

Work of a Topic Group

1. All scrutiny meetings in Hertfordshire are 'meetings held in public' (not 'Public Meetings')
2. Topic groups in Hertfordshire normally run for one, or occasionally, two days
3. All topic groups work to a pre-prepared scoping document. The scoping document sets out what the topic group is going to do i.e. questions to be answered, any constraints on its work and who will be attending as witnesses. The scope will have been reviewed and agreed by the commissioning committee prior to issuance.
4. There should normally be no more than 4 questions for the scrutiny to address
5. Constraints identify areas that will not be covered by the scrutiny and it is the responsibility of the chairman to ensure that the scrutiny does not digress into areas that are not covered by the scoping document.
6. It is vital to keep the scrutiny focused on the questions (see 4 above). Should members believe a constraint warrants further consideration the topic group report should draw this to the attention of the commissioning committee.
7. The scoping document is drafted by the service lead officer in consultation with the assigned scrutiny officer. The commissioning committee consider the scope and amend, if necessary, and agree the questions (see 3 above).
8. Witnesses can be internal and external to the County Council.
9. Topic group members are appointed by the commissioning committee. Membership can be drawn from the entire council; however, executive members and deputy executive members are excluded from undertaking scrutiny
10. Topic groups usually have 5 members with the exception of Education related items where a schools representative may be included (i.e. parent governor representatives (PGRs) or diocesan representatives) when the topic group will have 7 members. Both Scrutiny Committees have waived political proportionality.
11. Each scrutiny has a designated chairman. The role of the chairman is to ensure that all the questions on the scope are covered. The chairman will ensure that all members are engaged and have the opportunity to raise questions. The chairman will encourage the discussion to move on if he or she believes a point has been addressed or is not relevant to this scrutiny.
12. A pre scrutiny briefing is held for the topic group members in advance of the meeting.

13. Topic group members are expected to have read all the papers in advance of the meeting.
14. Topic group members are expected to attend for the duration of the scrutiny.
15. The scrutinies run to the agenda programme and it is the responsibility of the chairman to ensure that the scrutiny keep to the agreed timetable.
16. At the end of the scrutiny the scrutiny officer summarises the conclusions and recommendations in order to obtain broad agreement as to what they should be.
17. A draft report, concentrating on the evidence and recommendations is prepared by the scrutiny officer. The details of the discussion and papers received at the scrutiny are available via Hertfordshire.gov.uk
18. Reports follow a set structure of
 - Introduction
 - Recommendations
 - Evidence
 - Conclusions
 - Members & Witnesses
 - Appendix 1: Scoping Document
 - Appendix 2: Glossary
19. The draft report is produced within 10 working days of the meeting ending. The draft is sent to the lead officer for factual checking; then onto all topic group members for comment. Deadlines are set by the scrutiny officer for receipt of comments from the lead officer and topic group members.
20. The final report is published within 15 working days of the scrutiny.
21. The final report is sent to the executive member and chief officer and copied to all participants in the scrutiny and the commissioning committee chairman and vice chairman/men.
22. It is a statutory requirement that the executive member responds to the report and its recommendations within two calendar months. A template for the executive response is provided to the executive member and lead officer on publication of the final report.
23. The response is returned to the scrutiny officer and then circulated to members of the topic group and the chairman and vice chairmen of the commissioning committee for their information. It is also placed on the next commissioning committee's agenda so all members of the committee are informed of the response.
24. At the point at which the two month executive response form is returned, the lead officer and the chairman of the topic group are given a date, approximately

six months after the scrutiny, to attend the relevant Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committee.

25. The executive member has responsibility for ensuring the template is completed for the relevant Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committee explaining what steps have been taken regarding each and every recommendation.
26. The Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committees have the responsibility for 'signing off' the recommendations as complete and/or agreeing further actions.
27. The lead officer and executive member attend the Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committee to explain what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations.
28. The chairman of the topic group will be invited to the Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committee.
29. The chairman of each Impact of Scrutiny Sub Committee will be invited to attend the next meeting of its parent committee to give comment on its findings