GUIDANCE FOR TASK & FINISH GROUPS.

Cabinet has requested that Scrutiny Commission provides a standard template for all Task & Finish Groups, working within the four scrutiny groups, that will provide guidelines for the process procedure and reporting of these groups. This will provide some degree of uniformity of approach and clarity of reporting for Cabinet and Council consideration.

PROCEDURE

1. Initiation.

The task will be initiated by a mandate. This may be communicated verbally or in writing to an individual, or small group of people. The mandate should be clearly defined and, if necessary set within parameters. It will trigger the start of the task & finish process and will indicate the subject matter to be considered during the process.

The mandate should ideally contain some guidance on the background to and reasons for the task, the responsible authority, the broad objectives, an outline scope, any constraints, quality expectations and an indication of any deadline.

2. Start up.

It will be necessary at the initial stage of the group to ensure that certain prerequisites are in place. Appoint a Chair of the group to undertake preliminary planning.

- Appoint the members of the group. The numbers should be proportionate to the likely scale and complexity of the task. They should also have some knowledge and skills related to the area under review.
- Ensure that the mandate for the Task & Finish Group is clearly understood and agreed by all members of the group. Any misunderstandings, disagreements or proposed variations or deviations from the mandate must be resolved and/or reported to the initiator of the task.
- Agree minimum acceptable outcomes in terms of service level and quality.
- Gather basic information on the area or activity to be investigated, including external sources if necessary.
- Adequate resources should be available for the Task & Finish Group to complete task.

This will ensure that the Task & Finish Group has the authority, ability and resources to undertake a task which is clearly defined, agreed and understood. The group will need information in order to establish what needs to be done, why (the benefits/outcomes), who will be involved in the process and how and when the task will be done.
3. Planning.

A plan is the backbone of every project and is essential for a successful outcome. It describes how, when and by whom specific target(s) are to be achieved. The activities of the group need to be clearly identified and the appropriate resources allocated to them to ensure successful completion of each element within the time scales agreed. A plan is a design of how identified targets for outcomes, timescales, costs and quality can be met.

Effective planning will:-

- Identify whether the targets set can be achieved
- Identify the resources required
- Ensure that quality is built into the process
- Identify any risk
- Avoid confusion and ad hoc decisions
- Aid communication of what is to be done, how it is to be done, allocation of responsibilities and monitoring of progress
- Provide control
- Gain commitment from members of the group
- Develop a Business Plan for the service area under consideration
- Agree the type and level of communication

The key elements of a plan are:-

- The products/outcomes to be produced
- The activities needed to create the products/outcomes
- Validation of the quality of the products/outcomes
- The resources needed (including specific skills)
- Any dependencies on partners or external agencies
- Time scales
- Monitoring and reporting points
- Allocation of responsibilities

If the task is complex and/or extensive in scope then an overall plan may be required.

Consultation. Many of the Task & Finish Groups focus on outcomes and services provided for the public and also for staff who may be users of systems. Consultation is a vital element in establishing end user’s perceptions, requirements and aspirations. Consultation should be used as frequently and as extensively as necessary to obtain an accurate picture of these in order to shape any possible outcomes for the task.

Consultation should, where appropriate, include partners in service provision, external agencies and other authorities.
Discrimination. Care should be taken to ensure that any consultation takes due account of those covered by the Disability Discrimination Act, Age discrimination and other hard to reach groups.

4. Execution.

This is the doing part of the activity, as opposed to the planning. The activities of the Task & Finish Group will have to be kept under tight control if it is to report within the timescale set.

The Task & Finish Group will have responsibility for

- keeping the task on track according to the plan
- ensuring that the quality of work is maintained
- reporting on progress as required
- overcoming problems and queries
- managing any changes imposed to the overall plan
- reviewing progress made towards the outcomes
- identifying any risks
- retaining and storing securely all relevant documentation

Communication. The Task & Finish Group will be required to decide upon the means and frequency of communication within the group, and with relevant officers and members during the review process. It is important that all relevant and interested parties are kept informed of progress and the group will need to be clear at what stage of the task and to whom any communication is directed.

5. Concluding Report

This is a key document upon which decision would be made. It is therefore important that the report is complete, precise and clear, and is supported with appendices that provide an option appraisal together with supporting data including consultation and survey data and any other data that has contributed to the decision making process.

The report format is shown in Appendix A. The template is available in Word format on the shared drive at Democratic Services \ Scrutiny panels \ Task & Finish Report Template.

Submission of Report

The report and appendices need to be checked by Legal Services prior to publication to ensure that any exempt information is identified and the relevant statement included at the end of the report if necessary.

All reports will need an official number, obtained from Democratic Services.

The report and appendices have to be in the correct format before being submitted to the Democratic Services office. Democratic Services cannot be responsible for checking or proof reading reports. The documents need to be
pdf'd and placed in the meetings folder on the shared drive under the relevant meeting heading before the print deadline for that meeting. The report deadlines for 2007/08 are available on the shared drive at: Democratic Services \ Meetings Information \ Reports \ Deadlines \ 2007-08.

Democratic Services officers need to be kept informed as to when a Task and Finish group intend to submit a report to Scrutiny or Cabinet, so that it can be included in the draft Agenda and the Cabinet Forward Plan.

November 2007