

Attending a scrutiny meeting

Guidance for those invited to attend a Lambeth Scrutiny Committee

September 2009

Introduction

If you have not attended a Scrutiny Committee before, you may wonder what exactly is involved. This short leaflet has been prepared to explain what will happen and a little about how Scrutiny Committees work in the London Borough of Lambeth.

What is scrutiny?

Every council has a scrutiny process in place, which involves a committee or a number of committees made up of councillors. These committees hold the council's decision makers to account publicly.

The scrutiny function within Lambeth seeks to improve the council's services by focusing on the issues that matter most to our residents. It reviews the key services and policies – both of the council and external providers – to make sure they work in the community's best interests. It does this by:

- **engaging with local people and taking on their needs and views, and**
- **making recommendations for improvement on services and policy options, to the cabinet, full council, council officers and our partners.**

About scrutiny committees

There are six scrutiny committees within Lambeth Council. They are:

- Overview and Scrutiny committee.
- Children and Young People's scrutiny sub-committee.
- Environment and Community Safety scrutiny sub-committee.
- Finance scrutiny sub-committee.

- Housing scrutiny sub-committee
- Health and Adult Services scrutiny sub-committee

Cabinet members are not allowed to sit on scrutiny committees, as it is their decisions and policies that are likely to be reviewed.

Each committee reflects the political balance of the council, and some of the committees are chaired by members of the opposition.

Each committee has a chair and a vice chair. Councillors in these posts can change annually at the annual general meeting of the council.

Scrutiny committees meet at least six times per year.

Scrutiny is supported by a small team of officers within Lambeth Council. The team provides independent advice and support to councillors to enable them to undertake their work. This includes research, analysing data, report preparation and procedural advice.

About scrutiny commissions

Each year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and sub-committees identify areas for consideration and review. For in-depth, single issue, reviews we establish scrutiny commissions. These commissions are made up of between two and five non-cabinet, cross-party councillors.

Scrutiny commissions can look into any part of the council services, and in the past they have looked at topics such as parking, climate change, street patrols, budget overspends and asbestos safety.

What can scrutiny decide?

Both scrutiny committees and commissions are **non-decision-making**. However, they can make reports and recommendations to the council, full council, council officers and our partners. The strength of those reports and recommendations is based on the information that the committees or commissions receive.

What should I expect?

As a contributor to a scrutiny committee, we would like you to be completely at ease. You are invited to attend the meeting as the committee would like to hear your views but you are not obliged to attend. You are not going to be interrogated or put under pressure to answer questions that you are not prepared for. Councillors will not be looking to catch you out.

The process is about using your experiences to help improve services. Meetings will be as informal as possible although a note will be taken.

Your arrival

Details will be sent to you in advance of the meeting date, time, venue etc. For meetings during the day at Lambeth Town Hall please ask for the officer who invited you to attend at the reception.

For an evening meeting at the Town Hall please ask at the reception for directions to the meeting room.

Meetings are sometimes held outside of the Town Hall, in which case you will have been advised previously.

Please take a seat in the meeting room on arrival and, if appropriate make yourself known to the lead officer for the meeting. You will be called to the table by the Chair at the appropriate time.

Presentations

You may be asked to prepare a presentation, but this will have been arranged with you in advance. There will also be advance agreement with you on the focus and length of the presentation. It is of course up to you to decide what you say and how you say it.

If you do provide a presentation please send an electronic copy in advance of the meeting so that we can set it up prior to your arrival and provide handouts for distribution.

Questions from councillors

The questions that councillors may ask you are to help councillors to understand issues, and to enable them to make informed recommendations. Councillors will often look for facts, figures, professional advice, best practice from expert witnesses and for personal experiences from members of the public.

If you are unable to answer a question at the meeting please inform the Chair. Please also notify the Chair if you would like to provide additional information to the committee after the meeting (if, for example, you did not have the necessary information available at the meeting).

Further information

Should you wish to discuss the information contained within this leaflet or any other matters relating to scrutiny, please do not hesitate to contact the scrutiny team, they will be happy to help you.

Scrutiny Team
Room 200, Lambeth Town Hall
Brixton Hill
London SW2 1RW
scrutiny@lambeth.gov.uk
Tel: 020 7926 2173

Alternatively, information can be obtained from the Council's internet site at www.lambeth.gov.uk