

CfGS – HPBC Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Suggested Response

Area	CfGS Recommendations	Suggested Response
<p>The Focus and Priorities of Scrutiny</p>	<p>From our observations and evidence gathering, the Select Committees may benefit from ensuring greater clarity about what they are trying to achieve or what impact they are aiming to make. Similarly, the process for deciding what is important to scrutinise and what is not, is sometimes unclear. It seems that by convention every single executive decision goes through Select Committee, without much regard to prioritisation. Scrutiny cannot examine everything, nor is it necessary to do so, therefore establishing realistic priorities based on clear objectives is essential.</p> <p>Select Committees do make every effort to be strategic and focus on areas of importance, although in practice it sometimes falls short of this ambition. Select Committees can be too operational and council performance focused. It is therefore necessary to 'let go' of KPI concentrated work, and focus resource on strategy and policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Select Committee Programming Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Executive/Select Committee & Audit and Regulatory Committee Chairs/ Opposition Group Leaders • Consider Executive Work Programme and agree forward plan of scrutiny work
<p>Scrutiny's impact</p>	<p>There is scope for each Select Committee to review its agendas to ensure that they maintain a focus on crucial issues. Agendas can often become overburdened with routine reporting and discussion-led topics, leaving less capacity for the matters that can make a real impact.</p> <p>It was highlighted to us that Select Committees are very useful at conveying the views of different Members to the Executive, but it is hard to see how that translates into policy changes. Early access to information is important for scrutiny to operate as an integral part of policy and decision-making activities. The ability for Select Committees to engage early in the process of policy development will also assist scrutiny in making a greater impact.</p> <p>Scrutiny often has greater impact when it applies its efforts to pre-decision scrutiny. This is partially practiced at High Peak, although it is usually too close to the decision by the executive to play a useful shaping role and is limited to a binary choice of "for or against" pending Executive decisions. If scrutiny operated more up-stream, as policy and decisions were in a less advanced stage, it could provide useful insight, constructive challenge and creative input at a more strategic and forward-looking level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual scrutiny workshop to confirm work programmes • Review of Annual Report to include a focus - section on changes as a result of scrutiny
<p>Work Programming</p>	<p>There is a positive working relationship between the Executive and Select Committees, but the relationship has been described as a bit 'too close' at times, with the Executive having perhaps too much influence and involvement on Select Committee work programming and agendas. Whilst regular communication between the Executive and Select Committees is important,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Executive / Scrutiny Protocol • Annual scrutiny workshop to confirm work programmes Consider development of a methodology for work programme selection and prioritisation

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	<p>and suggestions for topics on the work programme or agenda should be welcomed, the scrutiny process does need to be independent.</p> <p>It is also noted that there has been some significant senior Officer time spent in supporting Members with the process of work programming, so it would be recommended that Members, led by committee Chairs switch the emphasis of work planning to be more Member-led where possible.</p> <p>To avoid low priority issues making their way onto the work programme and to ensure focus on high impact items, Select Committee Members might consider developing a methodology for their work programme selection and prioritisation, given that the sources to choose from (including Council Plan, MTFs, Delivery Plans, Executive forward plan/key decisions etc.) provide an extensive menu of options. The need to rationalise selection could be helped by a simple scoring or prioritisation process.</p>	<p>Reorder Scrutiny Committee agendas to consider work programming at the start of the meeting to give it a greater focus</p>
<p>Member development</p>	<p>It has been noted that there has been a relatively big turnover of Members at the last election in High Peak, so many are new to the role of being an elected councillor and to the role of scrutiny, who would benefit from further training and development.</p> <p>Whilst most Members take the opportunity to speak at committee, the engagement and contribution is varied. Some Members tend to ask information-gathering questions, rather than questions which explore and challenge issues, with often just a few members asking most of the more probing questions. Members may benefit from more training and experience in the area of questioning techniques.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of training / development for non-executive councillors • Ongoing training and development for Chairs / Vice Chairs of Scrutiny
<p>Meeting management</p>	<p>It has been highlighted that meetings could adopt a more logical approach in organising their line of enquiry. Currently just the Chair and Vice Chair have a pre-meet without any organised input from other committee Members (aside from the pre-meetings that occur in political groupings).</p> <p>Select Committees at HPBC might consider ways to give more time to planning and organising scrutiny meetings as a 'team', to set objectives and the agenda, as well as developing appropriate lines of enquiry. By using a brief pre-meeting, committees could effectively set a questioning strategy and decide who they would require to appear at the meeting, as well as the expectations on information needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop approach with Chairs of Panels
<p>Committee structure</p>	<p>The council has three Select Committees, which is not unusual, but there is a growing trend towards less committees, especially if work can be prioritised well and focused on strategic issues. Scrutiny's productivity is not measured by the volume of activity but the quality of its outputs, such as - constructive recommendations, ideas and feedback, and holding to account that leads</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review number of Select Committees • Consider structure of Committees and potential to create standing sub/working-groups to focus on specific areas of work

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	<p>to positive improvement.</p> <p>The council might wish to consider the option of two committees, one with an external focus - community impact, resident voice and service performance, and one with an internal focus - as a corporate and forward looking, policy and planning scrutiny role.</p>	
Public engagement	<p>Whilst trying to encourage public engagement is difficult, scrutiny could explore and experiment with ways to allow greater access, openness and involvement. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community listening panels • Inviting the public to offer ideas for work programmes • Greater use of social media channels <p>HPBC could also consider inviting external advisors to sit as observer status non-voting members of committees to provide additional insight and expertise to the committee. They could be set period appointments or invited to a one-off relevant meeting. Payment or reimbursement may encourage candidates. Some selection may be necessary, and terms of reference made clear.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop approach with Chairs of Panels • Introduce an open to public scrutiny review suggestion scheme • Explore and experiment with ways to allow greater public access, openness and involvement
Support and Resourcing for Scrutiny	<p>There is potential to review whether the level of officer resource available to support scrutiny is sufficient at HPBC. Whilst the current resource is highly valued, scrutiny would benefit from additional capacity, particularly in terms of research and policy support. Not only would this further reinforce a strong ongoing commitment to scrutiny across the council, it would also provide a strong platform upon which scrutiny could successfully develop.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officer support for scrutiny to be considered as part of the review of the Democratic Services team structure