

Item No. 7.	Classification: Open	Date: 4 October 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 it wishes to take forward. The main recommendations arising from the review are set out at paragraph 14 of this report for ease of reference.
3. That the overview and scrutiny committee notes the additional recommendations of the opposition group members on the committee, set out at paragraph 16 of the report and considers which of these recommendations it wishes to take forward.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

7. The overview and scrutiny committee received the CfGS Scrutiny Improvement Review letter at its meeting held on 24 April 2023. The letter was presented by Ian Parry Head of Consultancy, CfGS.
8. The committee agreed to defer consideration of the recommendations arising from the scrutiny improvement review to its next meeting.
9. A number of recommendations were put forward by Councillor Irina von Wiese to be considered as part of the scrutiny improvement review process. The additional recommendations are set out at paragraph 16 of the report.
10. The overview and scrutiny committee noted the guidance issued by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny for English local authorities on the use of call-in at its meeting held on 4 July 2023. The committee also agreed to a 'review of the call-in procedure based on benchmarking and examples of good practice' recommendation 9 of the scrutiny improvement review report.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. The CfGS letter identifies areas the council may wish to focus on to improve its scrutiny function. The CfGS has made 11 recommendations following its review (set out at paragraph 14 of this report), and has also made a number of suggestions on areas where the scrutiny process could be enhanced and improved. Due to the number of recommendations, suggested enhancements and actions the council may wish to adopt, it is proposed that agreed actions are implemented over a 2 year period (see CfGS letter or action plan for the complete list of recommendations, enhancements and other actions).
12. The proposed priority areas for implementation in 2023-24 municipal year are:
 - Recommendation 1 – strengthening collaborative relationships between scrutiny, cabinet and directors. Implementation of this recommendation will provide greater direction for the scrutiny function in terms of setting its work programme and supporting the council in delivering its agenda.
 - Suggested enhancement – developing a working agreement between members and officers. This will provide clarity and expectations for scrutiny members, cabinet members and officers when involved with the scrutiny process.
 - Recommendation 3 – providing development support and training for officers across the council. The council is keen to raise awareness of scrutiny across the council, which will enable a greater understanding around the role of scrutiny, and officers will be better able to factor the scrutiny process into their work as appropriate.

- Suggested enhancement – using work planning and scoping to consider the best methods for each review. The council is keen to maximise best use of Members time and effectiveness when undertaking reviews.
 - Suggested enhancement – developing an approach to pre-decision scrutiny. The scrutiny function is keen to assist with the development of policy areas.
 - Recommendation 9 – review of call-in procedure. A review of the call-in procedure will be timely in light of new guidance shortly to be issued by CfGS.
 - Recommendation 10 – focus on smaller set of high quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews (SMART recommendations). This will improve tracking of implementation of recommendations.
 - Recommendation 11 – further skills development for chairs and vice-chairs. This will enable the development of higher quality agenda items, and improving on take away actions from meetings.
13. Many of the actions detailed in the action plan will be implemented as scrutiny undertakes its work during the 2023/24 year.

14. **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.
15. Actions arising from Recommendations 1, 2 and 9, if adopted, will require consultation and agreement with cabinet / lead cabinet member / CMT.
16. In addition to the recommendations set out in the scrutiny improvement review letter, the opposition group members on the committee have requested the following recommendations are considered as part of the scrutiny improvement review:
1. To remove the requirement for a councillor to be a sitting member of the overview and scrutiny committee to call-in a decision, allowing any three councillors to request a decision to be called-in.
 2. To establish a recommendations monitor to be maintained by the scrutiny team in order to track the progress of recommendations.
 3. To treat the recommendations of the scrutiny improvement review as a priority area in the council's action plan.
 4. For minutes of the overview and scrutiny committee meetings to be submitted to council assembly, to be moved by the chair, and to be scrutinised and agreed by all members.
 5. To offer the position of the OSC chair to a member of the main opposition group of the council.

Resource implications

17. The actions arising from the proposed recommendations may require additional resource in terms of officer and member time, as well as additional officer time to support the process.
18. Meetings / initiatives that take place outside of the council's main offices may incur cost for venue hire, refreshments, hiring of audio/visual equipment.

Legal implications

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

Financial implications

20. The majority of the actions arising from the scrutiny improvement will be contained within existing resources. As detailed in paragraph 18 of the report, meetings / initiatives that take place outside of the council's main offices may incur cost. If the recommendation is agreed, a bid for additional resources will need to be made, and will be subject to approval.

Consultation

21. All members of the council were sent a copy of the CfGS, draft letter issued in December 2022.
22. Consultation with CMT was undertaken on 4 April 2023. Further consultation is planned as appropriate around recommendations 1, 2 and 9, if adopted 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	26 September 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			26 September 2023