

Southwark CfGS Scrutiny Improvement Review – Action Plan

This document sets out the actionable findings, recommendations and suggested enhancements arising from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) scrutiny improvement review and has been created to track agreed actions.

CfGS Issues identified / Recommendations and suggested enhancements to scrutiny process		Para.	How can this be achieved / Proposed actions	Adopted? (Y/N)	Action by / When
Scrutiny has the conditions for success (Feedback Report Letter – Section 1)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Shared working agreement to manage and avoid conflict.	1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement reached through discussion between political group whips. • Agreement included in a protocol 		
	Sharing of internal and external knowledge via internal sources (member/officer experiences both internally and externally) to embed into current practices and approaches.	1.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify individuals who may wish to share their experiences. • Creation of feedback forms/questionnaire. • Picking up through discussion via internal briefings around role and work of scrutiny. 		

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	Challenges at personal and system level (supporting development of new councillors)	1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify appropriate training and learning and development needs from the outset. Essential training delivered by scrutiny experts (CfGS). Development through Member learning and development programme. 		
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.					
Enhancement: Developing a working agreement between Members and Officers to strengthen collaborative relationships, clarify mutual expectations and manage potential areas of conflict.					
Enhancement: Using benchmarking and share good practice case studies to promote examples of 'what good scrutiny looks like' to inform reviews and design challenge questions.					

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Officer support and organisational culture (Feedback Report Letter – Section 2)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Training and Development support for Officers around the work of scrutiny and the scrutiny function.	2.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section included on the ‘Source’ around the role of scrutiny, including legislative background / references to the constitution. Briefings undertaken at Departmental Management Team meetings explaining the function and providing opportunity for questions. Clearer guidance to be made available/ issued to officers participating in scrutiny meeting/review. 		
	Capturing essential components of meetings in a streamline way that meets expectations and needs of the accountability process (to enable a reduction of officer time spent on producing minutes of meetings).	2.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and presentation of effective summaries. Clearer scoping and key lines of enquiry, aligned to purpose of meeting. Chair summarising discussion and main points at end of each item. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Challenges around providing reports and material supporting the work of the committee and commissions.	2.7 / 2.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer articulation of scope and focus of topics when requesting information. • Concise reports • Reports being produced in time for circulation with agenda to allow for sufficient preparation and reading time. • Managing changing expectations or realignment of key lines of enquiry as a scrutiny review progresses • Accessing information from different parts of the Council in a co-ordinated way. • Ensuring members are familiar with reports/subject matter before designing questions and review enquiries. • Development of working agreement / protocol to confirm agreed way of working. 		
	Repositioning the scrutiny function to emphasise the significance of the strategic elements of the role.	2.11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing vision statement and promoting principles. • Wider range of meetings between scrutiny chairs with senior officers and leaders in the council. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Repositioning the scrutiny function to emphasise the significance of the strategic elements of the role cont.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working strategically across directorates to access cross-cutting information and insights. • Sponsoring the development of enhanced scoping, key line of enquiry and recommendation tools. • Articulating the purpose and added value of scrutiny for wider Council delivery. • Focusing on trends from national policy agendas and direction to inform scrutiny. • Highlighting wider examples of innovation and good practice for scrutiny. • Supporting officers to prepare for scrutiny and aligning their input with the needs of the committee. • Developing a strategic road map for scrutiny with a refreshed focus on impact. • Horizon scanning. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Repositioning scrutiny function through a development plan	2.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development plan prepared with provision of support, including coaching and mentoring. Consider further resourcing issues to support greater strategic working. 		
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.					
Enhancement: Establishing cross-party pre-meetings for Scrutiny Committees and Commissions as an additional way to support the process.					
Collaborative approach to scrutiny (Feedback Report Letter – Section 3)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Engaging with local partners and stakeholders to identify key lines of enquiry that can interrogate the impact of local decisions.	3.1 / 3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopting more systematic approaches to community engagement and the identification of local experience. Identifying examples of innovation / good practice from other local authorities. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Addressing potential barriers to greater collaboration	3.3 / 3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring different venues for evidence gathering sessions. • Access to IT resources for virtual participation. • Identifying language and literacy need. • Considering timing of meetings/sessions. • Utilising community and voluntary sector to enhance collaborations and support to local people. 		
	Ensuring good communication between different parts of the council when engaging with local partners.	3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tapping into the networks of senior officers and cabinet members to identify organisations. • Keeping cabinet members/senior officers informed of direct engagement with partners. 		
	Mapping of local specialists and partners in Southwark and facilitating expert support for scrutiny members to scope questions and enquiry lines.	3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with key officers to develop a mapping document. • Arrange meetings with chairs and key officers to scope questions and lines of enquiry. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Enhancing understanding of Health Scrutiny, in a changing context.	3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange training and briefings for members involved with health scrutiny to keep them up to date with changing regulations and best practice. 		
	Co-opted Members on scrutiny commissions – enhancing their role	3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce document setting out roles and expectations of co-opted members. • Provide briefings and training for co-opted members as appropriate. • Schedule in annual feedback on co-opted member experience. 		
	Adopting creative approaches to scrutiny, outside of formal meeting process.	3.9	<p>Consider appropriate approach to evidence gathering – Options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny in a day • Social Return on Investment participatory scrutiny reviews • Field Trips • Stakeholder mapping and scoping • Following a fictional service user through the system to map impacts, integration opportunities and barriers • Task and Finish Groups 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Adopting creative approaches to scrutiny, outside of formal meeting process cont.	3.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of CfGS published resources 		
Recommendation 5: Developing a systematic approach to mapping opportunities for community engagement and collaborative approaches including a methodology for identifying local issues for residents.					
Enhancement: Extending the use of creative approaches to scrutiny in Southwark. Use work planning and scoping to consider the best methods for each review. Share examples of good practice and creative methods by creating a menu of different methods available to the Scrutiny Committee and Commissions.					
Enhancement: Supporting the co-opted Members through a refreshed support programme identifying their learning and development needs to get the most from their contributions.					
Scrutiny's focus and workplan (Feedback Report Letter – Section 4)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Strengthening the work planning process	4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of a consistent work planning tool to support each body to create a balanced work plan. Focus on key issues where scrutiny can make a significant impact on local people. Close working with senior officers and cabinet members to understand the most challenging issues around council delivery and outcomes. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Strengthening the work planning process cont.	4.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying areas where there are already robust forms of accountability and scrutiny, avoiding replication or where added value will be minimal. Highlighting issues that are high priorities for residents and that reflect their concerns. Focusing on only two or three substantive issues per meeting. Link work planning to the scoping process. 		
	Improving scoping process for individual reviews	4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise support from officers to map topics and identification of potential issues to scrutinise. Acknowledging areas that are directly under Council control and those where there is only influence or external control – key lines of enquiry and focused scrutiny questions can then emerge. 		
	Accessing, assessing and triangulating different forms of data.	4.5	<p>Receive evidence/review as appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The voice, concerns, and experience of local people. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Accessing, assessing and triangulating different forms of data cont.	4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and decisions of senior leaders. Frontline experience of delivering services. Evidence of outcomes and impact – including finance, quality, risk and sustainability. Wider survey of literature on good practice, policy frameworks and research. 		
	Receiving support to design challenging questions that highlight and probe different sources.	4.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify training for Members on key question skills. Liaise with officers on relevant subject matter with a view to preparing questions. 		
	Integrating frontline experiences to highlight the performance and quality of service.	4.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore how to achieve this at CfGS facilitated workshop. Consult with other local authorities around this process. 		
	Scrutinising Council performance for the benefit of accountability.	4.7 / 4.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review wording of OSC Procedure Rule 5.1(b) to clarify scrutiny role not related to performance management of individual councillors and chief officers. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Strengthening the focus of cabinet member interviews to enable effective preparation.	4.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make clear to cabinet members, areas of interest in advance. • Provide cabinet members with questions in advance. 		
	Agreeing formal process for pre-decision scrutiny	4.10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw upon CfGS case studies and guidance around pre-decision scrutiny. • Establish in advance emerging issues where pre-decision scrutiny may be appropriate. • Consider process(s) for enabling identification of issues. 		
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.					
Enhancement: Continue to develop an approach to pre-decision scrutiny in collaboration with Cabinet and Officers.					
Enhancement: Supporting Members to design effective challenge questions using triangulated evidence and data to enhance accountability.					

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Scrutiny committee structure and scheduling (Feedback Report Letter – Section 5)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Considering the use of task and finish groups as part of a wider spectrum of creative methods.	5.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish situations / circumstances where task and finish groups might be appropriate and feed into the scrutiny process. 		
	Managing scrutiny workload.	5.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of work planning, prioritisation, member education sessions and pre-meetings to manage demands. 		
	Scrutiny Call-in Process and enhancing the call-in procedure.	5.6 / 5.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review current call-in process against the CfGS guidance once issued. 		
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.					
Scrutiny's output and impact (Feedback Report Letter – Section 6)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Developing effective recommendations and tracking their impact.	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus recommendations on a small set of priorities. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Developing effective recommendations and tracking their impact cont.	6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring recommendations are clear and focused using SMART approaches (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, and timetabled). Testing draft recommendations with officers to ensure issues are understood and factually correct. Reviewing the impact and learning from recommendations over set time periods through regular agenda items. Revisiting previous scrutiny reviews to identify work that has already been done to inform future scrutiny. Ensuring a clear protocol with Cabinet to agree the process for considering and responding to scrutiny recommendations. Sharing recommendations with external partners, where applicable. Collecting additional evidence and feedback to identify the impact of recommendations. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Evidence of tracking recommendations dispersed across a range of documents.	6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify suitable central tracking tool to maintain an overview of recommendations. Liaise with other local authorities to establish how they manage this. 		
	Taking a joined up system wide approach to cross-cutting issues.	6.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross cutting-issues being reserved to overview and scrutiny committee. Commission chairs are part of its membership. 		
	Development of a 'Mission Statement' to raise awareness and esteem of scrutiny process.	6.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaison with other local authorities. Working with scrutiny members, cabinet members, officers and other stakeholders in developing a statement. 		
	Scrutiny holding itself to account for its work and impact.	6.7 / 6.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual report process Accessing self-assessment tools available from CfGS to support review process. 		
Recommendation 10: Focus on smaller sets of high-quality recommendations from scrutiny reviews.					
Enhancement: Enhance the formal system for tracking recommendations over time – identify the impact and learning from specific recommendations as well as factors that produce effective recommendations.					

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Enhancement: Consider cross-cutting issues as a regular part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work plan and agenda, bringing together strategic themes from across the four Commissions to identify opportunities for system wide working and accountability.					
Enhancement: Create a strategic summary statement on the purpose and contribution of scrutiny in Southwark. Use this to map impact.					
Enhancement: Use a self-assessment tool to support the annual review and evaluation of scrutiny.					
Chairing, member development and meeting preparation (Feedback Report Letter – Section 7)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Continuing chair development and direct support to strengthen the role.	7.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with chairs and establishing development needs and arranging training as appropriate. Providing chairs with quality briefings and information to enable them to keep abreast of subject matters and relevant considerations. 		
	Member education, master classes' and briefing sessions outside of formal scrutiny sessions.	7.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use scoping and work planning tools to identify and schedule briefing sessions. 		

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Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Pre-meetings before formal scrutiny sessions to co-ordinate activities.	7.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange pre-meetings as appropriate. 		
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.					
Enhancement: Extending the development process for Members to enable them to refresh their knowledge and understanding of the role of scrutiny – this should include learning activities such as workshops supported with materials and case studies.					
Enhancement: Use pre-meetings to prepare for scrutiny sessions by reviewing the key lines of enquiry and coordinating approaches to questions and evidence. Pre-meetings can facilitate teamwork between Members of the Committee or Commission.					
Enhancement: Provide Scrutiny Members with the essential core knowledge to be sufficiently effective in the scrutiny task through briefings, education sessions or 'master classes' for complex topics.					

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Public engagement (Feedback Report Letter – Section 8)					
Issues identified / proposed actions arising	Exploring and experimenting with ways to allow greater access, openness, and involvement with the public	8.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site visits in the community. • Inviting the public to offer ideas for work plans. • Use of social media channels for resident input. • Communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny. 		

Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny

Dated: 14 April 2023