SHARED INTELLIGENCE

Haringey Governance Review
Final Report

December 2010

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I FOREWORD

As the local leaders of the two political parties represented on Haringey Council we share a commitment to effective local government and local democracy.

We see meaningful engagement with local communities, taking decisions as close as possible to local people, a transparent and accessible set of governance arrangements and effective arrangements to hold the governing party to account as key features of effective governance.

We share a belief that only if these features are in place can Haringey provide effective services for the residents and communities in the borough.

This review was commissioned to help us ensure that the governance arrangements in Haringey Council are fit for purpose in today's challenging times. We believe that its recommendations will make our decision-making processes easier to understand and provide significantly more opportunities for local engagement and decision-making.

The review has also identified a number of challenging issues in relation to culture and ways of working in the council. We know that how we work is as important as the structures we use and we are committed to addressing this aspect of the review's conclusions.

Indeed, how the council responds to the review will be a good test of that. Its recommendations will be challenging to some people. Our aspiration is that we should all respond to the challenge constructively and use the review as an opportunity to build new relationships within the council and more importantly between the council and the residents of Haringey.

Cllr Claire Kober   Cllr Robert Gorrie

Leader of the Labour Group   Leader of the Liberal Democrat
                                            Group

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report sets out the results of a governance review of the London Borough of Haringey which was carried out by Shared Intelligence. The review was steered by a Reference Group which was chaired by the Leader of the Council. This report, which the Reference Group has approved for consultation with members and more widely:

- Summarises the brief, our approach to the brief and our key findings and recommendations;

- Reports some findings in relation to the council as a whole, including its culture, behaviour and ways of working;

- Sets out our detailed findings and recommendations in relation to each element of the governance arrangements;

- Sets out the combined impact of our recommendations and their contribution to achieving the objectives set out in the brief;

- Comments on the cost and burden imposed by the current arrangements and financial implications of our proposals;

- Makes some recommendations in relation to culture and ways of working.

1.2. The context in which this review is being undertaken is important. The council, in common with others, faces many difficult decisions over the next few years in the light of the recent spending review and the government's deficit reduction strategy. This has two implications for the review:

- The need for the governance arrangements to enable those difficult decisions to be taken in an effective, transparent and accountable way;

- The imperative to reduce the costs of the current arrangements.

2. SUMMARY OF THE BRIEF, OUR APPROACH AND OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1.   The brief for this Governance Review included the following objectives:

- Increasing public engagement and ensuring that decisions are taken closer to local people;

- Enabling all members to shape and influence the Council's policies and services and facilitating the community leadership role of members;

- Supporting the drive to improve council performance;

- Reducing the cost of the governance arrangements, including the sum spent on member allowances.

2.2.   The areas specifically identified for review were:

- Full council and the mayoralty;

- Overview and scrutiny;

- Area Assemblies;

- Council committees;

- Special Responsibility Allowances.

2.3.   Our work has been steered by a reference group comprising Cllrs Kober, Gorrie, Davies and Rice together with the Chief Executive and the Head of the Leader and Cabinet Office. The work was based on a series of discussions and working sessions with a number of groups and individuals, including:

- Interviews with a cross section of members (including the Leader and Opposition Leader), senior officers (including the chief executive and two directors) and four people from outside the council, but who work closely with it;

- Workshop sessions with: Cabinet; the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups; Area Assembly Chairs; new councillors; Overview and Scrutiny Members; Committee chairs; a group of members thinking about the role of full council; officers involved in area based working;

- Observation of full council, an area assembly and web-casts of overview and scrutiny.

2.4.   We have worked with council officers to assess the cost of the current governance arrangements and the burden they impose on the organisation. We also held a number of discussions with officers from the Council's legal service to consider legal and constitutional implications of this report.

2.5.   It is important to stress that we have worked in close collaboration with members and officers in Haringey. All the proposals in this report emerged in the course of discussions in the borough. In leading this review we have had regard to our knowledge of arrangements in other councils, but the focus has been on what is right for Haringey at this point in time.

2.6.   Our overall findings are that:

- Although some scrutiny reports have had an impact on the council, overall the Overview and Scrutiny function does not have a discernable impact on the key policies or decisions made by the council; yet it imposes a considerable burden on the council due to the frequency of meetings and the very large number of written questions;

- Area Assemblies provide a foundation for more engagement with local communities but some assemblies are more effective than others at engaging harder to reach groups and extending beyond prominent individuals and local vested interests;

- There is an appetite for the devolution of some decision-making to councillors meeting at a local level;

- Full council meets more frequently than is necessary and is widely perceived to display the less attractive features of party political exchange rather than providing a forum for political debate of the issues that matter to Haringey;

- The council has an elaborate committee system that provides for opaque decision making and which, on occasion, reflects badly on the council and imposes a significant burden on it;

- Many members feel divorced from decision-making and unable to initiate a dialogue with cabinet members or senior officers. This is widely held to be the main driver of the large and expensive volume of formal questions that is generated within the council.

2.7.   In summary our recommendations are that:

- There should be five council meetings a year, three of which would primarily be devoted to "Haringey Debates", designed to provide a forum for public discussion on the issues that matter;

- Area Assemblies should be refreshed, building on and consolidating existing good practice, providing a sound basis for more rounded public engagement;

- Haringey Council should begin a process of devolving decision-making to councillors meeting in Area Committees;

- The Area Committee chairs should form the core of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, becoming a cadre of well informed councillors providing an effective check and balance;

- New written conventions should be introduced to secure more focussed Overview and Scrutiny;

- The number of council committees should be reduced from 8 to 5 including two new committees – a Corporate Committee and a Regulatory Committee - to provide more effective governance;

- New protocols and ways of working should be introduced to enable all councillors to initiate a dialogue with Cabinet members and senior officers on issues of concern to them and their constituents.

3. THE COUNCIL: PERCEPTIONS, CULTURE AND BEHAVIOUR

3.1.   It is clear from the discussions we have initiated during the course of doing this work that there are a number of widely held and deep-seated perceptions about Haringey Council. These are shared by people in the council and outside, and by members and officers.

3.2.   The most significant perception in terms of the council's relationship with its residents is that it is seen as not listening. The other perceptions are that:

- Challenge is treated as criticism which is generally rebuffed, often robustly;

- There is an endemic lack of trust, between members and officers, between the cabinet and other members, and between the two political groups;

- The decision making processes are overly complex and opaque.

3.3.   These perceptions play out very strongly in the current governance arrangements and must therefore be addressed by any new arrangements.

3.4.   The tendency to treat challenge as criticism undoubtedly makes the task of Overview and Scrutiny a difficult one. On the other hand, members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee have shown a similar tendency in their reaction to constructive challenge of their ways of working.

3.5.   The lack of trust plays out in:

- The tendency for committees to stray beyond their remit, re-open old issues and second guess decision-making that has taken place elsewhere;

- The large number of formal questions to cabinet members which is imposing a significant burden on the council;

- The limited informal dialogue between the two political groups.

3.6.   The perception that the council does not listen and the complexity of its governance arrangements seem to be linked. As will be discussed later, in many cases the Area Assemblies do provide a forum in which the council listens. The fact it doesn't always act on what it hears is often not because it hasn't listened, or doesn't want to act, but because its structures and ways of working make it difficult for it to act.

3.7.   One issue which has arisen during the course of this work is the whole question of culture and behaviour and the relationship between members and between members and officers. Many people we have spoken to have cited examples of inappropriate behaviour and point to a lack of respect for appropriate boundaries and relationships. It is understood that this is not confined to a particular group and is deeply engrained. We have experienced very dominant voices (drowning out others), senior officers noting that they

felt unable to contribute honestly to a discussion, and constructive challenge being treated as criticism and being bluntly rebutted rather than explored.

"The council could be far more effective if the governance was better, but it is more about culture than structures."
SENIOR FIGURE WHO WORKS WITH THE COUNCIL

3.8.   In the course of our work one external partner said that he had worked with a Haringey councillor at close hand in two settings, one in the council and one elsewhere. The councillor added little value in the council setting but had a significant impact in the other. Aspects of this culture clearly reflect Haringey's recent history. However, there is a real danger that unless these long-standing issues are explored openly and addressed any changes introduced as a result of this review will have no discernible impact on the governance of Haringey or the quality services delivered to its citizens. This report includes a number of recommendations intended to specifically address these issues and create the conditions in which these behaviours and cultures begin to change.

4.   WARD COUNCILLORS

4.1.   There is an overall perception that there is little opportunity for councillors who are not in the Cabinet to influence council policy or services. This is seen as being particularly, but not exclusively, so in relation to Liberal Democrat members who do not have the opportunity to engage with Cabinet members in a political group setting.

> *"The real thing I enjoy about being a councillor is meeting residents and working directly with officers on their concerns"*   SENIOR LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR

4.2.   In practice there are examples of councillors who have succeeded in using informal contact with senior members and officers to secure action in their wards. The overwhelming perception, however, is that there is not an opportunity for all members to have a dialogue with Cabinet members. This is cited as being the main reason for the large number of formal questions to Cabinet members – at Overview and Scrutiny and full Council. There is no doubt that the current level of questions poses a significant financial and administrative burden on the council and in the majority of cases the questions do not influence council policy or service delivery.

> *"I have more influence as a school governor than a councillor"*   BACK BENCH LABOUR COUNCILLOR

4.3.   Our recommendations on devolved decision-making are intended to increase the ability of all members to influence council policy and services, but we believe that action is also required to challenge the perceptions referred to above and to introduce a number of conventions intended to enable all members to feel better able to pursue issues of concern to local residents. We are therefore recommending that in order to re-assert and support the role of all councillors in their wards:

- Each cabinet member should provide a regular opportunity for any councillor to initiate a dialogue on issues of concern to them. This could take the form of a monthly slot when they are available.

- The council should introduce written conventions to provide all members with access to senior council officers, including for example via "ward walk-arounds", without imposing an unacceptable burden on their time.

5. AREA ASSEMBLIES

Our findings

5.1. There is a widely held perception that Haringey's Area Assemblies are expensive to run, poorly attended and that the discussion is often dominated by people who are either not representative of local people or represent local vested interests. The reality is that:

- Attendance varies from area to area and can depend on the topics to be discussed, but some meetings are attended by over 100 people;

- There are some examples of assemblies influencing policy, for example in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation;

- There are examples of good practice in relation to the management of assembly meetings and agendas which can result in genuine community engagement and debate – but this hinges on the capacity of the chair and the quality of the support they receive;

- The council's system of Area Based Working provides a mechanism for solving local problems of the type that are identified at assembly meetings. However the present system is provided at significant cost and is currently being considered as part of a separate review of neighbourhood management.

5.2. We have also found that:

- The quality of support for area assembly chairs varies, as do the arrangements for setting agendas, securing officer and member input and distributing invitations and agendas;

- The Making a Difference programme, while being popular with some residents and councillors is expensive to operate and can be divisive;

- There is no obvious and transparent mechanism by which issues raised in Area Assembly discussions are fed into the council's policy and decision-making processes;

- The variable geography in Haringey with the police, health service, children's services and housing using different areas to the Assembles is potentially confusing and expensive.

5.3. We have found it difficult to obtain reliable data on the cost of supporting area assemblies (both direct and indirect), but the parallel reviews of the neighbourhood management and support services provide an opportunity to ensure that new arrangements are supported in a more cost-effective way.

Our recommendations

5.4. The brief for this review asked us to explore how to promote engagement with local people and how to enable decisions to be taken closer to local people. These are two very different objectives – though one can and should inform the other – and in our recommendations we distinguish between:

- Building on the current Area Assemblies as a vehicle for more effective engagement with local people; and
- The devolution of some decision-making to councillors meeting in public at a local level.

Community Engagement

5.5. Effective engagement with local communities is more important than ever given the potential implications of the cuts in public expenditure and the emphasis nationally of all three main political parties on the need for a new relationship between the individual and the state and on the role of civil society and communities in the delivery of public services.

> *"Properly structured discussions about local priorities in the current context would be more valuable than ever."*
>
> SENIOR OFFICER

5.6. We believe that Haringey's Area Assemblies provide a good foundation for building more effective community engagement, but that steps must be taken to:

- Exchange good practice and new ideas between the area assembly chairs and the officers that support them in order to improve the mechanisms for setting agendas and managing meetings;
- Provide a clear and transparent mechanism for the conclusions of Area Assemblies to be fed into the council's policy-making processes and for feedback to be provided on the outcome. We believe that this could be achieved through:
  - Developing the current mechanism by which Cabinet members brief Area Assembly chairs into a two-way process which would provide a mechanism for the chairs to feed issues into the council's decision-making processes;
  - Building on the role of Corporate Management Team members as Assembly "champions", providing another feedback mechanism;
  - More effective communication between the Assemblies, Area Based Working and the proposed Area Committees;
- Use the council's review of the neighbourhood management service and its support services to provide more cost-effective support for the assemblies.

Area Committees

5.7.   We recommend that Haringey should establish Area Committees to enable devolved decision-making. These committees should cover the same geographical areas as the Assemblies because:

- The link between public engagement at a local level and devolved decision-making is potentially important;

- The link between the current system of area-based working and devolved decision-making by councillors is also potentially important;

- There is a case for consolidating the various forms of locality working in Haringey, and the Area Assembly geography provides the best balance between localism and cost/economies of scale.

5.8.   The new Area Committees would therefore comprise the councillors for the wards which make up the current assembly areas. Each committee would elect a chair. We recommend that the question of whether Area Committee chairs should have some continuity of tenure be explored by both political groups.

5.9.   We are aware that there are some concerns about the shape of the current assemblies, particular the size of the Muswell Hill, Alexandra, Fortis Green and Highgate Assembly Area. Our suggestion is that the geography of the assemblies is reviewed after 3 years, at the end of the current administration, in the light of the experience of operating the proposed new arrangements.

5.10.   A suggested remit for the Area Committees is set out in the table. It is important to stress that this is very much an initial set of powers and that the remit of the committees should be reviewed along with their geography after 3 years, in the light of anticipated legislative change, with a view to devolving additional powers to them. The remit brings together four different sets of responsibilities:

- Varying the specification of environment and street scene services to reflect particular local needs and circumstances;

- Taking decisions about proposals affecting the area (for example local highway improvements and local by-laws);

- Formulating and influencing policy in relation to the area (such as local development orders);

- Formal consultative roles on planning, licensing and parking.

It is important to be clear, however, that the Area Committees will not be able to operate effectively unless they have a budget within which they can exercise local discretion and a key officer interface with council departments.

5.11.   At this stage we are not recommending that Area Committees have a role in taking decisions about planning or licensing applications because of:

- The cost of the frequent meetings that would be required to carry out this task;

- The contested nature of many of these decisions in the borough;

- Legislative obstacles to devolving licensing decisions;

- The mixed experience of some other London Boroughs which have devolved responsibility for planning decisions to a local level.

Securing a more local dimension to decision-making in this area is important, however. One step which should be explored is for the agendas of the licensing and planning committees to be arranged geographically, and, where appropriate, the sub-committees should meet in the area to which a majority of the items on its agenda relate.

Area Committees: Proposed Areas of Responsibility
Local Development Orders Area Committees will be able to instigate Local Development Orders (LDOs). A relatively new feature of the planning system (they were introduced in 2004) LDOs can : • Provide a mechanism through which minor development in defined areas can be managed more effectively; • Enable tools such as design codes to provide a positive mechanism to manage change in a local area and improve local environmental quality; • Provide a way for members to play an important role in developing a strategic framework for managing small scale development in an area. The use of LDOs by Area Committees would complement Haringey's approach to the local planning framework which already uses the Area Assembly geography.
Development Management Forums Area Committees will also be able to have a significant influence over the way in which consultation on major and sensitive planning applications is handled. They will have the power to instigate Local Development Forums to debate major and controversial developments. Area Committee Chairs will have a role in chairing the forums, which may span more than one Assembly Area.
Environment and Street Scene Area Committees will be able to influence the specification of a range of environmental and street scene service to reflect local need. At this stage it is not possible to be precise about the extent of flexibility because the council is still in contract dialogue which will be finalised by the end of November. There will, for example, be some flexibility for local choice and local standards within an overall financial framework and minimum levels of service delivery for the integrated waste management contract.
Local By-laws Area committees to be able to introduce local by-laws where they are in line with the model by-laws.
Local Highway and Transport Improvements Area Committees will be: • Encouraged to submit ideas to the Local Implementation Plan process; • Asked to prioritise between schemes in their area which meet the borough-wide criteria; • Consulted on the detailed design of successful schemes.
Community Safety Subject to discussion with the police Borough Commander Area Committees to be consulted on local police priorities in alignment with the current ward-level arrangements.

Area Based Working Much of the focus of the current Area Based Working process is on solving individual local problems. Area Committees will be in a position to take a wider view of the issues raised through this process and use that assessment to influence council policy and services.
Consultation Area Committees to have a formal consultation role in relation to: • Licence applications; • Planning applications; • Local implementation of parking controls.
Areas to be Explored There is potential to develop an important set of relationships between Area Committees, Area Assemblies and: • Friends of Parks in relation to local management of parks; • Tenants and Residents Associations in relation to local housing management.

5.12. We suggest that the Area Assembles and Area Committees should meet four times a year. There must be scope for the Area Committee to take decisions between meetings, particularly in respect of their consultative role on planning and licensing applications.

6.   OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

6.1.   The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide the Cabinet with independent challenge on key decisions and policy development, which, in the current policy and financial climate, is potentially very important. Underlying our approach to this aspect of the brief is the following question: How could Overview and Scrutiny add value to the difficult decisions the council will have to take over the next two to three years?

Our findings

6.2.   There is a widespread perception that Overview and Scrutiny has little impact on the council's strategic policy or key decisions. This view is shared by the council's managerial and political leadership, spans both parties and is shared by many other councillors. One widely perceived weakness of the current scrutiny process is that it "fails to see the wood for the trees".

> *"Scrutiny gets caught in the same trap as the Audit Committee. What it looks at seems random. It doesn't focus on the big issues"*
>
> SENIOR FIGURE WHO WORKS WITH THE COUNCIL

6.3.   We have sought to test this perception, bearing in mind the tendency within the council to treat challenge as criticism. We have identified some cases where individual scrutiny reports have had an impact – for example reviews into strokes, Tech Refresh and Post Office closures. Overall, however, we have found no evidence to challenge the shared perception that the current scrutiny function is a peripheral one and that reviews are rarely pertinent to the main pressures facing the council. Indeed, there is a concern that the recommendations in Overview and Scrutiny reports are often too readily accepted and are not subject to constructive challenge.

6.4.   It is clear that at a time when the council faces a series of significant and sensitive decisions and must reduce expenditure this situation cannot continue. The need for change is reinforced by the burden that Overview and Scrutiny currently imposes on the council.

> *"Scrutiny feels like it is done to you, which is not how it feels in other councils."*   SENIOR OFFICER

6.5.   Overview and Scrutiny has a large number of meetings each municipal year (19 in 2009/2010, and 16 planned for 2010/2011), and takes on a relatively large work programme of around 7 reviews per year through its task-and-finish scrutiny review panels.   Although the cost to departments of assisting with scrutiny questions, reviews, and call-ins is not routinely monitored (or indeed budgeted for) financial data we have seen shows that cabinet questions can generate on at least 1.5 – 2.0 person/days of work per month

per directorate. In addition the demands impose by task and finish reviews are also considerable.

6.6.   A major concern about Overview and Scrutiny in Haringey relates to the burden it imposes on Departments in responding to written cabinet member questions. There is a regular cycle of cabinet questions in which portfolio holders circulate an update report and in response scrutiny members table written questions, before appearing in person at a scrutiny meeting. On some occasions cabinet members have received in excess of 40 written questions – mostly about operational issues, and mostly in direct response to individual points in the update reports.

6.7.   We have not seen any evidence to suggest that these written questions and answers add any value to the council's decision-making processes. By contrast, on the basis of our observation of webcast scrutiny meetings, we consider that the oral questioning of cabinet members is far more valuable in terms of effective scrutiny than the written questions and cabinet member reports.

> *"I have no confidence that the scrutiny process is having the impact it should. It focuses on the wrong issues."*
> BACKBENCH COUNCILLOR

6.8.   Similarly, while the overall engagement between Overview and Scrutiny and Children's Services is perceived not to be effective there is evidence to suggest that oral questioning does add some value. The Care Quality Commission in its most recent inspection reports noted improvements in the level of challenge to officers from elected members. And our observation of a number of special safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny sessions led us to conclude that the process appeared to operate well in terms of enabling members to question senior officers about some strategic issues, and there seemed to be some holding to account.

6.9.   There is some evidence to suggest that weaknesses in the scrutiny process contribute to its lack of impact. There is, for example, inadequate dialogue between the scrutiny function, the cabinet and senior officers on both the overall scrutiny programme and the focus of individual reviews. A number of our recommendations address this issue, but we feel a more fundamental change to the way in which scrutiny operates is required to ensure the scrutiny process is to be more effective, particularly in light of the overall tendency within Haringey to treat challenge as criticism.

A new approach

6.10.   It is possible to envisage Overview and Scrutiny operating in a significantly different way in Haringey. It could be re-shaped as part of a wider package of changes designed to devolve decision-making to a local level and to empower councillors to engage more effectively with residents in localities. In developing our recommendations we have explored how Overview and Scrutiny could contribute to the current budget-setting process. A possible

approach is set out in the box below. This is just one example of what a new approach to Overview and Scrutiny might look like, including the proposition that major reviews such as this should, as a matter of course, be chaired by an opposition councillor.

Budget Scrutiny: A New Approach

The key elements of a new approach to budget scrutiny – illustrated in the diagram below - could be:

- An initial all-party Leader's Conference. An opportunity for officers to brief all councillors on the context for the budget and an exploration of the key themes, issues, possibilities, pressures.
- A scrutiny process initiated at a scoping meeting involving: scrutiny members, key cabinet members, and senior officers. This would identify a small number of themes on which the scrutiny process would focus. We might also envisage:
  - o The process being chaired by an opposition councillor;
  - o The three key themes being explored in a new way – eg 3 one-day events.
- Each area assembly devoting a meeting to exploring the issues relating to the budget that are particularly relevant to the area. This process would begin with an Assembly Chairs briefing – the task of which would be to agree a process for handling the meetings and focussing the discussion.
- A second Leader's Conference to hear and explore the results of the scrutiny process and area assembly discussions. That would be the end of the new process, but it is envisaged that:
  - o This process would inform that nature of members contributions to the discussions on the budget and at full council;
  - o The Cabinet would be able to draw on the discussions throughout the process to inform its discussions on the budget.

As a minimum all councillors would be better informed about the issues and there would have been an important opportunity for public engagement around those issues.

Our recommendations

6.11. We are recommending a number of changes to the scrutiny processes, but process changes alone will not be sufficient to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny can help the Council to address the challenges it faces, reduce the burden imposed by scrutiny and ensure it has an impact on the key decisions being taken by the council. We believe that there is real potential for improvement, putting the scrutiny process at the heart of the council's commitment to greater devolution and more effective public engagement.

6.12. We therefore recommend that the Area Committee Chairs should form the core of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. We are not aware of any other council that has adopted this approach, but we believe that it has three main advantages:

- First, and most importantly it would develop a cadre of very well-informed members with the knowledge and capacity to constructively hold the Cabinet to account;

- Second, Area Committee Chairs operate at the interface between corporate decision-making in the council and its impact on localities. They have a comprehensive understanding of local concerns obtained through their area role and access to results of Area Based Working;

- Finally, they would be in a position to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny programme is informed by their understanding of both local concerns and key corporate issues and their local impact.

6.13. In the course of discussing this proposal four challenges have been posed:

- Does it provide for independent scrutiny?

- Is it politically proportional?

- Would it dilute the focus on corporate issues?

- Would the workload be too great?

6.14. Our response to these challenges is:

Independent Scrutiny

6.15. The key requirement is that the Overview and Scrutiny process must be independent of the Cabinet and these proposals achieve that. If the amount of delegation to area committees expanded significantly these arrangements may need to be reviewed, but so would other aspects of the Council's governance.

6.16. Authorities which have delegated powers to area committees do not report any significant problems in ensuring effective scrutiny of those decisions, but the scrutiny procedures may need to be adjusted in the light of the final decisions about the scope of delegation to area committees.

Is it politically proportionate?

6.17.   The legal requirement is that membership across a council's committee system as a whole should be proportionate. If, however, Haringey Council does reduce the number of committees (as recommended below), there is a case for each committee being proportionate (apart from the Area Committees). We recommend that there should be an agreement between the parties at the start of each administration on the precise membership of the scrutiny committee to ensure that it is politically proportional.

   If new arrangements are introduced with effect from the start of the next municipal year such an agreement will need to be reached for the next 3 years of this administration. One contribution to securing political balance over this period could befor the largest assembly (Muswell Hill, Alexandra, Fortis Green and Highgate) to appoint two Liberal Democrat members to the committee (one of which would be the Area Assembly chair). This would also be one way of recognising its unusual size.

Focus on corporate issues

6.18.   One of our findings is that at present the Overview and Scrutiny function does not have enough traction with strategic decision-making within the council. Our recommendations are based on the premise that the cadre of well informed councillors we are proposing would secure that focus more effectively and consistently than the current arrangements.

Workload

6.19.   This is an issue; but one aspect of our thinking is that the workload facing the area committee chairs in their dual role would help to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny function focuses on what matters and imposes less of a burden on the Council. There will also need to be consideration given to how the council supports members in their new roles. We understand that this will be subject to an internal review of local democracy and member services.

6.20.   Our recommendations on the scrutiny process are as follows:

6.21.   We recommend a formal process be adopted by which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would engage with the Cabinet and Management Team before setting the annual Overview and Scrutiny work programme. This could be through meetings of Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet (as a group or individually) which should feed into setting the work programme. There is potential to convene some of these discussions alongside Cabinet Questions.

6.22.   We recommend the work programme concentrates on a smaller number of more in-depth reviews, where constructive challenge can add the greatest value. We recommend Overview and Scrutiny commence no more than 3 reviews per year and also that they do not restrict their programme by attempting to match reviews to HSP thematic priorities.

6.23.   We recommend the adoption of a written convention to enable closer and more iterative discussions between the scrutiny function and departments over the scope of individual reviews, and to ensure reviews engage with key issues and questions facing the council as they are carried out. We suggest the convention is based on:

- cabinet members and chief officers holding scoping meetings with scrutiny prior to the terms of reference being drafted for a review, to take views from departments on strategic objectives and challenges.

- Regular meetings being held between chairs of scrutiny review panels in the course of each review, including meetings to discuss emerging review recommendations.

- We recommend that the procedures for cabinet member questions are changed so that questions are both asked and answered as oral questions only, and then recorded via the committee's minutes.

6.24.   Directorates should no longer be asked to provide update reports specifically for scrutiny although scrutiny should carefully consider monitoring data and other performance information in advance of each cabinet member question session, in particular the monthly performance reports considered by Cabinet.

6.25.   We recommend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee holds fewer meetings in each municipal year – up to a maximum of 5 scheduled meetings (subject to review after the first year of operation): the cycle of meetings would be:

- One meeting at the start of the municipal year to agree a work programme.

- Four quarterly meetings to consider the councils performance and two cabinet members per meeting – 8 cabinet members in total. The meetings would also review progress of the scrutiny panels and issues emerging from Area Assemblies which the committee may wish to consider at its next meeting.

6.26.   We also recommend that:

- Where possible call-ins would be considered at scheduled meetings;

- The current approach to pre-decision scrutiny should be reviewed. Its effectiveness has been questioned, there is always the opportunity for backbench members to be present at Cabinet to ask questions on the reports, and this report recommends other mechanisms to increase interaction between cabinet members and backbenchers on policy matters.

7.   COUNCIL COMMITTEES

7.1.   Haringey Council has one of the more elaborate committee structures of any London Borough. This imposes a considerable burden on the council, including in relation to the cost of Special Responsibility Allowances. SRAs are current paid to the chairs of the General Purposes, Planning, Licensing, Alexandra Palace, Audit and Pensions Committees as well as to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and all Area Assembly Chairs.

> *"The committee is used by members of both parties as a political soap box that extends well beyond its remit"*
>
> AN IMPORTANT PARTNER

7.2.   Many boroughs, such as Barnet, Brent and Merton operate a similar structure, but its impact in Haringey is exacerbated by the fact that there is a tendency for members of some committees to stray beyond the committee's remit to re-open issues that have been determined elsewhere. In addition the large number of committees contributes to the perception that Haringey's decision-making structures are opaque and that it is not a listening council.

7.3.   There is no legal reason for the council to have as many committees as it has. We recommend that it should operate with five committees.

The Alexandra Palace Board

7.4.   This would provide a forum for councillors to discharge their responsibilities as trustees of Alexandra Palace. We are aware that at least one London Borough has included similar responsibilities in the remit of a corporate committee with the consent of the Charity Commission. On balance, however, given the importance of Alexandra Palace to the area, we recommend that this board should continue, but that the separate review of its governance arrangements should be completed as quickly as possible in order to reduce the number of bodies involved.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7.5.   See recommendations above.

A Corporate Committee

7.6.   We recommend that Haringey should establish a single Corporate Committee. The proposal is based on the approach adopted by Lambeth Council which we understand operates successfully. The remit of the committee would include the areas currently covered by the following committees: General Purposes, Remuneration, Audit, Pensions and the Miscellaneous Functions Sub-Committee.

7.7.   Although CIPFA recommends that councils should have separate Audit Committees, Haringey's external auditor has been informally consulted on this proposal and has commented that:

- The outline terms of reference for the Corporate Committee look preferable to the current split between Audit and General Purposes;

- The proposed approach would reduce duplication, such as the current practice whereby accounts and audit report are submitted to both General Purposes and Audit.

7.8.   Agenda management and chairing of the new committee would be very important and arrangements would need to be made for its membership to be augmented when, for example, dealing with its pensions remit. Being clear about the respective roles of scrutiny and audit are particularly important. Under our recommendations, the audit role of the Corporate Committee will continue to be quite distinct from the role of Overview and Scrutiny. CIPFA has advised they should be independent of each other so as not to blur their remits. Whereas the role Overview and Scrutiny is to provide the cabinet with independent challenge on key decisions and policy development, the Audit role is to assure the council of the effectiveness of its systems for managing risk, maintaining effective controls, and performance reporting.

A single Regulatory Committee

7.9.   We recommend that the council should create a single Regulatory Committee, combining the remits of the current Planning and Licensing Committees and their sub-committees. This would provide for more rounded consideration of a number of key issues facing Haringey. We believe that the workload this committee would face could be dealt with by a review of the current sub-committees (the current arrangements are seen as no longer being fit for purpose following the initial flurry of licence applications).

7.10.   Our proposal is that:

- The main committee would be responsible for planning and licensing policy;

- There should be two sub-committees, one dealing with planning applications and the other with licensing applications.

7.11.   We also recommend that consideration should be given to the main committee and two sub-committees having a single chair.

7.12.   We are not making any recommendations in relation to the Standards Committee as this did not form part of our brief and its function has not been raised during the review.

7.13.   The quality of chairing and business management of the new committees will be crucially important, a point which has been reinforced by the external auditor. The smaller number of committees should enable this to be achieved

and will also help to build a closer relationship between the committee chairs, the Cabinet and relevant portfolio holders.

7.14. We recommend that the main committees should meet four times a year and that the planning and licensing sub-committees should meet monthly. There may ne a need to put in place arrangements for the Corporate Committee to handle emergency items between meetings.

7.15. We are aware that reducing the number of committees will reduce the number of formal roles that councillors who are not in the Cabinet can play. But we do not see how members spending time in committee meetings supports the Council's objectives of:

- Promoting engagement with local people;

- Taking decisions closer to local people; or

- Facilitating the community leadership of members.

7.16. We suggest that these objectives are more likely to be achieved if members devote their time to:

- Taking an active part in area committee and area assemblies

- Exploiting the opportunities we are recommending for members to have a dialogue with senior officers and Cabinet members in order to pursue their constituents' concerns; and

- Participating in a smaller number of more focused scrutiny reviews.

8. FULL COUNCIL

8.1. Haringey's full council meets 8 or 9 times a year, which is more often than other London Boroughs. All the councillors we spoke to see it as providing the ultimate forum for holding the Cabinet to account and for taking a small number of key decisions. Political debate is an essential feature of local democracy and political rough and tumble is part of that. The ability to question the Leader and other members of the Cabinet at council meetings is seen as being particularly important. But few councillors enjoy council meetings and many feel that the type of political argument that currently takes place there often reflects badly on the local democratic process.

> *"I hate council meetings. They are a waste of time. An area for egos"*   SENIOR LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR

8.2. The number of council meetings also imposes a financial burden on the council. The data we have collected suggests that each additional council meeting costs at least £5,000 time in staff time, excluding the cost of report-writing.

8.3. We are making a number of linked recommendations in relation to the number and format of full council meetings in Haringey:

- That the number of council meetings should be reduced to 5;
- That two of those meetings would be the Annual Meeting and the Budget-setting meeting;
- That the council should divide the other three meetings into two parts a "Haringey Debate" and a formal business session.

8.4. The outcome of the "Haringey Debate" would be a resolution which the Cabinet and/or the Haringey Strategic Partnership would be required to consider and respond to. The themes of the Haringey Debates would be agreed between the parties at the start of each municipal year, but could include, for example:

- An annual "Carbon Council", a paperless meeting focussing on green issues;
- A "State of Haringey" debate with the Haringey Strategic Partnership;
- Debates on important policy issues such as worklessness in the borough or housing pressures;
- An exchange with the Youth Council;
- A session devoted to the Mayor's theme (see below).

8.5. There could also be an opportunity for Area Assemblies to suggest borough wide issues which should be considered by the Council

8.6.   The formal business session would include:

- Any decisions that must legally be taken by the council, with no items for noting or for information;

- An opportunity for members to question the leader and other members of the cabinet – a revised process with minimum bureaucracy and maximum opportunity for live, contemporaneous issues to be raised;

- Debating motions. How motions are slected for debate is an important and politically acute issue. This should be an early topic for discussion through the proposed "usual channels" (see para 11.7)

8.7.   The recommendation to reduce the number of council meetings will, if implemented, reduce the number of formal opportunities for public engagement with the council in that formal setting. We are confident, however, that the other opportunities for public engagement – at Area Assemblies and Area Committees and through more empowered Ward Councillors – will better meet the council's objective of increasing public engagement. The onus should be on the council going out into the community and our recommendations are designed to encourage and facilitate that.

9. THE MAYORALTY

9.1. Most people we spoke to felt that it was appropriate that the Mayor should continue to chair the formal business of council. The mayoralty is seen as being an important part of the civic leadership, but it was felt that the attention and interest that the Mayor attracts could be used to highlight a particular policy area, a council service or group within the community (for example early years education, street scene or older people).

9.2. It is therefore recommended that each mayor should have a theme (as well as a charity). A Mayor's theme would influence the visits she or he carried out during their year of office and would be the subject of one of the proposed Haringey debates.

9.3. We are also recommending that the Deputy Mayor should be a member of Opposition Party. This is intended to demonstrate the part that both parties have to play in the civic leadership of the borough.

10. THE COSTS OF GOVERNANCE

10.1. In the time available to us it has proved to be difficult to pull together consistent, reliable and confidential data on the costs, both direct and indirect, of the governance arrangements in Haringey. However the data we have seen and comparative CIPFA information suggests that the council currently devotes a comparatively high level of resource to supporting its democratic processes, particularly in responding to questions and officer time in attending meetings. We are confident that our recommendations would reduce costs in at least three areas:

- Fewer council meetings;
- Fewer committees and committee meetings;
- Greater control over the costs of Overview and Scrutiny.

10.2. Further work and analysis will have to be done in this area to understand the scale of the savings identified but we consider that there would be a significant saving to the council from the demands placed on directorates in supporting democratic processes.

10.3. We were specifically asked to look at the cost of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) in Haringey. In terms of comparisons with other London Boroughs we have found that:

- In common with the vast majority of boroughs, the level of individual SRA's is significantly less than those recommended by the Independent Panel appointed by London Councils;
- The allocation of posts to bands is broadly in line with the approach adopted by the panel and the level of fees paid is towards the middle of the range paid by other boroughs.

10.4. What distinguishes Haringey is the total number of SRAs paid – ie the number of posts that qualify for an SRA in the council.

10.5. Our recommendations would significantly reduce the number of SRAs paid. The table below compares the position now with the position if our recommendations are implemented. The Reference Group also considered the band to which a number of roles are allocated, including the Chief Whips. It was agreed that this would be in reviewed in twelve months based on an assessment of the experience, workload and responsibilities under the new governance structures.

Special Responsibility Allowances		
Band	**Current**	**Proposed**
Band 4	• Leader	• Leader
Band 3	• 9 or fewer Cabinet Members • Opposition Leader • Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	• 9 or fewer Cabinet Members • Opposition Leader • Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Band 2	• Chair of General Purposes Committee • Chief Whip • Chair of Planning Committee • Chair of Licensing Committee • Chair of Alexandra Palace Board • Chair of Audit Committee • Chair of Pensions Committee • Opposition Deputy Leader • Opposition Chief Whip • 6 Councillors on Overview and Scrutiny Committee	• Chief Whip • Opposition Deputy Leader • Opposition Chief Whip • Chair of Corporate Committee • Chair of Regulatory Committee • Chair of Alexandra Palace Board • 6 Area Committee Chairs who serve on O&S (excluding chair of O&S)
Band 1	• 7 Chairs of Area Assemblies	• Possibly 1 O&S member who is not an AC Chair

11. NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS: A PACKAGE

11.1. A full list of our recommendations is set out in the annex. In summary they are that:

- There should be five council meetings a year, three of which would primarily be devoted to "Haringey Debates", designed to provide a forum for public discussion on the issues that matter;

- Area Assemblies should be refreshed, building on and consolidating existing good practice, providing a sound basis for more rounded public engagement;

- Haringey Council should begin a process of devolving decision-making to councillors meeting in Area Committees;

- The Area Committee chairs should form the core of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, becoming a cadre of well informed councillors providing an effective check and balance;

- New written conventions should be introduced to secure more focussed Overview and Scrutiny;

- The committee system should be slimmed down with two new committees established – a Corporate Committee and a Regulatory Committee - to provide more effective governance;

- New protocols and ways of working should be introduced to enable all councillors to initiate a dialogue with Cabinet members and senior officers on issues of concern to them and their constituents.

11.2. The following table shows how the changes we are recommending meet the key elements of the brief set for this review. We believe that they form a coherent package, implementing the council's aspirations to devolve more, engage more effectively with communities and empower all councillors to influence council policies and services on behalf of their constituents. We therefore recommend that it should be consulted on and, we hope, implemented as a whole.

11.3. This review has not examined the council's constitution in detail. We therefore recommend that there is a review of the council's constitution in the light of these recommendations to implement the specific recommendations and broad approach set out in this report.

Aspect of Brief	Relevant Recommendations
Decisions closer to local people and more effective community engagement	• Some decision-making devolved to councillors at area assembly level; • More effective community engagement via refreshed area assemblies; • Themed "Haringey Debate" council meetings;
Enable all members to shape and influence policy and facilitate their community leadership role	• Some decision-making devolved to councillors at area assembly level; • New protocols for dialogue with senior officers and cabinet members; • Ability to influence scrutiny process via Area Committee chairs;
Support improvement across the council	• Proposed scrutiny conventions designed to secure greater traction on key issues; • Cadre of experienced members hold cabinet to account; • Decisions at very local level better reflect local needs; • More focussed committees;
Reduce costs	• Fewer council meetings; • Fewer committees and committee meetings; • Greater control over scrutiny costs;
Reduce SRAs	• Fewer committee chairs; • Area Committee chairs form core of Overview and Scrutiny.

Culture and behaviour

11.4.   Unless the cultural and behavioural issues we have referred to in the report are addressed there is a real danger that the recommendations set out in this report will not have the impact that is intended. As the table below illustrates, many of our recommendations are designed to create the conditions in which a new culture can begin to develop, but specific action is also required.

Issue	Relevant Recommendations
Challenge treated as criticism	• Area Assembly chairs form cadre of well-informed members able to hold cabinet to account;
Not listening	• New protocols on access to cabinet members and senior officers; • Refreshed Area Assemblies; • Area Committees;
Opaque	• Fewer committees with clearer, focused remits;
No Trust	• Delegation to Area Committees; • Creation of new cadre of powerful councillors; • More opportunities for dialogue; • Shift from written questions to oral dialogue.

11.5. Two dimensions are particularly important: relations between members and officers and relations between the two political groups.

"Haringey must become an organisation which listens."
LABOUR BACKBENCHER

11.6. We are aware that the way in which our steering group has operated is seen as a welcome example of effective cross-party collaboration on an issue that matters to the council as a whole. The process for appointing the chief executive was another example. A number of our recommendations hinge on there being a mechanism for reaching agreements between the parties, on, among other things:

- The topics for the Haringey Debates;
- The selection of the topics for debate at council meetings;
- How to secure proportionality in the membership of the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The management of business by the new set of council committees and in the area committees.

11.7. One way forward could be for Haringey to experiment with its own equivalent of Parliament's "Usual Channels" – an informal dialogue between the two parties to address issues such as those listed above. It could comprise the two leaders and chief whips. Such a group, working with the council chief executive, could develop a programme to address issues of culture and behaviour. It could also address any particular issues of unacceptable behaviour before they escalate to an issue for the standards committee to consider.

11.8. We recommend that three other steps are considered if the opportunity the new governance arrangements present to address cultural and behavioural issues are to be seized.

11.9. First, it is crucial that new ways of working are modelled "from the top", by the cabinet and senior management team in their relationship with each other and with the rest of the organisation. Some specific developmental work on this would be needed in order to ensure that it gains real traction.

11.10. Second, it is essential that meetings are chaired well, both to ensure that committees keep within their remits and that bad behaviour is challenged. The smaller number of committee chairs should help to achieve this, but some development and support for chairs may also be appropriate.

11.11. Third, in common with many London Boroughs Haringey shows a degree of insularity; people assume that "they way things are done round here" is normal and acceptable. In some cases that is not the case. Members should be encouraged to take more advantage of low cost opportunities to learn from colleagues in other boroughs.

11.12. The support available to members, including support to the political groups, will also be important if the new governance arrangements are to help the council to achieve its objectives. The support available to support the council's democratic processes should be reviewed and re-prioritised to reflect the new arrangements in the context of the overall pressure on the council's budget.

Final Thought

11.13. Haringey is a borough of contrasts – economically, socially and politically. The council itself mirrors those contrasts, but too often the contrast is between potential and reality. The commitment of Haringey's politicians is tangible, as is their passion for the communities and places they represent. Yet too often that passion is deployed inappropriately or ineffectively. The public service values of the council's officers are equally evident, but many of them have learnt to keep their heads down rather than help lead change and improvement. Today more than ever the council cannot afford to waste the potential contributions of either its councillors or officers. The primary objective of these recommendations is to channel that energy, commitment, passion and knowledge to better serve the citizens of Haringey.

ANNEX 1: CHECKLIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Ward Councillors

In order to re-assert and support the role of all councillors in their wards:

- Each cabinet member should provide a regular opportunity for any councillor to initiate a dialogue on issues of concern to them.
- The council should introduce written conventions to provide all members with access to senior council officers.

Area Assemblies

Build on the foundation provided by the current Area Assemblies by:

- Exchanging good practice and new ideas between the Area Committee chairs and the officers that support them;
- Providing a clear and transparent mechanism for the conclusions of Area Assemblies to be fed into the council's policy-making processes and for feedback to be provided on the outcome.
- Using the council's review of the neighbourhood management service and its support services to provide more cost-effective support for the assemblies.

Area Committees

Establish Area Committees to enable devolved decision-making:

- Covering the same geographical areas as the Assemblies;
- Comprising the councillors for the wards which make up the current assembly areas

The remit of the Area Committees should bring together four sets of responsibilities:

- Varying the specification of environment and street scene services to reflect particular local needs and circumstances;
- Taking decisions about proposals affecting the area (for example local highway improvements and local by-laws);
- Formulating and influencing policy in relation to the area (such as local development orders);
- Formal consultative roles on planning, licensing and parking.

Each Area Assembly and Area Committee should meet four times a year with scope for the Area Committee to take decisions between meetings.

The geography of the Area Assemblies and the remit of the Area Committees should be reviewed after 3 years, at the end of the current administration.

Overview and Scrutiny

The Area Committee Chairs should form the core of the Overview and Scrutiny committee.

There should be an agreement between the parties at the start of each administration on the precise membership of the scrutiny committee to ensure that it is politically proportional.

A written convention should be adopted to enable closer and more iterative discussions between the scrutiny function and Departments

Directorates should no longer be required to produce update reports specifically for scrutiny.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should hold a maximum of 5 scheduled meetings a year and conduct no more than 3 reviews a year.

Council Committees

There should be five council committees:

- Corporate
- Regulatory
- Overview and Scrutiny
- Alexandra Palace
- Standards

The main committees should meet four times a year and the planning and licensing sub-committees should meet monthly; and consideration should be given to the committee and sub-committees having the same chair.

Full Council

Council should meet 5 times a year, and:

- Two of those meetings would be the Annual Meeting and the Budget-setting meeting;
- The other three meetings would be divided into two parts a "Haringey Debate" and a formal business session.

The process for agreeing the motions for debate at Council meetings should be agreed through the proposed "usual channels".

The Mayoralty

Each mayor should have a theme (as well as a charity).

The Deputy Mayor should be a member of Opposition Party.

Implementation

The council should experiment with its own equivalent of Parliament's "Usual Channels" – an informal dialogue between the two parties to manage council and committee business and address issues of culture and behaviour.

A review of the council's constitution is carried out to implement these recommendations.

These recommendations should be consulted on and implemented as a package.

The support available to support the council's democratic processes should be reviewed and re-prioritised to reflect the new arrangements in the context of the overall pressure on the council's budget.
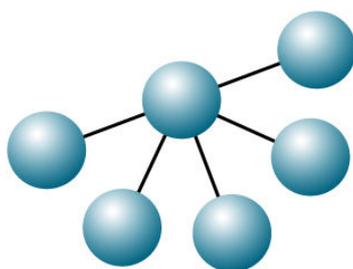
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