

Item No. 5.	Classification: Open	Date: 24 April 2023	Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Report title:		Southwark Council CfGS Scrutiny Improvement Review and Action Plan	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		N/a	
From:		Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That overview and scrutiny committee notes the letter from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) arising from the scrutiny improvement review commissioned by the council (Appendix 1 to the report).
2. That the overview and scrutiny committee notes the proposed Action Plan (Appendix 2) and considers which of the actions to take forward. Paragraph 7 of the report sets out proposed priority areas for 2023/24. The main recommendations arising from the review are set out at paragraph 9 of the report for ease of reference.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny were commissioned by the Council in August 2022 to provide a health check of the council's scrutiny function and to indicate where improvements could be made.
4. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny undertook a scrutiny improvement review of the council's scrutiny function in September and October 2022, and issued its draft letter to the Council in December 2022. All members of the council were provided with a copy of the draft letter in January 2023. The final version of the letter attached as Appendix 1 was issued in April 2023 following feedback from the council.
5. An action plan has been developed based on the guidance and recommended actions arising from the scrutiny improvement review (Appendix 2 of the report). This report highlights the proposed actions being recommended for implementation within the 2023-24 municipal year.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. The CfGS letter identifies areas the council may wish to focus on to improve its scrutiny function. The CfGS has made 11 recommendations (set out in

full at paragraph 9 of this report), and has also made a number of suggestions on areas where the scrutiny process could be enhanced and improved (see CfGS letter or action plan for the complete list of recommendations, enhancements and other actions). Due to the number of suggested actions the council may wish to adopt, it is proposed that agreed actions are implemented over a 2 year period.

7. The proposed priority areas for focus and implementation in the 2023-24 municipal year are:

- Recommendation 1 – strengthening collaborative relationships between scrutiny, cabinet and directors.
- Suggested enhancement – developing a working agreement between members and officers.
- Recommendation 3 – providing development support and training for officers across the council.
- Suggested enhancement – using work planning and scoping to consider the best methods for each review.
- Suggested enhancement – developing an approach to pre-decision scrutiny.
- Recommendation 9 – review of call-in procedure.
- Recommendation 10 – focus on smaller set of high quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews (SMART recommendations).
- Recommendation 11 – further skills development for chairs and vice-chairs.

8. The adoption of these recommendations and enhancements will have significant immediate impact on the council's scrutiny function. Many of the other recommended actions highlighted in the scrutiny improvement review will also be implemented as scrutiny undertakes its work during the 2023/24 year.

9. **Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendations**

- **Recommendation 1:** Strengthen collaborative relationships between scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny. Earlier and more systematic involvement of portfolio holders and Directors would enable scrutiny to identify issues, trends, and topics where it can focus for accountability and impact.

- **Recommendation 2:** Enable the scrutiny team to take a more strategic role in managing the relationships between different parts of the Council. This offers further opportunities to raise the profile and impact of scrutiny.
 - **Recommendation 3:** Provide development support and training for Officers across the Council to refresh and enhance their understanding and appreciation of scrutiny.
 - **Recommendation 4:** Review how reports and information is supplied to scrutiny – so that it supports the scrutiny objective, is not excessively detailed and is understandable by Members.
 - **Recommendation 5:** Developing a systematic approach to mapping opportunities for community engagement and collaborative approaches including a methodology for identifying local issues for residents.
 - **Recommendation 6:** Review and enhance work planning process for the Committee and the Commissions, building on current practice by using insights from this review. Consider the systematic use of work planning tools to assist with prioritising issues.
 - **Recommendation 7:** Use member education sessions, masterclasses, and pre-briefing to support Members to be ready to engage with scrutiny topics and Council plans.
 - **Recommendation 8:** Consider the use of task and finish group work and other alternative scrutiny arrangements to ensure the most effective use of time and resources and to deliver maximum impact.
 - **Recommendation 9:** Review the call-in procedure based on benchmarking and examples of good practice.
 - **Recommendation 10:** Focus on smaller sets of high-quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews.
 - **Recommendation 11:** Further skills development support is offered for the key roles of Chairs and Vice-Chairs – to support them to develop their approach to leading scrutiny and to reflect on their personal style and learning.
10. Actions arising from Recommendations 1, 2 and 9, if adopted, will require consultation and agreement with cabinet / lead cabinet member / Corporate Management Team (CMT). In the case of recommendation 9, this may be subject to formal approval processes, if changes to the council constitution are required.

Resource implications

11. The actions arising from the proposed recommendations will require

additional resource in terms of officer and member time, as well as additional officer time to support the process. The introduction of pre-meetings will be of significant impact.

12. Meetings / initiatives that take place outside of the council's main offices may incur cost for venue hire, refreshments, hiring of audio/visual equipment if necessary.

Legal implications

13. There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations of the CfGS.

Financial implications

14. Actions arising from the scrutiny improvement review that require financial expenditure will be contained within the existing Member Development and Scrutiny budgets. A bid for further resources will be made if necessary, particularly in respect of supporting meetings / initiatives taking place outside of the council's main offices (paragraph 12 above).

Consultation

15. All members of the council were sent a copy of the CfGS, draft letter issued in December 2022.
16. Consultation with CMT was undertaken on 4 April 2023. Further consultation is planned with cabinet/lead cabinet member/CMT as appropriate, particularly around recommendations 1, 2 and 9, if agreed by overview and scrutiny committee.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	CfGS Scrutiny Improvement Review Feedback report letter
Appendix 2	Scrutiny Improvement Review Action Plan

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Doreen Forrester Brown, Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	
Report Author	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny	
Version	Final	
Dated	14 April 2023	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistance Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team / Scrutiny Team	14 April 2023	