

THE ROLE OF POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEES

Committee name	Residents, Education and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Neil Fraser – Democratic Services
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide Committee Members with information about:

1. The general purpose and role of the Council's policy overview and scrutiny arrangements;
2. The Committee's updated remit, i.e. Terms of Reference agreed by Council on 10 May;
3. How reviews are undertaken and ways in which Members can add value to their findings; and
4. Consider potential next review topic ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the information within the report;**
- 2. Consider potential next review topic ideas and;**
- 3. Provide any comments or feedback to Democratic Services.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Larger local councils are required to have more than one overview and scrutiny committee as part of their core governance arrangements. The structure is local choice and most unitary councils have a number of such committees usually structured around cross-cutting service areas, engaging Councillors not in the Cabinet in a variety of activity. Their role is similar to that of Select Committees in Parliament, broadly to:

1. To assist in the development of Council policy;
2. To question and evaluate the actions of the Executive, both before and after decisions are taken; and
3. Have the power to make reports and recommendations on such matters.

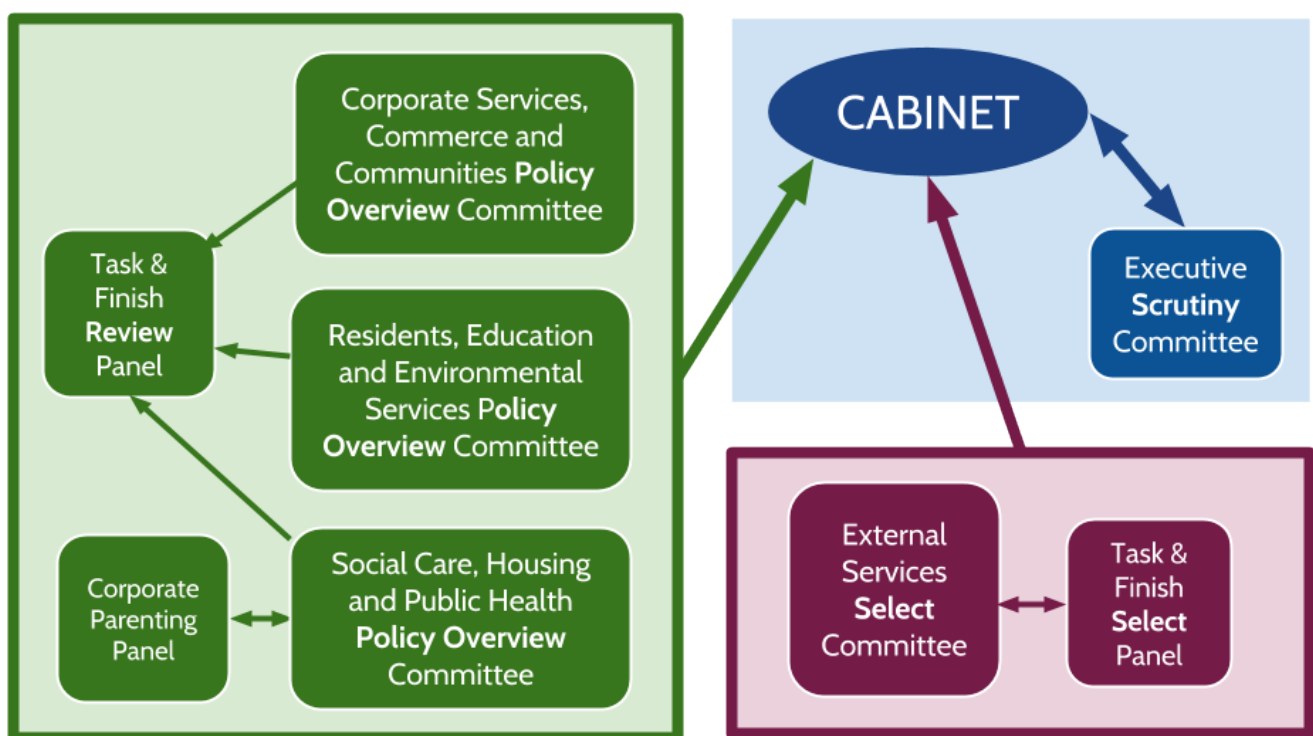
In Hillingdon, our policy overview, scrutiny and select committees undertakes a wide range of work in support of the above role, including:

- Monitoring the Forward Plan / pre-decision input on the Cabinet's upcoming business

- Formal post-Cabinet decision scrutiny (call-in option undertaken by the Executive Scrutiny Committee only)
- Undertakes statutory Health / Police scrutiny activity (this is by the External Services Select Committee only)
- Can review past decisions / Council actions
- Undertake policy reviews on topics within their remit
- Review implementation of previous reviews
- Comment on the annual budget before it's approval
- Provide comments on key policy framework documents before approval, e.g. Local Plan
- Monitors budget / performance / services / complaints twice a year
- Receives information reports on areas within their remit
- Oversees the statutory "Councillor Call for Action" (mechanism of last resort) which has not yet been used in Hillingdon.

Changes agreed by Council on 10 May 2018

Full Council recently agreed structural changes to the way the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements operate, streamlining the number of Policy Overview Committees and refreshing and consolidating their terms of reference as shown below:



Multi-year work programmes

Fundamentally, and this will be outlined in a later report on the agenda, Council was agreed that individual Policy Overview Committee work programmes will span across multiple municipal years to provide more flexibility in undertaking in-depth reviews, timetabling and reporting of findings to

Cabinet [or reporting to full Council should the Government introduce anticipated changes in guidance as set out in the Council report]. Also, as the conventional 'deadline' of completing reviews within a traditional municipal year will no longer exist, this opens up greater opportunities to engage with witnesses and residents, increasing the value of the Committee's findings. Multi-year work programmes also enable the Committee to better plan ahead for monitoring purposes, e.g. past reviews and update reports on matters.

A report later on this agenda sets out the initial "draft" multi-year work programme, that the Committee will update and refine as the months and years progress.

Task and finish review activity

Council also enabled [only should it be decided] that the Chairmen of the three new Policy Overview Committees may jointly agree to establish a single Task and Finish Review Panel at any one time to undertake either a focussed review within a particular committee's remit, or a cross-cutting review that covers the remit of more than one committee.

New Terms of References

All Policy Overview Committees have generic Terms of Reference as set out below:

- To conduct reviews of policy, services or aspects of service which have either been referred by Cabinet, relate to the Cabinet Forward Plan, or have been chosen by the Committee according to the agreed criteria for selecting such reviews;
- To monitor the performance of the Council services within their remit (including the management of finances and risk);
- To comment on the proposed annual service and budget plans for the Council services within their remit before final approval by Cabinet and Council;
- To consider the Forward Plan and comment as appropriate to the decision-maker on Key Decisions which relate to services within their remit (before they are taken by the Cabinet);
- To review or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken by the Cabinet, a Cabinet Member, a Council Committee or an officer.
- To make reports and recommendations to the Council, the Leader, the Cabinet, a Policy Overview Committee or any other Council Committee arising from the exercise of the preceding terms of reference.
- In accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to consider 'Councillor Calls For Action' (CCfA) submissions.

The Committee's direct remit of activity

This Committee's specific Terms of Reference are set out below. This sets the parameters (or service areas) in which the Committee can undertake reviews, present findings, request reports and provide direct input on matters. It is important that Committee remains wholly within their Terms of Reference and Democratic Services can advise further on this if required at meetings:

1. Education Services and statutory education authority functions
2. School performance and attainment

3. School Transport
4. Relationships with Local Academies / Free Schools
5. Pre-School & Early Years Services
6. Youth Services & Careers Services
7. Juvenile justice & probation services
8. Adult Learning
9. Education and learning partnerships
10. Music & The Arts
11. Highways, traffic, parking & street environment
12. Local transport, including rail, cycling & London Underground
13. Footpaths and Bridleways
14. Road safety and education
15. Planning & Building Control
16. Libraries
17. The Borough's heritage and history
18. Sport & Leisure services
19. Waste management & recycling
20. Green spaces, allotments, woodlands, conservation and sustainable development
21. Consumer Protection, Trading Standards & Licensing
22. Registrars & Bereavement Services
23. Local watercourses, drainage and flooding
24. Environmental Health, Air & Noise Quality
25. Local impacts of Heathrow expansion
26. Local impacts of High Speed Rail

Undertaking policy reviews

Over the years, Policy Overview 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.

Review phases

The typical phases of a review are as follows:

1. Selection of topic
2. Scoping the review / setting out objectives
3. Witness & evidence stage (this is the main activity)
4. Draft recommendations considered / early draft of review report
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

Selecting review topics

It is always best to sound out potential review topics early on. In respect ideas of areas to review these can come from a variety of sources e.g: Committee Members; Council officers; External partners / residents and Cabinet Members. When a Committee considers a potential review topic, we recommend running it past the following criteria as part of our scorecard (see Appendix A); i.e. topics that are:

- Resident-focused
- Under the correct remit of the Committee
- Matters the Council has influence over
- New issues
- Achievable for the Council
- Can gain wider organisational buy-in and support
- Drive improvement / efficiency
- Provide early warning or resilience for national changes
- Investigate the 'big issues' locally or nationally within Hillingdon

Witness and evidence stage

Ultimately, any Policy Overview 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 based 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.

Drafting recommendations

After hearing from witnesses and receiving evidence, the Committee then will meet to pull together all the information and shape its collective findings. Any final recommendations that come to Cabinet ideally should:

- Meet the initial aims / objectives of the review
- SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
- Not be a short-term fix, but a lasting outcome
- Affordable or can be aligned neatly with the MTFF process
- Based on a broad evidence base as possible
- Seek to review or amend existing approved policies (as opposed to new ones)
- If publicity or wider engagement or education is recommended, to target such communications as best as possible
- Consider 'conclusions' as well as specific recommendations

Nearer this time, Democratic Services staff supporting the Committee will advise further on drafting recommendations. Throughout this process, their role is critical to the Committee, to guide Members and secure the information and witness activity that Members wish to undertake. They also draft alongside the Chairman, the final report for the Committee to consider.

Possible next review topic ideas

Below is a list of recent review topics over the last 3 years (within the Committee's revised remit) to give an example of what has already been done:

2015/16

- Hoarding in Hillingdon
- The mechanism for reviewing major developments in the Borough and identifying lessons to be learned for the planning process

2016/17

- Charity Waste
- The Council's current and future relationship with Academies and Free Schools
- Supporting educational aspiration for disadvantaged children

2017/18

- Shisha Establishments
- Air Quality

In discussion with the Chairman, and following suggestions raised through other sources, the following initial topic idea is presented to the Committee to consider. Clearly, Committee Members may also have their own ideas to suggest as part of this first stage in the review process. Further

discussion of this topic will take place later in the meeting.

- Payment modernisation across key resident services, including new car parking payment technologies to improve user experience

Implications on related Council policies

Policy Overview Committees are at the heart of how the Council shapes policy at Member level.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Policy Overview Committees directly engage residents in shaping policy and recommendations from the Committees seek to improve the way the Council provides services to residents.

Financial Implications

None at this stage.

Legal Implications

None at this stage.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Council Constitution

Appendix A - Review topic selection scorecard

Resident-focused - High impact on residents and the community, with public interest and scope for making a positive difference (whether universal or a targeted group or area, e.g. young people or a particular town centre)	
Correct remit - is it covered in the Committee's Terms of Reference and does it cut across into the domain of other Committees? If it does, narrow the topic or consider suggesting the Corporate Services POC considers it, or perhaps a joint Committee working group review if the respective Chairmen and Committees agree.	
Influence - A topic that affects residents, groups, businesses and other key stakeholders in Hillingdon and relates to a service, event or issue in which the Council is in control of, has a significant stake in or has influence over, e.g. with partners.	
New - A new and 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.	
Achievable - A good level of expertise, best practice and information is available to draw on to complete this review. Committee resources, departmental plans and organisational timings permit a successful review with positive recommendations, during the current municipal year. Is the review ToR too wide and need to be narrowed to be achievable? Will the Committee's work programme accommodate the review?	
Wider organisational support - A topic that is likely to receive organisational buy-in from the Committee and wider Council. Possibly support from partner organisations to add value to existing work.	
Drives improvement - a service or area of partnership that has been identified internally or externally that requires improvement in the medium-long term and would benefit from Members' insight. Performance risks or areas of consistent under-performance.	
Drives transformation and efficiency - in support of the Council's objectives, any areas where service re-modelling is under consideration in the longer-term, that with Members' insight can help to deliver future savings, efficiencies and VFM.	
National and local - a topic that will assist the Council in the implementation or awareness of external challenges, new legislation, national policy or the changing role of the public sector. A topic relevant to Hillingdon's residents that seeks to lobby change in national legislation, policy or practice.	