



Westminster Scrutiny Commission

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Classification: General Release

Title: Improving Policy & Scrutiny

Report of: Policy & Scrutiny Manager

Cabinet Member Portfolio: Leader of the Council

Wards Involved: All

Policy Context: Overview and Scrutiny

Financial Summary: n/a

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Prior to the March 2012 meeting of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, Members commissioned a study into examining best practice in overview and scrutiny. The report was presented to the commission and Members welcomed the recommendations laid out in the report and agreed to consult on the changes proposed in the report with their respective committees.
- 1.2 This presentation to the Commission is intended to outline the changes which have taken place as a result of the changes in 2012.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- Are there any recommendations which the Commission feel still need to be implemented by Policy & Scrutiny Committees?
- What are the things that can change in order to improve the operation and quality of outcomes for Policy & Scrutiny?

APPENDIX A: Recommendations from the 2012 report

APPENDIX B: Presentation

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Mark Ewbank x2636
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ewbank, M (2012) *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Policy and Scrutiny*.

Westminster Scrutiny Commission (2012) *Review of the structure and operation of
Policy and Scrutiny Committees at Westminster City Council*

APPENDIX A

Practical measures to create successful impact in P&S

1. P&S reviews and investigations could outline key recommendations and evaluation of success should be on the basis of **how exactly those recommendations improved public services or alleviated the problem addressed.**
2. P&S committees could take advantage of changes in legislation which allows committees to request formal, publishable responses from **cabinet** to committee recommendations, with satisfactory and meaningful explanations as to the reasons why recommendations have been either accepted or rejected and whether (and when) recommendations will be implemented.
3. P&S committees could take advantage of changes in legislation which allow committees to request formal, publishable responses from **partners** to committee recommendations, with satisfactory and meaningful explanations as to the reasons why recommendations have been either accepted or rejected and whether (and when) recommendations will be implemented.
4. P&S committees could draft **protocols of what co-operation is expected from council's partners**, in order to encourage those outside the authority to engage with the function and respond and follow-through on recommendations.
5. P&S committees could consider **timestamping** committee Agenda, to reflect the importance of items and ensure partners, officers and Members are given clear instruction as to timing of items.
6. P&S committees could consider **publishing both actions (requests) and recommendations (long-term policy changes)** alongside cabinet member updates, to raise concerns about any progress made on issues.

Further issues for consideration

Policy & Scrutiny amplifying the concerns of the public

7. P&S committees may seek to consider items for work programmes that have originated from the concerns of the public at **Area Forums**. Through local engagement, strategic issues can be identified and discussed in committee.
8. P&S committees could take greater advantage of the local presence of **academics, researchers and professionals** in order for the committee to receive evidence to inform discussions.
9. Where relevant and where evidence would not be anecdotal or unrepresentative, P&S committees may wish to consider inviting qualitative **evidence from service-users**.

10. P&S committees may wish to consider engaging with those outside the council through the **co-option of non-statutory, non-voting representatives**. The type of co-option may depend on the topic and focus of committee.

Policy & Scrutiny with efficient, constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge

11. P&S committees may wish to consider having fewer committees, which meet on a **more regular basis**

12. Where relevant and where it would be efficient to do so, a P&S committee may wish to consider how it could use **innovative methods of investigation** of issues, such as the use of ‘rapporteurs’, as laid out in Westminster City Council’s constitution.

13. In addition to scrutinising the work of the Leader of the council, the Westminster Scrutiny Commission could consider the following three main roles:

- 1) responding to escalated concerns from P&S committees
- 2) examining cross-cutting issues
- 3) and shaping risk management decisions of the council.

Policy & Scrutiny led with responsibility and independence

14. P&S committees could consider whether they wish to have a role in **selecting membership and operation**.

15. P&S chairman, responsible for areas that have services provided by the triborough arrangements, could meet or speak with their counterparts when necessary, in order to ensure that there are **no gaps in monitoring services and provision**.

16. P&S committees may wish to consider the role of Policy and Scrutiny and potential to **add value in a Tri-Borough context**.