



Area governance

Ed Hammond, Director of Research, CfPS

Recap

- This is the fourth meeting of this Panel, which is meeting to consider the practical options for improving Council governance;
- This follows on from “Change at the Council”, the independent review and evaluation of governance carried out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and the Democratic Society in 2017/18;
- The first three meetings covered:
 - The overall scope for the work of the Panel;
 - How the public expect to be involved in decision making;
 - The options for governance across the whole of Kensington and Chelsea.

Aim is for recommendations to go to Full Council in May.

Purpose of this presentation

To give those present a sense of what options exist for the Council and local people on how people might be better involved in decisions at a more local level;

This is as much about the dialogue that informs the decision as the decision itself – having the space to come together and just discuss important things is really important.

To lead people into an informed discussion of those options and what might be best for Kensington and Chelsea (and different part of K&C).

A reminder

- Choosing the right approach to governance is about thinking through the options and going with **what will work best for you**
- There is no “best system”
- It isn't really possible to talk about, and weigh up, the “pros and cons” of each system **in isolation** – pros and cons will and should look different for each council

The options

Area bodies can have a number of names – and a range of powers

Some can be informal bodies, some can be formal “committees of the council”.

Often these bodies are “council owned” and supported but parish and community councils are independent

The options

They can be:

- Discussion groups, with no formal powers but allowing ward councillors and lead councillors to get a better understanding of local issues, and to exert some form of local scrutiny;
- Forums for councillors to gauge views about how small area budgets might be spent – often on “clean and green” projects – with councillors taking the final decision;
- Similar forums to the above but with local people taking part in decision-making;
- Bodies with powers to make planning or licensing decisions (the law defines how this can work at the local level)
- Bodies with other powers, which may have been formally delegated by the Council’s executive (such as grantmaking);
- Independent bodies like community councils which have direct elections and which may employ staff to carry out work directly in the community.

Common themes

Not all areas across a whole council's "patch" have to have the same forums/bodies with the same powers

Bodies do need clear terms of reference –

- what is their role?
- who takes decisions?
- how are decisions made, based on what evidence?
- what are the roles of councillors and local people in discussing, developing and making decisions?

Common themes (2)

There needs to be a clear understanding about how power is delegated – ie exactly how the Council legally “passes down” certain decisions and issues to local bodies in a way that is consistent, sensible and that makes sense to local people and councillors

In some areas local people have become frustrated because some local bodies have been seen to be influenced and directed in their work by small groups of local people who are seen as being “unrepresentative” of the wider community

Area forum and governance models: practice in other councils

Borough and area governance review panel

15 January 2019

Heather Wills, Interim Director of Governance, RBKC

Ward/ area budgets

- One-off spend with no ongoing commitment
- Spent on (for example): highway benches, speed warning signs, tree planting, tools for community garden, match funding for larger projects, activities to bring local people together
- Similar to RBKC (City Living Local Life: £30,000/ 3-member ward):

	£8,000/ councillor	Encourage resident-led activities that are independent and self-sustaining
	£9,500/ councillor	Improve the wellbeing of the local community, environment or economy
	£45,000/ ward	Work, events or activities that have positive impact in the ward
	£46,000/ ward	Address local issues and priorities

Area/ ward forums

	<p>Ward forums: joint problem solving in partnership with community groups, Council services and residents. Each ward has a priority plan (eg addressing social isolation, tackling fly tipping)</p>	<p>Ward budgets: £30,000/ ward</p>
	<p>Local assemblies: ward-based, chaired by ward councillor. Each assembly has a set of local priorities. Assembly works with voluntary sector, police, wider community and others to make things happen</p>	<p>Ward budgets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £12,500/ ward • £2,500 for councillors to spend on local projects
	<p>Community councils: local people, councillors and council officers meet to discuss anything of interest to the local community. Councillors involve local people in discussion and use points raised to help take decisions on issues (eg traffic management, community safety, environmental improvements)</p>	<p>Neighbourhood fund: £630,000 across the borough's 23 wards</p>

NB- Haringey had area committees - decommissioned in May 2015 in light of low attendance

Locally-based scrutiny

Hounslow – Area Forums (5 for the borough's 20 wards)

- Made up of local ward councillors: can also choose to co-opt up to three local people onto their membership, in a non-voting capacity
- Meetings monitor, scrutinise & review services delivered by the Council and other agencies in the area, (eg NHS & Police)
- Opportunity to comment on most aspects of council policy, as well as setting their own priorities and objectives.
- The forums can call-in planning applications to area forums, to discuss them and then decide whether they will be determined by the Planning Committee, or officers under delegated powers. Forums also have powers related to traffic schemes, parking restrictions, and certain other highways powers.
- There's usually an opportunity for members of the public to raise issues of concern

Delegated decision making

- **Kingston** - neighbourhood committees (NCs) made up of local ward councillors (4 groupings of the borough's 16 wards). Delegated powers inc. non-major planning applications, traffic management, parks, housing management, licensing.

NCs can:

- develop a Community Plan to frame local decisions
- make recommendations to strategic committees in relation to issues impacting on the Community Plan.

Supported by funding of £2,000/ councillor plus Community Infrastructure Levy and community funding grants

- **Bristol** (pop. 456,000) – area committees (between 4-7 wards each). Delegated executive decisions related to spending of Community Infrastructure Levy & s.106. Councillors hold community conversations to identify stage 1 ideas: committees meet to review detailed proposals
- **Wiltshire** (pop. 474,000) – area boards

Issues to consider

What are the issues best discussed and agreed at a local level?

What does “local” mean in this context? What’s the best geography?

How can systems be set up to ensure fairness, transparency and the involvement of a wide cross-section of local people?

How will we know that area governance is having a positive impact on local people’s lives – what will it look and feel like?