



# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20

London Borough of Merton

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/20

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## Foreword

This has turned out to be a year like no other – but we were not to know that when it started.

In July we invited the Centre for Public Scrutiny to undertake a review of scrutiny in Merton, our first for 10 years. Its findings were generally positive, but recommended changes to agenda planning and the conduct of meetings to achieve a clearer focus on objectives and outcomes. These have now been incorporated in the scrutiny improvement plan.

A busy year for the O&S Commission included three call-ins, two on parking charges. Call-ins are bound to be politically contentious, so it is credit to the evidence-based approach of members that one call-in was upheld solely on its merits, after careful examination.

The panels continued to hold partners to account through questioning “conducted in a healthy spirit of support as well as challenge”. (Rachael Wardell’s words, worth repeating because they strike the right balance scrutiny should aim for.)

Sustainable Communities held sessions with Veolia and Clarion that attracted resident participation, and asked Cabinet to review the impact of new parking charges on air quality, 6 – 12 months after implementation.

Healthier Communities maintained their support for disadvantaged Merton residents in making the case for the promised new acute hospital to be on the St Helier site. They also questioned the Medical Director of St George’s on the cardiac surgery service, and looked into local GP services, including retirement and succession planning for GP’s.

Children and Young People focussed on mental health and the SEND strategy as the costs of EHCP’s continued to spiral.

Then Covid-19 arrived in March, and changed everything. We had to cancel a number of panel meetings scheduled for the end of the civic year, but have now reinstated essential scrutiny channelled through the Commission in virtual monthly meetings, even as we plan for the return of scrutiny to the panels in the autumn.

Scrutiny will be relevant to the post Covid world in Merton as never before. The council faces a budget deficit of £35m, unemployment is expected to rise, children have been out of school since late March, and our older and more deprived residents have suffered higher morbidity rates from the pandemic. This will stretch us, but scrutiny can do a lot to help our residents find their way back and rebuild their lives.

This report marks the retirement of Julia Regan from Merton, after 11 years as head of scrutiny. We will miss her wise and calm guidance, and pay tribute to her achievement in building the best scrutiny team in London. She has set the highest standards for Stella Akintan and Rosie McKeever to emulate, but I know they are capable of it.

Thank you, Julia – you go with our best wishes.

**Councillor Peter Southgate**  
**Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Commission**

## What is overview and scrutiny?

Overview and Scrutiny was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Merton operates a Leader and Cabinet model, where the Cabinet makes the executive decisions of the authority on behalf of local residents.

Overview and Scrutiny's main roles are:

- holding the Cabinet to account
- improving and developing council policies
- examining decisions before they are implemented
- engaging with members of the public
- monitoring performance of the council and its partners

Scrutiny can look into services provided by other agencies and other matters of importance to the people of the borough. Scrutiny has legal powers to monitor and hold to account local health services (Health and Social Care Act 2001) and to scrutinise crime reduction and community safety issues (Police and Justice Act 2006).

### **Principles**

Overview and Scrutiny at Merton is:

- open to the public
- informed by methodically gathered evidence
- based on careful deliberation and discussion
- conducted in an appropriate manner

### **How Overview and Scrutiny works in Merton**

Merton Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Commission, which acts as a coordinating body supporting three Overview and Scrutiny Panels with individual areas of responsibility:

- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Sustainable Communities

Commission and Panel meetings take place throughout the year and members of the public are welcome to attend. Dates, agendas and minutes for these meetings can be found on the council website:

<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

More information about Scrutiny at Merton can be found at

<https://www2.merton.gov.uk/council/decision-making/scrutiny.htm>

or by phoning the scrutiny team on 020 8545 3864 or emailing [scrutiny@merton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk).

## Scrutiny achievements 2019-2020

Scrutiny is a rewarding and influential role for councillors and has led to some real changes in policies, service provision and council budgets over the past year. The detail of scrutiny activity carried out by each of the scrutiny panels and the Commission is provided in the main body of this report. Some of the highlights are set out below.

### **Improvements to local services**

Over the last year scrutiny has made recommendations that have had a significant impact on services provided by the council, its partners and other external organisations. These include:

#### Preventing loneliness

As a result of recommendations made by scrutiny, the council has continued the Befriending Service, increased the number of lunch clubs and produced a 'Practical Guide to Healthy Ageing' resource that includes an agreed list of services and organisations that support older people. An article about loneliness also featured in the council's My Merton magazine.

#### Road safety

Following recommendations made by scrutiny, the council will be seeking additional support from Transport for London to facilitate work with schools on safer and sustainable travel plans. The council will also provide information to schools that they can use to encourage parents to walk and cycle to school rather than using cars; and will be rolling out a programme of temporary parking restrictions around schools at drop off and pick up times.

#### Children's mental health

The multiagency CAMHS Partnership will have oversight of an action plan that will include work to help children and young people understand mental health, development of an online directory of services and encouraging schools to develop a mental health policy.

### **Involving the public in scrutiny**

The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process. The Commission and each of the panels have committed themselves to increasing public involvement this year and working to ensure that this is a meaningful and rewarding interaction for local residents.

A number of different approaches to public involvement have been used this year including:

- The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has played a leading role in voicing the concerns of the public in regards to proposals which could affect the range of services at St Helier Hospital. Panel Members attended local public meetings where this has been discussed. And

have conveyed Merton's views to the multi-borough Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee that will respond to NHS proposals for change.

- The Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has used social media (Twitter) to promote upcoming items at scrutiny and to encourage resident involvement and attendance. This has been particularly successful for the meetings attended by Veolia, Clarion Housing and IdVerde.
- Six members of the Youth Parliament joined scrutiny councillors for an event to discuss and agree recommendations on actions that could be taken to help tackle the climate change emergency. Cabinet has responded positively to this and arrangements have been made for young people to participate in the council's climate change working group.
- One of the parents who was involved in last year's scrutiny review of transitions from children's to adult services for people with SEND review has been in touch to say how pleased she was that the recommendations from the review have been used to improve the services.

## **Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is responsible for the scrutiny of cross cutting and strategic issues, crime and disorder and issues relating to the council's "corporate capacity". The Commission acts as a coordinating body in supporting the three Overview and Scrutiny Panels and has responsibility for developing and keeping scrutiny under review.

## **Scrutiny reviews**

### Road safety around local schools

The Commission has received an initial response from Cabinet with an action plan setting out how it would implement the recommendations. The Commission was satisfied with Cabinet's response and noted that a number of recommendations have already been implemented that will encourage safer and more sustainable forms of transport for the school run and discourage traffic congestion around schools. A further update on the action plan is due in autumn 2020.

### Commercialisation task group

The Commission has established a task group that will research new and innovative approaches to commercialisation, revenue generation and income maximisation being developed by other councils. It will discuss its findings with the council's corporate management team and take a view on whether there are aspects that Merton Council can learn from and/or seek to undertake.

### Review of overview and scrutiny in Merton

An independent review of the overview and scrutiny function was carried out in July 2019 by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), funded by the Local Government Association. Overall CfPS found that that scrutiny in Merton is effective and well respected and that it has a positive, significant and sustained impact on policy and service development. CfPS made a number of recommendations on agenda planning, external scrutiny, support to new members and member behaviour that will be taken forward through an action plan to be considered by the Commission in July 2020.

## **Involving young people in scrutiny**

For the second year running, an event was run during Local Democracy Week to give young people some experience of and insight into the council's scrutiny processes. Six members of the Youth Parliament joined four councillors to carry out a joint scrutiny of the council's response to the climate emergency. The councillors were impressed by the dedication and passion shown by the young people and the

articulate way in which they put their views forward. The Commission remains committed to more active involvement of young people in scrutiny.

Cabinet has responded positively to the five scrutiny recommendations and arrangements have been made for young people to participate in the council's climate change working group.

### **Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny**

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive attended to set out their priorities for 2019/20 and to outline the extent of the financial difficulties facing the council. Other key challenges were the targets set for new and affordable housing as well as the need to improve air quality whilst balancing the concerns of residents and motorists. Members of the Commission asked questions about a wide range of issues including income targets, encouraging economic development in Mitcham, regeneration of Morden town centre and communication with residents.

The Commission received a draft of the Merton Partnership Annual Report, enabling its comments to be taken into account in the final version, This led to additional information being included in some sections, including more specific targets.

The Commission also received an early draft of the Community Plan and commented that would be helpful to have an explanatory preamble about how the eight themes had been chosen and developed. Members also suggested that the Community Forums should be involved in developing the direction of the Plan and recommended that councillors should be given ward level data on social capital and invited to provide further examples of similar projects that they are involved in.

Discussion of the results of the 2019 Residents Survey resulted in concerns over the performance of the street cleaning service being referred to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

At its meeting in January 2020 the Commission received a report and data setting out the demographic profile of the population of Merton and, for the first time, of councillors, council staff and senior managers. This information showed that young and disabled people are under-represented amongst councillors, council staff and senior managers and that black and minority ethnic groups are under-represented amongst senior managers. The Commission plans to continue to review these matters, starting with an update report in 2020/21.

## Scrutiny of crime and disorder

Merton is part of the south west London Basic Command Unit (BCU). The BCU Commander and the Head of Safer Merton provided reports to the Commission's meeting in September 2019. The BCU Commander provided the latest crime statistics and answered members' questions on a wide range of issues including knife crime, stop and search, resourcing levels and policing of the Eastern Electrics festival.

Safer Merton's update report provided detail, as requested, of work on anti-social behaviour, knife crime and street drinking. The Commission noted the public health approach that has been adopted nationally and regionally in respect of knife crime.

The Commission endorsed the planned community weapon sweeps and recommended that these be publicised to all ward councillors. The Commission also resolved to endorse and promote the Safer Merton Community Safety Consultation.

## Call-in

Three call-in requests were received by the Commission in 2019/20, two on a decision on parking charges and one on the feasibility and costs of a council tax voluntary scheme:

### A strategic approach to parking charges

The Commission upheld one of the two call-in requests on the grounds that insufficient attempts had been made to reach particular interest groups which would potentially be affected by the new charging regime. The decision was referred back to Cabinet with a specific recommendation that Cabinet complete the process of consultation with affected groups prior to reconsideration of its decision. Cabinet has now done so and has noted the three requests made by the Commission that there should be a review after 12 months after implementation of the new charges of the impact on air quality and numbers of parking permits issued; that the results of the diesel levy be reported to scrutiny as soon as practicable; and that other measures should be introduced to tackle air quality.

### Feasibility and costs of a council tax voluntary scheme

This call-in upheld cabinet's decision not to pursue a scheme whereby residents could opt to make additional payments to the council. The Commission agreed that the voluntary scheme was a risky approach financially, particularly given the lack of experience from other boroughs, and welcomed Cabinet's willingness to continue to look at options in the future.

## **Finance and performance monitoring**

The financial monitoring task group has continued to monitor quarterly financial management reports and the budget outturn report. It has also scrutinised a number of budget areas and related issues in depth – budget forecasting, level and use of reserves, questioned under and over spends on quarterly monitoring reports and on budget outturn, recruitment and offer to staff, debt management, lessons learned from the customer contact contract, allocation of grants through the voluntary sector strategic partners programme, shared services, social care charging and a deep dive review of the future capital programme.

The Commission examined the impact of Universal Credit on Merton residents – noting the various rule changes, in particular the shift of support with applications from the council to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the role of the council in relation the provision of discretionary housing payments.

## **Scrutiny of the budget**

Budget scrutiny was undertaken in November and January to examine the draft business plan, medium term financial strategy and capital programme. There was also detailed scrutiny of the each of the proposed budget growth items and savings, alongside equality impact assessments for individual savings.

Members highlighted the need to use the capital programme to ensure that sustainable solutions could be found for heating and lighting of council buildings. They also noted that there may be a need to use some of the corporate capital contingency fund in 2023/24 for repairs to Bishopford Bridge, and commented that they, and residents, would expect the council to negotiate vigorously with the contractor.

The Commission made a recommendation to Cabinet in November 2019 noting the difficulties faced in setting a balanced budget and asking Cabinet to join the Local Government Association and London Councils in lobbying government for additional monies to meet cost pressures facing councils and to provide a multi-year funding settlement rather than the current year by year approach.

A further recommendation was made to Cabinet in February 2020 requesting that Cabinet keep the Commission informed about the outcome of each of the government's strategic reviews and provide a view on what impact these will have on the council's medium term financial strategy.

## Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Areas of responsibility:** scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people. This includes education, children’s social care, child protection and youth services.

**Councillor Sally Kenny, Panel Chair:** “I consider it a privilege to chair the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel for another year. I continue to be impressed with quality and depth of questioning from Panel Members and the responses from the presenters of documents and our Director of Children, Schools and Families. Merton is privileged to have such committed and caring people who work endlessly to provide a very good and positive, current and future for our young people. It is especially satisfying to see the continual move towards and the development of the involvement of young people in their future”.

**Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families:** “Children and Young People’s Scrutiny has gone from strength to strength this year. The Children, Schools and Families directorate has focused on ensuring that the Departmental Report provides a breadth of information about the work of the directorate, which supports members’ understanding of the work and enables them to identify priority areas for scrutiny. These areas have been subject to individual updates or more detailed reports and have benefitted from thorough questioning conducted in a healthy spirit of support as well as challenge. Done right, the scrutiny process can be an enjoyable one, bringing a diversity of insights to the work and encouraging Children, Schools and Families colleagues to raise our game.

I’m pleased and proud that we have continued the direct involvement of young people in our scrutiny arrangements, and that we are developing their own skills as scrutineers, as well as ensuring that members hear young people’s voices when they are considering the priority issues facing children and young people in the borough.

In the new municipal year, the scrutiny process will no doubt be affected by the impact of the coronavirus, but I am sure that we will be able to find ways to maintain our attention to detail, and our commitment to young people’s voice. A huge thank you to all those who enable the scrutiny process, from scrutiny officers who support the panel, to all those who provide the reports and attend for questioning, and of course to the members for their interest and their questions, and to the Chair for steering the discussions so skillfully”.

## Scrutiny reviews

### **Children’s Mental Health task group**

The Panel received the final report of the Children’s Mental Health Task Group in October 2019. The Chair of the Task Group attended to give an overview of the work of the task group and highlighted the recommendations.

The Panel were invited to comment on the recommendations prior to the report being sent to Cabinet for final agreement. Following a suggestion from a Panel Member at the meeting, it was decided that a 'champion' would be nominated from the task group, who would undertake ongoing liaison with officers in order to implement the recommendations going forward.

The action plan was brought to the March 2020 Panel with the Director of Children's, Schools and Families summarising the key points. The Panel considered the draft action plan and sought clarification on the recommendations and how they would be implemented. Panel Members queried whether it was realistic that recommendations 5 and 7 from the action plan could achieve their stated objectives of 'provision of training for anyone/every parent'. Therefore it was agreed the actions would be updated to read "further training will be scheduled based on need".

### **Digital Technology in the classroom task group**

In June 2019 this Panel commissioned a task group to consider 'Digital technology' in Merton schools. The review would consider the benefits of the rise in technology in the classroom, how it is being used in other Local Authorities and whether Merton can grow in this area. The terms of reference were agreed by the Panel with a number of school visits planned for the task group.

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| <b>Pre-decision scrutiny</b> |
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### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy 2019-23**

The Director of Children Schools and Families, along with the Assistant Director for Education, gave an overview of the report which provided members of the panel with information on the development of the Merton SEND Strategy 2020-23. Details of the timetable for next steps in the development of the strategy were discussed as was the consultation process. Members were reassured that the action plan to follow complements this strategy and will include the targets and measures of success.

Members were also very pleased to hear that the Neurodevelopmental Pathway (Diagnosis of Autism) will be recommissioned specifically in order to place support with families before a diagnosis is made.

### **Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

The Director of Public Health Group presented the Panel with an update on the Health & Wellbeing Strategy for 2019-2024. Members requested more information on how themes will be addressed and how the actions and outcomes will be measured. It was agreed that once a year the accountability plan will provide feedback on this.

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| <b>Performance monitoring</b> |
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### **Performance monitoring data**

The Panel has continued to review progress against a basket of agreed key targets (Key Performance Indicators) with Councillor Hayley Ormrod taking the role of

performance monitoring lead for the Panel. This item has been discussed on the majority of agendas with time allocated to the scrutiny of the data and for key points and clarifications to then be discussed at the meeting.

### **School Standards annual report**

The Panel received its annual schools report looking at the performance of Merton's schools over the academic year September 2018 to August 2019.

The Head of School Improvement and the Social Inclusion Manager gave an overview of the report and pointed out areas of good performance, those requiring development and key priorities going forward.

The Panel were extremely pleased to learn that the proportion of schools judged to be good or better in Merton rose from 93% to 95% over the course of the academic year. This proportion is above the London and national averages

Members were keen to learn more about the rise in home schooling figures and how the Local Authority monitors these children. Further details were provided by Officers and it was further agreed by the Social Inclusion Manager that a broader report about home schooling would be brought to this panel later in the year once it has been produced.

### **Merton Safeguarding Children Board**

The Panel received the annual report of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) in February 2019. Members used the session to understand how the performance is monitored and how the board has continued its strong partnership working.

### **Financial monitoring**

Members used the two budget and business planning sessions this year to explore how the over spend in the high needs block is driving the deficit of the Dedicated Schools Grant. Members noted how the number of EHCP's has increased, as has the cost of placements, and how work has continued on addressing SEN School Transport. After discussing varying challenges and approaches for addressing this, the Director of Children, Schools and Families agreed to explore a Panel Member's suggestion of using Cricket Green School (for example) as an agency, by recruiting and employing teaching assistants to support mainstream schools with 1:1 and EHCP's, instead of using agency workers.

### **Call-in**

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2019/20.

## **Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to health, public health and adult social care. This includes promoting good health and healthy lifestyles, mental health issues, and reducing health inequalities for people of all ages.

**Councillor Peter McCabe, Chair** said “I am pleased with the outcomes from our task group work over the last eighteen months. Recommendations have made a significant impact on the lives of local people. As a result of our work; a new Homeshare scheme has been established matching an older person requiring some basic support with a key worker who benefits from affordable accommodation. Our review on loneliness has raised the profile of this issue amongst key partners.”

### **Improving Healthcare Together 2020-2030**

The Improving Healthcare Together Programme completed its Public Consultation on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. This Programme was established to consider the future of acute facilities across South West London. It proposes to consolidate services on one site at either Epsom, St Helier or a new facility in Belmont. The South West London Clinical Commissioning Groups identified the new hospital as the preferred option. Whilst the council welcomes financial investment into the region it is keen to ensure that all services are maintained at St Helier Hospital given the significant impact the change would have on Merton residents in the area who are already experiencing high levels of deprivation.

This Panel had an important role in considering the issue from a Merton perspective. The IHT Programme Directors attended the Panel to provide detail on the Merton Consultation. Panel members made a number of suggestions about the Merton events highlighting the importance of holding them in the most affected areas. The Panel were also keen that feedback from Merton residents should be reflected in the final outcome.

Councillor McCabe represents on the South West London and Surrey Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee which was set up to scrutinize the proposals and respond to the consultation.

### **Review of Primary Care Services**

Primary Care services have undergone significant investment in recent years. The Panel wanted to ensure it is leading to service improvements and specifically that people are able to get appointments to see their GP. The Panel were informed that Practices are working together to improve services for patients, there is increased availability of digital and weekend services. Following discussions with NHS colleagues, the Panel were satisfied that there are a number of initiatives in place to attract and retain new GPs to Merton and succession planning for GP's is a national challenge. The Panel asked how planning for GP retirement impacts upon health

inequalities in the more deprived east of the borough and were told that this is taken into consideration when making commissioning decisions.

### **St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust - Progress Report.**

The Medical Director from St George's attended the Panel to provide an update on their on-going plans to make improvements across the Trust, including within the cardiac surgery service where there had been some serious concerns. Panel members were pleased to hear that the Trust expected improved outcomes from a recent CQC inspection. The Medical Director was asked a number of searching questions in regards to improving standards within the Trust including efficient discharge times and improving the ear nose and throat out patient service.

### **Public Health Annual Report**

The Panel were pleased that diabetes remained a priority given that a task group considered this issue in 2016. The Director of Public Health highlighted the important role of the council in creating a healthy environment to tackle obesity and reduce the steady rise in diabetes. The Public Health team are leading on a number of initiatives including a sugar smart campaign to reduce levels across schools and our own caterers. Panel member recognised the important role they can play in working with local communities to improve lifestyles.

### **Budget updates**

The Panel considered the budget updates in November 2019 and February 2020. In November there was considerable uncertainty given the impending election and lack of clarity of the final Local Government settlement.

In January, Panel members asked for more details on proposed savings on passenger transport for adults with special educational needs and disability. The Director of Community and Housing indicated that a wide scale review is taking place to provide a service for those who need it as well as support those who can travel independently.

### **Merton Joint Sexual Health Strategy**

The Director of Public Health said there are around 30,000 attendances at sexual health clinics per year. It is a high volume service. There is a focus on vulnerable groups through outreach. Panel members queried if there are any services to support those who are frequent attenders at clinics. Also if there is support for those who face social and economic disadvantage. The Director of Public Health reported there are a number initiatives in place to support disadvantaged groups.

### **South West London Clinical Commissioning Group Merger Proposals.**

South West London Clinical Commissioning Groups developed merger proposals to respond to the need to increase efficiency. The Managing Director of Merton and

Wandsworth CCG's said the merger had been agreed with new structure in place from April 2020.

Panel Members asked what savings will be made as a result of the merger and were informed it will reduce both management and running costs. A Panel member stated they want to see improved joint working between the providers across South West London and recognition that residents travel between the four hospitals and not necessarily their nearest one. It was reported that the new proposals will strengthen links between the hospitals and co-ordinate the back office functions.

### **Substance Misuse Services**

The Panel saw a short film on service user's experiences of the substance misuse clinics alongside a report detailing the service provision. There are over 38,000 people in Merton who mis-use alcohol and at least 6,000 of those are in the higher harm category. The Service operates a partnership approach to tackle these issues involving the police, charities and mental health. The Panel sought to achieve a better understanding of how the service is working with prison services and homelessness organisations to support those most at risk.

### **Improving access to psychological therapies**

The Improving access to psychological therapies service was last reported to scrutiny in February 2019, when there were concerns about long waiting lists and difficulty accessing the service. The Panel were pleased to find the service is now operating well and achieving its targets. The importance of reaching all sections of the community was highlighted and the need to ensure the service is accessible to under- represented groups.

### **Adult Immunisations and Cancer Screening Programmes**

NHS England lead on cancer screening programmes working in partnership public health teams and clinical commissioning groups. Every year the Panel receives an update on the uptake of immunisations and cancer screening in Merton. The report highlighted that the number of people who are fully immunised continues to be a challenge in the borough. Therefore further work to consider what the council and its partners can do to respond will be included in the 2020-21 work programme.

### **Task group updates**

Preventing Loneliness in Merton

This update reassured the Panel that preventing loneliness is still a priority within the borough. The Cabinet Member reported the council will continue with the Befriending Service and have increased the number of lunch clubs over the winter period. Recent changes as a result of recommendations put forward by this task group have resulted in 'A Practical Guide to Healthy Ageing' resource that includes an agreed list of services and organisations that support older people. Preventing loneliness is deeply embedded within initiatives across the borough including social prescribing, the Wellbeing section of the Strategic Grants Programme, a special session was

held with GP Practice Managers. An article entitled *No need to go it alone*’ also featured in My Merton looking at the issue of loneliness.

**Transition from children’s to adults services for people with special educational need and disability.**

The final report and recommendations were considered by the Panel in June, it was an ambitious piece of work looking beyond the transfer between services and focusing on how to prepare these young people for adulthood. Recommendations included; making it easier for parents to navigate their way through the transitions process, appointing a social worker to support parents and young people to identify opportunities for their future, improve access to volunteering for young people with special educational needs. All the recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet. The Department have drawn up an action plan and will report to the Panel in twelve months time.

## Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Areas of responsibility:** scrutiny of issues relating to housing, environmental sustainability, culture, enterprise and skills, libraries and transport.

**Councillor Natasha Irons, Panel Chair:** “We’ve had a busy and varied year on the Sustainable Communities Panel. As the panel’s Chair, I am proud of the collaborative way we have worked to address some of the key issues facing people in our Borough. We’ve dedicated two sessions to the scrutiny of Veolia’s performance, worked with Clarion to address issues of repairs and maintenance and scrutinized the council’s aim to link PTAL ratings to parking charges. With a tour of Clarion’s regeneration sites and a focus on resident participation, this year has seen a concerted effort to take the panel’s work beyond the committee room. This has given us a rounded view and greatly informed our recommendations to Cabinet.”

## Scrutiny reviews

### Single Use Plastics Task Group

Following the recommendations being agreed by Cabinet, officers continued this work by producing an action plan to reduce the use of plastic in council buildings. The action plan was presented to the Panel in October 2019 by the Assistant Director for Infrastructure and Technology.

Although progress had been made, some difficulties have arisen as the work sits across two directorates. After questioning from the Panel, the Assistant Director for Infrastructure and Technology agreed to return to scrutiny in the future with an updated plan detailing the objectives and measures of success.

## Pre-decision scrutiny

The Panel has undertaken pre-decision scrutiny on a range of strategic issues and Council priorities. These include:

### Fly Tipping Strategy

The Assistant Director of Public Space brought a report focused on delivering improvements, all of which are underpinned by an action plan, to the September meeting. The Panel heard about different options to address fly tipping in the borough and how other Local Authorities are tackling the rise in incidents with education and surveillance. Updates will be brought to Scrutiny during the development of the strategy.

### Public health and air quality - a review of parking charges

As agreed in the previous municipal year, the results of the planned public consultation were shared with the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel in June 2019 prior to the report being received by Cabinet in July. Panel

Members had the opportunity to review the 3000 responses to the consultation and were assured the issues raised were reflected upon and influenced changes.

Residents shared their thoughts on the proposals at the meeting before Panel Members asked questions of clarification of the Director of Environment and Regeneration and key officers.

Panel resolved to make a reference to Cabinet contributing additional thoughts/issues for consideration prior to a final decision being made by Cabinet. Requests included additional evidence to demonstrate how public transport accessibility issues will be addressed and improvements achieved and encouragement of officers to investigate alternative options to improve air quality and take a more proactive approach in terms of sustainable travel

The Panel also welcomed the review planned 6-12 months after implementation of the new charges and recommends that the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has an opportunity to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the findings of this review in the next municipal year.

### **Town Centre regeneration**

October 2019 saw another update presentation for the Panel on the plans for the redevelopment of Merton. The Panel were delighted to hear about upcoming shop front improvements in Merton High Street and welcomed any and all future updates.

## **Performance monitoring**

### **Performance monitoring data**

The Panel has continued to review progress of both the Environment and Regeneration and the Community and Housing Departments key performance indicators. This item has been discussed on every agenda. The lead member for performance monitoring this year was Councillor Ben Butler with time given at the meetings for the scrutiny of the data and for key points and clarifications to be discussed.

### **Waste, recycling and street cleaning**

Monitoring the performance of the waste, recycling and street cleaning contract has continued to be a key part of the Panel's work due to the high resident and member interest. The panels were used as an opportunity to discuss performance issues, hear resident feedback and receive updates on the service. Representatives from Veolia UK attended twice during the year,

The September 2019 meeting included a large amount of submissions, with the panel hearing from four residents, seven Residents Associations and two MP's about their experiences of Veolia.

The Panel resolved to make reference to Cabinet recommending that Merton's large estates each receive a review on how the new collection service is working. If required due to under performance in service delivery or when requested by local ward members, an action plan shall be prepared that includes a review of the service

delivered with recommended improvements, timelines for improvement implementation, resident engagement and a communication plan to support the any service modifications.

Representatives from Veolia were due to attend in March to feedback on progress but the meeting was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This agenda item will be rescheduled into the 2020/21 work programme.

### **Clarion Housing – Repairs and Maintenance**

Residents were invited to speak at the February Scrutiny Panel and public attendance for this agenda item was the highest of the year. After thorough questioning from the Panel Members and at the suggestion of the Chair, Clarion made the undertaking to conduct site visits to those areas highlighted by residents at the meeting, along with a working group consisting of Clarion senior management and Councillor Irons and Councillor Stanford. Progress on this will be reported to the Panel in the 2020/21 work programme.

### **Clarion Housing – Regeneration**

The Director of Merton Regeneration for Clarion Housing was welcomed to the October meeting to present another update on the estate regeneration. The Panel was pleased that residents also took an active interest in this topic with a number speaking at the Panel. Prior to the meeting, Members of the Panel visited the three regeneration sites, facilitated by Clarion, which they found extremely useful and informative. Members were keen to maintain their interest in Clarion going forward.

### **Financial monitoring**

The Panel used the two sessions on budget and business planning to focus on new savings proposals and to question officers on the content of the service plans. Through a reference to Cabinet, the Panel requested that “the proposed saving of ENV1920-01 be accepted on the proviso that the key locations that give rise to PCN’s are checked and reviewed by the Highways inspectors to ensure that the appropriate signage, layout and road markings are clear and therefore not unfairly penalising residents”.

### **Call-in**

The Panel had no call-ins during this municipal year.

## Get involved

The involvement of local residents, community organisations and partners is an important part of the scrutiny process and councillors are committed to responding to the views and concerns of residents.

Getting involved in scrutiny is one of the best ways to influence decision making at the council, as councillors will hear your experiences first hand. There are a number of ways you can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the council:

### Suggesting an issue for scrutiny

The council's website contains an online form which can be used to make suggestions on issues and topics for future scrutiny:

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/scrutiny/scrutiny-getinvolved.htm>

Suggestions may also be made in writing, by email or by phone to the Scrutiny Team – contact details overleaf.

All suggestions received will be discussed by the relevant scrutiny Panel and the person who made the suggestion will be contacted to let them know what has happened to it.

### Attending meetings

All scrutiny meetings are open to the public except where confidential information has to be discussed. A list of meeting dates and agenda items can be found on the council's website. <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm>

If you would like to attend a meeting simply come along to the meeting venue or, if you want more information, contact the Scrutiny Team – details overleaf.

### Providing information and views

Members of the public can send in written views or speak on issues that are under discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission or one of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

Information on current task group reviews and any deadlines for submission on information can be found on <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny> or by contacting the Scrutiny Team – details overleaf.

## Contact the Scrutiny Team

The Scrutiny Team provides independent and professional support and advice to the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the three standing Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

You can contact the Scrutiny Team using one of the following methods: -

In writing:

Scrutiny Team  
Democracy Services  
Merton Civic Centre  
London Road  
Morden  
Surrey SM4 5DX

By emailing:

[scrutiny@merton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk)

By phoning:

Stella Akintan –Scrutiny Officer  
020 8545 3390

Rosie McKeever – Scrutiny Officer  
020 8545 4035

Julia Regan – Head of Democracy Services (until 31 July 2020)  
020 8545 3864

John Dimmer – Head of Policy Strategy and Partnerships (from 1 August 2020)  
0208 545 3477

For further information about overview and scrutiny at Merton please access our web pages using the following address <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny>