

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 14 July 2015

Subject: Member Survey 2015 - Analysis

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

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

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Recommendations:

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission considers the findings arising from the 2015 Member Survey.
 - B. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission agrees the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny.
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 For the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to consider the findings from the 2015 Member Survey and the proposed actions to be taken forward to improve the scrutiny function.

2. DETAILS

- 2.1 Each year the Scrutiny Team carries out a survey to collect the views of Merton councillors and co-opted scrutiny members about how scrutiny is working - where things work well, where things don't work quite so well, and how they can be improved. The survey also evaluates satisfaction with the scrutiny function as a whole and with the different workstreams that make up overview and scrutiny.
- 2.2 The 2015 Member Survey was sent out to 60 councillors and 7 co-opted members. It was completed by 33 councillors and 2 co-opted members, giving an overall response rate of 52% (with a 55% response rate from councillors). The councillor response rate is lower than last year and 2011 but higher than that achieved in 2012 and 2013.
- 2.3 The target set for Member satisfaction with the overall effectiveness of the scrutiny function has not been met, with a rating of 61% against a target of 75%. This is the first year time that this target has not been met in recent years and is the lowest rating since 2008. The reasons for this therefore warrant further investigation.
- 2.4 Analysis of satisfaction with the individual elements of scrutiny (set out in Appendix 1) indicates that dissatisfaction with the operation of pre-decision scrutiny is the main factor that has contributed to this year's decline in the overall measure of satisfaction with scrutiny. Satisfaction with call-in is also low but that has been the case for a long time and has not changed significantly this year.

- 2.5 The target set on scrutiny agendas was met. In response to the question “do you think that the commission/panel agendas are too full to consider the items properly?”, 51% thought this to be the case, which is lower (and therefore better) than the target of 60%.
- 2.6 The level of satisfaction with the support provided by the scrutiny team continues to be high. 52% rated this support as excellent and 48% rated it as good.
- 2.7 The analysis and detailed findings of the 2015 Member Survey are contained in Appendix I. Appendix 2 contains all the verbatim comments received from members.
- 2.8 Appendix 3 contains a list of proposed actions for improvement.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 Whilst there is not a requirement to undertake an annual member survey, the findings of the survey enable members’ satisfaction with the scrutiny process at Merton to be measured against agreed annual targets and actions to be taken to improve the scrutiny process year on year.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 The Member Survey is conducted annually, usually during February/March and runs for a minimum of three weeks each year. In 2015 the survey was conducted during March and April so that new councillors would have experienced the full cycle of budget setting prior to completing the questionnaire – this change was made in response to feedback from new councillors in 2011.

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1 The Member Survey was undertaken in March and April 2015 and reported to the Commission in July so that identified actions could be incorporated into its 2015/16 work programme.

6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None directly relating to the Member Survey itself. However, some actions arising from the findings of the survey year on year may have resource implications which need to be taken into consideration.

7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None relating to this report.

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 findings of the Member Survey are reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission which is open to the public.

9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None relating to this report.

10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None relating 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: Member Survey 2015

11.2 Appendix 2: verbatim comments from members

11.3 Appendix 3: list of proposed action points

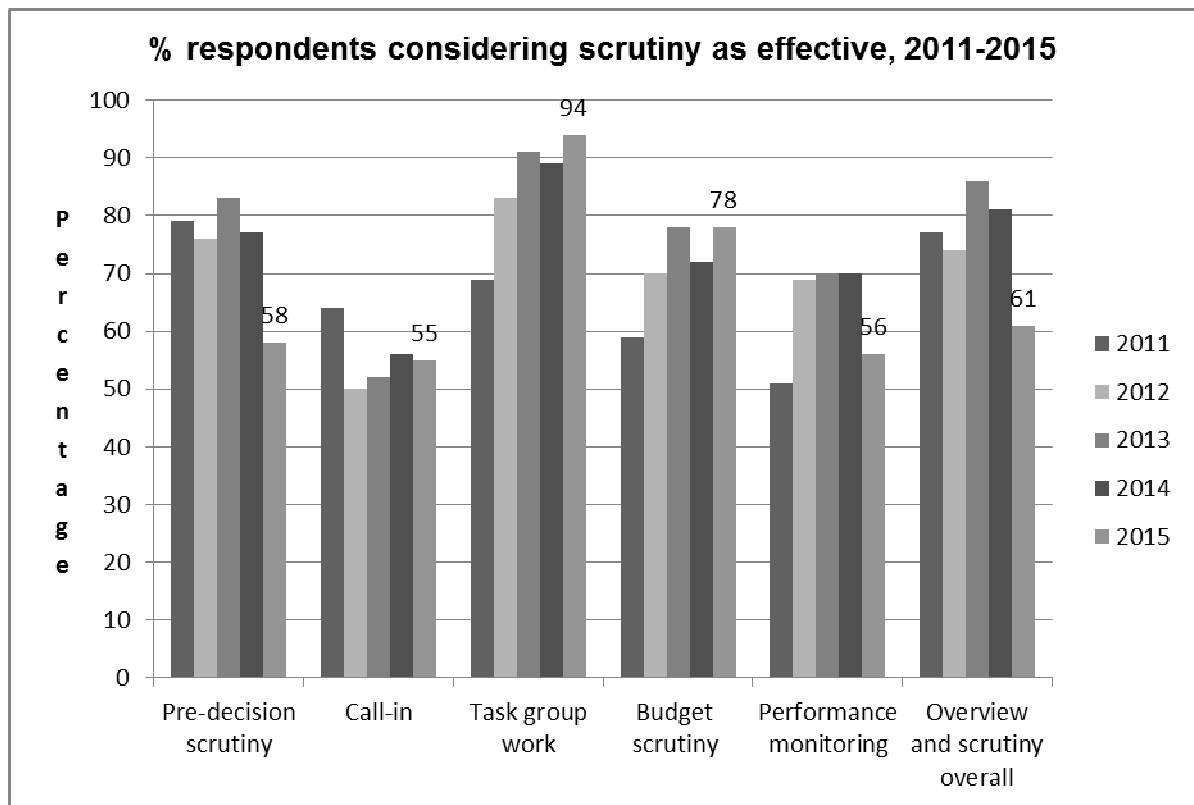
Member Survey 2015

Survey respondents

1. The survey was sent to all 60 Members of the Council and to the 7 co-opted scrutiny panel members.
2. 33 councillors and 2 co-opted members completed the survey form, giving an overall response rate of 52% (with a 55% response rate from councillors). The councillor response rate is lower than last year (62%) and 2011 (67%) but higher than that achieved in 2012 (53%) and 2013 (42%).
3. The majority of respondents have been actively involved in the scrutiny process over the past year:
 - ❖ 22 are **members of the scrutiny commission or a panel**. Sixteen of these have sat on a scrutiny review task group. Five have called in a decision.
 - ❖ 6 are “**other non-executive members**”, four of whom have attended a scrutiny meeting as a visiting member to observe/make a contribution.
 - ❖ 5 are **cabinet members**, all of whom have attended a scrutiny meeting to give evidence or to observe/make a contribution.
 - ❖ One of the 2 **co-opted members** who responded has sat on a scrutiny review task group.

Effectiveness of the scrutiny function

4. The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they considered the scrutiny function to be effective in each key area of scrutiny activity and to rate the effectiveness of scrutiny overall. Results from the past five years are set out in the chart overleaf.
5. Respondents' perception of the overall effectiveness of overview and scrutiny has fallen significantly from 81% in 2014 to 61% in 2015.
6. Analysis of satisfaction with the individual elements of scrutiny shown on the chart overleaf indicates that dissatisfaction with the operation of pre-decision scrutiny is probably the main factor that has contributed to this decline in the overall measure of satisfaction with scrutiny, though satisfaction with performance monitoring has also fallen considerably. Satisfaction with call-in continues to be low compared to other aspects of scrutiny - that has been the case for a long time and has not changed significantly this year.



7. A number of the comments made indicate that scrutiny has been weakened this year due to an unwitting shift in behaviour that has led to the perception of undue party influence rather than cross-party consensus built on evidence gathering:

- *Decisions being made on party lines (scrutiny member)*
- *Many members seem to have forgotten their responsibilities regarding scrutiny. They forget it is not whipped! I have been sickened to hear the constant political party broadcasts and members forgetting the real reason they are there! They are not working together as a team. It is very much a "them and us" situation! Appalling! (other non-executive member)*
- *I'm not really involved in the scrutiny process but my sense is that the political divide inhibits the famous holding to account, however it goes through the motions nicely. (other non-executive member)*

Pre-decision scrutiny

8. The consistently positive trend to 2014 indicates that this function worked well within an authority that had no overall political control. Having a majority administration requires some adaptation and the fall in the satisfaction level from 77% in 2014 to 58% in 2015 indicates that further work is urgently required on this.

9. Pre-decision scrutiny is an important aspect of an effective scrutiny function. Comments by both scrutiny members and cabinet members indicate the need to ensure that pre-decision scrutiny takes place on important issues in 2015/16:

- *There were several important issues in 2014/15 which did not allow for any pre-decision scrutiny. If scrutiny is only involved at a late stage it cannot be effective and is also more likely to engender an adversarial atmosphere. It means that scrutiny is reduced to supporting or rejecting a course of action already decided upon. (scrutiny member)*
- *We mucked up a couple of pre-decision scrutinies this year – timetabling rather than purposeful disregard. I know we can do better. Likewise, budget scrutiny could be tightened up. (cabinet member)*

10. Action points

- That forthcoming decisions listed on the forward plan will be included in each Panel/Commission work programme report at each meeting so that issues can be identified for pre-decision scrutiny if appropriate
- That the informal meetings between each scrutiny Chair, Vice-Chair, Cabinet Member and Director will be re-invigorated so that they take place twice a year and provide an opportunity to identify potential issues for pre-decision scrutiny as well as discussing any areas of concern

Call-in

11. Call-in continues to be an area with relatively low rates of satisfaction. It is the most political element of scrutiny and does not usually result in a request to Cabinet to review its decision. In 2014/15 there were no requests to Cabinet to change its decision and only one reference back to Cabinet with comments on the issue under discussion.

12. Four call-ins were received in 2014/15. This is comparable to previous years:

- 3 in 2013/14
- 4 in in 2012/13
- 2 in 2011/12
- 5 in 2010/11

13. Comments made criticise the scrutiny function, party groups and cabinet members for actions and attitudes that have led to dissatisfaction with the call-in process:

- *Panel members must engage with the evidence presented. It is not enough simply to vote without explanation. (scrutiny member)*
- *Call-in's require very careful management. This has not always been in evidence, allowing the meeting to drift. For example members have tended to get into debate and a degree of point-scoring early in the proceedings. I have noticed a lack of willingness on all sides to debate openly and honestly leaving*

the impression that outcomes have been decided before the meeting.(scrutiny member)

- *Too many politically motivated, essentially vexatious call-ins. (cabinet member)*

Task groups

14. Task group work was once again rated the most effective element of scrutiny, with satisfaction reaching 94%, its highest level ever. This indicates that members continue to find it a productive and effective way to contribute to policy development that will have a positive impact on residents' lives.
15. The challenge is to build on and bring some of the collaborative working and impact on cabinet decision making that is a feature of task group working to the wider work of Panels/Commission. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at its recent topic selection workshop, proposed a new approach to its work programme in 2015/16 that would entail themed meetings with sub groups of members carrying out scrutiny activities in preparation for the meeting, mirroring some of the work that has previously been done by task groups. It is hoped that this will lead to recommendations and references to Cabinet on these issues.
16. **Action point**
That the Head of Democracy Services should work with the Chair and members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel towards the end of the 2015/16 municipal year to review the impact of and satisfaction with the themed meeting and member sub group approach that has been adopted this year.

Budget scrutiny

17. Satisfaction with budget scrutiny remains relatively high and has increased from 72% in 2014 to 78% in 2015. However comments reveal some frustration regarding a lack of impact, summed up by this comment from a scrutiny member:
 - *budget scrutiny in 2014/15 was surprisingly poor and less effective than in previous years. The first round of budget scrutiny simply did not happen. By the time my scrutiny panel debated the budget proposals there was very little scope for any creative thinking around the cuts presented. Members of the public who might have taken a close interest in the process would have been surprised at the apparently uncompromising approach that the council seemed to take. (scrutiny member)*
18. **Action points**
That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission delegates to the financial monitoring task group a role in carrying out some in-depth scrutiny of a small number of areas (such as estate management) and report back any recommendations to the Commission.

That the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission discuss the role of scrutiny in the 2016/17 budget process with the Cabinet Member and Director when they meet in September.

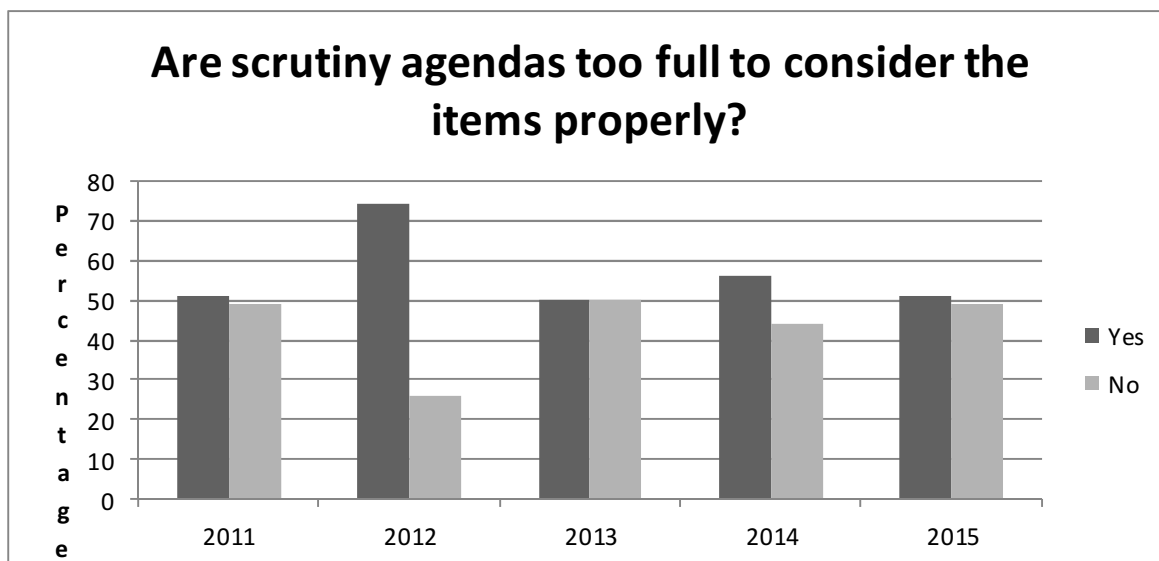
That the Scrutiny Team works with Directors to identify any big or sensitive budget proposals that would benefit from a briefing session for members (as was done on Merton Adult Education last year)

Performance monitoring

19. Satisfaction with the scrutiny of performance monitoring information has fallen from 70% in 2014 to 56% in 2015. This reflects lack of performance monitoring activity by some of the Panels, summed up by this comment made by a scrutiny member:
 - *Performance monitoring is often the poor relation in a scrutiny agenda. The value of having it as an agenda item is surely to stimulate a discussion on how performance could be improved. This rarely seems to happen. (scrutiny member)*
20. The approach to performance monitoring has changed over the past two to three years. Previously there was a performance lead for each Panel/Commission who perused a standard set of performance indicators prior to the meeting and drew members' attention to any areas of concern. Each Panel now has a more tailored approach – Children and Young People review a set basket of indicators at each meeting and devote one meeting to scrutinising the standards report (exam results, attendance, exclusions...), Healthier Communities review performance as part of agenda items where relevant and Sustainable Communities is currently considering its options. The Commission receive crime data at each meeting attended by the Borough Commander and has delegated detailed quarterly financial monitoring to the financial monitoring task group.
21. **Action points**
To discontinue the appointment of a performance lead as a default position so that each Panel and the Commission can adopt an approach to performance monitoring that best suits its needs

Scrutiny agendas/ workload

22. The proportion of respondents who consider scrutiny agendas to be too full to consider items properly has continued to decrease, as shown in the chart overleaf. The figure now stands at 51%, which is lower and therefore better than the target of 60%.
23. Comments indicate an ongoing need to pay attention to the size of the agenda to keep them manageable both in terms of the number of items and number of pages. Comments also indicate a willingness to have additional meetings from time to time to accommodate important issues as they arise.
24. It is proposed to change the question in next year's survey so that a target can be set that is easier to understand. Instead of asking whether agendas are too full to consider items properly and having a target that is met when the percentage is lower than the target figure, it is suggested that there should be questions to measure satisfaction with size and content of the agendas.



25. The Commission's topic workshop in May noted that work is in hand to address the size and format of the budget packs (received by scrutiny, cabinet and budget council) as well as improving the consistency of the equality impact assessments provided for the budget proposals. Proposals for change will be discussed by the Commission Chair, Vice Chair, Cabinet Member and Director when they meet in September.

26. **Action points**

That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the Head of Democracy Services work together to redesign the questions relating to the size and content of scrutiny agenda.

That the Head of Democracy Services review the budget pack in conjunction with other officers and the Director of Corporate Services to produce proposals for consideration by the Commission Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Finance.

Development of the Commission/Panel work programmes

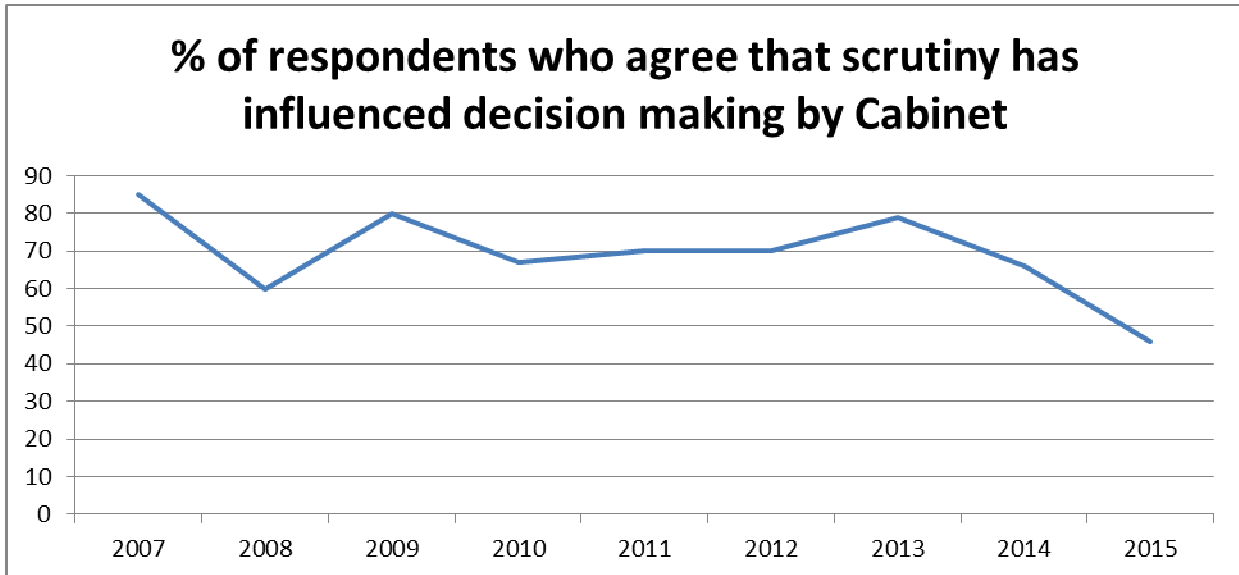
27. The survey asked respondents whether they have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the Commission/Panel work programmes.

28. In 2015, 97% of respondents said that they have had an opportunity to contribute to the panel work programmes. This is the highest level ever, continuing the overall upward trend since 2009, which may in part be due to the success of the topic workshops which were introduced in 2010.

29. Comments indicate the need to assist new councillors to contribute to topic workshops and to ensure that Cabinet Members' views are taken into account in making decisions on scrutiny work programmes (but the decision is always taken by scrutiny).

Scrutiny impact on decision making by the Cabinet

30. The survey asked whether decision making by the Cabinet had been influenced by scrutiny. The proportion agreeing that there had been an influence has fallen steeply to 46% this year, continuing a decline from 79% in 2013 to 66% in 2014. 46% is the lowest level ever recorded by the member survey:



31. As has been the case for some time, comments reveal conflicting views on whether the Cabinet's decision making has been influenced by scrutiny. The scope for influence is seen to vary for the different elements of scrutiny so there is a correlation between dissatisfaction with the operation of pre-decision scrutiny and belief that Cabinet does not take scrutiny views into account.
32. Task group work during 2014/15, although interesting and rewarding to members, has not yet reached the point at which it is received and then actioned by Cabinet. This will happen over the summer and autumn and will hopefully demonstrate that scrutiny can have an impact on decision making by Cabinet and this will be reflected in the survey results next year.
33. **Action points**
That the Scrutiny Team ensure that all task group recommendations and other references to Cabinet are followed up through a report back to the relevant Panel/Commission and that policy and service changes resulting from scrutiny recommendations are well publicised.

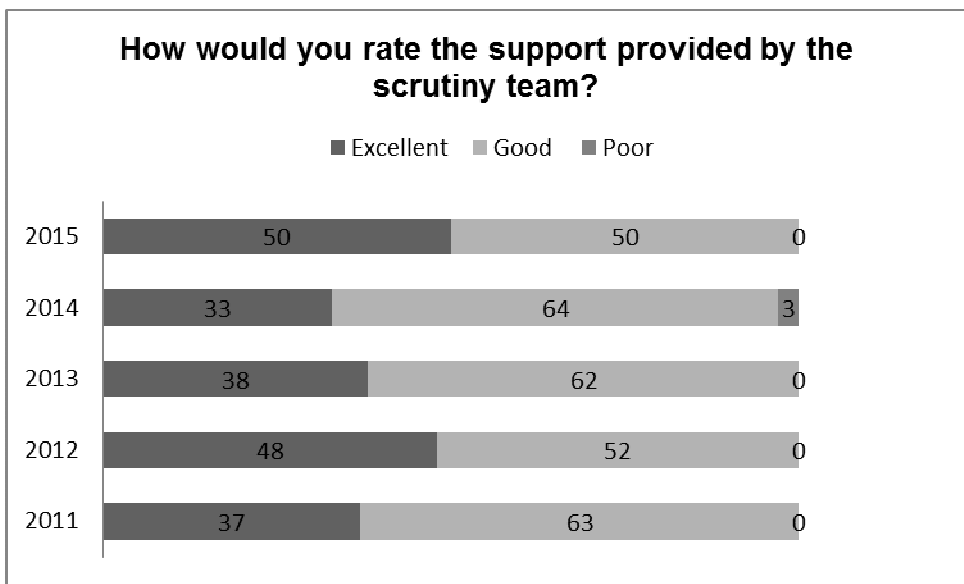
That recommendations in task group reports should, where applicable, include targets or intended outcomes that can be measured once implemented by Cabinet.

Quality of evidence presented to overview and scrutiny

- 34. 85% of respondents said that the evidence presented was good. This is comparable to rates in previous years.
- 35. Comments indicate a need to ensure that written evidence is relevant and concise.

Support from the Scrutiny Team

- 36. Satisfaction with the service remains highly positive, with 50% of respondents rating the support provided as excellent (more than ever before), 50% as good and 0% poor, as shown in the graph below:



- 37. The increase in the proportion of respondents rating the team as excellent might reflect the level of involvement that the team had in induction and other scrutiny training events this year, demonstrating the team’s expertise.
- 38. Members were also invited to rate different aspects of the scrutiny team on a scale from 1 to 4 (with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest). These results were very positive. There were no ‘1’ ratings, for example. The team scored a 90% satisfaction rate for email communication, a 82% satisfaction rate for task group reports (lower than previously, probably because most task groups had not reached report stage at time of the survey), 89% for other written documents, 84% for verbal communication, 87% for quality of response to enquiries, and 88% for speed of response to enquiries.

Members' training and development needs

39. The skills and knowledge which members bring to the overview and scrutiny process are crucial to its effectiveness, so the survey asked what scrutiny related training and development opportunities they would like to have provided in the coming year.
40. At least ten respondents agreed that there was a need for training and development opportunities in each of the core areas specified in the questionnaire:
- chairing and agenda management (12 respondents)
 - questioning skills (12)
 - how to monitor performance and interpret data (13)
 - finance/budget scrutiny (17)
41. A Cabinet Member suggested that it may be helpful to have regular in-depth presentations outside of scrutiny meetings on discrete subject areas by the specialist officers (such as the seminar given last year by the Head of Revenues and Benefits on forthcoming changes to housing benefit regulations) and comparative studies of work in other councils.
42. **Action points**
That the Head of Democracy Services will, in discussion with HR (who have responsibility for member development and training) ensure that appropriate training sessions are offered on all the areas identified by the survey.

That HR liaises with group offices throughout the year to promote awareness of upcoming training opportunities.

Suggested issues and themes for scrutiny

43. In response to a request for suggested issues/ themes to be considered for inclusion in the overview and scrutiny work programme in 2015/16, the following suggestions were made:
- *The implementation of the Care Act 2014 in Merton and the resources required to deal with self funders who apply*
 - *Rules for allocating vehicle crossovers/off street parking*
 - *Mental health issues among young people*
 - *In work poverty – zero hours contracts*
 - *Support for SMEs + South Wimbledon*
 - *Housing – private rentals and landlords, rent capping*
 - *Building our own properties*

- *In the current and foreseeable context of declining budgets and the many ways in which council services are being transformed, the pressing need is to monitor the implementation of service delivery changes required by the recent budgeting process to assure ourselves as members of the council that what was promised is actually delivered, including service levels.*
- *How do we support older people with physical and mental disabilities in the community? Is the council doing this effectively with care, consideration and responsibility?*
- *Review of commercial waste contracts. How many businesses do we deal with? How many shops don't have proper arrangements (eg Leopold Road), thus contributing to fly tipping/littering of shopping parades?*
- *Review of small scale recycling for flats/people without transportation to Garth Road, i.e. have a centrally based small mini site where people can go on foot/public transport*
- *Health – ways to improve public health by increasing walking/cycling/swimming in the borough*
- *The effects of the savings/cuts on the health and welfare of the user citizens*
- *I would like scrutiny to review the whole topic of “enforcement”, i.e. in relation to planning applications, traffic and parking offences, anti social behaviour, licensing, littering etc etc. Is enforcement happening? Is it consistently applied? Is it fair? Is it cost effective?*
- *I would like scrutiny to review and challenge the removal of the webcasting of council meetings. I believe there is a communication/democracy shortfall being created by this lack of transparency.*
- *Maybe of review on waste management*
- *Cabinet member – I'd like to see masterplanning of the entire budget discussed*
- *Cabinet member – I'd like to see a proper discussion of how we can create a tourist industry in Merton*
- *Co-opted member – continue to integrate equalities in all aspects of scrutiny work*

44. Action point

All of these suggestions have been considered during the topic selection process for 2015/16.

Appendix 2: list of verbatim comments from respondents

#1 How would you rate the effectiveness of the overview and scrutiny function?

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- *PDS - Important decisions have not been tabled in time to allow for pre-decision scrutiny*
- *Call-in – panel members must engage with the evidence presented. It is not enough simply to vote without explanation*
- *Budget – scrutiny failed to achieve change and thus failed to add value, partly because substantive savings were late in coming to the panels*
- *Generally the function of scrutiny is shown to be effective as it allows for checks and balances*
- *There were several important issues in 2014/15 which did not allow for any pre-decision scrutiny. If scrutiny is only involved at a late stage it cannot be effective and is also more likely to engender an adversarial atmosphere. It means that scrutiny is reduced to supporting or rejecting a course of action already decided upon.*
- *Call-in's require very careful management. This has not always been in evidence, allowing the meeting to drift. For example members have tended to get into debate and a degree of point-scoring early in the proceedings. I have noticed a lack of willingness on all sides to debate openly and honestly leaving the impression that outcomes have been decided before the meeting.*
- *Budget scrutiny in 2014/15 was surprisingly poor and less effective than in previous years. The first round of budget scrutiny simply did not happen. By the time my scrutiny panel debated the budget proposals there was very little scope for any creative thinking around the cuts presented. Members of the public who might have taken a close interest in the process would have been surprised at the apparently uncompromising approach that the council seemed to take. For those who looked closely, it seemed to be a prolonged period of poor PR for the council. More attention to the early stages of the budget process is required.*
- *Performance monitoring is often the poor relation in a scrutiny agenda. The value of having it as an agenda item is surely to stimulate a discussion on how performance could be improved. This rarely seems to happen.*
- *Though task groups and performance monitoring have been good, the pre-decision scrutiny has evaporated since May 2014. Call-ins have been a farce though I appreciate the efforts of the scrutiny staff. Cabinet treats call-in with disdain.*
- *Decisions being made on party lines*
- *A very good experience and the ability to get involved with assisting in identifying and find solutions of problems encountered by the residents. Data collection was also excellent.*
- *Overview and scrutiny groups should be involved at earlier stages during the process*
- *Not effective as often over ruled by Cabinet and block voting*
- *Call-ins have been helpful in bringing forward information which should have been in the public domain to help understand prior decision making, but is generally sadly missing. Very little pre-decision scrutiny is in evidence. The*

budget scrutiny is hampered by missing/inconsistent data provided. Only have seen performance monitoring in OSC task group, not by other scrutiny meetings.

- *Very little guidance on role of scrutiny and its input in overall process of administration*

Other non-executive Members

- *Many members seem to have forgotten their responsibilities regarding scrutiny. They forget it is not whipped! I have been sickened to hear the constant political party broadcasts and members forgetting the real reason they are there! They are not working together as a team. It is very much a “them and us” situation! Appalling!*
- *I’m not really involved in the scrutiny process but my sense is that the political divide inhibits the famous holding to account, however it goes through the motions nicely.*
- *Given my level of exposure and experience, I find this difficult to judge*

Cabinet Members

- *Too many politically motivated, essentially vexatious call-ins.*
- *We mucked up a couple of pre-decision scrutinies this year – timetabling rather than purposeful disregard. I know we can do better. Likewise, budget scrutiny could be tightened up.*
- *The most useful aspect is task group work where councillors working in scrutiny can inform themselves of an issue and set the agenda. Budget scrutiny, pre-decision scrutiny and performance monitoring can be effective depending on those involved and the issues discussed. If I have a criticism, it is that there is too little genuine expertise or knowledge, so that even uninformed comments are taken seriously simply because they have been made by a scrutiny member. Call in operates on a party political basis with opposition councillors seeing it as a way of gaining publicity for their positions and mobilising external opposition. In reality no threshold is applied so that virtually any call-in has a hearing..*

#2 Do you have an opportunity to contribute to the development of the commission/ panel work programmes (for example, suggesting topics for review or items for agendas?)

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- *Yes - The decisions and discussions are fruitful and relevant and therefore participation is paramount*
- *Yes – there was a good workshop on this last year*
- *I have the opportunity but some members get listened to more than others*
- *Yes – I have suggested topics for both years.*

Other non-executive members

- *Yes – anybody can put forward a topic for discussion*
- *Yes – but I have not done so recently*
- *Yes – as a very new councillor invited to attend agenda workshops but unable to make a useful contribution*

Cabinet Members

- Yes – cabinet members' comments are not always taken seriously because of the apprehended need to demonstrate independence of the executive.

#3 Do you think that the commission/panel agendas are too full in order to consider the items properly?

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- No – timing, finance and relevance have been helpful in keeping the panels focussed
- Yes – I would like to see us look at piloting solutions more in task groups and maybe have time for innovations
- Yes – more selective as first step but if an important item needs to be covered then additional meetings are ok
- Yes – both. Do not allow any item on the agenda after the weekend before meeting
- Yes – items should be treated individually and not cross into each other
- Yes – quite often agenda packs run to 300-400 pages and it is impossible to be thorough and effective in our role as scrutineers
- Yes – think answer should be more meetings but not sure councillors would want this or that officers would be able to accommodate them
- No – I think if there is a politically “big” issue the agenda should be more flexible to accommodate more specific meetings

Other non-executive members

- No – I think it is a shame that relationships between health/CCG and Council are being broken down. Some members forget that we are supposed to be a critical friend to health – not a destructor!
- Yes – being more selective may help but things should not be unscrutinised for lack of capacity reasons
- Yes . This is a gut feel – I think the council generally produces too much paper on too many topics

Cabinet Members

- Yes – 5 items per meeting is better
- Yes – attempting to do everything leads to nothing being covered adequately.

#4 Has decision-making by the Cabinet been influenced by comments from the commission/panels? If yes, please give examples.

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- Yes – where there is an opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny
- Yes – reviewing initial budget “plans”
- It would be good to hear from the Cabinet on this one
- No – the Cabinet since May 2014 has ridden rough shod over the panels and treats the call-ins/items as rubber-stamping by their majority members

- Yes – due to the cuts in government grants the Commission/Panels have had a difficult time but have managed to hold cabinet to the minimum cuts to public services
- No – Cabinet pick and choose what to listen to from the scrutiny panels and therefore makes a nonsense of transparency and effectiveness
- No – very poor influence since election
- No – Cabinet may say they do but only example I can give is that Cabinet would try to bring savings forward – they didn't need scrutiny function (or shouldn't need it) to tell them that. Being used as a "tick-box" exercise.
- The issue is to enable the panels to comment on topics where Cabinet may be considering policy.

Co-opted members

- Yes – recently the decision on savings/cuts in social services

Other non-executive Members

- No never! They never listen! MAE, CIL, High Path, All Saints!
- Yes – but only when they were already prepared to do so
- No – I'm not aware of Cabinet making changes as a result of scrutiny

Cabinet Members

- Yes – we certainly don't ignore scrutiny: it influences the way we go forward generally. (didn't want to give specific example)
- Yes – virtually all task group reports are adopted wholesale, e.g. on economic development and the inward investment. Pre budget comments tend to be taken seriously as the record of cabinet decisions will show.

#5 Do you feel that the quality of evidence presented to overview and scrutiny has been good? Has it met the needs of the session?

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- Yes – generally ok
- Yes – some items are far too wordy
- No – sometimes I suspect we are given too much information to muddy the picture and hide what we should really be looking at
- Yes – often disregarded in decision-making by majority of Labour councillors
- Yes – generally good
- No – needed more data and answers to likely questions

Other non-executive Members

- No – sessions are too short to have a proper q and a.
- Yes – of course I don't know but I hear that discussions can be robust – and I call that evidence!
- No – scrutiny often seems to lack the presentation of alternatives for consideration. Such alternatives may have been rejected but might help understanding of issues

Cabinet Members

- **No – I tend to attend call-ins where much of the evidence is partial or partisan**

#8 How could the scrutiny team improve the way it supports overview and scrutiny?

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- *Speed is not an issue*
- *Sometimes the dates for scrutiny are booked in too short a time and this in effect has had considerable negative impact on attendance and more impetus in the tasks.*
- *By getting them involved at the earliest possible stage*
- *Clarity rather than reams and reams of paper, limit lengths of reports and ensure just appropriate data included*
- *All good. Very impressed with Stella.*
- *Think all members of the scrutiny panels should be able to review and recommend adjustments to the minutes before they are published – otherwise used for political purposes to slant discussions. Julia is excellent.*

Other non-executive Members

- *More staff?.*

Cabinet Members

- *By developing expertise in distinct areas through close working with officers in those departments to advise scrutiny panels and chairs on subject areas..*

#10 If you have any further comments/ suggestions about the overview and scrutiny function, including how it can be improved, please use the space below.

Members of the scrutiny commission or panels

- *It would be good to tighten the timing so that the meetings last for a maximum of two hours only.*
- *I would be interested in innovation teams – looking at piloting solutions and ideas.*
- *Try and get the Cabinet to treat scrutiny with respect (like before May 2014)*
- *Change the balance of members on panels*
- *Consider changing the chairs of panels*
- *Basically make it more accountable to the public at large as some meetings have been a farce*
- *It is well chaired and timed - keep it up!*
- *None negative. Well structured and delivered, the children's scrutiny. Very prompt and precise.*

Other non-executive Members

- *Forward plans should be published early so as to enable scrutiny to be properly planned. In depth scrutiny needs to be programmed so that meetings are longer and more effective.*

- *The Chair and Vice Chair are excellent. I think that the majority group dominate the vote. I guess that if oppositions cllrs were numerically stronger the same problem would arise but at least the holding to account would be more obvious..*

Co-opted members

- *The background details will be useful to participate in the discussion productively.*

Appendix 3: List of proposed action points

- That forthcoming decisions listed on the forward plan will be included in each Panel/Commission work programme report at each meeting so that issues can be identified for pre-decision scrutiny if appropriate
- That the informal meetings between each scrutiny Chair, Vice-Chair, Cabinet Member and Director will be re-invigorated so that they take place twice a year and provide an opportunity for identify potential issues for pre-decision scrutiny as well as discussing any areas of concern
- That the Head of Democracy Services should work with the Chair and members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel towards the end of the 2015/16 municipal year to review the impact of and satisfaction with the themed meeting and member sub group approach that has been adopted this year.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission delegates to the financial monitoring task group a role in carrying out some in-depth scrutiny of a small number of areas (such as estate management) and report back any recommendations to the Commission.
- That the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission discuss the role of scrutiny in the 2016/17 budget process with the Cabinet member and Director when they meet in September.
- That the Scrutiny Team works with Directors to identify any big or sensitive budget proposals that would benefit from a briefing session for members (as was done on Merton Adult Education last year)
- To discontinue the appointment of a performance lead as a default position so that each Panel and the Commission can adopt an approach to performance monitoring that best suits its needs
- That the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and the Head of Democracy Services work together to redesign the questions relating to the size and content of scrutiny agenda.
- That the Head of Democracy Services review the budget pack in conjunction with other officers and the Director of Corporate Services to produce proposals for consideration by the Commission Chair, Vice Chair and Cabinet Member for Finance.
- That the Scrutiny Team ensure that all task group recommendations and other references to Cabinet are followed up through a report back to the relevant Panel/Commission and that policy and service changes resulting from scrutiny recommendations are well publicised.
- That recommendations in task group reports should, where applicable, include targets or intended outcomes that can be measured once implemented by Cabinet.
- That the Head of Democracy Services will, in discussion with HR (who have responsibility for member development and training) ensure that appropriate training sessions are offered on all the areas identified by the survey.
- That HR liaises with group offices throughout the year to promote awareness of upcoming training opportunities.



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