

**Annex 1**

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Meeting	Review of Effectiveness of Task and Finish Group
Date	
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Review of Effectiveness of Task and Finish Group – Feasibility Study</b>
Report of Summary	Scrutiny Office This report outlines the findings of a feasibility assessment of the proposal to conduct a review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny task and finish groups

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Officer Contributors	Andrew Charwood, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
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## **1. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 That Members consider the findings of the feasibility assessment and, based on the information contained therein, decide whether to proceed with a review of the effectiveness of task and finish groups.

## **2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS**

- 2.1 Annual Council, 19 May 2009, Agenda Item 13.2.1, Report of the Special (Constitution Review) Committee, Overview and Scrutiny: New Arrangements
- 2.2 Policy & Performance Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 2 June 2010, Agenda Item 7 (Overview & Scrutiny Appointments)
- 2.3 Business Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 8 March 2012, Agenda Item 10 (Any Other Items the Chairman Decides are Urgent) – the Committee outlined proposed review topics
- 2.4 Business Management Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 18 April 2012, Agenda Item 14 (Task and Finish Group Appointments)

## **3. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW**

- 3.1 At the Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 18 April 2012 Members considered topics for the basis of future Task and Finish Group reviews. Included within the topics proposed for consideration was a review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny task and finish groups. In line with the protocols agreed with Members and following the best practice guidelines for good scrutiny, the Scrutiny Office have undertaken an initial feasibility study to assess whether review of the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny task and finish groups is an appropriate topic to take forward as TFG.
- 3.2 Following consideration of the information contained within this assessment, Members are requested to determine whether to proceed with a review or not.

## **4. KEY PRINCIPLES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

- 4.1 In January 2012, the Council received support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to develop a framework for scrutinising issues relating to the Ageing Well Programme. The Scrutiny Office has adapted this framework to be more generic for application with all overview and scrutiny topics, including task and finish group reviews. The framework identifies the following key considerations:
  1. Exceptionality;
  2. Clearly defined objective;
  3. A TFG as the most appropriate means of investigating the issue; and
  4. Appropriate levels of resources being available to ensure an effective review of the issue

- 4.2 Informing the Scrutiny Framework is the Scrutiny Best Practice Guidance provided by the CfPS which advises that Scrutiny should:
1. Provide a “critical friend” challenge to decision-makers as well as external authorities and agencies;
  2. Reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
  3. Take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public; and
  4. Make an impact on the delivery of public services.

- 4.3 They go on to suggest that effective Scrutiny should engage the public as active citizens and secure the effective promotion of community well-being at the local level. A joint report from INLOGOV and the IDeA in April 2001 set out the following requirements for effective scrutiny:

1. Member leadership and engagement;
2. A responsive executive;
3. Genuine non-partisan working;
4. Effective direct officer support and management of the scrutiny process;
5. A supportive senior officer culture; and
6. A high level of awareness and understanding of scrutiny work

## **5. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS**

- 5.1 Overview and scrutiny working groups (or task and finish groups) ordinarily comprise of a small group of between three and five of non-Executive Members which look at a particular issue in detail over a prescribed period of time. Currently, the suggested timeframe for a review is three months. However, in practice reviews often take longer due to a number of factors which include: officer support; Member availability; the complexity of the issue under consideration; scope creep; the report drafting process; and timescales for reporting to Business Management OSC and Cabinet.

- 5.2 The purpose of the groups can be twofold:

- (i) to investigate an issue of concern to elected Members or members of the public which does not form part of the council's policy agenda (policy development); or
- (ii) to review council policy (in development or during implementation) and make recommendations for improvements (policy review).

- 5.3 Overview and scrutiny working groups have been established in Barnet in a variety of formats since the introduction of executive arrangements. This feasibility study will focus on scrutiny reviews conducted over the last six years (2006 to 2012).

- 5.4 Between 2006 and 2009, overview and scrutiny committees commissioned working groups to consider issues in detail. Findings were initially reported to the parent committee for review / approval and then to the Cabinet. Reviews considered during this period are as follows:

- Section 106 Review (Cabinet, 24 July 2006)
- CPZ Reviews – Consultation Process (Cabinet, 8 May 2007) (*majority and minority reports*)
- Waste Management Review (Cabinet, 26 July 2007)
- Effects of Domestic Violence on Children and Families in Barnet (Cabinet, 29 October 2007)
- Hate Crime Review (Cabinet, 21 February 2008)
- Review of Local Strategic Partnership (Cabinet, 6 October 2008)
- Children’s Centres and Extended Services (Cabinet, 3 December 2008)
- Young Carers in Barnet (Cabinet, 20 January 2009)
- Protection of Trees in the Borough (Cabinet, 22 April 2009)
- Anti-Social Behaviour (Cabinet, 22 April 2009)
- Parks in Barnet (Cabinet, 22 April 2009)
- Review of Signature Street Cleaning (Cabinet, 8 June 2009)
- Open Spaces in Barnet (Cabinet, 8 June 2009)

5.5 In late 2008, a Member Working Group was convened to consider overview and scrutiny arrangements. Committee structures were reformed and an emphasis was placed on the task and finish group work as this was recognised to be good practice nationally. In May 2009, the Council implemented the new overview and scrutiny arrangements.

5.6 Working arrangements for task and finish groups are not overly prescriptive. The Council’s Constitution contains the following:

**“Task and Finish Groups, Project Groups, Research**

Much of the work of Task and Finish Groups will be carried out informally both in gathering information and interviewing relevant personnel. Those sessions will not be expected to be held in public nor will they be subject to the Access to Information Rules.

However, where it is appropriate for more formal meetings to be held in public, the presumption is that they will be. The findings and recommendations of Task and Finish Groups will be presented for consideration by the appropriate Overview & Scrutiny body, operating under the Access to Information Rules.

HOWEVER, when these Groups are conducting their research there will be a general expectation that:

- (i) Members in carrying out these activities will, as appropriate, visit and meet with local communities, meet with the Council’s partners and others as necessary.
- (ii) Members will look at a variety of methods for inviting comments and views and publicising their work.
- (iii) Meetings and other activities may, on occasions, take place at locations away from the Town Hall or other Council offices. The Head of Governance will make the necessary arrangements in consultation with the relevant Chairman and Members.”

5.7 Task and Finish Groups have the ability to determine their own terms of reference and working arrangements. They can draw evidence from a wide range of sources including elected members, interest groups, academics, service users, residents, officers and any other interested / relevant parties. In addition, detailed research can also be undertaken to inform evidence-based recommendations.

- 5.8 In 2010, the Scrutiny Office introduced a mechanism for tracking the implementation of recommendations made by task and finish groups which had been accepted by Cabinet. In monitoring recommendation, the initial response of Cabinet is captured (i.e. accept or reject, plus any commentary). Each recommendation is assigned a responsible officer who is contacted at six-monthly intervals to provide updates. Updates are reported regularly to the Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Copies of the tracking document will be made available at the first meeting.
- 5.9 The Committee decide to proceed to review, the following key lines of enquiry could be considered:
- (i) Actions to capture the progress made in implementing recommendations made by scrutiny working groups conducted between 2006 and 2009;
  - (ii) Review of recommendations by task and finish groups / scrutiny panels between 2009 and 2012;
  - (iii) Topic selection; and
  - (iv) Review of working arrangements including: officer support; evidence received (verbal and written); quality of reports; political considerations; measuring outcomes; and public engagement.