

Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel Agenda



Provision of Value for Money within Planning Services Task and Finish Panel Tuesday, 23rd October, 2007

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 7.30 pm

**Democratic Services
Officer:** Zoe Folley ext 4532
email: zfolley@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors Mrs L Wagland (Chairman), R Bassett, M Colling, R Frankel, D Jacobs, A Lee, P McMillan, G Mohindra, R Morgan, Mrs P Richardson and H Ulkun

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE (Pages 3 - 10)

The Panel is asked to formulate a terms of reference for its work for submission to the next OSC for endorsement. Draft proposals are attached for consideration.

Also attached is guidance notes and the OS request form for this review. The Panel is asked to give consideration to these documents.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

Having set a Terms of Reference, the Panel is now asked to draw up its work programme with reporting deadlines for each item.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To agree a forward programme of meetings for this Panel



TASK AND FINISH PANELS GUIDANCE NOTES

Introduction

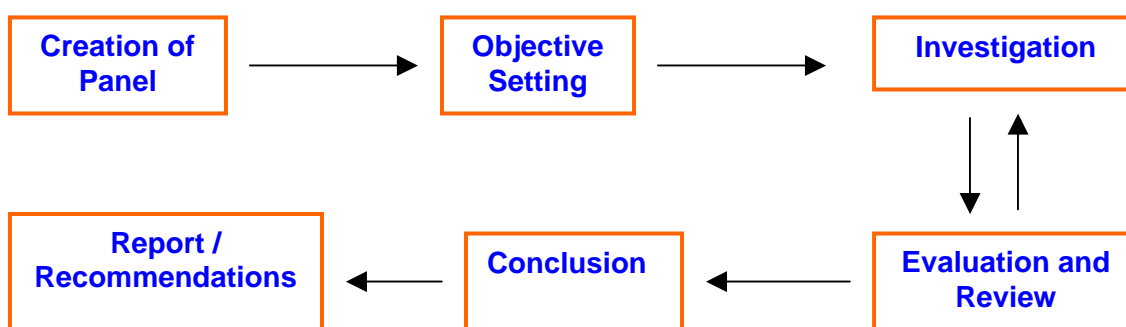
1. Task and Finish Scrutiny Panels are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to deal with ad hoc projects or reviews included in the annual work programme for Overview and Scrutiny.
2. Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel status will be restricted to those activities which are issue-based, time limited and non-cyclical in character and have clearly defined objectives.
3. Task and Finish Panels as with all Overview and Scrutiny must be member led. The members should control the agenda and have ownership of the work programme.

Scoping Phase

4. **(Pre Scoping)** Before their first meeting with the Chairman, the Lead Officer should hold an informal meeting with any officers that may be connected to the topic to be reviewed to try and establish any and all issues related to the subject, so that that the Lead Officer on meeting with the Chairman, has some background information to submit.
5. **(Scoping)** At the start of a Task and Finish Panel the Lead Officer will draft the Terms of Reference in conjunction with the Chairman of the Panel. The Panel will then meet to discuss the Terms of References and decide how they are to achieve their goals. An emphasis must be put on clear and realistic objectives, which are timely and time limited.
6. Terms of Reference and objectives should, if at all possible, be defined using the **SMART** objective framework:

Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time Limited

7. The life cycle of a Task and Finish Panel will look like this:



Investigation Phase

8. Before any conclusions can be drawn, evidence must first be gathered. All available sources must be tapped, making the most of the expertise within the Council, any outside organisations and public opinion if applicable.
9. The investigation phase can be handled as a full group review or as a 'delegated tasks' approach, with individual members or small sub groups, gathering evidence to bring back to the full Panel.
10. Any reports by officers to a Task and Finish panel should provide relevant evidence and background but should not make any recommendations. They should be done in an informal style, and not mirror the house Cabinet, Portfolio Holder style of reports.
11. If thought necessary outside bodies should be involved in the evidence gathering phase, either by inviting that organisation to give a one off presentation or by co-opting an outside member onto the Panel for the duration of the Panel's life in a non-voting capacity.
12. Creativity and imagination should be used in gathering evidence. Ways can and should be found of getting the views of groups who may be overlooked. Perhaps the review should be publicised and contributions invited, the use of community venues encouraged and feedback provided to participants.

Witnesses and Questioning

13. When questioning witnesses, questions should be kept brief, clear and to the point. Start with broad questions first and then narrow down the focus. Remember to use 'follow ups' to obtain a clearer explanation. The use of pre-meetings could be used to organise the Panels approach to the questioning of 'witnesses' and to get the most out of the session.
14. Remember the panel is not there to trip people up, "grill" them, apportion blame or to make their life difficult. Rather it is to understand the issues affecting the topic under review and how it affects the District Council and its residents.

Gathering Evidence

15. Methods of evidence gathering should be as systematic and objective as possible, not just anecdotal. Use a variety of approaches and not just rely on a single source. Some different ways that evidence could be gathered are:

- Statistical Surveys;
- Focus Groups and Workshops;
- Public Meetings;
- Self-advocacy groups;
- Street surveys;
- Site visits;
- Mystery Shopping.

Panel members should carry out these tasks, design the survey forms or prepare the questionnaires themselves. Officers are to be used in an advisory capacity only.

Report and Follow-up

16. The concluding report will need to be clear, concise, evidence based with illustrative anecdotes. All the evidence gathered should be listed and if thought appropriate summarised. There will need to be clear, realistic and specific recommendations formulated so that progress can be measured and followed up. The report should (wherever practicable) ask for responses to its recommendations within a realistic time period. (A draft format of a Task and Finish report is attached.)

17. The report should, if thought appropriate, be promoted to the public, e.g. through a press release and/or publicised via our website.

18. A mini-review of outcomes be carried out after an appropriate period (not later than six months (if appropriate) after the end of the panel). The results of this review should be reported back to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The entire Panel should not be involved in this follow-up review. The Chairman on his/her own or a small sub-group of two or three members would be enough. They could provide the full panel with a short written report on their findings if necessary; otherwise a verbal report would suffice.

Democratic Services
July 2006

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Request by Member for Scrutiny Review



Please complete the form below to request consideration of your issue by the
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Proposers Name: S. Tautz Performance Improvement Manager	Date of Request 14 March 2007
Supporting Councillors (if any): Councillors D. Jacobs, J. Hart, J. M. Whitehouse	
Summary of Issue you wish to be scrutinised: Councillors D. Jacobs, J. Hart and J. M. Whitehouse comprise a Sub-Group of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel and, in that role, have considered the Council's Value For Money Analysis for 2005/06 with the support of the Head of Housing Services and the Head of Human Resources and Performance Management. Following this process Councillors Jacobs, Hart and Whitehouse wish to propose the establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel during 2007/08, to consider in detail the provision of Value For Money within the Development Control (Planning Services) function, focusing specifically on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The success of the 'hit squad' established to focus on the backlog of planning applications; (b) How and to what extent performance in relation to the determination of planning applications has improved as a result of the 'hit squad' and other additional resources such as the new integrated computer system, the restructure of Planning Services and the application of Planning Delivery Grant; and (c) How unit cost and other benchmarking information in relation to the Development Control function can be obtained to increase the effectiveness of the Value For Money Analysis for 2006/07 and future years. 	
NOTE: ENTRIES BELOW RELATE TO ISSUE CATEGORIES OF THE PICK PROCESS. PLEASE REFER TO THE EXPLANATORY NOTES TO THIS FORM FOR FURTHER INFORMATION	
Public Interest Justification: Development Control performance has been identified as a priority for which several Key performance Indicators have been adopted. Significant additional resources have been directed towards improving performance in this area. The Council is keen to demonstrate the provision of Value For Money across all service areas as part of the ongoing Use Of Resources assessment by the Audit Commission.	

Impact on the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area:	
<p>The Development Control function controls, protects and regulates the use of land and development through the processing of planning applications, to ensure that the district is developed in a sustainable manner and in a way that promotes the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area. The demonstration of Value For Money is essential to the Council's operations.</p>	
Council Performance in this area (if known: Red, Amber, Green):	
<p>Development Control performance is measured by Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) 109a, 109b, 109c (planning applications) and 204 (planning appeals). Government targets for BVPI 109 are:</p> <p>BVPI 109a (Major Applications) - 60% within 13 weeks; BVPI 109b (Minor Applications) - 65% within 8 weeks; and BVPI 109c (Other Applications) - 80% within 8 weeks.</p> <p>Performance for 2006/07 against BVPI 109 to 31 December 2006 was 64%, 73.4% and 90.8% respectively (i.e. all well above the Government targets).</p> <p>Performance against BVPI 204 has been volatile, particularly when the numbers of appeals in a quarter are lower than normal, and that performance has to take into account appeals allowed against a member decision to refuse an application.</p> <p>The Council has set its own 'upper quartile' targets for these indicators for 2006/07. Current performance (to 31 December 2006) against the majority of the BVPIs is below target (i.e. 'Red'), with uncertain prospects for the achievement of the target by the year-end.</p>	
Keep in Context (are other reviews taking place in this area?)	
<p>It is not believed that other reviews taking place in this area, although the impact of the 'hit squad' was reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 10 July 2006. The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel reviews and monitors performance against the Development Control BVPIs on a quarterly basis.</p>	
Office Use:	
Pick score:	Considered By OSCC:

Proposed Terms of Reference

To consider in detail the provision of Value For Money within the Development Control (Planning Services) function, focusing specifically on:

- (a) The success of the 'hit squad' established to focus on the backlog of planning applications;
- (b) How and to what extent performance in relation to the determination of planning applications has improved as a result of the 'hit squad' and other additional resources such as the new integrated computer system, the restructure of Planning Services and the application of Planning Delivery Grant; and
- (c) How unit cost and other benchmarking information in relation to the Development Control function can be obtained to increase the effectiveness of the Value For Money Analysis for 2006/07 and future years.

Aims and Objectives:

To gather evidence and information in relation to the topics through the receipt of data, presentations and by participation in fact finding visits;

To consult with Partners, Agencies, Stakeholders and Users of the services under review, to establish key issues and future need;

To evaluate all relevant facts in relation to the topics under review in an objective way and to produce recommendations for future action accordingly;

To establish whether there are any resource implications arising out of the topics under review and advise Cabinet for inclusion in the Budget Process 2008/09; and

To report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at appropriate intervals and to submit any final reports in the proposed Corporate Format for consideration by O & S, the Cabinet and Council.

TIMESCALE	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL
Commencement		X June 2007
1. Interim report to include any budgetary items for the next budget round.	By October 2007	
Reports.	As above?	

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