

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TASK AND FINISH GROUP PROTOCOL

1. PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 Task and Finish Groups are opportunities for a more detailed gathering of information from this authority, other organisations and members of the public
- 1.2 The Task and Finish Group should be as politically balanced as possible, however attempts should be made to involve smaller parties where they otherwise would not be entitled to a seat
- 1.3 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will generally rotate around the political parties, however the Party rotation system should be flexible enough to ensure that, with the agreement of the political parties, the most suitable Member chairs the group.
- 1.4. The Task and Finish Group members drive the process from 'scope to recommendations' to Cabinet/Council/Executive Member.
- 1.5. Inviting external input into the Task and Finish Group should be strongly encouraged. A balance of examples from other relevant Local Authorities and similar public and private sector organisations should be included where possible.
- 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.
- 1.7. The Task and Finish Group Members are encouraged to focus their discussions on what could be possible and not be too detail-centric.
- 1.8. The report and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It will then be considered by Cabinet/Council/Executive Member together with any additional report required by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 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.
- 1.10 The report of the Leadership Team will accompany the Task and Finish Group report to Cabinet/Council/Executive Member however the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Chairman may opt for this report to also be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the same time as the Task and Finish Group report.

2. Choosing topics and drafting the Scope

- 2.2 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/Executive Member.

Choosing Topics

- 2.3 The committee can discuss possible Task and Finish Group 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 dependant on business needs.

Drafting the scope

- 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.
- 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
- 2.6 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, and legal issues.
- 2.7 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will discuss the draft scope with the lead officer and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group.
- 2.8 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

- 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.
- 2.10 If the Task and Finish Group wishes to make any further changes to the scope, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group will agree all changes with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3. Organising the Task and Finish Group

- 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.
- 3.2 It is intended that each Task and Finish group be chaired by the best person available whichever party they come from, whilst still ensuring that, over time, all parties take their turn chairing task and finish groups. The Committee will therefore take a flexible approach to chairing Task and Finish Groups. Instead of 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 Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will choose the chair for the Task and Finish group.
- 3.3 Once nominations are received, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will arrange a date for the first meeting.

Meetings

- 3.4 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will liaise with the Members of the Task and Finish Group to set dates for meetings. Where possible dates for the whole of the Task and Finish programme will be allocated at the beginning of the process.
- 3.5 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will be responsible for the management of the meeting. The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will record the evidence given to the meeting along with the subsequent discussion, during which the Group will weigh the evidence and reach initial conclusions and recommendations.
- 3.6 The task and finish group can gather evidence through a variety of ways, such as:
 - written evidence
 - oral evidence and interviews with external and internal witnesses
 - site visits
 - Interview experts
 - visiting other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils
 - research
 - talking to people who are affected by the issue

- 3.7 On occasion, a Task and Finish Group will, through its investigations, 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 Chair 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.

4. Producing a report and subsequent steps

Drafting the report

- 4.1 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will draft the report on behalf of the Task and Finish Group so they are satisfied that the report reflects their views and the evidence given.
- 4.2 The Scrutiny Officer will share all drafts of the report with the lead officer. The lead officer will seek the comments of the Leadership Team and prepare a report on their behalf. This report will accompany the Task and Finish Group report to Cabinet/Council/Executive Member however the Overview and Scrutiny Committee/Chairman may opt for this report to also be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the same time as the Task and Finish Group report.

Consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 4.3 The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will present the report to the next scheduled meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the report and either:
- With the agreement of the Task and Finish Group Chair, make any changes that it considers appropriate or
 - Produce a parallel report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be presented to Cabinet/Council/Executive Member alongside the Task and Finish Group report.
- 4.5 The Committee will refer the report to Cabinet/Council/executive Member for its consideration. Reports will normally be sent to Cabinet for consideration but in certain circumstances reports may be more appropriately sent to Council or an Executive Member
- 4.6 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager will prepare a covering report for Cabinet/Council/Executive Member. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group will present the Task and Finish Group report to Cabinet/Council/Executive Member. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will present any parallel report produced.
- 4.7 The lead officer will prepare a report for the same meeting of Cabinet/Council/Executive Member that records the comments of the Leadership Team. This report can be in whatever format deemed appropriate by the Leadership Team.

- 4.8 Cabinet/Council/Executive Member will consider the reports and comment on and consider all recommendations.

Follow up to the Report

- 4.9 The recommendations of the Task and Finish Group and any parallel Overview and Scrutiny recommendations will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Resolutions report.

FLOW CHART

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Choose a Task and Finish Group Topic

Draft Scope is drawn up and discussed with the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny and Lead Officer

Contact Group Leaders regarding membership and Chair

Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny and Task and Finish Group finalise the Scope

Dates set for meetings of the Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Group Review

Report of the Task and Finish Group produced

Lead Officer to seek views of Leadership Team and produce report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider report of the Task and Finish Group (and Report from Leadership Team)

Cabinet/Council/Executive Member to consider the report of the Task and Finish Group, any parallel report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and report of the Leadership Team

Recommendations to be included in the Resolutions Report