



Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2016/17

London Borough of Merton

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Foreword

Scrutiny has never been more relevant to the work of Merton council than it is today. Financial pressures are changing the framework for service provision out of recognition. Scrutiny needs to keep pace with these changes to ensure residents are still getting the services they need, and service providers remain accountable for their delivery.

Scrutiny is at the interface between residents and the council, so public involvement is essential if it is to reflect residents' views and needs. This is not just about numbers. The Commission welcomed Cabinet's decision to consult on appropriate levels of council tax, a consultation that attracted more than 2000 responses, and gave clear support for levying the Adult Social Care precept in the 2017/18 budget. At the other end of the scale, one local resident attending a meeting on the problems of finding suitable short term accommodation for the elderly on release from hospital suggested a web based solution that is now being investigated. We have also listened to organisations that speak for user groups threatened by cuts in welfare budgets, such as Merton and Lambeth CAB, Faith in Action and Merton Centre for Independent Living, and encouraged closer links with the council to support their work. And we have called on external advisers with professional experience to mentor our enquiries into subjects such as child safeguarding.

Call-in can provide another channel for public involvement. I'm aware that call-in is sometimes regarded as symptomatic of failure in scrutiny earlier in the decision process, but packed meetings in the council chamber attested to strong interest (and sometimes passionate views) on the council's plans for waste collection and parks maintenance. Debate at call-in can often elicit information not previously in the public domain, helping to counter misperceptions. Even if Cabinet's decision is upheld, the transparency call-in brings is to be welcomed.

As the council moves towards more radical responses to the financial pressures it faces (and the formation of a Local Property Company is an innovative example), scrutiny will have to adapt to dealing with new bodies that are not accustomed to being held publicly accountable. We are up for the challenge, knowing we can count on the support of our dedicated scrutiny team of Julia Regan, Stella Akintan and Annette Wiles. Members may have the ideas, but it's our officers who them happen. We owe them our grateful thanks and support.

Cllr 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 2016-2017

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

- Abbotsbury school council asked scrutiny to look at loneliness and social isolation of older people. This is now the focus of an in-depth task group review. Councillors also visited the school and were given a long and comprehensive list of suggestions on how to tackle the issue;
- A local resident shared their experience of living as a tenant of the social housing provider Circle Housing. This enabled scrutiny councillors to ask challenging questions of the service provider and subsequently to meet the provider to discuss individual issues raised through councillor casework;
- A local resident attended a scrutiny meeting to suggest the development of a website to advertise vacancies in local care homes. As a result the Head of Adult Social Care is now working with the resident to determine if the suggestion is feasible;
- Merton and Lambeth Citizens Advice, Faith in Action and Merton Centre for Independent Living attended a scrutiny meeting to discuss the impact that welfare reform is having and how to mitigate this;
- Muslim Women in Morden made a representation to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel about the negative effect the Prevent agenda is having on the local Muslim community. As a result, there have been discussions about how the Muslim Women in Morden could work with the Children, Schools and Families Department to support its Prevent training for headteachers.

This year we have consciously increased our use of external advisers in order to be able to provide more rigorous challenge. Advisers included the Independent Chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children's Board, the Head of Young People's Services at The Who Cares? Trust (now called Become), an investment management expert from Henley Investment Management and the Operations Manager from Age UK Merton.

Councillors have scrutinised many topical issues of concern to local residents, for example by getting involved at each stage of the development of a new leisure centre, including monitoring the appointment of relevant experts, understanding how the Centre will relate to other local community providers, checking how residents are being consulted on the development and reviewing designs from first concept stage.

Three in-depth task group reviews have been carried out, details of which can be found under the relevant Panel headings:

- Supporting vulnerable young people into employment – Children and Young People Panel
- Loneliness - Healthier Communities and Older People Panel
- Air quality - Sustainable Communities Panel

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 reviews

Shared and outsourced services

Two task group reviews last year examined how different models of service delivery work and made recommendations to stimulate a more consistent and rigorous approach to selecting delivery models and challenging officers on the most appropriate model for each service. The recommendations have been accepted by the Council's Cabinet and implementation is now being monitored by the Commission.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive attended to set out their priorities for 2016/17 and the financial challenges facing the council. The Commission asked them questions on issues including the new leisure centre, waste services, Crossrail 2, the council's efficiency programme and Merton's ambition to be the best council in London. The Leader undertook to continue to take up issues of poor performance with Circle Housing Merton Priory (now Clarion).

The Commission commented on the annual report from Merton Partnership and requested additional information on the findings and outcome of the apprenticeship review as well as the number of affordable homes that have been provided in the borough.

Changes were made to the new equality and community cohesion strategy in response to the Commission's comments on the draft strategy – to add more detail on hate crime and to include Motspur Park and Raynes Park stations in the list of those requiring step-free access, as well as fully populating the strategy with performance measures.

The Commission discussed the content and process followed for the public consultation on the level of council tax. At a later meeting it examined the council's partnership approach to consultation and community engagement.

The Commission received a presentation setting out the functions and activity levels of the planning enforcement service. As a result of a request by the Commission, this information has now been shared with all councillors, residents associations and community forums.

Updates on the customer contact programme have been received at critical points in the project. The Commission was pleased with the increased level of use of online services but disappointed that there had not been more progress with the programme.

The Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council attended in November 2016 to discuss the voluntary sector and volunteering strategy. The Commission endorsed the strategy's direction of travel and made some comments on the draft that were taken into account in producing the final document, notably on the development of definitions for social value and updated guidance in the council's contract standing orders.

The Commission received a presentation on proposals to set up a local authority property company in order to enable members to understand the financial aspects prior to it being brought to a meeting of Council. The Commission welcomed the proposals as an innovative way of raising revenue from the council's assets without selling them. Members expressed some concerns about the accountability of the company and stressed the need for its decisions to be subject to scrutiny.

Scrutiny of crime and disorder

The Commission has examined crime data and was pleased that crime rates continue to remain low in Merton and are on a par or better than most neighbouring boroughs. It noted that, on top of the Londonwide MOPAC priorities, the two local priorities for Merton are moped theft and household burglary.

The Borough Commander has been asked questions on a wide range of issues including hate crime, traffic speed enforcement, street drinking and the work of police officers in local schools. The Commission welcomed progress made with the implementation of new CCTV equipment and its success in assisting the police to prosecute crime.

The Commission discussed the Mayor of London's policing priorities with the London Assembly Member for Merton and Wandsworth. They also discussed the operation and performance monitoring arrangements for the proposed four-borough Basic Command Unit model of policing.

The Commission welcomed the work being done by Merton Centre for Independent Living to identify, measure and draw attention to the problem of disability hate crime. It was assured that the Safer and Strong Partnership Board, comprising the Council, Police and partner organisations, would receive and respond to the report.

The Commission heard from the Probation Service and the London Community Rehabilitation Companies about how low, medium and high risk offenders are managed locally and requested an update to show the progress being made.

Call-in

Four call-in requests were received by the Commission in 2016/17:

South London Waste Partnership – waste collection

Further to pre decision scrutiny on this issue by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel, in August 2016 the Commission reviewed Cabinet's decision to appoint Veolia ES (UK) Ltd to provide waste collection and related environment services. The call-in signatories and invited witnesses raised considerations relating to consultation processes, the introduction of wheeled bins, fortnightly residual waste collection, workforce terms and conditions. The Commission voted to uphold Cabinet's decision and agreed to ask Cabinet to ensure that all residents were informed of forthcoming changes, and that Cabinet should continue to take steps to ensure that all residents take pride in a litter free environment.

South London Waste Partnership – parks maintenance

Further to pre decision scrutiny on this issue by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel, in August 2016 the Commission reviewed Cabinet's decision to appoint The Landscape Group Ltd (now idverde) as Preferred Bidder to provide parks maintenance and related services. The call-in signatories and invited witnesses raised concerns on the level of public consultation, terms and conditions of staff and the potential impact on Friends' Groups. The Commission voted to uphold Cabinet's decision .

Harris Secondary School – required site approvals

Further to pre decision scrutiny on this issue by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel, in August 2016 the Commission reviewed Cabinet's decision relating to the proposed site for a new secondary school in the borough. The Commission heard concerns regarding the proposed location and the impact that this would have on a neighbouring primary school and on other local services. The Commission also heard concerns about whether the site was sufficient for delivery of a full curriculum. These concerns were addressed by officers and the Commission voted unanimously to uphold Cabinet's decision.

Introduction of a diesel surcharge

Further to pre decision scrutiny on this issue by the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel, in December 2016 the Commission reviewed Cabinet's decision to introduce a surcharge for all diesel vehicles that have a resident, business or trade parking permit. It agreed on the need to reduce air pollution, accepted that diesel vehicles are a major cause of this and discussed whether the levy would change behaviour. Members expressed concern at the quantum level of the surcharge and the short lead-in time for its introduction. The Commission voted to uphold Cabinet's decision.

Subsequently, the cabinet member responsible for implementation agreed to change the phasing in from £100 in 2017/18, £125 in 2018/19 and £150 in 2019/20 to: £90 in 2017/18, £115 in 2018/19 and £150 in 2019/20

Finance and performance monitoring

The financial monitoring sub-group has continued to monitor quarterly financial management reports. In particular, it has scrutinised the forecast overspend, capital programme and lack of progress on achieving savings in some service areas. It has scrutinised a number of areas in depth including transport services, savings achieved by the customer contact programme, overspend in the greenspaces budget, estate management and the budgets for supported lodging/housing, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and no recourse to public funds.

Scrutiny of the budget

The draft business plan, medium term financial strategy and proposed budget savings proposals were examined in detail, alongside equality impact assessments for each of the savings.

The Commission made a recommendation to Cabinet in November 2016 asking it to bring forward savings proposals wherever possible in order to address the predicted funding gap from 2017/18 onwards. It also asked Cabinet to consider a number of options to address the gap, including reviewing the application of earmarked reserves and the level of council tax. In response, Cabinet has brought forward a number of savings proposals and these were subsequently accepted by Council.

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Areas of responsibility: scrutiny of issues relating to children and young people. This includes education, children's social care, child protection and youth services.

Councillor Dennis Pearce, Panel Chair:

"This year has seen the Panel continue to focus on the work of the Children, Schools & Families Department and additionally to scrutinise the work of its partners such as the Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust and colleagues in the Council's housing department. I'm particularly pleased that the Panel has received a number of representations from external witnesses this year which has provided us with additional insight to our work."

Scrutiny reviews

Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts: working closely with colleagues in all departments in the Council as well as Merton's Economic Wellbeing Group, the task group brought its work to fruition this year with a final report which has been accepted by Cabinet. Recommendations focus on the use of work tasters/work experiences and apprenticeships with these being offered through the Council's contractors and other services providers. The Panel will receive an action plan at its meeting in June 2017 and continue to monitor progress against this.

Rapporteur scrutiny review of user voice: following positive feedback in the scrutiny member survey, the decision was taken to pilot a new form of scrutiny review based on a rapporteur model. This involves an individual member looking in-depth at an issue supported by the scrutiny team. A trial is happening through the Children and Young People Panel with a member examining how looked after children and young people are able to express their wishes and feelings and participate in decisions that affect their lives. A report is anticipated in June 2017. In addition to consulting with officers and looking at how other councils ensure the participation of looked after children in services, children and young people are participating in the review through the Children in Care Council.

Online strategies in schools: completed in July 2015, this task group focused on how to keep Merton's young people safe online. The Panel continued to monitor the implementation of the task group's recommendations with progress against all being reported in October 2016.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

Harris Wimbledon Secondary School: members were given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposed site for the new school prior to this gaining Cabinet approval. Members focused on the anticipated growth in demand for secondary schools

places, how the proposed location had been selected, how the impact on the existing users of the site will be ameliorate and how the development of the new school will be funded. The Panel made a reference to Cabinet requesting that the new school be developed to ensure all its pupils gain the same advantage enjoyed by children at other secondary schools in Merton.

School Provision: the Panel has continued to review provision of sufficient school places which is one of the Council's key statutory duties. Members were reassured that surplus places are in line with the Audit Commission's advice taking into account rising birth rate projections. Performance monitoring data is being revised to assist the Panel in achieving on-going scrutiny of this provision.

Safeguarding: members were given the opportunity to question the independent chair of the Merton Safeguarding Children Board and the Acting Borough Commander about safeguarding provision for Merton's children and young people. This focused on strengths, areas for review during the coming period, work with schools, action to address knife crime, domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse.

Health and wellbeing: with the support of the community health provider, (Central London Healthcare NHS Trust), the Panel looked at how the Council is giving children and young people in Merton the best start in life by improving access to child mental health services, achieving school readiness, increasing the rate of immunisations and tackling childhood obesity. Members focused on the quality of information being used to promote immunisations, the role of parents in their children's health and how community venues are being used to achieve outreach.

Schools Annual Report: members received the detailed annual schools report giving them the opportunity to focus on attainment for all key stages as well as at foundation stage and for post 16. Members noted the need to retain their focus on children on SEN support as well as looked after children.

Corporate Parenting: members received the detailed annual corporate parenting report as well as reports on the looked after children and care leavers sufficiency strategy and accommodation for care leavers. As a result, members resolved to consider accommodation for care leavers in partnership with the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel supported by officers from the Children, Schools & Families, Community & Housing and Environment & Regeneration Departments either as a deep dive Panel meeting session or through a task group.

Performance monitoring

This year the Panel appointed a lead member for performance monitoring (Councillor Mike Brunt). In July, Councillor Brunt and other members participated in a performance monitoring workshop. Supported by officers, this gave members the opportunity to look at the basket of performance measures in detail and to improve their understanding of each measure. The performance lead and relevant officers now meet before every Panel meeting allowing for in-depth discussion and to highlight points to be raised with the Panel. Measures are being identified to be the

focus of a deep dive.

External representations

Resulting from the scrutiny topic suggestion process, the Panel has received a number of external representations this year which has given additional insight to its work. The scrutiny team has proactively encouraged those making topic suggestions to attend the relevant Panel meeting to make a representation.

Muslim Women in Morden

Nuzhat Ali of the Muslim Women in Morden attended the Panel's meeting on safeguarding and spoke powerfully about the negative effect of the *Prevent* strategy on Muslim families and children in Merton. As a result of attending the Panel, how the Muslim Women in Morden group might be able to help inform the delivery of *Prevent* training for schools is being explored. *"Being heard is critical for positive community engagement, especially in relation to issues that are not considered by statutory bodies; such as the detrimental impact that Prevent and the widespread islamophobic narrative has on the mental health of children and families. The opportunity to present to the Scrutiny panel was a start - raising awareness with the Council of actions required"*, said Ms Ali.

Priory Primary School

Jane White, Headteacher of Priory Primary School, attended the Panel meeting at which the schools annual report was presented. This gave her the opportunity to highlight, on behalf of all schools in the borough, the difficulties faced in recruiting and retaining teachers. The Panel welcomed the representation and resolved to consider recruitment and retention of key workers as part of the topic selection process for 2017/2018. *"The opportunity to present an issue to Councillors on behalf of Headteachers was welcome and the invitation certainly demonstrated a willingness to listen on behalf of the Council. Councillors commented on how useful it had been to have a representative speak face-to-face and to ask questions directly of someone working as a school leader. It is through such dialogue improvements can happen and creative solutions found. I hope other Council employees and residents will take the opportunity to take up the invitation to speak at the scrutiny Panel on a topic close to their hearts in the future"*, said Ms White.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2017/2018 in November 2016 and January 2017 including receiving reports from the Directors of Corporate Services and Children, Schools & Families. The Panel focused on funding for schools maintenance, the effect cost savings will have on staff stability, SEND transport costs and how the costs of the new Harris Wimbledon School will be funded.

Call-in

No call-in requests were received by the Panel in 2016/17.

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.

Councillor Peter McCabe said *“The significant changes taking place in local public services highlights the important role of overview and scrutiny. As local councillors with connections to our communities we understand the impact that the closure or significant change to a health service can have on local people. This strengthens our resolve to hold decision makers to account. Scrutiny also provides an opportunity for local people to come along and have their voices heard.”*

Responding to local issues

Merton Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Service

The Chair of the Panel received anecdotal evidence about difficulties accessing this service. In June, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and the Director of Addaction, the service provider came along to present their performance data. They admitted that this newly established service was experiencing challenges and an improvement plan had been put in place. The Panel considered the progress in November and were satisfied that improvements were being made.

Wilson walk in Centre

Dr Andrew Murray, Chair of Merton Clinical Commissioning Group attended the Panel to discuss plans to close a GP surgery and walk in health centre resulting in dispersal of patients to local surgeries. The Panel expressed concern about the capacity at local surgeries to deal with the additional patients. MCCG said additional funding had been made available to support the change. The Panel were reassured that these changes would not result in longer waiting times as a raft of new measures would support access to primary care.

Care in the community for older people and support when they are released from hospital.

The Interim Head of Adult Social Care attended the Panel and highlighted that the service is currently meeting need, however finding suitable support for people when they leave hospital is more challenging during busy periods such as when there is a local flu outbreak. A local resident who had suggested the panel consider this topic attended the meeting. They asked the council to consider setting up a website in which council checked care homes can upload details of short term room availability.

Councillors asked the Head of Adult Social Care to meet with the resident to discuss the proposal in more detail and determine if it is feasible. The Panel will receive a further update in due course.

Financial Monitoring

Merton Public Health Budget – 2016/17

The Panel scrutinised savings within the public health budget and expressed concern about de-commissioning the handy man service as it can prevent hazards in older people's homes preventing distress, falls and hospital admissions.

Panel members also had the same concerns regarding the Live-Well re-procurement which will in turn lead to reductions in smoking cessation services. The Panel moved a motion panel to support the public health budget except for the cuts to the handy man service. The department provided a response to the Panel stating that public health services in Merton and across the country are moving away from individual interventions to population-based approaches. Also, a local handyman service provided by Age UK Merton will still be available to meet local need.

Impact of welfare reform

The Panel hosted a session looking at the impact of the changes to the welfare benefits system since 2010. The purpose of this session was to understand the impact at the local level and consider how the council and its partners can provide support. Given the cross cutting nature of the issue, members of the Sustainable Communities Panel were invited to attend. Local organisations, Faith in Action, Citizens Advice and Merton Centre for Independent Living attended to give an overview of the issues from their perspective. After a wide ranging discussion, Panel Members resolved to ask council officers and Citizens Advice to support Faith in Action in calculating the added value of their work, to look at possible venues for the drop in sessions and look at the feasibility of sending benefits advisors to Faith in Action drop in sessions.

Scrutiny of key partners

Merton Clinical Commissioning Group – Update on current priorities.

At the first meeting of the municipal year the Chair of MCCG attended the Panel to give an update on the latest priorities, issues and challenges. The Panel asked a number of questions including how MCCG is tackling their deficit, how the prevention agenda is being imbedded in health services. The Panel also urged MCCG to lobby government for more resources for the health sector.

Epsom and St Helier University NHS Trust – Update on current priorities

The Chief Executive of Epsom and St Helier, informed the panel of the significant challenges caused by the current buildings which are old, expensive to maintain and not fit for purpose. Despite this the Standard Hospital Mortality Rate still placed the Trust in the best quartile in the country. The Panel emphasised strongly that they want to see a new St Helier hospital on the same site. The Chief Executive said this will be determined by the outcome of the Sustainability and Transformation Plans.

Scrutiny reviews

Activities within Learning Disability Day Centres

The Panel held a one day mini review looking at the range of activities provided for people in learning disability day centres. The review found that the current day centre service is supported and appreciated by service users and carers. However budget savings had an impact on the range and frequency of activities that are provided. The task group asked the Panel to ask for more detailed scrutiny on sources of external funding that can help to sustain activities in day centres and also to look more widely at the health services available for this group. Both recommendations were agreed.

Preventing Diabetes in the South Asian community Task Group

In September the Panel received the final report arising from the Preventing Diabetes in the South Asian Community task group. Recommendations included ensuring existing services are culturally appropriate and working with voluntary and community sector organisations to share consistent messages. The Panel reviewed the Department action plan setting out how they will implement the recommendations. Panel members thanked officers for their work so far and looked forward to receiving a further update in twelve months time.

Childhood Immunisations in the 0-5 age group

In 2013 a scrutiny task group review was commissioned to look at improving immunisation rates in the 0-5 age group . NHS England along with our public health team attended the meeting to discuss the progress with this work. The Panel were informed that immunisations rates have improved in Merton and an local partnership was now in place.

South West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chair and Vice Chair of this Panel represent the council on the South West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The committee is scrutinising the main provisions within the Sustainability and Transformation Plans within the South West London footprint. This process is still in the very early stages and meetings have been held in October 2016 and January 2017. We have made clear our strong opposition to any attempt to remove accident and emergency and maternity services from St Helier hospital.

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Areas of responsibility: scrutiny of issues relating to housing, environmental sustainability, culture, enterprise and skills, libraries and transport.

Councillor Abby Jones, Panel Chair:

“This year the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has covered a breadth of subjects across our remit which has kept us extremely busy. During this municipal year the Panel has focused extensively on housing in the borough. We have scrutinised Merton’s leading social landlord, *Circle Housing*, during its merger with *Affinity Sutton* to encourage it to remain focused on repairs and regeneration during a period of change. Additionally, against a backdrop of over 40,000 deaths in the UK attributed each year to exposure to outside air pollution, the Panel has scrutinised the emission levy prior to Cabinet approval and established a task group to consider other measures the Council can apply to improve air quality in the borough. We are grateful to officers in the Community & Housing and Environment & Regeneration teams for supporting the Panel over the last year.”

Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration:

“In terms of Scrutiny this was another busy year for Environment & Regeneration. A number of significant policies and projects were scrutinised including the emission levy and the work being done to externalise waste, street cleaning and parks maintenance. It was helpful having pre-decision scrutiny of the emission levy as this highlighted the need to phase in any levy charge. The regular focus on performance ensures that Members hold the service to account and highlight good performance as well as those areas in need of improvement. In addition, the focus on budget and possible savings helps to identify the disproportionate impact on customers of some savings and the need to review and re-examine them. Scrutiny has helped add value to the service and helped in Merton’s ambition to be London’s Best Council.”

Scrutiny reviews

Commercial Services Task Group

The final report of the commercial services task group was presented to the Panel in November 2016. The task group put forward ways to embed a commercially-based approach across the Council as well as ambitious recommendations on ways to generate income. These include exploring opportunities to develop a private sector joint venture and looking at innovative technologies such as installing a multi-purpose street lighting system. Cabinet accepted the group’s recommendations and the Panel received an action plan in February 2017. This set out how the department will respond to the task group’s recommendations over the next 12 months which will be monitored by the Panel.

Air Quality Task Group

In September 2016, the Panel commissioned a task group to look at how to improve

air quality in Merton. This is very timely as it coincides with the review of the Merton Air Quality Action Plan. The task group is focusing on the role of the planning system, reducing pollution at construction sites as well as how to make effective use of monitoring and enforcement. The task group is also considering strategic leadership to improve air quality across south west London. The review will be completed and presented to the Panel in September 2017.

Housing Supply Task Group

Completed in September 2015, this task group focused on how to increase the supply of affordable housing in Merton. The Panel continued to monitor the implementation of the task group's recommendations with good progress against all being reported in January 2017. Additionally, the Panel agreed that the recommendation on overcrowding should be reviewed.

Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

The Panel has undertaken pre-decision scrutiny on a range of strategic issues and Council priorities. These include:

South London Waste Partnership (procurement of waste collection and related environmental services): the Panel scrutinised the procurement process for the waste collection and related environment services immediately before the final tender stage and the report to Cabinet. This included consideration of the findings of the wheeled bin resident trial and draft service charters. The Panel made a reference to Cabinet asking for the period of 'Preferred Bidder fine tuning' to be used to determine how many households will experience significant difficulty in storage and/or presentation of wheeled bins for regular emptying.

Emissions Levy: prior to consideration by Cabinet, the Panel reviewed proposals for the application of an emission levy through a surcharge on resident parking permits. Members were asked to comment on the principle of imposing a levy on the most polluting vehicles and gave their views on how this should be communicated to residents. The Panel's advice led to the levy having a phased implementation.

Resurgence and the collapse of the Circle Group structure: members scrutinised the proposal to collapse all nine Circle Housing organisations into one to become Circle 33 resulting in the loss of the local governance board to be replaced by a local community panel.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition: having monitored the performance of this new system since its installation at the beginning of the municipal year, the Panel took the opportunity to look at this in greater depth specifically focusing on how issues with its operation are being addressed. Members were provided with much more detail about the system and heard how officers are working with the operator to optimise performance.

Shared service expansion (environmental health, trading standards and licensing): members were given the opportunity to examine the proposal to expand the existing regulatory shared service. The Panel focused on Merton's role in

hosting the service, TUPE and the development of the ICT system that will underpin the expanded service.

Performance monitoring

The Panel regularly undertakes a performance monitoring role by reviewing outcomes against agreed key targets (Key Performance Indicators) and by receiving more detailed performance updates on key services:



Circle Housing Merton Priory (CHMP): Circle is the social housing provider to which the Council's housing stock was transferred in 2010. It has attended the Sustainable Communities Panel on two occasions during this municipal year to separately answer member questions regarding the then proposed merger with Affinity Sutton and to address members' concerns regarding repairs and regeneration. On the former occasion, the CEOs of both Circle and Affinity Sutton attended. On the latter occasion, the Director of Housing as well as the heads of the repairs and regeneration services attended. In both instances, members provided initial questions in advance to which the responses provided were included in the agenda pack. This enabled Panel members to ask more detailed and in depth questions at the meeting and focus on performance issues.

Libraries and Heritage Service Annual Report: members noted that again, the performance of this service is very high (and demonstrated by benchmarking against similar services delivered by other councils). As a result they questioned if performance indicators should be revised upward but it was agreed that this wouldn't be possible with a new service model forthcoming.



Town regeneration: members received a presentation updating them on progress achieved in all five town centre regeneration areas (Wimbledon, Raynes Park, Morden, Mitcham and Colliers Wood). This included consideration of public consultation activity as well as the potential impact of Crossrail2.

Merton Adult Education: an update report was provided to the Panel on the operation of the service in its first year following the implementation of a new commissioning model. Members focused on how the service is providing appropriate progression for all learners, community learning provision within the context of a national fall in demand and how provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is being successfully provided in-house.

Public Transport Liaison Committee (PTLC): the Panel has requested a meeting of the PTLC be convened which will happen in May 2017. This will enable local people to meet Council staff, representatives from Transport for London and other transport operators and to have their say on what is being done to improve transport in Merton.

Financial monitoring

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2017/2018 in November 2016 and January 2017, including receiving reports from the Directors of Corporate Services, Community & Housing and Environment & Regeneration. The Panel recommended to Cabinet that two Environment & Regeneration cost savings proposals be brought forward and that the cessation of building control letters be reconsidered. All these recommendations have been accepted by Cabinet and an alternative saving is being considered to replace the cessation of building control letters.

Call-in

The Panel has heard three call-ins during this municipal year:

Call-in	Outcome
Land at 111 – 127 The Broadway SW19 (know as P4)	Not to refer the decision back to Cabinet and therefore the decision was upheld and took immediate effect.
Belvedere Road and Belvedere Grove Experimental Width Restriction Review	Not to refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member and therefore the decision was upheld and took immediate effect. The Panel also resolved to make a reference to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Environment and Housing to consider the implementation of physical changes such as signage similar to the type already in place in other parts of the borough and improved junction treatment over an appropriate timescale so that the impact can be assessed when the next traffic volume survey is carried out in 24 months.
Emissions Levy – Statutory Consultation	Not to refer the decision back to Cabinet and therefore the decision was upheld and took immediate effect.

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

Annette Wiles – 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>