

# Scrutiny – a Guide for Local People



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF  
KENSINGTON  
AND CHELSEA

## What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a councillor-led function of the Council. Its job is to hold the Leadership Team (which takes decisions) to account on behalf of borough residents and to help develop policies and initiatives that make the borough a better place to live and work.

The day-to-day running of the Council is managed by the nine councillors who are members of the Leadership Team (sometimes called 'the cabinet'): they take most of the biggest financial, policy and service decisions.

Councillors from all parties take part in Scrutiny and, when carrying out Scrutiny work are expected to apply an independent mindset and to not act in a party-political way.

Scrutiny acts as a 'critical friend' to the Leadership Team. By law, scrutiny committees can:

- hold inquiries (that can take different forms) and produce reports making recommendations for the Leadership Team to act on, any issue affecting the borough and its residents.
- require Lead Members and officers to appear before them. People from outside the Council can be invited, but not compelled, to attend.
- receive a response to their recommendations from the Leadership Team within two months.
- call in 'Key Decisions' made by the Leader and her Team to review them and possibly ask them to reconsider it.
- scrutinise health bodies and providers in the borough.

Scrutiny committees provide a way to look at the detail of issues and how these affect local people's lives. They can spend weeks or months examining a topic in depth, taking evidence widely and producing recommendations.

Scrutiny makes recommendations to the Leadership Team and Council partners. The decision of whether to pursue these recommendations falls on the Leadership Team and/or other bodies (NHS, police, etc), but the more researched, evidence-based and reasonable they are, the more these recommendations are likely to be acted-upon.

Effective scrutiny requires the Committee to 'ask difficult questions'. It also requires the Leadership Team to listen and respond, considering what they've heard when developing future policies and improving current services.

## How is scrutiny carried out?

Scrutiny aims to involve and respond to local people and to make a direct difference to their lives. It is led by one overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and four service-based

Select Committees. These five committees each have the powers mentioned above and carry out their work in a mix of formal meetings and working groups.

**The Overview and Scrutiny Committee** is made up of 10 members. Councillor Marie-Therese Rossi is the Chair and Councillor Adrian Berrill-Cox is the Vice-Chair. Other members include Councillors Sarah Addenbrooke, Kasim Ali, Mohammed Bakhtiar, Marwan Elnaghi, Janet Evans, Greg Hammond, David Lindsay and Will Pascall.

Its key responsibilities include:

- the preparation of an annual scrutiny work programme and the ongoing co-ordination of scrutiny work;
- considering, assessing and allocating Grenfell-related topics.
- ensuring that statutory scrutiny functions are addressed (health, floods, police);
- deciding on whether to make recommendations to the Leadership Team;
- exercising call-in powers among others.

You can check its full list of responsibilities in the Council's Constitution<sup>1</sup>.

### **How can I get involved in Scrutiny?**

*You can propose a topic for review.*

You can propose a topic to be examined in the future. If there is an issue that you would like scrutiny to look at, please contact the Scrutiny Team ([scrutiny@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@rbkc.gov.uk)).

*You can respond to a 'Call for Evidence'*

Scrutiny councillors need to find out what things are like for local people and organisations affected by, or with a stake in, the topic being explored. Select Committees issue calls for evidence to hear from residents, experts and organisations.

This is an opportunity for you to share your views and experiences, putting forward the issues that you would like the Overview and Scrutiny or Select Committees to become aware of, that perhaps they had not really thought about before. You can present evidence in writing if you do not want (or cannot) attend in person. In addition, you can invite scrutiny councillors to community meetings, so they can hear views relevant to the review.

*You can attend a meeting*

You are also welcome to attend scrutiny sessions simply to listen and be informed of topics that you care about. Select Committees gather in formally constituted meetings five times a year, but a lot of their review work happens in working groups – which are informal meetings that may take place in community venues throughout the borough. Whether formal or informal, scrutiny meetings and inquiries are routinely held in public. Up to date information about them appears in the calendar of meetings: [www.rbkc.gov.uk/committees/meetings.aspx](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/committees/meetings.aspx)

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<sup>1</sup> Part 9, Section 3, pg. 102. [<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/council-councillors-and-democracy/how-council-works/constitution>].

If you have a concern about an individual case or personal circumstances, please speak to an officer attending the meeting rather than raising the subject in the meeting.

*You can become a member of a scrutiny review*

If you, or the organisation of which you are part, have expertise on a topic being reviewed, you can ask the Select Committee to appoint you as co-optee to the panel conducting the review (you would not have voting rights but you would be able to suggest how the review should gather evidence, to question those giving it, and to contribute to discussions about the review's findings).

### **Any comments and suggestions?**

Please email the Scrutiny Team ([scrutiny@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@rbkc.gov.uk)) for information about how to be part of a scrutiny review, suggest topics or help us improve what we do.