GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP

This document sets out the guiding principles that Wirral Council's Committees should consider when considering the establishment of Panels, Forums, Working Groups, Liaison and Task & Finish Groups.

For the purposes of this document, all bodies will be referred to as Working Groups.

This document has been developed to:

- Ensure Committees are fully utilising the opportunities to have Working Groups.
- Provide a consistent approach to the running of Working Groups
- Manage the impact of Working Groups on officer and member capacity

What is a Working Group?

Wirral Council's Constitution outlines that Panels, Forums, Working Groups, Liaison and Task & Finish Groups may be established by Committees. The purpose of such working groups is to examine in detail specific issues or aspects of policy, procedure or service, according to their remit. These groups do not take any decisions but inform the deliberations of the committees. Their membership may include councillors from each party, non-councillors by invitation and, occasionally, employees.

They shall be for specific purposes and shall be time limited. They will only be established when the matter cannot be undertaken by a relevant Committee and each committee is limited to establishing [two] such committees at any one time.

Considerations when Establishing a Working Group

When deciding whether to establish a Working Group, is its suggested that the Committee should give consideration to a number of factors as outlined below.

a) Is the topic related to Policy Framework, Policy Development or Budget?

Committees should be mindful that two active working groups are permitted at any one time, therefore topics relating to Policy Framework, Policy Development or Budget matters should be prioritised. Committees should also consider any requests or suggestions for topics referred to them from Council or Policy & Resources Committee.

b) Is the topic a priority in the Council's Plan?

Priority should also be given to topics that are included in the Council Plan.

c) Are there any other mechanisms to review the topic?

There are a variety of other tools at the disposal of Committees that may be more appropriate for a particular topic. These include but are not limited to:

- One off workshops
- Submission of an officer report to Committee
- Informal briefings with Officers
- Briefing notes to be circulated outside of the Committee
- Site visits

d) Is the review timely?

Working Groups can be added to the Committee work programme in order that they are scheduled at the most opportune time, such as to coincide with the budget setting process, cross thematic work or national policy developments.

e) When was the last time the topic was reviewed?

Committees should consider when a topic was last reviewed, as well as whether other committees or services have undertaken any similar work to avoid unnecessary duplication.

f) What is the desired outcome?

Working Groups should be focused with a desired outcome of making clear recommendations to the parent committee and where appropriate, Policy and Resources Committee.

Setting up the Working Group

If after considering all of the above factors a Committee is of the view that a Working Group is the mechanism to provide the best outcomes for a given topic, the Committee should ensure that the Working Group scope has been clearly defined. Consideration should be given to the following:

a) Appointment of the Chair and Members of the Group

The Chair and members of the Working Group should be appointed based on the topic for review. Members of the group may have a special knowledge or interest in the subject being considered. It is not required that Working Groups are politically proportionate.

Panels will require a Chair to lead the review, chair meetings and report on progress. The Chair can either be appointed by the parent committee or at the first meeting of working group/task finish.

b) Agreeing the Scope of the Working Group

At the first meeting of the Working group, members should agree a clearly defined scope for the review topic having regard to the request from Committee. This will allow officers to better understand the desired outcomes and present more timely and pertinent information to the Working Group.

A draft scope document should be prepared by officers in advance of the first meeting for members' consideration. A standard template has been created.

c) Number and frequency of Meetings

The number of meetings will depend on the scope and methodology of the review. A draft timetable will be presented for consideration at the first meeting of the Working Group. Where possible, all reviews should be concluded during the course of the municipal year.

Meetings will be scheduled to fit in with Members availability unless evidence gathering can only be achieved at specific times. Members availability will be taken into consideration, and a 'best fit found', however in some cases the review will need to proceed at times without all members being able to attend. The decision to proceed will be at the discretion of the Chair.

Confidentiality should be maintained throughout the evidence gathering process and findings should be used only for the purpose of the review and final report.

d) Officer Support

The Group will be supported by Democratic and Member Services Officers, and officers from the relevant directorate.

Outcome of the Working Group

On completion of the review, the Panel will produce a final report with clear recommendations to present to the relevant Policy and Service Committee for consideration. If the Working Group is unable to unanimously agree the recommendations, they should be subject to a vote. That vote, and the alternative considered and rejected should be included in the final report to the parent committee. In certain circumstances, where the Working Group feel it is required to allow proper consideration by the parent committee, the group may produce a majority and minority report and recommendations.