

FOREWORD TO O&S ANNUAL REPORT

Local government continues to face severe financial challenges in delivering services to residents, and these inevitably affect the scope of scrutiny and what can be achieved with limited resources. We have responded by trying to ensure the topics and issues selected for scrutiny are as relevant as possible to the challenges confronting the council, while retaining our independence from the executive.

Nothing could be more relevant to the council than the determination of its budget, and scrutiny made Cabinet fully aware of the concerns of service users over proposed cuts in adult social care. Cabinet responded by setting up a £1.3m Savings Mitigation Fund for 2016/17 to help the most vulnerable users, and agreed to consult on levying a precept for adult social care in future.

This is the latest example of scrutiny making a real difference to the budget setting process in Merton, and it sets us apart from other London boroughs where scrutiny has very little influence on the budget.

We have also chosen topics for investigation that are highly relevant to the financial pressures facing the council. The Commission is looking into shared and outsourced services, and whether there is scope to do more; while Sustainable Communities is investigating the potential for commercialising services to generate additional revenues. The Commission maintains a watching brief for the voluntary sector, because we realise how crucial it is in supporting vulnerable communities in Merton. We depend more and more on our partners in the voluntary sector for the social cohesion of the borough.

For the first time I can remember, there were no call-ins in 2015/16. Does this mean we have perfected the use of pre-decision scrutiny?

Perfect in every respect is our small but hard working officer team, and on behalf of all members involved in scrutiny I would like to thank Julia Regan, Stella Akintan, Annette Wiles (from January 2016) and Rebecca Redman (until December 2015) for their unwavering commitment to making scrutiny in Merton amongst the best in London.

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