

Terms of Reference

Sifting / Pre-Meetings for Committees/Scrutiny Panels /Joint Panels

1. Purpose

The purpose of sifting or pre-meetings is to ensure that formal meetings are efficient, focused, and informed.

These preparatory sessions allow officers and Members to:

- Review and prioritise agenda items
- Clarify complex or contentious issues
- Identify items requiring further information or deferral
- Ensure alignment with strategic objectives and statutory responsibilities
- Confirm arrangements for the formal meeting

2. Membership

Sifting/Pre meetings will typically include:

- Chair and Vice-Chair of the relevant committee/panel.
- Lead officers or Senior Officers responsible for agenda items
- Democratic Services representative
- Cabinet Member(s) (where appropriate)
- Monitoring Officer and Finance officers (as required)

3. Frequency and Timing of Meetings

- Sifting/Pre-meetings will be scheduled approximately 7–14 working days prior to the formal meeting and can be held remotely as required.
- Additional sifting meetings may be convened at the discretion of the Chair or Monitoring Officer as required.

4. Scope of Discussion

Sifting/Pre-meetings will focus on:

- Reviewing the draft agenda and supporting reports
- Identifying if further information needs to be included in the reports.
- Identifying items for deferral, withdrawal, or urgent inclusion
- Clarifying officer recommendations and legal implications
- Assessing public interest, media sensitivity, or reputational risk

- Ensuring completeness and accuracy of documentation
- Identifying future items and determining the work programme.
- Consider extending invite to other members (e.g other Panel Members and Portfolio Holders.)
- Determine if any communication/pre-briefing with other Council bodies or elected Members is needed before the meeting.

5. Outcomes

- Finalisation of the agenda for the formal meeting
- Clear guidance to officers on any required amendments or supplementary information and deadlines for submission of final reports.
- Identification and determination of items requiring special handling (e.g., exempt reports, public speakers, urgent items)
- Confirmation of any declarations of interest or potential conflicts

6. Confidentiality

- Discussions in pre-meetings are informal and not part of the public record.
- All participants must respect confidentiality, especially regarding exempt or sensitive items.

7. Record Keeping

- Democratic Services will maintain a summary of actions arising from the pre-meeting.
- These notes are for internal use and will not be published.

8. Governance and Compliance

- Pre-meetings are advisory and do not replace formal decision-making processes.
- All decisions must be made in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Standing Orders, and relevant legislation

9. Access to documents

- Agendas for formal meetings will be published 5 clear days before the date of the meeting
- Agendas will be available to the public via the website and exempt documents will be available internally via the Intranet.
- Members can access the agenda through Modern.gov including exempt reports.

- Democratic Services will update the meeting request with a copy or link for the agenda.