

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6 September 2022

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: TASK & FINISH GROUP ON COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT
– SCOPING DOCUMENT**

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE, MEMBER AND SCRUTINY MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Not applicable

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE
TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to update Members on the progress towards establishing the Task and Finish Group on Communication and Engagement. It highlights the key components of the protocol for task and finish groups agreed in 2020 and proposes that the core elements of the scope for the proposed group be endorsed including: the title and purpose of the review, the timeframe, membership, and core areas of investigation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the Committee notes the Task and Finish Group Protocol 2020 as attached at Appendix A;
- 2.2. That the Committee reviews and comments on the draft scoping document as attached at Appendix B;
- 2.3. That the Committee endorses the principles of the review and approves consultation with Group Leaders to appoint members and a Chair for the Task and Finish Group.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To ensure Members are informed of the agreed protocol for the establishment of Task and Finish Groups and understand the stages of the process including the role of relevant officers;
- 3.2. To ensure that final scoping document takes into account suggestions from Members and relevant officers;
- 3.3. To allow Members to be appointed to the Task and Finish Group.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The Task and Finish Group Protocol 2020 gives responsibility for drafting scoping documents to the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager and final approval of the scoping document to the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group concerned. At this stage, owing to staff availability and the time it has taken to produce this draft, relevant officers have not been able to provide detailed comments. Rather than proceed with making appointments to the group on the basis of an unfinished draft it was felt additional Member input was essential.
- 4.2. This report has been brought to the Committee prior to the appointment of any members and a Chair to the Task and Finish Group to allow for additional consultation with Members and relevant officers.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Each Committee meeting includes the opportunity for Members to comment on and input to the Committee's programme of works.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Committee initially sought to establish a Task and Finish Group review into the introduction of the Waste Contract in 2018. The start of this review was scheduled to begin once the then-ongoing Hitchin Town Hall Review was concluded.
- 7.2. On 16th June 2020 the Committee resolved to expand the remit of this proposed Task and Finish Group to encompass Communication and Engagement more generally (see [Minute 9, Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 16 June 2020](#)) and to delay the start of this work owing to the limitations on public engagement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 7.3. Significant changes to ways of working, the ongoing challenges of COVID-19, and staffing changes in the Committee, Member and Scrutiny team meant resources to conduct the review were not available until the start of this year. The Committee resolved on 13 July 2022 to resume work on the Task and Finish Group on Communication and Engagement and work has been ongoing towards the production of the scoping document throughout August.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. Paragraph 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/Council/relevant Executive Member.
- 8.2. In 2020 the Committee approved the Task and Finish Group Protocol (attached at Appendix A) which sets out the process to be followed for the establishment of task and finish groups. Core parts of the protocol are as follows:

- 8.3. “ 2.4: The committee will ask the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager to scope any topics which it has chosen. The committee will indicate which general issues the scope should cover.”
- 8.4. “2.5: The draft scope shall include (but not be limited to) consideration of the following:
- The terms of reference/purpose for the task and finish group
 - Setting boundaries for the review, what will and will not be included in the review
 - 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
 - Environmental issues
 - Briefing arrangements
 - Whether any visits might be included in the review
 - Its membership, including the possibility of co-opting outside members
 - The relevant Executive Members
 - The lead officer
 - The support officer”
- 8.5. “ 1.6. A lead officer will be appointed by the authority and will act as support to ensure only that factual/legal guidance is given to and discussed by the Task and Finish Group.”
- 8.6. “1.9. All drafts of the scope, report and recommendations will be shared with the lead officer/Leadership Team so that a parallel report can be produced by them in whatever format they see fit. This is crucial to ensure that informed decisions are taken that take into account the advice and guidance of senior officers.
- 8.7. “3.1 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will contact 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. attempts should be made to involve smaller parties where they otherwise would not be entitled to a seat. Members of a Task and Finish Group do not have to be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.”
- 8.8. “2.9: The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will finalise the scope in conjunction with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.”
- 8.9. The Corporate Peer Action Plan 2020 at part 57 recommends that the Committee “Use the task and finish programme to support early engagement and involvement with policy making.”

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Paragraph 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.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As detailed Section 14, Human Resource Implications, the wider the reach, the more significant the impact on officer time in terms of report writing, data analysis and meeting attendance. Given recent funding pressures and the consequent reduction in officer numbers, significant requests to support scrutiny work will limit officer time available to spend on activities such as identifying and delivering cost reductions, income generation and project management.
- 10.2 Although not significant, a committee attendance allowance of £25.17 per officer per evening meeting is payable to officers in attendance. This is in addition to providing time off in lieu, or overtime as an alternative.
- 10.3 It is proposed that to limit the financial implications and impact on other workloads associated with this review that meetings be conducted during normal working hours and, where possible, are held remotely.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Effective overview and scrutiny of policy, administrative, service delivery and expenditure decisions helps reduce the risk of an inappropriate decision being made. The scope and time frame for scrutiny interventions should be considered in the light of the potential impact of inappropriate scrutiny leading to decisions not being made, inappropriately made, or not made at the right time.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no direct equality implications arising from the report. Effective scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains transparent, accountable and open which ensures that the delivery of public services benefits all aspects of the community, where practical.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to *this report*.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The widening of the reach of scrutiny reviews has the potential to significantly impact on officer time in terms of the reprioritisation of already agreed projects, their scope or timetabling and resources. There is also the potential for additional resource requirements in relation to report writing, information collection and analysis and

committee attendance. Delivery of service plans to achieve the Council's agreed Corporate Plan objectives might, therefore, be potentially negatively impacted.

- 15.2 Following the agreed protocol regarding the establishment of this review is essential to ensure that the additional resource requirements associated with the Task and Finish Group are manageable and deliverable and that the service plans of the departments involved are not disrupted. The input of relevant officers in consultation is therefore essential to ensure that the scope of the review remains deliverable with current resources.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Protocol 2020
- 16.2 Appendix B - Task and Finish Group – Communications and Engagement Draft Terms of Reference

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 17.1 William Edwards, Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, William.edwards@north-herts.gov.uk, ext: 4295

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Previous reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and minutes of previous meetings available here: [Browse meetings - Overview and Scrutiny Committee | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)