

POLICY REVIEW DISCUSSION & GUIDANCE

Committee name	Children, Families & Education Select Committee
Officer reporting	Ryan Dell, Democratic Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 – Guidance on undertaking policy reviews
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To discuss ideas on suitable review topics by the Committee. To assist, this report provides guidance on the Committee's remit, an overview of how reviews can be undertaken, potential new and previous review topics and a scorecard to use to assess.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the guidance on undertaking policy reviews in Appendix 1;**
- 2. Seek to make use of the scorecard attached in Appendix 1 (Annex A) to assess any policy review topic ideas;**
- 3. Develop a single or shortlist of potential topic ideas over the coming months or year for officers to scope further and report back to the Committee on feasibility.**
- 4. Delegate to the Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with the Chair (and in consultation with the Opposition Lead) any further agreement on review topic selection as required.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Committee's direct remit of activity

This Select Committee's specific Terms of Reference are set out below. This sets the parameters (or service areas) in which the Committee can undertake a policy review, present findings, request reports and provide direct input on matters:

Portfolio(s)	Directorate	Service Areas
Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education	Children's Services	Children's Social Care (incl. safeguarding & corporate parenting)
		Corporate Parenting Panel
		Prevention & Youth Justice (incl. youth services, stronger families and adolescent mental health)
		Education & SEND (incl. Adult & Community Learning, Skills, Lifelong Learning, Music Services and School Travel)

	Adult Services & Health	Children and Family Support Services (incl. Early Years and Children's Centres)
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This Select Committee will establish a Panel to support strong oversight of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities. The Committee may appoint 3 Members to this Panel based on political balance. Membership may include non-Cabinet Members not on the Committee. The Committee may also appoint relevant Council officers and other external stakeholders to the Panel and agree its chairship and operation. In agreeing its operation, the Committee will provide for the Panel not to be able to establish any other sub-group or body to carry out its responsibilities.

Selecting a topic and undertaking a review

Appendix 1 attached provides detailed guidance on selecting topics and undertaking any policy review. A Scrutiny Topic Scorecard is provided to assist with this. Further guidance can be sought from Democratic Services.

Previous policy reviews

It is advised not to review an area that has either been recently reviewed by a committee or is subject to internal review or planned service transformation to avoid duplication and additional resourcing. A list of past reviews over the last few years, pertinent to this Committee's remit is shown below for information:

2024/25

- Persistent absenteeism
(due to be considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 24 July 2025](#))

2022/23

- [Stronger Families Hub](#)
(considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 09 November 2023](#))

2021/22

- [Adult and Community Learning Service](#)
(considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 11 November 2021](#))

2020/21

- [Making the Council More Autism Friendly](#)
(considered at the Virtual [Cabinet meeting on 22 April 2021](#))

2019/20

- [Combating the homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying of young people in Hillingdon](#)
(considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 20 June 2019](#))

2017/18

- [Supporting Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities in their Early Years](#)
(considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 15 February 2018](#))
- [Criminalisation of Looked After Children \(LAC\)](#)
(considered at the [Cabinet meeting on 25 January 2018](#))

Possible topics under current consideration

Members may wish to present their own new topic ideas at the meeting and provide details of what particular aspects merit a review to assist officers in any scoping exercise.

It is important to differentiate between “information reports” you may wish to come before a committee to look at a service and then “review topics” which are more in-depth reviews resulting in a final report and the focus of this report.

As mentioned in Appendix 1, one way to ‘test out’ a potential policy review topic would be to add it as an ‘information report’ to an upcoming meeting on your work programme, to probe the matter further with Council officers or other stakeholders and ascertain whether it merits a fuller review – again perhaps running it through the Scrutiny Topic Scorecard provided.

Implications on related Council policies

A statutory role of the Select Committees is to undertake reviews and make recommendations to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council’s policy and direction. Reviews selected should be consistent with the Council’s policy and budgetary framework.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

None at this stage, pending any findings and recommendations devised in the final report.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.

Appendix 1 - Guidance on undertaking policy reviews

Over the years, Hillingdon's overview and scrutiny committees have undertaken successful in-depth reviews of Council services and policies. This has resulted in a number of positive changes locally, with some also affecting policy at a national level. Such committees engage Councillors in a wide range of Council activity and build a greater understanding about service provision to residents.

Policy reviews generally seek to:

1. Address a [significant] matter affecting the Borough
2. Seek to improve the delivery and/or efficiency of local services
3. Consider changes to policies or procedures to improve outcomes to residents/users

REVIEW PHASES

The typical phases of a review are as follows and set out further below:

- 1 Selection of topic
- 2 Scoping the review / setting out objectives
- 3 Witness & evidence stage (this is the main activity)
- 4 Findings and Draft recommendations (possible early report draft)
- 5 Final report approved by Committee
- 6 Referred to Cabinet for consideration
- 7 Monitoring the implementation of recommendations once approved / amended by Cabinet at meetings, i.e. in six months

1. Selection of topic

It is always best to sound out and check the feasibility of potential review topics early on, as there will be lots of ideas coming forward and often knowing what topic will add most value will be difficult to gauge at this stage. It is important not to generalise, e.g. a review into waste services.

It may also not be known whether a topic is currently under review by the Cabinet or Council officers or part of a planned service transformation in due course. All of this and other factors need to be investigated and in particular, any duplication of review activity should not take place.

Whilst most policy reviews last a number of months, not all policy review ideas will suit this and may benefit from a single meeting review. It really depends on the scope of the review. If very narrow, i.e. a particular service policy, then a single meeting review may suffice. If a review seeks to look at an entire way a service operates then a number of months may be required to ensure you can undertake all your witness sessions and secure the necessary evidence and information before you formulate your findings.

Ideas for review topics can come from a number of sources including:

- Committee Members
- Cabinet Members
- Council officers
- External partners/ organisations
- Residents
- Ombudsman findings

When Councillors or the Committee itself considers a potential review topic, it is recommended running it through the Scrutiny Topic Scorecard (see Annex A). This gives you the opportunity to 'score' topics based upon their impacts under the following criteria:

Resident focused	Influence	Achievable
Correct remit	New	Wider support
Drives improvement	Drives transformation and efficiency	National impact

Another way to consider a potential review topic, is to add this as an information item at an upcoming meeting on your work programme, to probe the matter further with Council officers and ascertain whether it merits a fuller review – again perhaps running it through the Scorecard above.

It is strongly advised that one review topic is undertaken at any one time, given resources.

2. Scoping report

Once a topic is agreed upon by the Committee, then officers will prepare a scoping report setting out the objectives of the review for your consideration. The scoping report will show how the review can be timetabled and structured, i.e. through themed witness sessions, along with details of potential witnesses and other contextual information to get the review started, e.g. lines of enquiry or questioning of witnesses.

The scoping report is a 'live' document owned by the Committee. Should the review's focus change mid-review, then the scoping document and its objectives can be adapted.

3. Witness and evidence stage

Ultimately, the Committee's efforts are at their best when external witnesses and residents participate, adding value to intelligence gathering and findings. In support of this, Committees have undertaken a variety of both formal and informal activity "in meetings" and "outside meetings". It is important to pull together a broad evidence base for any potential findings later on. Additionally, the ability for Councillors to bring their 'local' insight is highly valuable. Activities the Committee can undertake include:

- Surveys/ social media
- Promotion of review to seek views
- Invite the relevant Cabinet Member to attend for their views
- Question key council officers
- Hold informal workshops
- Networking events, e.g. with partners
- Have closed meetings, i.e. confidential, such as social care clients
- Commission reports from council officers / externally
- Request data and intelligence on the topic
- Visits to other local authorities
- Undertake site visits within the Borough or council facilities
- Appoint experts or advisors to join the Committee throughout its review
- Selecting the best range of witnesses to get a real user / resident perspectives
- Invite national experts in their field

Whilst information will be provided to Councillors, it may be helpful when preparing for this stage of a review, that Councillors:

- Prepare their draft questions for each witness in advance;
- Read a witness bio or find out more about their organisation;
- Do their own additional research on the topic - you may find something officers don't!
- Use their network of councillors in other local authorities to seek views;
- Tell residents at Surgeries / Ward Walks about your review, get their thoughts.

4. Findings and draft recommendations & 5. Final Report

After hearing from witnesses and receiving evidence, the Committee then will meet to pull together all the information and shape its collective findings, i.e. what needs to be improved or changed as a result.

The Committee will form 'draft' recommendations from this, which consistent with the Protocol on Cabinet and Scrutiny Relations, are usually shared with the Cabinet Member for their feedback and valuable insight.

In developing any recommendation, the Committee should bear in mind the following:

- Meet the initial aims / objectives of the review
- Be SMART, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
- Not be a short-term fix, but a lasting outcome
- Consider the financial aspect, e.g. cost neutral, provide savings or if at a cost, then affordable – and if possible aligned with the MTFF (budget planning process)
- Be based on a broad evidence base as possible and 'user or resident' insight
- Not create additional bureaucracy, e.g. if it relates to a policy, then to seek to review or amend existing policies (unless there is an absolute imperative for a new policy)
- If publicity or wider engagement or education is recommended, to target such communications as best as possible rather than generally
- Consider 'conclusions' as well as any specific recommendations.

Around this time, the Democratic Services Officer supporting the Committee will advise further on findings and drafting recommendations. Throughout this process, their role is critical to the Committee, to guide Members and secure the information and any witness activity that Members wish to undertake. They also work with the Chairman to bring the final draft report for the Committee to approve before it is scheduled to Cabinet.

6. Referred to Cabinet & 7. Monitoring of recommendations

The Committee's report will be shared with the Leader and Cabinet Member and scheduled to a Cabinet meeting as soon as possible. There is a legal requirement for any such report to be considered by the Cabinet.

Should Cabinet approve the Committee's recommendations, then they become official policy and officers are charged with implementing them.

A post report review is undertaken in say 6 months or a years' time to see how the Committee's recommendations have been implemented. This is scheduled on your work programme.

Annex A – Scrutiny Topic Scorecard 2022-2026

Topic	Criteria scores showing 1-5 (5 being the highest, 0 the lowest). Then add up the total score. The higher the better review.									
	Resident focused	Correct remit	Influence	New	Achievable	Wider support	Drives improvement	Delivers transformation and efficiency	National impact	Score

See criteria descriptions overleaf...

Detailed criteria to assess review scoring (5 being the highest, 0 the lowest)
Resident-focused – The topic will have high impact on residents and the community, with public interest and scope for making a positive difference (can be universal or a targeted group of people or an area of the Borough e.g. young people or a particular town centre)
Correct remit – A topic that is clearly covered in the Committee's Terms of Reference and does it cut clearly into the domain of other Committees (unless a cross-cutting brief). If it does, then see if you can narrow the focus of the topic.
Influence - A topic that relates to a service, event or issue in which the Council is in control of, has a significant stake in or influence over the matter, e.g. with partners.
New - A new, fresh topic preferably. One which has not previously been reviewed by a Committee in the last 2-3 years, or which is not currently being reviewed by another Committee or internally by Cabinet Members and Officers, e.g. through service transformation.
Achievable – A topic that is not open ended. One where the Committee's work programme can accommodate the review. Where there is likely to be a good level of expertise and information to draw on to complete. Does the topic need to be narrowed to make it more achievable?
Wider support - A topic that is likely to receive buy-in from the Committee and wider Council, e.g. Cabinet Members, Officers. Or support is welcome from partner organisations to review the matter.
Drives improvement - A topic where performance levels of a service have dropped on a consistent basis, or the contractor is not performing against agreed standards or there are significant (evidenced) complaints or feedback from residents on the matter.
Delivers transformation and efficiency – a topic in support of the Council budgetary objectives, any areas where service re-modelling is under consideration in the <u>medium to longer-term</u> , that with Members' insight can help to deliver future savings, efficiencies and value for money services to residents. A topic where new ways of working could be adopted to benefit service delivery.
National impact – A topic where emerging or recent legislation mean that it would be timely to review the matter to ensure Hillingdon Council is well prepared. Or a topic, that whilst Hillingdon focussed, could potentially be of benefit to other local councils or governmental authorities.

