

SELECTING A NEW REVIEW TOPIC

Committee name	Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee
Officer reporting	Neil Fraser – Democratic Services
Papers with report	None
Ward	All

HEADLINES

To provide Committee Members with information about:

1. How reviews are undertaken and ways in which Members can add value to their findings; and
2. Potential next review topic ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

1. **Note the information within the report; and**
2. **Consider potential topics for the next review.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Undertaking policy reviews

Over the years, Policy Overview Committees (now Select 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 Select 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.

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 5 years (within the Committee's revised remit) to give an example of what has already been done.

2015/16

- The mechanism for reviewing major developments in the Borough and identifying lessons to be learned for the planning process
- Raising Standards in Private Sector Rented Accommodation

2016/17

- Disposal of Charity Shop Waste

2017/18

- Review into Air Quality

2019/20

- Littering and Fly-Tipping within Hillingdon

It is requested that the Committee suggest and discuss potential topics for the next review, for further consideration by the Chairman and relevant officers.

Implications on related Council policies

The role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet, who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Select 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

<p>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)</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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?</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	
<p>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.</p>	