

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 7 July 2016

Subject: Member Survey 2016 - Analysis

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

Lead Member: Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

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Recommendations:

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission considers the findings arising from the 2016 Member Survey.
 - B. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission agrees the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny (actions run throughout the report and are listed in Appendix 3).
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 For the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to consider the findings from the 2016 Member Survey and the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the scrutiny function.

2. DETAILS

- 2.1 Background: each year the scrutiny team carries out a survey to collect the views of Merton councillors and co-opted scrutiny members about how scrutiny is working - where things work well, where things don't work quite so well, and how they can be improved. The survey also evaluates the effectiveness of the scrutiny function as a whole and with the different workstreams that make up overview and scrutiny.

- 2.2 Methodology: the survey was conducted predominately in paper format, with surveys being distributed to councillors in hardcopy. The survey was sent to co-opted members as an MSWord attachment to an email inviting participation.

In accordance with the recommendations resulting from the member survey in 2015, and as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, the survey was reviewed in 2016 prior to distribution. The opportunity was taken to make some questions clearer (specifically those on the size and content of scrutiny agenda) and also to test use of a five point response scale which is the market research industry standard. Importantly, this has given respondents the opportunity to indicate that they neither agree nor disagree with statements made in the survey; the objective is to give all respondents a full range of response options (including neutrality) so that the survey can adequately capture their views. This has made it difficult to achieve a direct comparison with previous results but hopefully will improve the accuracy of the survey over time.

- 2.3 Response rate: the 2016 Member Survey was sent out to 60 councillors and six co-opted members. It was completed by 37 councillors and four co-opted members, giving an overall response rate of 62% (with a 62% response rate from councillors). This is on par with the highest response rate achieved since 2011.
- 2.4 Analysis: for the purposes of this report, the responses of councillors have been split out and reported separately from those of co-opted members. This is to allow us to specifically focus on responses from co-opted members and to separately address the points that they have made.
- 2.5 Key findings:
- 2.5.1. Overall effectiveness: the target set for member satisfaction with the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function has not been met, with a rating of 65% against a target of 75%. This target was also not met last year, the first time it has not been met in recent years. However, this year's rating is an improvement on last year; up by 4% from 61% (the effect of the new response format should be noted).
- 2.5.2. Impact on Cabinet: however, it should also be noted that there has been a significant increase in the perceived impact scrutiny has on Cabinet, up by 16% from 46% to 62%. This is likely to be due primarily to the improved rating that has been given to pre-decision scrutiny this year.
- 2.5.3. Call-ins: perceived effectiveness of call-in remains low, (it is the only aspect of the scrutiny function that has not achieved at least a 50% positive member rating). However, there was no call-in during the entirety of the past municipal year and members were explicitly asked to answer the survey questions in relation to their experience of scrutiny over the past year. As such, this response may simply reflect the lack of call-in experience during the qualifying period for the survey.
- 2.5.4. Agenda length: clarifying the question on whether or not Commission/Panel agendas are the correct length in order to consider items properly means the 60% satisfaction rating has been exceeded; 70% agree (35% strongly) that agendas are the correct length.
- 2.5.5. Scrutiny team: the level of satisfaction with the support provided by the scrutiny team continues to be high; 95% are satisfied, with 46% describing the support provided as excellent.
- 2.5.6. Co-opted Members: as a group co-opted members are the least satisfied with the scrutiny function. Action is recommended to address this.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Whilst there is not a requirement to undertake an annual Member survey, the findings enable members' satisfaction with the scrutiny process at Merton to be measured against agreed annual targets and actions to be taken to improve the scrutiny process year on year.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 The Member Survey is conducted annually, usually during February/March and runs for a minimum of three weeks each year. In 2015 and 2016, the survey was conducted during March and April so that views could be taken following the completion of the budget scrutiny process.

- 5. TIMETABLE**
- 5.1 The Member Survey was undertaken in March and April 2016 and is being reported to the Commission in July so that identified actions can be incorporated into its 2016/17 work programme.
- 6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**
- 6.1 None directly relating to the Member Survey itself. However, some actions arising from the findings of the survey year on year may have resource implications which need to be taken into consideration.
- 7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**
- 7.1 None relating to this report.
- 8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**
- 8.1 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 findings of the Member Survey are reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission which is open to the public.
- 9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**
- 9.1 None relating to this report.
- 10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**
- 10.1 None relating to this report.
- 11. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**
- 11.1 Appendix 1: Member Survey 2016 – analysis and detailed findings
- 11.2 Appendix 2: Verbatim comments from Members
- 11.3 Appendix 3: List of proposed action points

Member Survey 2016

Analysis and findings

Methodology

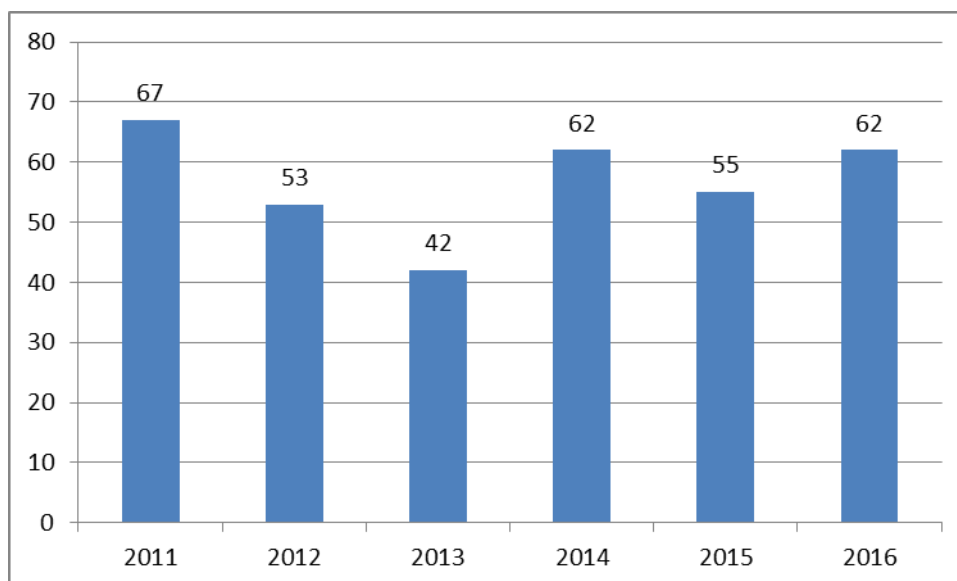
1. The survey is conducted predominately in paper format, with surveys being distributed to councillors in hardcopy. The survey was sent to co-opted members as a MSWord attachment to an email inviting participation
2. It is an on-going objective to maximise responses. A full range of promotional mechanisms are already employed; direct emails to members and through group offices with frequent reminders of the deadline being sent. Promotion through the group offices and laying copies round at Council seems to have been particularly beneficial this year.
3. Providing a range of response mechanisms including online may also prove positive. Those returning forms online this year found this difficult. Four used this method with half of them printing out a hard copy, completing it offline, scanning it and then returning the completed survey as an email attachment. This seems an unnecessarily complex approach.
4. **Action points:**
 - Explore the use of an online survey response mechanism (eg: SurveyMonkey) to make survey completion easier for respondents. This would be accessible by members completing the survey from home.
 - Alongside use of quantitative methods, consider use of qualitative methods to explain the findings more fully. It is proposed that a number of in-depth interviews be conducted by the scrutiny team immediately after the survey period.
5. In accordance with the recommendations resulting from the Member Survey in 2015, and as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, the survey was reviewed in 2016 prior to distribution. The opportunity was taken to make some questions clearer (specifically those on the size and content of scrutiny agenda) and also to test use of a five point response scale which is the market research industry standard. Importantly, this has given respondents the opportunity to indicate that they neither agree nor disagree with statements made in the survey; the objective is to give all respondents a range of possible responses that the survey can adequately capture their views. This has made it difficult to achieve a direct comparison with previous results but is increasing the accuracy of the survey.
6. **Action points:**

In order to provide greatest clarity and to standardise the survey, consider using a five point response scale throughout. In addition provide a 'Don't know/Not applicable option'. Currently, some respondents are leaving some questions blank making it impossible to understand their intention. By providing a full range of possible responses, it is hoped the number of respondents that return completed surveys will increase.

Survey respondents

7. The survey was sent to all 60 councillors and to the six co-opted scrutiny panel members.
8. Thirty seven councillors and four co-opted members completed the survey form, giving an overall response rate of 62% (with a 62% response rate from councillors). This is an increase based on last year's results and the joint highest response rate achieved since 2011:

Diagram 1: Member survey annual response rate (all figures are %)



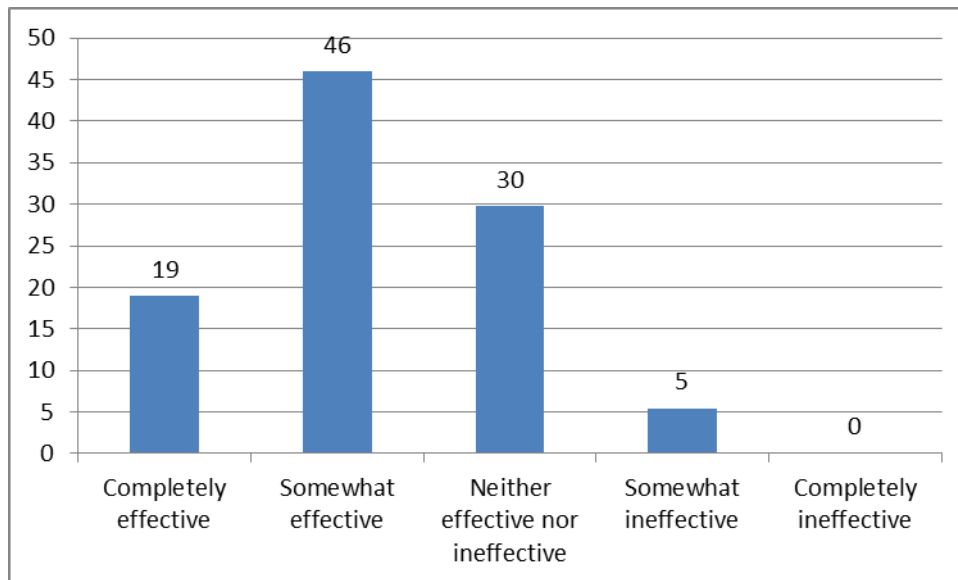
9. The majority of respondents have been actively involved in the scrutiny process over the past year:
 - 21 are **Members of the Scrutiny Commission or a Panel**. Fifteen of these have sat on a scrutiny review task group. As there have been no call-ins this year, none have had that experience this year.
 - 11 are “**other non-executive Members**”, nine of whom have attended a scrutiny meeting as a visiting Member to observe/make a contribution.
 - 5 are **Cabinet Members**, all but one have attended a scrutiny meeting to give evidence or to observe/make a contribution.
 - 4 are **co-opted Members** one of whom has sat on a scrutiny review task group.

Analysis of Councillors' responses

Effectiveness of the scrutiny function

10. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they considered the scrutiny function to be effective in each key area of scrutiny activity and to rate the effectiveness of scrutiny overall. A new response format has been introduced to provide an industry standard five point response scale. This makes it difficult to compare findings with those from previous years.

Diagram 2: The overall effectiveness of scrutiny in 2015/2016 (all figures are %)



11. Respondents' positive perception of the overall effectiveness of overview and scrutiny has increased on that achieved last year; up from 61% to 65% which is the first increase achieved since 2013. It should be noted that the majority of respondents are still positive about the overall effectiveness of scrutiny despite the introduction of the five point response scale and that a very small percentage (5% or just two respondents) view scrutiny's effectiveness negatively (somewhat ineffective). Shifting the 30% of respondents that regard scrutiny as neither effective nor ineffective to be more positive will be an important aspiration for the year ahead.

12. The overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function received a number of compliments through the verbatim comments supporting the quantitative findings of the survey:

Scrutiny has helped to hold the Council/Cabinet to account by ensuring that issues affecting residents are properly looked into (other executive Member).

The panel is effective and has rendered a value service for money (a scrutiny Member).

I have been impressed by the quality of scrutiny meetings this year. The chairing of panels is particularly good (a Cabinet Member).

13. However, other verbatim comments continue to indicate perceptions that scrutiny is weakened by undue party influence rather than cross-party consensus built on evidence gathering. This is likely to continue to have an influence on perceptions of scrutiny's effectiveness overall and is potentially reflected in those that think scrutiny is neither effective nor ineffective:

Scrutiny is as effective as Members make it. Labour Members do tend to hold back from scrutiny challenge. Performance monitoring and related discussion has improved this year with selected focus on key items for improvement (a scrutiny Member).

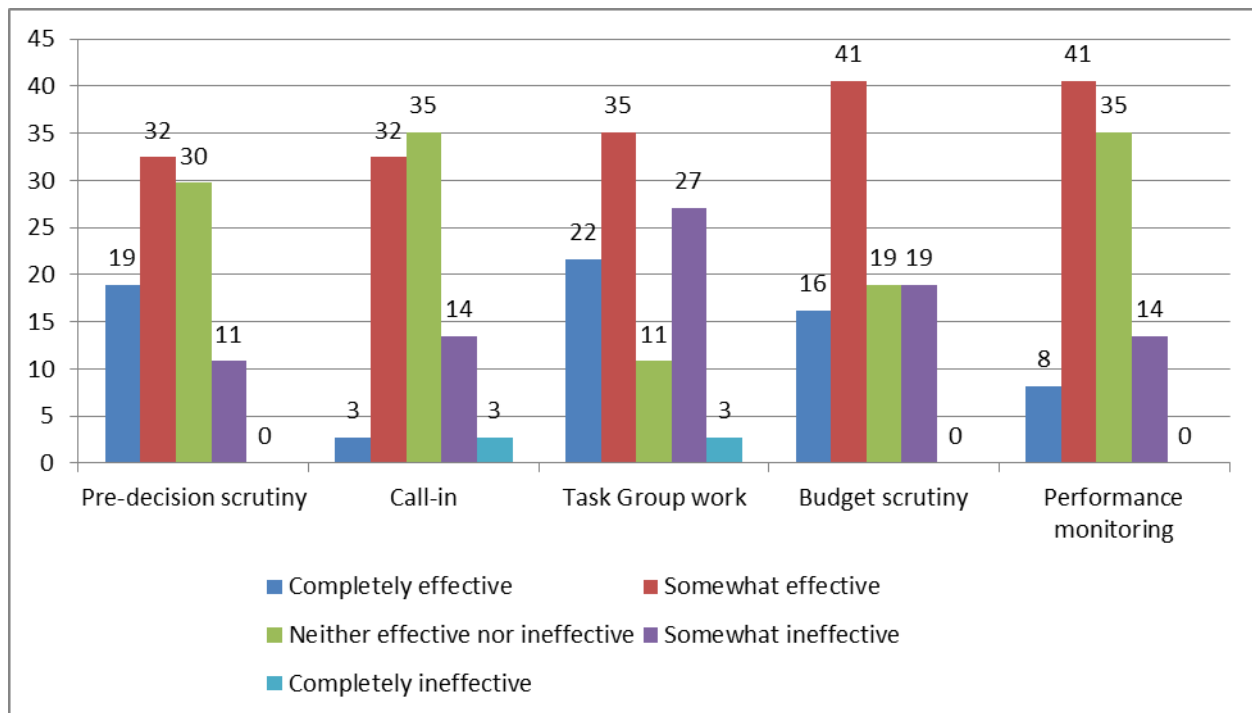
Scrutiny is too political (a non-executive Member).

Political pressures and alliances work against improvement (a scrutiny Member).

Panel chairs should not be occupied by administration nominees (other non-executive Member).

Consider making at least 1 chair an opposition Member. Or have 1 committee with a different balance of parties (a scrutiny Member).

Diagram 3: The effectiveness of the different aspects of scrutiny in 2015/2016 (all figures are %)



Pre-decision scrutiny

14. The consistently positive trend to 2014 indicates that pre-decision scrutiny worked well within an authority that had no overall political control. Having a majority administration required some adaptation and the fall in the satisfaction level from 77% in 2014 to 58% in 2015 indicated that further work was urgently required on this. This year pre-decision scrutiny received a 51% effectiveness rating which indicates an improvement and links to the increase recorded in perceived impact of scrutiny on Cabinet (see point 35). Further work will be required during 2016/17 to ensure that opportunities for meaningful pre-decision scrutiny continue to be identified and taken up.

15. Verbatim comments imply that the operation of pre-decision scrutiny has improved during the last year:

There were no call-ins for 2015/2016 which would suggest much more effective pre-decision scrutiny. Still scope for improvements (a scrutiny Member).

Issues raised about proposals on wheeled bins have been taken on board. These are issues raised at the Panel meeting (a Cabinet Member).

16. Action point:

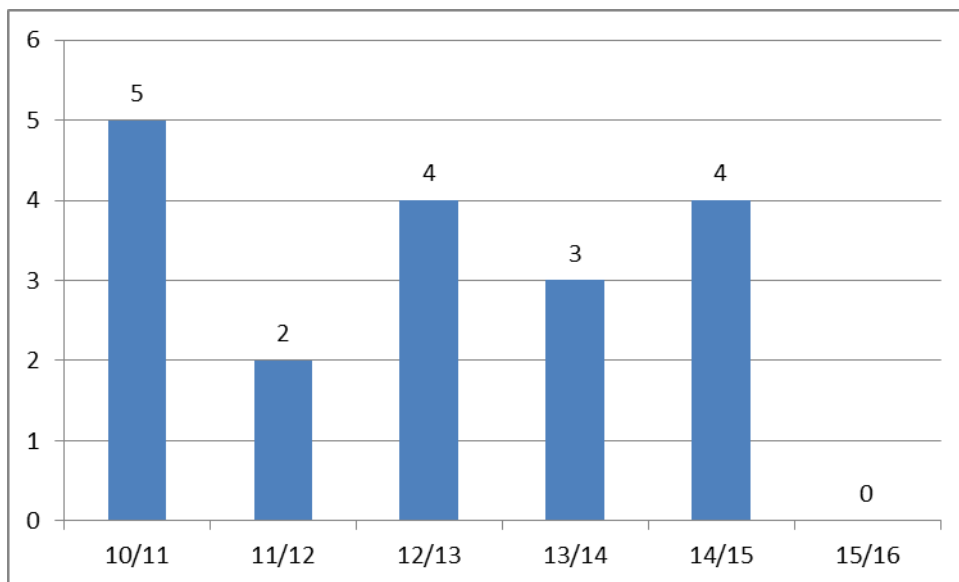
Opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny should continue to be highlighted to the Commission/Panel on the work programme reports and through the informal meetings held twice yearly between the scrutiny Chair, Vice-Chair, Cabinet Member and Director.

Call-in

17. Call-in continues to be an area with relatively low rates of perceived effectiveness. It is the most political element of scrutiny and rarely results in a request to Cabinet to review its decision.

18. In 2015/16 there were no call-ins. This is unusual with at least two call-ins or more having been requested during the previous five years:

Diagram 4: The number of call-ins each year for the last five municipal years



19. Given the lack of call-ins during the year, these illicit very little verbatim comment and remain the lowest ranked in terms of effectiveness of all the scrutiny functions (35%). Also, it should be noted that over a third (a further 35%) state that this is neither effective nor ineffective. A Sustainable Communities call-in has already happened in the 2016/2017 giving us a better ability to test this in the 2017 Member Survey.

20. However, as has already been seen, at least one respondent notes that the lack of a call-in this year could be linked to an improvement in pre-decision scrutiny.

Task groups

21. Task group work was once again rated one of the most effective elements of scrutiny with a 57% effectiveness rating and the lowest number of members responding that they are undecided. This indicates that members continue to find it a productive and effective way to contribute to policy development that will have a positive impact on residents' lives:

Task groups are good and give Members an opportunity to get their teeth into policy (a Cabinet Member).

Task groups are excellent because they all seem to work collectively (a Cabinet Member).

23. However, 27% of respondents report task groups as somewhat ineffective. Verbatim comments indicate the need to for the scrutiny team to continue ensuring all task group recommendations and other references to Cabinet are followed-up through a report back to the relevant Panel/Commission and that policy and service changes resulting from scrutiny recommendations are well publicised. This may be the main reason why some members regard task groups as ineffective:

There is little evidence that they pay more than lip service to recommendations (a non-executive Member).

24. The Children and Young People Panel has also taken a different approach to more in-depth scrutiny work during the year which has been positively received by members. This involved conducting a themed meeting, breaking the Members into workshops to allow further in-depth work with support provided by an external expert. This has demonstrated there is a range of ways in which it is possible to support in-depth scrutiny and effectively use Members' time:

Particularly liked the children's scrutiny Panel breaking into group work. It helped Members to focus on a subject, rather than gloss across it (a Cabinet Member).

25. Action point:

The scrutiny team should continue to explore a range of opportunities that support Members to conduct in-depth scrutiny and which make effective use of the time available.

26. Just under half (43%) of councillors indicate their interest in conducting their own reviews.

27. Action point:

Develop a framework to support councillors in conducting their own reviews for launch in autumn 2016. Initially impact should be assessed through the 2017 Member Survey.

Budget scrutiny

28. Satisfaction with budget scrutiny remains high (57% effectiveness rating). However comments continue to reveal some frustration regarding a lack of impact:

More proactive approach to the scrutiny of the Council budget. Members should receive more training in financial analysis (a non-executive Member).

On the budget scrutiny I think it is difficult to get into detail without considering the whole budget and we don't do this – also difficult re offering alternatives as this is something not really debated (a scrutiny Member).

Better use of first round budget scrutiny (a scrutiny Member).

29. Action point:

Comments from the Member Survey to be shared with the Director for Corporate Services and reflected in planning for the scrutiny of the budget over the next year.

Performance monitoring

30. Over a third of members (35%) state that performance monitoring is neither effective nor ineffective. This is the highest ranking of those that aren't sure (neither effective nor ineffective). Verbatim comments indicate an improvement in performance monitoring over the year but that there is a need to improve this further:

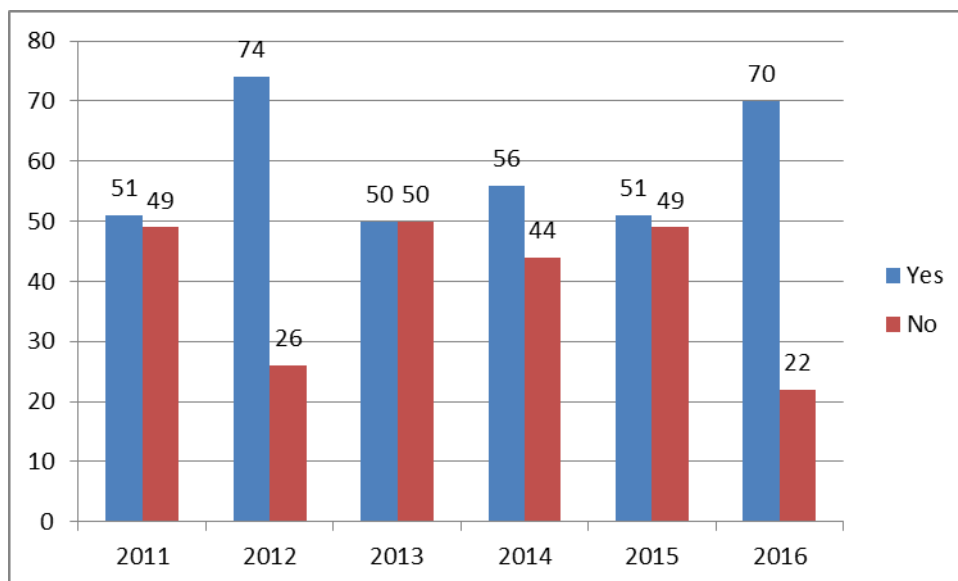
Performance monitoring and related discussion has improved this year with selected focus on key items for improvement (a scrutiny Member).

31. The approach to performance monitoring has changed over the past two to three years. Previously there was a performance lead for each Panel/Commission who scrutinised a standard set of performance indicators prior to the meeting and drew Members' attention to any areas of concern. Each Panel now has a more tailored approach – Children and Young People and Sustainable Communities review a set basket of indicators at each meeting. Additionally, Children and Young People devotes one meeting to scrutinising the standards report (exam results, attendance, exclusions etc). The Healthier Communities Panel reviews performance as part of agenda items where relevant. The Commission receives crime data at each meeting attended by the Borough Commander and has delegated detailed quarterly financial monitoring to the financial monitoring task group.

Scrutiny agendas/ workload

32. Clarifying the question on whether or not Commission/Panel agendas are the correct length in order to consider items properly means the 60% satisfaction rating has been exceeded; 70% agree (35% strongly) that agendas are the correct length:

Diagram 5: Are Commission/Panel agendas the correct length? (All figures are %)



33. Additional responses indicate an on-going need to pay attention to the size of the agenda to keep them manageable both in terms of the number of items and number of pages (just over half of respondents agree that agendas should be more selective). Comments also indicate some willingness to have additional meetings from time to time to accommodate important issues as they arise (supported by 24% of respondents).

Development of the Commission/Panel work programmes

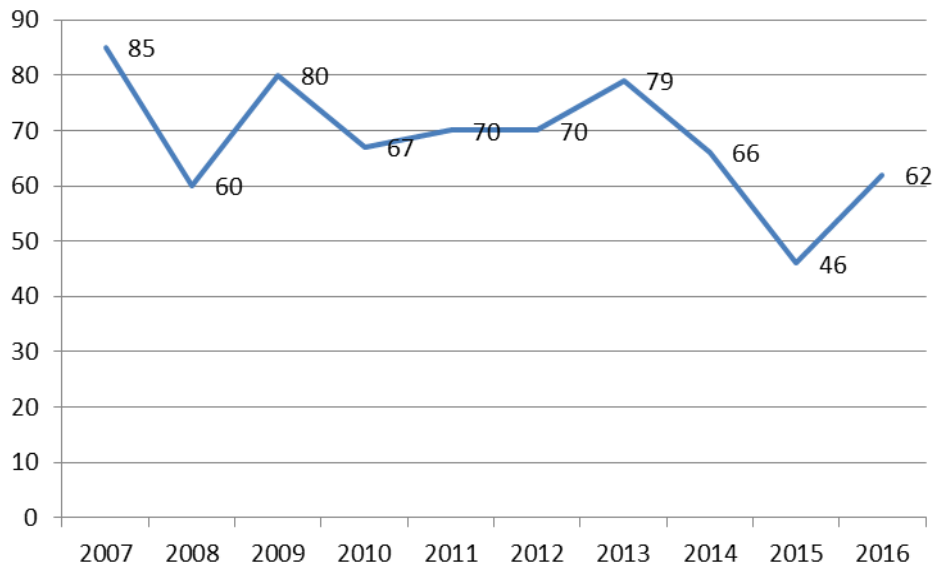
34. A large majority (86%) of councillors continue to agree that they have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Commission/Panel work programmes. This has been the case since the introduction of the topic workshop approach in 2010.

Scrutiny impact on decision making by the Cabinet

35. The survey asked whether decision making by the Cabinet had been influenced by scrutiny. The proportion agreeing that it has increased considerably by 16% up from 46% in 2015 to 62% which bucks what had been a downward trend. This is supported by verbatim comments:

Budget - establishment of savings, mitigation fund and agreement to consult on levying adult social care precept (a scrutiny Member).
 The changes made to some of the budgetary suggestions demonstrate that influence has occurred within the Cabinet (a scrutiny Member).

Diagram 6: Has scrutiny had an impact on Cabinet decision making? (% saying yes)



36. As has been the case for some time, comments reveal some conflicting views on whether the Cabinet’s decision making has been influenced by scrutiny:

Cabinet still disregards most of the decisions taken at scrutiny panel level (a scrutiny Member).

There is little evidence that they pay more than lip service to recommendations (a non-executive Member).

37. Action points:

- That the scrutiny team ensure that all task group recommendations and other references to Cabinet are followed up through a report back to the relevant Panel/Commission and that policy and service changes resulting from scrutiny recommendations are well publicised. This should be monitored through scrutiny team meetings.
- That recommendations in task group reports should, where applicable, include targets or intended outcomes that can be measured once implemented by Cabinet.

Quality of evidence presented to overview and scrutiny

38. The majority of respondents (78%) said that the evidence presented to overview and scrutiny has been good and meets the needs of the session. This is slightly down on last year (85%) but still comparable to rates in previous years.

39. Comments indicate a need to ensure that written evidence is relevant and concise:

There is not enough transparency in information and papers provided to scrutinise effectively (a scrutiny Member).

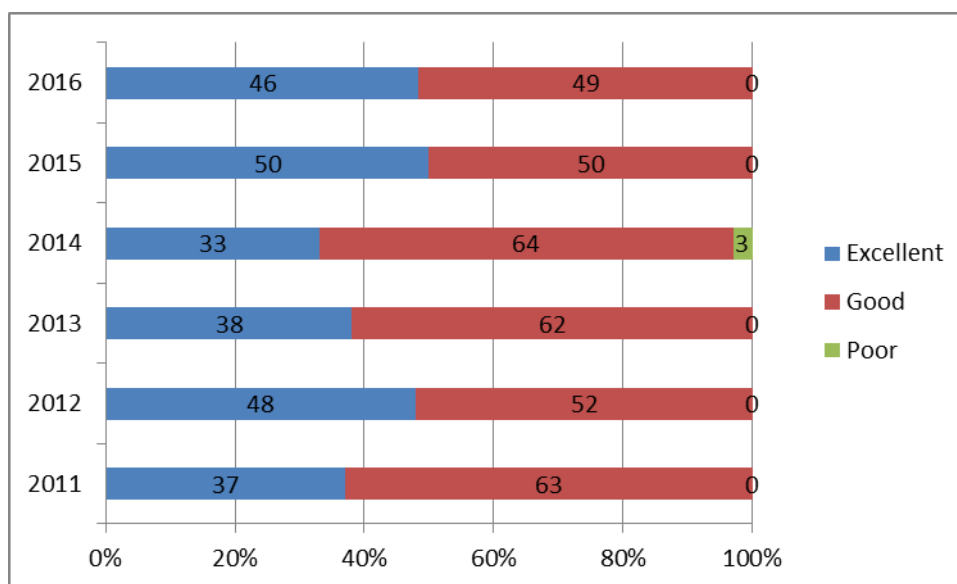
There are still areas where better reports should be presented to scrutiny (a scrutiny Member).

Support from the Scrutiny Team

40. Satisfaction with the service remains highly positive, with 46% of respondents rating the support provided as excellent and 49% as good with 0% poor. This is supported by verbatim comments:

Thank you for all of the work that you do and the support especially to new approaches and new ideas that you have given. The flexibility of the team is crucial and I appreciate the can do approach (a Scrutiny Member).

Diagram 7: Satisfaction with scrutiny (all figures are %)



41. Members were also invited to rate different aspects of the scrutiny team’s work. These results were positive. The team scored a 78% satisfaction rating for the quality of its verbal communications, a 76% satisfaction rating for the quality of task group reports and email communications and 73% and 68% respectively for the speed and quality of its responses to enquiries. Again, this question now features a five point scale making direct comparison with previous years difficult. However, it should be noted that by all the measures provided the team received a positive rating by a majority of respondents.

Members’ training and development needs

42. The skills and knowledge which members bring to the overview and scrutiny process are crucial to its effectiveness, so the survey asked what scrutiny related training and development opportunities they would like to have provided in the coming year.

43. There is a reasonable level of demand for all the core training and development areas specified in the questionnaire:

- chairing and agenda management (7 respondents)
- questioning skills (9 respondents)
- how to monitor performance and interpret data (7 respondents)
- finance/budget scrutiny (8 respondents)

However 21 out of the 37 respondents made no response to these core training opportunities. This may reflect the fact that these questions were asked last year but training was not provided, other than for budget scrutiny.

44. Action points:

- That the Head of Democracy Services will, in discussion with HR (that has responsibility for Member development and training) ensure that appropriate training sessions are offered on all the areas identified by the survey during the municipal year.

- That HR liaises with group offices throughout the year to promote awareness of upcoming training opportunities in good time.

Analysis of co-opted Member responses

45. Notably it appears co-opted members are the least satisfied with the overall effectiveness of scrutiny. Three out of the four rated this as somewhat ineffective (the lowest ranking received) with other low rankings for individual scrutiny functions.

46. This is supported by verbatim comments:

I don't find scrutiny particularly useful. Papers are so late and often too much to digest. There doesn't seem to be much discussion - more statements from the usual people that contribute and then moves onto the next person. Little debate and I'm not clear on how any actions are followed up.

47. **Action point:**

Follow-up with each of the co-opted member respondents to understand more about their comments. Once this is established, the Scrutiny Team will consider what actions might be needed to provide information and support to co-opted Members.

Appendix 2: List of verbatim comments from respondents

Q1: How would you rate the effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function?

Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:

The panel is effective and has rendered a value service for money

Financial management task group has helped to highlight areas that need further examination and I hope that this group can continue to be instrumental in the review of the budget in 2016/2017.

No interest in truly scrutinising officers and policies

There were no calls in for 2015/2016 which would suggest much more effective pre-decision scrutiny. Still scope for improvements elsewhere eg. Better use of first round budget scrutiny and more focussed on performance monitoring.

Scrutiny is as effective as Members make it. Labour Members do tend to hold back from scrutiny challenge. Performance monitoring and related discussion has improved this year with selected focus on key items for improvement.

Improvement this year. Most meetings have been better. Though I felt the budget scrutiny meeting (sus comms) was very soon after Christmas and went through at speed - didn't allow for scrutiny or options.

Generally the function of the overview and scrutiny has been quite effective due to questioning and probing of stakeholder presentations.

Re pre-decision and call in I have not been involved so could not really comment. On the budget scrutiny I think it is difficult to get into detail without considering the whole budget and we don't do this – also difficult re offering alternatives as this is something not really debated. Overview and Scrutiny I have found confusing this year there seemed to be some implication especially re Budget conversations that we would re-discuss decisions already made at other scrutiny panels – we cannot do this effectively without all the papers from those panels and from taking part in the discussions so I felt that this was a little unfair and also a little. There is not enough transparency in information and papers provided to scrutinise effectively.

I don't feel that scrutiny is being as effective as it was.

Other non-executive Members:

The scrutiny has helped to hold the Council/Cabinet to account by ensuring that issues affecting residents are properly looked into; and project implementations are in their best interest.

Scrutiny is too political.

Too political. It shouldn't be! Is action taken on task group findings?

I have a high regard for the principle of scrutiny.

Cabinet Members:

Task groups are good and give Members an opportunity to get their teeth into policy

Very impressed by their decisions and all their hard work.

I have been impressed by the quality of scrutiny meetings this year. The chairing of panels is particularly good.

I think we've become a little lazy in our scrutiny of late. I also worry about Members (well, one Member) abusing scrutiny, fellow scrutineers and the truth itself. It would be good to get a ruling on the ethics of scrutiny from the Chair of O & S.

Co-opted Members:

I don't find scrutiny particularly useful. Papers are so late and often too much to digest. There doesn't seem to be much discussion - more statements from the usual people that contribute and then moves onto the next person. Little debate and I'm not clear on how any actions are followed up.

Q3: In what ways do you think Commission/Panel business might be better organised? Other ideas, please specify?

Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:

There are still areas where better reports should be presented to scrutiny.

Fewer items to allow better scrutiny

Resources are limited of course but we should find scope to try doing things in different and more innovative ways.

Consider separate budget scrutiny meeting for sustainable communities.

Tighter chairing of meetings

More expert speakers

I think we are moving towards some of these things in CYP and have been trying new approaches. I think involving external witnesses and moving away from officer presents and Members respond will be helpful going forward.

More transparency

Other non-executive Members:

Scrutiny meetings should act as plenary sessions - deliberating (?) what should be scrutinised - and then formal scrutiny arranged along the lines of a public local inquiry.

Cabinet Members:

Particularly liked the children's scrutiny Panel breaking into group work. It helped Members to focus on a subject, rather than gloss across it.

Task group work should be extended

Bad behaviour, including deliberate unpleasantness and mendacity (including improvable assertion) to be punished by expulsion from the scrutiny process.

Co-opted Members:

A brief summary document to highlight any relevant background for context. Clearer actions/decisions about what scrutiny want to happen. A summary about what has happened as a result.

Be more selective

Q4: Please give examples of where Cabinet decision-making has been influenced during the 2015/2016 municipal year by comments from the Commission and/or Panels.**Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:**

On the budget of 2016

Can't think of any.

Cabinet still disregards most of the decisions taken at scrutiny panel level

Budget - establishment of savings, mitigation fund and agreement to consult on levying adult social care precept.

Wheeled bins, Merton Adult Education

I don't recall seeing this. The closest was the adult social care recommendation from Health/Older People Committee. However, Cabinet barely budged.

In coming to a decision on 'cuts' and where they were relevant or even in terms of reflection and further discussion on impact.

The changes made to some of the budgetary suggestions demonstrate that influence has occurred within the Cabinet. Within CYP I don't have many examples and perhaps this is something we need to work on for the year ahead.

Other non-executive Members:

There is little evidence that they pay more than lip service to recommendations

Cabinet Members:

Issues raised about proposals on wheeled bins have been taken on board. These are issues raised at the Panel meeting.

Climate change policy. Housing policy.

The budget for a start.

Q5: What training do you need to support you in being part of overview and scrutiny? Other, please specify:

Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:

I think it's always good to have updates/training on all the topics
How to carry out one or two Member reviews with minimal call on officers
Not sure. Those above have been covered at some stage.

Other non-executive Members:

Members should receive more training in budget/financial analysis, to enhance a robust and focused approach to holding the Cabinet to account.

Cabinet Members:

Not for me to say really. However, perhaps some extra budget training. Also training on our role as an employer.

Co-opted Members:

Process of scrutiny and how it fits into overall Council.
Better knowledge of how the council and cabinet system works.

Q7: Please use this box to provide any comments on the support offered by the Scrutiny Team.

Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:

The scrutiny team are being provided with in-depth information.
Excellent
Review of road safety ideas across borough. Theme of pollution, tree canopy cover, measures to clean air up. Review of procedures on notifying people regarding planning applications. Sustainable car travel (electric charging, ZIP cars, car pooling etc)
Excellent work in communicating with stakeholders in order to ensure effective scrutiny.
Thank you for all of the work that you do and the support especially to new approaches and new ideas that you have given. The flexibility of the team is crucial and I appreciate the can do approach.
Already submitted them.

Executive summary would be useful re information reports and glossary of terms/acronyms perhaps given to all councillors at start of year.

Other non-executive Members:

More proactive approach to the scrutiny of the Council budget. Members should receive more training in financial analysis.

I guess the scrutiny team has too much work to do.

Cabinet Members:

I do not work with the scrutiny team. As a Cabinet Member I'm not always sure when I'm needed at the Panel meeting - so I attend all that refer to my remit. Who should invite Cabinet Members - chair?

Task groups are excellent because they all seem to work collectively

Very good

I'd like to see a tourism strategy discussed by scrutiny.

Co-opted Members:

Effects of cuts in social service to the older people in the borough.

Q8: Do you have any suggestions for issues/themes that you would like to see explored as part of the overview and scrutiny work programme in 2016/17?

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels:

They should keep the momentum

Project management procedures

Adult social care, dementia and diabetes.

Consider making at least 1 chair an opposition Member. Or have 1 committee with a different balance of parties.

To seek ways to increase/extend the opportunities for older people to improve their mental and physical wellbeing.

Obesity in Primary School children and what is being done to reduce this?

1. Social Workers recruitment, retention and training. 2. Fostering and Adoption in the borough how are matching need with supply of support. 3. Implication of academisation of schools by 2022 4. Pre-scrutiny on the secondary school site. 5. Impact of the Education and Care Bill and proposals re changes to social care and LAC. 6. Health and well being of Merton young people.

Political pressures and alliances work against improvements.

Cabinet Members

Monitor police numbers/neighbourhood wardens to ensure each ward is covered adequately

Master planning of Morden Town Centre. Master planning of Wimbledon Town Centre. Future governance of sites of interest for nature conservation in the context of limited financial resources.

Co-opted Members

Impact of cuts. Mental health. How health can work as part of a holistic view of individuals. Better coordination of rubbish collection and street cleaning.

All of these suggestions have been considered during the topic selection process for 2015/16.

Q9: Please use this box for any further comments/suggestions you have about the overview and scrutiny function, including how it can be improved.

Members of the scrutiny Commission or Panels:

This is always room for improving.

Dates need to be set in advance not in a rush as previously done.

There should be a recognised procedure to follow to ensure that recommendations put forward by scrutiny task groups and agreed by the Scrutiny Commission are implemented.

It was really good to have an external expert at our scrutiny panel.

Other non-executive Members:

Overall, the Overview and Scrutiny function acts as a watchdog. It should be supported through Membership development achievable by training.

Prevention on health issues. Closer integration with NHS. Social services. Isolation of older people.

Panel chairs should not be occupied by administration nominees.

Cabinet Members:

Continue to use the task force report as it is vital

Appendix 3: List of proposed action points

- Explore the use of an online survey response mechanism (eg: SurveyMonkey) to make survey completion easier for respondents. This would be accessible by members completing the survey from home.
- Alongside use of quantitative methods, consider use of qualitative methods to explain the findings more fully. It is proposed that a number of in-depth interviews be conducted by the scrutiny team immediately after the survey period.
- In order to provide greatest clarity and to standardised the survey, consider using a five point response scale throughout. In addition, provide a 'Don't know/Not applicable option'.
- Opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny should continue to be highlighted to the Panel through the informal meetings held twice yearly between each scrutiny Chair, Vice-Chair, Cabinet Member and Director.
- The Scrutiny Team should continue to explore a range of opportunities that support Members to conduct in-depth scrutiny and which make effective use of the time available.
- Develop a framework to support Councillors in conducting their own reviews for launch in autumn 2016. Assess initial impact through the 2017 Member survey.
- Comments from the Member Survey to be shared with the Director for Corporate Services and reflected in planning for the scrutiny of the budget over the next year.
- That the scrutiny team ensure that all task group recommendations and other references to Cabinet are followed up through a report back to the relevant Panel/Commission and that policy and service changes resulting from scrutiny recommendations are well publicised. This should be monitored through scrutiny team meetings.
- That recommendations in task group reports should, where applicable, include targets or intended outcomes that can be measured once implemented by Cabinet.
- That the Head of Democracy Services will, in discussion with HR (that has responsibility for Member development and training) ensure that appropriate training sessions are offered on all the areas identified by the survey.
- That HR liaises with group offices throughout the year to promote awareness of upcoming training opportunities in good time.
- Follow-up with each of the co-opted member respondents to understand more about their comments. Once this is established, the Scrutiny Team will consider what actions might be needed to provide information and support to co-opted members.

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