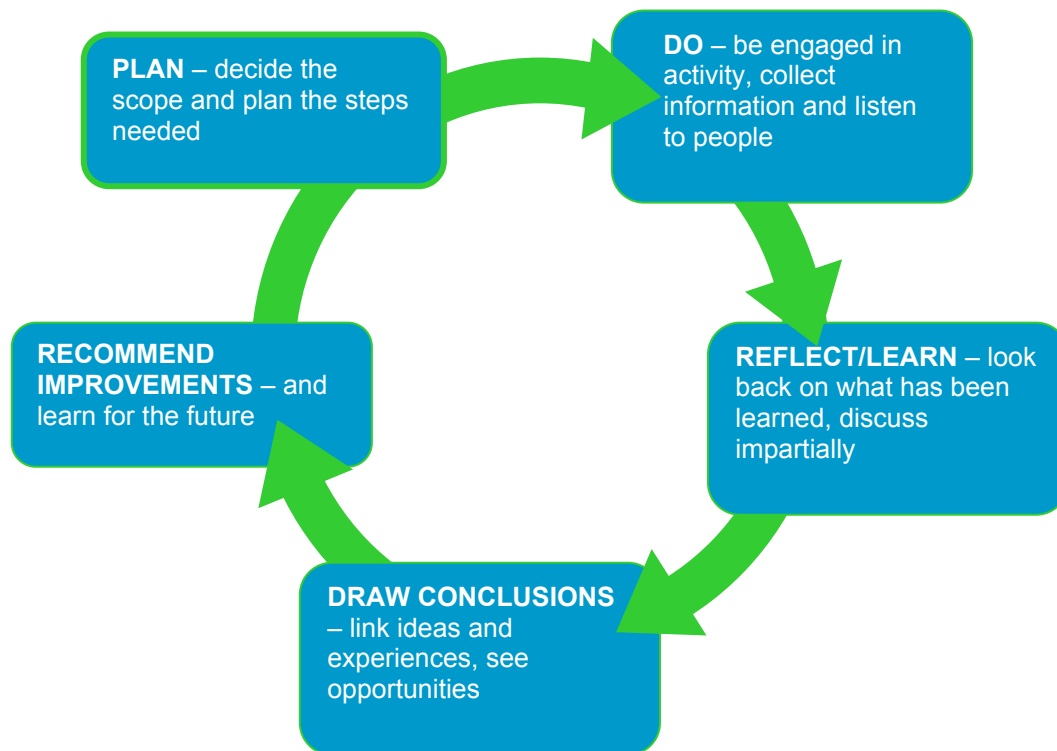


APPENDIX 10 (ANNEX 1)

PROTOCOL FOR SCRUTINY REVIEW WORKING PARTIES

A scrutiny review working party is a small group of Members who are asked to carry out a specific piece of work. A committee sets up a working party when it has been agreed that detailed work is required on a topic. A scrutiny review working party normally has between 3 and 6 Councillors as members. They will plan their work (assisted in this by advice from officers) and meet as necessary to finish their task.

Scrutiny review work gives Members the opportunity to explore issues in depth. A review has different stages that need to be carried out before it is completed:



The working party is responsible to the committee that set up the group. They must report their findings to the committee for approval before the report is sent to Cabinet.

Selecting a topic

One of the most important stages in any review happens before a scrutiny review working party is set up.

Choosing a topic for review is a crucial stage in the process. Members must consider why the topic should be looked at and what benefits would result from the work.

This will involve receiving general information about the topic, either from officers or from representatives of other bodies. Having received initial information and achieved a basic understanding of the issue, the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee will decide whether the matter demands further investigation by overview and scrutiny.

There are a number of criteria that are used to judge each suggestion and the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee is responsible for making the judgement. If they decide more work should be done, then they will refer the work to a particular committee.

The relevant committee will decide how best to do the piece of work and when the work is to be carried out. If a review is needed, the committee will set up a scrutiny review working party to carry out the task.

Setting up a Scrutiny Review Working Party

When a committee sets up a scrutiny review working party there are a number of actions that need to be carried out:

- (a) The committee will decide how many Members they wish to form the group – usually between 3 and 6
- (b) The committee will request any members of the committee who wish to participate in the task to make their desire known
- (c) The committee will decide if they wish to open up membership of the scrutiny review working party to Members who are not on the committee – it is good practice to make use of councillor interest, experience or specialist knowledge
- (d) The Chair of the committee will nominate a councillor to chair the working party.
- (e) A timescale needs to be agreed for the review.

If any Member not present at the meeting is put forward for membership of the working party, a written invitation should be sent to ask if they would like to participate. Members are able to accept or decline the invitation.

It is recommended that Members sit on no more than one or two working parties at any point in time. This is to allow for workload to be balanced.

When responses to the Members' expertise and specialist knowledge survey have been received, the detail provided will be used to inform the process of setting up a working party.

The Scrutiny Review Process

Planning and scoping

Members need to be thoroughly involved in the planning of a review. Having been given an indication of what the scope should be by the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee (through the suggestion form), the working party should consider the specific issues it will cover and agree a plan for the review. They should be assisted in this by advice from officers.

The plan should set out:

- (i) A clear statement of the scrutiny topic

- (ii) The aim (or purpose) of the project
- (iii) The scope of the project - what will be included and excluded
- (iv) Any specific questions to be answered
- (v) Specific concerns or issues, which should be addressed
- (vii) How it will contribute to achieving Corporate Priorities
- (viii) Initial list of key stakeholders, partners or other agencies to involve
- (ix) Timescales both for completion of the task and any interim requirement.

Within the agreed scope, members of the working party decide what information they need and what questions to ask and whether external expertise should be involved. Where needs are identified, consideration should be given as to why that information/contact etc. is necessary. This may include which people or organisations should be consulted and at what stage further consultation may be appropriate. In addition, the group should consult appropriate contacts on their views at the planning stage.

Gathering information

Once the planning aspect is finished, the working party will actively gather its evidence. Some of this will be written information, such as Council documents, national guidance or information from organisations providing a similar service. Information can also be collected by interviewing people. Evidence given to working parties from officers should be fact-based and not contain recommendations unless presented in the form of options. Information might also be gathered from user groups, the public, other interested parties or partners. On occasion the group may take the view that their enquiries would benefit from a site visit or by other activities such as directly accessing the service.

Site visits by members of a working party can be an extremely valuable part of the process and may inform Members' questioning of subsequent contributors.

If the group wishes to hold a public meeting to seek views on an issue, then they can. Members of working parties should be engaging with other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils etc. and talking to people affected by the issue being considered so as to ensure they are gathering as much information as possible.

Meetings of the scrutiny review working parties are minuted. The minutes should strike a balance between an exact record and a summary of the discussion, which can be helpful when the final report is being written. Minutes also allow people who have contributed information to check if it has been understood properly.

Reports of the working party meetings are submitted to the parent overview and scrutiny committee on a regular basis. This allows the members of that committee to monitor the work and to make suggestions about the tasks the working party are undertaking.

Reflect, learn and draw conclusions

When the working party has gathered all the evidence it needs, it will assess it and reflect on what has been learned. A draft report is then prepared to help this process and to help the group in drawing conclusions from what they have learned. The report of the working party's recommendations must be an expression of the views of the working party rather than a report to the working party written by officers. This means that it is important for members of the working party to express their views at the drafting stage.

The relevant Directorate will normally be given a chance to comment on the draft report before the group makes recommendations. This is an opportunity for factual corrections to be made. Sometimes the report relates to work by bodies outside the Council. In that case, these bodies may be consulted.

Report findings and recommendations

At the end of each review, reports need to be produced and written in plain English. Reports must outline the information gathered and present information in a variety of ways so that they are interesting and easy to read.

The final report will be based on facts collected and give a full picture of the issues under scrutiny. It will reflect the range of views presented to the working party and contain conclusions and clear recommendations.

Generally, when the report is endorsed it will be by consensus among all members of the working party. However, occasionally agreement cannot be reached, so the views of all members will then be reflected in the report.

When the working party have finished their report, the members of that group present their work to their parent overview and scrutiny committee. As part of this process, the working party will explain the work that has been done and ask the committee to support their recommendations. The committee could also comment on the report or ask for further work to be done.

The Committee's Responsibilities

Submitting a final report

If the committee formally supports the document, it will be sent to the Chief Executive. The overview and scrutiny committees are not decision-making bodies, therefore the Chief Executive will arrange for the report to be sent to the Cabinet or Full Council – whichever is appropriate. An agreed process is in place to make sure that recommendations are considered and responded to.

If the inquiry relates to an area outside the Council's control, the committee may also send its recommendations to the body concerned.

Follow up and feedback

The Cabinet formally respond to the recommendations that the committee has made. Their report will explain what actions or decisions will take place following the committee's recommendations.

The committee will monitor the way its recommendations are put in place and decide when they wish to receive a progress report.

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It is an important part of the scrutiny process to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the review that has been undertaken. This enables lessons to be learned for the future about areas of the process that are successful as well as those that can be improved upon. It also helps to demonstrate the value of the process.

It is important to feed the results and outcome of the scrutiny back to everyone who has taken part and other interested stakeholders, including all Council Members.

Classification: NULBC **UNCLASSIFIED**