

SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS – GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

The Council Constitution provides for its Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC) to appoint Scrutiny Project Groups (SPG) for a fixed period of time (ie. informal task and finish working groups). These SPGs are not Statutory Scrutiny Committees and do not have the powers of those committees. Their purpose is to enable informal, co-operative working to help develop policy and improve services, as opposed to a holding to account role.

1	An SPG will comprise at least 3 members, to include any council member and/or officer. The OSC will approve (retrospectively) the SPGs remit (scope / terms of reference), membership, duration, reporting back procedures and private status This information will be contained within the SPG Project Start Report (PSR) approved by the OSC.
2	Lead members for SPGs should be identified in advance of project group formation, ideally during the annual work programming process. Where this is not possible OSC Chairs may agree lead member appointment pending OSC approval. OSC Chairs together with the SPG lead member will also discuss and agree appropriate group memberships pending OSC approval.
3	The SPG's PSR is to be submitted to and agreed by the OSC as soon as possible. It should be received by the OSC Chair(s) and Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer within 4 weeks of committee approval to appoint the group, together with (if needed) a completed resource needs request form. Work should not commence before the PSR is received.
4	It is important for the SPG lead member and group members to have informal conversation with the relevant cabinet members and/or the Cabinet Member for Governance (Scrutiny) to help develop a good understanding of related, wider issues and context before finalising the group's PSR document and commencing the work. The relevant cabinet member and corporate/service manager should be consulted on the group's agreed PSR for comment, before submission to Chairs. Group leads are also encouraged to talk informally to relevant cabinet members and officers throughout the project and provide opportunity for them to comment on any final project report and recommendations.
5	SPGs are encouraged to project-plan their work (see SPG project management toolkit / framework). This will help to manage the review more effectively by agreeing tasks/actions and deadlines in advance including group/committee meeting dates, who to involve, evidence and resources needed (including members' own skills, experience and capacity to do the work). The Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer and Democratic and Scrutiny Officer(s) will help with project management.
6	Before the SPG commences, a guidance meeting with the Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer (OSC Chairs if needed) and the SPG lead member will take place. Additional meetings should be scheduled to enable ongoing project oversight.
7	The SPG lead member will provide a brief progress update to each meeting of the SPGs parent OSC. If necessary OSCs may need to reconsider appointments in the absence of reporting back.
8	The SPG lead member will be expected to provide any final written group report and/or recommendations, present these to the relevant OSC and if approved, attend Cabinet to present as necessary. Before presenting the report to OSC the lead member will ensure relevant cabinet members and managers have had opportunity to comment on the report / recommendations. A very brief statement of corporate considerations (ie, financial and human resourcing, equalities and legal etc.) should also be provided.
9	A report template is available for the drafting of review reports. The Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer / Democratic and Scrutiny Officers, or other service officers can help with writing and finalising reports.
10	All final SPG reports must be received by the OSC Chairs and Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer for sign-off before progressing through the decision making process . The Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer will then manage transition of all reports to OSC and onwards to Cabinet (or other decision making body) as appropriate.

11	The SPG lead member will be responsible for agreeing group meeting arrangements and requests for attendance and information.
12	There is an understanding that all SPG members will meet their own administrative requirements as much as they possibly can including taking their own brief notes at meetings.
13	Further to 11 and 12 above and resource availability the SPG lead member may request democratic and scrutiny officers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) book rooms for meetings and any refreshments needed; (b) arrange meetings, send out meeting invitations and papers / documents; (c) undertake other associated administrative duties, such as photocopying, typing, document production and formatting; (d) attend the Group meetings to take notes / minutes - (or as a very last resort and in an adequate time frame, request arrangements for audio recording equipment to be provided for the meeting).
14	At least one week's notice to attend SPG meetings should be given (and if audio recording equipment is to be used, the intention must be made clear to all attendees in advance, ideally with the invitation one week before).
15	The Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer will not normally attend SPG meetings unless technical input (overview and scrutiny advice and guidance) is needed.
16	Corporate/service managers can provide specific service related technical support and information to SPGs if needed, given their resource availability.
17	If SPG lead members feel unable to continue with their lead role or are unable to progress the review work to timetable they must inform the Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer and OSC Chair(s) as soon as possible.
18	The SPG lead member will assist with review and evaluation of their SPG review on its completion to enable ongoing assessment and improvements of the scrutiny review process.

[Adopted by Overview and Performance Scrutiny Forum on 25.07.13. Amended 28.11.13 and 10.09.14. Further amends OPSF 9.5.17].