Scrutiny Function:
Task and Finish Group Protocol

Background

Task and Finish Groups are more informal approaches to scrutiny which involve a small group of Councillors being commissioned by a formal scrutiny committee to go and investigate a topic in detail, before reporting back with recommendations.

The Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny (2019) sets out that selected topics can be scrutinised by task and finish groups, which could be either:

1. A task and finish group of two or three meetings to ensure that it's focused, and members can reach conclusions and make recommendations in a couple of months or less.

2. Longer term task and finish group – six or seven meetings spread over a number of months if scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail.

Overview of Procedure

Scrutiny Board is the coordinating scrutiny committee for Wolverhampton responsible for coordinating the wider scrutiny work programme and will therefore have the responsibility for the creation of task and finish groups. The following approach will be taken to establishing a task and finish group in Wolverhampton:
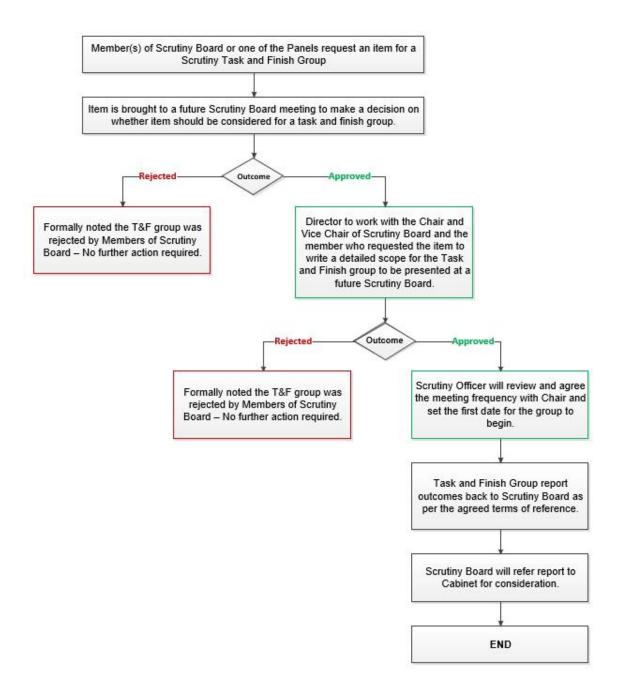
Membership

The Membership of each task and finish group should be agreed by the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board, which will usually comprise of members of the relevant scrutiny panel drawn from each of the political groups on a proportional basis. It is advised the Chair and Vice Chair will do this in consultation with Leaders from each group.

However, it need not be drawn exclusively from the group's parent committee as any member can be nominated to participate and it is good practice to make use of Councillors experience or specialist knowledge. Group Secretaries may also nominate members to sit on groups but the ultimate decision rests with the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board. The number of Members on a Task and Finish Group will also be set by Scrutiny Board and this will be dependent on the nature of the review.

There may also be non-voting co-opted members where the task and finish working group considers this would be advantageous to their work e.g., for expert advice on a topic.

Process diagram for Task and Finish Groups

Member(s) of Scrutiny Board or one of the Panels request an item for a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

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Item is brought to a future Scrutiny Board meeting to make a decision on whether item should be considered for a task and finish group.

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Outcome

— Rejected →
Formally noted the T&F group was rejected by Members of Scrutiny Board – No further action required.

— Approved →
Director to work with the Chair and Vice Chair of Scrutiny Board and the member who requested the item to write a detailed scope for the Task and Finish group to be presented at a future Scrutiny Board.

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Outcome

— Rejected →
Formally noted the T&F group was rejected by Members of Scrutiny Board – No further action required.

— Approved →
Scrutiny Officer will review and agree the meeting frequency with Chair and set the first date for the group to begin.

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Task and Finish Group report outcomes back to Scrutiny Board as per the agreed terms of reference.

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Scrutiny Board will refer report to Cabinet for consideration.

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END

Management of meeting and production of report

Task and finish groups will take place in person and will be open to the public, unless exempt information is being presented. They will not be live streamed, but a local recording will be made to assist with preparation of the report and minutes.

Where required meetings will be set up as a hybrid meeting to allow for any external witnesses to attend online.

Due to the frequency of task and finish group meetings, the minutes and papers from each task and finish group meeting will be published as an appendix to the group's final report.

The Scrutiny Officer will draft the report on behalf of the members based on the views, evidence and recommendations given.

Resources

It is recommended that one task and finish group operates at a time to ensure the effective administration of this aspect of the scrutiny function.

Relationship with the Executive

Cabinet members are able to attend meetings and provide information and evidence where required to do so by the task and finish group.

Recommendations from a Task and Finish Group will be made to Cabinet.

Recommendations will be presented by the Chair of the working group.

Monitoring the outcomes of a Task and Finish Group

Once Cabinet has accepted any or all of the recommendations, the Lead Officer for the service area will be asked to develop an action plan for their implementation to be shared with the Cabinet Member and Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

The Cabinet Member should attend Scrutiny Board or the relevant Panel approximately six - twelve months after Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations and report on the progress of the action plan. If Scrutiny feel that sufficient progress has not been made it will further commission monitoring reports.

Scoping Document Template

The following template will be used to prepare the key information for a task and finish group to present to Scrutiny Board for consideration.

Task and Finish Group Key Information	
Task and Finish Group Title	
Directorate and Service Area for Investigation:	
Chair of Task and Finish Group	
Morning, Afternoon or Evening meeting	
Members of Task and Finish Group	

[Confirm number of members involved and Political Balance. The membership of the TFG will be cross party].	
Scrutiny Clerk:	
Director / Head of Service and Service Lead Officers:	
Scoping form completed by:	
Group requested by:	
Background and Rationale [Consider: Why this needs a more detailed review and cannot be adequately reviewed in a scrutiny meeting. Also consider rationale against council plan priorities, importance to residents, value for money concerns, partnership working, cross cutting issues]	
Purpose of the Review [Cover the key lines of questioning and give a brief description of what we hope undertaking the review will achieve e.g., Improved performance, amended policy, efficiencies, or increased footfall]	
Indicators of success [Include details of desired indicators of success and how these can be measured]	
Scope	
In scope [All of the areas that are subject to this scrutiny review group, the goals of the review and the work required to accomplish those goals]	
Out of scope [Anything that does not fall within the established scope of the project/ tasks that do not contribute to the scrutiny review groups goals]	
Stakeholders	
Who would need to be involved from the Council?	
Which of our partners, stakeholders and Members of the community should we discuss this with?	
Review resources	
Evidence: [Background Information and documents to look at]	
Site visits: [Details of site visits and when they will be held if appropriate]	

Consultation: [Is there any consultation which needs to be undertaken to feed into the review?] [Do findings need to be published for consultation before making final recommendations?]	
Subject Matter Expert (SME) Advice: [Do the Task & Finish Group require expert advice support due to the nature of the review.]	

Risks	
What are the risks to the review? [Describe each risk, its impact and the mitigating action. See risk identification checklist for types of risks: Risk Identification Checklist.docx (sharepoint.com)]	

Timescales	
Anticipated review start date:	
Anticipated review end date:	
Frequency of meetings:	
Draft outline of meetings [Outline draft agenda for each meeting]	
Date to evaluate impact: [A review in six to twelve months (dependent on outcomes) at this point deciding to either re scrutinise this matter, with a different task and finish group, or sign it off as the indicators of success have been achieved]	