

## **Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission

**Date:** 17 July 2018

**Subject:** Analysis of the Annual Member Scrutiny Survey 2018

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 2018 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 4).
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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 2018 Member Survey and the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the scrutiny function.

## **2. DETAILS**

### **Background**

- 2.1. 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 do not 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.

### **Key findings**

- 2.2. Overall, the results from this year's survey are very positive for scrutiny at Merton:
- 2.3. Overall effectiveness: There has been a noticeable positive shift in perceptions regarding the overall effectiveness of scrutiny with an 11% increase in those that think it is somewhat effective and a corresponding decline in those that think it is neither effective nor ineffective. This means that overall, 90% of respondents think scrutiny is effective.
- 2.4. Task groups: Task group work was once again rated the most effective element of scrutiny with a slight rise from 82% to 85% effectiveness rating (a combination of completely and somewhat effective). As a result, there was a continued decrease in the number that reported task groups as somewhat ineffective: down from 9% last year to 3%.
- 2.5. Scrutiny team: Satisfaction with the service remained overwhelmingly positive with respondents giving the team a satisfaction rating of 100%. In total, 63% of

respondents rated the support provided as excellent (this is on par with last year that was the highest rating ever received). A further 37% rate the team as good.

2.6. Satisfaction with scrutiny: Members were also invited to rate different aspects of the scrutiny team's work. These results are all positive.

2.7. Methodology: The survey was initially conducted online using a bespoke (and free) online survey tool. Towards the deadline for completion, it was distributed in paper format in order to capture additional responses. The 2018 member survey was sent out to sixty councillors and four co-opted members giving a survey cohort totalling 64 members. In total, 38 responses were received giving a response rate of 60%.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1. Whilst there is no statutory 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 for a minimum of three weeks each year.

### **5. TIMETABLE**

### **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 that need to be taken into consideration. The cost of this would be met from existing budgets.

### **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 that 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 2018 – analysis and detailed findings

11.2. Appendix 2: Methodology

11.3. Appendix 3: Verbatim comments from Members

11.4. Appendix 4: List of proposed action points

## Member Survey 2018

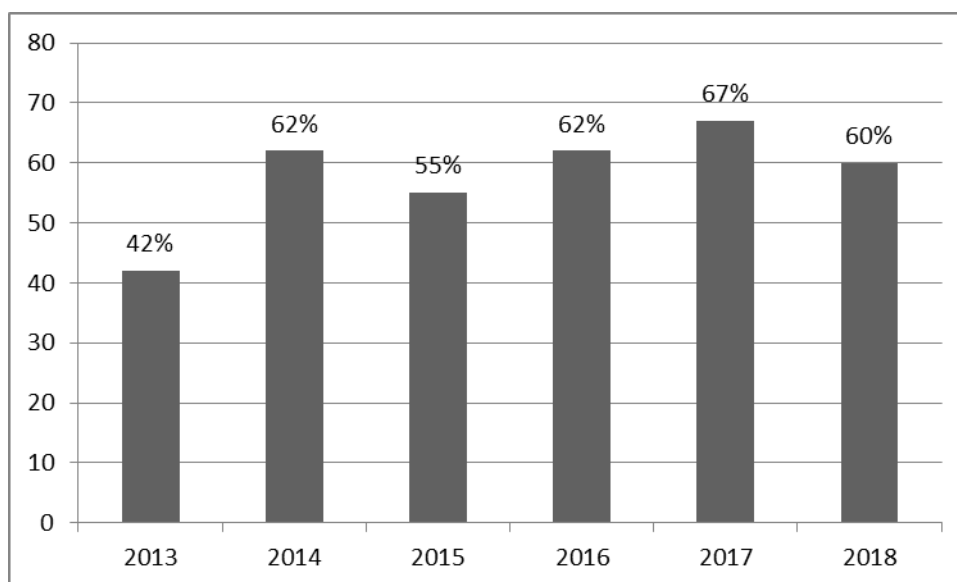
### Survey respondents

1. The 2018 member survey was sent out to sixty councillors and four co-opted members giving a survey cohort totalling 64 members.

### Response rate

2. The survey was completed by 35 councillors and three co-opted members, giving an overall response rate of 60%. This is a decline on the response rate achieved in the previous two years but this is by no means the lowest recorded. It is assumed that this will have been affected by the survey being conducted in the lead-up to the local elections when members were busy with canvassing and/or about to step down.
3. There were seven incomplete responses made online. If all were indeed additional then the response rate would have peaked at 70%.

**Diagram 1: Member survey response rate**



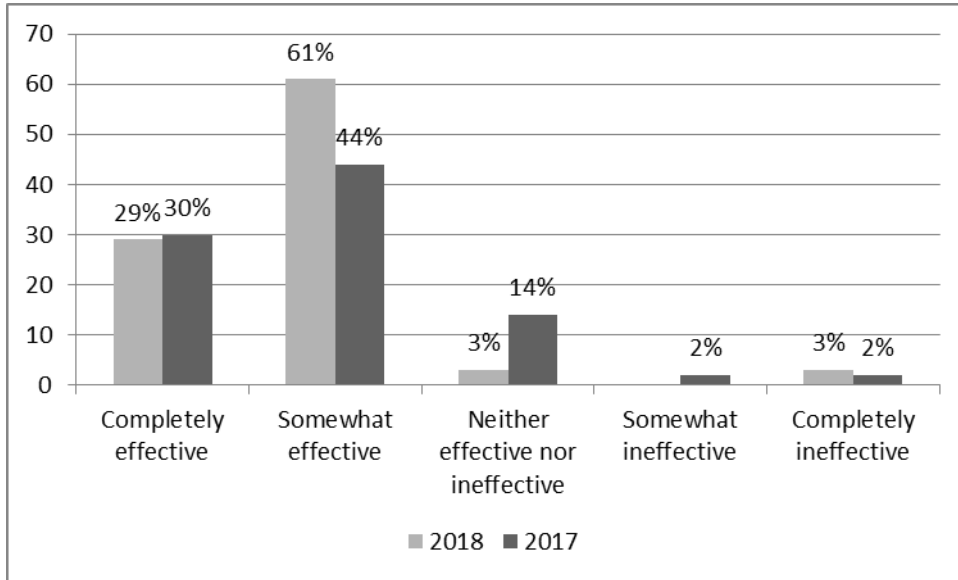
4. The majority of respondents have been actively involved in the scrutiny process over the past year:
  - 25 are members of the Overview Scrutiny Commission or a scrutiny panel
  - 5 are 'other non-executive members'
  - 5 are Cabinet Members
  - 3 are co-opted members
  - 33% respondents have sat on a Task Group
  - 27% have attended a scrutiny meeting as a visiting member to observe/make a contribution

- 5 respondents have had no involvement with scrutiny this year (nonetheless, their contribution is welcome)

**Effectiveness of the scrutiny function**

5. The survey asked respondents to consider the overall effectiveness of scrutiny. A comparison with last year’s results is illustrated below:

**Diagram 2: The overall effectiveness of scrutiny in 2017/2018**

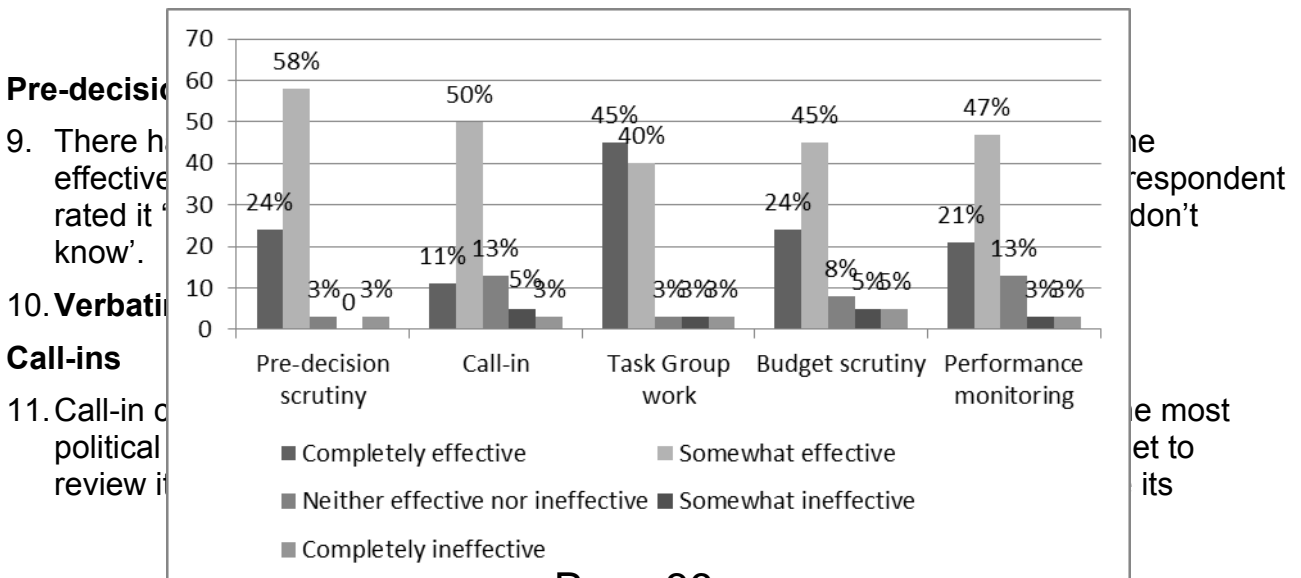


6. There has been a noticeable positive shift in perceptions regarding the overall effectiveness of scrutiny with an 11% increase in those that think it is somewhat effective and a corresponding decline in those that think it is neither effective nor ineffective. This means that overall, 90% of respondents think scrutiny is effective.

7. **Verbatim comment:** *“I believe the Overview and Scrutiny function gives me the opportunity to learn from others by way of practice, policy, communication and link working”.*

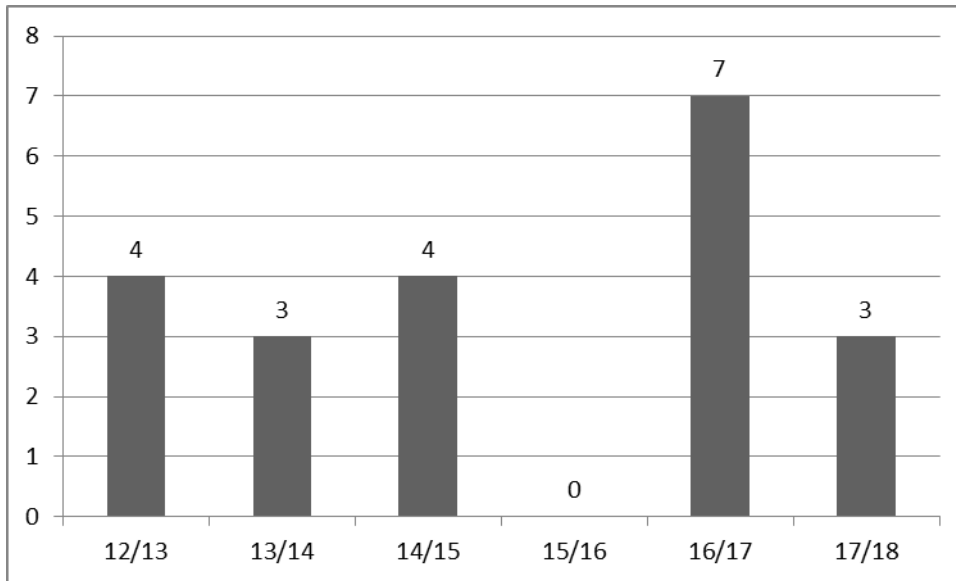
8. Given the decline in respondents, one person now represents three percentage points. Therefore, only one respondent in each case thinks that scrutiny is neither effective nor ineffective, or completely ineffective.

**Diagram 3: The effectiveness of the different aspects of scrutiny in 2017/2018**



decision and only one reference back to Cabinet with comments on the issue under discussion.

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



### **Task groups**

12. Task group work was once again rated the most effective element of scrutiny with a slight rise from 82% to 85% effectiveness rating (a combination of completely and somewhat effective). As a result, there was a continued decrease in the number that reported task groups as somewhat ineffective: down from 9% last year to 3%.
13. This indicates that members continue to find task groups a productive and effective way to contribute to policy development and have a tangible impact on decision-making.
14. Verbatim comment: *“The air quality task group work has led to early wins in getting more air-quality monitoring”*.

### **Budget scrutiny**

15. The effectiveness of budget scrutiny is down slightly on last year (69% effectiveness compared to 72%). This may reflect the realities of such tight budgets giving scrutiny little opportunity for influence. However, it should be noted that this shift only represents one respondent.

### **Performance monitoring**

16. The effectiveness of performance monitoring has also slightly decreased on last year (68% effectiveness compared to 77%). This is the biggest drop and it is hard to discern from verbatim comments any rationale.

### **Action point:**

17. To verify with all Panels and the Commission that they feel they are able to undertake appropriate performance monitoring; that they have sufficient time, information and guidance.

### **Scrutiny Agendas/Workload**

18. Only 61% of respondents agreed that Commission/Panel agendas are the correct length of which 18% strongly agreed. This is below the target set for scrutiny (70%), which is disappointing. However, at the same time those that feel scrutiny agenda are

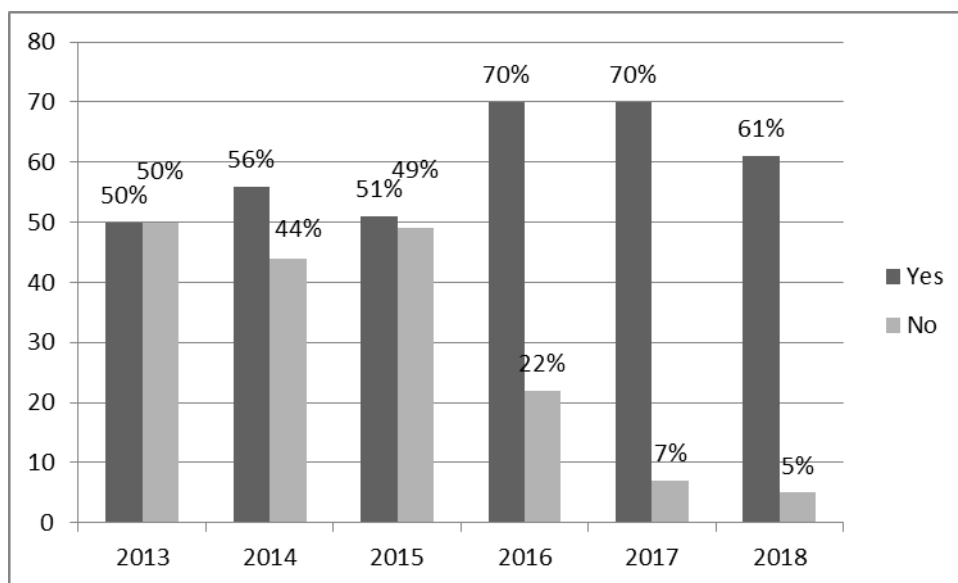
too long has also decreased. The number of respondents who do not know if scrutiny agenda are the correct length increased. If these are removed from the analysis, 92% of respondents agree that the Commission/Panels have the correct length agenda compared to 8% that disagree.

19. **Verbatim comment:** “Do not over load agendas, or request last minute Items”.

Action point:

20. For the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the Head of Democratic Services will review the wording of this survey question, its construction and the performance target for next year.

**Diagram 5: Are Commission/Panel agendas the correct length?**



**Development of the Commission/Panel Work Programmes**

21. This year there has been a slight increase in the numbers that agree they have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Commission/Panel work programmes (up from 70% to 79%).

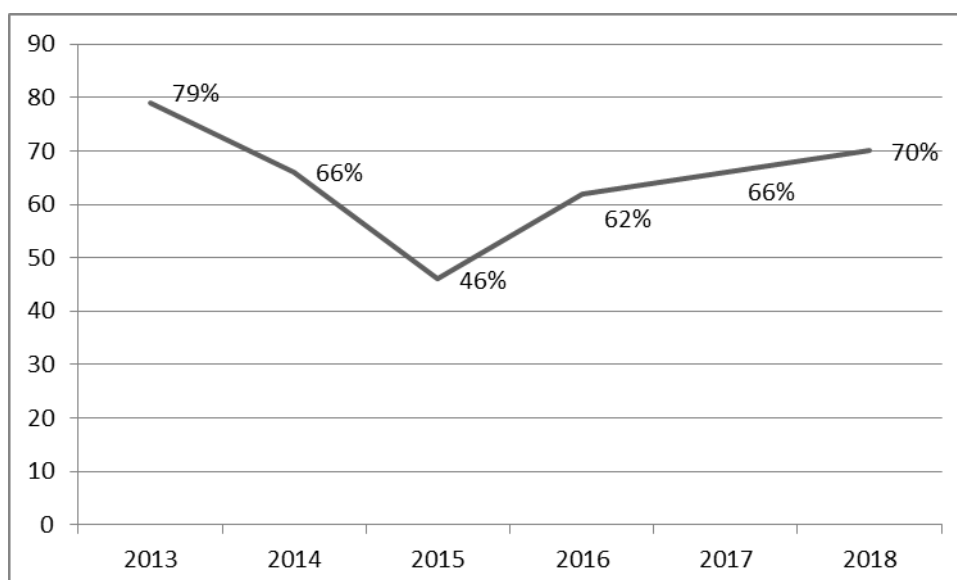
**Scrutiny impact on decision making by the Cabinet**

22. This year councillors feel decision-making by the Cabinet has been influenced by comments from the Commission and Panels; 66% (with 26% strongly) for the Commission and 74% (with 26% strongly) for the Panels. This gives an average rating of 70% of members agreeing scrutiny has had a positive impact on decision making by the Cabinet. This is an improvement on last year’s rating and continues a four-year positive trend.

23. Interestingly, the relative position of the Commission and the Panels has been reversed this year with the Panels being seen as more impactful in their influence on Cabinet.

24. **Verbatim comment:** “SC [Sustainable Communities] Panel sessions with Veolia and Clarion focussed attention on problems. Time will tell if this has a significant, sustained impact”.

**Diagram 6: Has scrutiny had an impact on Cabinet decision-making?  
(% saying it has had a positive impact)**



## Better organisation

**Diagram 7: In what ways do you think the Commission/Panel business might be better organised? 2017/18**

More use of external experts to provide context and challenge	50%
Commission/Panels to be more selective when setting agendas	44%
Guidance provided on possible questions to be asked at meetings	44%
Background policy guidance provided	41%
Cross-party pre-meetings to agree lines of questioning for some agenda items	38%
More meetings to accommodate all the items	21%
Councillors supported to conduct their own individual reviews	18%

25. These results are remarkably consistent with last year's findings. Half (50%) of respondents would like to see more use of external experts to provide context. Additionally, 40%+ of respondents want to see more selective agenda setting, guidance on questioning and background policy information provided.

26. Demand for individually led scrutiny reviews continues to fall and is now at 18%. However, this still reflects that one in five members are interested in this approach and this does provide a useful additional approach to fulfilling the scrutiny role.

### Action point:

27. For scrutiny officers to continue to work on greater use of external experts, being more selective in the setting of agenda, provision of guidance on questioning and background policy information. Additionally, for next year's survey to feature a question to see if this has had any impact.

28. The scrutiny team will continue to offer support for any Councillor who is interested in conducting a rapporteur review if endorsed by the relevant scrutiny Panel or the Commission.

### Quality of evidence presented to overview and scrutiny

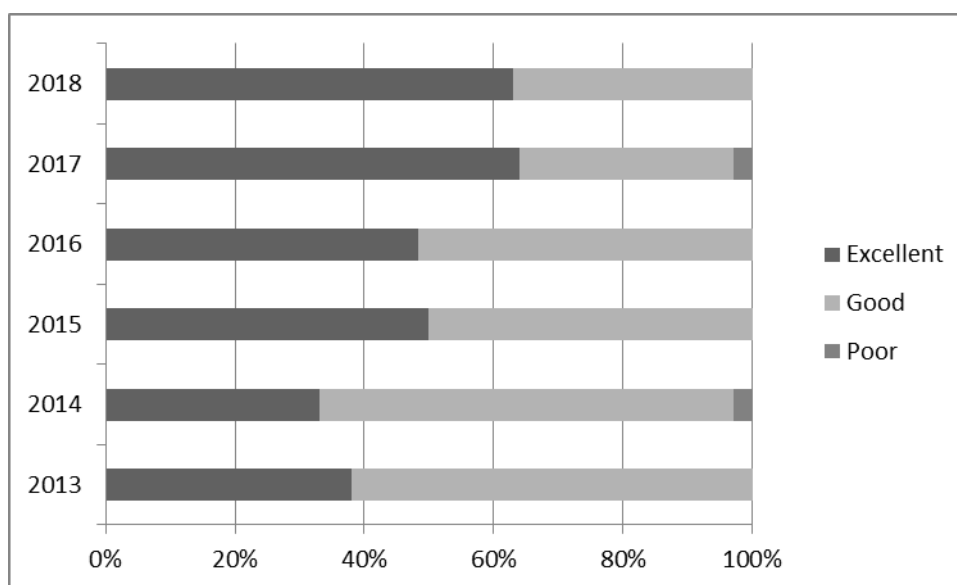
29. The vast majority of respondents (87%) said that the evidence presented to overview and scrutiny has been good and meets the needs of the session. This is the highest rating received for four years and has stopped a three-year decline in its tracks. Potentially, this is linked to the work the scrutiny team has already undertaken to leverage in external expertise to support the scrutiny process.

### Support from the Scrutiny Team

30. Satisfaction with the service remained overwhelmingly positive with respondents giving the team a satisfaction rating of 100%. In total, 63% of respondents rated the support provided as excellent (this is on par with last year - the highest rating ever received). A further 37% rate the team as good.

31. **Verbatim comment:** *“Excellent support provided by the scrutiny team”*.

**Diagram 8: Satisfaction with scrutiny team**



32. Members were also invited to rate different aspects of the scrutiny team’s work. These results were all positive:

- Speed of responses to enquiries = 84% (77% in 2017)
- Quality of response to enquiries = 84% (82% in 2017)
- Quality of email communications = 90% (80% in 2017)
- Quality of verbal communication = 84% (87% in 2017)
- Quality of task group reports = 84% (87% in 2017)

33. There were no responses of somewhat or completely dissatisfied with any aspect of the scrutiny team’s work.

### Members’ training and development needs

34. 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. This year, we took the opportunity to seek the views of existing councillors on both their training needs and what they considered might be the training needs of newly elected councillors.

35. Based on those who responded, there is a high level of demand for all the core training and development areas specified in the questionnaire:

**18. Diagram 9: Demand for member training**

	<b>New Cllrs</b>	<b>Returning Cllrs</b>
<b>Principles of effective scrutiny</b>	60%	40%
<b>Questioning skills</b>	55%	45%
<b>How to monitor performance and interpret data</b>	51%	49%
<b>Budget scrutiny</b>	57%	43%
<b>Chairing and agenda management skills</b>	51%	49%

36. Member training on the principles of effective scrutiny has already been provided as part of the member induction training. This was well attended and received. Training for new chairs is in the process of being organised.

Action point:

37. How to fulfil the request for training on questioning skills and budget scrutiny needs to be considered. How to monitor performance and interpret data might be dealt with at the level of individual Panels/the Commission.

**Public awareness questionnaires**

38. In addition to the member survey, the scrutiny team has also been issuing questionnaires to members of the public attending scrutiny meetings. Whilst only a small number have been returned (13 in total), these have established that:

- Accessing the building, finding the meeting room and following scrutiny Panels meetings is positive. Members of the public are able to do all without difficulty being reported;
- There is work to do in terms of communicating how to register for Panel meeting updates and requesting to make representations at Panel meetings;
- Members of the public are undertaking activity as a result of attending Panel meetings which should be helping to raise public awareness of scrutiny and how it works; and
- Work need to continue on increasing public engagement in scrutiny with a focus on increasing the diversity of those that attend scrutiny Panel meetings.

Action point:

39. For the scrutiny team to:

- continue to issue public awareness questionnaires at Panel meetings;
- consider how to improve the communication of registering for Panel meetings updates and requesting to make a representations;

- work with voluntary sector partners to raise awareness of scrutiny and how to participate; and
- work with their colleagues in Democracy Services to rollout this public awareness questionnaire to other council committees and meetings.

### Methodology

1. The survey was initially conducted online using a bespoke (and free) online survey tool. Towards the deadline for completion, it was distributed in paper format in order to capture additional responses.
2. Less than half of responses were made online which is down on last year (over half were received online previously). The overall response rate is down on last year which may have affected the numbers using the online survey tool. However, there is still advantage to using the online version. It forces respondents to answer all questions before submission. It also provides a good tool for the addition of paper based responses and is significantly easier to use for the manipulation of data compared to using a package such as MS Excel.
3. Duplicate responses were thought to be an issue last year. It was suspected that some respondents who had completed the survey online also completed the paper-based version. As the survey was anonymous, it was hard to be certain whether this had occurred. This year, it was made explicit on the paper-based version that it was not to be used if the survey had already been completed online.
4. Seven online responses were abandoned before submission. Sadly, not having a paid for version of the survey tool means these cannot be accessed. Whilst it is not possible to say with certainty whether these are additional responses there is a strong probability that this is the case.

#### Action point:

5. The scrutiny team will continue to improve both the content and delivery of the survey to maximise completion online, reduce the potential for inputting errors, and duplicate responses. With the new intake of members, it is hoped that increasingly this will be seen as the norm for completion of the survey with paper-based responses the exception.
6. Additionally, the scrutiny team will explore the costs of using a paid for online survey in order to capture incomplete responses.

#### **Five point scale**

7. In 2015/16 the opportunity was taken to test use of a five point response scale which is the market research industry standard. This gave respondents the opportunity to indicate that they neither agree nor disagree with the statements made in the survey in order to capture their views. This was continued for all questions in this year's survey.
8. The addition of a neutral midpoint option has resulted in an increased number of fully completed questionnaires.
9. With two or three years of data in this new format, the opportunity has been taken to reconfigure how some responses are reported.

#### **Analysis**

10. Responses from Councillors and co-opted members have been analysed together. This was the approach taken previously with only 2015/2016 being the exception. This was due to the marked variation in response from co-opted members such that these warranted being dealt with separately.

**Verbatim comments from members**

**Question 7:** Please give examples of where the Commission and/or Panels have had a demonstrable impact (other than on Cabinet decision-making):

- Task group recommendations
- NONE
- We are experiencing difficult time where homelessness is concern and due to financial constraints, there is a larger demonstrable impact nationwide where affordable housing is concerned.
- Budget scrutiny
- The air quality task group work has led to early wins in getting more air-quality monitoring. The performance review monitoring has highlighted some new learning and questioned which measures are needed or not and dug into long term trends. The select-committee style grilling of external service providers is quite good here.
- Visiting schools re Prevent assessment
- None. It's smoke and mirrors; an affront to democracy
- Recommendations of task group reviews are almost always accepted by Cabinet
- FMTG enquiry into performance of Merton's property portfolio improved quality of information provided
- SC Panel sessions with Veolia and Clarion focussed attention on problems. Time will tell if this has a significant, sustained impact
- Performance monitoring of Veolia contract
- Supporting officers giving presentations in various means of services delivery.
- Applying its role in working with all the scrutiny teams for the benefit of the residents of Merton.
- Finance task group.
- Holding Veolia to account.

**Question 9.** In what ways do you think the Commission/Panel business might be better organised?

- Discussions and seeking agreement rather than voting
- Stop Committees being dominated by the Chair or ruling administration
- Finish a little earlier - before 9:30pm as officers have to work early the next day, as do some Councillors.
- Scrutinising Veolia, ID Verde, Clarion Housing Group.

**Question 10.** A number of scrutiny-related training sessions have been provided over the past four years. For example, seminars on questioning skills, chairing meetings, budget scrutiny and service plans. Thinking ahead, what training and development do you think would be useful for NEW and/or RETURNING Councillors following the May 2018 election?

- I think it is very important when setting training to ensure that dates and times doesn't clashes with Councillors allocated duties, for e.g. Council meetings, committee meeting etc.
- Many times training has been missed due to clashes with meetings.
- Briefings where appropriate
- Limiting the number & length of questions asked by one person
- Training doesn't seem to work for most councillors on the Labour side. They don't ask effective questions, they don't make proposals; they stick to the party line. It's awful to watch. It's excruciating. I get a far better discourse from a group of 9-year-olds.

**Question 12.** How satisfied are you with the various aspects of the scrutiny team's work?

- I will say I am still learning and a slow learn, having not done anything like this before. I would like to thank everyone in the Scrutiny team for their support and time. I would like to say a special thank you to Annette for all her support throughout the Prevent Task Group findings and presentation.
- Julia, Annette and Stella have been excellent and a pleasure to work with.
- All good
- Any failings lie with members, not the scrutiny team
- The task group reports in themselves are fine, it is the reluctance to put in recommendation that some officers don't like and do not wish to take forward that disappoints me
- Excellent support provided by the scrutiny team
- All 3 do a really thorough and professional (job?).
- The scrutiny team are very well organised and very helpful.
- I rarely make enquiries.
- I think Annette Wiles is an excellent support to our committee.

**Question 14.** Please use this box for any further comments/suggestions you have about the overview and scrutiny function, including how it can be improved:

- I feel that to avoid any political bias that the Chair of the Scrutiny panel should be an opposition Councillor.
- I believe the Overview and Scrutiny function, gives me the opportunity to learn from others by way of practice, policy, communication and link working. It also gives an opportunity to identify where changes need to be made and practice and habits need to be change.
- Thanks to the team
- Possible selection of chair by secret ballot of the committee members (like in Select Committees)

- more use of external expert witnesses (not just our own internal heads of service)
- better rules and guidance of decorum for executive members attending scrutiny (know their place)
- scrutiny report/feedback to full council (so we all have brief outline of what is going on)
- I really like our scrutiny. As a Cabinet member I often have to bite my tongue when the obvious isn't asked, and some of the politically motivated questioning remains puerile, but occasionally, a topic soars. When that happens it reminds me of why I'm a Councillor.
- The function cannot be improved until Labour and their mates in Merton Park begin to respect democracy. Highly unlikely.
- Perhaps we should reduce the items on the agenda.
- Pre-decision scrutiny not used enough.
- Do not overload agendas or request last minute items.
- Cllr Pearce is a very fair and effective chair.
- Members should follow conscience (not party lines).
- Thank you for all your assistance in 2017/2018

### List of proposed action points

1. To verify with all Panels and the Commission that they feel they are able to undertake appropriate performance monitoring; that they have sufficient time, information and guidance.
2. For the Chair the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the Head of Democratic Services will review the wording of this survey question, its construction and the performance target for next year.
3. For scrutiny officers to continue to work on greater use of external experts, being more selective in the setting of agenda, provision of guidance on questioning and background policy information. Additionally, for next year's survey to feature a question to see if this has had any impact.
4. The scrutiny team will continue to offer support for any Councillor who is interested in conducting a rapporteur review if endorsed by the relevant scrutiny Panel or the Commission.
5. How to fulfil the request for training on questioning skills and budget scrutiny needs to be considered. How to monitor performance and interpret data might be dealt with at the level of individual Panels/the Commission.
6. For the scrutiny team to:
  - continue to issue public awareness questionnaires at Panel meetings;
  - consider how to improve the communication of registering for Panel meetings updates and requesting to make a representations;
  - work with voluntary sector partners to raise awareness of scrutiny and how to participate; and
  - work with their colleagues in Democracy Services to rollout this public awareness questionnaire to other council committees and meetings.
7. The scrutiny team will continue to improve both the content and delivery of the survey to maximise completion online, reduce the potential for inputting errors, and duplicate responses. With the new intake of members, it is hoped that increasingly this will be seen as the norm for completion of the survey with paper-based responses the exception.
8. Additionally, the scrutiny team will explore the costs of using a paid for online survey in order to capture incomplete responses.

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