

Deep Level Scrutiny Mini Groups – procedure note

1 Topic selection and the Annual Work Programme

- 1.1 Mini Group review topics can be proposed by any Committee Member, and shall be agreed by the formal Scrutiny Committee as a whole. Membership shall be established at the same meeting, and a Chairman selected. Expected timescales for the review will also be set. Members are encouraged to join Mini Groups that will help develop their knowledge of new service areas, rather than Mini Groups focusing on topics of which they already have detailed knowledge.
- 1.2 Topics should lend themselves to a shorter review process than the traditional working group model, often building on longer reviews already undertaken. As such, Mini Groups will focus less on evidence-gathering and more on analysis and evaluation. An overarching theme of ‘towards a new form of public services’ will be adopted to guide the review, and emphasis will be placed on scrutinising services within the context of the new national policy framework.
- 1.3 Mini Groups are intended to provide a swift response to current issues, and consequently can arise on an ad hoc basis. Thus, it may not be possible to specify Mini Group topics in the Scrutiny Committee’s annual work programme process in September. When new topics are agreed, they will be added to the Work Programme and publicised on the Scrutiny website.
- 1.4 When compiling the Annual Work Programme, the Scrutiny Committee will give consideration to whether space should be reserved in the Programme for Mini Groups that may arise over the course of the year. Two Mini Groups are considered to be roughly equivalent in terms of time and input to one traditional working group and, in general, the principle set out in the Scrutiny Guide of limiting working groups to two per year will be extended to encompass four Mini Groups, or one traditional working group and two Mini Groups.

2 Mini Group meetings and meeting preparation

- 2.1 Once a Mini Group is established, a support officer (normally the Clerk to the Committee) will attempt to find suitable meeting dates. The relevant Executive Director(s) and Cabinet Member(s) will be alerted and invited to attend. They will not formally join the review Mini Group, but their presence is intended to promote the collaborate side of Scrutiny working rather their being present solely to be held to account.
- 2.2 Members will set aside time at the first Mini Group meeting to discuss desired outputs from the review process and to agree boundaries to the topics under

scrutiny. If the Mini Group has been established to build on a previous in-depth Scrutiny review, then a copy of that paper will be made available to Members to aid this process.

- 2.3 In order to address the need to consider service delivery within the new national policy framework, as outlined in point 1.2, the Chairman may ask officers to prepare a short summary of local thinking on the topic under scrutiny, as well as a summary of developing practice around the country. This may include ideas around developing the market of providers, sharing services, localism, transparency and citizen involvement.
- 2.4 A support officer will be present to capture main themes of the discussion and any action points arising. These notes will not be published, but will be used as an aide memiore for the Chairman when verbally updating the Scrutiny Committee on progress and outcomes.

3 Outcomes of Mini Group reviews

- 3.1 Following the Chairman's verbal update to the Scrutiny Committee at the end of the Mini Group review process, the Committee will select one or more of the following options:

- Agree to adopt and champion some or all of the suggestions for change arising from the Mini Group review. The relevant Cabinet Member(s), supported by the Executive Director(s), will then be asked to provide a response to these suggestions at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting, either outlining steps that will be taken to implement the suggestions, or alternatively explaining why this course of action will not be adopted.
- Agree that Members are satisfied with the information received during the course of the Mini Group review and that they have no further comments / wish to take no further action.
- Agree that the topic requires further time and attention. The Committee could then:
 - Grant an extension to the Mini Group to carry out further work. The Committee may wish to give specific guidance to the Mini Group as to the aspects they would like to see developed.
 - Mark the topic for a Deep Level Scrutiny session at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting. At this point the Committee may wish to identify specific officers to be brought in for further questioning.
 - Raise some general questions that can be dealt with via the standard reporting process to the next committee meeting.
 - Establish a traditional working group review with formal terms of reference.