

Neighbourhood Planning

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How to write a terms of reference

A toolkit for neighbourhood
planners

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What is a terms of reference?

A terms of reference is a document that supports a neighbourhood planning steering group - it provides structure around who will do what, and what the responsibilities of each member are.

Steering groups

A parish or town council may choose to establish an advisory committee or sub-committee under [section 102\(4\) of the Local Government Act 1972](#) and appoint local people (who need not be parish councillors) to those bodies.

Members of such committees or sub-committees would have voting rights under [section 13\(3\), \(4\)\(e\) or \(4\)\(h\) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989](#).

This is also known as a neighbourhood plan steering group: a group of people (approximately 10 - 15 members) who are the driving force behind a neighbourhood plan. Key members of this group include the Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.

What does a Terms of Reference cover?

A terms of reference document provides the structure and detail of how the steering group operates and the member's within it. The document usually includes the following:

- Background
- Purpose/Objectives
- Principle
- Tasks and activities
- Group membership
- Roles
- Meeting arrangements
- Finance
- Changes to the TOR
- Dissolution of the group

It should also include information on how you appoint and dismiss members of a steering group.

To consider...

Members of a neighbourhood planning steering group should be aware of and consider:

- The way the group will work (for example, how it will represent the whole community and not just the views of group members)?
- Whether people being asked to join a group as a largely strategic, advisory role or are they being asked to do the work?
- Being clear about the purpose and the member's roles should ensure you find the right people.

Prior training

It is recommended that all members get prior training in both neighbourhood planning and in the areas that they are expected to cover in their role on the steering group. This can save significant time during the process.

Stay transparent

The relationship between any group and the formal functions of the town or parish council should be transparent to the wider public. The terms of reference for a steering group or other body should be published and the minutes of meetings made available to the public.

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