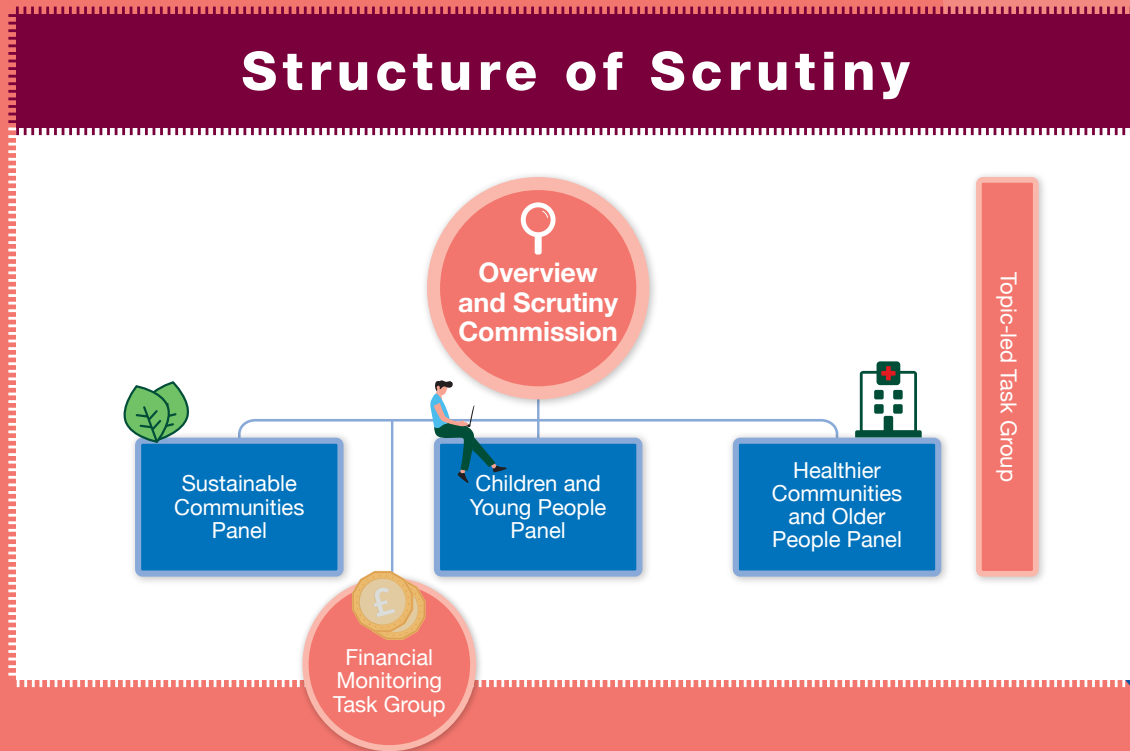


Scrutiny in Merton

The scrutiny function acts on behalf of the community to improve services and decision-making inside and outside of the council. It does this through in-depth reviews, evidence-gathering sessions on a topic or questions to service providers, Cabinet members or partners.

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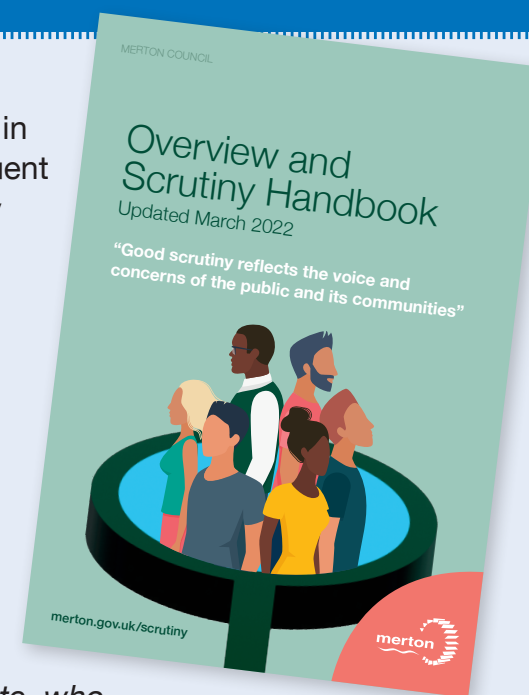
Foreword

During the last year, overview and scrutiny at Merton continued to reflect the concerns of the public and influence the decision-making process. The response to the pandemic remained a priority and the Director of Public Health attended meetings of the **Healthier Communities** and **Children and Young People Panels** to provide updates on the latest Covid-19 rates. The Director also outlined the efforts of the council and health partners in the vaccine roll-out and take up, especially amongst vulnerable sections of the community. Panel members wanted to ensure that clear messages on the importance of vaccination were communicated across the borough and misinformation was challenged.

This municipal year culminated in local elections and the subsequent intake of new councillors, many of whom are new to overview and scrutiny. A revised scrutiny handbook and introductory video was launched during the councillors' induction event.

Councillor Edward Foley was appointed as new Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. Councillor Foley said: *"I would like to thank my predecessor, Peter Southgate, who skilfully chaired the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for many years. It is a credit to him that a review of the function by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny in 2019 found scrutiny in Merton to be effective with a positive impact overall.*

"As the new Chair of the commission, this year will be important in helping our new councillors to get to grips with their role. As we emerge from the pandemic, panel members will have more opportunities to visit services and engage with/interact with local communities. As panel members, we must focus our time and resources on how our work is having an impact and resulting in improvements to services for our residents." ➔



Relationships between scrutiny and local partners remain productive. The **Sustainable Communities Panel** met with Veolia regarding concerns around street cleanliness and rubbish collection.

The commission

held its regular meetings with the Borough Commander to ask questions and raise matters on crime and safety.



Councillors conducting site visits of Merton's green spaces

Scrutiny in action



Scrutiny support Merton's commitment to improving night safety for females in the borough

The varied work of the Safer Merton team, including the extensive partnership response to violence against women and girls and the plans for additional interventions to improve safety were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, alongside attendance and additional input from the Borough Commander.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission unanimously supported a recommendation to Cabinet that Merton Council sign up to the Mayor's Night Safety Charter as a statement of the council's commitment to improving the safety of women and girls in Merton.

Monitoring the performance of Clarion Housing's repairs and maintenance standards took a front seat at every **Sustainable Communities Panel** this municipal year. The panel welcomed regular attendance and engagement from Clarion's Senior Management Team.

The panel stressed the importance of keeping residents informed with clear processes and subsequently recommended updates to the Merton website to inform residents of their rights and responsibilities, provide useful contacts and signpost residents into the current repairs process.



The panel were pleased Clarion agreed with their advice and recommendations and employed resident liaison officers, undertook regular door knocking exercises and improved visibility in neighbourhoods with pop-up offices and the development of a customer engagement strategy.

A special video was filmed for the **Healthier Communities and Older People Panel** featuring the feedback from care home managers about the impact of the pandemic. It highlighted that the council and health partners worked closely with care homes providing a wide range of advice and support.

This successful partnership helped to reduce Covid-19 fatalities, leading to Merton having the lowest rate of Covid deaths in south west London. Panel members heard that funding was secured, which enabled officers to find temporary accommodation for residents once discharged from hospital to prevent the spread of the disease. The panel resolved to write to all care homes in Merton thanking them for their work during the pandemic.

A head teacher and assistant head from a local primary school attended the **Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panels** to talk about their experiences during the pandemic. Teachers reported that some of the pressures included the rise in need for free school meals and an increase in safeguarding referrals. There was

also a rise in assessment for mental health provision and continued Covid-related sickness amongst staff and pupils.

Teachers said daily briefings from the council were helpful during the pandemic. The panel were concerned that support is provided for pupils who had fallen behind during the pandemic and resolved to continue to monitor their progress.



The Children and Young People Panel heard of the rise in need for free school meals

Whilst undertaking their standard scrutiny of the quarterly monitoring reports, the **Financial Monitoring Task Group** also took a deep dive into other issues such as the Disability Related Expenditure disregard and the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Members were reassured to hear the plans in place to ensure the cumulative deficit stops growing and the work of officers and directors to be part of the DfE's safety valve process moving forward.



Other topics scrutinised

School streets

Local policing and Safer Merton

Access to GP surgeries

Proposed council budget savings

School places planning strategy

Fly-tipping strategy

Immunisations

Management of green spaces

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Scrutiny in numbers

Meetings and members

- ➔ 25 panel meetings
- ➔ 36 members
- ➔ 4 co-optees
- ➔ 88 items considered
- ➔ 2,111 YouTube views averaging 85 views per meeting

Plus

- ➔ 3 call-ins
- ➔ 6 scrutiny referrals/recommendations to Cabinet including Budget



Ways to get involved:

There are a number of ways you can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the council by:

- ➔ suggesting an issue or topic for scrutiny to look at merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny/get-involved or by writing, emailing or phoning the Scrutiny Team on **020 8545 4035**
- ➔ attending a meeting open to the public
- ➔ requesting to give information and views in writing or speaking at a meeting
- ➔ contacting your local councillor on how to get involved

You can also view our scrutiny pages on our website, which include meeting dates, agendas and panel membership, via merton.gov.uk/scrutiny or by contacting the Scrutiny Team on scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

