



## **Change at the Council**

Independent Review of Governance for the  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

## Foreword

### Jacqui McKinlay, Chief Executive of the Centre for Public Scrutiny

It would be impossible to offer this report without paying tribute to the 72 people who lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower tragedy. We also wish to offer our thoughts for those who have suffered injuries, lost loved ones or were in any way caught up in the terrible events of that night. While our work has not been about the fire specifically, we felt its shadow in everything we did.

The central message from our work over the last few months is one of change.

Partly, this is because change is needed. It is in fact essential if the Council is to rebuild trust and be equipped to understand and meet the needs of everyone in Kensington and Chelsea, now and in the future. Even before the Grenfell tragedy there was clearly a need for things to be different. In our evidence, we heard many times a similar message; that the Council's decision makers should be more outward looking, less distant, more involving.

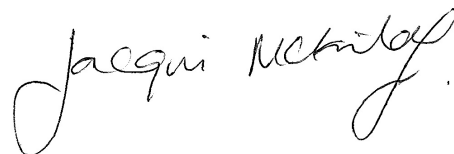
But change is not only needed; it is wanted. The majority of the residents, councillors, council officers and partners we spoke to offered a similar vision of what "good" could look like in future. The Council is in the fortunate position of having vast amounts of experience, skills, expertise, passion and enthusiasm to draw on from all parts of the Borough. A new attitude of wanting to connect with people can only improve thinking and inform better democratic decision-making.

We are not offering this report as a list of tasks. The challenge is more complex and change will take a long-term commitment to shift behaviours and beliefs. There are some practical steps that we have recommended, but we believe that the best ideas and plans for how a new relationship between the Council and its communities will develop need to come from conversations between all those involved with the Borough.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who shared their views with us, whether face to face or in writing. I also want to thank everyone at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) who supported us in our work and ensured that all the practical arrangements ran so smoothly. I want to express my appreciation for the team at the Centre for Public Scrutiny, for their hard work and dedication. I want also to acknowledge The Democratic Society for their highly skilled contribution to this project. Finally, I want to thank the Local Government Association for funding this work.

In closing, it is important to say that we heard so many positive ideas and high aspirations that I have no doubt that RBKC can be an excellent example of an outward-looking council in future.

Best wishes, Jacqui McKinlay

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqui McKinlay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

## Summary

Councillors and council officers recognise that the formal processes of decision-making, and the informal culture that surround them, need to change. While there are many good things that the Council does, it must now look to be outward rather than inward facing.

By talking to a wide range of people and gathering evidence through surveys, desktop research and observing meetings, we have produced a series of proposals that we believe will help the Council improve and be more outward looking. These proposals are intended to reflect the common ground between all those involved. We have also included some suggestions from our own experience of working with councils and other organisations.

At the heart of our report are twelve principles and seven recommendations that we believe should provide the foundations for the way the Council works in future. We also have included a number of options for next steps for the Council to consider once those foundations have started to be put in place.

We recognise that fundamental to how a council works is democratic decision-making and accountability. To bring about change we have focused on councillors' dual role as civic leaders as well as decision makers and scrutineers in relation to strategic and operational decisions. Involvement will be different depending on the circumstance but should be a mindset that sees those affected and involved as central to the way policy is devised and decisions are made.

The balancing of different views means that councillors will increasingly have to make hard choices. Decision-making is difficult. Even where decisions are difficult, it is right that councillors need to formally make those decisions, and it is right that there will inevitably be some people who are unhappy with them. The recommendations and other measures we propose are about confronting this reality and giving everyone the confidence that, even when a decision is made with which they do not personally agree, they understand the evidence that underpins that decision and the rationale for it having been made. In many cases, we

expect that people with a stake in decisions will be able to play a role in crafting them as well.

Kensington and Chelsea faces similar challenges here to other public services in finding ways to engage that allows diverse voices to be heard, as well as some more unique challenges around the high numbers of people who only frequent the Borough on a daily basis.

We also recognise the complexity of the current circumstances and that the recommendations we have made will be challenging to achieve. Their ambition reflects what was heard; implementation will need to be realistically planned and communicated by the Council.

## Principles

These principles describe what good governance means for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. They have been designed using suggestions from residents, councillors, council officers and partners. We believe that they will be useful to guide the Council going forward, and we will set out what each means in the report.

- 1. Connecting with residents**
- 2. Focusing on what matters**
- 3. Listening to every voice**
- 4. Acting with integrity**
- 5. Involving before deciding**
- 6. Communicating what we're doing**
- 7. Inviting residents to take part**
- 8. Being clearly accountable**
- 9. Responding fairly to everyone's needs**
- 10. Working as a team**
- 11. Managing responsibly**
- 12. Having the support we need**

## Recommended foundations for improvement

These recommendations are things the Council needs to start doing in the next twelve months to improve its governance. Further details of all of our recommendations can be found in our description of the twelve principles and in the separate technical appendix.

- A. Incorporate the twelve principles into the Council’s key policies, strategies and partnership arrangements, including the Constitution, organisational, officer and member development programmes, as the foundation for a new and positive culture
- B. Hold a Borough-wide conversation to decide the strategic direction and governance arrangements for the Council
- C. Establish a citizens’ assembly, along with similar “deliberative” process as part of the Borough-wide conversation on the strategic direction and future governance of the Council
- D. Establish a “listening committee” for councillors to hear directly from residents in an open format
- E. Set up a commission to review how Borough-wide and area governance will work in the future, involving residents and partners to consider options
- F. Take practical steps to engage with local government good practice
- G. Use the Annual Government Statement as the basis for an ongoing, wider conversation about how governance can be improved

### Options for next steps

These are options for things that the Council could start doing over the next two years, depending on the conversations with the community and once the foundations for improvement have started to be put into place.

It is not our expectation that the Council will do all of this in the way that we have set out in our report. Instead, the Council and community should use the framework provided by the citizens’ assembly, and other opportunities for dialogue, to decide what the best approach should be. This means that there will be a proper sense of ownership – from the Council and local people – over whatever changes are put in place.

#### Resident involvement in decision-making

- Publish a statement of the Council’s new culture (and new strategic vision) to

demonstrate how the Council will work with local people to understand how decision-making ought to be opened up

- Introduce an advisory panel for policy development
- Set up a model of policymaking that involves residents appropriately in the development of policy proposals, including the use of policy commissions
- Redesign the Council website
- Work with councillors and the voluntary sector to foster and support local individuals, groups and organisations to self-organise to influence council decision-making

#### Councillors working with residents

- Hold development sessions for councillors working with communities
- Focus member induction (and ongoing support to councillors) on a clear understanding of councillors’ various roles
- Take action to ensure that officer responses to councillor requests are consistently timely, positive and informative

#### Lead members and decision-making

- Clarify the different roles of officers and members in the decision-making process
- Redesign the “key decision” process
- Review the governance of the bi-borough and partnership arrangements to ensure they are compatible with the twelve principles
- Publish an accessible general guide to how decisions are made
- Publish in a consistent way the reasons and evidence behind individual decisions
- Introduce “back to the floor” sessions for Leadership Team and senior officers
- Review the way that different voices are balanced when decisions are made
- Direct more policy questions to scrutiny – particularly where answers are unclear

- Leadership Team, mirrored by the Council's most senior officers, should create additional opportunities to discuss key policy issues as a group

### **Scrutiny**

- Review and agree scrutiny's role and purpose, and ensure that this role and purpose are well understood
- Prioritise scrutiny work better, informed by scrutiny's role and better use of information by scrutiny members
- Put in place a single work programme for scrutiny that allows scrutiny councillors to focus on the most important issues for the Council and residents
- Clarify the role and responsibilities of lead members in respect of scrutiny to ensure a clear process of holding to account
- Extend the use of co-option to give local people, and local experts, more of a stake in the scrutiny process
- Redesign the governance support function

### **Council meetings**

- Co-design with residents a petitions system to easily allow residents to raise issues for debate at council meetings
- Review the expectations of local people, in terms of their experience of playing an active part at council meetings

## **Longer-term aspirations**

These are ideas that the Council can consider once the foundations and next steps have been addressed. In particular, we think that detailed steps to address the frequency of council meetings and the committee structure can only be addressed after the above recommendations about role, purpose and overall governance have been resolved.

### **Resident involvement in decision-making**

- Map where community and amenity groups exist to make it easier for those groups to self-organise and support each other

### **Councillors working with residents**

- Employ political assistants for party groups

### **Lead members and decision-making**

- Put in place a policy "green paper" or working paper system to share policy challenges at an early stage

### **Council meetings**

- Review the frequency of council meetings and the committee structure – only after other recommendations about role, purpose and so on have been resolved
- Full Council to continue to provide space for the public to address councillors, which places contributions from the public at the centre

# About this report

## How this study came about

Shortly after the Grenfell Tower fire, a meeting of the Council passed a motion asking for “a full and independent study of the advantages of re-introducing a committee-based system of scrutiny”. The scope of the review was later extended by the Council to include:

- The best way to ensure an effective scrutiny and decision-making system for Kensington and Chelsea
- The range of governance options open to the Council
- Community engagement in decision-making
- Ensuring the effectiveness of formal council meetings, including opportunities for public and democratic debate
- The role, function and resourcing of governance, oversight and scrutiny arrangements

In this report, the term “governance” is used often. It refers to the way that the Council makes decisions and who is involved in making those decisions. Good governance means doing the right things in the right way. It is about more than just legal systems and policies. It is about being transparent, accountable, involving people, acting with integrity and having the right support. This is what we call a “culture of good governance”.

When the independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce produced a report in the autumn of 2017, it asked the Council to make sure that the independent study also covered “what good looks like in relation to the behaviours and performance in role of Members”.

This report, therefore, looks at not only what is written down about how the Council makes decisions but also how people actually behave in practice. The proposed principles and the detail that sits behind those principles will provide a practical foundation to inform all aspects of member behaviour, and should inform the development of member induction, training and development, code of conduct

and any associated performance standards the Council wishes to develop.

We at the Centre for Public Scrutiny were asked to carry out this work in the summer of 2017. We are a charity that provides advice and support to councils, but also challenges them, on issues relating to governance. We are supported by a grant from the Local Government Association, which is a national body of which most councils (including the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) are members, and work with councils around the country. The Local Government Association agreed that it would provide us with separate funding to cover this work, at no cost to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

We agreed with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea that we would carry out this work. Proposals for this study were included in a report to the Council’s Executive Services Scrutiny Committee, which met on 18 September 2017. We attended this meeting, which was held in public, and answered questions about how we proposed to do this work. As a result of this meeting we agreed with the Council, and the Local Government Association, that we would carry out our work in the way we describe below.

We then engaged a second independent organisation, The Democratic Society, to support our work in their area of specialism: citizen participation and resident voice. The Democratic Society has a long-standing relationship with local government in the UK, including with the Local Government Association and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and has worked on governance and democracy issues with rural and urban councils across England. As an international non-profit organisation, it also understands best practice from beyond the UK. The Society is a non-partisan membership organisation, and constitutionally barred from political alignment or activity.

While the Grenfell tragedy is of course the trigger for this work, our brief was to look at governance across the whole of the Borough, and this is what we have done.

## Overall approach

Broadly speaking, our approach has been to focus on what people want to be different in the future, what a good future might look like and what good things are happening already, both inside and outside of the Council. This report, therefore, focuses on positive solutions. Our evidence gathering has of course looked at the past – existing and former practice – to come to a view about the journey that the Council has to take towards improvement.

We believe that it will be councillors, residents and officers working together who will make the necessary cultural change a reality. It cannot happen just by mechanical implementation of recommendations from external experts. Our approach, therefore, has been to listen carefully to what people have told us and to highlight areas where we think there is common ground. What we have suggested in this report are, as far as possible, things that we believe will work in Kensington and Chelsea because they have been suggested by people in Kensington and Chelsea.

We have also made some suggestions based on our work with other councils where we think is helpful.

We believe that the process of change is long term and we see this report as setting out only the foundations. It is, of course, essential to address the foundations before moving on to other things.

Our report makes a range of recommendations, but our focus has been on the following:

- **Developing a set of principles that should form the basis for good governance.** These principles reflect the things that people to whom we have spoken think are most important. They cover the way that the Council acts and behaves when it makes decisions, when it puts together its policies and when it tells people about what it is doing. Signing up to a set of principles like this will be important for the Council – it shows local people that it is prepared to change, and that it understands what that change needs to look like.

- **A Borough-wide conversation that would help local people and the Council to work out together what the Council's priorities should be, and the changes that would need to be made to make those priorities happen.**

There are big issues in the Borough for the Council to address. Over the course of the next twelve months, the Council should talk to local people to better understand how it can work with them to tackle those issues together. We suggest some ways in which this might happen.

- **A range of other options that could help the Council improve the way it makes decisions.** Some of these are medium term, with action being taken within the next two years or so. Some are for further down the line.

For all of these issues, action can only start after the local elections in May 2018. The manifestos of the individuals and parties involved, and the election campaign, will provide the foundation for this work.

In our evidence gathering, we have looked at the following key themes that were set out in the Council's proposal for this study:

- General culture
- Resident involvement in decision-making
- Councillors working with residents
- Lead members and decision-making
- Scrutiny
- Council meetings

While the principles we have proposed in this report are relevant across the board, we have listed our recommendations and options against these key themes.



## Evidence gathering

Our work has focused on gathering evidence in three ways – from council officers and councillors (through focus groups, interviews and a survey), a review of policies and council documentation, and from residents (through focus groups, interviews and a survey).

We have designed our evidence gathering to reflect the fact that our work is a first step towards a more meaningful dialogue between the Council and local people – a dialogue in which local people take the lead. In this context, our work was not about carrying out a comprehensive consultation exercise or an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of council governance past and present. This is an initial piece of work, and we expect that local people will continue to have conversations – with each other and with the Council – as work to improve governance goes forward.

The evidence we collected for this report included:

- Fifty interviews with residents, voluntary organisations, councillors, council officers and partners
- Five discussion groups and workshops with residents and councillors

- Two surveys, one for residents and one for those connected with the Council, which received 375 and 79 responses respectively
- Desktop research completed by the research team
- Seven meetings attended with councillors and council officers
- Observations of nine council meetings

The evidence we collected reflected views from across the Borough. We spoke to councillors and organisations from North and South. The responses to our survey also reflected the many different communities of Kensington and Chelsea.

The full details of how evidence was collected and analysed can be found in the method statement included as an appendix to this report.

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## Research team

The work for this report has been done by:

### **Centre for Public Scrutiny**

Jacqui McKinlay, Ed Hammond, Dave McKenna, Sunita Sharma, Elena Konopelko, Ian Parry

### **LGA peer members**

Cllr Ed Davie, Cllr John Riley

### **The Democratic Society**

Anthony Zacharzewski, Mel Stevens, Beth Wiltshire

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## Change at the Council: An overview

From the evidence we heard it is clear that, while there are many good things in place, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is a council, and a Borough, which wants to see major change.

We heard from residents, councillors, officers and partners about a number of practical things they want to be different about how the Council works day to day – the way that it communicates with residents, holds meetings, makes decisions. But we also heard a desire for broader change in the behaviours, attitudes and values that sit alongside these practical activities.

The leadership of the Council is clear that it is now in a different world; that the Council cannot go back. The Council also understands that it cannot move forward without a clear and honest conversation with its residents.

The aim of this governance review, therefore, is to provide the Council and the local community with the foundation they need in order to begin that conversation about how the Council is run.

This is a conversation that needs to have residents, their needs and hopes, at its heart.

While our work happened in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's problems are about more than its operational response to that fire. Local people have told us that they have been unhappy with the way that the Council has been run for many years, but the Council has not listened. In contrast, the Council has, with some justification, seen itself as a body that manages public finances well and delivers many well-regarded services. Over many years, these seemingly opposite views have led to frustration, anger and deep distrust among many local people.

Our view is that the Council does have a firm foundation to build on. It has many strengths, particularly in the delivery of services to residents. But the Council is inward facing. As the Council begins to adapt, recognising that it has to change in order to better represent and reflect the needs of its residents, it now

needs to move to an outward-facing model – one that welcomes challenge, and is candid and frank about the way that it works. In this way it can draw on the advice and resources of residents, the support of partner organisations and the good practice ideas of other councils. As one person responding to our survey said, the Council needs to: “Give residents a real voice and listen and react to their issues, concerns and complaints”. Another said: “More local decision-making. More meaningful consultations that aren't simply a box ticking exercise. Residents being put at heart of decision-making process.”

Kensington and Chelsea is also well placed in a second way; it benefits from having many active, well-informed and well-organised residents, and voluntary groups and charities that are active across the Borough. We were impressed with the people we met from right across the Borough, and believe that their energy and commitment hold the key to how the Council operates in future. In response to the survey question: “Why is it important for people like you to get involved with decisions made by the Council?”, one resident replied: “So that the Council is helped to be more outward facing and made accountable”. It is clear from our evidence that many residents have a realistic understanding of the challenges that the Council faces and are keen to offer support. As another resident said in a survey response: “You only have to ask”.

However, the issue of trust is central to what happens next in Kensington and Chelsea.

In our report, we highlight a number of things the Council needs to do. These things on their own will not rebuild trust – the lack of trust is a long-term problem that will take a great deal of time and effort if it is to be fixed.

According to research done by Mayar, Davis and Schoorman (published in 1995), earning trust depends on three things. The first is that you do what you say you will do, the second is showing that you care about the person you are asking to trust you and the third is acting with integrity. We have thought about these things when designing our proposals to ensure that the

principles we have suggested will, in particular, support a longer-term process of building trust.

It is also clear to us that there needs to be a better recognition of the role that councillors play in Kensington and Chelsea. Councillors have a range of connected roles. They make decisions, they sort out local people's problems, they hold the Council to account. They also play a "civic leadership" role – helping others to empower themselves, and strengthening the capacity of the communities which they serve to take action on their own behalf to tackle things that are important to them.

An outward-looking council will put its councillors at the centre of efforts to better involve, engage and empower local people. Councillors, as well as local people, have to be empowered as part of the work the Council is doing to change its culture. Not just lead members but all councillors have an active and critical role to play – holding decision makers to account, taking part in decision-making and policy development, working and supporting people in their wards are just a few of the many roles they have. In relation to our recommendations specifically, councillors should hold the Council to account on its commitment to take forward what we are proposing, and should play an active role in the Borough-wide conversation that we think needs to happen as a first step.

We heard many good examples of councillors who were able to build up meaningful connections with residents in their communities and who demonstrate many of the behaviours needed to gain trust. These councillors need to be supported in what they do and their good practice shared as something that can be repeated across the Borough. Councillors not only provide the public face of the Council but also have a critical role in connecting the needs and aspirations of residents to the decision-making process, whether as advocates for residents' views or as organisers, helping residents to get directly involved.

Of course, councillors also have a role as decision makers, and this involves balancing the needs of everyone across the Borough. While this will always involve making difficult choices, it is through an honest conversation

with residents that these choices can be made well and explained well. As mentioned above, residents understand this, and are more likely to accept even those decisions they disagree with if they feel they are informed and involved.

At the heart of this report are twelve principles for good governance. These principles have not been taken "off the shelf" but instead reflect what we have heard from the residents, councillors, council officers and partners we spoke to. While we have checked these principles against more recognised general frameworks, they represent, first and foremost, the aspirations of people living and working in Kensington and Chelsea and the particular circumstances of the Borough. As much as is possible, they reflect the common ground of what people have told us. This is why we think they should be helpful for a conversation about good governance going forward.

Our hope is that these principles can be used as the basis for redesigning the governance of the Council. Nine of the twelve principles reflect the need for the Council to be more outward facing. The remaining three are about how the Council should work behind the scenes.

We believe that these principles will be of interest to other councils that would like to be more outward facing.

Drawing on these principles, and on the evidence we gathered, we have made a series of recommendations for things we believe that the Council should do to achieve a reasonable level of good governance.

In summary, this report sets out what good might look like in future and highlights the steps we think might help the Council, working with residents, to get there.

We can only provide a framework for what the future might look like. We cannot provide a detailed plan. Only the Council and the community can do that.

# Good governance principles for the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Good governance means doing the right things in the right way.

To capture what good governance means and to represent the common ground of what we heard from residents, councillors, officers and partners, we have designed twelve principles. These are drawn directly from the conversations we have had – they sum up what people in Kensington in Chelsea believe when it comes to the Council doing the right things in the right way. We hope that these principles will be meaningful to everyone involved with the Borough and will support good governance going forward.

The twelve principles are:

- 1. Connecting with residents**
- 2. Focusing on what matters**
- 3. Listening to many voices**
- 4. Acting with integrity**
- 5. Involving before deciding**
- 6. Communicating what we're doing**
- 7. Inviting residents to take part**
- 8. Being clearly accountable**
- 9. Responding fairly to everyone's needs**
- 10. Working as a team**
- 11. Managing responsibly**
- 12. Having the support we need**

While they are not listed in order of importance, the first nine principles are what we would expect from an outward-looking council. The remaining three principles are more about making sure things work well behind the scenes. All of these relate directly to the change in culture that the Council is embarking on – a change to people's behaviour, attitudes and values – which is so crucial in reconnecting RBKC to the people it serves.

These principles underpin our approach. They are about empowering local people; they are also about empowering and recognising the role of local councillors. A focus on the multiple roles of all councillors – not just the decision-making roles of lead members – will be critical in helping the Council to improve. On behalf of

and alongside local people, councillors can work to ensure that these twelve principles begin to be embedded in the way that the Council works.

Our recommendations are focused on building some foundations for improvement. The scale and scope of the challenge RBKC faces should not be underestimated. Change takes time, effort and energy. Local people have a strong appetite for change; but we were told that part of the problem previously was that the Council has taken action without reference to local people. For us, making recommendations that put local people at the very heart of the process – supported by councillors, and the Council at large – had to be a priority.

Conversation and agreement take time, but our suggestions are not about things continuing as they are while a lengthy series of talking shops is convened. We want the Borough-wide conversation that we propose to begin to have immediate effects, as the Council and local people experiment practically with different approaches to decision-making, scrutiny and public participation and empowerment to see what works for local people. This more open approach to trying new things – alongside local people – is part of the cultural change that the Council needs to see. The Council can start by experimenting with some of the suggestions that we make over the course of the rest of the report.

For each of our twelve principles we have made suggestions; options that will follow on from this Borough-wide conversation. Local people, and the Council, will be best placed to decide on how to take these options forward. Many of these options will require the Council to take some kind of final, formal decision to take effect. The evidence we provide, both in this report and especially in our technical appendix, will hopefully go some way to making these conversations easier.

## Our recommendations: The foundations for improvement

Our first general recommendation is that **the Council should incorporate our principles into its key policies and strategies.** This should include the Council Constitution (the rule book that sets out how decisions are made), as well as organisational, officer and member development programmes, as the foundation for a new and positive culture. Positively, work has already started to develop a significant organisational development programme for the Council; the principles and this report should inform that work.

As the informal culture is as important as (if not more important than) the formal changes that the Council makes, we wish to underline our support for the development programmes for officers and councillors that we understand are being put in place. In putting the principles into practice, we also recommend that they are used to review partnership arrangements, including those with Westminster Council.

Our second general recommendation is that **the Council should hold a Borough-wide conversation about its strategic direction and future governance arrangements.** While the strategic direction will be determined largely by the May election, we think that there will still be much to talk about in terms of priorities and the details of how things will be done.

While we think that the twelve principles will provide a good foundation for the governance element of that conversation, and that our recommendations are things that the Council could start doing now, we also know that there are more voices to be heard and more ideas that could be considered.

Ideally, we believe **an independent citizen assembly (of which elected councillors would also form a part) or similar deliberative process would not only be helpful in getting to the right results for the Borough-wide conversation but would also send out an important signal about the outward-facing type of council that Kensington and Chelsea wants to be.** An assembly like this would be able to support a wider range of local people to get involved, make their views heard and have their say on the future of the Borough. This would not be a

talking shop – it would be a way for local people to be firmly in the driving seat when it comes to the Borough’s future. An assembly would be able to support other local conversations between local people, as they are helped to “self-organise” to make their views heard and understood.

Under the “inviting residents to take part” principle, we recommend that **a “listening committee” should be set up.** Now that the Council has given residents the opportunity to make direct presentations to councillors, it is vital, in our opinion, that there continues to be a mechanism for this to happen – at least while other options are developed – alongside the Council acting as a venue for democratic debate. Such a committee would not just be a space for local people to complain with the Council remaining silent. We would expect that comments, complaints and concerns brought to the committee would provoke the Council into speedy action, and open reporting back to local people on what that action has been.

Certainly, we had a strong sense from our evidence that the principle of residents addressing council meetings is seen as a good innovation and should be continued. The balance between this strongly felt need, and the need for councillors themselves to have the time and space to debate, is something that we cover in the main technical appendix to this report.

During our evidence gathering, we heard calls for decisions to be brought closer to residents to ensure that the Council responds fairly to needs across the Borough. There are a range of different ways that this can happen, including consultancy boards, neighbourhood forums, community interest companies, cooperatives and urban parishes. These are covered in more detail in the technical appendix.

There are also suggestions that decision-making across the whole Borough should change – in particular, that the Council could adopt a model for decision-making based on committees, rather than the so-called “Leader and Cabinet” model that the Council uses now. We do not believe that it is for us to suggest whether any of these options should be taken up, simply

because for any of these options to work they must be chosen and developed by those who will be involved in making them happen.

We recommend, therefore, that **a commission should be set up, including residents and partners, to look at the different options for both Borough-wide and area governance** and to see which best meets the twelve principles we have set out in this report. In our appendix we provide a significant body of evidence about the various options to inform this work. Our technical appendix provides extensive evidence to support the work of this commission.

Our next general recommendation is that **the Council needs to take steps to engage more with good practice across local government**. From our evidence gathering, we observed a limited knowledge and curiosity about what other councils were doing beyond the neighbouring boroughs of Westminster, and Hammersmith

and Fulham. If the Council is keen to be more outward facing, which is what we heard in our evidence, then councillors and officers should be more actively curious about what other councils are doing.

From what we heard and observed, we think that the Council needs to regularly reassure itself about how well its governance systems are working and what could be done to improve them. The obvious process for doing this is the Annual Governance Statement, which is reported to the Council's Audit Committee.

**We recommend that the Council should invest in this process so that it is a wider annual conversation than is the case at the moment.**

The twelve principles should be used to see how decision-making, including the work of Leadership Team and scrutiny, are working and how they might be improved.

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## The twelve principles: Suggestions for action

These “suggestions for action” are things on which the Council will need to take a firm view in light of the Borough-wide conversation above. Until then, we suggest that (in support of the work of the citizens’ assembly, and the other conversations that will be happening in the Borough) the Council might choose some of these suggestions to experiment with – different approaches to formulating decisions, and holding them to account, which local people, councillors and the Council can try out to see what works.

This experimental approach is the most proportionate for a number of reasons:

- It recognises that the Council and local people are not going to be able to build perfect systems for everything straight away. A trial period is necessary.
- Putting in place “permanent solutions” could be seen as more risk – to the Council and to local people. Trialling different approaches means that decisions can be taken later, informed by evidence.
- Putting in place “permanent solutions” could be seen as resource-intensive. Experimental approaches can be trialled and evaluated more dynamically.
- Experimentation helps to manage the challenge of prioritisation – that is, which of these measures to address first. Because a number of these measures are interconnected, setting a priority and order for them is very difficult. Experimenting with different elements of what we propose before taking firm action means that the Council is able to prioritise from a more informed standpoint.
- Finally, an experimental approach means that the Council, councillors and local people “own the change”, when it happens. People will have had the opportunity to check, review and evaluate the strengths and pitfalls of different approaches – they will understand what they are signing up to and how to make it work.



## Connecting with residents

A widely shared view from the people we spoke to was that the Council should be less remote and closer to residents across the whole of the Borough. Time and again we heard about the need for councillors and officers to get out of the Town Hall and to meet residents face to face. At the same time, people want to see a more friendly and informal approach so that they feel more at ease when talking to councillors and officers and attending meetings. People are put off by the bureaucracy that they see in the way that the Council works. We also heard about the need for the Council to be more diverse so that everyone can see that the Council is for “people like me”.

There are some examples of the Council connecting with residents that it can build on. City Living, Local Life is an example of the Council helping local people to find practical solutions to the issues in their communities (which links to some of our recommendations on working in neighbourhoods).

Central, though, to the connection between the Council and local people is the role of local elected councillors. In all of their various roles – as representatives of local people, as advocates for those people’s interests, as people holding the Council to account both at ward and Borough levels and as decision makers – councillors are critical. On this issue in particular, part of the challenge for the Council lies in ensuring that, as steps are undertaken to better connect it to local communities, councillors play a core role. Their unrivalled knowledge and insight into the communities they serve will help the Council – and local people – to work better together.

A number of councillors are excellent at keeping in contact with people in their wards (we think that the central role of councillors in building and keeping solid links with the community needs to be promoted). We also heard about senior officers who were willing to take time out to meet with residents informally and listen to their concerns.

However, while good examples do exist, they are isolated and do not reflect the way that the Council as a whole has worked in the past – although we understand that concerted efforts

are already being made to change this.

The challenge for the Council is to take some of those good examples, and plans for the future, and to turn them into the normal way of working for councillors and officers.

As a first step, we recommend that councillors are offered development sessions to help them learn from good practice in the Borough and elsewhere. We also recommend that both Leadership Team and the Council’s senior officers formalise regular sessions where they go out and about and meet residents. In one interview, we heard the distance between senior managers and frontline staff described as a series of hurdles that made it hard for important messages to get through, and so we would also encourage senior managers to invite frontline staff to take part in their management meetings.

Beyond face-to-face contact, we heard several times about the need to improve the Council’s website. We recommend that a major redesign takes place as soon as possible, so that the website meets the needs of residents. The gov.uk design principles provide an excellent starting point, and we would also suggest talking to the LocalGovDigital group if more help is needed.

## Focusing on what matters

A common theme from our evidence is that the Council ought to pay more attention to the needs of residents and less to the management and financial needs of the organisation. This was summed up in one survey response as the need to focus on “residents, not reserves”.

Both are important – and it is important not to see this as an “either/or” discussion. While the need for strong management and financial prudence remain essential, our evidence suggests that the balance needs to shift. This is consistent with The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy’s (CIPFA) international framework for good governance, which includes “determining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits” as one of its principles.

At the same time, we heard that that more time needs to be spent on the most important issues and less on the smaller decisions. The way that the key decision system is set up means that

lower-level decisions are being automatically fed into Leadership Team and scrutiny meetings without discussion of what needs the most time or what is most important to residents. This is one of the reasons why we think that the key decision process needs to be redesigned.

At the same time, scrutiny needs to take greater control of its own work programme and focus more on the big issues that matter to residents and to the Council. The role of councillor-led public scrutiny will be crucial as the Council moves to change and improve its culture and the way it works. We heard and observed that the work of the scrutiny committees needs to be less dependent on the key decision process and more able to plan topics beyond just the next meeting. Scrutiny – the vital work of backbench councillors holding the leadership of the Council to account – also needs to link in to councillors’ wider “representative” role. Councillors can and should be bringing the insight and perspective they get from their ward work to bear on what happens in scrutiny. This is a way of linking in scrutiny work with the area-based, community-led activity we recommend elsewhere.

For these reasons, we recommend that a single work programme is set up that can be managed by scrutiny councillors. This would invite a wide range of views on what scrutiny should be looking at and allows councillors and residents to know what will be coming up well in advance.

The Council has been praised for its service delivery in many key areas such as children’s services and social services. The Council now needs to build on this, by developing and pursuing a vision for the wellbeing of the Borough. Once such a vision is in place it will allow Leadership Team and scrutiny councillors to see what issues they should be focusing on in their respective work plans.

## **Listening to many voices**

Many good governance frameworks, for example the CIPFA International Framework, highlight the need for stakeholder engagement to be comprehensive. In other words, it is important to hear from as many affected people as you can before making a decision. Similarly, our evidence showed a desire on the part of both residents and Council officials to hear from a wide range

of people. Good governance for the people we heard from means listening to the North and the South, the rich and the poor, the loud and the quiet. As one person responding to our resident survey put it: “A wide input is required in order to ensure that the decisions which are made are for the benefit of all residents”.

The presence of many active resident and community groups in the Borough provides a strong foundation for the Council as it seeks to listen to many voices. The challenge, from the evidence we heard, is threefold. First, the Council needs to ensure that its relationship with existing resident and community groups is as effective as it can be. We recommend that conversations about this with the relevant groups start as soon as possible. Second, the Council needs to take proactive steps to hear from those who are seldom heard. We recommend that the Council establishes a panel of local people to direct its approach on these issues, as one element of its response. In the longer term, a panel like this might be used to debate and discuss Borough-wide issues of importance, in a forum owned and directed by local people. Finally, the Council needs to be confident that it can balance what it hears from different voices when making decisions. We believe that the Council should continue to seek an independent or peer review of this aspect of decision-making during implementation, not only to ensure good practice but also to provide independent assurance to all those who share their views.

The need to speak directly to local people is not about cutting elected councillors out of the loop – in fact, it is about doing the opposite. Councillors have an unrivalled knowledge and understanding of the communities they serve. They, too, are tasked with making difficult decisions, which involving listening to and acting on the different voices in their communities. They can and should be recognised as playing a critical part in these debates and discussions.

## **Acting with integrity**

Following the Grenfell disaster, there have been many calls for the Council to show more honesty, integrity and empathy. Many have pointed to a breakdown in trust between residents and the Council, particularly in the North.



Behaving with integrity means following a set of principles that are seen as worthwhile by those you hope will trust you. To that end, we hope that the twelve principles in this report will be a good starting point.

We make reference here to the Charter for Families Bereaved Through Public Tragedy, proposed by The Right Reverend James Jones KBE in his recently published report on Hillsborough. This charter, recently adopted by the Council, includes the commitment to:

“Ensure all members of staff treat members of the public and each other with mutual respect and with courtesy. Where we fall short, we should apologise straightforwardly and genuinely.”

We also want to highlight Nolan’s seven principles of public life, which were published in 1995. The principles are: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. We think that these are consistent with the principles we have proposed here, but they should always be considered in any discussion of integrity in public bodies.

Another key aspect of trust is the ability to follow words with actions. While trust can take a long time to repair, and sometimes might never be repaired, an important foundation is for the Council to do as it says.

This means not only taking the actions that have been promised but also promising only what can be done – and doing the right things. As an illustration of this point, we heard how residents in the North responded well to officers who got small things done. We also heard from residents that they would rather hear that people did not know, or that timescales could not be given, than be given promises that cannot be kept. Equally, we heard that part of the frustration with the Council has been that it often takes action without properly considering the needs of local people.

The relationship between council officers and councillors is a crucial one when it comes to getting things done for residents. We heard some great examples from councillors of officers who listened, give honest answers and were willing to problem-solve around issues brought to them. We also heard from councillors that

many officers could be more effective in their responses.

We recommend, therefore, that learning how to engage with residents and councillors become a key aspect of officer development.

## **Involving before deciding**

One of the most consistent messages from our evidence is that decision makers need to be involving other people much earlier in the decision-making than is the case at the moment. Many talked about wanting to be consulted before options have been agreed and before the Council had settled on a preferred course of action. Backbench councillors also told us that they should be involved earlier in the process – either through scrutiny or in their ward roles. At the same time, officers felt that they would be able to contribute helpfully to decisions outside of their direct areas if they were asked to earlier.

The Council has many knowledgeable and committed people – residents, councillors and officers – who it can draw on to make decisions. It needs to take steps to involve them early.

As a first step, the Council should publish a statement explaining how it intends to be open to involvement in decision-making. This will be led by our earlier recommendations about local people’s wider expectations on governance and decision-making, both Borough-wide and area by area. This should reflect the different types of decisions the Council and councillors make.

We have looked in more detail at the “key decision” system – the way that the Council identifies which major decisions are coming up and how it deals with them. The key decision system has many good aspects and is a process that is well understood by those directly involved with it. We recommend, however, that this system is redesigned to ensure that it fits with the twelve principles and is able to meet the needs of those who use it, whether councillors, officers, residents or partners. Specifically, we believe that there is a need to ensure better prioritisation, early involvement, participation and co-design opportunities for residents.

We also recommend that, as part of redesigning the overall key decision process, the Forward Plan of decisions is also redesigned with the needs of residents, councillors and officers in mind. Specifically, the aim should be to encourage early input and involvement. Longer term, the Cabinet could also look to introduce a policy green paper or working paper system to encourage discussion and involvement.

The Leadership Team should also be seeking to direct policy topics to scrutiny, particularly those where there is no preferred way forward, so that they can be dealt with through working groups. We heard from councillors that these working groups were the most effective aspect of the scrutiny process and so they should be used more. It is, of course, for scrutiny councillors to decide whether the suggested working groups should take place.

Policy development is currently focused on policy boards, which are meetings chaired by lead members, alongside senior council officers. While we do not think that this model is fit for purpose as it currently stands, we do think that lead member and senior officer discussions of policymaking, wherever it happens, have to start with thinking about how the public (and a wider range of councillors) are likely to be involved.

The evidence we have gathered suggests that the approach the Council takes towards how it involves people will need to reflect the fact that different people will want and expect to be involved in different ways in decision-making on different issues. There may be some decisions in which it will be right that the public is empowered to take an active part in decision-making. There will be some where it is right that the Council continues to take the lead. But the Council cannot be the sole judge of this. This is why we suggest that the independent community-led panel we mentioned above should play a part – with councillors, cross-party – in understanding how Council decision-making on critical decisions should be opened up. There is a “matrix” of different kinds of involvement and empowerment that will be appropriate for different types of issue or decision.

Longer term, the Council should experiment with commissions – such as those held by

Hammersmith and Fulham, Calderdale’s Health and Flood Commissions and Kirklees Democracy Commission – that seek to involve the public, gathering evidence to consider issues of importance to the Borough.

## Communicating what we’re doing

Transparency is a cornerstone of good governance. One of the most consistent messages we heard from residents was that they wanted the Council to communicate better. First, residents want to hear more about what the Council is doing. We heard the decision-making process described as a “black box”. We heard that there is a tendency to use reasons such as commercial confidentiality as justification for not sharing information when this was not necessary – although it should be stressed that we have seen no direct evidence of this, or of attempts motivated by bad faith to withhold information from councillors or others. Second, residents want councillors and council officers to be better at how they communicate. Many different ways of providing information to the public were suggested to us, as well as the need to ensure the use of plain language. We think the elderly residents’ reading group, which checks social services documents, is a really good way of supporting this and should be used more across the Council.

Communication about decisions is not just about communication with residents. Councillors, too, have an active role to play in using information – both to hold the Council to account through scrutiny, and to support local people to understand what the Council is doing and how they can influence it.

We recommend that the Council should take the following steps in order to improve how it communicates about decision-making with residents.

First, a service highlighting key decision-making issues should be designed and set up to allow interested residents to follow council business via email and other channels such as social media. We understand that such a service does exist, and we think this should be refreshed and relaunched, better targeted and with its usage monitored.

Second, the Council should design and publish an accessible general guide to explain to residents how decisions are made.

Third, the extensive network of community and residents organisations in the Borough should be used much more effectively as a communications network (and, in due course, as a source of both support and challenge to the Council). Conversations with the different groups should take place to see how this can best happen.

Finally, the Council should take steps to better explain why decisions are being taken – the evidence that underpins decisions, the options considered and the business cases underlying the Council’s approach. The Council has procedures around the preparation and publication of this information, but they are inconsistently applied. Better information can influence and support public input into decision-making. This is an issue that could be picked up as part of a broader redesign of the key decision process, which we have recommended elsewhere, and can work to directly inform the way that member-led scrutiny happens.

### **Inviting residents to take part**

For many of the people we spoke to, good governance meant more than simply listening to residents or taking account of their views when making decisions. They told us that residents should have a direct role in council meetings and be able to express themselves in person.

Since the Grenfell tragedy, residents have been able to speak directly to Full Council meetings and residents’ representatives and have been asked to sit on the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee as members with voting rights. While both of these things have happened in exceptional circumstances, they point to the kinds of changes that people told us they want to see.

For this reason, we support the idea that we heard in our evidence of the Council setting up a “listening committee”. The role of this committee, which could be standalone or part of the Council’s scrutiny set-up, would be to invite public presentations and to make reports

to Full Council meetings based on what has been heard. The listening committee would also be expected to take what people had told it and coordinate action in response – providing direct accountability to local people. The exact format of this committee should be discussed with residents. In our view, however, the fewer requirements there are for the public to take part, the more effective this committee will be. We recognise that it is not easy to balance the need to involve residents in a meaningful way with the need to ensure the smooth running of meetings. We think that the insight that the Council (and the community) has gained through the difficult experiences at the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee will help in designing this approach; whatever that approach looks like, the public has to play a central role in designing it. We explain this in more detail in our appendix.

We observed a Planning Applications Committee and thought this showed the Council at its best when it comes to involving residents in meetings. While we have heard people question the length of time allowed for residents to make presentations, the small size of the meeting, the opportunity for residents to sit at the table and clarity in understanding the process, all suggest good practice that could be used in other council meetings.

We heard from many of those we spoke to that the “commission model” of developing policy was something that worked well in other councils, particularly Hammersmith and Fulham. We think this is a really good way for the Council to work with residents on issues of public concern. Based on what we heard from residents, we believe planning policy, and the issues of fairness and equal opportunity, would certainly capture the public imagination if they were to be chosen as policy commissions. We have also suggested elsewhere in this report that looking at options for devolving decisions could be a possible topic for a commission.

We also heard that, before the Grenfell disaster, some of the best moments at council meetings had been the result of public petitions, and some of the better scrutiny meetings had been those that heard directly from the public – although we know that part of a positive experience for the public rests on getting a response to those contributions at the meeting

from council officers and councillors, which is not always possible. Motions brought to council meetings that involved residents in their design had also been effective in bringing people into these meetings. We also observed the public being invited to sit at the table and discuss planning applications with councillors, and we felt this worked effectively.

The challenge for the Council, therefore, is to embed this good practice, along with some of the changes made since the Grenfell disaster, as normal practice across the Council. A revised petition process could allow residents to bring issues to scrutiny and council meetings. While the details should be co-designed with residents, we feel that the thresholds for petitions are unnecessarily high. The Council should look at the work done recently in Rotherham in respect to petitions, council meetings and petition thresholds

The Council should also extend the practice of co-opting residents to all scrutiny committees. This could be done by inviting the representatives of resident or community groups to sit on committees; alternatively, an idea we heard from a councillor was to have a lottery scheme for residents to join committees.

While the Borough benefits from having many active, well-informed and well-organised residents, people from across the Borough still need help if they are to take part in decision-making. As argued by the report of the Kirklees Democracy Commission, the Council should seek to nurture and support citizens and community groups so that they can play an active role.

We think that councillors have a really important role to play and could be given more support to help residents take part. We heard good examples both of councillors letting residents know about what issues were being discussed at meetings and of councillors encouraging residents to submit petitions. We recommend, therefore, that the Council does more to promote, encourage and support this good practice.

We also heard from the voluntary sector that it would be willing to play a bigger role in supporting residents to take part and in helping residents to organise themselves. We also recommend, therefore, that this is something

that the Council discusses as part of its ongoing meetings with the voluntary sector.

Longer term, we suggest that the Council, in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, looks to map out existing resident and community groups across the Borough, as well as interests and concerns, to make it easier for people to self-organise and support each other.

We heard the suggestion that the Council should experiment with participatory budgeting and agree that this is something that should be considered longer term.

### **Being clearly accountable**

As well as being important to residents, accountability is a fundamental building block of any good governance system. Residents should expect decision makers to give clear accounts of what they are doing and why they are doing it. They should also expect to see accountability taking place through a public and documented conversation between decision makers and those who are in scrutiny roles.

In Kensington and Chelsea, there is a good foundation for accountability arrangements. In writing, systems and policies are robust and consistent. However, the way that the Council is “siloed” (with decisions being made department by department, and often not joined up) does make accountability for some decisions complicated. These challenges are particularly acute in relation to cross-cutting issues – subjects that cut across more than one lead member’s portfolio, and where “silo working” makes coordination difficult.

From our observations of scrutiny, we conclude that backbenchers’ holding to account of lead members needs to be significantly improved. We heard from several interviews that the Council’s scrutiny arrangements should be more like parliamentary select committees (which we explain in more detail in our technical appendix), and we agree that this would strengthen accountability in a number of ways. In particular, the need to hold lead members to account needs to be the focus of formal scrutiny meetings. As with select committees, we recommend that lead members only attend when invited by scrutiny councillors, sit at

the witness table when attending and present reports themselves. At the same time, a way of consistently recording the holding-to-account conversation needs to be in place – this could be done through minutes and reports or through letters. Either way, there should be a written record of questions and answers.

As a first step, we would like to see a review of scrutiny's role and purpose carried out to ensure clarity and a consistent approach.

We also have a number of further recommendations about how scrutiny should be made more strategic and proactive in the short term, the details of which are included in an appendix to this report.

Additional recommendations for scrutiny are covered under subsequent principles.

## **Responding fairly to everyone's needs**

A common message that we heard from residents was that the Council needed to be better at responding to needs right across the Borough. There is a strong perception that the Borough is run by people in the South, for people in the South. At the same time, we heard from those both inside and outside the Council that councillors and officers needed to more closely resemble people from across the Borough. This would then help the Council to better understand – and respond to – what different people need. If people are to trust their council, they need to feel that they are cared about and their needs recognised.

One way that needs are responded to well is through the work that individual councillors do with residents in their communities. We heard good examples, from all party groups, of councillors dealing with issues and concerns at surgeries and in response to phone calls, letters and emails. Going forward, the Council needs to ensure it supports and encourages this work. First, the corporate casework management system currently being developed needs to be implemented as a priority. Second, induction for new councillors needs to encourage sharing of skills and experiences of ward councillors (new and experienced) from across the Borough in the context of our twelve principles and the new sets of behaviours – attitudes and values to

which we expect everyone to sign up. Third, the way that officers respond to councillor requests needs to be reviewed to ensure a consistent and positive approach.

At the strategic level, the Council needs to take steps to ensure that decision-making takes account of needs across the Borough. In this report (and in our appendices), we have provided examples of ways that the Council can better understand and weigh different views. Councillors have a significant role in this – as representatives, they can understand how local people's needs can be properly taken into account.

Longer term, we know that many in the Borough would like to see a more devolved system that allows more decisions to be taken closer to residents. In our technical appendices we have discussed some options for achieving this. These include consultancy boards, neighbourhood forums, community interest companies, cooperatives and urban parishes. Where it is established, member-led scrutiny should also be linked into area working. We suggest that a commission is set up, including residents and partners, to look at the different options, in light of our twelve principles.

## **Working as a team**

This is the first of three principles that are about the Council's internal systems and processes.

We heard from officers, particularly those who had experience of other councils, that they felt that lead members and council departments would benefit from working more closely together across portfolios and departments. At the time of our research, issues were only discussed by Leadership Team as a whole if they affected more than one lead member's area of responsibility. This means there has, in the past, been limited opportunity for lead members to challenge and contribute to each other's decisions. For this reason, we recommend that Leadership Team should create additional opportunities to discuss key policy issues as a group, and should develop mechanisms that make individual lead members' decisions more visible to their colleagues. For similar reasons, we believe that decision-making would benefit from much more regular meetings of



the directors' team. This would signal a more corporate approach to strategic working to officers, and accessible mechanisms for senior people and teams to engage, network and share best practice.

We understand that the Chief Executive will be instituting regular meetings for his executive directors, and there is also now a weekly meeting of Leadership Team and executive directors. These are positive developments.

At the moment, councillors can and do work well together in some forums, but the influence of party politics – important as it is for local democracy – can be unattractive to local people. We recognise that, as an election approaches, this will be difficult to resolve in the short term. Scrutiny, in particular, should continue to be more constructive. We heard from councillors of all political backgrounds that working groups were good examples of cross-party working. We understand the difficulty of this kind of collaboration in what is a political environment. We think that good work programming can help to identify opportunities and risks around this kind of collaboration, subject by subject.

We also heard that Full Council meetings were at their best when councillors either came together in common purpose or were able to debate motions without party lines being enforced. While it is right that the Council chamber provides a stage for political debate, the public should also have the right to expect to regularly see councillors working together in the public interest.

## Managing responsibly

This is the second of three principles that are about the Council's internal systems and processes

In any process of change, it is important that the Council maintains high standards of management and control. This is one of the principles of CIPFA's international framework for good governance: "Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management". The Council cannot expect to function well as an outward-facing council if it does not manage well internally.

Overall, from an audit perspective, we have no reason to think that the Council is anything but well run, although this is not an area we explored in depth in our evidence gathering.

We did hear some suggestions that the arrangements for overseeing risk could be usefully reviewed, particularly to give the opportunity to look at some areas in depth. We are not making this a recommendation but would like to flag up the issue in any case.

## Having the support we need

This is the third of the three principles about how the Council's internal systems and processes.

It is council officers that provide lead members and scrutiny councillors with their main source of support and advice. We found that, because decision-making is very much focused on individual portfolios, there is a wide variation in the way that responsibilities are shared between councillors and officers. In some areas, lead members are seen to take what might be considered as operational decisions; in other areas, officers are seen to take the lead in policy. For this reason, we recommend that a conversation takes place about the respective roles of councillors and officers in relation to how decisions are made. In principle, councillors should set direction and policy – a framework for action, driven by their political priorities. Officers should work within that framework, devising solutions that deliver those priorities on the ground. While this is understood in theory, its translation into the way that people actually work is inconsistent and could be improved.

In our evidence, we also heard people describe the need to improve support in two ways.

First, there was a wish to see more support for backbenchers, alongside a perception that the Leadership Team had an unfair share of the resources available.

Second, we heard from a number of people that scrutiny support should be strengthened, made more independent and given a greater policy and research focus.

For these two reasons, we recommend that the governance support function is redesigned to

ensure that it better meets the needs of lead members and scrutiny councillors respectively, beyond simply supporting administration. As well as a greater focus on policy, we heard several times that governance support needed to be better at making the links to outside bodies and residents. In other words, governance support needs to meet the needs of an outwards-facing council.

A third thing we heard was that the Council needed to pull in more external expertise to improve the capacity of scrutiny committees and task-and-finish groups in particular. The contributions of co-optees, both on the audit committee and in scrutiny, is well regarded, and the idea of extending the use of co-optees was supported by many who we spoke to; we go

into more detail about the precise mechanics of how this might work in our appendix. In particular, there is the option to use co-optees more systematically to inform the development of policy, especially on the policy commissions that we recommend elsewhere. Similarly, the use of external experts – whether practitioners, academics or representatives of different community groups – was widely considered to be a positive support for the Council as it seeks to widen its understanding of the different issues it faces.

Longer term, the Council could consider giving party groups access to political assistants. Visits to other councils that employ this system of support might be a useful first step.

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## Thank you

### Who we heard from

We want to give our sincere gratitude to all the people and organisations who have contributed to this work. We have been overwhelmed with the energy and commitment of people who have taken part, from giving their time to be interviewed to helping promote opportunities for wider involvement. A big thank you to everyone.

#### Resident and community groups and organisations we had contact with

We are grateful to residents Mary Gardiner, Sophia Lambert, Michael Bach and Rosemary Baker, who presented evidence to the Council meeting of 6 December 2017. We also spoke to Mary, Sophia and Michael in person.

#### Councillors we interviewed

- Robert Atkinson (Labour)
- Judith Blakeman (Labour)
- Elizabeth Campbell, Council Leader (Conservative)
- Emma Dent Coad MP (Labour)

- David Lindsay, Lead Member (Conservative)
- Pat Mason (Labour)
- Daniel Moylan (Conservative)
- Bevan Powell (Labour)
- Andrew Rinker (Conservative)
- Robert Thompson (Labour)
- Linda Wade (Liberal Democrat)
- Mary Weale (Conservative)
- Charles Williams (Conservative)

#### Councillors who took part in discussion groups

- Sarah Addenbrooke (Conservative)
- Mohammed Bakhtiar (Labour)
- Judith Blakeman (Labour)
- Barbara Campbell (Conservative)
- Catherine Faulks (Conservative)



- James Husband (Conservative)
- David Lindsay (Conservative)
- Quentin Marshall (Conservative)
- Daniel Moylan (Conservative)
- Matthew Palmer (Conservative)
- Will Pascall (Conservative)
- Monica Press (Labour)
- Marie-Therese Rossi (Conservative)
- Malcolm Spalding (Conservative)
- Robert Thompson (Labour)
- Linda Wade (Liberal Democrat)
- Charles Williams (Conservative)

### **Council officers we interviewed**

- Nick Austin, Bi-Borough Director of Environmental Health
- Stella Baillie, Tri-Borough Director Integrated Care
- Ray Brown, Director of Customer Access
- Chris Buss, Interim Director of Finance
- Melissa Caslake, Bi-Borough Executive Director, Children's Services
- Richard Egan, Director of Corporate Property
- Robyn Fairman, Director for Grenfell
- Bernie Flaherty, Bi-Borough Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health
- Graeme Gordon, Strategy Consultant
- Sue Harris, Executive Director of Environment, Leisure and Residents' Services
- Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager
- David Hughes, Tri-Borough Director of Internal Audit
- Monsur Khan, Interim Head of Community Engagement
- Melanie Marshman, Head of Consultation and Partnerships Team

- Debbie Morris, Bi-Borough Director of Human Resources
- LeVerne Parker, Monitoring Officer
- Stuart Priestley, Chief Community Safety Officer
- John Quinn, Bi-Borough Director of Corporate Services
- Sue Seal, PA to the Director of Corporate Property
- Robert Sheppard, Head of Governance
- Mahmood Siddiqui, Bi-Borough Director of Transport and Highways
- Mike Sloniowski, Principal Consultant (Risk Management)
- Graham Stallwood, Executive Director Planning and Borough Development

### **Partners and co-optees**

- Olivia Clymer, Healthwatch
- Mona Hayat, NHS
- Ian Luder, Audit Committee Co-optee
- Lorraine Mohammed, Audit Committee Co-optee
- Louise Proctor, NHS
- Angela Spence, Kensington Social Council
- Spencer Sutcliffe, Borough Fire Commander
- Christine Vigars, Healthwatch

### **Grenfell Taskforce**

- Jane Scott, Grenfell Taskforce Chair

### **Organisations to whom we spoke**

- Blenheim CDP
- Chelsea Society
- Citizens Advice Kensington and Chelsea
- Clarendon Cross Residents' Association
- Community Monitoring Group

- Dovehouse Street Residents' Association
- Earls Court Square Residents' Association
- Edwardes Square Scarsdale & Abingdon Association
- Epic CIC
- French African Welfare Association
- Garden Square News
- Grenfell Tower Community Monitoring Project
- Grenfell Tower Victims Unit, DCLG
- Journey of hope
- Kensington and Chelsea Social Council
- Kensington Society
- Midaye Somali Development Network
- Milner Street Area Residents' Association
- Norland Conservation Society
- Onslow Neighbourhood Association
- Open Age
- St Helens Residents' Association
- St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum
- Volunteer Centre
- Wand UK
- Warwick Rd Estate Leaseholders' Association

14 other organisations spoke to us but had not confirmed their willingness to be listed here as we went to press.

- Labour Group
- Conservative Group
- Council

### Sources of further advice and evidence

- Simon Burrall (Involve)
- Perry Walker (Talkshop)
- Justin Griggs (National Association of Local Councils)

We would also like to register special thanks to: Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager, who acted as our contact point and was so efficient in making all of the practical arrangements for us; Joe Batty, Kensington and Chelsea Social Council, for assisting with organising a community group workshop; and Amanda Frame, Kensington Society, for assisting and organising a workshop for residents' associations.

### Meetings we attended and took part in

- Councillor David Lindsay, Lead Member
- Barry Quirk, Chief Executive
- Scrutiny Chairs
- Scrutiny Steering Group
- Leadership Team



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