

ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 22 NOVEMBER 2010

DEEP LEVEL SCRUTINY - PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURE

This paper sets out the principles of 'deep level scrutiny', proposed as a new way of working for the Family and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee, and submits a procedure note for the Committee's consideration.

FOR DECISION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Family and Children's Services (FCS) Scrutiny Committee trialled 'deep level scrutiny' at the September 2010 committee meeting, with a session on the Stronger Families Transformation Programme. A procedure note has been developed and refined on the basis of that meeting and is now proposed as a basis for future 'deep level scrutiny' sessions (see Appendix A).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 'Deep level scrutiny' is a halfway house between the traditional methods of undertaking scrutiny that are currently in place in the Royal Borough, namely;
- Reports and presentations considered in a formal committee setting, and
 - In-depth reviews undertaken by working groups.
- 2.2 The first of these options, reports and presentations, forms the basis of the Committee's agenda for formal meetings. There are advantages to this method of considering information. Firstly, reports can be commissioned as issues arise, allowing for a topical and up-to-date agenda and a prompt scrutiny response. Secondly, the full committee is present to hear and, if they wish, contribute to discussion on the issue. However, there are many reports on an average agenda, and there is not always enough time available to consider the more complex topics in detail.
- 2.3 The second of these options, in-depth reviews, take place over a number of months and are conducted by working groups (three or four councillors selected from amongst the parent committee's membership). The advantage of this method is that it allows for detailed consideration of all aspects of the

topic under scrutiny, and there is a formal process for creating recommendations as a result of the evidence considered. However, due to the time taken to complete an in-depth review, it is often not possible to obtain a swift response to a current topic. Furthermore, outputs are not the result of the full committee working together, but simply reflect the views of the Members on the working group. Lastly, topics are selected via the annual work programme process, making it more difficult to respond to issues that arise mid-year (although there is provision to amend the work programme, where necessary).

- 2.4 Deep level scrutiny draws on the advantages of both methods outlined above. Topics are considered at formal committee meetings, but in detail over the course of an hour. This allows for a deeper level of analysis than will be given to a standard committee report. However, topics can still be selected as and when they arise and added to the work programme for subsequent committee meetings.

Discussion is contained within one meeting so outcomes are made known reasonably rapidly (although provision exists to return to a topic at a subsequent meeting if the topic is too significant or complex to address in a single session). Debate takes place in a structured manner that encourages all Members of the committee to contribute equally.

Lastly, there is a recognised process for capturing the debate and discussion; at the conclusion of a 'deep level scrutiny' session the Committee can agree to send a statement summarising the Committee's views and priorities on the matter to Cabinet, either for information or for a response.

- 2.5 The new approach is intended to promote the following:
- That the committee will be able to provide a faster response to current events without sacrificing detailed analysis,
 - That, due to the structured nature of the questioning and discussion, all Members will have equal opportunity and time to voice their opinions and pose questions,
 - That Members will be further encouraged to consider, research and prepare comments and questions in advance of the meeting,
 - That conclusions will be drawn on the strength of a full committee debate, rather than being predominantly based on comments from one or two Members who may have strong feelings on a particular subject,
 - That the more formalised process will make the meeting easier to manage and co-ordinate, and that stricter time-keeping will allow business to be conducted with equal thoroughness but in a quicker and more focused manner, and
 - That Cabinet Members in attendance will learn scrutiny's views on current topics, and that – if the Committee agrees it is appropriate – a summary of the Committee's view's and priorities will be submitted to the Cabinet agenda for information or for a response.

- 2.6 It is noted that not all topics will be suitable for deep level scrutiny; some will still benefit from the more detailed process of in-depth review and others will remain suited to a short report for the committee's agenda. However, the third option of 'deep level scrutiny' will provide an additional tool for the committee where topics need detailed analysis and yet also require a prompt response.
- 2.7 If the model is demonstrated successfully by the FCS Scrutiny Committee, it may be something that other scrutiny committees wish to adopt in future years.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the procedure note set out in Appendix A be adopted to guide the new 'deep level scrutiny' process.

COUNCILLOR PROFESSOR SIR ANTHONY COATES, CHAIRMAN
FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Background papers: None

Contact officer: Clair Bantin, Scrutiny Manager
Tel: 020 361 2634 **E-mail:** clair.bantin@rbkc.gov.uk