



Westminster Scrutiny Commission

Date:	Monday 2 nd September
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Policy &Scrutiny – Developments in the Function
Report of:	Member Services Manager
Cabinet Member Portfolio:	Leader
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Governance
Financial Summary:	N/A
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the 19th November 2011 meeting of the Westminster Scrutiny Commission, officers were tasked with preparing a report on best practice relating to the statutory overview and scrutiny function of local authorities. At the 20th March 2012 meeting of the Commission, a report was presented entitled '*Enhancing the Effectiveness of Policy and Scrutiny.*' Within the report a series of recommendations were made relating to the organisation of Policy & Scrutiny at Westminster.
- 1.2 At the same meeting, Members of the Commission agreed to move forward with changing the function and, at the Chairman's request, officers prepared a short consultation on the recommendations put forward in the report. The consultation received a number of responses from Councillors, officers, providers, stakeholders and members of the public in Westminster.
- 1.3 A consultation report was published shortly afterwards, which contained a series of suggestions based on consultation responses. The consultation responses on the recommendations were brought into a report presented to the General Purposes Committee on the 10th May and subsequently this was

presented for adoption at Westminster's Annual Council Meeting on 16th May 2012. The Council agreed to the propositions presented in the report.

- 1.4 As such committees at Westminster met more frequently in fewer issue-based committees to order to maximise strategy (*for input into the Council's business cycle*), focus (*for specific outcomes*), promotion (*launching and running campaigns*) and evaluation (*to assess the worth and 'return-on-investment' of investigations undertaken*).
- 1.5 As part of the rolling evaluation of the P&S changes in 2012, a survey was run with the Senior Leadership Team of the council and all external witnesses who appeared before committees in the last municipal year. This short report details the results of this survey, conducted in June 2013.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- 2.1 Main points on which the committee may wish to provide a view:

§ To consider the results of the SLT survey (n = 17)

§ To consider the results of the external witness survey (n = 17)

3. Background

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- 3.1 In the last year, the Committee work programmes have attained to be more strategic, allowing timely input into issues where there is relevance within the business plans of departments. **85% of officers in the SLT consider that this has improved the strategic nature of the P&S committees**
- 3.2 The number of items on each agenda has reduced, to ensure that meetings only cover two or three main items in depth. **77% of officers in the SLT consider that this has improved the operation and outcomes of P&S.**
- 3.3 In the last year, Committees have sought to make numbers of recommendations to service areas as a result of each item under consideration. **77% of officers in the SLT consider that this has useful in providing depth and steer in P&S Committees.**
- 3.4 In order to boost the engagement of Members and reduce the lengths of meetings, the number of committees has reduced from 6 to 4, whilst the frequency of committee meetings has increased from 4 to 6 per year. **62% of officers in SLT consider that this shift has been a positive one.**
- 3.5 The P&S function does not now accept papers which only provide information or updates for Members, given that Member input and recommendations for action are now the primary goals for Committees. **46% of officers in the SLT**

consider that this has improved the operation and outcomes of the P&S committees.

- 3.6 The survey also received qualitative comments upon how to comments how to maximise the effectiveness of P&S and how to boost Member and Officer engagement in the function. The officer presenting this report will provide a verbal update on the comments received. The questions asked were as follows:

How do you consider we could maximise the effectiveness of P&S?

How would you boost Member engagement in P&S?

How would you boost Officer engagement in P&S?

EXTERNAL WITNESS SURVEY

- 4.1 Alongside the survey of the senior leadership team, a short survey was circulated to all of the external, expert witnesses who had attended a committee to provide evidence in the 2012 – 2013 municipal year. (Total number of witnesses was **50**).
- 4.2 **88% of external, expert witnesses felt that Members of the Committee were receptive to the issues that they raised.**
- 4.3 **82% of external, expert witnesses found the discussions helpful for their own professional needs and / or organisations.**
- 4.4 **82% of external, expert witnesses would attend a Committee again to give evidence, should they be invited by Members.**
- 4.5 **68% of external, expert, external witnesses considered that the recommendations and / or conclusions made by the Committee reflected the balance of evidence provided at the session.**
- 4.6 **53% of external, expert witnesses thought that they positively influenced the discussions of the Committee.**
- 4.7 The survey also received qualitative comments upon how expert, external witnesses felt about their appearance at the Westminster P&S committees. The officer presenting this report will provide a verbal update on the comments received. The questions asked were as follows:

What things could the Chairman, Committee Members or the Secretariat have done to improve your experience at the discussions at Westminster?

What were the most positive aspects of your experience / appearance as an external, expert witness?

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Mark Ewbank x2636
mewbank@westminster.gov.uk**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ewbank, M (2012) *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Policy and Scrutiny*.

Westminster Scrutiny Commission (2012) *Review of the structure and operation of
Policy and Scrutiny Committees at Westminster City Council*