



# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13

London Borough of Merton

# Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2012/13

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## Foreword

Without wishing to be complacent, I believe scrutiny has run on a more even keel this year, adjusting more successfully to the reduction in our resources than we did in 2011/12. The Financial Monitoring Task Group (FMTG) replaced an informal member group for 2012/13, meeting quarterly with support from our scrutiny officers. The FMTG provides an effective forum for detailed examination that would not be possible in meetings of the full Commission. This year we have looked into the potential impact of any future changes in council tax benefit, as well as reviewing the most recent Financial Monitoring Report each time.

Budget scrutiny again occupied significant time for the Commission (less for the Panels), but Cabinet accepted all of the recommendations made in three rounds of scrutiny, thus safeguarding funding for the voluntary sector and resources for enforcement. Commission members can take satisfaction from meeting the concerns of our residents with these changes.

This has been an especially busy year for the Healthier Communities and Older People (HCOP) panel because of the radical changes taking place in the NHS, and members have devoted extra time to joint health scrutiny with our neighbouring authorities where we have interests in common, such as the future of St Helier. HCOP has been very effective in engaging the public with a well attended open meeting at St Helier, and gained publicity for its enquiry into the formerly taboo subject of female incontinence.

The Commission chose to review volunteering in Merton this year, and I believe all members of the task group have found this to be one of the most rewarding reviews we have undertaken. Scrutiny works best when members come together without regard to political affiliation, because they share a common desire to improve the things they value, and to enhance the quality of civic life in Merton. Elsewhere in this report you will find examples of how our scrutiny reviews have made a real difference to the lives of our residents.

None of this would be possible without the support of our hard working scrutiny team, namely Julia Regan, Stella Akintan and Rebecca Redman. I am conscious that we ask more of them each year, and rely on their commitment to scrutiny to achieve all that we continue to do. On behalf of all members, I would like to thank them for all their undiminished enthusiasm and professionalism.

**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](mailto:scrutiny@merton.gov.uk).

## Highlights 2012/13

It has been another busy year for scrutiny. Scrutiny councillors have worked on five in depth task group reviews, details of which can be found under the relevant Panel headings:

- Secondary school places (Children and Young People Panel)
- Incontinence (Healthier Communities Panel)
- adult skills and employability (Sustainable Communities Panel)
- volunteering (Overview and Scrutiny Commission)
- financial monitoring (Overview and Scrutiny Commission)

Scrutiny has shaped decision making on the Council's budget this year. Cabinet agreed with the majority of the recommendations made, including not taking savings relating to the Attic Theatre or the council's enforcement team and to defer savings on parks and greenspaces until a review of these services has been carried out.

Cabinet has been asked this year to examine the feasibility of purchasing air quality monitoring equipment jointly with other local authorities. It has also been asked to examine options for providing a 24/7 noise control service.

The Commission and Panels have continued to monitor the outcome of previous scrutiny recommendations to ensure that scrutiny does bring about real change in policies and in service provision, such as:

- ❖ Cabinet responded to a request to reconsider their plans to withdraw Freedom passes from people with mental health problems, by finding temporary funding to support this group
- ❖ The review on safeguarding people in their own homes has resulted in lifting and handling training for carers, new information and advice leaflets and better promotion of Elder Abuse Awareness Day by the council.
- ❖ .the review of trees has led to greater community involvement in caring for the borough's trees through increased support to the tree wardens and friends groups. It also resulted in the Council making a commitment to woodland creation and improvement of the "urban forest" through an annual tree planting programme in open spaces and on streets.

## **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**

### **Volunteering**

This task group highlighted the considerable benefits that volunteering brings to the volunteers themselves, the local community and the local economy. The task group also explored opportunities for the council to increase the involvement of volunteers in delivering its services.

The task group's report will be presented to Cabinet in June.

### **Civil unrest**

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

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

## **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 the Council's priorities for Merton in 2012/2013.

The Borough Commander has attended twice to talk about the future of policing in Merton and to consult on planned savings. The Commission congratulated him and his officers on reductions in crime rates and improvement in detection rates. The Commission welcomed many of the proposed changes including those that would increase the number of officers on the front line, whilst awaiting the actual outcome, but expressed serious concern at any proposal to close either Wimbledon or Mitcham Police Stations (neither of which is now proposed).

The Commission has examined a number of strategic issues including:

- changes to the council tax benefit scheme. A briefing for all councillors was subsequently provided at the request of the Commission.
- noise nuisance – it requested that Cabinet explore options for providing a 24/7 noise control service. This piece of work is currently underway and will be reported back to the Commission in due course.
- customer contact strategy – the Commission has continued its scrutiny of this strategy. It has endorsed the proposals whilst raising some issues and concerns to Cabinet in relation to costs, benefits and impact on residents.
- draft Corporate Equality Strategy 2013-17 – discussion resulted in changes being made to the strategy.
- review of Merton translation service – extensive discussion and comments made to guide future direction of the service.
- changing needs of the local population – the Commission examined data from the 2011 census with a view to carrying out further scrutiny of how services have responded to these changes.

### **Call-in**

The Commission upheld a call-In request and referred a decision on the sale of land on Wimbledon Broadway (P4) back to Cabinet for further consideration – Cabinet will discuss this issue at its meeting on 10 June 2013.

### **Finance and performance monitoring**

The Commission established a sub-group to examine financial monitoring reports on a quarterly basis. The sub group has expressed concerns about the predicted overspend on the new payroll service and the lack of data on staffing, questioned the size and use of the contingency budget, and reviewed the capital programme.

The sub-group has also commented on and proposed changes to draft service plans, including financial information and performance indicators for services.

### **Scrutiny of the budget**

Budget savings proposals have been examined in detail and recommendations made to Cabinet about which should be accepted, reviewed or rejected. Cabinet agreed with the majority of the recommendations made, including not taking savings relating to the Attic Theatre or the council's enforcement team and to defer savings on parks and green spaces until a review of these services has been carried out. In response to concerns raised, Cabinet agreed to re-profile the funding of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme to ensure a greater take-up from young people in schools and areas of the borough where there is greatest need.

Cabinet also agreed with the Commission's recommendation to use the repatriated funds from the London Councils Grants Scheme to support local voluntary sector organisations.

## **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**

A task group review of the provision of secondary school places was carried out this year that sought to support the council in responding to the increase in school age population and demand for secondary school places. The task group agreed the following terms of reference for the review:

- Review the planning assumptions relating to the projected increased demand;
- Examine the public policy factors which impact on the provision of school places;
- Examine options available to the council and their funding implications;
- Identify strategies employed by other councils with similar challenges; and
- Report on findings and recommendations

### **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.

Pre-decision scrutiny took place on primary school places and the potential sites further to an in-depth review undertaken by Capita on addressing the need for primary school provision in Merton.

The Panel has considered a number of strategic issues during their 2012/13 work programme including:

- Merton Children's Trust and OFSTED judgments on the current partnership practices and arrangements;

- Public Health services transition and performance;
- The improvement of adoption and permanency services;
- The Troubled Families Initiative;
- Safeguarding and Looked after Children;
- Youth violence and gang related offending;
- SEN Transport provision;
- School Leadership Succession Planning;
- Post Munro Developments; and
- Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy

### **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.

Members also received progress updates on the following:

- OFSTED Adoption Services Action Plan; and
- OFSTED Fostering Service Action Plan

### **Financial monitoring**

The Panel scrutinised the proposed budget for 2013/14 in November and January. Several budget saving proposals were referred back to Cabinet for further consideration after panel members expressed concern about efficiencies being made within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities integrated service; the running of the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme; and the Social Care and Youth Inclusion restructure.

The Panel also undertook budget monitoring at appropriate intervals throughout the year.

## Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

This Panel has responsibility for the scrutiny of issues relating to 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.

### Introduction

As the implementation of the Health and Social Care Act has gained pace, so has the work of this panel. We have held three additional meetings in order to meet the demands of our work, and have participated in two additional joint health scrutiny committees with our south west London neighbours. For the first time in Merton, a public scrutiny meeting was held outside the civic centre, at St Helier, hospital to discuss the Better Services Better Value Review of local health services.

### Scrutiny reviews

#### Incontinence amongst women of childbearing age

This review tackled the taboo subject of incontinence. We looked at the current services available and how they could be improved as well as strategies to encourage people to seek help for this condition. The Panel Chair and Cabinet Member took a bold step with a joint article in the local newspaper sharing their experience with incontinence. (see [http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/local/topstories/9902763.Councillors\\_speak\\_out\\_on\\_wee\\_problem/?ref=rss](http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/local/topstories/9902763.Councillors_speak_out_on_wee_problem/?ref=rss)).

We also want to encourage people not feel embarrassed about having this problem; therefore our lead members thought it was important to lead by example. We focussed on 'women of childbearing age' as we hoped that if our recommendations could help people within this group it would prevent the problem getting worse amongst older age groups where incontinence is more prevalent. We have spoken to front line workers, commissioners and produced an online questionnaire for members of the public to complete. The final report and recommendations will be considered at the first meeting of the new municipal year.

#### Safeguarding older people

This review looked at safeguarding people in their own homes as this was the area of highest abuse in the borough. The majority of our recommendations were accepted by Cabinet, including providing lifting and handling training for carers, new information and advice leaflets and better promotion of Elder Abuse Awareness Day by the council.

## Strategic Issues

### **Better Services Better Value**

The Better Services Better Value review will have a big impact on the provision of acute care across south west London. The plans could see a reduction in the number of Accident and Emergency and Children's departments. The Chair and Vice Chair of this Panel sit on a South West London Joint Scrutiny Committee to review the proposals. We also wanted to look at it as a borough, therefore a special meeting was held at St Helier hospital in September last year. The Panel took the opportunity to discuss the proposals with the Better Services Better Value team and hear the views of the community. The Panel hosted a lively debate in which the NHS were held to account for their proposals. The discussions from the evening were to be fed into the panels' final consultation response. However, local changes have meant the original proposals need to be re-evaluated, therefore the panel may have to repeat this process all over again!

### **Croydon NHS Finances Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny**

In 2010/11 NHS Croydon reported a £5.4 million surplus. It later transpired that they were running a £22.73 million deficit. A subsequent review commissioned by NHS London highlighted a number of system failures and made some recommendations for improvement. The south west London Joint Scrutiny committee was set up because some members felt that there needed to be further review and accountability for what took place. A south west London approach was suggested as the local health economy in the sub region would be impacted by the Croydon deficit. The Chair and Vice Chair were invited to sit on the Panel. The report and recommendations are being finalised at the time of writing.

### **Public Health Transition**

From April 2013, the council will take control of public health from the former Primary Care Trust. We held a special meeting to look at the transition planning as we had concerns that the process seemed to be slow in Merton and there was a lack of member involvement. The Director of Community and Housing attended the meeting and addressed our concerns. The Panel wanted the opportunity to scrutinise each stage of the public health transition process. Therefore the Interim Director for Public Health regularly attended panel meetings. We also saw the notes from officer meetings. The Chair of this panel also sat on the panel that successfully appointed the new Director for Public Health in Merton.

### **Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

This Strategy sets out priorities for tackling health inequalities and helping people to improve their health. The strategy will inform the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board. We held a special meeting to look at this Strategy, inviting members of the public to share their views. We made a formal response to the proposals asking for a number of changes including flexibility in designing services to ensure that they meet the needs of everyone in the borough.

### **Scrutiny of mental health services.**

This panel has a keen interest in mental health and has two co-opted members with a direct interest in this area. The Panel opted to retain a sub group looking

specifically at this issue given the pressure on the main agenda. In February the Panel visited Springfield Hospital to see the wards and supported housing for Merton patients. This was a good opportunity to see the facilities and meet staff and service users. We were impressed with the vast improvements in services and continue to monitor the Trust's commitment to keep patient experience and quality at the heart of all that they do.

#### Further Issues discussed

The panel has also over the past year investigated a review into the way GP surgeries in the borough are funded and the closure of Jasmine Ward at Tolworth hospital. The panel has also explored how we can foster better relations with the Care Quality Commission and has continued to monitor reports from Merton LINK and its transition to Healthwatch.

### **Performance Monitoring**

#### **Applications for Foundation Trust Status**

One of the requirements of the Health and Social Care Act is that all Trusts seek Foundation Trust status. As a Panel we saw this as an important opportunity to review the progress with the Trust as well as their direction for the next ten years. Our comments feed into their consultation proposals

South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust – Following our advice, the Trust agreed to extend their consultation to include Mitcham Town Centre

St George's 10 year strategy – The Panel were keen to emphasise the importance of keeping the patient experience at the centre of all their work.

St George's Foundation Trust Status Consultation: A joint meeting with the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and this Panel was held to consider the proposals for Foundation Trust status, comments from the discussion will form the basis of a formal response.

The Chair and Vice- chair together with other panel members also attended public events held by St George's to explain their new proposals.

### **Scrutiny of the Budget**

Last year this panel asked the Cabinet to reconsider their plans to withdraw Freedom Passes from people with mental health problems. As a result of our representations, a pot of money has been made available to support this group temporarily. This Panel continues to emphasise the importance of protecting frontline services and services for vulnerable people in this time of financial restraint and regularly monitors the impact of budget cuts on older people and adult social care services.

## **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 adult skills and employability with the overarching aim of supporting the council and its partners in their work to increase the prosperity of the borough.

The review focused on 3 key areas: reducing unemployment, attracting inward investment and improving the quality of adult education.

The Task Group sought to answer the following questions:

- How can we sell the existing positive aspects and strengths of the borough to prospective businesses?
- How could Merton become more attractive to prospective employers?
- What will it take to reduce unemployment in the borough, particularly in the East of the borough?
- How can we marry skills training to the nature of the current and prospective businesses in the area?
- How can adult education support the council to attract inward investment?
- What role do/could partner organisations play in reducing unemployment?

The review made recommendations on:

- How Merton can be promoted as a great place to do business;
- How we can seek to reduce unemployment amongst residents, especially those in the East of the borough, to as low a level as is feasible;
- How we provide adult education and training, to ensure residents are appropriately skilled and able to access employment;
- How to attract value-added employers to the borough; and
- How to strengthen the links across relevant departments and between partner organisations

The Task Group are due to make recommendations to Cabinet in June 2013.

## Strategic issues and pre-decision scrutiny

Members received a presentation from the Environment and Regeneration and Community and Housing departments and Cabinet Members with portfolios related to the remit of the Panel regarding their priorities for the year to enable a strategic overview to be maintained by the Panel.

The Panel undertook pre decision scrutiny of the acquisition of air quality monitoring equipment and recommended to Cabinet jointly purchasing the equipment with other local authorities, or purchasing it with a view to loaning it to other authorities to recoup costs.

Members also undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the Draft Housing Strategy 2012-2015 and recommended that the strategy include a commitment to giving priority for social housing to members of the armed forces returning to civilian life.

Further pre-decision scrutiny was undertaken on the draft Tenancy Strategy.

The Panel considered and contributed to the scoping process for the Public Value Review of Street Cleaning (PVR) with a small ad-hoc task group set up to contribute to the review at the appropriate stages during its lifespan and make recommendations, as necessary.

The Panel undertook pre-decision scrutiny of the findings and recommendations resulting from the Town Centre Parking Review. The Panel supported the recommendations and welcomed the introduction of cashless payment systems for parking as soon as possible.

The Panel considered the following briefings with a view to undertaking further scrutiny and monitoring any strategic or service delivery issues, as appropriate:

- Parking Services;
- Cycling Provision;
- Trade Permits Update;
- Presentation from new Interim Director of Merton Priory Homes on priorities going forward;
- Government consultation on extending the permitted development rights for homeowners and businesses;
- Flood Water Management Act;
- Briefing from the new Interim Director of Merton Priory Homes; and
- Localism Act

## **Performance monitoring**

The Panel has regularly undertaken a performance monitoring role by reviewing performance results against key indicators and making recommendations to the appropriate service. Service Plans were also discussed at the meeting in April 2012.

- Library and heritage service – update on performance and developments;
- Enforcement Task Group Action Plan – Monitoring delivery;
- Update on the Cleaner Town Centre’s Action Plan – Monitoring delivery;
- Staff sickness levels in the waste service – performance monitoring;
- Town Centre Development – progress in delivery of the action plans;
- Trees Task Group Action Plan – Monitoring delivery;
- South London Waste Partnership – performance monitoring;
- Trade Permits

## **Financial monitoring**

The Panel scrutinised the budget saving proposals in two rounds, one in November and one in January, and following discussion, made comments and recommendations to Cabinet.

## ***Call In***

The Panel heard the call in of the following decisions that had been taken and made recommendations to Cabinet, as appropriate:

- New types of permit for controlled parking zones – Trade Permits (July 2012)
- Mitcham Town Centre Regeneration Scheme (March 2013)

## 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](mailto: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>