

GUIDELINES / PROTOCOL FOR THE OPERATION OF WORKING GROUPS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There is no legal definition of a Working Group / party. Generally, however, a Working Group/party consists of a small group of Members (but with Officers in attendance at meetings to provide support and advice) with a specific remit. They have a particular role in relation to projects/items of work which need to be completed within a specified time period ('task and finish') but otherwise may be set to meet as and when required to enable Members and Officers to work together to explore matters in detail outside of the formal setting of a Council or Committee meeting.
- 1.2 A Working Group conducts its business on a less formal basis than that of a committee. It does not have any decision-making powers and can only make recommendations to the body from which it was formed, or to such other body as the parent body decides, or to an officer.
- 1.3 A Working Group may be formed as a way to deal with topic specific information and help to inform decision making.
- 1.4 The purpose of this document is to give guidance in relation to the operation of all Working Groups appointed by the Council and its committees.

2. APPOINTMENT OF WORKING GROUPS

- 2.1 The Council and any of its Committees may establish a Working Group and determine the precise terms of reference of the working party, its membership and (if appropriate) duration. Working Groups in existence will be reviewed and appointed afresh at each statutory annual meeting of the Council or at the first meeting of a Committee in each new municipal year.
- 2.2 In exercising the powers under paragraph 2.1 above the appointing body shall seek to ensure that Member and Officer time and the financial resources of the Council are used in such way as it considers to be in the best interest of the Council and local people.
- 2.3 Since Working Groups are not decision-making, the normal principles of political balance do not apply to membership appointments, although the appointing body may wish to follow those principles in certain cases.

3. METHOD OF OPERATION

- 3.1 Working Groups meetings are not held in public and therefore the rules relating to publicity and access to information will not apply. Meetings will be supported by Officers of the Council who will co-ordinate the arranging of meetings, sending out agendas for meetings, and taking notes of meetings.
- 3.2 For each Working Group there will be a Lead officer who will work with the Chairperson, including drafting and agreement of agendas with the Chairperson, support during meetings and implementing actions as required.

- 3.3 Meetings will take place during daytime hours to allow for officer support e.g., meeting presentations and minute taking.
- 3.4 Notes of a meeting will be submitted to the subsequent meeting for ratification, retained as an internal record and accessible to all Members of the Council.
- 3.5 Meetings of Working Groups will normally be attended only by those Members appointed, however from time to time a Working Group may choose to invite other Members to participate and provide information, and this may extend to the invitation of external representatives e.g., stakeholders or business representatives and members of the public to assist with their work. The role of such representatives would be to act as advisors to the Working Group using their particular expertise or experience.
- 3.6 A quorum of Members for a meeting of a Working Group will be as set by the appointing body, but in no case shall be less than three. Substitutes may be permitted from the membership of the body that appoints the Working Group, or from a panel of substitutes if so appointed. Notification of a substitution must be given to the Chairman and/or the Officer named for contact purposes on the agenda before the start of a meeting.
- 3.7 The agenda and supporting papers for meetings of Working Groups shall be treated as confidential to the Council. Should the outcome of Working Group deliberations involve matters of a confidential nature, the subsequent report to the Council or a Committee will accommodate that in line with existing reporting practice.
- 3.8 Working Groups will report to the relevant appointing body or elsewhere as required. Papers and recommendations should be written as a report of the Working Group, and the Chairperson for the meeting will report back at the next available committee meeting.

4. CHAIRPERSON AND LEADERSHIP ROLE

- 4.1 Each Working Group shall appoint a Chairperson at its first meeting, and then afresh at the first meeting of a municipal year. In the absence of the Chairperson at a meeting, a Working Group shall appoint a Chairperson for that meeting.
- 4.2 The Chairperson will lead the Working Group and present its reports at subsequent meetings of the Council or a Committee.