

Democratic Transparency & Engagement

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Transparency Commission

7th September 2015

TRANSPARENCY

- **A wide topic. See range of areas covered in DCLG Local Government Transparency Code**
- **These slides focus on the democratic decision-making & scrutiny processes and the extent to which the law, the Council's Constitution and/or practice promotes transparency and accountability**
- **Transparency = openness in decision making so that residents can:-**
 - 1. Easily know who is taking decisions that affect them, when, what those decisions are and the reasons for them**
 - 2. Witness the process if they wish; and**
 - 3. Hold the decision-makers to account.**
- **But also engagement – are local people engaged in the process?**
- **And participation – what opportunities do residents have to participate and influence decision-making & scrutiny and do they take them up?**

TRANSPARENCY & PARTICIPATION MEASURES IN PLACE AT LBTH (1)

In Law

- Agendas, minutes and reports published for all formal meetings
- Meetings open to the public (except part 2)
- Individual executive decisions published (inc reasons/alternatives)
- Key decisions 28 days in advance (subject to urgency procedure)
- Planning and Licensing consultation
- Council Tax consultation (statutory)
- Co-opted members – O&S etc
- Information published on Mayor and all Councillors - name, contact details, membership of committees, Register of Interests.
- Constitution is published and on line

TRANSPARENCY & PARTICIPATION MEASURES IN PLACE IN LBTH

In Council's Constitution/practice

- Publicise meetings in EEL/on website; and use modern.gov tablet app
- Petition Scheme/Petitions and public questions at meetings
- Webcasting (Council & Cabinet) pilot, procurement under way
- More member information online:- Timesheets, outside bodies, surgeries
- Consultations/Scrutiny Panels/co-opted members
- Planning/Licensing speakers, protocols in place
- Young Mayor – election every 2 years plus 2 deputies.
Turnout Jan 2015 = 71.95%. Supported by Youth Services. Oversee projects & represent TH nationally.
- Young Council and Local Democracy Week events
- Localisation - Ward Forums, Community Champion Co-ordinators
- Elections – outreach work in communities and with women, students

HOW ARE WE DOING?

- **Most executive decisions taken in public**
- **Low % of exempt/Part 2 items**
- **Relatively high public attendance esp. at Council meetings**
- **50 public questions to Council in year to July 2015 (& informal Cabinet sessions)**
- **19 petitions to Council in year to July 2015 (inc. 1 x petition debate)**
- **Webcasting viewing figures**
- **Scrutiny panels/task and finish reviews**
- **Co-opted positions filled on O&SC, SAC, Pensions Committee**
- **Relatively high level of delegated powers in some areas**
- **Electoral participation high – e.g. 2014 turnout**
- **Fol responses, Members' access to information provision.**

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- Need for comprehensive approach
- Statutory (compliance with law) vs. discretionary measures
- Individual decision-making vs. collective/meetings
- Level of delegated powers (officer decisions)
- Shift of emphasis Council meeting to Executive
- O&S role in policy development/consultation and advance scrutiny before decision-making
- Even where participation is high, are all communities represented?
- However open, formal council proceedings may not attract people
- Move from transparency to interactivity
- Opportunities offered by technology, social media
- Members' role, access to information, outside organisations
- Best practice elsewhere

POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS

- **Review of information to residents – wider range of channels**
- **Plain English reports, decisions, constitution**
- **Social media strategy – inc FB/Twitter pages for decisions, consultations. Virtual surgeries/Q&A chat (RO hour May 2015)**
- **Webcasting – increase scope, more meetings, live webcasts? Also interactive features, surveys/votes**
- **E-petitions, review of requirements**
- **Meetings in outside venues/at different times?**
- **Governance review (& LGA) to have transparency strand – constitution, delegations etc. Meetings from September 2015**
- **Guidance on exempt items - split reports with minimum in Part 2**
- **Outside bodies – review arrangements for nominees reporting back**
- **Targeted outreach (electoral registration, localisation, participation)**

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Questions/Comments?

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