

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Date: 25 November 2014
Wards: All
Subject: Proposal for the recruitment of new co-opted members to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services
Lead member: Cllr Peter Southgate, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
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Recommendations:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission consider the proposals set out in this report and agree any changes it wishes to make to the process for the recruitment of non-voting co-opted members to the Commission.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Commission, at its meeting on 7 October 2014, discussed and agreed proposals for a formal process for the appointment of non voting co-opted members, drawing on procedures that the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel has recently put in place. The intention is to attract co-opted members from across the community through an open and transparent recruitment process.
- 1.2 The Commission agreed that the proposed approach could be adopted flexibly to meet the specific individual needs of the Commission and the three Panels. It recommended that appointments be made for a 12 month period and that positions be advertised in My Merton.
- 1.3 This report sets out proposals for the recruitment and support of a maximum of two new non-voting co-opted scrutiny members on the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.
- 1.4 Note that the arrangements for appointing the statutory co-opted members (the Diocesan Board and Parent Governor representatives on the Children & Young People Panel and on the Commission) are not within the control of the council and are therefore not addressed in the report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Co-opted members can provide scrutiny committees or task groups with outside knowledge, experience and skills that can inform the work of scrutiny and complement the role of councillors. Co-opted members can be particularly helpful in representing community perspectives, contributing a wider perspective and encouraging public engagement.

- 2.2 The Commission and its associated task groups may also call upon expert witnesses to present information and ask/answer questions for particular agenda items or meetings – this may be a more effective use of that person’s time given the wide remit of the Commission.
- 2.3 The Commission’s remit includes:
- Crime and community safety, 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, including scrutiny of the budget & business plan, financial monitoring and the performance monitoring framework and the approach to partnership arrangements
 - Corporate capacity issues – communications, legal, human resources, IT, customer service
 - Responsibility for keeping scrutiny under review

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission is asked to consider the proposals set out below and agree any changes it wishes to make to the process for the recruitment of non-voting co-opted members to the Commission:

Advertisement

- 3.2 The role must be widely advertised. This should include the Council’s website, My Merton, Merton Voluntary Service Council e-bulletin plus emails to local community organisations and resident associations.
- 3.3 In order to ensure that there is maximum learning from recruitment to the Healthier Communities and Older people Overview and Scrutiny Panel, it is proposed that the advertisement for co-option to the Commission will be placed in January 2015..

Role description

- 3.5 A draft role description and person specification is set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the advertisement for co-opted members should state that the Commission would particularly welcome applications from people who have a particular interest or experience of crime and community safety issues or financial expertise.

Selection

- 3.8 Applicants will be shortlisted against the criteria set out in the role description.
- 3.9 Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an informal 20 minute interview with the Chair, Vice Chair and Head of Democracy Services.
- 3.10 The appointment should be made for a twelve month period and applicants will be encouraged to attend a meeting of the Commission prior to making a final decision.
- 3.11 In recognition of the existing size of the Commission, it is proposed that a maximum of two people will be appointed.

Support

- 3.13 Co-opted members should attend an induction briefing with the scrutiny officer prior to attending the first panel or task group meeting.
- 3.14 Co-opted members should be invited to join any training that is provided to scrutiny councillors.
- 3.15 Non-voting co-opted members will not be paid an allowance but travel and any reasonable subsistence expenses that are incurred whilst fulfilling duties as a co-opted member will be re-imbursed.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Commission is invited to discuss the proposals within the report and request any changes that it wishes to make.

5. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 5.1 None for the purposes of this report.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of recruitment and support of co-opted members would be met within existing budgets.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Local Government Act 2000 provides for the formal co-option of a person onto a committee to occupy a non-voting position.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engagement. The proposed approach for a widely advertised and clear process will enable local residents and community and voluntary sector groups to apply for these positions and to engage with scrutiny.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Police and Justice Act 2006 allows crime and disorder committees (the Commission has this role in Merton) to co-opt additional members with particular expertise in crime and disorder issues. Co-optees must be employees, officers or members of one of the responsible authorities. Cabinet Members may not be co-opted.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are none specific to this report.

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

- 11.1 Appendix 1 –draft role description and person specification for appointment of non-voting co-opted persons to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 None

Role Description

Position:

Voluntary Co-opted Scrutiny Member to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Background information

Are you interested in improving local public services?

Are you able to investigate issues in-depth; work in a non-party political way; focus on the needs of the whole borough and not just those of where you live or the group that you identify with, and give up your time to attend and actively participate in meetings?

If the answer is yes, then volunteering as a co-opted member could be for you. The Council currently has vacancies for non-statutory, voluntary co-opted scrutiny members to serve on the 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 Committees do not make decisions on spending or policy – this is a function of the Cabinet and the full Council. Neither can Scrutiny Committees, by law, investigate individual complaints against the Council or other public bodies.

A Scrutiny Co-opted Member's Role

As a co-opted member, you will work with elected councillors from all parties on the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and will be expected to use your relevant skills and knowledge to add to the discussion and debate.

You may also be invited to join a task group to look at a particular issue or service in greater depth, where you have relevant knowledge or expertise.

Time Commitment

Co-opted members will be expected to attend Overview and Scrutiny Commission meetings (approximately 6 times a year but this may vary) which are held from 7.15pm in the evening at the civic centre and last a maximum of three hours. You will need to allow some time before the meeting to read and consider reports and to attend any additional member development meetings or site visits.

Terms of Appointment

Co-opted members will be appointed for a period of twelve months initially and may be re-appointed for a further twelve months by the Commission. Co-opted members will also be required to comply with any conditions that are attached to the position. Where there is a breach of conditions, co-option will cease following consideration by the Head of Democracy Services and the Monitoring Officer.

Training

You will be given the opportunity to learn about how aspects of council services are delivered and to take part in scrutiny training sessions and any site visits that members of the overview and Scrutiny Commission undertake. Dates will be provided as and when they become available.

Application

You will need to complete an application form and this should be supported by a reference.

Conditions of appointment

All applications will be evaluated against the competencies stated above.

The total number of non-statutory co-opted members to the Commission will not exceed the required number of two. Where the number of applications exceeds this number, the most appropriate representatives will be selected.

Co-opted members will be entitled to claim travelling or other reasonable expenses. A candidate for appointment must disclose any relationship to a Councillor or to any member of staff.

Successful applicants will be expected to observe the Code of Conduct for Members, as set out in the Council's Constitution which covers, among other matters, treating others with respect, not disclosing confidential information and disclosing relevant financial interests. The Code of Conduct can be found in the Merton constitution which is on the website or at the following link:

<http://democracy.merton.gov.uk/documents/s2597/Part%205A.pdf>

The deadline for applications is Friday 30 January 2015. Completed application forms should be either emailed or posted to:

Email: scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

Post: London Borough of Merton, Democracy Services, London Road, Morden SM4 5DX

Overview and Scrutiny Commission – appointment of a co-opted member

Person specification

Qualifications:

No formal qualifications are required

Essential:

Be able to contribute to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission as a whole in terms of debate, local knowledge and insight into issues of local concern.

Have a working knowledge and/or experience of one or more of the following areas:

- Crime and community safety
- Public sector finance
- Voluntary and community sector
- Diversity and equalities issues
- Performance management

Be committed to equalities and the positive development of all Communities in Merton.

To be a good communicator and to be able to contribute constructively to discussions

Have an understanding of local government.

Be available to attend evening meetings in the civic centre

Live or work in the borough

To build positive relationships with other Commission members, councillors, partner organisations and officers in the council.

To sign up to the councils code of conduct and complete the declaration of pecuniary interest form.

Desirable

Experience of working in committee structure in the public, private or voluntary sector.

Understanding of the work of locally elected councillors

Be able to offer relevant specialist skills or knowledge relevant to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

Other requirements:

Must not be disqualified from standing for election as a councillor, ie been adjudged bankrupt or been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for a period of not less than three months in the past five years.