

SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

What is a Scrutiny Task Group?

Scrutiny task groups are set up by a parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine specific issues in detail. Typically, 5 Members are appointed to the Task Group on a politically proportionate basis. Any non-Cabinet Member can serve on a Task Group.

Task Groups tend to work more flexibly and informally, and meetings are not open to the public. The review could be of an existing policy or service, but scrutiny task-groups can also look to develop new policies and can sometimes look at services that are outside of the Council's remit or control. They have a fixed time frame and are dissolved once they have completed their work.

Task Groups are supported by the Democratic Services Team and also one or two lead officers from the relevant department.

How does it work?

When the Task Group first meets it will agree the scope of the review. It is important that the scope is clear and manageable. It is advised to keep a Task Group's scope narrow and deep in order to add the most value. The Task Group will also agree how it plans to approach the review and what the key lines of enquiry will be. The Task Group can obtain information through many different means, including face-to-face interviews; questionnaires; focus groups; site visits; reports; and written submissions. The most common witnesses are council officers, representatives from partner agencies, service users and external experts.

What happens next when the Task Group finishes?

When the Task Group has finished gathering information, officers will draft a report and the Task Group will agree what recommendations it wishes to make, ideally through consensus. The report will then be considered by the relevant O&S Committee(s) who will be asked to endorse the recommendations before the report is forwarded to the Cabinet for its consideration. If the recommendations are agreed, then the O&S Committee will monitor the implementation and outcome of the recommendations and review them, typically in 6-12 months' time.

Case Study – Early Help (Parenting) Task Group

Medway has carried out many scrutiny reviews on a wide range of topics and the reports of these can be found on the [Council's website](#). The pace of Task Groups is largely set by Members.

In 2020, the Council carried out a review into Early Help (Parenting) which was carried out at pace across 12 weeks (this is unusual though, most Task Groups take longer). The key successes of the Task Group included:

- Scope – The topic of Early Help was picked to support the Council's Ofsted improvement journey. However, Early Help as a whole is wide ranging, and therefore the Task Group set a scope focused on parenting support which enabled it to scrutinise the topic in depth and make recommendations which in turn, formed part of the subsequent Parenting Support Strategy adopted by the Council.
- Methodology – The Task Group conducted all of its activity online using MS Teams. Although fully remote might not always be preferable it should be recognised that this really helped more people to attend and did not have an impact on the Task Group's reach of gathering evidence from stakeholders. It is therefore encouraged for Task Group activity.
- Wide reach of evidence gathering – They met with a wide range of partner stakeholders at a stakeholder event, met with parents, met officers from two other best practice local authorities elsewhere in the UK and met with professional experts from within the services directly involved in Early Help both within the Council and NHS colleagues.
- Flexibility of Task Group Members – Members were readily available to attend meetings which varied between daytime and evening sessions, depending on the availability of the witnesses.
- Frequency of meetings – The flexibility of Members enabled meetings to be arranged at pace and in short frequency, which in turn helped in building the story from evidence gathering.