

CONSTITUTION PRACTICE NOTE

TASK AND FINISH GROUP PROTOCOL

1. Function of Task and Finish Groups

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will establish time-limited Task and Finish Groups to undertake investigations or reviews.
- 1.2 Task and Finish Groups are responsible for undertaking an in-depth review to investigate specific aspects of policy, services or issues of concern to the community. The work undertaken by Task and Finish Groups aims to influence and improve policy and service delivery.

2. Guidelines for the Operation of Task and Finish Groups

- 2.1 Task and Finish Groups need to operate on a relatively informal basis in the sense that they are a forum for information gathering and discussion between Group members and officers, rather than a formal decision making body.
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group will support the lead officer in producing the Terms of Reference for the review. This will provide background information to explain why the review is taking place, will set review objectives and outline expected outcomes. The Terms of Reference are to be agreed at a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.3 Following the approval of the Terms of Reference for the review, the Task and Finish Group will produce a Scoping Document for the review. This Plan will further detail the scope of the review, set out timescales for site visits, highlight the consultation required and detail the information and research that is required to support the review.
- 2.4 In discussing issues to reach conclusions and make recommendations, it is hoped that the Group will be able to reach an agreement. However, if this is not the case on any particular issue, then all views on that issue should be included within the final report.
- 2.5 There is an expectation that most Task and Finish Groups will complete their work and submit their final report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee within three to six months of the review commencing.

3. Membership

- 3.1 Task and Finish Groups will consist of a minimum of two Councillors and take into account cross party representation.

- 3.2 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can nominate themselves for a Task and Finish Group based on their interest of the issue, as a representative of a relevant ward, and personal knowledge and expertise. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are responsible for finalising the membership of a particular Task and Finish Group.
- 3.3 Substitution arrangements will not apply to Task and Finish Groups, unless there are exception circumstances, for the following reasons:
- Councillors are appointed to Task and Finish Groups by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the basis of experience, interest and availability.
 - Task and Finish Groups are small, focused and time limited allowing Councillors to gain an in-depth knowledge of that particular subject over a series of meetings.
 - It would be difficult and potentially disruptive for a new Councillor to join the group part way through the process.

4. Member Interests

- 4.1 Although Task and Finish Groups are not formal committees of the Council, Councillors should declare any interest where required under the Member Code of Conduct in any matter being considered at a meeting of the Group. A Councillor should not join a Task and Finish Group if they have any interest which precludes their participation in the matter.

5. Role of Councillors and Officers in Task and Finish Groups

5.1 Role of Councillors in Task and Finish Groups

- 5.1.1 To support the lead officer in the production of the Terms of Reference for the review.
- 5.1.2 To work with officers involved to produce a Scoping Document for the review.
- 5.1.3 To question Cabinet Members, senior officers and other contributors on issues related to the specific review subject.
- 5.1.4 To attend site visits, forums and meetings and to undertake research, as necessary in order to obtain further understanding and information to support the review.
- 5.1.5 To make recommendations for the final report.

5.2 Role of Lead Officer in Task and Finish Groups

- 5.2.1 To lead on producing the Terms of Reference for the review in liaison with the Task and Finish Group.

5.2.2 To lead on the production of the Scoping Document in liaison with the Task and Finish Group.

5.2.3 To lead on the project management of the review.

5.2.4 To secure sufficient officer resource to contribute to the work of the review.

5.2.5 To ensure that all Group Members are kept informed of the different aspects of the review.

5.2.6 To organise sessions and site visits where Councillors can talk to groups who are affected by the issue being considered.

5.2.7 To liaise with the Democratic Services Officer and ensure that they are kept informed of the progress made with the review.

5.2.8 To produce the final report in liaison with the Task and Finish Group.

5.2.9 To present the final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5.2.10 To evaluate the impact of the review at the agreed period, as detailed in the Scoping Document, and ensure that any recommendations or action required has been taken. This evaluation can be carried out within the Directorate and does not require a follow-up report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, unless otherwise requested.

5.3 Role of Democratic Services Officer in Task and Finish Groups

5.3.1 To liaise with the Director responsible for overseeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify potential Task and Finish Group projects and lead officers.

5.3.2 To liaise with the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify Councillors to be part of the Task and Finish Group.

5.3.3 To liaise with Task and Finish Groups to determine the timeframes for the review.

5.3.4 To advise and support officers in working with Councillors, when contributing to the review.

5.3.5 To arrange, in co-operation with the lead officer, for contributors (internal officers and external organisation representatives) to attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings as necessary.

5.4 Role of Policy and Performance Team in Task and Finish Groups

5.4.1 To carry out research, analysis and prepare information which is relevant to the review.

5.4.2 To provide comprehensive advice and guidance to members and officers throughout the review process.

6. Reporting

- 6.1 Each Task and Finish Group will be required to prepare a final report for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.2 The final report should be objective based on the facts gathered throughout the course of the review and will give a full picture of the issues under scrutiny.
- 6.3 The report should reflect the range of views presented to the Task and Finish Group and should contain conclusions and clear recommendations.
- 6.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will then consider and discuss the report and the Committee will agree upon future actions and make recommendations to Cabinet, where appropriate.