



Llais Cynghorau Cymuned a Thref yng Nghymru
The Voice of Community and Town Councils in Wales

Practice Development Note 9

Terms of Reference for Council Meetings

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OVW Practice Development Note 9

Terms of Reference for Council Meetings

A simple guide for Community and Town Councils

Action	Purpose	Timescale	At-a-glance timescale
1. What do we mean by terms of reference?			
<p>1.1 Any committee, subcommittee, joint-committee, working group or task-and-finish group should have a clear understanding of the nature of business which it will transact and debate.</p> <p>1.2 This is usually set out in a document describing those areas which the relevant body can expect to deal with. These guidelines are commonly referred to as terms of reference.</p> <p>(For ease of reference, this document generally uses the term 'committee' to describe the type of body referred to in 1.1 above.)</p>	<p>Terms of reference provide an overarching framework for the work of the committee.</p> <p>They provide clarity, certainty, and direction for those who sit on the committee and those who support it.</p>	<p>Terms of reference should be in place before each committee begins its year of business, or at the start of a project for any working group.</p>	<p>Ensure that terms of reference are approved for each committee or group. This would normally require a Council decision.</p>

Action	Purpose	Timescale	At-a-glance timescale
2. What should they cover? Some examples for you.			
<p>2.1 There are few rules about what the terms of reference should include. Here are some headings which could be included though:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of the committee • Membership • Arrangements for decisions, such as any rules about a quorum • Frequency of meetings • Reporting processes – who does the committee report to? • Delegations. 	To establish a clear framework for the work of the committee.	N/A	N/A
<p>2.2 One Voice Wales can provide model forms of terms of reference for some types of committee. Contact Paul Egan pegan@onevoicewales.wales or your Development Officer Here are also some examples from around Wales.</p>			

<p>2.3 Some Councils, such as Pontypool Community Council and Barry Town Council have produced a comprehensive document which addresses key areas for each committee.</p> <p>2.4 Some Councils, such as Brecon Town Council, have produced a summary of the areas of responsibility for each committee.</p> <p>2.5 Many other Councils have established committees with responsibility for key areas of activity. Here is an example of a Finance Committee from Radyr and Morganstown.</p> <p>2.6 Other Councils have an Appeals Committee that deals not only with staffing or performance, but also appeals relating to the consideration of complaints. OVW can provide a Model terms of reference that can be adapted.</p>			
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Action	Purpose	Timescale	At-a-glance timescale
3. Which committees etc. should you have?			
<p>3.1 Again, there are no rules about this. Most observers would expect a Council to establish committees with responsibility for areas such as finance, personnel, appeals, environment, planning, events and perhaps policy. Some of these areas could be combined for administrative convenience if there was sufficient correlation between the work areas. Working groups could be established for a particular purpose, such as to oversee a building project or arrange a community celebration.</p> <p>3.2 The above examples from Pontypool and Barry include most of these key areas, and a few others.</p>	<p>A Council should consider establishing such committees as it will help it manage its business effectively, making the best use of Member and Officer time. The scope of the Council's responsibilities and size of budget will be relevant in this context.</p>	<p>Committees etc. should be appointed at the Annual Council Meeting. Other bodies can be appointed as the business of the Council develops.</p>	<p>Review which committees etc. you need annually.</p>
<p>3.3 A Council can arrange for any of its functions to be carried out by a committee, subcommittee, or officer. Councils such as Abergavenny Town</p>		<p>There are set timescales for decisions such as setting the precept and approving accounts.</p>	<p>See Practice Development Note (1)</p>

Council have produced a comprehensive Scheme of Delegations.

3.4 **NB** the following functions should only be carried out by the Full Council though:

- setting the final budget or the precept (Council Tax Requirement).
- approving accounting statements.
- approving the annual governance statement.
- borrowing.
- writing off bad debts.
- declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence.
- addressing recommendations in any report from the internal or external auditors.

3.5 The Council may impose limits on other delegations, such as a financial limit to grants awarded under delegated powers.

Action	Purpose	Timescale	At-a-glance timescale
4. How often should they be reviewed?			
4.1 The Council should review terms of reference of committees etc. annually. This could be done at the Annual Council Meeting.	To ensure that terms of reference remain fit for purpose and reflect any changes in policy or legislation.	Annually	This could be done at the Annual Council Meeting.
4.2 The terms of reference should then be reported to the next committee meeting and included early on the agenda.	To ensure that the committee fully understands its role.	At the first meeting following the Annual Council Meeting.	At the first meeting following the Annual Council Meeting.
4.3 For working groups and other ad hoc bodies, terms of reference should be agreed at the outset. This is usually a decision of Council but could be put in place by the group itself depending on circumstances.	To ensure that the group fully understands its role.	At the first meeting.	At the first meeting.

Some key tips:

- Make sure that terms of reference are in place for all committees, subcommittees, working groups etc. Keep them under review.
- Make sure that all committee members understand the terms of reference.
- If you are creating a committee for the first time, contact One Voice Wales for help with model terms of reference. Look at other Councils to learn from their examples.
- It is important that terms of reference provide clarity to guide the work of the committee. Consider making your terms of reference flexible though to respond to changing circumstances Maybe add “ Any other matters, which, for reasons of expediency, are referred to this committee” to create an agile organisation.