

Overview and Scrutiny Transparency Commission – Draft Scope and Work Programme

Councillor(s) submitting proposal	Cllr John Pierce, Chair
Title	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) Transparency Commission
Reason for Commission	<p>The Commission seeks to identify what actions the Council should take to improve transparency.</p> <p>Transparency was an issue identified in the Best Value Inspection of the Council, including in relation to some decision making processes. The specific problems highlighted in the inspection are being addressed through the Council's Best Value Action Plan.</p> <p>More generally, transparency in local authorities has been a central government priority, encouraging councils to provide more information on how they are spending public money and about the decisions they make.</p> <p>Transparency was also a key theme of the recent local Mayoral election.</p> <p>The OSC Transparency Commission is an opportunity for Members, from all political parties, to work together to identify how the Council could be more transparent.</p>
Proposed completion date	It is proposed that the Commission will report by November 2015.
Core Questions	<p>The core question is how can the Council be more transparent?</p> <p>In addressing this question, Members may seek answers to a range of related questions, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could residents be better informed about Council activity, processes and decisions? • How could Members be supported to make more transparent decisions? • How can decision makers be held to account transparently? <p>In seeking to address the core question, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny has identified a number of particular areas where he would wish the Committee to focus.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of Information requests • Open Data and Access to Information • Transparency and community engagement in decision making, including public notices, consultation and decision making on Licensing and Development Committees • Planning Contributions / Community Infrastructure Levy <p>At Overview and Scrutiny on 27th July, the Committee agreed to add Whistleblowing to the scope of the Commission.</p>
Desired outcome	Recommendations to improve transparency within the Council.

What will not be included	Specific issues identified within the Best Value Inspection; these are being addressed through the Best Value Action Plan.
Risks (mitigation)	<p>Transparency is a broad topic. There is a risk that the scope of this work exceeds the time available, including the intention to report by November 2015. Following discussion by Overview and Scrutiny on 27th July, this scoping document has been submitted for OSC's approval to help mitigate this.</p> <p>There is also a risk that some identified witnesses, including other local authorities, will not be available to attend OSC meetings. Where witnesses are not available to attend OSC, other evidence gathering methods will be used, such as written questions and submissions.</p>
Equality & Diversity considerations	The Commission may wish to consider whether there are any specific equality issues relating to transparency, such as whether some disabled residents, or those whose language or literacy skills are limited, experience particular access issues.
Possible co-options	Commission consists of full OSC, including co-opted members.
Key stakeholders/consultees	<p>Potential witnesses are identified below.</p> <p>In addition, a survey of local residents and organisations is taking place to ascertain their views on transparency.</p>
Cabinet member(s)	Mayor
Witnesses	<p>John Biggs, Executive Mayor</p> <p>Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director of Development & Renewal Anna Finch-Smith, Employee Relations and Policy Manager David Galpin, Service Head for Legal Services Ruth Dowden, Complaints and Information Manager Minesh Jani, Head of Risk Management Louise Russell, Service Head for Corporate Strategy and Equality David Tolley, Head of Consumer and Business Regulation Owen Whalley, Service Head for Planning and Building Control John Williams, Service Head for Democratic Services</p> <p>Other local authorities that are well regarded in particular aspects of transparency. These authorities are to be confirmed but will include London Borough of Redbridge.</p> <p>National organisations with an interest or focus on transparency. These organisations are to be confirmed but will include the Centre for Public Scrutiny.</p> <p>Journalists with a local interest e.g. Mark Baynes, "Love Wapping" blog Ted Jeory, "Trial By Jeory" blog</p>
Research/Evidence required	<p>A public consultation exercise on transparency is being undertaken. This survey is being publicised to residents and local groups.</p> <p>The remainder of evidence will be taken orally and in writing from the range of witnesses identified.</p>

<p>Work Programme</p>	<p>July OSC meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, Scope and Work Programme (Cllr John Pierce, Chair) • Journalists' perspective (Mark Baynes, "Love Wapping" blog Ted Jeory, "Trial By Jeory" blog) • Responding to Freedom of Information requests (David Galpin, Service Head for Legal Services and Ruth Dowden, Complaints and Information Manager) • Public notice, consultation and decision making on Licensing and Development Committees (David Tolley, Head of Consumer and Business Regulation; Owen Whalley, Service Head for Planning and Building Control) <p>September OSC meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Mayor's perspective (Mayor John Biggs) • Decisions on use of planning contributions (Aman Dalvi, Corporate Director of Development & Renewal and Owen Whalley, Service Head for Planning and Building Control) • Community Engagement (Louise Russell, Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality) • Democratic Engagement (John Williams, Service Head for Democratic Services) • Whistleblowing (Minesh Jani, Head of Risk Management and Anna Finch-Smith, Employee Relations and Policy Manager) • Transparency and Scrutiny – A National Perspective (Ed Hammond, Head of Programmes, Local Accountability, Centre for Public Scrutiny) <p>October OSC meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results from public consultation on transparency (Louise Russell, Service Head for Corporate Strategy & Equality) • Learning from other authorities (Representatives to be confirmed but will include London Borough of Redbridge) <p>November OSC meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Transparency Commission report
<p>Publicity</p>	<p>There will be regular press releases updating on the Commission's work,</p>

	<p>articles in East End Life and use of social media.</p> <p>All sessions will be held in public.</p>
Links to Strategic / Mayoral Priorities	<p>The Mayor indicated in his election commitments a focus on transparency and accountability, including answering questions at full Council and OSC. The development of a Transparency Protocol by the Executive is an action in the Strategic Plan, and the work of the Transparency Commission can directly inform this protocol.</p>