

Overview and Scrutiny Board – Inquiry/Task Group Procedure Guidelines

There are two ways in which the Overview and Scrutiny Board can complete an in depth investigation of a topic.

Short, Sharp Inquiry

The first, a “short sharp inquiry” is carried out through a mix of both formal Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings and informal meetings involving all Members of the Board and chaired by the Overview and Scrutiny Board Chairman. This type of inquiry can be used for the investigation of a topic already on the Board’s work programme or a topic on the Forward Plan which the Board felt warranted a more in depth investigation being carried out. However, it can also be used to consider matters of local concern, that have not been scheduled on either the work programme or Forward Plan but which Members feel would merit inclusion and further investigation.

The guidelines below will be followed when carrying out a “short sharp inquiry”:

1. The Board decide that a specific topic requires a more in depth investigation and agree to carry out a “short sharp inquiry” and all Board Members will be involved in the investigation.
2. As it is likely that such an inquiry will need to be completed fairly quickly, the Board will discuss broad terms of reference and set a time scale for completion of the inquiry at the same time as agreeing to carry out the investigation.
3. Members will also stipulate who they wish to interview, what evidence they wish to gather etc and set a date for the initial informal meeting of the inquiry. The Board may appoint people as non-voting co-optees if they so wish.
4. The Chairman of the Board, Committee Services Officer and relevant Head of Service will then meet, as quickly as possible after that meeting, to agree the terms of reference (this will be done by completing an Overview and Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist, Appendix 2).

5. At the first meeting of the Inquiry, the Terms of Reference will be confirmed, the Timetable (Appendix 3) will be agreed together with the Meeting Work Plan (Appendix 4), and if possible initial witnesses interviewed.
6. A progress update will be given at each formal meeting of the Board and if appropriate, some witness sessions will also be included within the formal Board meetings.
7. The Committee Services Officer will compile the final report on behalf of the Board, based on recommendations proposed by Members. The content of the draft report will be approved by Members.
8. The Chairman of the Board will take a lead in presenting the final report for the consideration of the Cabinet, though the Committee Services Officer will attend alongside him/her to help where required.
9. The Portfolio Holder will then present the Cabinet response to the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.
10. Cabinet decisions on Inquiry recommendations will be placed on the Quarterly Recommendation Tracker to be monitored and, with the approval of the Board, removed when completed.
11. After 12 months the Committee Services Officer will meet with the relevant Head of Service to go through the original report and recommendations to pick up any further actions that may be necessary.
12. The Committee Services Officer will compile the report for the 12 month review of the inquiry, for presentation at the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.

Task Group

The second way is for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to set up a task group, which is separate from the Board and can include Members who are not Members of the Board (Members of the Cabinet cannot join a task group). When setting up a task group the following steps need to be considered:

1. For any task group that is proposed a Topic Proposal Form (Appendix 1) must be completed and presented, with a covering report, for Members' consideration at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. This can be a topic put forward by a Councillor (not necessarily a Member of the Board) or from a member of the public.

2. If the Board agreed to commission the task group the Chairman will ask at that meeting whether there were any volunteers from amongst the Members of the Board to act as Chairman (the Chairman of the Board is not expected to be the Chairman a task group).
3. All task groups will be chaired by a member of the Board and each Chairman is required to provide an update on the progress of the task group at future meetings of the Board in order for it to be able to hold the task group to account for the work it is carrying out.
4. Following the Board meeting, when a task group has been approved, copies of the completed Topic Proposal Form will be circulated amongst non-Cabinet Members for consideration. Members will be advised to contact the Committee Services Officer to let them know whether they are interested in participating in the task group. If there is insufficient interest from Members, the Group Leaders will be asked to nominate Members for the task group, in order that membership can then be confirmed relatively quickly.
5. Membership of task groups must be at least 4 but no more than 7 Members (including the Chairman).
6. The Chairman of the task group, Committee Services Officer and relevant Head of Service will then meet to agree the terms of reference (this will be done by completing an Overview and Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist, Appendix 2).
7. The Chairman of the task group will then provide an update, for information, at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, which will include the terms of reference and membership. A timescale for completion of the investigation will also be set at that meeting (usually 3 months from the date of the first meeting).
8. At the first meeting of the task group the Timetable (Appendix 3) will be agreed together with the Meeting Work Plan (Appendix 4), as far as possible. (This meeting may take place prior to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board at which an update on the terms of reference and membership is given.)
9. Members will stipulate who they wish to interview, what evidence they wish to gather etc. The task group may appoint people as non-voting co-optees if they so wish.
10. The Committee Services Officer will compile the final report on behalf of the task group, based on recommendations proposed by Members. The content of the draft report will be approved by Members.

11. The Chairman of the task group will take a lead in presenting the task group's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board, though support will be provided by the Committee Services Officer where required.
12. If approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Board the Chairman of the task group will then take a lead in presenting the final report for the consideration of the Cabinet, accompanied by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, though again the Committee Services Officer will attend alongside him/her to help where required.
13. The Portfolio Holder will then present the Cabinet response to the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.
14. Cabinet decision on recommendations will be placed on the Quarterly Recommendation Tracker to be monitored and, with the approval of the Board, removed when completed.
15. After 12 months the Committee Services Officer will meet with the relevant Head of Service to go through the original report and recommendations to pick up any further actions that may be necessary.
16. The Committee Services Officer will compile a report for the 12 month review of the task group, for presentation at the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.