



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Establishment of Task and Finish Groups

Date: 21 September 2022

Key decision: No

Class: Part 1

Ward(s) affected: All

Contributors: Assistant Chief Executive

Outline and recommendations

The purpose of this item is for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish two time limited Task and Finish Groups and agree the membership of each body.

Reason for lateness: This report is late because agenda publication was brought forward by one day due to the granting of an additional bank holiday - an item of business may only be considered at a public meeting where a copy of the agenda has been available for inspection by the public for at least five clear days before the meeting. Bringing forward the agenda did not allow officers sufficient time to comment and provide advice on the proposed groups.

Reason for urgency: The next meeting of the Committee is 29 November 2022. Should this report be delayed until that meeting, any Task and Finish Groups established by this committee would be delayed by two months.

1. Summary

1.1. The intention of this item is for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish two time limited Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) and agree the membership of each body. The TFGs will aim to end by 31 March 2023 (so last for approximately 6 months). However TFGs are intended to be a flexible resource and, following the scoping process, it may become clear that the proposed TFGs require less or more time. TFGs cannot last longer than 12 months.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to agree that:

- (a) Two time limited task and finish groups are established to look at *creative and community workspaces* and *community gardening and allotments practice*.
- (b) The following memberships for each group are agreed:

Creative and community workspaces

1. Cllr Billy Harding
2. Cllr Mark Ingleby
3. Cllr Rudi Schmidt
4. Cllr Aliya Sheikh
5. Cllr Liam Shrivastava

Community gardening and allotments:

1. Cllr Natasha Burgess
2. Cllr Will Cooper
3. Cllr Laura Cunningham
4. Cllr Sian Eiles
5. Cllr Coral Howard

3. Policy context

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Groups will support the Council's corporate priorities (outlined in the current Corporate Strategy 2018-22), in particular:
 - **Building an inclusive local economy:** Everyone can access high-quality job opportunities, with decent pay and security in our thriving and inclusive local economy
 - **Making Lewisham greener:** Everyone enjoys our green spaces and benefits from a healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.
- 3.2 The proposed community gardening and allotments TFG has links to the Council's [Climate Emergency declaration and action plan](#); the [Parks & Open Spaces Strategy 2020-25](#) and [social prescribing strategies](#).
- 3.3 The proposed creative and community workspaces TFG links to the upcoming [Economic Development Strategy](#) and the Council's commitment to establish a post [Borough of Culture](#) 'Creative Lewisham' programme to drive ongoing cultural and economic development in the Borough. More widely it links to the (GLA supported) [Economic Recovery Framework for London](#). In 2018 the Mayor of London designated Deptford and New Cross as one of six Creative Enterprise Zones (CEZ), which is focussed on supporting local digital and creative sectors.

4. Task and Finish Groups

4.1 As a result of the Local Democracy Review, the Local Democracy Working Group recommended some changes to the Council's practice and approach to scrutiny, including the introduction of time limited Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) to look at topical issues of importance or concern. The establishment of TFGs was initially put on hold due to the pandemic, however, the first three TFGs were established last year (2021/22) and they have now concluded and reported to Mayor and Cabinet.

4.2 It has been agreed that:

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will agree which TFGs should be established and their duration; but TFGs will not last longer than 12 months.
- Each TFG will meet at least twice in public (one meeting to scope out the work required and one to agree a final report and recommendations).
- Evidence will be collected in between formal meetings in a variety of ways. Methods will include, but will not be limited to, desktop research, telephone/MS Teams conferences, site visits, good practice visits and a wide range of engagement activities. Some evidence may be collected at a formal, public meeting of the TFG where expert witnesses are asked to give evidence.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will agree the membership of TFGs on the basis of political party nominations. The membership will be politically proportionate.
- Each TFG will have five members. However, the membership of any TFG looking at education matters will be open to the statutory parent governor and diocesan representatives, who can choose to sit on the group (as full members with voting rights) if they wish. Such TFGS will therefore have more than 5 members.
- TFGs are effectively time limited Select Committees with the same constitutional powers as standing Select Committees. This includes the power to make reports to the Executive.
- The TFG will conduct an investigation into the issue it was established to scrutinise, agree a report on the basis of the evidence heard and report directly to Mayor and Cabinet / the relevant external organisation for a response within two months.
- TFGs will focus on producing a small number of focused, evidence-based recommendations.
- A copy of each TFG's final report will be circulated by email to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note, and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny may suggest that the report is presented to full Council to allow for wider debate, in addition to it being considered by the Mayor and Cabinet for an executive response¹.
- The TFG will be disbanded once it has made its final report. Its final set of minutes will go to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for agreement.
- The Mayoral response to the TFG will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The relevant TFG Members will be invited to lead the

¹ Statutory Scrutiny Guidance suggests that full Council should be informed of the work of scrutiny and that one way in which this can be done is by reports and recommendations being submitted to full Council rather than solely to the executive. It does not, however, prescribe this, stating that "*Scrutiny should decide when it would be appropriate to submit reports for wider debate in this way, taking into account the relevance of reports to full Council business, as well as full Council's capacity to consider and respond in a timely manner*".

discussion on the response. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may request an update on the implementation of agreed recommendations in six or 12 months' time to itself or an appropriate Select Committee.

5. Proposed Groups

5.1. Two groups have been proposed:

Creative and community workspaces: How can we maximise strategic opportunities for inclusive meanwhile, creative and community workspace in Lewisham, post Borough of Culture, to ensure that we grow and retain talent within the Borough and attract inward investment?

Community gardening and allotments practice: How can community gardening and current allotments practice be expanded and adapted to increase community participation and offer more opportunities for local interactions with schools, food banks, housing associations, the voluntary sector & social prescribing services?

5.2 The detailed proposals for each of these groups, prepared by the proposing councillor, can be found in the appendix to this report.

5.3 The following officer comments have been made in relation to the proposals:

Creative and community workspaces:

- The Council has recently commissioned the development of an Affordable Workspace Strategy and action plan for the borough. This work is due to be completed by Christmas. The Consultants will be asked to review existing evidence and engage with interested members in undertaking this work. Some of the areas of focus of the proposed TFG are likely to duplicate this work. Regardless of whether this TFG goes ahead, officers can share the emerging strategy with Members and consult interested members on key elements in shaping this work.
- Officers working on the Borough of Culture will have limited capacity to provide support the TFG as there are still over 80 events to service between now and the end of the calendar year – this will particularly impact on any queries relating to the Creative Lewisham programme.
- The scope of the TFG references the intention to look across the corporate estate to identify opportunities. The Council is currently developing a new Strategic Asset Management Plan which will review the Council's estate in the context of service delivery need and wider opportunities for economic and social value delivery. Whilst this is ongoing, officers will have very limited capacity to engage in a wider review of the corporate estate, as it would pre-empt ongoing work.
- The Council is at the start of the process of discussing how it can work with partners, including the GLA, to secure a viable Borough of Culture legacy and is scheduled to bring a programme to Scrutiny in March 2023.

Community gardening and allotments practice:

- The TFG should bear in mind that public allotments are resourced by the council (there are also private allotment sites in the borough on land not owned by the council) but community gardens are not resourced by the council, although the council will advise and support where feasible.

- It is a busy time in the Parks, Sport and Leisure service in terms of the delivery of significant capital projects as well as business as usual and ongoing pressure to contain spending and identify budget reductions, which will impact on the officer resource available.
- There is a lot of work currently being undertaken in this area. Public Health Team is producing a cross-organisational Food Justice Action Plan and expect to publish the final version in November this year. This will be an important source of evidence for the TFG. Lewisham Local has also been commissioned to co-ordinate the Good Food Lewisham programme, which includes action to ensure that individuals, community groups and local businesses are able to access information and share resources about food growing. They are also working with [Grow Lewisham](#) to further develop their network of community growers and green space networks. Officers envisage that the Good Food Lewisham Network will play a central role in supporting and co-ordinating the implementation of the Food Justice Action Plan and could provide the opportunity to use an existing platform to take forward any actions proposed by the Council's TFG. Care will need to be taken to ensure that the TFG does not duplicate existing and planned work.
- Public Health Team resources are focussed on the development and implementation of the Food Justice Action Plan within the tight timescales required and the team will initially have limited resources to support any queries arising from the TFG.
- If the decision is taken to go ahead and establish the TFG officers would strongly recommend that the group is aligned and integrated with the establishment of the governance arrangements and implementation of the Food Justice Action Plan.

6. Proposed Membership and time frame

- 6.1. Nominations for membership of each of the groups are set out in the report recommendation.
- 6.2. Statutory scrutiny guidance suggests that, scrutiny bodies may wish to work with independent local experts who can provide advice and assistance in *understanding and evaluating evidence* (not in formulating recommendations – this is for members). Such experts would be appointed as technical advisors to the scrutiny body. This is different from engaging experts who *provide evidence*. To date, experts have generally been used to provide rather than evaluate evidence. Appointing technical advisors can have resource implications as it can require paying a daily allowance (per diem) to cover the advisor's expenses, although some experts may provide support for free as part of their organisation's commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. It is suggested that technical advisors are not appointed to either of these TFGs, but experts are engaged to provide evidence.
- 6.3. The TFGs will hold their first formal meetings in late October to allow time for scoping papers to be developed. It is envisaged that the groups will complete their work by no later than the end of March 2023. They cannot last longer than 12 months. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the response to any recommendations made by the groups and consider whether any follow up work / progress updates on recommendation implementation are required.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. Scrutiny work is managed within existing budgets. Formal recommendations to the Mayor arising out of any TFG investigations; specific work items within select committee work programmes; or items considered by the full Overview and Scrutiny Committee are evaluated in the usual way through the process of formal reports. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. The Council's Constitution provides at paragraph 6.11, Article 6 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may from time to time appoint sub-committees, to be known as task and finish groups which will exist for a period of no less than 3 months, nor more than 12 months from the date of their creation. It further adds that "Any task and finish group shall consist of 5 members and be established for the purpose of examining a particular issue in depth. The terms of reference of any task and finish group shall be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which shall also appoint members to it."

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1. The delivery of the Council's equalities objectives is to be achieved through the delivery of all of the Council's strategies, plans and procedures. As such, scrutiny bodies, when planning their work and scrutinising items, bear in mind the delivery of the Council's equality objectives.
- 9.2. Scrutiny tries to make sure that its work reflects the diversity of Lewisham's communities and that the views of residents are fairly represented in scrutiny processes. Any recommendations arising from scrutiny work support the Council's corporate strategy and reflect the needs of local residents.
- 9.3. The proposed Task and Finish Groups will specifically consider matters of equality. As noted in the proformas put forward by Members, community growing can be a vehicle for social cohesion and be a practical expression of cultural diversity, helping to drive inclusion and tackle inequalities. The oncoming and escalating Cost of Living Crisis and Climate Emergency affects those in poverty the worst, but the wider mental health benefits of community growing and green social prescribing are available to all. Finding places for local creativity to be more inherent in Lewisham's identity will help to embed this character in the borough, leading to creativity & diversity becoming even more fundamental to what the borough is, what it does and who participates.

10. Climate change and environmental implications

- 10.1. There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from this report.

10. Crime and disorder implications

10.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

11. Health and wellbeing implications

11.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Overview & Scrutiny	Overview and scrutiny is the way in which Mayor and Cabinet (the 'Executive'), officers and external organisations are held to account for the decisions that they make. It is led by councillors who are not members of the Executive. They also influence policy development and investigate issues of local concern, making recommendations for improvement.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	A committee made up of all non-executive councillors which carries out scrutiny focussing on strategic and cross cutting issues.
Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel (OSBP) and Education OSBP	<p>Lewisham has two Business Panels (sub-committees of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).</p> <p>OS Business Panel is made up of the chair and vice-chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the chair of each of the Select Committees, and two other non-Executive councillors.</p> <p>The main functions of Business Panel are reviewing key decisions once they have been taken (potentially "calling in" key decisions that have been made but not yet implemented); coordinating and approving the overall scrutiny work programme; and allocating scrutiny work in the event that it crosses the remit of more than one scrutiny body.</p> <p>Three parent governors and two diocesan representatives sit on the Education Business Panel, alongside the councillors that make up the regular Business Panel. The Education Business Panel reviews (and can call-in) key decisions that are education matters.</p>
Task and Finish Group	A time limited scrutiny body which gathers evidence in relation to a topical issue of concern in order to make recommendations to improve outcomes for residents.

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