

23 February 2012

Extract of report

3.6 Access to meetings and papers in respect of Scrutiny Task Groups

3.6.1 When the current scrutiny arrangements were introduced it was determined that scrutiny task groups should be treated in the same way as formal committees with agenda and minutes being published on the web and the meetings open to the public.

One of the problems which occurred following a meeting of the Hospital Parking Charges Task Group at which the press was present was that an inappropriate quote was published in the paper.

The purpose of task groups is to brainstorm ideas and thoughts on a specific topic with a view to making recommendations to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. If the press and public are present there is always the risk that a "random" comment made as part of the discussion may be taken out of context and presented as a firm proposal. This can set hares running unnecessarily. It is also important to encourage a good flow of ideas at Task Groups to ensure that all aspects of the topic are covered and having the press and public present can stifle such debates.

We have consulted other local authorities to see what they do with regard to task groups and most responded that they did not treat them as public meetings.

Obviously recommendations made to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee will become public, along with the background papers which would include Task Group reports and minutes.

3.6.2 It is suggested that Task Groups be treated as informal meetings and not publicised but that the Task Group reports and minutes be included as background papers (and therefore accessible) once the Task Group's final recommendations are submitted to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.