

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PRINCIPLES FOR TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

1. Task and Finish Groups are opportunities for a more detailed gathering of information from both this authority and other similar organisations.
2. The Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny should choose the most appropriate Member for that topic and therefore the Party rotation system should be flexible to best accommodate this.
3. The T&F members should feel like they are driving the process from 'scope to recommendations' to Cabinet/Portfolio Holder.
4. The T&FG will submit their report to O&S so it can be scrutinised before being progressed to Cabinet/Portfolio Holder.
5. Inviting external input into the T&FG should be mandatory. A balance of examples from other relevant Local Authorities and similar public and private sector organisations will be included where possible.
6. A lead officer will be appointed by the authority and will act as the support for the Scrutiny Officer to ensure only that factual/legal discrepancies are resolved.
7. The T&FG members should be encouraged to focus their discussions around the 'abstract' - what could be possible - and not too detail-centric. These recommendations should then flow through the OSC, for changes, and onto Cabinet/Portfolio Holder intact.
8. The Scrutiny Officer must share all drafts of the scope, report and recommendations with the lead officer so that a substantial and addendum parallel report can be produced by the authority's SMT. This is crucial to ensure that the Cabinet/Portfolio Holder are able to make an informed decisions based on 'what could be possible' and 'where are we now that may make some of these recommendations less worthy of immediate adoption than others'.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

PROTOCOL FOR TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

Part 1: Choosing topics and drafting the Scope

Constitutional position

- 1.1 Part A, section 6.2.7(u) of the Council's Constitution enables the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- To appoint time limited task and finish groups to undertake detailed scrutiny work and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet.

Choosing Topics

- 1.2 The committee will have a rolling programme of task and finish groups so that the work of scrutiny is not interrupted by the transition from one civic year to the next.
- 1.3 The committee can discuss possible topics at any of its regular meetings. The committee will choose which topics to consider and prioritise them. Subsequently, the committee may decide that a topic is not suitable or timely and may either remove it from the list or leave it pending with a future date indicated dependent on business needs.

Drafting the scope

- 1.4 The committee will ask the scrutiny officer to scope any topics which it has chosen. The committee will indicate which general issues the scope should cover.
- 1.5 The draft scope shall include (but not be limited to) consideration of the following:
- The terms of reference for the task and finish group
 - The nature of the expected outcomes, as far as this is practicable
 - Its timeframe and availability of key officers
 - How it links to the council's priorities, core business, other activities or to the interests of the people of North Hertfordshire
 - Potential witnesses and community engagement
 - Key questions, including costs
 - Green issues
 - Briefing arrangements
 - Whether any visits might be included in the review
 - Its membership, including the possibility of appointing outside members
 - The relevant Executive Members
 - The lead officer
 - The support officer

- 1.6 The lead officer may wish to use the following as a checklist:
- Sources and usefulness of evidence
 - Potential witnesses
 - Where the group might look for best practice
 - Any scheduling issues
 - What officer resources will be required
 - Whether the review duplicates work already being carried out
 - Whether the review might consider other aspects of the subject
 - Any other issues or problems with conducting the review eg timing, availability of information and/or key personnel, or legal issues.
- 1.7 The scrutiny officer will discuss the draft scope with the lead officer and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group.
- 1.8 The review should be completed in a reasonable time and the draft scope will state how long it is intended to last. The review may be conducted by a variety of means to aid efficiency.

Finalising the scope

- 1.9 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will finalise the scope in conjunction with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.10 If the Task and Finish Group wishes to make any further changes to the scope, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group will need to agree them with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Part 2 - Organising the task and finish group

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Officer will write to the group leaders seeking nominations for the task and finish group. The principle of political proportionality will apply inasmuch as this is possible within a small group.
- 2.2 It is intended that each task and finish group will be chaired by the best person available whichever party they come from, while still ensuring that over time all parties will take their turn chairing task and finish groups. The Committee will therefore trial a more flexible approach to chairing TFGs. Instead of the chairmanship rotating automatically from one party to the next, group leaders will be asked to indicate whether their nominee(s) would be a good person to chair the task and finish group. If there is more than one suitable member, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will choose the chair for the task and finish group.
- 2.3 Once nominations are received, the Scrutiny Officer will arrange a date for the first meeting, endeavouring to find a mutually convenient time for all parties.

Handling of the meeting(s)

- 2.4 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will be responsible for the handling of the meeting. The Scrutiny Officer will record the evidence given to the meeting along with the subsequent discussion in which the committee will weigh the evidence and reach initial conclusions and recommendations.

- 2.5 Sometimes, a Task and Finish Group's work will cause it to discover things which are important but not within the scope of the review. In such cases the Group will either:
- amend the scope of the inquiry with the agreement of the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee so that they can be considered during the review; or
 - flag any important issues in the report which were not considered as they were outside the scope so that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider them if it wishes to.

Part 3 – Producing a report and subsequent steps

Drafting the report

- 3.1 The scrutiny officer will draft the report on behalf of the members of the task and finish group, so they are satisfied the report reflects their views and the evidence given.
- 3.2 The scrutiny officer will seek the comments of all witnesses on the recorded evidence making changes as appropriate.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Officer will share all drafts of the report with the lead officer. The lead officer will seek the comments of the Senior Management Team (SMT) and prepare a report on their behalf which will accompany the Task and Finish Group report to Cabinet.

Consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.4 The Chairman of the Task and Finish Group will present the report to the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny committee. The Committee will consider the report and make any changes that it considers appropriate.
- 3.5 The Committee will send the report to Cabinet or Council for its consideration. Reports will normally be sent to Cabinet for consideration but in certain circumstances reports may be more appropriately sent to Council.
- 3.6 The Scrutiny Officer will prepare a covering report for Cabinet. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will present the report to Cabinet.
- 3.7 The lead officer will prepare a report for the same meeting of Cabinet recording SMT's comments on the report.
- 3.8 Cabinet will consider the report and comment on its recommendations.

Follow up to the report

- 3.9 Once Cabinet has accepted any or all of the recommendations, the lead officer should draw up an action plan for their implementation. The action plan should be discussed with the Executive Member and the Chairman of the Task and Finish Group.
- 3.10 The Executive Member should attend the Committee approximately six months after Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations and report on the progress of the action plan to the Committee.