



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

London Borough of Merton

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2014/15

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Foreword

A new council, and new opportunities and challenges for scrutiny. Last year's local elections saw many newly elected members joining our scrutiny panels. I was encouraged by their evident enthusiasm at the induction event and topic workshops held in June. Scrutiny gives all members the opportunity to contribute based solely on their interests and willingness to get involved – you don't need years of experience as an elected member.

A new council brought with it recognition of the increasing challenges we face in continuing to provide key services for residents while maintaining a balanced budget. We have to accept that difficult savings cannot be put off to another day, yet scrutiny members do not have the knowledge or experience to suggest alternatives. With few savings available to scrutinise before the December round of scrutiny, members were unable to add as much value to the budget process as in previous years. The lesson to be drawn from this is that budget scrutiny needs to be a near continuous process, monitoring achievement against savings targets for the current year even as proposals for the next year are being developed.

After a rather quiescent period, a number of Cabinet decisions were challenged through the call-in process, notably the decisions to move to a commissioning basis for Merton Adult Education, and to outsource the maintenance of parks and greenspaces through the South London Waste Partnership. Call-ins provide a valuable opportunity for backbench members to interrogate Cabinet decisions in a public forum – particularly important if the timetable has precluded the option of pre-decision scrutiny. If the call-in is to be effective, members must be willing to analyse the evidence and justify their reasons for accepting Cabinet's decision or referring it back for reconsideration. I look forward to a more rigorous approach as new members develop confidence in this role.

Fortunately our new members have old hands to guide them, and scrutiny in Merton benefits from having a well established team of chairs and officers. I would like to thank Councillors Jeff Hanna, Russell Makin and Peter McCabe for chairing their panels with professionalism and impartiality and for their constructive contributions to the work of the Commission. But as members we all recognise how much we depend on the dedication and hard work of our officers, and I would like to thank Julia Regan, Stella Akintan and Rebecca Redman for their commitment to scrutiny in Merton, making it amongst the best in London.

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: <http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/committee.htm>.

More information about Scrutiny at Merton can be found at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/scrutiny.htm> or by phoning the scrutiny team on 020 8545 3864 or emailing scrutiny@merton.gov.uk.

Scrutiny achievements 2014-2015

It has been a busy year for Scrutiny. The elections in May led an influx of new councillors, many of whom have been actively involved in scrutiny.

We were very pleased that so many members of the public and local organisations have also been involved in scrutiny this year, sending in suggestions of issues to scrutinise, attending meetings and taking part in task group reviews.

The e-safety task group has had focus group discussions with groups of young people including the children in care council, scouts and girl guides, school councils youth parliament and the Wimbledon police cadets. Seven housing associations from across London have contributed to the housing supply task group. More than a hundred local residents have attended call-in and other Panel meetings.

The Healthier Communities Panel has recruited three co-opted members to bring their experience to Panel meetings and task group work. The Commission is in the process of seeking new co-opted members with financial and community safety expertise.

The scrutiny team was successful in bidding to become one of the pilot authorities for scrutiny of improving take up of immunisations, thus receiving five days free support from a centre for Public Scrutiny Adviser which has enabled the task group to adopt new approaches, particularly in getting wider input to the scoping of the review and measuring the return on investment on conducting a scrutiny review.

This year, scrutiny councillors have carried out three in depth task group reviews, details of which can be found under the relevant Panel headings:

- Being safe online, e safety strategies in schools - Children & Young People Panel
- Immunisations for under 5s - Healthier Communities Panel
- Housing supply - Sustainable Communities Panel

Monitoring the outcome of previous scrutiny reviews has demonstrated that scrutiny does bring about real change in policies and in service provision. Examples of implementation successes include:

Volunteering – development of more flexible ways for busy people to volunteer, increased communication plus recruitment campaigns and work to encourage young people to volunteer

School leadership – a survey and subsequent action plan to support the recruitment and retention of black and minority ethnic staff in senior and middle management in schools

Climate change – drafting of a business case for an Energy Savings Company “ESCo” whereby the council would provide energy at a lower cost to schools and local businesses in the first instance, thereby also creating an income stream

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.

In 2014/15 the Commission oversaw a programme of training that included an introduction to scrutiny for new councilors, questioning skills, performance information and budget scrutiny as well as promoting events run by the London Scrutiny Network.

Scrutiny reviews

Volunteering

The Commission has continued to monitor and is now satisfied that all recommendations have been implemented. It received an annual update on volunteering and praised the extensive progress made, discussed ways of encouraging more people to volunteer and work being done to support employers who take on young volunteers,

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

At the start of the year the Commission received a presentation from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to set out their priorities for 2014/15 and the financial challenges facing the council..

It has continued to scrutinise the customer contact programme at each stage of the competitive dialogue process and examined the contract award decision in detail.

Other strategic issues scrutinized this year include:

- CCTV - visited the control room, examined findings of an independent review and received update on measures taken to improve management of the service, procure new equipment and review existing contracts
- welfare reform and financial resilience action plans – welcomed work undertaken by the council and partners to protect the most vulnerable people and made recommendations for future action, including one relating to support for disabled people to help them with medical assessment interviews
- domestic violence needs assessment – noted findings of independent review and requested implementation update in 2015/16
- My Merton – scrutinised cost and distribution. Made recommendation to explore potential for increased commercial income
- Equality Strategy – examined action plan and priorities for the coming year

Policing in Merton

The Commission has examined crime data and was pleased that crime rates have remained low in Merton. It has questioned the Chief Superintendent on two occasions regarding local policing issues (such as the controlled drinking zone, CCTV..**) and the deployment of police officers within the borough. ***update following 25 March meeting*

Call-in

In March 2015 the Commission reviewed Cabinet's decision to move the adult education service to a commissioning model. The call-in signatory and external speakers challenged the consultation process and raised considerations relating to use of the Whatley Avenue site. Cabinet Members and the Director responded to points made and addressed financial issues. The Commission voted on the call-in and resolved to uphold Cabinet's decision.

Finance and performance monitoring

The financial monitoring sub-group was re-established in 2014 and has continued to monitor quarterly reports. In particular, it has scrutinized the forecast overspend, capital programme and lack of progress on achieving savings in some service areas. It has identified areas of concern to be prioritised for scrutiny in 2015/16 – capital programme, community transport, commercial waste, HR metrics and estate management.

Scrutiny of the budget

The draft business plan and proposed budget savings proposals were scrutinised in detail, alongside equality impact assessments for each of the savings. Recommendations were made to Cabinet regarding the predicted overspend for 2014/15 and the need to vigorously challenge the capital programme to remove items that will not be used. The commission expressed concern about proposed reductions in youth services, planning enforcement and daycare centres. It recommended that Cabinet identify savings that could be brought forward and consider alternative sources of revenue.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people. This includes education, children's social care, child protection and youth services.

Scrutiny reviews

The Panel set up a task group to look at the role of schools and the council in ensuring that children remain safe online. The task group met with a range of stakeholders in this process, including young people, head teachers, school councils, youth parliament and parents to produce a number of recommendations that cover e-safety within and outside of schools. The task group will shortly engage the Chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board and report their findings and recommendations in June 2015.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

At the first meeting of the municipal year, presentations were given on the key challenges faced by those delivering services to children and young people and priorities for the year ahead.

The Panel also received a report at each meeting on the developments in the Children, Schools and Families department covering national and local developments that fell within the remit of the Panel, which enabled Members to maintain a strategic overview.

The Panel has considered a number of strategic issues including:

- Children and Families Act 2014
- The Local Authority Role in promoting Access to Child Care and Early Education for Families
- Looked after Children and the Safeguarding of ChildrenThe Role of Schools in Promoting the Broader Wellbeing of Children and Families
- Raising the Participation Age and Career Pathways for Young People
- Local Authority role on reducing particular vulnerabilities faced by girls
- Marketing Merton's Schools
- Secondary School Places Strategy
- Survey of BAME teachers

Performance monitoring

The Panel receives a performance monitoring report at each of its meetings and has reviewed the performance indicators it wishes to receive.

The Panel also receives an annual report to provide greater detail on performance measures relating to education, including test and examination results, school attendance and exclusions and standards in the Celebrating Success – Standards and Achievement in Merton Schools report, and which also provides information on the provision of support and intervention provided to our schools by CSF officers.

Members also received progress updates on the following:

- Transforming Families Initiative
- Youth Offending Service including Preventative Approaches
- Public Health Services for children and families

The Panel participated in a development workshop which focused on the performance management framework and the approach that the Panel could take to the specific areas of performance that fall within its remit. As part of this training, members looked at how certain indicators and performance could be analysed and interpreted and discussed how best to respond in terms of monitoring, evaluating and establishing improvement has been made. This resulted in a revised approach to performance monitoring by the Panel to ensure the process added value to the work of the department.

Outcomes of the previous task group review on school leadership succession planning were considered to ensure that agreed timescales for implementation of the Panel's recommendations were met, and that anticipated benefits and outcomes had been realised.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2015/16 in November 2014 and January 2015.

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.

Recruitment of co-opted members

This year the Panel agreed to refresh its approach to recruiting co-opted members to ensure the process is open, transparent and all sections of the community have the opportunity to apply for a position. After an advertising campaign and interview process involving Human Resources, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Panel, three co-opted members were appointed.

Strategic Issues

Visits to Merton Dementia Hub

Following an invitation from the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, a number of panel members visited Merton Dementia Hub, a modern facility offering services to people who have been diagnosed with dementia, their carers and people needing information and advice. The service is delivered in partnership with Merton Council, the Alzheimer's Society and other health partners. The Panel will consider further work with the Hub as part of their topic selection and work programming process for 2015/16.

Health Partner's challenges and priorities for 2014/15

At the start of the municipal year, this panel traditionally receives updates from local health providers. This year Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, Public Health and Adult Social Care came along to discuss their priorities and challenges for the year ahead. A couple of issues to emerge were succession planning for retiring GP's and waiting times to get doctor appointments. The Panel asked for further updates on these issues.

The Director of Public Health attended the meeting and spoke about their work to reduce health inequalities across the borough. The Panel heard about the work of health champions, who are representatives from within local communities in Merton to support people and signpost them to the right services.

The Director of Community and Housing attended the meeting and discussed the new opportunities and challenges raised by the Care Act and the increasing demand for services due to the ageing population. The panel were keen that the council maintain high standards in domiciliary care and were reassured that this takes place through monitoring of contracts as well as feedback from customers.

Strategies for improving GP services in Merton / Waiting times at surgeries

Some Panel members had heard concerns from their constituents that they experienced difficulties or long waiting periods to get an appointment with their GP. The Panel wished to look at this issue in more depth and invited NHS England, who commission GP services and receive reports on GP data. Healthwatch Merton were also invited as they had recently conducted a review on GP services and written a report with recommendations asking for some improvements to services.

After a discussion on the issues, the Panel would like to see extended hours and flexibility in obtaining GP appointments which are synchronised with opening times at pharmacies. NHS England updated the panel on pilot schemes that are running and could lead to extended hours in GP surgeries in future. The Panel supported the recommendations within the Healthwatch Merton Report and asked for an update once responses had been received from NHS England and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group.

Changes in the provision of primary care services in Merton

The Panel were approached by NHS England in line with their statutory duty to consult scrutiny about substantial variation in services. The Panel heard that the Vineyard Hill Surgery faced possible closure as the current GP's were going into retirement. NHS England were consulting on proposals to disperse patients to other local surgeries, none of which were in the current ward area. The Panel heard representations from the Ward Councillor and local residents. The Panel had concerns about the proposals given the distance that patients would need to travel to a local surgery. The Panel asked NHS England to look at continuing the surgery at the current location or finding a suitable alternative within the Wimbledon Park Ward.

End of life Care

At the topic suggestion workshop last year, a local resident expressed concern about people being able to exercise choice about where they die, therefore the Panel asked for an update on end of life services. Panel members asked a number of questions around partnership working and learning from best practice. It was also suggested by a panel member that the terminology should be changed from 'A Good Death' to 'A Peaceful Death'. Merton Clinical Commissioning Group agreed to take the feedback on board.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Director of Adult Social attended the Panel to discuss the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and particularly their work to reduce health inequalities between the East and West of the borough. The Panel supported the general direction of the Strategy particularly the focus on prevention. They would like to see positive actions taken to encourage healthy behaviour, such as teaching people to cook healthy meals rather than just telling people to stop doing things.

Scrutiny of the budget

Budget 2015/16

This year the Panel were required to consider a number of savings across Adult Social Care. The Panel members expressed concern about the impact on vulnerable people but many felt they were faced with no choice given that the service had been protected thus far but the council needed to make considerable savings. Some members felt that the savings should be taken from elsewhere from the council's budget. The Panel reluctantly agreed to accept the savings and asked Cabinet to ask officers to look again at the equality impact assessment of all the savings taking into consideration those all those who will be affected and particularly looking at the knock on effects on the voluntary sector.

Response to the Adult Social Care consultation

The Panel also considered a response to the council's consultation on changes to adult social care. Again Panel members expressed concern about the impact that the proposed savings may have on disabled people, including social isolation, increased burden on carers and entry to residential care at an earlier stage.

Scrutiny reviews

Diabetes Task Group

This year the Panel will be looking at Diabetes as an in-depth review. This review was prompted by a report from the London Assembly which highlighted the increase in type two diabetes across London driven by lifestyle and genetic factors. Task group members are due to meet shortly to decide which area to focus on.

Improving uptake of immunisations in the 0-5 Age Group

This year the scrutiny function received support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to conduct a review on improving the uptake of Immunisations. The Panel agreed to look at immunisations from birth to five years age group as this was the area with the lowest rates. The task group gathered evidence from a wide range of sources including NHS England, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group, Sutton and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health Merton. Recommendations are around improving local co-ordination and to supporting parents through the immunisations schedule.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to housing, environmental sustainability, culture, enterprise and skills, libraries and transport.

Scrutiny reviews

The Panel undertook a task group review of Housing Supply in Merton. The task group sought to establish how the supply of affordable housing to meet identified need in the borough could be facilitated, looking at the role of the council as an enabler of housing development and opportunities for partnership working and the business case for the council as a provider of social housing.

The Task Group have engaged a range of stakeholders to date including, housing associations across London, think tanks, charities, providers of alternative models of housing and organisations such as the National Housing Federation.

The groups work is ongoing as they are gathering further evidence and exploring good practice in relation to the use of NHS surplus land, mixed use sites, policy development and innovative approaches to financing housing development. The Task Group will report in September 2015.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Panel have undertaken pre decision scrutiny on the following strategic issues and priorities of the council. This included:

Inward Investment Strategy – The Panel had made recommendations regarding the development of the council's inward investment strategy as part of their task group review of adult skills and employability and asked to comment ahead of their consideration by Cabinet. The Panel made recommendations on the nature of the activities the council could undertake to promote the borough as a great place for business.

Economic Development Strategy – The Panel received a progress update on delivery of the councils economic development strategy and made recommendations (*will be updated following the meeting on the 18th March*)

Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP) Regeneration Proposals –The Panel have received briefings on the development of CHMP Regeneration Programme and master planning for their housing estates in Merton.

20 Mph zones/road safety – The Panel considered the outcome a review of the operation of 20mph zones and limits by an independent consultant and considered the options for Merton. The Panel supported 20mph zones and limits be considered

on a case by case basis in the borough and recommended that Cabinet investigate radar based technology and signage, and associated costs and benefits to manage speeds.

Morden Leisure Centre – The Panel have committed to being involved at the appropriate intervals in the roll out of the project for Morden Leisure Centre and, to date, have considered and made recommendations on the initial decisions taken by Cabinet on the site and facility mix.

Street Lighting - The Panel considered the councils approach to street lighting and possible technology that could be used, including the position of the council's street lighting contract and made recommendations on *(which will be updated following the meeting on the 18th March)*

Merton Adult Education (MAE) Service – options for achieving a value for money service – The Panel undertook pre decision scrutiny of the recommended commissioning mode for delivery of the MAE service which they supported and requested that there be a commitment to the commissioning principles proposed.

Performance monitoring

The Panel has regularly undertaken a performance monitoring role by reviewing performance results against key performance indicators (KPIs) and making recommendations to the appropriate service.

Performance Workshop - The Panel participated in a development workshop which focused on the performance management framework and the approach that the Panel could take to the specific areas of performance that fall within its remit. As part of this training, members looked at how certain indicators and performance could be analysed and interpreted and discussed how best to respond in terms of monitoring, evaluating and establishing improvement has been made. This resulted in a revised approach to performance monitoring by the Panel to ensure the process added value to the work of the department.

Circle Housing Merton Priory: Stock Transfer Commitments - The Panel meet with Circle Housing Merton priory (CHMP) every six months to receive a performance update on the delivery of the commitments within the stock transfer and in relation to the repairs and maintenance of CHMP housing stock. Members also receive a quarterly performance report as part of their monitoring role.

Outcomes of Task Group Reviews - The Panel continued to keep an overview of the delivery of the recommendations and action plans resulting from their previous task group reviews of Adult Skills and Employability and Climate Change and Green Deal Task Group, with the support of the Member Champion, Councillor James Holmes.

Town Centre Parking and Parking at Neighbourhood Shopping Parades – The Panel monitored progress with implementation of the action plans resulting from the earlier reviews of town centre parking and parking at neighbourhood shopping

parades.

Town Centre Regeneration – The Panel receive a presentation every six months on progress with delivery of the regeneration programme for each of the town centres in Merton.

Libraries – The Panel consider the Library and Heritage Service Annual Report and made comments on the demographics of library users and looked at how improvements and innovative solutions that have been rolled out have impacted on the use and enjoyment of libraries in Merton.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2015/16 in November 2014 and January 2015. In order to understand specific proposals in more detail, the Panel set up a special meeting with the Director of Community and Housing and the Business Partner to explore the options appraisal for savings within the Merton Adult Education Service to inform their recommendations and comments to Cabinet at the second round of budget scrutiny in January 2015.

Panel asked for amendments and consideration of a number of savings relating to building and development control, dog waste options, joint procurement of waste services and housing service options.

Call In

The panel heard the call in of the following decisions that have been taken and made recommendations which were accepted by Cabinet:

- South London Waste Partnership – opportunities for joint procurement of waste collections, street cleaning and associated services
- Merton Adult Education – Options Appraisal
- Tariff changes to on street parking

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
Corporate Services
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX

By emailing:

scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

By phoning:

Julia Regan – Head of Democracy Services
020 8545 3864

Stella Akintan –Scrutiny Officer
020 8545 3390

Rebecca Redman – Scrutiny Officer
020 8545 4035

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

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