

**Executive response to Governance & Resources Commission recommendations in relation to the Governance Review**

<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	<b><u>Executive response</u></b>
<p>1. <u>Role Descriptions</u></p> <p>That the Council develop and adopt "role descriptions" for Chair and Vice Chair positions within the new governance structure.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed. Cabinet would support the introduction of role descriptions for Chair and Vice Chair positions within the new governance structure, and agree that this would provide greater clarity around role expectations.</p> <p>The Corporate Director for Legal, HR and Regulatory Services will take this recommendation forward, and develop role descriptions in consultation with relevant members/committees.</p>
<p>2. <u>Joining-up local neighbourhood meetings</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Officers are currently revisiting the alignment of ward forum meetings with CAPs, which are police led panels. We understand that the Metropolitan Police are looking to ensure greater consistency in the approach taken across boroughs through Safer Neighbourhood Forums and ward panels.</p> <p>Officers will be meeting with local police on October 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss opportunities for joint working. There is certainly agreement in principle that it would be helpful to join up the mechanisms for engaging with local people more effectively.</p>
<p>3. <u>Clarifying the suite of tools available for Ward Councillors</u></p> <p>That all of the procedures available for Councillors to use be presented collectively in an innovative way.</p>	<p>Agreed. Cabinet is in support of raising awareness amongst Members of the procedures available to them for raising issues that are material to local residents.</p> <p>Corporate Director of Legal, HR and</p>

<p>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.</p> <p>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 are to change, there might be greater need for awareness of alternative procedures.</p>	<p>Regulatory Services to produce guidance on this.</p>
<p>4. <u>Policy debates at Full Council</u></p> <p>Introduce procedures, guidance and training for Full Council meetings to initiate debate and agree further activities to develop new policies or review existing policies.</p> <p>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).</p> <p>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 pubic 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.</p>	<p>Cabinet support the use of Council meetings for policy debates, which was also agreed by Full Council when it agreed the governance review. A debate entitled a 'Place for Everyone' has provisionally been scheduled for Council in January 2015 to discuss the changing face of Hackney and future priorities.</p> <p>Whilst the principle of greater forward planning of policy debates is supported, it is felt that an annual Full Council planning meeting may not be the best way to achieve this, although Scrutiny may wish to consider possible debates at the Scrutiny Chairs annual work programming meeting.</p>

<p>It will be important to get input from Cabinet in order to plan effectively for topics that it would be appropriate to discuss at an early stage. This could be achieved by arranging a Full Council Planning Meeting ahead of the Municipal Year where Scrutiny Chairs, Cabinet, Scrutiny Officer, Chief whip, etc. come together to map out the year ahead as much as possible. Council meetings could then be promoted actively well in advance via channels such as Hackney Today, Twitter, the Council website, etc.</p>	
<p><u>5. Use of current Council Procedures</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>The Council's petition scheme is available on the Council's website on a dedicated web page, and sets out how and when petitions are reported to different Council bodies. In reality, whilst the channels for doing so are there, many residents do not necessarily wish to present their petitions to a formal meeting of the Council, but just want reassurance that their concerns are being listened to and addressed. Whilst the volume of petitions to meetings of Cabinet or Scrutiny is low, for instance, the Mayor will regularly receive petitions from residents which are dealt with through the casework process; these will range from a few households petitioning about parking or ASB in their street, to much larger lobbying campaigns around specific policy or service issues.</p> <p>However, we will review how engagement between residents and the Council could be promoted to increase awareness of what is possible.</p>
<p><u>6. Open Public Question Times</u></p> <p>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</p>	<p>There are already a number of ways in which residents can engage with the Council and its elected representatives including the Mayor and Cabinet. These include through casework, surgeries, ward forums, public questions at Full Council and Cabinet, Cabinet question times at scrutiny, and Meet Your Mayor sessions. Many members are also active on social media. Of these, Meet</p>

<p>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.</p>	<p>Your Mayor and ward forums are both public forums at which residents can ask spontaneous questions of members (i.e. of the Mayor or in the first instance, and ward councillors in the latter instance). However, in recognition of the request from scrutiny for further opportunities to spontaneously question the Mayor and Cabinet at public meetings, it is agreed that the requirement for prior written notice of questions at Cabinet meetings will be waived. It should be recognised, however, that if members are not supplied with any notice of questions, their ability to respond with any detail will be limited. It is therefore suggested that residents should still be encouraged to provide some notice of the questions, although the option to ask a question with no notice will be there.</p>
<p><u>7. Overview and Scrutiny Debates at Full Council</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>There is no formal requirement for reports from scrutiny reviews to be reported or debated at Full Council, and which reports are discussed there has always been at the discretion of Scrutiny Chairs. Whilst in previous years the practice has been for all scrutiny reports to be discussed at Full Council, more recently Scrutiny Chairs have opted to only present certain reports at Full Council, where it is believed the reports are more appropriate for a debate in that forum. This approach is supported.</p>
<p><u>8. Behaviour of Councillors at meetings</u></p>	<p>Agreed. Upon election, all members are</p>

<p>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.</p>	<p>required to sign up to a Code of Conduct which is based upon the seven principles of public life, and which promotes high standards of conduct from all members, including treating others with respect.</p> <p>Whilst it is recognised that discussion within the Council chamber can occasionally get heated, it is the role of the Speaker as chair to call a Member to order if their conduct is not deemed to be in accordance with the principles of public life.</p>
<p><u>9. Practical points about Council meetings</u></p> <p>i. The Council should introduce paperless meetings and consider providing Councillors with appropriate equipment for reading and annotating papers in an electronic format.</p> <p>ii. The Council should introduce a jargon buster in the explanatory notes at the front of every council paper or agenda as appropriate.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>i. The use of tablet devices is currently being trialled with some members, to determine whether they support more efficient working, deliver cost savings, and enable paperless meetings.</p> <p>ii. Whilst this can be implemented, reports should be presented in a user friendly format in plain English.</p> <p>Officers will be reminded of the need to make clear in reports unusual words or meanings. Where jargon is unavoidable it must be explained.</p> <p>iii. The Council has a popular twitter feed (11,300 followers) and regularly tweets from Full Council meetings and other meetings that are thought to be of particular public interest.</p> <p>As part of the refurbishment of the Town Hall, facilities will also be installed in the Council chamber which support online streaming of Council meetings.</p>