 2010.

There are variations across the borough. Residents living in the east of the borough in Ravensbury, St Helier, and Cricket Green indicated that they are more concerned about anti-social behaviour than the average across Merton.

The council will be expected by the Mayors office to participate in the delivery of community triggers and other such elements of the new ASB legislation and as this is 'new' work it is clear that the council needs to consider how best to do this within limited resources and what work will no longer continue in order to facilitate enough resource to meet the new demands.

What could Scrutiny do?

The Commission could ask for a report summarising what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour, outlining successes, future work and challenges, and any data that is available.

Alternatively, the Commission could set up a task group to look at the new legislation and its implementation locally in order to support and direct the work that the ASB team will do in the future. This could include assessing the role of voluntary groups in tackling anti-social behaviour.

CCTV

Who suggested this issue?

The Environment & Regeneration Departmental Management team suggested the issue of CCTV cameras throughout the borough would be a timely topic for scrutiny as the service is currently being reviewed.

Summary of the issue:

CCTV in Merton is a staffed service run by Safer Merton within the Department of Environment and Regeneration, led from a secure control room. The cameras are run solely by the council, but often the council will work with partner organisations such as the police to provide footage of criminal activity.

Direct links are live between the CCTV Control Room and the borough police operations room. Police officers are contactable by radio, and town centre shops are part of the Retail Radio Scheme, which means they can be alerted to any criminal activity.

CCTV staff support the monitoring of criminals through RIPA legislation and can identify known offenders if needed as well as locating lost and vulnerable individuals.

Nationally CCTV is a politically sensitive issue, with civil liberties organisations such as Liberty and Big Brother Watch leading campaigns centred on people's right to privacy.

There currently is no CCTV strategy in regards to the development of the CCTV program in Merton. There is no assessment of cameras and their locations. There is a need for the infrastructure to be completely overhauled due to its age and technological advances. CCTV on the borough is currently under review by an external technical auditor financed by the council. Capital investment in the overall CCTV system is an aspect of the review as is its location, funding and strategic direction.

What could Scrutiny do?

It is suggested that the Commission receive the external consultant's report on the CCTV review, timed so that it can discuss emerging recommendations and therefore impact on review outcomes. A final audit report was sent to the Director of Environment and Regeneration recently, and officers are currently finalising how it could be implemented.

This would be with a view of the Commission offering suggestion as to the strategic direction and governance of CCTV going forward.

REVIEW OF COUNCIL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

Who suggested this issue?

This issue was suggested by the Environment and Regeneration Departmental Management Team due to the current review of how this service is managed within the Safer Merton team.

Summary of the issue:

A domestic violence audit is currently taking place in the borough, within Safer Merton and in conjunction with public health and children schools and families, the way that services are provided, and what level of service is provided, are being reviewed.

At a national level the Home Office has redefined domestic violence and abuse. The cross-government definition of domestic violence and/or abuse is any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behavior and now includes those aged 16 and 17 (within a familial or intimate relationship context).

There are a number of interventions that support the aim of reducing domestic abuse/violence:

- MARAC, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference, is a multi-agency meeting forum where local agencies talk about the high risk individual experiencing domestic abuse. This is in order to draw up a multi-agency action plan to support, help and manage the risk that the individual faces.
- OSS – one stop shop a drop in service run every working Monday
- Children's centers offering support
- Refuges
- IDVA's – independent domestic violence advocates
- 16 day campaign
- Male Champions (against DV)

The audit currently being undertaken looks at all Council and partnership interventions that aim to stop domestic abuse/violence and their funding to see how we could improve our services and ways of working. It is estimated that less than 30% of victims report their abuse and suffer abuse for an ongoing period prior to reporting it. It is the councils wish that these victims are supported and that they are offered access to the relevant and pertinent services in order to minimize serious harm and even death (both to the victim and any children that may witness such behaviors).

How could scrutiny look at it?

It is suggested that the Commission receive an agenda report to review the findings and outcomes of the domestic violence audit and support and advise as to how best to implement the issues that are therein so that the Commission can comment and impact on the resultant action plan.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Who suggested this issue?

This was raised by the Environment and Regeneration Departmental Management Team as an issue of strategic importance to Merton.

Summary of the issue:

There are about 300 CSPs in England. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are comprised of representatives from the police, health service local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, and local probation services. The Home Office sets the policy framework and functions of these partnerships at a national level, and it is a statutory requirement that councils will work as a lead member within these partnerships and adhere to the logic implicit in working with local organisations to deliver better, more agile and responsive outcomes to reducing crime and disorder, ASB and assisting in reducing re-offending .

CSPs work to protect communities from crime and aim to make people feel safer. They develop multi-agency strategies to tackle drug or alcohol misuse and the related antisocial behaviour this can cause, and reduce reoffending. They decide upon annual local crime priorities and work out how to deal with these issues in consultation with the local community. It is a statutory requirement to carry out a strategic assessment every year and undertake a three year rolling plan. The role of O&S in regards to scrutinizing the partnerships role is also covered in the legislation.

People who live and work in Merton were consulted by Safe Merton on their top crime concerns. These results, along with crime statistics, helped the Local Community Safety Partnership decide their top priorities for 2013/14, which were:

- Alcohol and drug related crime
- Burglary
- Domestic violence
- Youth violence including knife crime

The Safer Merton team has reduced by 80% over 7 years as has its budget. In the forthcoming years (till 2018) the unit will see funding cuts from the Home Office, Mayors Office, PRG and the Council.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission receive regular update reports on the work of the CSP in Merton, including achievements and areas for improvement, it could in conjunction with meeting its requirements for reviewing Community Safety also have a task group that looks at the delivery of partnership priorities going forward and how this will be achieved in the light of cuts.

FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Who suggested this issue?

The Corporate Services Departmental Management Team suggested that the Commission could be interested in receiving information about the financial resilience project currently being carried out.

Summary of the issue:

The project will aim to improve Merton residents' access to financial services which meet their needs. An individual is seen as financially resilient if they have the knowledge and skills to be able to effectively manage their finances (financial capability) and access financial services which meet their needs, including basic banking and affordable credit (financial inclusion).

The project will review existing systems and services to ensure Merton residents have appropriate access to information and advice which enables them to effectively budget, manage debt, and make informed choices about credit. Current partner organisations for the council in this field include Merton and Lambeth Citizens Advice Bureau locally and the Money Advice Service (MA) nationally.

Ensuring that residents are encouraged to access basic financial products and services will enable them to manage their money better, plan ahead for the future and cope with financial distress if it occurs. This will have a positive impact on physical and mental health and may alleviate the pressure on health services.

At a national level, the costs of financial exclusion are potentially significant. Oxfam UK has estimated that people on low incomes pay a 'poverty premium' of around £1,280 per person a year through poor access to basic financial services and utilities.

The final Merton report will go to the Corporate Services Departmental Management team in autumn 2014.

What could Scrutiny do?

It is suggested that the Commission could receive a report in the autumn in time to comment on emerging recommendations and/or the action plan.

WELFARE REFORM

Who suggested this issue?

A councillor suggested that scrutiny could ask for an exploration of the system of the Universal Credit and how it affects residents.

Another councillor suggested that the Commission review the impact (to date) of council tax localisation and the operation of welfare reforms, noting that the council has assumed responsibility from the Department of Work and Pensions.

Summary of the issue:

The national policy context is of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

Key measures include:

- A cap on benefit entitlement for each family.
- The spare room subsidy (“bedroom tax”), which affects local authorities’ payment of local housing allowance.
- Residents now accessing benefits such as community care grants and crisis loans from the Revenues and Benefits team in the Corporate Services department rather than the DWP
- Localised support to pay council tax, where the council subsidises the cost to residents on low incomes, replacing council tax benefit.

The changes resulted in a 10% funding reduction for council tax benefit. Merton decided to absorb this cut rather than pass it on to residents. Residents may now claim some welfare benefits from the DWP and others from the council.

The government is setting up a Single Fraud Investigation Service into which local authority staff who work on benefit fraud will be transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Commission received a report about this issue at its last meeting.

The local policy context is that the number of housing benefit recipients are falling in inner London and rising in outer London, including Merton. A London Councils report published in 2013 stated that the number of housing benefit claimants in private rented housing in the capital has risen by 17 per cent over the previous two years.

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could ask for a task group review of how Merton residents are being affected by the 2012 Welfare Act

Members could ask for performance monitoring and update reports on the transfer of fraud investigation officers to the DWP

BUSINESS RATES DISCOUNT SCHEMES

Who suggested this issue?

This topic was suggested by the Corporate Services Departmental Management team

Summary of the issue:

Discretionary rate relief is a well established scheme that enables the council to grant business rate relief to non-profit making organisations such as charities and educational establishments etc. This relief is part funded by the Council within policy frameworks set by central government.

The Council has the discretion to grant relief of up to 100% off the rates on properties occupied by some non-profit making bodies, or in the case of registered charities that are entitled to 80% mandatory relief, to top up to 100%.

When deciding to grant discretionary relief the Council will ascertain whether the services provided by the organisation are directly for the benefit of residents in the borough.

Business rates retention (introduced in 2013) has given authorities the power to introduce local discounts for firms on their business rates. This new relief can be used on individual cases or as part of a wider strategy to enhance or encourage business to occupy empty premises in Merton.

Its aim is to support the attraction of new businesses (and the associated investment and jobs) into the borough, particularly into the east and parts of the borough undergoing regeneration.

Both schemes help reduce the number of empty premises and thereby reverse the physical and economic decline of areas. Nationally, the government has decided that owners with retail premises with a rateable value of up to £50,000 will be entitled to a discount of up to £1,000 on their business rates for two years from 2013.

In a bid to end the scourge of empty retail premises and shops which dominates many town centres, the chancellor also unveiled a "reoccupation relief" – the halving of business rates for entrepreneurs who set up shop in vacant stores.

To address the proliferation of empty shops which dominates many town centres, the chancellor also unveiled a "reoccupation relief" – the halving of business rates for entrepreneurs who set up shop in vacant stores.

What could Scrutiny do?

The Commission could ask for updates from officers about the implementation of both these programmes

DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED REGULATORY SERVICE

Who suggested this issue?

In view of the previous scrutiny work on noise nuisance, the Head of Public Protection has suggested that the Commission may be interested in receiving an update about the development of the shared service that will include the noise pollution and monitoring team.

Summary of the issue:

The council is working in partnership with the London boroughs of Croydon and Richmond to implement a Shared Service for Environmental Health (including noise nuisance), Trading Standards and Licensing. This will be referred to as the Shared Regulatory Service.

Merton will be the lead and host authority. Croydon and Richmond staff are expected to TUPE transfer across to Merton in July 2014. The project is currently in its first phase which is the implementation of the shared management structure. A Head of Shared Regulatory Service was recently appointed and further interviews and appointments in to the rest of the management structure will take place in June.

The service will be governed by a project board, on which all the partner boroughs will have representation.

What could Scrutiny do?

As the Commission has previously expressed an interest in being briefed about the development of this shared service (in part due to its previous work scrutinising noise nuisance) it is suggested that a progress report be received at the Commission meeting in autumn 2014.

CUSTOMER CONTACT PROGRAMME

Summary of the issue:

During 2013/14, the Commission has continued its scrutiny of the development and implementation of this programme. The programme's key objective is to improve the way the council interacts with its customers, in line with the Customer Contact Strategy agreed in 2013, so that services are delivered as far as possible 'right first time, and on time'. This will not only improve customers' experiences but also efficiency, as avoidable contact is removed and customers are encouraged and facilitated – where possible – to self-serve, that is to manage their own interactions with the council with reduced personal contact.

Strands of work include:

- procuring and implementing IT systems to enable self-serve and a more holistic and consistent view of customers; interactions
- managing the change required in the way services are organised and delivered so that the objectives of the programme can be delivered

The Commission has endorsed the proposals whilst raising some issues and concerns to Cabinet in relation to the pace of progress and the need to manage change carefully.

The Commission has received information on customer segmentation, customer views, how customer interaction takes place now and how it compares to other councils and how the council might approach customer insight going forward. It has also received regular updates on progress made in procurement of the necessary technology.

The research demonstrated that 84% of residents were “web ready” and provided a clear case for implementing web based customer interaction.

What could scrutiny do?

It is suggested that the Commission should continue to receive regular updates on the progress of this work.

MONITORING THE COUNCIL’S EQUALITIES COMMITMENTS

This has been a standing item whereby the Commission receives an annual update on The Equality Strategy Action Plan, which sets out the actions the council will take to meet the equality priorities both corporately and departmentally.

Summary of the issue:

The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years. The equality strategy outlines the Council’s ‘Equality Objectives’ as the following five themes:

- Tackling Inequality
- Service Access
- Improving Engagement
- Promoting Community Cohesion
- Workforce Development

Activity to support the delivery of the Equality Objectives includes:

- bridging the gap between the levels of deprivation and prosperity in the borough particularly focusing on:
 - raising educational attainment for all children and young people and reduce attainment gaps for target groups including children with special education needs or disabilities, those who are looked after in care, specific BAME groups, specific groups of White boys and those who are excluded from school
 - tackling rising unemployment particularly among young BAME communities and disabled residents and supporting those who are long term unemployed back into work
 - reducing health inequalities particularly the issues affecting some BAME communities, disabled and older residents
 - increasing education and economic opportunity in the east of the borough

What could scrutiny do?

The Commission could ask officers for a progress report about how the equalities agenda is being implemented in local council schools.

The Commission could receive an annual update at its March 2015 meeting to review the implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-2017.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Who suggested this issue?

The Commission identified this as an area for future work.

Summary of the issue:

In municipal year 2012-13 the Commission received a presentation giving overall trends and ward level information from the 2011 Census. There was further discussion of these issues at a member workshop in May 2013 and at the Commission meeting in November 2013.

Key trends are:

- The census noted an 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 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. In November 2013 members received a report and presentation on key demographic trends and their impact on service delivery.

What could scrutiny do?

Options include:

- Picking out a specific issue from the data and examine these in more detail as scrutiny reviews
- examine how the changing demographic of Merton will support future economic growth
- request an update about what departments are doing to assess the impact of demographic change on services in the form of a workshop or one-off task group

DISTRIBUTION OF MY MERTON (COUNCIL MAGAZINE)

Who suggested this issue?

A local community organisation suggested that scrutiny could review circulation, with a view to improving it, particularly when it is used as a vehicle for public consultation.

Summary of the issue:

My Merton, the official magazine of Merton Council, is published quarterly and distributed free to more than 80,000 households across the borough. It is also published in digital format on the council's website, where site visitors can also view previous editions.

How could scrutiny look at it?

Members could ask for a briefing from officers to investigate whether more distribution outlets could be considered for the magazine, and whether the present distribution strategy could be improved.

The Commission could ask officers to brief them about whether there could be more advertising in local libraries directing people to the My Merton website, particularly in areas where there is a consultation being undertaken.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SCRUTINY - REVIEW OF CO-OPTIONS AND EXPERT WITNESSES

Members of the public and representatives of local community organisations can get involved in scrutiny in a number of ways including as co-opted members or expert witnesses. These are valuable roles for scrutiny and can be particularly helpful in representing community perspectives, contributing to providing a wider/balanced picture of an issue and encouraging public engagement.

How could scrutiny look at it?

The scrutiny team have suggested that a more formal approach could be adopted in future so that each Panel identifies the area of expertise that is required and then recruits accordingly for a time-limited period rather than open-ended as at present.

It is suggested that the Head of Democracy Services should research good practice in other authorities and bring a draft strategy to the Commission for discussion at its meeting in October so that a new approach could be agreed for the 2015/16 municipal year.

FINANCIAL MONITORING:

In previous years the Commission has delegated this work to a financial monitoring task group with the following terms of reference:

- To carry out scrutiny of the Council's financial monitoring information on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
- To advise on other agenda items as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
- To report minutes of its meetings back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
- To send via the Commission any recommendations or references to Cabinet, Council or other decision making bodies

The meeting dates for the task group were set in consultation with the Director of Corporate Services to enable the financial monitoring information to be examined on a quarterly basis. Agendas and minutes have been published on the Council's website and meetings took place in public so that interested residents could attend should they wish to.

During 2013/14, the financial monitoring task group has scrutinised financial monitoring information on a quarterly basis. It has also examined and commented on the commercial waste review and the local council tax benefit scheme.

It is recommended that the Commission continue to delegate its financial monitoring work.

BUDGET SCRUTINY:

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has a constitutional duty to coordinate the scrutiny responses on the business plan and budget formulation.

It is suggested that, as in previous years, the Commission should put aside some time in its meeting in November and prepare to devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny.

ANNUAL REPORTS RECEIVED BY THE COMMISSION IN PAST YEARS:

Analysis of Members' survey – an annual survey of all councillors and co-opted members to collect views about how scrutiny is working and how it can be improved. The survey also evaluates satisfaction with the scrutiny function as a whole and with the different workstreams that make up overview and scrutiny.

Overview and Scrutiny annual report – the council's constitution requires the Commission to submit to Council an annual report outlining the work of the overview and scrutiny function over the course of the municipal year. This report is drafted by the scrutiny team in conjunction with the scrutiny chairs and is brought to the Commission for approval prior to submission to Council.

FOLLOW-UP ON PAST SCRUTINY REVIEWS:

An important aspect of scrutiny is to monitor the outcome of scrutiny task group reviews to ensure that recommendations are implemented by Cabinet.

Volunteering

The task group made recommendations which are designed to both assist and celebrate voluntary work taking place in Merton, and to ensure this valuable work is both recognised and that the council and community reap the full rewards from it.

In September 2013 the Commission received a detailed implementation plan relating to the task group, and there was also an update in April 2014, when the Commission was briefed on actions taken by the corporate management team on the volunteering strategy. The Commission was pleased with the progress made and did not require further updates on progress against the recommendations.

It is suggested that the Commission receive an annual report as recommended by the task group in order to:

- continue to monitor the implementation of the Merton Partnership's Merton Volunteering and Community Action Strategy 2012 – 2014 and beyond
- take an ongoing interest in progress on volunteering by asking the lead Director (currently the Director of Community and Housing) to bring an annual update on behalf of the Council's Corporate Management Team and the Merton Partnership

AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS FOR COMMISSION'S MEETING ON 8 JULY 2014:

The Commission, at its meeting on 7 April, agreed to invite the Leader and Chief Executive to the meeting on 8 July to set out their priorities for the year ahead.

The Commission also agreed to invite the Borough Commander to the October meeting.

Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 12 June 2014

The purpose of the workshop is to identify priority issues for consideration as agenda items or in-depth reviews by the Scrutiny Commission. The final decision on this will then be made by the Commission at their first meeting.

All the issues that have been suggested to date by councillors, officers, partner organisations and residents are outlined in the supporting papers.

Further suggestions may emerge from discussion at the workshop.

Points to consider when selecting a topic:

- Is the issue strategic, significant and specific?
- Is it an area of underperformance?
- Will the scrutiny activity add value to the Council's and/or its partners' overall performance?
- Is it likely to lead to effective, tangible outcomes?
- Is it an issue of community concern and will it engage the public?
- Does this issue have a potential impact for one or more section(s) of the population?
- Will this work duplicate other work already underway, planned or done recently?
- Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?
- Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?

Notes from discussion of topics relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Scrutiny Topic Selection Workshop 12 June 2014

Attendees:

Councillors Peter Southgate (Chair), Peter McCabe (Vice Chair), Hamish Badenoch, John Dehaney, Brenda Fraser, Najeeb Latif, Russell Makin, Oonagh Moulton, Dennis Pearce
Co-opted member Denis Popovs
Caroline Holland, Director of Corporate Services
Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration
Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services (note taker)

Apologies – Councillor Jeff Hanna and Yvette Stanley, Director of Children Schools and Families

Policing in Merton

AGREED to continue to invite the Borough Commander to attend Commission meetings twice a year. The Borough Commander will be asked to provide data in advance of the meeting so that this can be published with the agenda.

Also AGREED to have a short item on the agenda of the meeting prior to the Borough Commander's attendance in order to outline what he should address in his presentation and what questions members wish to ask.

Councillor Southgate is meeting the Borough Commander on 25 June and will discuss the Commission's requirements with him.

Rehabilitation strategies

Noted that a lot of change is anticipated in how rehabilitation (probation) services are delivered in line with the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 and that it would be helpful to understand this even though there is little scope to impact on the changes.

AGREED to have an agenda item to provide information and data (including benchmarking data) so that the Commission can assess the impact that the legislation will have in Merton and can consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations about ways of working locally.

Antisocial behaviour

Several attendees expressed interest in this issue and identified links to the use of CCTV. Noted that updated legislation is expected to be implemented later this year so there is little scope for scrutiny to impact on this at the moment.

AGREED to consider anti-social behaviour issues alongside scrutiny of CCTV rather than having a separate report.

CCTV

REQUESTED that a visit be arranged to the CCTV control room for those members who have not previously visited. ACTION: Julia Regan

Discussed and suggested that the Commission examine the re-commissioning of CCTV cameras and take a view on how new technology is best deployed, as well as checking on the quality of the photos taken (especially at night).

AGREED that the Commission should, at its October meeting, receive the external consultant's report on the CCTV review and scrutinise in relation to the impact on anti-social behaviour and environmental cleanliness as well as taking a view on the re-commissioning of cameras and their deployment. AGREED that the Commission would then make a decision on whether to carry out a task group review of some aspect of CCTV.

Domestic violence

Noted that although this is an area of high importance, there are no service or policy issues to scrutinise at present.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration said that a potential transfer to the Children Schools and Families Department is being considered. Attendees expressed support for the potential co-location of domestic violence services alongside children, schools and families' services and the MASH (multi-agency services hub) and asked to be kept informed.

AGREED to have an agenda report to review the findings and outcome of the domestic violence audit and an update on discussions regarding the location of domestic violence services.

Community Safety Partnership

Expressed concerns regarding reduction in funding and AGREED to address through scrutiny of any proposed budget saving rather than as a separate agenda item.

Also AGREED that the Safer Merton team service plan and information about the team should be provided prior to discussion of budget proposals so that the context of proposals can be understood by the Commission.

Financial resilience project

AGREED to receive an agenda report, timed so that the Commission can comment on emerging recommendations and/or the action plan.

Welfare reform

Noted that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny panel will be considering this issue. Also noted that Sutton will be a pilot area for the roll out of Universal Credit.

AGREED to recommend no further action by the Commission at present – wait until the Universal Credit rollout is further advanced.

AGREED that the Commission would wish to scrutinise any proposal from Cabinet for a change to the local council tax benefit scheme.

Business rates discount schemes

The Director of Corporate Services said that these were national schemes and that although there would be scope for a local scheme this would not be sufficiently advanced for meaningful scrutiny until 2015/16.

AGREED to carry forward as a topic suggestion for 2015/16.

Development of a shared regulatory service

The Director of Corporate Services said that Croydon have withdrawn from the shared service subsequent to the May elections.

AGREED that the Commission should take no further action on this.

Customer contact programme

AGREED that the Commission should continue to receive regular progress updates. These should include information on the replacement of the Care First system.

Monitoring the Council's equalities commitments

AGREED that the Commission should continue to receive an annual update on the Equality Strategy's action plan.

Changing demographics

Councillor Southgate commended to new councillors the report that had been provided to the Commission on demographic changes and policy developments. ACTION: Julia Regan to email the report to new councillors.

AGREED that the Commission should take no action on this until further work has been completed by officers.

Distribution of My Merton (Council magazine)

AGREED to receive a short briefing report on circulation and distribution and that this should include results from the Annual Residents Survey in relation to readership.

Community engagement in scrutiny – review of co-options and expert witnesses

Councillor McCabe said that the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel had decided to adopt a new system of recruiting co-opted members by inviting applications from people within the community in a similar way to that used for the Standards Committee. Appointments would be made for a time limited period.

AGREED that the Head of Democracy Services should review good practice elsewhere and report to the Commission in October on this as well as providing an update on the Healthier Communities Panel's new approach.

Financial monitoring

AGREED that the Commission should continue to delegate financial monitoring to the financial monitoring task group

Budget scrutiny

AGREED that the Commission should put aside some time in its November meeting and devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny

Annual reports and past scrutiny reviews

AGREED to continue to receive these reports

This page is intentionally left blank