The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

The ‘Future Council’: changing roles for the council and councillors

Phase I Report and Next Steps
Brief for the project

INLOGOV was commissioned to assess how well RBK is able to:

☐ respond to changing demands
☐ be fit for the future – as an ‘enabling council’
Key questions

- **How well does the Council currently:**
  - listen and respond to the voices of residents?
  - work with partners?
  - operate at ward level?
  - engage at ward and neighbourhood level?
  - make decisions at Full Council?
  - manage the political and managerial interface?
  - lead collectively across the Council?
  - Maximise its pan-London influence and impact?
Methodology

1. Review of relevant literature to inform conversations with members and officers.
2. Interviews with ten members across the political spectrum and three officers.
3. Summary report of the headlines to “hold a mirror” to the Council on the issues in the brief.
Working with partners

• The Council’s work with partners was much better regarded than its work with residents.

• **Good** relationships with:
  - Health bodies
  - Police

• **Improving** relationship with:
  - Neighbouring authorities - although differing views about AfC

• **Variable** relationships with:
  - Business interests was considered very variable, other than *Kingston First*
  - Voluntary sector, especially smaller organisations
Working at the ward level

• Most frontline members suggested that they “represented their ward to the Council” and not vice-versa.

• Portfolio holders held the opposite view.

• Case work in wards has decreased but an increase in the number of special interest groups and local campaigns on a wide range of issues.

• Residents are thought to have high expectations which are not being fully met – especially digital engagement.

• More vulnerable are not currently engaged with well.
Engagement at neighbourhood level

- Most interviewees attached real importance to forums that better connect with residents locally.
- Some confusion about whether neighbourhood structures are for decision making or engagement.
- Some concerns that distributed decision making structures make it hard to be strategic.
- Most saw four as a reasonable number of neighbourhood forums.
Decision-making at the council level

- Full Council – concerns about:
  - formality and ‘pomp’ and
  - the way it represented RBK to citizens.
- Committees were reasonably well regarded.
- Most agreed that the overarching structure worked and that the Council has the right number of committees in place.
- Committee titles could reflect language residents would use, rather than ‘council language’.
Members and officers

• Interviewees thought that relations between officers and members at RBK were generally good and productive.
• Executive directors could have more ‘outward facing’ ambassadorial roles, leaving middle managers responsible for running/commissioning services.
• Make better use of officer/member boards to work together flexibly and informally on key issues and themes.
Over-arching issues

- Current structures militate against agility.
- Culture and systems are as important as structures in shaping the council.
- It is hard to see where the levers for strategic change are located.
- Is there a common understanding of members’ individual contributions to collective leadership?
- Members and senior officers all have roles in managing the Council’s external reputation and relationships.
- Skills gaps include community engagement and ‘client side’ commissioning.
## Becoming an Enabling Council: transformational change (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From 20(^{\text{th}}) century narrative</th>
<th>To 21(^{\text{st}}) century narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paternalism and consumerism</td>
<td>Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit model of public services</td>
<td>Asset and capacity- based models, not deficits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership - top down</td>
<td>Leadership – collaborative and whole systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective political and managerial leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silo-based governance</td>
<td>Networked governance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Becoming an Enabling Council: transformational change (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From 20th century narrative</th>
<th>To 21st century narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Council centric’</td>
<td>‘Borough centric’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process focus</td>
<td>Outcomes focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmented services</td>
<td>Integrated services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure demand</td>
<td>Managed demand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next steps (1)

- Developing a shared narrative.
- Strengthening engagement with communities.
- Supporting transformation to agile, flexible, responsive and empowering council.
- Developing skills and building confidence in managing the political/managerial interface.
Next steps (2)

- **INLOGOV’s contribution:**
  - Facilitating conversations about change – through a series of workshops for officers and members.
  - Providing expertise, evidence and rigour e.g. ‘21\textsuperscript{st} Century Public Servant’ and ‘21\textsuperscript{st} Century Councillor roles’.
  - Acting as a ‘critical friend’ to support the council on it’s transformation journey.