



City of Westminster

Committee Report

Meeting:	Westminster Scrutiny Commission
Date:	6th July 2010
Status:	General Release
Title:	Work of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission 2010/11
Wards Affected:	All
Financial Summary:	The limited financial implications are addressed in the report.
Report of:	Head of Member Services

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Commission elect a Chairman at their first meeting of the municipal year. This report is intended as a position paper with suggested items for discussion. The paper sets out proposals for scrutiny development, puts forward a series of suggested items for the Westminster Scrutiny Commission to consider for their own work in 2010/11 and notes areas of interest for the Westminster's Scrutiny function arising from the new coalition government agreement. The Commission meeting dates for 2010/11 are 9 November 2010 and 13 April 2011.
- 1.2 The Commission are asked to consider/comment on the following scrutiny development proposals:
 - Establishment of a Young People's Panel comprised of young people aged 16-21 in Westminster.
 - Holding meetings outside of City Hall
 - Introducing a quarterly Scrutiny Bulletin
 - Improving the presence on the Council's website
- 1.3 In the second part of the paper, suggestions are made for the WSC's own work during 2010/11. These are:
 - Question and Answer sessions with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive
 - How they wish to look at cross-cutting work: Olympics, Council's financial strategy/transformation programme.
 - Reviewing approach to scrutiny of major contracts

- Reviewing success of centralised procurement function
- Introduction of a regular item reviewing upcoming decisions

2. Recommendations

- That the Commission consider and comment on the proposals for scrutiny development work.
- That the Commission consider suggestions made in the paper for the work of the WSC during 2010/11, identify which items they wish to look at and how and when they wish to do this, and put forward any further suggestions for work.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The Westminster Scrutiny Commission has responsibility for maintaining oversight of the work of the Council's six Policy and Scrutiny Committees, promoting and developing scrutiny in Westminster and dealing with cross-cutting issues or projects such as Council transformation and the performance of the Westminster City Partnership.
- 3.2 Since 2008 Committees have been involved in policy development as well as scrutinising the work of the Council and holding the executive to account. There has also been a clear shift to a focus on outcomes and tracking recommendations made to identify their impact. Over the past year the scrutiny function has carried out much good work – looking at over 70 different topics, hearing from and consulting with a huge range of witnesses and making around 100 recommendations. A more formal approach to recommendation tracking has now been introduced to ensure recommendations are followed up and responded to.
- 3.3 Given that £1.165bn of in year cuts for local government funding have already been announced and Westminster will bear in-year grant reductions of £5.7m in 2010/11, the scrutiny function will continue to have an important role in ensuring that the Council continues to deliver value for money for residents, workers, businesses and visitors.

4. Overview

- 4.1 The Westminster Scrutiny Commission (WSC) are asked to consider the following paper for discussion – the first section looks at ideas for scrutiny development including establishing a Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel and the introduction of a quarterly scrutiny bulletin. The second section puts forward topics for discussion relating to forthcoming work of the WSC and asks for input from the WSC as to their work programme for 2010-11. The final section looks at possible implications for scrutiny of the new coalition government.

5. Scrutiny Development

5.1 Young People's Panel

5.1.1 Background

There is a huge spectrum of young people who use and engage with the Council's services and would welcome a greater say in how their communities are run. As part of the Children and Young People's Plan 2009-2011 the Council has committed to improving engagement and participation for young people in Westminster and, with a drive for greater citizen involvement, it would be an excellent time to enhance young people's involvement in policy and scrutiny in Westminster. Furthermore, with proposed reductions in some youth related services, such as holiday and Saturday provision (as set out in the report to Cabinet on 28th June) input from young people on which services they actually use or need would be valuable.

- 5.1.2 At the moment the involvement of Westminster's young people in policy and scrutiny is relatively limited. In January 2010 the entire Westminster Youth Council attended the Community Safety P&S Committee to take part in an evidence gathering session on Youth Disorder held by the Community Safety P&S Committee and, more recently, three Looked After Children attended the Children's and Young People's P&S Committee. The Youth MP has also addressed full Council meetings.
- 5.1.3 The enthusiasm of the young people, evident at both these meetings and supported by feedback from Youth Services, suggests that there is an opportunity for scrutiny to better engage with young people in Westminster on how their city is run.. However, a full committee meeting can be an intimidating environment for many young people. Establishing their own panel would be a more accessible way for them to be involved in decision making.
- 5.1.4 Other local authorities, such as Essex County Council (see **Appendix A** for a case study) and Leeds City Council, have already piloted Youth Scrutiny Committees. Anecdotal, these have been successful although the former was very resource intensive. Our proposal would be to introduce the panel within existing resources in the Member Services Scrutiny Team and Youth Services department with a small amount of expenditure. The details of the Westminster proposal are set out below:

5.1.5 Westminster Young People's Panel Proposal

Aim

To increase the involvement of young people in developing policy and having a say on how and what services are delivered in Westminster.

To provide representation for young people supporting and contributing to the work of the main policy and scrutiny committees.

How

Establish an informal, time limited Westminster Young People's Panel to look at an issue of genuine concern to young people (16-21) in Westminster. This would be a pilot scheme intending to last between 7-9months, reporting back in summer 2011.

Outcomes

- Achieve better engagement and representation for young people in Westminster with the policy and scrutiny function and council decision making.
- Create a city-wide scrutiny forum which could run beyond the pilot and be a valuable way of involving and engaging with young people who may otherwise not be heard.
- For those young people who wish to do so, gain a formal qualification
- Produce a final report back to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission in Spring/Summer 2011

Why now?

Local authorities currently, and for the foreseeable future, will be subject to significant spending cuts. However, the coalition government has also made a commitment to better and greater involvement of local communities in how services are delivered. By allowing young people to have their own scrutiny panel they could look at issues that are of real importance to them, gain skills and confidence which could prepare them for formal employment, and most importantly have an additional influence and 'voice' in the Council's decision making.

Who would be on the Panel?

The work of the Youth Council is extremely valuable however, they already have considerable demands upon their time - asking them to take on a formal involvement in policy and scrutiny would put a lot of strain on the young people involved already. Furthermore, we would like to involve young people from a broader range of backgrounds and with differing levels of needs on the Panel.

Having consulted with Westminster Youth Services, the Panel could be recruited primarily via Westminster's Youth Hubs. The aim would be to have a panel made up of 9-10 young people aged 16-21. Locality Teams at the three hubs (North-West, North-East and South) could look to recruit three young people from each area to take part in the Panel. Targeting an older age group should mean they have a greater input on what the Panel looks at, how it is run, and require less intensive support and direction from either Member or Youth Services. The Panel should be made up of young people from a range of backgrounds and with differing levels of need.

We would not intend to approach the schools directly as part of the recruitment process – in some parts of the borough schools have a high proportion of students who come from outside of Westminster. However, the Locality Teams based at the hubs are in regular contact with the schools and have good access and knowledge of young people in their areas. Schools would be informed if any of their pupils take part in the Panel.

What would they do?

- The Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel could be established by either the Westminster Scrutiny Commission or the Children's and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee, as an informal task group and would then be asked to elect a Chairman.
- As with other informal task groups in Westminster it would be up to the Panel as to whether they held meetings in public or not.
- The Young People's Panel would select a single topic area, to use the Essex example, anti-bullying, which they wished to look at in more depth.
- With guidance from youth workers and the scrutiny team, design and carry out a scrutiny project.
- As a conclusion to their scrutiny, produce a final report with recommendations which would report back directly to the Westminster Scrutiny Commission.

What would young people involved get out of it?

They would be able to:

- Have a clearer influence on decisions being made by the Council and a better understanding of how these decisions are made.
- Raise the profile of young people's issues in Westminster
- Develop useful workplace skills and build confidence.
- Possible qualification to young people involved in the scheme recognising their work as part of the scrutiny panel.

Resources

Undoubtedly establishing and running a Young People's Panel will involve considerable amounts of work. Initial conversations with Youth Services have been very positive and they are willing to support/facilitate the pilot through their Locality Teams in conjunction with the Member Services scrutiny team.

Type of expenditure	Details	Estimated cost (£)
Officer support	Full support and running of Young People's Scrutiny Panel	Within existing resources
Research	Possible costs for carrying out site visits, surveys, obtaining background material	£250
Meeting venues	Intend to use Youth Hub meeting rooms	-
Refreshments	Drinks/biscuits for young people at any meetings	£75
Final report production	Design/printing of final report	£300
Marketing	Website, Westminster Reporter activity	-

If the WSC support the establishment of the Panel they could set aside a proportion of their 2010-11 overall budget to cover these costs – estimated at circa £625.

Evaluation

As part of any work in setting up the panel we will work with Youth Services to create a useful means of evaluating the scheme. The outcomes listed earlier would provide the basis for evaluating the success of the Panel. We would ask the young people in the scheme to take part in a feedback session at the conclusion of the pilot so the success/usefulness of the Panel can be measured.

Beyond the pilot

If the pilot is successful, the Young People's Panel could become an established city-wide forum, continuing to carry out independent scrutiny and/or assisting or being involved with the work of other Policy and Scrutiny Committees.

Possible risks

- Not enough young people willing to be involved
- Difficulty in keeping to proposed timescales due to problems setting up meetings/delays in carrying out research work
- Member Services/Youth Services not able to provide sufficient support to make the pilot work
- Young people selected to sit on the Panel become disengaged
- Topic selected not of particular relevance and does not make useful recommendations

Timescale

Date	Activity	Lead officers
July 2010	Produce formal project plan	Member Services/Youth Services
Late July-Aug 2010	Recruitment for Panel	Youth Services
September 2010 – April 2011	Project implementation	Member Services/Youth Services
June/July 2011	Final report for submission to Westminster Scrutiny Commission	Member Services

5.2 Scrutiny beyond City Hall - External Meetings and Visits

- 5.2.1 The move to informal task groups and, where appropriate single member scrutiny, has allowed for greater flexibility in how Committees conduct their work. However, to raise the external profile of scrutiny, and to involve and engage more local people Committees could look to hold full and informal meetings outside of City Hall.
- 5.2.2 There is a risk, that by asking people to come to City Hall, only those 'in the know' attend meetings. Some committees and topics are more appropriate than others for holding external meetings. For example, if the Built Environment, Business, Enterprise and Skills Committee were carrying out a piece of work on small business development it may be appropriate to see if the meeting could be held at the new Paddington Business Innovation Hub once completed.
- 5.2.3 It would be more appropriate to hold informal meetings outside of City Hall as there is more flexibility on how these meetings are run. The structure of full Policy and Scrutiny Committees and associated costs of running them, such as the use of the microphone systems, means that it might not be cost-effective to move full Committee meetings to external venues. Any additional cost with meeting at external venues would need to be met from the scrutiny budget.
- 5.2.4 Holding any meetings outside of City Hall may require more promotional effort but this should not come at any significant additional cost. The Council's own website and communication channels such as the Westminster Reporter, emails to amenity societies and interested parties, and informal networks should all be used to promote the meetings – with the benefit of getting a broader spectrum of people involved in scrutiny and concomitantly a better understanding/ownership and involvement in the Council's decision making .

5.3 Communications – website and 'Scrutiny bulletin'

5.3.1 Scrutiny bulletin

To improve the information available, access to and profile of scrutiny in Westminster, Member Services are proposing to introduce a quarterly 'Scrutiny bulletin'. This would be produced quarterly, and provide a round-up of each

committees work in that quarter. This would coincide with each round of main committee meetings, and a summary of these meetings would make up a significant part of each committees section. However, the bulletin would not be limited to simply the main committee meetings – it could include updates on task groups, site visits and ongoing work and give a brief overview of the work planned for each committee in the next quarter as well as upcoming key dates/events. The bulletin would be put up on the scrutiny pages on the external website, and circulated via email (hard copy where requested) to Members, amenity societies, schools, youth clubs, key business contacts (eg. BIDS), and internally to senior officers.

5.3.2 Website

The Member Services Scrutiny team have worked to improve the Policy and Scrutiny pages on the external website. Previously these were difficult to understand, unclear and often out of date. These now include an organogram of all the scrutiny committees and task groups in Westminster, a '*Have your Say*' button, the 2009-10 Scrutiny Annual Report, as well as up to date information on the remit and role of the committees. Informal task groups papers, which have been made public, will also be published on these pages.

The Member Services team are continuing to work on improving the scrutiny website presence and make pages easier to find and improve the level and quality of information available. Any suggestions or comments from the WSC on the website and improvements which could be made are welcome.

6. Proposals for the work of the Scrutiny Commission – 2010/11

6.1. Question and Answer Sessions

Last year the Committee held separate question and answer sessions with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Barrow and the Chief Executive, Mike More (twice). The WSC are asked to consider if they wish to continue with this approach, and if they would prefer for the Leader and the Chief Executive to attend jointly.

6.2 Cross-Cutting Work

6.2.1 Olympics and Paralympics

The responsibility for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games falls within the remit of the Cabinet Member for the Built Environment. As such the principle scrutiny Committee for the Council's preparations for the Games falls to the Built Environment, Business, Enterprise and Skills P&S Committee.

However, the Olympic Route Network, street management preparations (with the exception of licensing enforcement), and legacy commitments for young people and volunteering also fall under the remit of other Committees. Currently a dedicated full committee meeting will be held by the Built Environment, Business, Enterprise and Skills Policy and Scrutiny Committee on 20th October 2010. Given the breadth of areas affected by and involved in Olympic preparations, and to avoid multiple separate pieces of work being carried out by individual committees the WSC could look at:

- i) Carrying out or holding this scrutiny jointly
- ii) And/or via a dedicated task group
- iii) A discrete piece of work carried out by the WSC itself

6.2.2 Council financial strategy/transformation

The report to Cabinet on the 28th June identified a structural deficit of £20m. Following further assessment of the Council's financial position, the prospects for commercial activity and early indications of the new Coalition Government's policies, £14m of savings need to be found in 2010/11. However, during 2010/11 there will be a shortfall of £4m on this target (£9m of savings plus use £1m of Local Authority Business Growth Initiative (LABGI) funding).

The Council are also targeting savings of £10m to be delivered by transformation activity by 2012. During 2010/11 £2.5m of transformation savings will need to be delivered in addition to the £9m programme of savings identified. Progress on achieving transformation projects identified for 2010-2011 will be considered by the Finance and Resources Policy and Scrutiny Committee as part of their 2010-2011 work programme.

Over the summer the Council will conduct Fundamental Service Reviews to address the potential budget deficit of £4m in 2010/11. The findings of central government's three year Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) will be announced on 20th October 2010 and will set out the size of cuts for individual government departments.

The Budget and Performance Task Group are set to meet to consider the impacts of these announcements. However, given the timings and implications of both of these reviews, the WSC may also want to take a full paper on the Council's overall financial strategy at their next meeting on 9th November 2010.

6.3 Scrutiny of Major Contracts

The oversight of all contracts in excess of £5m and/or which the Strategic Director for Resources consider as major, now falls within the remit of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and thus, if the Finance and Resources Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

During 2009-2010 Policy and Scrutiny committees undertook scrutiny of several high profile and high value contract re-lets. Following the termination of the first parking enforcement contract re-let process due to methodological problems with the financial evaluation, the Built Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee requested that the Chief Executive considered how scrutiny of contract letting in Westminster could be improved. Officers from Legal Services, Procurement and Service departments have commenced work on a possible protocol which would provide for a more valuable participation by Members in the procurement process with the aim of reporting to the Commission at its next meeting.

In light of this, the Commission may want to consider how Committees approach future scrutiny of major contracts:

- (i) At what stage(s) Members should be involved in the contract letting process ie to inform the drawing up of specification and evaluation criteria as well as carrying out evaluation of the process later on.
- (ii) What information should be provided to committee Members so they can effectively carry out scrutiny
- (iii) The composition of committees for scrutiny of contracts ie establishing dedicated task groups by the committee under whom the contract subject falls, and/or co-opting on members from other committees with relevant experience.

6.4 Procurement

As part of last year's re-organisation the Council established a centralised procurement and supplier relationship management unit. This was set up with the intention of providing expert procurement advice across the organisation, ensuring value for money in the procurement of services and that these met the functional needs of the Council. In conjunction with work reviewing the approach to the scrutiny of contract letting, the Commission could also look at the success of this centralised approach during 2010/11.

6.5 Upcoming Decisions

The Commission are asked whether they wish to introduce a regular item reviewing the forward plan of decisions and determining which committee is responsible for carrying out the appropriate scrutiny.

7. Other issues

7.1 New Coalition Government

On the 20th May 2010 the government announced its coalition agreement. A number of proposals announced will have impacts on local government. These range from general commitments to promote radical devolution and financial autonomy to local government and community groups including a review of local government finance to more specific proposals such as a commitment to allow local authorities to charge more for late night licensing to pay for additional policing. Proposals in the agreement which may be of particular interest to the WSC are:

Cut local authority inspection and abolish the CAA

The new government has now abolished the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) inspection regime which was introduced by the previous government in April 2009. Further details on what will replace the CAA have not yet been provided. However, it is possible that they may move to a 'peer review system' for local authorities.

Publication of task group/informal meeting papers

The new government's coalition agreement states that *"We will require all local councils to publish meeting minutes and local service and performance data."*

The extent of this requirement is not yet clear. As Policy and Scrutiny Task Groups are now informally constituted, meetings no longer have to be held in public. In practice, it is up to the Task Group as to whether the meeting papers are made publicly available. The Council's Constitution states that these will usually be open to the public. However, by publishing all task group meeting minutes online and, where appropriate, making agendas and papers publicly available, the Council could support greater public sector transparency. The Agenda, reports and minutes of all formal committees are already, except with certain limited exceptions, open to the public.

Allow Councils to return to a Committee system, should they wish to do so

This would re-introduce the possibility of a formal Committee decision making system Council should any local authority wish to return to such a system.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers please contact: Rebecca Gwilliam, Scrutiny Research Analyst, rgwilliam@westminster.gov.uk or 0207 641 3402

Appendix A – Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee

Overview

Since 2008 Essex County Council has run an award-winning Youth Scrutiny Committee aimed at raising awareness of youth issues in the County. The pilot looked at anti-bullying efforts in Essex, carrying out wide ranging consultation with, and led by, young people. The Committee reported directly to the Essex County Council Scrutiny Board but was mentored by the Chairman of the Children's and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

Although resource intensive the Council understandably consider the project a success – there was a very a low dropout rate amongst participants (only one in 14), young people involved achieved a linked qualification and valuable recommendations including introducing a confidential 'Bully text alert' service were made to the Council. Essex has now agreed to run a second round of the scheme, beginning later this year. This will involve a smaller number of young people and link in directly with the work of Youth Councils in Essex.

Scrutiny in action - Anti- bullying - Essex Youth Scrutiny Committee

- Young people recruited via Youth Services, social workers, youth councils and advertisements placed on local Connexions website
- 14 young people from South Essex selected – majority with high needs.
- Between June and Sept 2009 consulted with over 1500 young people to find out issue young people in South Essex would most like them to look at using a short poll card survey with 12 options.
- Set up own dedicated website – www.eysc.org.uk
- Attended 7 public events to canvas young people including hosting their own 'Scrutiny Day' which was attended by 12 local schools
- Identified anti-bullying as the most popular topic (27% of responses)
- Held 2 evidence sessions on anti bullying – 2 mock committees also run to prepare young people
- Witnesses included representatives from the Police, Women's Aid, the Basildon Youth Council, Young Essex Assembly, Transport and Safeguarding officers, mental health workers from the PCT and the Council's anti-bullying co-ordinator and a young person who had experience bullying first hand.
- Committee met to consider evidence and produce final report
- Submitted final report with 12 recommendations to the Council's Scrutiny Board (their equivalent of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission)

Resources

The Essex P&S Scrutiny Committee was directly supported by 11 officers including a youth consultant, employed specifically by the Council for the project, youth workers, the marketing team and committee and member support officers. Additionally, 20 other individuals and organisations were involved as stall holders on the dedicated scrutiny day.