

SKILLS, ECONOMY AND GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMISSION

LEGISLATION

Overview and Scrutiny was introduced following [Local Government Act 2000](#). Local authority Overview and Scrutiny has been strengthened over the years through a variety of legislations.

Since the initial Act, establishing overview and scrutiny, in 2000 there has been a number of further Acts, often accompanied by secondary legislation, which have gradually strengthened the powers of scrutiny. Today, the legislative provisions for overview and scrutiny committees for England can be found in the Localism Act 2011, which mostly consolidated previously existing law. As a note the 2011 Act also removed the obligation on councils using the committee system to have an overview and scrutiny committee.

ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) in local authorities is the process for holding the Executive to account, ensuring transparency in decision making and encouraging engagement by residents in the way local services are provided.

Traditionally this focused solely on the operations of the council, either through pre-decision scrutiny (where scrutiny committees review the production of formal plans and strategies etc) or reactive reviews that look at the impact and performance of any existing council service. Increasingly the role of elected Members through Overview and Scrutiny focuses on decisions taken not just by the council but by local partners as well, across the whole range of services in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) – the national body for scrutiny - devised the following four principles for Effective Overview and Scrutiny.

1. provide constructive “critical friend” challenge;
2. amplify the voice and concerns of the public
3. be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
4. drive improvement in public services.¹

The membership of O&S commissions is politically proportionate. Scrutiny is non-adversarial² and non-partisan³. The role of scrutiny is to be a “Critical friend” challenging decision maker within LBH as well as external agencies.

REMIT

The Commission scrutinises matters relating to employment and skills (including adult learning), effects of macro-economic change, infrastructure developments for transport, planning and licensing for residents and businesses, large scale schemes and economic regeneration, libraries and voluntary and community sector.

¹ <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/revisiting-the-four-principles-of-good-scrutiny/>

² Non-adversarial means there is a spirit of co-operation, a passive stance, the parties are willing to reach a mutually satisfying resolution to a problem. There is persuasion rather than coercion.

³ not partisan means not affiliated to, influenced by, or supporting any one political party

Scrutiny Commission Remit / Areas	
High level remit as per constitution	Prosperity of the borough and development, in particular economic development, employment and large-scale planning and transport infrastructure schemes.
Statutory functions	None
Economy and Economic Regeneration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Town Centres • Supporting Business • Effects of macro economic development. 	
Licensing - residents and businesses	
Planning - businesses	
Voluntary Sector and Community Sector Partnership	
Employment and Skills (including adult learning)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult learning element of Education and Schools • Employment and training opportunities • Ways into Work • Apprenticeships 	
Transport - strategic transport (infrastructure developments for transport)	
Libraries	
Cabinet Members SEG holds to account	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cllr Williams • Cllr Nicholson • Cllr Coban • Cllr Kennedy 	
Service performance issues in the above remits	

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE COUNCIL

The directorates the SEG remit covers are:

- Chief Executives Directorate
- Climate, Homes and Economy Directorate
- Finance and Corporate Resources

SCRUTINY REVIEWS

The Commission usually carries out one major review each year. Once the review report is agreed it is sent to Cabinet for an 'Executive Response' and this goes on the Cabinet Agenda. Some scrutiny reports and their responses are also debated at Full Council.

When reviews are completed there is a system of recommendation trackers whereby officers are required to come back after 6 -12 months to discuss the progress made and to provide updates on the implementation of the recommendations from the review.

SITE VISITS AND OTHER APPROACHES TO EVIDENCE GATHERING

The commission meetings are just one way in which the commission collects evidence for its in-depth reviews. Members also go on site visits and use other formats such as focus groups or observing groups or activity. The latter is more appropriate if Members are speaking to service users on sensitive issues which would be difficult for them to discuss in an open committee. The notes recorded from external site visits are placed in the agendas.

CABINET MEMBERS AND CABINET MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In the municipal year the Commission holds question time sessions with the Cabinet and Senior Officers to ask questions about performance and decision-making within the Council related to their portfolio areas. The Cabinet Members are asked to come and answer questions on 3 pre-agreed areas. This is similar to Select Committee operations in the House of Commons, same format. All Cabinet Members and the Mayor must attend at least one of these a year.

The Commission's remit covers the following Cabinet Member's portfolios:

- **Cllr Guy Nicholson, Deputy Mayor for delivery, inclusive economy & regeneration.** Councillor Guy Nicholson has lead responsibility for:
 - 2022 to 26 manifesto & council strategic plan delivery
 - capital programme – new homes, infrastructure and services delivery
 - town centre, high street, estates and neighbourhood place making
 - planning service – performance, policy, plan making, building control & enforcement
 - inclusive economic development – local business, cooperative & social enterprise led community wealth building delivery
 - regional & international economic partnerships delivery.

- **Councillor Carole Williams, Cabinet member for employment, human resource and equalities.** Cllr Williams has lead responsibility for:
 - employment strategy and partnerships
 - Hackney works
 - apprenticeships – including Hackney apprenticeship network and the apprenticeship levy
 - employment programmes including supported employment, adult trainees and paid work experience
 - Human Resources and organisational development
 - relationship with the trade unions
 - adult learning and English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) – delivering excellence
 - post 18 skills, including further and higher education
 - supporting the London living wage
 - equalities and anti-racism
 - refugees and vulnerable migrants
 - windrush
 - policy, strategy and devolution
 - fair trade with the climate justice and fair trade champion
 - volunteering

- **Councillor Chris Kennedy, Cabinet member for health, adult social care, voluntary sector, and culture.** Cllr Kennedy has lead responsibility for:
 - health and relationship with the local NHS
 - adult social care
 - mental health and wellbeing
 - public health
 - voluntary and community sector (SEG Commission)
 - arts & culture
 - libraries, museum and archives (SEG Commission)
 - food justice
 - communications and consultations
 - waterways and boaters

- **Councillor Mete Coban, Cabinet Member for environment and transport.** Cllr Coban has lead responsibility for:
 - climate change – including responding to the emergency, mitigation, adaptation, and public awareness
 - environmental sustainability
 - transport (working with Mayor) – bus priority, road safety, accessibility, strategic infrastructure and transportation
 - liveable neighbourhoods – promoting walking and cycling
 - clean air and tackling pollution
 - public realm and streetscene
 - electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure
 - energy – community and local generation, efficiency, and procurement
 - retrofit council homes programme with cabinet member for housing services and resident participation
 - growing the green and circular economy
 - waste and recycling
 - waste services and waste reduction and prevention
 - street and estate cleansing
 - corporate decarbonisation and just transition to net zero
 - vehicle and cycle parking.

WORK OF THE COMMISSION 2021-2022

RECENT REVIEW

Following Hackney Council's climate emergency declaration in June 2021 the overview and scrutiny function decided to review the council's work on sustainability and net zero carbon. Various pieces scrutiny work was undertaken to contribute to an overarching review. In SEG they looked at the following:

- Skills for the net zero carbon economy
- Transport for a cleaner, greener Hackney Economy
- Decarbonising Hackney's economy and Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises to decarbonise.

(A report and recommendations from this work will follow shortly)

HOLDING TO ACCOUNT

Last year SEG held cabinet question time sessions with Cllr Nicholson and Cllr Williams.

For Cllr Nicholson the session looked at post pandemic recovery, supporting cultural night time economy. This covered:

- Investment in Hackney's future from large local businesses and associated opportunity creation for residents.
- Affordable commercial rents and the impact of Brexit & coronavirus.
- Rejuvenation of the night-time economy.

For Cllr Williams the session was themed around a skills enquiry. The Commission reviewed the council's understanding in relation to the shift net zero and the impact on demand for net zero skills, new skills needed, and the jobs being created. The commission was particularly interested in the construction, transport & energy sectors. This covered:

- Opportunities and risks for Hackney's working population with the shift to net zero,
- The role of the council and other key stakeholders (FE colleges, private sector to support people to be able to shift.
- Emerging green jobs, the skills demand, how residents will fit in, and what the shortfall of skilled labour to emerging green roles is like.
- Skills shortage (Energy Strategy and procurement).

OTHER DISCUSSION ITEMS IN 2021/2022

Other discussion topics covered by the commission were:

- Community Involvement in Regeneration – How the community is involved and engaged to influence area regeneration. This also covered community engagement with the planning team affects area regeneration, and how the Hackney Wick Development Trust approached community engagement in area regeneration with local residents & businesses.
- Transport for a Cleaner, Greener Hackney – As the borough rebuilds and moves toward achieving its net-zero targets. A look at the work by the council in response to the Secretary of State for Transport and the Department for Transport call to local authorities to undertake emergency structural measures to encourage active travel and discourage non-essential motor- vehicle use.
- Decarbonising Hackney's Economy - how the council can help support local SMEs to decarbonise their business model and operations. To help them align with the council's aims and ambitions to achieve net zero carbon by 2040.
- Economic Stocktake (incl. Highstreets) - Council's work to support the development of the local high streets and at this juncture in the pandemic understand what has happened to the local economy since the pandemic. The Commission is keen to identify if the council's decisions and measures put in place have helped to keep the local economy remain stable. In addition to identify which businesses /sector has survived.
- Voluntary Sector - The item is to review how COVID has impacted the voluntary sector, how it's affected the sector's ability to meet the needs of the borough, what demand in these services looks like, and the future of volunteering work.

LIFECYCLE OF A SCRUTINY REVIEW – A BRIEF GUIDE

The schematic below shows the processes involved in the completion of a typical scrutiny review.

