

## ***1. Role Descriptions***

That the Council develop and adopt “role descriptions” for Chair and Vice Chair positions within the new governance structure.

There is a need for clarity about the work that is expected to be undertaken and means by which leading Members may be held to account for delivery of their role. This recommendation could also help Councillors in some positions by clarifying their duties and role. Greater clarity increases the potential for accountability and for them to report on achievements.

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## ***2. Joining-up local neighbourhood meetings***

The potential to align Ward Forum meetings with CAPs should be revisited in light of potential changes to CAP arrangements proposed by that Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime.

This has already been adopted by some Ward Forums and CAPs on an ad hoc basis. In some areas there is a view that since the ‘neighbourhood policing model’ is changing, local teams are less sure about the future remit and direction of CAPs. Also, it is not the best use of time for public services nor residents to have multiple local meetings for different services.

This recommendation has the potential to rationalise the number of local meetings that are held at Ward Level, bring public services together in an area, increase the identity of a ward and community leadership role of Councillors

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## ***3. Clarifying the suite of tools available for ward Councillors***

That all of the procedures available for Councillors to use be presented collectively in an innovative way as part of the induction for 2014, if not before.

There are number of procedures available within the constitution that are not currently used widely by Councillors, in part because some are not all widely known. This recommendation should clarify and promote less frequently used options such as ‘call for action’, different types of petition and deputation, ‘call-in’, and Member mail-outs.

By May 2014

Most Councillors are aware of the levers available to them for getting things done and are able to use them effectively. However, discussion of some of these procedures during the review did provoke interest, particularly if the

roles of some formal bodies such as full Council were to change, there might be greater need for awareness of alternative procedures.

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#### ***4. Policy debates at Full Council***

Introduce procedures, guidance and training for Full Council meetings to initiate debate and agree further activities to develop new policies or review existing policies.

The Commission heard evidence to suggest that Council meetings could be used as the start, rather than the end, of a policy process. Topics debated at Council might initiate work to be carried-out by a lead Cabinet Member before a decision is taken at a later stage, or lead to a suggestion for a Scrutiny Review for example. This approach could take the form of a Parliamentary model with Green and White papers (perhaps produced by Ward Forums or Scrutiny Commissions).

Combined with fewer meetings of Full Council overall, this would have the potential to radically alter the nature of those meetings and the ability of all Councillors to participate in the debate. It is not clear at this stage what the impact would be on the policy development process compared to current approaches.

Deputations, petitions and public question that do not relate to the topic of debate may get crowded-out and will need accommodating elsewhere, for example at Cabinet or Scrutiny.

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#### ***5. Use of current Council Procedures***

The procedures for receiving deputations and petitions work effectively at Full Council and existing provisions within the constitution should be promoted to residents and Councillors so that they can be used equally effectively at Cabinet, Scrutiny and other relevant committees.

The Council's procedures for receiving and responding to deputations and petitions was described by one resident as a 'model of democratic procedure'. Others had more mixed experiences of using them but the overall impression was that they worked well and should be used more of settings other than Full Council. The Commission was informed that the current constitution allows for this but that such procedures were not widely used. For example, it was possible currently for deputations and petitions to be received by Cabinet or Scrutiny.

This approach might increase the opportunity for deputations or petitions of varying natures to be directed at the most appropriate body, and possibly increase the number overall. What difference this would make to local

governance, engagement or the quality of decisions is untested but would support the Nolan principle of openness, for example.

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## ***6. Open Public Question Times***

Consideration should be given to introducing open public question times, similar to those held by the Greater London Authority where members of the public can ask questions of their lead politicians spontaneously on the night.

Some guidance should be provided for this which encourages participants to give some early indication of the topic they might ask a question about. Guidance would also be required regarding the scope of topics for questioning and use of appropriate language, where this is not already covered in the current Constitution. This approach could replace Cabinet Question Time at OSB and reduce the need for a Mayor's statement to which only opposition leaders can respond currently.

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## ***7. Overview and Scrutiny Debates at Full Council***

The reports of Overview and Scrutiny Commissions should only be referred to full Council if the Commission agree that the subject, findings and recommendations merit wider debate. Where a scrutiny review has been carried out at the request of Full Council it should always be reported back for receipt and debate.

The Commission found that not all matters that had been the subject of a scrutiny review were a relevant topic for debate at Full Council meetings. Furthermore, some of the concluding reports were detailed and quite technical in their nature. This meant that not all Councillors were in a position to participate in such debate.

This would reduce the number of scrutiny debates at Full Council meetings but should also improve the quality of debate for those scrutiny reviews that do feature on the agenda. A recent example of this was debate surrounding the summary report of a scrutiny review regarding Childhood Obesity

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## ***8. Behaviour of Councillors at meetings***

While the Commission recognises that vigorous debate is a sign of a healthy democracy, there should also be a commitment to civility in meetings. Those speaking in Council meetings should avoid the use of ridicule and demeaning language when engaging in debate.

Members of the public and local press were clear that ‘yah-boo’ style politics were not attractive nor of interest, and that at its worse it could prohibit constructive discussion and debate across the whole Chamber.

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### ***9. Practical points about Council meetings***

- i. The Council should introduce paperless meetings and and consider providing Councillors with appropriate equipment for reading and annotating papers in an electronic format .
- ii. The Council should introduce a jargon buster in the explanatory notes at the front of every council paper or agenda as appropriate.
- iii. The Council should experiment with how digital technology can be used to present and report the activity of meetings in ways that a minute cannot.