

16 July 2024		ITEM: 9
Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Future of the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group		
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 two options being presented to Members regarding the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group which are to decommission the Group, or restructure and re-scope the Group. Senior Officers are recommending option A (to decommission the T&F Group) due to the lack of substantive work completed in 2023/24, and the lack of officer resources to support additional T&F Groups.

Included within the report is information regarding the background to the Task and Finish Group throughout 2023/24, officer views, and recommended governance arrangements.

Commissioner Comments

N/A

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Place O&S Members to choose one of the two options presented below:

- (a) To decommission the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group. This is the recommendation supported by senior officers.**
- (b) To restructure and rescope the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group, bringing the Terms of Reference in line with the new ways of working for the overview and scrutiny function.**

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

Version 1 - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input

1.2 If Members choose Option B: Members to comment and suggest priorities, activities and tangible outcomes for the Task and Finish Group.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 At the June 2023 meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the delivery of private and housing stock within the borough.
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group first met in August 2023 where a Chair and Vice-Chair were elected; the purpose and aims of the Group were discussed; the Terms of Reference were agreed; and a presentation was received regarding HRA development activity.
- 2.3 The purpose and aims of the Group were agreed as *“to create a responsive working group to discuss Thurrock Council’s capacity to deliver major projects in regard to private and housing stock homes. To discuss major new builds, look at those partnerships who successfully delivered homes, those partnerships that were non-successful, look at examples of what went well v not so well and analyse the differences. To work alongside the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee members in achieving this”*.
- 2.4 In total the Committee met twice between August 2023 (when the Group was established) and February 2024 (when the Group agreed to disband). In addition, three meetings were cancelled in this period due to lack of business and lack of officer resource and capacity. No tangible outcomes are evidenced, nor have any issues progressed during these meetings, and most planned activities as outlined within the Terms of Reference were not completed.
- 2.5 The Task and Finish Group met for the final time in February 2024 where they received a verbal update regarding lessons learnt from Purfleet Regeneration and TRL; and discussed the future of the Group.
- 2.6 At this meeting, Members also discussed the local plan consultation, and wanted to ensure that regular work on the Local Plan was included within the new O&S structure to ensure that members of the public were aware of any updates. Members also considered the work of the Group so far and the difficulty of holding meetings due to the busy municipal calendar schedule. Members asked that the Task and Finish Group be disbanded, following agreement from Housing O&S, but agreed that the Chair of the relevant O&S Committee in 2024/25 be informed of the Task and Finish Group’s work for their consideration within the work programme. The full minutes can be found online and are listed as a background paper at section 8 of this report.
- 2.7 In accordance with the Task and Finish Group’s Terms of Reference, only the Housing O&S Committee could approve to disband the Group. A briefing note was therefore presented to Housing O&S Members in March 2024, which outlined the Task and Finish Group’s wish to disband.
- 2.8 Housing O&S Members discussed the briefing note, including the work undertaken by the Group and the importance of housing within Thurrock, and disagreed with the recommendation from the Task and Finish Group to disband. Housing O&S Members agreed that the Task and Finish Group should continue their work.

- 2.9 Therefore, a report is being presented to the Place O&S Committee, as the new parent committee, to determine the most appropriate way for Members to discuss and consider Thurrock Council's capacity to deliver major projects in regard to private and housing stock homes.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Option A: to decommission the Task and Finish Group.

- 3.1 Option A agrees to disband and decommission the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group. Any reports on private or housing stock could be included within the standard Place O&S committee process through formal committee reports agreed by Members/officers as part of the work programming process, briefing notes, informal meetings, or spotlight events.
- 3.2 The Chair, Vice-Chair and wider Committee Members will be involved in the work programming process under the new structure, and can request reports, presentations, or briefing notes as and when issues arise, or officers can suggest reports for scrutiny. These reports and presentations can be heard through a variety of different avenues, including but not limited to the formal committee meetings. Residents will continue to be involved with scrutiny as they maintain the ability to ask questions and make statements on any reports contained within an agenda.
- 3.3 This option is recommended by officers as it is in line with best practice governance guidelines from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and ensures that Thurrock Council are meeting recommendations set out within the Best Value Inspection and within the governance improvement journey. It also ensures that work is not replicated, and resources are allocated to committees and Task and Finish Groups effectively.
- 3.4 If in future Members feel that there is not enough capacity within the standard Committee process a Task and Finish Group regarding housing could be established.

Option B: to restructure and rescope the Task and Finish Group.

- 3.5 Option B agrees that Place O&S can restructure and rescope the current Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group to align with the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol and recommendations from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, as outlined in the report to General Services Committee on 13 February 2024 and as agreed by Full Council on 20 March 2024.
- 3.6 This means that the Task and Finish Group should be time limited to a maximum of 10-weeks and provide tangible outcomes that benefit Thurrock Council from either a financial, recovery or governance perspective.
- 3.7 If Members agree to rescope the Task and Finish Group, in accordance with recommendation 1.2, Members will need to suggest the priorities of the Group, potential activities, and tangible outcomes that the Group could deliver. O&S Officers, in consultation with Housing colleagues, will then draft a new Terms of Reference and a scoping document, including potential activities and outcomes, for agreement by Members at a future Place O&S meeting.

- 3.8 Members should note that senior officers are concerned that a separate Task and Finish Group would not be conducive to efficient and effective working, as it could significantly reduce officer capacity and resource. Members should also be aware that a cross-party Local Plan Working Group remains in place, which will discuss housing stock across the borough within a Local Plan context. For specific larger housing projects Council-wide steering groups which include Members are often put in place to oversee progress, provide challenge, and monitor developments. There remains concern that an additional Task and Finish Group would replicate work already being undertaken through other forums.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Place O&S Committee are being asked to comment and decide whether to decommission or restructure the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group.
- 4.2 Members are asked to take into consideration the views of the original Task and Finish Group, Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, senior officers, and the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol agreed at Full Council on 20 March 2024.

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

- 5.1 This report has been through internal governance processes including the Senior Leadership Team.
- 5.2 The contents of the report have also been discussed with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) as part of ongoing officer meetings.

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

- 6.1 Private and housing stock within Thurrock may have a large impact on residents and local communities so it is important that any reports on this issue are considered through the appropriate governance channels.
- 6.2 Housing within Thurrock will also be important to the emerging Local Plan, which has a large corporate and resident impact for the Council. It will be necessary to view any housing decisions or issues within the context of the ongoing Local Plan consultations and discussions.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Rob Chimani**
Accountant

20 March 2024

This report has no direct financial implications. If any financial implications arise these can be included directly within any Task and Finish Group or Committee reports. Any Task and Finish Group will have impact on officer resource and capacity.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Jayne Middleton-Albooye**
Interim Head of Legal Services
20 March 2024

It is a statutory requirement as set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011 for all authorities operating executive arrangements to establish overview and scrutiny committees.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny committees were revised by Full Council on 20th March 2024 and the options set out in this report for decision are matters that fall within the remit of the newly set up Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

There are no diversity or equality implications associated with this report. Residents will be able to get involved democratically through the Committee or Task and Finish Group governance processes.

7.4 Risks

The risks surrounding this report relate to governance, as all issues need to be considered through the appropriate channels and in line with the new ways of working for the scrutiny function as outlined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny from recommendations within the Best Value Inspection. There is also a risk surrounding officer resource and capacity for the overview and scrutiny function, as well as Task and Finish Groups and work outside the core objectives.

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

There are no other implications associated with this report.

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):

Version Control (delete as appropriate)

Version 1 - First draft ready for DMT, SLT and Commissioner input

- Minutes of the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group – 6 February 2024: [Minutes Template \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](https://www.thurrock.gov.uk)
- Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 5 March 2024 – [Minutes Template \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](https://www.thurrock.gov.uk)

9. Appendices to the report

- N/A

Report Author:

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Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Democratic, Scrutiny and Members Services