

Part 5 - Protocol: Task and Finish Groups

1. Task and Finish Groups may be established by the Council, by Cabinet or by Committees of the Council (except for Planning and Licensing) and their sub-committees.
2. The purpose of any Task and Finish Group will be to carry out an assigned piece of work according to the remit established by the parent body, and to report its findings and conclusions back to that parent body.
3. As part of its methodology, a Task and Finish Group may wish (but is under no obligation) to include a draft report to the parent body before finalising its conclusions.
4. Every Task and Finish Group need not be politically balanced. Members of the Task and Finish Group should have a special knowledge or interest in the subject to be investigated. The presumption shall be that other members of Council have delegated their authority and trust to those subsequently appointed to serve on the Task and Finish Group, to complete their work in an effective manner. If it is not possible to reach agreement on the membership of a Task and Finish Group the make-up of the group will be based on political balance.
5. Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, the documents relating to it should be regarded as documents for a "work in progress" and as such are not in the same category as committee documentation which is generally regarded as complete.
6. Task and Finish papers may contain work undertaken on a range of proposals, some of which may be put forward to give comparison between a range of possibilities, and/or to help members clarify arguments for or against certain actions.
7. In some cases, premature publication of such documents may be counter-productive, in raising concerns that the Council may be inclined to a particular course of action, before any alternative courses of action have been considered or tested.
8. Members of a Task and Finish Group should therefore consider the papers sent to them in connection with their work to be of a sensitive nature, and should not copy, or cause them to be copied, outside the group. However, where a member of the Task and Finish Group feels that there would be benefit from the Group seeking the views of an external body, group or individual, then they should be invited to attend a future meeting for this purpose.
9. The Chair of the parent body may request copies of papers for their information only, but again must not copy, or cause them to be copied further.
10. This proscription is not intended to obscure the need for transparency in local government decision making, but to ensure that the fullest possible range of options in any case, may be considered, without unduly raising disquiet.
11. Members of any Task and Finish Group should however be free to brief their political groups about progress in general terms and consult with their members at the point at which outcomes are becoming clearer.
12. Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, its meetings will be held in private. Agendas will be provided for all members and will clearly indicate the items to be discussed. Any member wishing to attend the meeting who is not a member of the Group shall be entitled to attend. Unless they have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter under discussion, any member may speak having first given prior notice of their intention to do so or otherwise at the discretion of the chair.

Part 5 - Protocol: Task and Finish Groups

General Framework

1. It is important to note that such work will generally be carried out through in depth reviews by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or its sub-committee. Committee agendas should ideally have a small number of topics on them i.e. 1 or 2, so that there is the opportunity to explore issues thoroughly. The in depth work can be carried out by the Committee, or by Task and Finish Groups.
3. Work Plans for the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are developed using topics proposed by Members.

Work Plans develop and evolve from a combination of the following:

- Areas that emerge through the transformation process
- Matters referred to O&S from Council/Cabinet
- Outcomes of public engagement
- Suggestions made by Council Members
- Suggestions made by the Council's Director Team
- The Council's Strategic Action Plans
- Forward Plan for Cabinet
- Performance Monitoring Reports
- Suggestions made by Partners/Stakeholders
- Suggestions made by the public/communities
- Topics from financial monitoring reports/financial strategy
- Issues from reports from internal audit and from inspections and peer reviews

4. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee or relevant sub-committee assesses whether work plans are manageable and focus on improvement and outcomes that make a difference to local people. Officers will support Members to prioritise the topics and build in timing that allows the opportunity to inform decisions. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee or relevant Sub-committee also decides which matters require more in depth scrutiny, through the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, and set the terms of reference and deadlines for the Group to report back.
5. Where new matters arise following the setting of the work plan the following Protocol will be adopted:-
 - a) Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or relevant sub-committee discusses with their Scrutiny Officer
 - b) If issue can be resolved outside the Overview and Scrutiny system, Scrutiny Officer forwards for resolution as appropriate
 - c) If issue cannot be resolved outside the Overview and Scrutiny system, the matter will be referred to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee or relevant sub-committee to consider if and when it should be included in its work plan.
6. Where urgent matters arise the Scrutiny Officer will consult with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or relevant sub-committee to decide if an urgent meeting of the Committee or sub-committee is required.
7. Once the topic area for review is agreed, the Corporate Head of Legal and Democratic Services will confirm with Corporate Directors which Officer will lead on this matter. This Officer will draft all reports for the meetings and carry out necessary research in liaison with the Scrutiny Officer.

8. The Scrutiny Officer will support the Corporate Director and ensure all witnesses, co-optees, papers, etc are ready for consideration by Scrutiny members in the agreed timescales.

Note:

(1) Statutory Scrutiny Officer will:-

- Co-ordinate the support available to deliver outcomes from overview and scrutiny activity undertaken by the Council
- Assist in ensuring that proper provision is made for independent O&S support to Members

(2) See also Task and Finish Protocol