

**Task & Finish Group Feedback from Councillors on two Task & Finish groups during 2016/17 - Carparking and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**

| <b>Positive</b>  | <b>Negative</b>   | <b>Lessons Learnt</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Having served on other T&amp;F groups in the past, I was very impressed with this last one on HMOs. This was mainly because it was led well. It was very comprehensive and convincing with the amount of evidence gathered and taken forward... The group was reasonably cohesive, especially when some were absent!</p> <p>The general desire not to let Party differences get in the way and the desire to have consensus were quite remarkable. So choice of participants is important but because it is voluntary of course there isn't actually a choice! But ground rules can be set.</p> |   | <p>I think it would be good to appoint a coordinator if the group decides to revolve the chairing. I do think you had a disproportionate amount of work to do bringing it together. So maybe 2 coordinators to work together.</p> <p>Also we should make sure there is monitoring of the outcomes when the recommendations have gone forward.</p>   |
|  | <p>Based on a number of years sitting on these groups and if done right can be both rewarding and beneficial, it can however be disappointing for what has not been achieved and these latest T&amp;Fs fall in to the latter.</p> <p>The timings of these meetings leave a lot to be desired as they usually fall into office hours and for those that work is sometimes difficult to attend? Making improvements to the subject matter can sometimes be officer driven and therefore the councillor can sometimes feel that they haven't achieved what they have wanted to and have sometimes felt railroaded into the final decision? Making improvements to working practices is fine if that is what a T&amp;F is looking at particularly with HMOs but where there is a big financial element to be considered it can be difficult given the financial constraints that councils have to comply with and you are limited in scope of what you can do to improve things in the types of</p> | <p>So the things that need looking at are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Timings of meetings should be later?</li> <li>2 Final Recommendations should be more towards councillor driven and not officer driven?</li> <li>3 The need to understand the financial constraints a group is working under and what is wanted from the group to make improvements and efficiencies?</li> </ol> |

|  | recommendations you put forward? |  |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| <p>Given the way the (HMO) report was praised, we can't have done badly! Rotating chairs could have been a disaster, but probably meant greater ownership across the group. Different people took on different tasks, with particular praise for Colin (and officers) going to Durham conference, phoning other councils etc and so finding out so much about best practice, elsewhere I'm delighted that as a group we managed to resolve issues by continuing to discuss (some would say excessively) until a consensus was reached that everyone could sign up to. Often this led to decisions that were better than either of the original opposing views.</p>   |                                  | <p>Tacit ways of working that we didn't know were:<br/>officers are much more likely to attend meetings before 5pm minutes taken by officers for several meetings were never circulated... I never found out why not, but presumably this is something about them needing to be of a high standard before being circulated. After Andrew sent brief action points immediately after a meeting, this became the standard including with officers and it worked well</p> |
| <p>The Car Parking Charges, were helpful in that all our work has now gone towards, WDC Car Parking Strategy, as it not only highlighted the charging regime, and how the charges were arrived at, but also brought to our attention the views of various groups and what they felt raising the charges would mean to them ,as well as looking at repairs and maintenance, to existing car parks.</p> <p>The other important thing was that it made us look at Car Parking in the context of the Local Plan, which is very far reaching.</p> <p>The HMO T and F was considerably larger, and let people see I think for the first time, how many HMOS were in the towns, but also made us aware that we could get access to very useful mapping systems. Again the views of many people were taken in to account, which I think was most important. Also it highlighted many areas that needed looking into more closely, as well as letting us see how these reports are put together, working with the officers.</p> <p>Also a good mix of ages and backgrounds on this group proved</p> |                                  | <p>Could we do better? Yes probably, perhaps breaking the work down into bite size pieces, so that everyone does a fair share of the work?</p>   |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| useful.   |   |   |
| Good – cross party working and broad scope meant the issues were explored from many different angles  | Not so good - Understanding timescales (ie when to influence budget), commitments, time of officers to support  | HMO T&F set (themselves?) a very punishing schedule of almost fortnightly meetings which was quite a lot of work for officers supporting as well as Councillors.<br>Understanding which officers could help where. Perhaps more senior support/interventions at intervals?<br>Committee services officer role needs properly defining.<br>Have regular monitoring of progress against actions part of recommendations |
| Cross party pooling of opinion and ideas is healthy and constructive. We had strong officer support from Lesley and Chair support from Cllr Quinney. Officers whose remit includes parking provided detailed information which produced an invaluable evidence base. Stakeholders were consulted and provided useful input. Car parking is an important subject because of its impact on the local economy and it was appropriate for it to have been discussed by a T & F group. It is good to know that the Group's conclusions and recommendations will influence future policy. |   | T & F should be used sparingly and not seen as a panacea for every problem.   |
| Enough enthusiastic members to attend/share the tasks (HMO)   | Not enough members to attend/share the tasks (Carpark)  | majority members of any T&F should have time, energy and commitment to share tasks  |
| At least one member able to take rapid action notes for circulation and follow up after every meeting. Likewise to draft/redraft findings and conclusions.  | Officer support not always available or timely.   | rely mainly on member admin on action notes and report drafting   |
| Much information shared with both Groups by Officers  | Information often hard to store, control and access in systematic way - though admin support offered some useful initiatives on this<br>Some information (mainly Carparks) was slow to obtain or obtain in written form; one parallel major piece of work was commissioned which duplicated/overlapped with | Agree information storage/control/access systems with Officers from the outset<br>- ensure proper, full and timely information is available from Officers to minimise delay, gaps and overlaps  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   | T&F work without Group Member knowledge or involvement.   |  |
| Rotating chair of HMO did share responsibilities and approaches cross-party. Sole chair of Carpark Group made communications and admin simpler  | On balance Single Chair is preferable - or no more than 2. However Chair of Carpark Group not being member of O&S was not ideal in terms of presentation to the Committee | No more than 2 rotating Chairs. Chair(s) should preferably be members of O&S   |
| Good cross-party working across both Groups with unanimous agreed conclusions   | Some members of the Carpark Group spoke out against conclusions after publication which was unexpected and led to confusion, delay and weakened its impact                | Clear guidelines should be issued training members on how decision-making at a T&F Group may be handled - by unanimity, majority vote, minority report or whatever - and how each option then determines subsequent presentation and debate for Group members.   |
| <p>Overall, I think that the Task and Finish Group on HMOs was successful in its operation, and benefitted hugely from a way of cross-Party working that allowed members to be open and transparent with each other behind closed doors; all councillors being friendly, courteous, and trusting of each other allowed much to be discussed in a positive way which helped with the investigations, whilst on a personal level it was great to build up friendships amongst councillors from across the Council.</p> <p>In terms of Officer support, we spoke to, saw in front of us, and commissioned the work of many officers. The regularity of meeting (once every two weeks) meant that information from previous meetings was still in mind, and the shorter time frame spurred members on to make sure their actions were complete.</p> <p>Rotation of Chair also helped with this, and gave everybody more responsibility which helped spur every member of the Task and Finish Group on – there was not just one person driving it, everybody was pushing it forward.</p> |   | <p>The care at the end of the investigation to make sure that the final report was as reader friendly to any member of the public, whilst it took a number of weeks, was extremely important, and well received; care over making sure that any member of the public could easily access such Council papers is something that other Task and Finish Groups should definitely take into consideration, and there may be a learning on this for the Council in general. (The different thought processes and ideas to laying out the report to produce an easy to understand narrative was also useful for pulling together the whole report, and making its recommendations much clearer to give direction to Officers).</p> <p>The (HMO) Task and Finish Group had been given a fairly large profile within the Council, with the support of the Executive in highlighting its importance to Senior Officers, meaning that many Officers were happy to engage with the questions, queries, and directions from the Task and</p> |

Finish Group. However, this then did also lead to the Group acquiring more and more tasks and areas that it was looking into; there is perhaps a learning around more defined remits of Task and Finish Groups, with Executive and Senior Officers being mindful of what the remits of Groups were when they were commenced.

Whilst all Councillors were thankful for support from Committee Services in facilitating meetings, and writing notes, often the minutes took a long time to be put together, and perhaps did not capture all of the areas that the Group required; this led to the use of Action Lists by Group Members to keep track of what needed to be done outside of the meetings. For independent oversight there is clearly a need for members of Democratic Services to be involved in this way in Task and Finish Groups, so there either needs to be an understanding of the timeline in which minutes would be turned around, or the Group needs to have access to the draft notes (prioritising actions that need to be followed up in between meetings). For the public, it would also have been useful to have minutes and documents uploaded and available on the WDC website.