

PROTOCOL FOR WORKING PARTIES &
WORKING GROUPS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 There is no legal definition of a working party. Generally, however, a working party consists of a small group of members (but with officers in attendance at meetings to provide support and advice) with the remit to consider policy development and review and other specific matters. They can have a particular role in relation to projects which need to be completed within a specified time period (task and finish based work)
- 1.2 A working party/group conducts its business on a less formal basis than that of a committee. It does not have any decision-making powers and can only make recommendations to the body from which it was formed, or to another body as the parent body decides, or to an officer.
- 1.3 At NNDC, the terms “working party” and ‘working group’ refers to all informal bodies appointed by the Council, its committees, including the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. It does not include sub-committees. These are covered Chapter 5, section 3 of the Constitution.
- 1.4 The purpose of this protocol is to provide guidance in relation to the operation of working parties and working groups.

2. APPOINTMENT OF WORKING PARTIES & GROUPS

- 2.1 The Council, its committees and Cabinet (the Executive) may establish a working party/group or amend the terms of reference or membership of existing working parties/groups. In establishing such bodies, the appointing body will determine the precise terms of reference (having regard to the terms of reference of any other working parties), initial membership and, if appropriate, duration of the working party or group.
- 2.1 At NNDC, to differentiate between their roles, working parties will operate on a long-term basis, working on projects or policy development and making recommendations through to their appointing body. Due to their higher profile, working parties may hold their meetings in public and allow the public to ask questions or make statements. Working groups, however, will usually operate on a short-term basis, with a limited remit – often a single, focused task or project.
- 2.2 In exercising the powers under paragraph 2.1 above, the appointing body shall ensure that member and officer time and the financial resources of the Council are used in such way that is considered to be in the best interests of the Council and local residents.
- 2.3 It is good practice for working parties and groups to be appointed in accordance with the principles of political balance. Cabinet can choose to appoint on a non-politically balanced basis if the remit of the body requires it. This would be an exception however and there is an expectation that generally, working parties/groups will reflect the political balance of the Council.

3. AGENDAS, REPORTS AND MINUTES AND METHODS OF WORKING

- 3.1 Working parties/groups may be required to act in the manner of “consultative panels” receiving reports from officers on matters on which they will be expected to provide guidance to the decision maker. On other occasions they could be tasked with

investigating policy issues and will be expected to formulate recommendations for the relevant appointing body which could be Council or one of its committees (including Overview & Scrutiny Committee) and Cabinet.

- 3.2 Working parties appointed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will often take the form of a consultative panel and must undertake their work in accordance with the principles of overview and scrutiny as set out in Chapter 4 of the Constitution and in the Executive / Scrutiny Protocol. In these instances, the recommendations of the working party/ panel will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the appointing sub-committee before they are forwarded to the appropriate decision-making body.
- 3.3 An agenda for a working party/group meeting will be sent out prior to a meeting of the working party setting out its business. For meetings of working parties held in public, agendas will be despatched in line with statutory requirements.
- 3.4 Minutes will be taken by a member of the Democratic Services team. They will be reported to a subsequent meeting of the appointing body for information. If recommendations are made they will be debated and then formally voted on.
- 3.5 Working parties/groups may consider whether to invite external representatives e.g. stakeholders or business representatives and members of the public to assist with their work. The role of such representatives would be to act as advisors to the working party using their particular expertise/experience.

4. LOCATION OF MEETINGS

- 4.1 As working parties/groups are non-decision making and can operate in a less formal manner than committees, it may be appropriate to hold them remotely. However, any working parties that allow the **public** to attend will be held in person – usually in the Council Chamber. This reflects best practice and is in line with NNDC committee meetings which are open to the public.

5. ACCESS TO MEETINGS BY THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- 5.1 Details of meetings that the press and public can attend will be set out on the Council's published notice of meetings. As for formal committee meetings, if an exempt matter is discussed, the press and public will be asked to leave the meeting. As stated above, meetings of working parties open to the public will take place in person.

6. ACCESS TO INFORMATION BY THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

- 6.1 Agendas for those working party meetings that are open to the press and public will be published on the Council's website. Meeting dates will be advertised in advance. Exempt information will be marked as confidential.

7. ACCESS TO INFORMATION BY NON WORKING PARTY MEMBERS

- 7.1 All elected members will be able to access copies of agendas and supporting information. They can attend meetings of working parties/groups as an observer if they wish.

8. INTERESTS OF MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

- 8.1 Elected members, co-opted members and officers acting in an official capacity when attending meetings of working parties shall declare any personal interests and shall not take part in any discussions in which they have an interest and withdraw from a meeting in accordance with the respective Codes of Conduct for Members and Employees.

9. PROCEDURES AT MEETINGS OF WORKING PARTIES

9.1 Quorum

A working party/group must have a quorum of three if it consists of fewer than nine elected members.

9.2 Election of Chairperson

Working parties/groups shall elect a chairperson at their first meeting. In the case of the chairperson being absent a chairperson shall be elected for that meeting. The chairperson will have a second or casting vote.

9.3 Formulation of Recommendations

A recommendation arising from the deliberations of a working party or group will normally be reached by a consensus. It may, however, be appropriate to determine a way forward by taking a vote on a proposal. In such circumstances, the recommendations before the working party shall be determined by a simple majority of those members present in the room at the time proposal was put.