

16 July 2024		ITEM: 8
Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Task Force Report		
Wards and communities affected: N/A	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Lucy Tricker, Overview and Scrutiny Officer		
Accountable Assistant Director: Helen Nicol, Assistant Director Legal & Governance		
Accountable Director: Daniel Fenwick, Executive Director of Corporate Services & Monitoring Officer		
This report is public		
Version: Final Version		

Executive Summary

This report outlines the background and proposed future governance of the LTC Task Force, following the General Services Committee recommendations in February 2024, which were agreed by Full Council in March 2024.

Commissioner Comments

N/A

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the continuation of the LTC Task Force until the Development Consent Order (DCO) decision is published; at which point officers will review the request for a standing or time limited LTC Task and Finish Group, in accordance with the new overview and scrutiny operating model and will present a further report to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members.**
- 1.2 **The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree that in advance of the government's DCO decision, the Place Directorate commit to providing LTC Task Force Members with regular monthly email updates regarding the scheme.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Thurrock Council has had a Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) Task Force in place since 25 September 2017, following the government's preferred route announcement on 12 April 2017. The parent committee of the LTC Task Force is the General Services Committee, but the

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Chair of the LTC Task Force reports directly to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, and when updates are appropriate.

- 2.2 The current LTC Task Force has nine Members and is not politically balanced, with equal representation from the three political groups. There are also four co-opted Members: a Thurrock Business Board Representative; a business representative; a Thames Crossing Action Group Representative, and a resident's representative.
- 2.3 The Task Force has monthly meetings scheduled (other than during pre-election period and summer), but meetings are often cancelled due to lack of business, as the work programme is dependent on the progression of the scheme. In 2022/23 three meetings were held out of ten scheduled meetings. In 2023/24 four meetings were held out of eleven scheduled meetings.
- 2.4 In September 2022, Thurrock Council entered a period of intervention by the government, following concerns regarding finances. The Commissioners examined and investigated many areas of the council including finances, major projects, and governance. Following this, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) were brought in to review governance and the scrutiny function. Their findings were reported to the Governance Recovery Board in September 2023 where they recommended a refresh of the scrutiny system, including reducing the number of committees and changing the way Task and Finish Groups were utilised. This included a proposal to remove the LTC Task Force and bring its work into the scrutiny function to provide focus and resources.
- 2.5 Following work to restructure the O&S function the General Services Committee met on 13 February 2024 to consider the CfGS' Governance Recovery Board report, and a recommendation was presented to Members to disband the LTC Task Force. Some Members commented on this recommendation as they felt that the Task Force undertook an important function holding National Highways to account whilst effectively engaging with residents and business groups. Other Members of the General Services Committee thought to the contrary and felt that the suggested Place O&S Committee would be able to accommodate the current LTC role while effectively engaging residents and stakeholders as before.
- 2.6 Members of the General Services Committee proposed, and agreed, two alternative recommendations which read as follows:
- 1.1 The Lower Thames Crossing Task Force continues as a body until such time as the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider creating an LTC Task and Finish Group.*
- 1.2 The Place O&S Committee can create two Task and Finish Groups in addition to a Lower Thames Crossing Task and Finish Group.*
- 2.7 The CfGS' governance and scrutiny recommendations were also agreed at General Services Committee on 13 February 2024, and Full Council on 20 March 2024, therefore reducing the number of O&S committees to three and limiting the number of Task and Finish Groups to two per committee. It was also agreed through the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol that Task and Finish Groups be limited in scope and produce tangible outcomes.
- 2.8 General Services Committee and Full Council agreed to grant an exemption to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to allow them to have three Task and Finish Groups if the LTC Task and Finish Group is agreed.

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3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Place O&S Members are being asked to endorse the continuation of the current LTC Task Force until the government publish their decision regarding the DCO. At such time, officers will revisit the request for an LTC Task and Finish Group and will produce an options document for Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to consider.
- 3.2 The Task Force will receive regular email updates from the Place Directorate including any updates to the scheme, government decision process, or updates from National Highways. This ensures that Task Force Members maintain oversight of the LTC until the DCO decision is made, at which point this will be reviewed.
- 3.3 The Task Force Terms of Reference, as agreed in 2017, will remain in place.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Place O&S Members are being asked to agree the recommendations, based on the recommendations from General Services Committee in February 2024 and taking into consideration the guidelines from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 This report has been through internal governance processes, and therefore the Senior Leadership Team have been consulted on proposals.
- 5.2 The report has also been discussed with the CfGS to ensure the Council is in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The LTC scheme could have a major impact on the borough if agreed, so it is important that the Council consider the scheme through appropriate channels. This includes input from democratically elected Members.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Finance Manager

7 March 2024

There are no financial implications associated with the report. If any financial impacts are identified in future, a separate report or briefing note will be presented to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**
Governance Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer
8 March 2024

The recommendations set out in the report reflect previous Council decisions for the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee structure operating in Thurrock for the municipal year 2024/25.

This committee is amongst other things is responsible for considering and holding to account the relevant cabinet member(s) and Director(s) for the delivery of the council's plans and financial strategy as they relate and impact on the Borough's amenities, infrastructure, local economy, development, and community-based services.

Under the new structure and responsibilities for Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out in the Council's Constitution, this committee has power to appoint up to 2 task and finish groups per year, providing these can demonstrate a positive and necessary contribution to the council's priorities. Task and finish groups to comprise of up to 6 members and should complete its work within 10 weeks. (d) The Proper Officer shall maintain a list of all task & finish groups, including: (i) membership; (ii) terms of reference; (iii) objective (iv) reporting deadlines.

As stated in paragraph 2.8 of this report, an exemption has been approved by Full Council for this Committee to appoint up to 2 Task and Finish Groups in addition to a Lower Thames Crossing Task and Finish Group if recommendation options 1.1 (a) or 1.1 (b) is agreed.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement & Project Monitoring Officer
8 March 2024

The report does not have any direct diversity or equality implications. Any direct implications will be considered within committee or Task and Finish Group reports, and residents will be engaged through the democratic process and potential co-opting.

7.4 Risks

There are several risks associated with this decision, namely the appropriate governance and engagement around decision-making related to the LTC, and the ability for governance teams to support additional committees or bodies outside core work, considering the intervention. The report ensures that LTC decision-making is properly addressed through the activity of the relevant O&S Committee.

7.5 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

If the Lower Thames Crossing scheme goes ahead, it may increase health inequalities within the borough, for example through changes to air quality.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- General Services Committee, 13 February 2024: Overview and Scrutiny Function report - [Agenda for General Services Committee on Tuesday, 13th February, 2024, 7.00 pm | Thurrock Council](#)

9. **Appendices to the report**

N/A

Report Author:

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Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Democratic, Scrutiny and Members Services