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Classification: General Release

Title: **Developing the Role of Scrutiny**

Report of: Julia Corkey- Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

Cabinet Member Portfolio Leader of the Council-Councillor Nickie Aiken

Wards Involved: All

Policy Context: Civic Leadership and Responsibility

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents options for developing scrutiny's role and enhancing the role of ward members. The report considers the role of scrutiny in supporting the delivery of the new City for All strategy and suggests ways for greater openness, transparency and engagement in scrutiny for members, staff and residents. Strengthening the role of scrutiny would contribute to the aim of Civic leadership and Responsibility.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to consider whether it wishes to recommend:
1. Draft scrutiny work programmes should be shared with all ward members to enable them to contribute their concerns and ideas.
 2. Giving more prominence to the work programmes on the website and inviting contributions from the public regarding items/services which scrutiny should consider
 3. Scrutiny and cabinet members together should agree on up to three themes/areas where policy working groups should do detailed work and discuss this role with the Leader of the Council

4. The council should establish a system whereby staff (perhaps anonymously) and any member can suggest items for scrutiny at any stage in the year.
5. Actively invite residents to put questions to cabinet members at some scrutiny meetings to encourage engagement and attendance
6. Hold more scrutiny meetings outside of City Hall to make them more accessible to the public and advertise them.
7. Develop the role of ward members as part of scrutiny which could include formalising their contribution to committees as expert witnesses with special knowledge of their local areas and issues.
8. Any other measures that would strengthen the role of scrutiny which could be achieved within existing resources.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Leader of the Council has set out an ambitious agenda to take advantage of the expertise and knowledge of ward members, ensuring that back benchers have an earlier say in policy making. To take forward this agenda, this report proposes a number of ways in which the role of scrutiny could be further developed to engage ward members in contributing to policy development and building an open and transparent council.
- 3.2 Scrutiny is most effective when it contributes to policy development and works alongside the executive to support the delivery of the council's policy goals. Executive members already use scrutiny very effectively to make sure that there is transparency in, and early engagement with members in decision-making. For instance, the task group on air quality is working collaboratively with the cabinet members and will provide recommendations that will inform the new Air Quality Action Plan.
- 3.3 To build on this good practice, this paper invites your views on the options to:
 1. Provide greater transparency in how we develop scrutiny work programmes, putting Policy Working Groups at the heart of our approach
 2. Enable community involvement through more open and transparent decision-making
 3. Further develop the expertise and knowledge of members to contribute towards policy development
- 3.3.1 Provide greater transparency in how we develop scrutiny work programmes, putting Policy Working Groups at the heart of our approach

The scrutiny work programme is currently developed in consultation with the committee chairmen and informed by analysis of key risks and performance

issues from business plans, issues identified through the City Survey and through liaison with the cabinet member and executive directors. They also take account of any statutory responsibilities particular committees may have. Although this work is done on an annual cycle, there is scope for some of these processes to be ongoing to ensure scrutiny Chairmen have a “live feed” of concerns that may arise during the year.

To provide greater transparency and build engagement in the work of scrutiny, we could however do a number of things differently. Options could include:

- Sharing the draft work programmes in advance of the first committees of the municipal year with ward members so that they have an opportunity to contribute towards them.
- Publishing the work programmes in a more prominent place on the council’s website and providing the opportunity for residents and wider members of the public to suggest items for consideration directly to the chairmen.
- Support the chairmen in consultation with cabinet to identify with ward members a maximum of three key issues a year where Policy Working Groups could be established to make a direct contribution towards policy development. This would be possible within existing arrangements in which committees already have the discretion to have fewer committee meetings and use the time and officer resource to accommodate more focused policy working groups.
- Build on the good practice already established of publishing a scrutiny annual report to highlight the contribution made by scrutiny in contributing to policy development.
- Establish a mechanism whereby staff could anonymously notify scrutiny Chairmen of any service/quality concerns they may have.

3.3.2 Enabling community involvement through more open and transparent decision-making

Effective scrutiny has great potential to improve community involvement in council decision making and bring transparency to decisions taken by partners that affect our residents. Scrutiny committees are well attended when there is an item of special interest that we actively promote such as the proposed pedestrian/cycle bridge from Nine Elms to Pimlico which drew approximately 100 residents and other stakeholders to the meeting.

To further develop the role scrutiny can play in contributing to community involvement in decision making, we could:

- Actively invite residents to put written questions to cabinet members in advance of scrutiny meetings.
- Hold more scrutiny meetings outside of City Hall to make committees more accessible to the public and advertise them.
- Develop the role of ward members as part of scrutiny which could include formalising their contribution to committees as expert witnesses with special knowledge of their local areas and issues.

3.3.3 Further developing the expertise and knowledge of members to contribute towards policy development

A better shared understanding of the role and potential of scrutiny can contribute to more effective and confident scrutiny, which in turn can support the delivery of the council's wider policy goals.

Should the Commission agree, we could further develop this existing training to provide an opportunity to work up the detail of some of the options put forward in this paper ahead of a fuller training programme being developed with the new scrutiny chairmen and ward members.

We could use the first cycle of the municipal year to carry out a development needs assessment to identify, particularly from new chairmen and committee members, which areas of development would provide the most effective support for scrutiny members to carry out their new potentially enhanced role.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 In conclusion, Members are asked to consider the options discussed in this paper and any other options they wish to consider, which would enhance the role of scrutiny and contribute to the desire for more open and transparent government that engages both ward councillors and our residents in decision making.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact Muge Dindjer x2636
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