

**Committee:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission

**Date:** 16 July 2013

Agenda item:

Wards: All

**Subject:** Overview and Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2013/14

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

Lead member: Cllr Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Forward Plan reference number: n/a

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## Recommendations:

That Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

- i) Consider their work programme for the 2013/14 municipal year, and agree issues and items for inclusion;
  - ii) Consider the methods by which the Commission would like to scrutinise the issues/items agreed;
  - iii) Identify one issue for an in-depth agenda item, if appropriate;
  - iv) Appoint members to the financial monitoring task group, to meet on 3 or 4 September, 29 October, 18 February and a later date to be determined by the task group;
  - v) Agree on an issue for in-depth scrutiny by a task group and appoint members to the task group. Note that the dates set aside for meetings of the task group are 3 September, 2 October, 31 October, 27 November, 19 December and 21 January. The task group may subsequently agree to change these dates;
  - vi) Consider the appointment of additional non-statutory co-opted members for the 2013/14 municipal year, to sit on the Commission and/or on the Task Group;
  - vii) Consider whether they wish to make visits to local sites; and
  - viii) Identify any training and support needs.
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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to support and advise Members to determine their work programme for the 2013/14 municipal year.
- 1.2 This report sets out the following information to assist Members in this process:
  - a) The principles of effective scrutiny and the criteria against which work programme items should be considered;
  - b) The roles and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;

- c) The findings of the consultation programme undertaken with Members, Senior Management, voluntary and community sector organisations, partner organisations and Merton residents;
- d) A summary of discussion by councillors and co-opted members at a topic selection workshop held on 21 May 2013; and
- e) Support available to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to determine, develop and deliver its 2013/14 work programme.

## **2. Determining the Overview and Scrutiny Commission Annual Work Programme**

- 2.1 Members are required to determine their work programme for the 2013/14 municipal year to give focus and structure to scrutiny activity to ensure that it effectively and efficiently supports and challenges the decision-making processes of the Council, and partner organisations, for the benefit of the people of Merton.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has specific roles relating to budget and business plan scrutiny and to performance monitoring that should automatically be built into their work programmes.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 26 April 2012, the Commission agreed to establish a financial monitoring task group to lead on the scrutiny of financial monitoring information on behalf of the Commission, with the following terms of reference:
  - To carry out scrutiny of the Council's financial monitoring information on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
  - To advise on other agenda items as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
  - To report minutes of its meetings back to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission;
  - To send via the Commission any recommendations or references to Cabinet, Council or other decision making bodies.
- 2.4 At the scrutiny topic workshop on 21 May 2013, members recommended that the Commission re-establish this task group. The Commission is therefore requested to appoint members to the group. It is proposed that the task group will meet four times during 2013/14 to enable the financial monitoring information to be examined on a quarterly basis. The meetings will be held in public and the agenda and minutes will be published on the Council's website, alongside those of the Commission.
- 2.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission may choose to scrutinise a range of issues through a combination of pre-decision scrutiny items, policy development, performance monitoring, information updates and follow up to previous scrutiny work. Any call-in work will be programmed into the provisional call-in dates identified in the corporate calendar as required.
- 2.6 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has six scheduled meetings over the course of 2013/14, including the scheduled budget meeting (representing a maximum of 18 hours of scrutiny per year – assuming 3 hours per meeting). Members will therefore need to be selective in their choice of items for the work programme.

Principles guiding the development of the scrutiny work programme

2.7 The following key principles of effective scrutiny should be considered when the Commission determines its work programme:

- **Be selective** – There is a need to prioritise so that high priority issues are scrutinised given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time available. Members should consider what can realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what the session is intended to achieve.
- **Add value with scrutiny** – Items should have the potential to ‘add value’ to the work of the Authority and its partners. If it is not clear what the intended outcomes or impact of a review will be then Members should consider if there are issues of a higher priority that could be scrutinised instead.
- **Be ambitious** – The Commission should not shy away from carrying out scrutiny of issues that are of local concern, whether or not they are the primary responsibility of the council. The Local Government Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to do anything to promote economic, social and environmental well being of local communities. Subsequent Acts have conferred specific powers to scrutinise health services, crime and disorder issues and to hold partner organisations to account.
- **Be flexible** – Members are reminded that there needs to be a degree of flexibility in their work programme to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration/comment during the year and accommodate any developmental or additional work that falls within the remit of this Commission. For example Members may wish to questions officers regarding the declining performance of a service or may choose to respond to a Councillor Call for Action request.
- **Think about the timing** – Members should ensure that the scrutiny activity is timely and that, where appropriate, their findings and recommendations inform wider corporate developments or policy development cycles at a time when they can have most impact. Members should seek to avoid duplication of work carried out elsewhere.

Models for carrying out scrutiny work

2.8 There are a number of means by which the Overview and Scrutiny Commission can deliver its work programme. Members should consider which of the following options is most appropriate to undertake each of the items they have selected for inclusion in the work programme:

Item on a scheduled meeting agenda/ hold an extra meeting of the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Commission can agree to add an item to the agenda for a meeting and call Cabinet Members/ Officers/Partners to the meeting to respond to questioning on the matter</li> <li>■ A variation of this model could be a one-day seminar-scrutiny of issues that, although important, do not merit setting up a ‘task-and-finish’ group.</li> </ul>
Task Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A small group of Members meet outside of the scheduled meetings to gather information on the subject area, visit other local authorities/sites, speak to service users, expert witnesses and/or Officers/Partners. The Task Group can then report back to the Commission with their findings to endorse the submission of their recommendations to</li> </ul>

	<p>Cabinet/Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ This is the method usually used to carry out policy reviews</li> </ul>
Commission asks for a report then takes a view on action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Commission may need more information before taking a view on whether to carry out a full review so asks for a report – either from the service department or from the Scrutiny Team – to give them more details.</li> </ul>
Meeting with service Officer/Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A Member (or small group of Members) has a meeting with service officers/Partners to discuss concerns or raise queries.</li> <li>■ If the Member is not satisfied with the outcome or believes that the Commission needs to have a more in-depth review of the matter s/he takes it back to the Commission for discussion</li> </ul>
Individual Members doing some initial research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A member with a specific concern carries out some research to gain more information on the matter and then brings his/her findings to the attention of the Commission if s/he still has concerns.</li> </ul>

2.9 Note that, in order to keep agendas to a manageable size, and to focus on items to which the Commission can make a direct contribution, the Commission may choose to take some “information only” items outside of Commission meetings, for example by email.

Support available for scrutiny activity

2.10 The Overview and Scrutiny function has dedicated scrutiny support from the Scrutiny Team to:

- Work with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission to manage the work programme and coordinate the agenda, including advising officers and partner organisations on information required and guidance for witnesses submitting evidence to a scrutiny review;
- Provide support for scrutiny Members through briefing papers, background material, training and development seminars, etc;
- Facilitate and manage the work of the task and finish groups, including research, arranging site visits, inviting and briefing witnesses and drafting review reports on behalf on the Chair; and
- Promote the scrutiny function across the organisation and externally.

2.11 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission will need to assess how they can best utilise the available support from the Scrutiny Team to deliver their work programme for 2013/14.

2.12 The Commission is also invited to comment upon any briefing, training and support that is needed to enable Members to undertake their work programme. Members may also wish to undertake visits to local services in order to familiarise themselves with these. Such visits should be made with the knowledge of the Chair and will be organised by the Scrutiny Team.

2.13 The Scrutiny Team will take the Overview and Scrutiny Commission’s views on board in developing the support that is provided.

### **3. Selecting items for the Scrutiny Work Programme**

3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission sets its own agenda within the scope of its terms of reference. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission undertakes a coordinating role to ensure that any gaps or overlap in the scrutiny work programme are dealt with in a joined-up way.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has the following remit: -

- Formal crime & disorder scrutiny
- Safer communities: the role of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, safer neighbourhood teams, anti-social behaviour, drugs & alcohol treatment, domestic violence and road safety
- Stronger communities: community leadership, voluntary & community sector, public involvement & consultation; community cohesion, service delivery diversity & equalities
- Cross-cutting & strategic matters, inc. scrutiny of the budget & business plan and the approach to partnership arrangements
- Corporate capacity issues – communications, legal, human resources, IT, customer service
- The performance monitoring framework
- Financial monitoring
- Responsibility for keeping scrutiny under review

3.1 The Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for issues to scrutinise either as agenda items or task group reviews. Suggestions have been received from members of the public, councillors and partner organisations including the police, NHS Sutton and Merton and Merton Voluntary Service Council. Other issues of public concern have been identified through the Annual Residents Survey. Issues that have been raised repeatedly at Community Forums have also been included. The Scrutiny Team has consulted departmental management teams in order to identify forthcoming issues on which the Commission could contribute to the policymaking process.

3.2 A description of all the suggestions received is set out in Appendix 2.

3.3 The councillors who attended a “topic selection” workshop on 21 May 2013 discussed these suggestions. This workshop was held in response to the finding of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission’s recent review of the scrutiny function that found a need to be more imaginative in the selection of topics and recommended a workshop approach.

3.4 The suggestions were prioritised at the workshop using the criteria listed in Appendix 3. In particular, participants sought to identify issues that related to the Council’s strategic priorities or where there was underperformance; issues of public interest or concern and issues where scrutiny could make a difference.

3.5 A note of the workshop discussion relating to the remit of the Commission is set out in Appendix 4.

3.6 Appendix 1 contains a draft work programme that has been drawn up, taking the workshop discussion into account, for the consideration of the Commission. The Commission is requested to discuss this draft and agree any changes that it wishes to make.

#### **4. Task group reviews**

- 4.1 The Commission is invited to select an issue for in-depth scrutiny and establish a task group in order to carry out the review. The task group will subsequently meet to scope the review and draft the terms of reference that will be reported back to the next Commission meeting for approval.

#### **5. Co-option to the Commission membership**

- 5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission can consider whether to appoint non-statutory (non-voting) co-optees to the membership, in order to add to the specific knowledge, expertise and understanding of key issues to aid the scrutiny function. The Commission may also wish to consider whether it may be helpful to co-opt people from “seldom heard” groups.

#### **6. Public involvement**

- 6.1 Scrutiny provides extensive opportunities for community involvement and democratic accountability. Engagement with service users and with the general public can help to improve the quality, legitimacy and long-term viability of recommendations made by the Commission.
- 6.2 Service users and the public bring different perspectives, experiences and solutions to scrutiny, particularly if “seldom heard” groups such as young people, disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic communities and people from lesbian gay bisexual and transgender communities are included.
- 6.3 This engagement will help the Commission to understand the service user’s perspective on individual services and on co-ordination between services. Views can be heard directly through written or oral evidence or heard indirectly through making use of existing sources of information, for example from surveys. From time to time the Commission/Task Group may wish to carry out engagement activities of its own, by holding discussion groups or sending questionnaires on particular issues of interest.
- 6.4 Much can be learnt from best practice already developed in Merton and elsewhere. The Scrutiny Team will be able to help the Commission to identify the range of stakeholders from which it may wish to seek views and the best way to engage with particular groups within the community.

#### **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 7.1 A number of issues highlighted in this report recommend that Commission members take into account certain considerations when setting their work programme for 2013/14. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is free to determine its work programme as it sees fit. Members may therefore choose to identify a work programme that does not take into account these considerations. This is not advised as ignoring the issues raised would either conflict with good practice and/or principles endorsed in the Review of Scrutiny, or could mean that adequate support would not be available to carry out the work identified for the work programme.

- 7.2 A range of suggestions from the public, partner organisations, officers and Members for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme are set out in the appendices, together with a suggested approach to determining which to include in the work programme. Members may choose to respond differently. However, in doing so, Members should be clear about expected outcomes, how realistic expectations are and the impact of their decision on their wider work programme and support time. Members are also free to incorporate into their work programme any other issues they think should be subject to scrutiny over the course of the year, with the same considerations in mind.

## **8. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 8.1 To assist Members to identify priorities for inclusion in the Commission's work programme, the Scrutiny Team has undertaken a campaign to gather suggestions for possible scrutiny reviews from a number of sources:
- a. Members of the public have been approached using the following tools: articles in the local press, My Merton and Merton Together, request for suggestions from all councillors and co-opted members, letter to partner organisations and to a range of local voluntary and community organisations, including those involved in the Inter-Faith Forum and members of the Lesbian Gay and Transgender Forum;
  - b. Councillors have put forward suggestions by raising issues in scrutiny meetings, via the Overview and Scrutiny Member Survey 2013, and by contacting the Scrutiny Team direct; and
  - c. Officers have been consulted via discussion at departmental management team meetings.

## **9. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the financial, resource and property issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific financial, resource and property implications.

## **10. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Overview and scrutiny bodies operate within the provisions set out in the Local Government Act 2000, the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- 10.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the legal and statutory issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific legal and statutory implications.

## **11. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 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 reviews will involve work to consult local residents, community and voluntary sector groups, businesses, hard to reach groups, partner organisations etc and the views gathered will be fed into the review.

11.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications.

## **12. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 In line with the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police and Justice Act 2006, all Council departments must have regard to the impact of services on crime, including anti-social behaviour and drugs. Scrutiny review reports will therefore highlight any implications arising from the reviews relating to crime and disorder as necessary.

## **13. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised. Furthermore, scrutiny work will also need to assess the implications of any recommendations made to Cabinet, including specific risk management and health and safety implications.

## **14. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

14.1 Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Commission draft work programme 2013/14

14.2 Appendix 2 – Summary of topics relating to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission's remit suggested for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme

14.3 Appendix 3 – Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 21 May 2013

14.4 Appendix 4 – Notes from discussion of topics relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Scrutiny Topic Selection Workshop on 21 May 2013

## **15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

15.1 None



**Draft work programme 2013/14****Meeting date – 16 July 2013**

<b>Item/Issue</b>
Borough Commander – update on the implications of the Police & Crime Plan for Merton
Civil unrest – Cabinet’s action plan for implementation of task group recommendations
Customer contact programme – update

**Meeting date – 19 September 2013**

Leader and Chief Executive – vision, key priorities & challenges for 2013/14
Cabinet response to request for options appraisal of 24/7 noise control service
Volunteering task group – Cabinet response and action plan
Public value reviews – report on the pilot reviews
Policy and service developments in response to demographic change

Note – report on options for use of equalities information within the budget setting process has not been included given Cabinet’s decision on 10 June to continue with approach used in 2012/13.

**Meeting date – 26 November 2013**

Budget scrutiny round 1
Borough Commander – rolling review of local policing (if agreed on 16 July)
Development/implementation of shared environmental health service – progress report
Review of local council tax benefit scheme

**Meeting date 30 January 2014 – scrutiny of the budget****Meeting date 11 March 2014**

Borough Commander – rolling review of local policing (if agreed on 16 July)
Monitoring the Council’s equalities commitments
Analysis of annual members’ scrutiny survey
Customer contact programme update

**Meeting date 30 April 2014**

Single fraud investigation service
Civil unrest - progress report on implementation of task group recommendations
Gang call-in report (if requested by Commission)
Overview and scrutiny annual report

## **Description of topic suggestions received in relation to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

### **Local policing model**

#### **Who suggested it?**

Environmental and Regeneration Department Management Team  
Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Member of the public suggested scrutiny should ensure that community police officers are around when school children are on the way home from school to keep anti social behaviour to a minimum.

#### **Summary of the issue**

The Mayor of London's Police and Crime Plan 2013-16 sets out the crime reduction strategy for London for the next four years.

This includes the implementation of a Local Policing Model that will transform policing to deliver more police on the streets, and a shift in focus towards the frontline, with the intention that they should be better equipped, better trained and better deployed and so more able to act directly for and with the public

By reforming the back office, including reducing the number of senior officers and supervisors, releasing under-utilised assets and reducing overheads, MOPAC will fulfil the Mayor's commitment to keep police numbers high despite a reduced budget.

The Plan intends to increase the number of police officers in every borough and guarantees that each borough will be led by a dedicated borough commander.

The Plan pledges to improve public access by bringing the police to the public in new ways, such as guaranteeing that every victim of crime is offered a visit and opening up more of the local policing estate to the public, whilst co-locating contact points in public buildings such as libraries, hospitals and council offices.

#### **What could scrutiny do?**

The Borough Commander has undertaken to attend the Commission's meeting on 16 July 2013 to update on the implications of the Police and Crime Plan 2013-16, as now published, for Merton.

He has been asked to provide a breakdown of all officers in the Borough as at 2011, both neighbourhood teams and other officers, setting out what teams they were attached to, how many in each team, with a one line summary of the role of each team, and with an equivalent breakdown for the year now started, and one for 2015. This information will help the Commission to understand exactly what changes are taking place.

## **Customer contact strategy**

### **Who suggested it?**

Corporate Services Departmental Management Team  
Overview and Scrutiny Commission

### **Summary of the issue**

During 2012/13, the Commission has continued its scrutiny of the development and implementation of this strategy. The strategy's key objective is to improve the way the council interacts with its customers. Strands of work include:

- making services more accessible and delivering them "right first time and on time"
- procuring and implementing IT systems to develop a customer management system
- increasing use of cheaper on-line and telephone transactions whilst retaining face to face contact for those who need or prefer it
- a change management programme to change the culture of the council so that the other strands of the programme can be delivered

The Commission has endorsed the proposals whilst raising some issues and concerns to Cabinet in relation to costs, benefits and impact on residents.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

Commission could continue to receive regular updates.

## **Monitoring the Council's Equalities Commitments**

### **Who suggested it?**

Corporate Services Departmental Management Team  
Overview and Scrutiny Commission

### **Summary of the issue**

The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years to demonstrate how it will meet the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Commission received the draft Equality Strategy 2013-2017 at its meeting in November 2012 and made comments that were taken into account in writing the final document.

There will be an accompanying action plan that will be reviewed annually and the targets refreshed as appropriate.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

The Commission could receive an annual update at its March 2014 meeting as part of the review of the action plan.

## **Changing demographics and citizenship**

### **Who suggested it?**

A councillor has suggested that the Commission could examine the changing demographic landscape and what the concept of "citizenship" means to so many disparate groups

### **Summary of the issue**

The Commission had a presentation at its meeting on 30 April 2013, giving overall trends and ward level information from the 2011 Census. There was further discussion of these issues at a member workshop on 9 May.

- increase in population since 2001 – population density is now above average for London. Large growth in Wimbledon Park and Trinity wards, decrease in Hillside and Wimbledon Village wards
- younger population – mean age fallen from 37 in 2001 to 34 in 2011
- more diverse population - 16% fall in White British population, 6% rise in Other White population (predominantly Polish and South African)
- housing changes - 8% increase in flats and 6% decrease in terraced houses
- owner occupation levels still above London average but there has been a 67% increase in private rented accommodation (particularly around transport hubs)
- decline in car ownership, also particularly around transport hubs
- significant differences in the level of educational qualifications in different parts of the borough
- a decrease in economic activity – caused by increase in economically inactive (retired people and those looking after home or family) rather than an increase in unemployment
- Merton is a comparatively healthy borough but has significant geographical differences.
- Members said that they would also like to have some analysis of what is driving the demographic changes and how this will impact on council policies and service delivery.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

The Commission could request a report from the Directors, asking them to set out what service and policy changes are likely to be made response to demographic change. The Commission could then select one or two services to examine in detail in order to provide a challenge to the service review process and/or refer these to the relevant Scrutiny Panels..

Alternatively the Commission could set up a task group to examine one of the demographic changes in more detail. For example, to investigate the impact of the growth in private sector rented accommodation in Merton.

### **Noise nuisance**

#### **Who suggested it?**

Environmental and Regeneration Department Management Team  
Overview and Scrutiny Commission

#### **Summary of the issue**

During 2012/13, the Commission has received two reports about the Council's noise nuisance service. The Commission noted that there had been an increase in the number of noise complaints since 2009/10. It also noted that the number of enforcement notices has reduced as a result of officers resolving issues at an earlier stage, thus avoiding cost of legal proceedings.

The Commission agreed that, bearing in mind the financial constraints facing the service, they wished to do more to help local residents who are afflicted by noise nuisance and to enable the service to become a beacon of excellence.

The Commission therefore sent a reference to the Cabinet asking it to explore options for providing a 24/7 service through an "invest to save" approach that would deal with complaints promptly and further reduce the need for court action as well as sending a message to residents that anti-social noisy behaviour will not be tolerated.

It also asked officers to provide an update on work being carried out to assess the feasibility of developing a shared environmental health service across the five south west London in order to give greater resilience and make savings. This has subsequently been discussed at Cabinet

and delegated authority to progress towards implementation of such a service has been given to the Director and Cabinet Members.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

The Commission is expecting a formal response from Cabinet in relation to its request to explore options for providing a 24/7 noise control service. Cabinet will be considering its response at its meeting on 10 June and this will be reported to the Commission's meeting on 19 September.

The Commission could also have an agenda item to receive a progress report on the development of the shared environmental health service.

## **Review of local council tax benefit scheme**

### **Who suggested it?**

The Head of Revenues and Benefits has suggested that the Commission review this scheme towards the end of 13/14 to feed into the 2015/16 budget process.

### **Summary of the issue**

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Local Government Finance Act have abolished Council Tax Benefit and made provision for its replacement by local support schemes from April 2013, with a 10% reduction in expenditure.

On 21 November 2012 full Council approved that the Council would absorb the funding reduction for council tax support and adopt the existing default scheme as its local council tax support scheme. It also agreed that a review of local schemes would be undertaken for the full year of 2013/14 and that changes arising from the review will be developed for consideration for the 2015/16 budget process.

During 2012/13 the Commission and the financial monitoring task group have examined the local scheme, commented on the principles and costs and compared the scheme to those adopted by neighbouring authorities.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

The financial monitoring task group has recommended that the Commission (or the task group?) should receive a report on the review of the local scheme undertaken for the full year 2013/14, including information from neighbouring boroughs, as well as the success of exemptions and discount measures in achieving target savings.

This report could be taken at the Commission's meeting in November so that there will be meaningful information on the impact of the new schemes. This date would also enable the Commission's recommendations to impact on decisions taken in regard to the 2015/16 budget process.

## **Welfare reform – wider picture. .**

### **Who suggested it?**

Corporate Services Departmental Management Team  
Community and Housing Departmental Management Team

### **Summary of the issue**

The government has introduced major changes to the welfare environment, mainly through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. These measures are complex and will have a significant impact on councils. In summary the changes are:

Localised support for council tax (set out in previous item)

Localised welfare support – from April 2013 elements of the discretionary Social Fund budget (community care grants and crisis loans) were devolved to councils to determine how this is spent

Universal credit – will be rolled out between October 2013 and 2017. Will replace a number of individual tax credits and benefits, including housing benefit. Councils have no formal role but it is likely they will be invited to participate in face to face delivery for those people unable or unwilling to transact on -line

Benefit cap – introduced from April 2013. Designed to ensure that no household or individual in receipt of benefits receives more than average earnings after tax and national insurance. Pending the roll out of universal credit, the cap will be delivered by councils through housing benefit.

Social housing size criteria – from April 2013 there will be a reduction in housing benefit (“bedroom tax”) for those deemed to be under occupying. Pensioners are exempt.

Introduction of single fraud investigation service (SFIS) – during 2013 the SFIS will bring together the investigative services of DWP, councils and HM Treasury into one service for investigating all benefit and tax credit fraud. Council staff transferring into the SFIS will remain employees of the council. Councils will need to make other arrangements to investigate other fraud such as that associated with tenancies or council tax.

### **What could scrutiny do?**

Receive information outlining the changes and discuss potential implications for residents and for the Council. This could be achieved through a report and/or presentation to the Commission (at a single-issue meeting?) or through a task group review.

Alternatively, as this is a very broad area, scrutiny could focus a task group review on one aspect such as:

1/ Helping people back into work

or

2/ How under occupancy will be dealt with sensitively by registered providers and the council.

or

3/ the change from Disabled Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment and the effect this may have upon adult social care.

### **Financial and performance monitoring**

During 2012/13, the financial monitoring task group has scrutinised financial monitoring information on a quarterly basis. It has also examined and commented on the draft service plans for 2013/14.

The Commission will be asked whether it wishes to continue to delegate this work.

### **Budget scrutiny**

It is suggested that, as in previous years, the Commission should put aside some time in its meeting in November and prepare to devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny.

### **Annual reports received by the Commission in past years**

Analysis of Members' survey

Overview and Scrutiny annual report – for approval prior to submission to Council

### **Follow-up on past scrutiny reviews**

Balancing the night time economy

The Commission, at its meeting in April 2012, received an update on progress with implementing the recommendations and agreed to seek a further update in 12 months.

### **Civil unrest**

The task group examined reports of the civil unrest that took place in parts of Colliers Wood, Wimbledon and Mitcham in August 2011. Recommendations addressed future levels of policing; communication with local businesses, community leaders, residents and young people; and preventative work, particularly with the 18-24 age group.

The Cabinet's action plan for implementing these recommendations will be reported to the Commission in July 2013.

### **Agreement of agenda items for Commission's meeting on 16 July 2013**

The Commission, at its meeting on 30 April 2013 agreed to invite the Leader, Chief Executive and Borough Commander to attend Commission meetings in order to set out their priorities for the year ahead.

The Commission also agreed to receive a report from Cabinet on progress made with the implementation of the recommendations of the civil unrest task group review.

### **Selecting a Scrutiny Topic – criteria used at the workshop on 21 May 2013**

The purpose of the workshop is to identify priority issues for consideration as agenda items or in-depth reviews by the Scrutiny Commission. The final decision on this will then be made by the Commission at their first meeting.

All the issues that have been suggested to date by councillors, officers, partner organisations and residents are outlined in the supporting papers.

Further suggestions may emerge from discussion at the workshop.

Points to consider when selecting a topic:

- Is the issue strategic, significant and specific?
- Is it an area of underperformance?
- Will the scrutiny activity add value to the Council's and/or its partners' overall performance?
- Is it likely to lead to effective, tangible outcomes?
- Is it an issue of community concern and will it engage the public?
- Does this issue have a potential impact for one or more section(s) of the population?
- Will this work duplicate other work already underway, planned or done recently?
- Is it an issue of concern to partners and stakeholders?
- Are there adequate resources available to do the activity well?



## **Notes from discussion of topics relating to the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission, Scrutiny Topic Selection Workshop 21 May 2013**

### **Attendees:**

Councillors Peter Southgate, John Dehaney, Jeff Hanna, Logie Lohendran, Diane Neil Mills and Dennis Pearce.,  
Councillor Mark Allison, Cabinet Member for Finance  
Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services (note taker)

### **Local policing model**

Noted that the Borough Commander will be attending the Commission's meeting on 16 July and that he will be asked to provide a breakdown of all officers in the Borough as at 2011, both neighbourhood teams and other officers, setting out what teams they were attached to, how many in each team, with a one line summary of the role of each team, and with an equivalent breakdown for the year now started, and one for 2015.

Noted that residents are very interested in policing and in the longer term implications of the model.

Recommended that the Commission conduct a "rolling review" of local policing by inviting the Borough Commander to a further two Commission meetings during the year.

### **Customer contact strategy**

Recommended that, due to the detailed nature of this issue, the Commission should delegate the receipt of regular progress updates to the financial monitoring task group.

### **Monitoring the Council's equalities commitments**

Recommended that the Commission should receive an annual update at its March 2014 meeting on the Equality Strategy's action plan.

Discussed how equalities assessments have previously been incorporated into the budget setting process and expressed interest in finding out how other councils approach this. Councillor Mark Allison said that he thought that DCLG had changed the rules in relation to these – ACTION: Julia Regan to check.

Recommended that the Commission should receive a report from the Director of Corporate Services in September setting out cost effective options for continuing to have an element of equalities assessment within the budget setting process. This would enable the Commission to take a view on what information to request for the budget scrutiny meetings.

### **Changing demographics and citizenship**

Recommended that the Commission should request a report from each of the Directors on what service and policy changes are planned in response to changes in the demographics. Agreed that Members don't want to see more data, they want to know how the data has been applied to policy and service decisions, in particular how services are being reviewed in order to meet changing needs

Agreed that scrutinising the concept of citizenship was unlikely to add any value and therefore should not be pursued.

**Noise nuisance**

Noted that Cabinet will be considering (on 10 June) its formal response to the Commission's request that Cabinet explore options for providing a 24/7 noise control service.

Recommended that Cabinet's response should be reported to the Commission's meeting on 19 September.

Recommended that the Commission should receive a progress report on the development of the shared environmental health service.

**Review of local council tax benefit scheme**

Recommended that the financial monitoring task group receive a report in November to review the local scheme and information from neighbouring boroughs with a view to having a report to the Commission at a later date so that the Commission can impact on decisions taken in regard to the 2015/16 budget process. ACTION: Julia to check timetable with Head of Revenue and Benefits. Julia will also check whether the single person discount can be varied by the Council.

**Welfare reform**

Recommended that the Commission receive a report on the single fraud investigation service in order to understand how this will work and what the financial impact on the Council will be.

ACTION: Julia to consult Director of Corporate Services on the timetable so that report can be programmed at an appropriate date

**Financial monitoring**

Recommended that the Commission should continue to delegate financial monitoring to the financial monitoring task group

Recommended that the task group should receive follow-up information on the Merton Translation Service at its meeting on 25 June (at which meeting it will discuss the Final Accounts).

**Budget scrutiny**

Recommended that the Commission should put aside some time in its November meeting and devote the whole of its January meeting to budget scrutiny

**Annual reports and past scrutiny reviews**

Agreed to continue to receive these reports