

Overview & Scrutiny Committee Improvement Plan

2024/25

(A) Aims and Objectives: All Members, officers and residents in Tower Hamlets to understand the role of scrutiny and what it aims to achieve					
Objective	Priority	Action	Owners	Delivery	Progress/Comments
O&S has a clearly defined and valued role in the Council's improvement and governance arrangements. This includes prioritising resources to ensure that the scrutiny function concentrates on delivering work of genuine value and relevance to the work of the wider authority.	Improve engagement with the Executive. Establish ongoing engagement between Scrutiny Leads, Cabinet Members, and senior officers to ensure scrutiny members are engaged on key issues, add value to key strategic priorities, and are involved from the very beginning of policy initiation.	Scrutiny Leads to meet with senior officers and Cabinet Members every quarter.	Strategy & Communities	June 2024- April 2025	Meetings have been arranged with Corporate Directors, Cabinet Leads and Scrutiny Leads for 2024/25. Scrutiny Members may also meet with additional Directors throughout the year depending on issues which arise.
		Provide scrutiny with additional resources which will allow for dedicated scrutiny support to deliver a comprehensive work programme, hold additional sub-committee meetings, and add additional co-opted members	Chief Executive	April 2025	This will be considered and delivered as part of the corporate restructure.

	Increase the profile of O&S and promote details of the scrutiny work programme and all other scrutiny activities internally and externally.	Develop a Communications plan for 2024-25 to promote and publicise the work of the scrutiny function across the corporate comms channels.	Strategy & Communities, Communications	September 2024	A draft programme has been developed by Strategy & Communities. Communications will now be engaged to develop the plan further and support delivery.
	All Members, Officers, and other key stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities relating to scrutiny.	Develop and promote a scrutiny toolkit.	Strategy & Communities	September 2024	A scrutiny toolkit is published to provide essential information and guidance to all key stakeholders. Following amendments to the structure this will need to be amended. Further work is needed to promote this in order to increase Officer and Member uptake. This will be captured in the Communications Plan.
		Deliver a training session for the Mayor and Cabinet on	Strategy & Communities	November 2024	The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny engaged MAB in April 2024 to discuss the function of Scrutiny and the

		‘supporting effective Scrutiny’.			expectations of the Executive and the Corporate Management Team (CMT). Consideration will be given to further work needed with the Executive and CMT (separately).
		Develop a Scrutiny Protocol that meets local needs and is understood by all parties. This will address issues such as how Cabinet will engage with scrutiny recommendations at Cabinet and establish a process that supports a formal response to all issues referred to Cabinet by overview and scrutiny including recommendations, questions or calls for action.	Strategy & Communities	September 2024	A draft protocol has been drafted. Officers will now engage CMT and Cabinet to ensure it is understood and meets the needs of all parties. This will strengthen arrangements that promote effective working between scrutiny and the executive.
		A mandatory training session, for all senior managers will be introduced on how to support effective scrutiny.	Strategy & Communities, Democratic Services, HR	April 2025	

O&S Members receive the training and development opportunities to deliver their roles effectively	Establish an annual training package for Scrutiny Members to help develop the key skills required to perform their roles.	Undertake an annual audit of Members skills to inform their development needs and training required	Strategy & Communities	June 2024	A skills audit has been circulated to all Scrutiny Members.
		Provide an annual induction/refresher for all Scrutiny Members to ensure they understand scrutiny's purpose and role.	Strategy & Communities	June 2024	A scrutiny induction/refresher workshop was delivered to Members on 13 June.
		Draft a scrutiny Member learning & development programme, and commission external training (where required) including a mentoring programme.	Strategy & Communities	September 2024	New Individual Member Training Budgets are available to Members for tailored training to help with their scrutiny roles. Conversations with potential external partners that might assist with a new mentoring programme have started.
		Introduce a specific training element for scrutiny members focusing on the management of corporate and service risks and the MTFS to address sector weaknesses identified by recent studies. Additionally, Section	Strategy & Communities, Internal Audit Anti-Fraud & Risk, Finance	October 2024	

		151 to co-ordinate external training for all Scrutiny Members throughout the year so that when budgets need to be scrutinised in year or as part of the main budget process they are in a better position to do so.			
Tower Hamlets reflects best practice in the delivery of its scrutiny function	Engage with regional and national best practices, including exploring learning opportunities with other local authorities	Promote and engage in meetings of the London Scrutiny Network (Members & Officers)	Strategy & Communities	April 2025	
		Promote and engage in Centre for Governance and Scrutiny events/conferences (Members & Officers)	Strategy & Communities	April 2025	
		Officers will review scrutiny procedures in relation to the recently published good practice guides from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Statutory Scrutiny Guidance and report to OSC on completion.	Strategy & Communities	May 2024	LBTH delivery against statutory guidance was considered in a report discussed by the Committee in May 2024
		Scrutiny support officers will visit neighbouring	Strategy & Communities, Democratic Services	April 2025	Two meetings have taken place with officers and Members from Kensington &

		boroughs to explore shared learning opportunities and learn from best practices, understand different approaches to supporting scrutiny, and address issues such as party-political conflicts and member development.			Chelsea. Further meetings are being arranged with Lewisham, Hackney, and Greenwich.
(B) Meeting Administration: All scrutiny meetings to be run in a professional and highly efficient way to enable effective scrutiny to take place					
O&S meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make the best use of the resources available to it	Ensure Executive and Senior Officer representation at all meetings.	Liaise with the Mayor's Office and CMT to establish when the Mayor, Cabinet Members, and Directors are expected for items	Strategy & Communities	August 2024	OSC meetings have been moved to Tuesday evenings to avoid a clash with the Mayor's surgery. The Mayor's Office and CMT will be engaged in the draft forward plan following the work programme workshop in June.
		Statutory Scrutiny Officer to meet with each Corporate Director to discuss concerns, expectations, and scrutiny arrangements for 2024-25.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Strategy & Communities	June 2024	All CMT Leads have been engaged as part of the work programme setting process and provided with an opportunity to feed in their views of how scrutiny can be more effective. Ongoing dialogue will continue with Corporate Directors throughout the year, including frequent

					attendance at DLTs and 1-1 meetings with Corporate Directors.
	All scrutiny meetings to be supported with legal representation	Monitoring Officer to consider legal representation at each meeting.	Monitoring Officer, Chief Executive	September 2024	
	Members receive information on time. This means action log requests are provided by the following meeting and all committee reports are to be shared with Members a week in advance of the meeting to allow Members sufficient time to review the papers and establish key lines of enquiry for the item.	Commission reports and engage the Executive and Senior Officers in sufficient time, setting out the committee's scope and expectations. Agendas for Sub-Committees to be circulated to DLTs 6 weeks in advance of each meeting.	Strategy & Communities	Apr 2025	
		Committee Chairs to hold a pre-agenda meeting with report authors three weeks before each Committee meeting. This will be an opportunity to discuss progress and ensure it meets the requirements of OSC.	Strategy & Communities, Committee Chairs	April 2025	
		Democratic Services to ensure that the	Democratic Services	April 2025	

		papers are published within the required publishing timelines. Informing the Committee Chairs if there are any deviations or changes to the agenda items			
		The Chief Executive will re-enforce the need to provide responses to Scrutiny information requests and committee papers in a timely manner, monitoring and enforcing specific turnaround times where issues are identified	Chief Executive	June 2025	
	Scrutiny Members to take responsibility and ownership of their scrutiny role, ensuring they are prepared for meetings and have read committee papers.	Scrutiny chairs to distribute agenda topics amongst committee members to help sharpen the focus/ examination of the topic and take collective ownership of the issue	Scrutiny Committee Chairs	Apr 2025	
		O&S Members to review Cabinet Papers and submit pre-decision questions by the deadline	Scrutiny Members	April 2025	

	Improve focus of pre-meets	Draft a pre-meet agenda template to assist the chairs in focusing the pre-meeting discussion and improve its effectiveness	Strategy & Communities	May 24-Apr 25 May 24-Apr 25	Pre-meets are now held in a separate room from the main meeting
	Members to effectively work 'cross-party' and ensure their independence whilst sitting on the Committee	Develop a seating plan to ensure Members do not sit in their party groups	Democratic Services	April 2024	Microphones will be assigned to Members and provide them with specific seats at the meeting
(C) Work Programme: Develop and deliver a coordinated work programme across all scrutiny committees which supports the council in achieving its strategic objectives and reflects the concerns of residents					
O&S Committee and its sub-committees develop a work programme, which reflects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement agenda Delivering the strategic plan Linking performance and budget scrutiny Residents concerns 	Develop an evidence pack to supplement the development and maintenance of the Committee's work programme. This should identify emerging or strategic issues where it may be useful to have early engagement with scrutiny.	Collate intelligence from a range of sources to capture national, regional and local issues including ARS, complaints and Performance data, community insights, partners feedback, DLTs feedback and strategic plans	Strategy & Communities	June 2024	Officers have visited all DLTs to discuss key information which should be included in the evidence pack. Directors are provided with the opportunity to highlight emerging or strategic issues which should be presented to scrutiny as options for early engagement. This was presented to Members at the scrutiny work programme workshop on 19 June and used to inform Members selection of agenda items.
	Prioritise essential issues for scrutiny and reduce the	Establish a criteria/selection tool	Strategy & Communities	May 2024	A topic selection tool has been developed and included

	volume of agenda items for more robust and effective scrutiny.	to support Members to prioritise scrutiny agenda items			in the scrutiny toolkit. Members were provided with this tool at the work programme workshop to inform their selection process.
		Provide additional 'offline' briefing sessions for members to develop their knowledge of upcoming agenda items and inform their questioning This may be a written briefing paper or a discussion with officers.	Directorate Executive officers and Strategy and Policy officers (supporting scrutiny)	April 2025	
Promote opportunities for residents to engage in scrutiny meetings.	Refresh the Communications Plan to engage residents. This should include a session to capture residents' priorities and suggestions for the work programme and holding meetings in community settings.	Hold some scrutiny meetings at community venues to encourage better local engagement and promote scrutiny's role in the community.	Strategy & Communities	April 2025	
		Hold a workshop with residents to collect their views on what issues scrutiny should focus on	Strategy & Communities	June 2024	A workshop was held with 21 residents in May to understand the issues they would like included in the work programme for 2024/25. Their feedback was shared with Members as part of the work programme workshop

		Explore the development of a scrutiny outreach programme where members of scrutiny will be supported to go into the community including schools and colleges to explain the important role of scrutiny and the work that it does.	Strategy & Communities, Democratic Services, Scrutiny Members	April 2025	
	Expand the scope and areas of focus of agenda items to include lived experience, external organisations, and local groups	Invite residents to provide evidence at Committee meetings	Strategy & Communities	April 2025	
		Links to the agenda planning and the Council's comms and engagement function will be put in place to pre-plan early the opportunities for resident engagement and the best way to organise it.	Strategy & Communities, Communications	June 2024	
	Promote the Council's online scrutiny webpage and mailbox including how residents can get involved	Include details on all promotional material and work with corporate comms and partners to help share details	Strategy & Communities	April 2025	

(D) Evidence gathering: Ensure a wide range of witnesses are engaged, and evidence researched, to allow Scrutiny to make informed and effective recommendations

<p>Council explores where 'independent expertise' exists in the borough, taking account of existing networks and contacts, and how this could be used to assist independent scrutiny of services.</p>	<p>The discussion, findings and recommendations are informed by a broad range of independent views</p>	<p>Scrutiny chairs to consider where external expertise could be co-opted onto the committee, as they develop the work programme for 2024/25, particularly around budget scrutiny.</p>	<p>Scrutiny Leads supported by Strategy and Policy officers</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	
		<p>Create more opportunities for residents to give evidence at meetings and assist with collation of evidence</p>	<p>Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	
		<p>Invite independent experts to provide evidence and an 'alternative view' at meetings</p>	<p>Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	
		<p>Scrutiny Leads to gather evidence outside of meetings through meetings with officers and opportunities to engage with residents and partnership boards</p>	<p>Scrutiny Leads</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	
<p>(E) Scrutiny improves outcomes and drives improvement in public services</p>					

<p>Scrutiny reviews its work on an annual basis and continually aims to improve.</p>	<p>Scrutiny is Member led, independent, and is provided with the opportunity to assess its performance and implement actions to strengthen its effectiveness.</p>	<p>Undertake a scrutiny function review to understand performance and where improvements are required.</p>	<p>Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>June 2024</p>	<p>A workshop was held with all Members to discuss strengths and challenges. The session was facilitated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and allowed Members to highlight the actions they feel are needed to improve the scrutiny function. In addition, the Chief Executive has suggested several actions that could help strengthen scrutiny and discussed them with the Committee in June.</p>
<p>Improve governance arrangements to monitor recommendations</p>	<p>Scrutiny ensures its recommendations are actioned and reported back to the committee to understand their impact</p>	<p>Strategy and Policy officers to work with services to ensure delivery of action plans is on track and all officers are aware of when 'follow up' items have been scheduled into the work programme</p>	<p>Strategy & Communities</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	
	<p>Ensure delivery of the Scrutiny Improvement Plan to ensure Scrutiny in Tower Hamlets is effective, robust, and adds value to strategic priorities and residents' lived experiences.</p>	<p>Formally review the delivery of the improvement plan on a six-month basis.</p>	<p>Strategy & Communities, Scrutiny Members</p>	<p>April 2025</p>	

(F) Accountability & Culture: Nurture a culture of scrutiny and work closely with the Council's Cabinet Leads and Corporate Directors to encourage their buy-in and have open and honest conversations about performance, key issues and identify where scrutiny can add value					
Strengthen the role of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer and ensure it is more visible and receives further support to enable it to effectively advocate for the role of scrutiny.	Ensure the role of Statutory Scrutiny Officer is fully integrated into the work and decision-making of the authority.	Allocate the role of Statutory Scrutiny Officer to a Corporate Director.	Chief Executive	September 2024	This will be considered as part of the corporate restructure
		Statutory Scrutiny Officer to develop an engagement programme with Corporate Directors and Directors to promote the work of the Scrutiny function and develop arrangements to identify key issues where Scrutiny input would be beneficial to the authority.	Statutory Scrutiny Officer		The Statutory Scrutiny Officer has met with all corporate directors to discuss the role of scrutiny and will meet with them throughout the year to discuss issues, challenges, where scrutiny needs their support, and how scrutiny can continue to add value.
	Strengthen the relationship between the Executive and Scrutiny	Statutory Scrutiny Office to attend CMT every month to discuss issues, forthcoming agenda items, and challenges	CMT and Statutory Scrutiny Officer	May 2025	
Improve the diversity and representation of scrutiny	Increase the number of females leading on scrutiny activity	Empower female members of the Committee to lead on scrutiny roles/projects	OSC Committee members	May 2024	A new Scrutiny Lead role was created for Environment and Climate change and Members voted for Cllr Natalie Bienfait to assume this position

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