

Scrutiny Task and Finish Group Protocol

What is a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group?

A Scrutiny Task & Finish Group is a small group of Councillors commissioned by a scrutiny committee to undertake a time limited review of a particular issue. As its title suggests the Group is set up for a specific purpose to undertake a review and report back within a defined timescale.

Background

All SCC Scrutiny Committees can establish Councillor Task and Finish (T&F) Groups. These Groups are especially useful in allowing Councillors to look at an issue in which they have a particular interest, in more detail. They can take a variety of forms, from a detailed review to a short, sharp concentrated focus on a high profile issue. They offer the opportunity to use a variety of more diverse working methods (working flexibly to adapt to the needs of different reviews), including making visits, and use of interviews and publicity events to encourage community participation and public engagement in scrutiny.

This protocol provides information relating to the commencement and completion of work by T&F Groups. In doing so, it defines the key role that Directors and Strategic Managers have in helping to manage the process.

Diagram 1 – Overview of Process

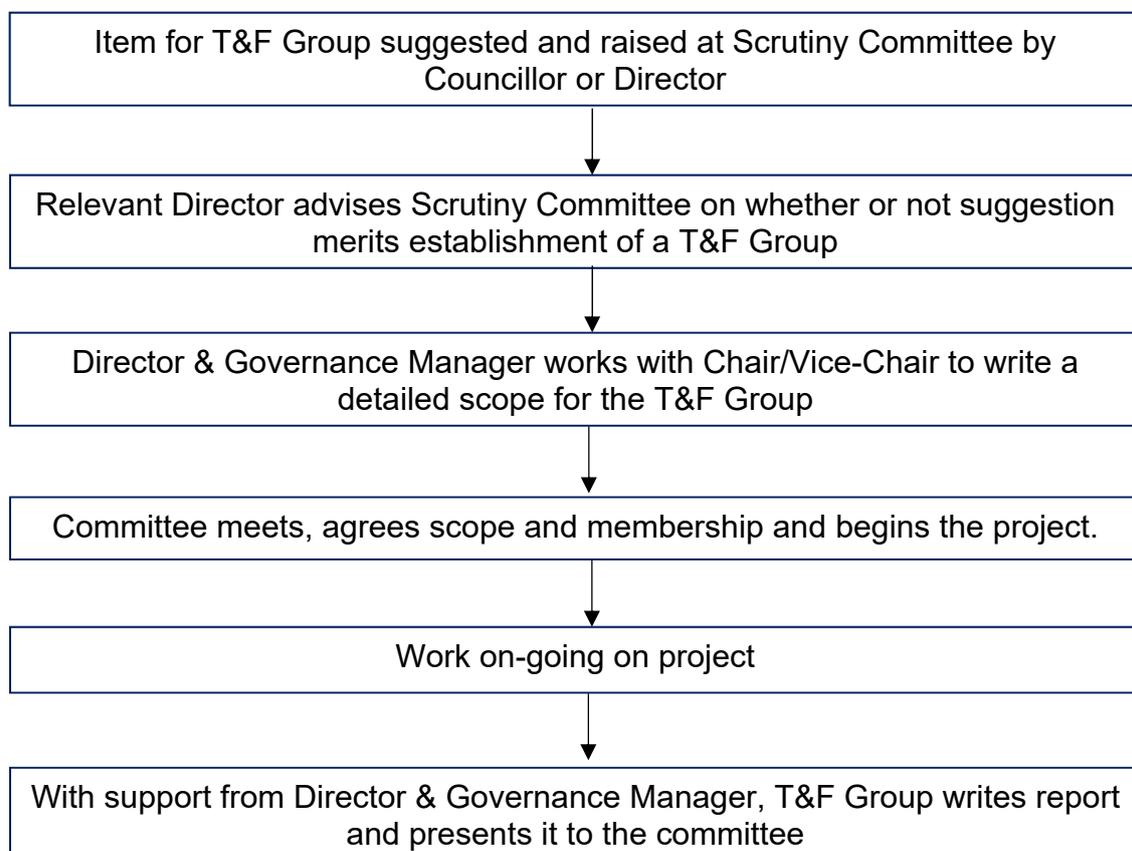


Diagram 1 illustrates the process from inception to completion for T&F Groups.

Guidelines on Process:

- Ideas for establishing T&F Groups will be raised at the appropriate Scrutiny Committee via the Chair.
- Consideration should be given to:
 - **external or national priorities;**
 - **priorities identified within the SCC County Vision & Business Plan and in key Somerset policies** such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) and Improving Lives Strategy (consideration should be given to which priorities may benefit from the intervention of scrutiny, for example, overview of progress against milestones or specific policy development in a priority area);
 - **key decisions** to be taken and the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee's **Forward Plan;**
 - evidence from recent public consultation or a trend emerging from Councillors' case work which may be the subject of scrutiny.

- The Councillor or Director proposing the item for scrutiny should outline the proposed scope of the project and the desired outcomes. This discussion will be led by the relevant Director who will advise on the suitability/unsuitability of the project. For example, if the proposal is too operational then the Director may recommend the project should not progress.

- If the Director and Members of the Committee agree there is merit within the item, a T&F Group can be created. The final decision of whether to form a T&F Group rests with Members of the Committee following careful consideration of the advice of the relevant Director.

- The Committee Chair & Vice-Chair (who may or may not chair the group) will work with the relevant Director & the Governance Manager to discuss the detailed scoping of the Group (see scoping document Appendix 1). This will then be agreed at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee as well as Group membership. The relevant Director should attend this meeting to answer any other questions members of the Group may have.

- As a guideline, T&F Groups will normally consist of three to five members depending on the nature and complexity of the review. Political balance of membership is not required. The Group should be chaired by a member of the scrutiny committee but this does not have to be its Chair or Vice-Chair. Substitute members should be discouraged, on the basis that members have built up a knowledge and expertise on the review subjects and it may be difficult for a new member to join the Group part way through a review or to attend single meetings and participate effectively.

- The Committee will decide if they wish to open up membership of the T&F Group to Councillors who are not on the Committee – it is good practice to make use of Councillor interest, experience or specialist knowledge.

- The Committee may also wish to make the T&F Group joint with the Council's other Scrutiny Committees or with partner organisations.
 - It is recommended that Councillors sit on no more than two Task and Finish Groups at any point in time.

- Other Councillors and Non-Councillors may be co-opted to be members of a Task and Finish Group if they have specific knowledge or expertise.
- Cabinet members and other members may be invited to the Group to give evidence.

- Meetings will take place as often as needed until the task is complete. Following the planning meeting, the Group should aim to hold the necessary meetings within as short a timeframe as possible so that findings are timely.
- Directors need not attend all meetings but they will be kept informed of progress from Democratic Services Officers. Notes of each meeting will be produced by Democratic Services Officers and comprise a record of the main facts gathered and points of discussion.
- As the T&F Group is completing its work, the relevant Director will review the Group's draft report and attend their final meeting to provide feedback.
- When the T&F Group has finished and agreed their report, the members of that Group will present their work to their relevant Scrutiny Committee. As part of this process, the Group will explain the work carried out and ask the Committee to support their recommendations. The Committee could also comment on the report or ask for further work to be done.
- Scrutiny Committee will then refer the report and recommendations to the Cabinet or relevant Cabinet Member for consideration.
- The Cabinet/Cabinet Member should then provide a formal response to the Scrutiny Committee within as short a timeframe as possible. A review of the Task & Finish Group outcomes by the Committee should be agreed accordingly by the Committee and the Cabinet/Cabinet Member.

Member Interests

- Meetings of Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups require members to declare any personal interest in any matter being considered at a meeting of the T&F Group in accordance with the Code of Conduct and if the matter is also prejudicial, the member should withdraw from consideration of that issue. A member should not join a T&F Group if they have a prejudicial interest which is likely to arise so frequently at meetings that they will be unable to make a worthwhile contribution. It should be noted that Parent Governor and Church Representatives on the scrutiny committee which has responsibility for education matters are also required to observe the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Role of Members

- Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups are member-led and members should control the direction of the review, but always in compliance with the defined terms of reference. All variations must be approved by the commissioning scrutiny committee.

- Members of the Group are responsible for setting the agenda within the above parameters.
- Members of the Group may question Cabinet Members, senior officers, and other contributors on issues related to the specific review subject.
- Members of the Group are responsible for making the recommendations in the final report (Officers are not part of the decision making process) and in so doing must observe the equality and diversity policies of the Council.

Appendix 1

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - TASK AND FINISH GROUP SCOPING DOCUMENT

Task and Finish Group Title:	
Membership of Working Group:	
Service Area:	
Key Officer Contacts: [Lead and support]	
Scoping form completed by:	
T&F Group requested by:	
Criteria for inclusion in work programme:	(If yes please provide details)
External or National Priorities:	
Priorities identified in SCC Vision, Business Plan or other Key Policies/Plans:	
Planned Key Decisions or Forward Plans:	
Evidence from Public Consultation or trend from Councillor Case Work:	
Summary of anticipated benefits and outcomes: [Give a brief description of what we hope undertaking the review will achieve e.g. improved performance, amended policy, efficiencies or increased footfall]	

<p>Indicators of success:</p> <p>[Include details of desired indicators of success and how these can be measured]</p>	
Scope:	
<p>In Scope:</p> <p>[Define what the scope of review is]</p>	
<p>Excluded from Scope:</p> <p>[Define the exclusions from the scope of the review]</p>	
Council and Partner Involvement:	
<p>Who would need to be involved from the Council?</p>	
<p>Which of our partners, stakeholders and Members of the community should we discuss this with?</p>	
Review of Resources:	
<p>Evidence:</p> <p>[Background Information and documents to look at]</p>	
<p>Witnesses:</p> <p>[Who to see and when]</p>	
<p>Site visits:</p> <p>[Details of site visits and when they will be held if appropriate]</p>	

Democratic Services & Other Service Resource:	
<p>Consultation:</p> <p>[Is there any consultation which needs to be undertaken to feed into the review?]</p>	
<p>Expert Advice:</p> <p>[Do the Group require expert advice support due to the nature of the review? Note: if a cost is involved the senior officer will need to agree payment]</p>	
Risks:	
What are the risks to the review?	
Timescales:	
Anticipated Review Start Date:	
Anticipated Reporting Date:	
Frequency of Meetings:	
<p><i>Date to evaluate impact:</i></p> <p>[A review of the outcomes by the Committee should be agreed accordingly by the Committee and the Cabinet/Cabinet Member]</p>	