

Agenda item 7: HBC Scrutiny Arrangements Scrutiny Review - Consultation with Operations Review Committee

This document contains the draft recommendations arising from the Hertsmere Scrutiny Arrangements Review for consultation with the Operations Review Committee.

Attached is the ‘Scrutiny Improvement Review’ report from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), a piece of work commissioned by the Task & finish group. The nine recommendations from the CfPS report are listed below.

Using the nine recommendations of the CfPS Scrutiny Improvement Review as a basis, and informed by Members’ input from various sources (e.g. Members’ Workshop, Mapping of Partnerships Review and Member Survey), the Scrutiny Review Group is proposing the recommendations below regarding Hertsmere’s scrutiny arrangements.

The Operations Review Committee’s views are sought on the 9 CfPS Recommendations and the arising Recommendations of the Scrutiny Review Group prior to the finalisation of all recommendations and their submission to Policy Review Committee for approval.

1	CfPS Recommendation	Work programme prioritisation and focus. Developing a clear methodology focused on HBC’s key corporate or community priorities should itself be a priority. Items on the work programme should have a clear rationale to justify their inclusion and a clear system for selection. <i>[see section 8.1 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	That scrutiny committee agendas be re-ordered to consider committee work programmes and the Forward Planning Programme at an earlier stage of each meeting. A consistent theme of the CfPS report, Members Survey and Members Workshop was the extent to which scrutiny planning is often a rushed item at the end of meetings. Members feel strongly that greater ability to focus on scrutiny work programming will lead to multiple improvements.
2	CfPS Recommendation	Scrutiny and the Executive needs to work more collaboratively. This will achieve stronger pre-decision scrutiny, allow greater influence and contribution to policy shaping as well as supplying more high-quality recommendations. A triangulation meeting held bi-monthly could include the Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair, Executive Member or Leader, taken in relevant rotation, and Scrutiny Officers plus relevant service area Officers. The purpose of this would be to jointly scope future areas for scrutiny to develop, but without compromising scrutiny’s independent and authority. <i>[see section 8.2 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	That Portfolio Holders continue to attend sessions of the Internal (Operations) Review Committee annually and attend sessions of the External and Policy Review Committees as and when requested by the relevant committee. This will allow the scrutiny process to impact upon issues and policy as they emerge; reducing the need for ‘rearguard’ action once initiatives become operational.

3	CfPS Recommendation	Bring Executive public accountability and transparency into more focus at scrutiny committees. Executive Members or the Leader (if appropriate) should be the main focus of scrutiny questioning and accountability sessions. This would take on a more parliamentary select committee approach. <i>[see section 8.3 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendations	<p>That seating arrangements reflect a ‘select committee’ style. Executive Members appearing at the Committee should sit in front of (rather than beside) any officers and receive advice from them as appropriate. The protocol should not allow for officers to deliver the bulk of presentations/responses. <i>[see sections 8.3 and 8.6 of CfPS report]</i></p> <p>That scrutiny committee meetings be publicised in advance and webcast.</p> <p>Greater use of topic-specific public consultation as part of, or in addition to reliance on Scrutiny Reviews.</p>
4	CfPS Recommendation	Review the responsibilities of the two scrutiny committees. This should aim to strengthen both committees but also to add clarity about their roles. Also consider the size of membership on both committees. <i>[see section 8.4 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	To increase membership of the Policy Review Committee and to make the Chair of this Committee the Council’s Lead Scrutiny Councillor.
5	CfPS Recommendation	Explore additional scrutiny of commercial and investment areas of the council. This could be through a finance and investment sub-committee that scrutinises budget, commercial activity, investment strategy and the medium-term financial plan. <i>[see section 8.5 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendations	<p>To establish a Finance and Investment sub-committee of the Executive that scrutinises budget, commercial activity, investment strategy and the medium-term financial plan. Whilst this is not a recommendation specifically within this Scrutiny Review’s TOR, the Review Group consider that such an Executive body would be a useful complement to Scrutiny’s own work and the work of other monitoring bodies such as the Audit Committee.</p> <p>To establish a new ‘External Review & Scrutiny Committee’ responsible for scrutiny of commercial activity and partnership arrangements (including wholly owned subsidiaries).</p> <p>That the Operations Review Committee is renamed to the ‘Internal Review & Scrutiny Committee’.</p> <p>That a new terms of reference be agreed for all three scrutiny committees reflecting the above changes, allowing for eight members of each committee [1 Chair, 1 Vice-Chair and 6 ordinary members].</p>

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6	CfPS Recommendation	Reduce the reliance on Officer presentations and Executive reports. Instead, scrutiny should set its objective for each subject to be considered and material presented or verbally reported by Executive Members, with Officer assistance. <i>[see section 8.6 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	That general service or departmental reports be circulated in advance for background. Presentations to meetings should reflect a particular angle, theme or comprise responses to a set of themed questions to be determined in advance by the committee.
7	CfPS Recommendation	Expand public participation and community involvement. This will strengthen scrutiny and its external focus. Develop the idea of holding more committee meetings in other parts of the Hertsmere District. <i>[see section 8.7 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendations	That scrutiny workshops, events or specific investigation meetings are held in locations around the Borough. To include a public participation session on the agenda at appropriate scrutiny meetings. To invite public submissions on relevant pieces of scrutiny work.
8	CfPS Recommendation	Consider further use of task and finish and other ‘set piece’ scrutiny techniques. Focused events or enquiry days can highlight major areas of policy development or community concern. <i>[see section 8.8 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	To adopt a one year pilot in which focussed scrutiny events, enquiry sessions and other established best practice techniques are implemented for ongoing scrutiny work. Input and advice can be sought from the Centre for Public Scrutiny to develop templates and formats for this work.
9	CfPS Recommendation	Adopt a Member and Officer scrutiny development and skills programme. This will support greater understanding of the role of scrutiny and improve its effectiveness. <i>[see section 8.9 of CfPS report]</i>
	Associated T&F Recommendation	That scrutiny Members undertake training to develop scrutiny questioning skills.