



ESSEX QUALITY REVIEW PANEL | MEMBERS' GUIDE

ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



County Hall, Chelmsford
Essex, CM1 1QH

T: 0333 013 7271

Newhall Be, Harlow - image Courtesy of Alison Brooks Architects

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86 - 92 (evens)
William Hunter Way
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MONTAZZO PLACE
FLATS 86-92
WILLIAM HUNTER WAY,
BRENTWOOD
CM14 4EN



1.0 Introduction

Introduction to the Quality Review Panel

The Essex Planning Officers Association in partnership with Place Services has established the Essex Quality Review Panel (EQRP) and the Uttlesford Quality Review Panel (UQRP).

Essex is one of the UKs fastest growing regions through its close links to London as well as its well-defined infrastructure and economy, the built environment is developing fast and the requirement for high quality design has never been as important.

These QRPs will ensure delivery and promotion of high-quality new developments through the creation of good design, sustainability, and improved quality, creating better places and environments to work and live in the County.

A Quality Review Panel provides a well-established method of offering independent and impartial guidance on the design of new buildings, landscapes, and public space.



The Echoes, Grays - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

The Purpose of this Document

This document is aimed at the QRP's current pool of members, as well as potential future members who may be interested in joining the panel. It explains how the QRP process works and incorporates information on how members may get the most value from the quality review process.

It gives practical guidance on how the process works, communications and information you will receive, including briefing documents and ground rules for the Review session.

Quality Review Panels are a well-established way of improving the quality of design outcomes in the built environment, and it is now recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023), as quoted below:

"133. Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life⁵¹. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels."



St Chads, Tilbury - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

Our Principles & USP

The Panel's objective is to encourage high quality design, sustainability, environmental infrastructure and community coherence within Essex. Each panel will be individually tailored to suit the projects aims and outcomes where panel members will be called upon to reflect the need and requirement of an application. The QRP does this by not only striving to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design, but also considering the wider aspects of what makes a fully cohesive community.

Other elements such as heritage, health and wellbeing, sustainable energy and public art are all incorporated. This is what separates the EQRP from more traditional Design Review Panel formats.

The purpose of the QRP is to raise the quality of the built environment and not to question the principle of development. The QRP will be available to all who would wish to use it, and is expected to be of particular aid where quality and design is at the forefront of discussions at pre-app stage or earlier.

For the QRP to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust, transparent and collaborative process. It must also offer consistently high standards in the quality of its advice. These standards can be summarised in the key eleven principles (see overleaf).

You have signed up to an open and transparent review process in which all information is circulated beforehand, and all the main discussions occur with the Panel, the Local Planning Authority (LPA), and the Applicant in the same

room. This is to ensure that everyone is properly briefed and has an input into the process with all parties present. The output of the meeting is a Report which accurately records the Panel's feedback in the review.

It is also important that the Panel is independent of the LPA, and the Applicant and give commentary unencumbered by any conflicts of interest. All reviews are conducted in the context of and referring to National and Local Policy on design which should align with the principles of the National Design Guide and the Essex Design Guide . We encourage you to familiarise yourself with these documents and applicable Local Policy.

All feedback provided by the Panel will be made in accordance with the set review principles stated within this section of the document.

Quality Review Principles:

- 1** **Independent** – it is conducted by people who are unconnected with the scheme's promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that conflicts of interest do not arise.
- 2** **Expert** - the advice is delivered by suitably trained people who are experienced in design, who know how to criticise constructively and whose standing and expertise is widely acknowledged.
- 3** **Multidisciplinary** - the advice combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, town planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment.
- 4** **Accountable** - the Quality Review Panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public. This should be ingrained within the panel's terms of reference.
- 5** **Impartial** - the advice is informed by independent experts, people who are unconnected with the scheme's promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that any potential conflicts of interest are managed in an open and transparent way.
- 6** **Transparent** – the panel's remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.
- 7** **Proportionate** – it is used on projects whose significance, at either a local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.
- 8** **Timely** - the advice is conveyed as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid a great deal of wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.
- 9** **Advisory** - the Quality Review Panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.
- 10** **Objective** – it appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.
- 11** **Accessible** – its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and clients can all understand and use.



The Team

Place Services have created, manage and deliver the services offered through this panel.

Place Services are a leading public sector provider of integrated environmental assessment, planning, design and management services. Their combination of specialist skills and experience means that they are uniquely qualified to help public organisations meet the requirements of the planning process, create practical design solutions and deliver environmental stewardship.

The panel is managed by Jason Yates, Sam Williams and Colette Portway with Rosie Follett, Neha Patil, Alexandra Wightman and Khwezi Mdlalose acting as the Panel Coordinators. Their experience and skills demonstrate the drive for high quality design throughout Essex and the UK.

Contact Us

We're always interested to hear from you regarding the EQRP, regardless if you want to provide us some feedback, become a panel member or just interested in finding out more surrounding the Panel, you can contact us in the following ways:

Essex Design Guide

Email: essexdesignguide@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 6840

Website: www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/qualitypanel



Panel Manager - Jason Yates

Email: jason.yates@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 7271

Mobile: 07740901097

Jason's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQRP, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



Panel Manager - Sam Williams

Email: Sam.Williams@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 3136

Mobile: N/A

Sam's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQRP, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.

Panel Manager - Colette Portway



Email: Colette.portway@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 03330 321588

Mobile: 07353103240

Colette's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQRP, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



ESSEX QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

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Panel Coordinator - Rosie Follett



Email: Rosie.follett@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 9493

Mobile: N/A

Rosie serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Khwezi Mdlalose

Email: Khwezi.Mdlalose@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 032 0674

Mobile: N/A

Khwezi serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.

Panel Coordinator - Neha Patil



Email: neha.patil@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 9313

Mobile: N/A

Neha serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Alexandra Wightman

Email: Alexandra.Wightman@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 8413

Mobile: N/A

Alexandra serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.

2.0 What to Expect During a Review

The Essex Quality Review Panel will be based around a structured format where it is felt this provides the most productive and structured outcomes.

The panel will be formed of at least five panel members who will include the Chair, Panel Manager from Place Services who will arrange, record the panel and compile the panel report. It is recommended that LPA officers involved with the application site would attend the panel; these could include the case officer, landscape, urban design, conservation or highways officer. Any external involvement such as Historic England may also be invited to the review. We also encourage elected members to observe quality review panels to gain an understanding of the discussions that input into a panel report.

The panel will be made up of the following:

- Panel Chair
- Four Panel Members
- Panel Management
- Applicant and Team

Additionally:

- Planning Case Officer / Representative from Local Authority
- External Consultants (Historic England, Highways, etc.)
- Council / Ward Member (Observer)

Panels will be offered on either an online, half day or full day basis. This will depend on the size, complexity, requirements of a site visit and how developed project proposals may be. The panel manager will confirm or recommend the panel format during the request process.

Panels in most cases will require a site visit by the chair and panel members. Again, should this be required, a site meeting will be recommended and scheduled in before a review. Depending on the location, the panel review can be organised locally to a site to ensure a full review is achievable within one panel review.

The need for a site visit will be agreed between the Panel Chair and Panel Manager prior to the meeting date. Those attending site will consist of the Panel Chair, Panel Members, Panel Manager and Local Authority representative (Case Officer). Should other parties wish to attend this will be considered by the Panel Chair on a case by case basis.

Panels will be formally structured to ensure the applicant has sufficient time to present their design and concepts while allowing suitable time to ensure a constructive discussion can be held around the feedback provided.

Disciplines covered across the EQRP Panel Members

The Essex Quality Review Panel is proud of the members it is able to offer across the County. The Panel comprises of a range of professionalisms responding to the coverage the Panel is able to cover. All Panel Members and Chairs have key experience and links to Essex to ensure a panel is constructed to provide high quality advice for applicants and their teams.

We are always looking to recruit panel members as part of the Essex Quality Review Panel. The Panel is open to the following professions:

- Architecture
- Landscape Architecture
- Urban Design
- Ecology
- Heritage and Conservation
- Sustainability
- Health/Wellbeing/Active Design
- Arboriculture
- Garden Communities
- Public Art
- Digital Technology
- Transport
- Engineering/drainage



3.0 The Quality Review Process and EQRP Structures

Background Briefing

Prior to the review session, the panel management team will provide the members with any additional background information not included within the agenda, for example; additional contextual information / site photographs, etc. along with the Case Officer's briefing report containing a summary of the local authority's views on the application, and relevant planning context.

This period also allows the panel members to establish any key issues that have been identified within the scheme that need to be explored during the formal discussions. If the project is one that has been reviewed previously by the EQRP, then members who are not familiar with the project will be made fully aware of any key issues arising from any previous involvement, to ensure consistency of the approach within the session and subsequent comments made within the issued report.

Panel Discussion

Following on from the applicant's presentation, there will be an opportunity for the members ask questions and any areas for further clarifications in turn, before proceeding onto the formal panel discussion, led by the Chair. Although the EQRP encourages panel members to engage with each other's points in an exploratory manner, it is important that each member expresses his/her views on the project proposals in a very clear and concise manner, in order to aid a succinct written report of the discussions.



Discussions Summary

Following on from the discussions, the Panel Chair will then have the opportunity to summarise the main issues covered within the session, providing the key headlines for the applicant team to take away from the detailed feedback provided. If any member feels that an important issue was not covered or sufficiently detailed within the summary, the Chair will invite he/she to raise their respective point at this stage. This is important, as the content of the written report to be issued will be strictly based upon the panel's views and opinions expressed within the open discussion, and not any thoughts shared after the conclusion of the session.

Internal Reflection

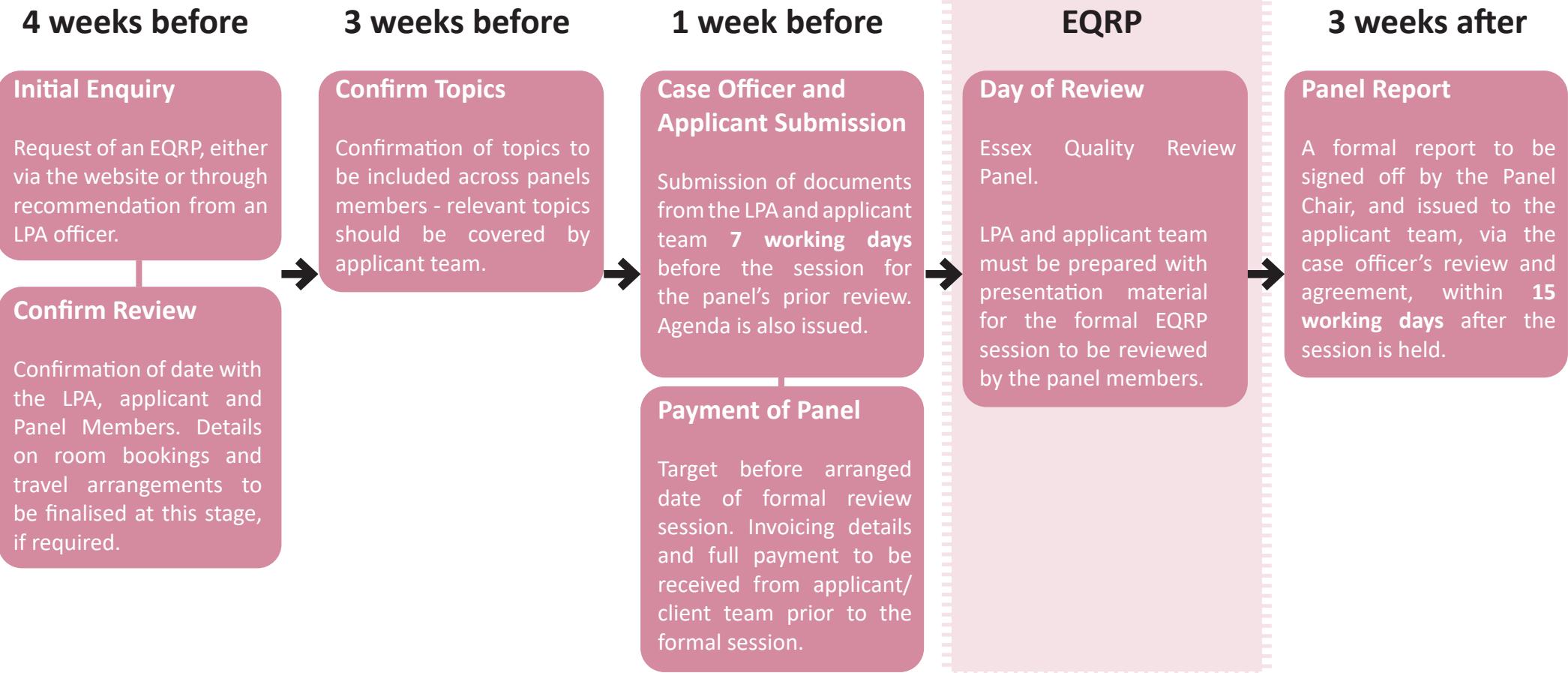
Once the session has formally concluded, there will be an opportunity for the members and Chair to reflect upon the summary of the discussions, and agree with the panel management team about the tone, emphasis, and content the written report should take.

Preparation and Distribution of the Report

Once a report of the session has been drafted, it will be circulated to all panel members, usually within 2 weeks after the session, for their comments by a certain date (to be detailed within email). Once comments have been collated and amended within the report, a final draft can be approved and signed off by the Chair before formal issue.



Timetable of Standard EQRP Process



Initial Invite - Typically 3 Weeks Before the Panel Date

You will be asked to join a particular Panel based on your level of expertise related to the requirements of the project available to us at the time.

In the early stages of Panel arrangements, we will have been contacted by the Applicant or the Case Officer to arrange a review. We will have established mutual availability of the Applicant, LPA and Panel Chair. We will have scoped the likely topics required for a review and will be seeking to establish the make-up of the Panel depending on availability.

If you receive an invite, it is because your skill set aligns with the requirements of the scheme.

It is important to respond to your invite as soon as possible as, if you do not have availability, we will need to approach someone else. You will be sent an invite by email containing:

- The date and time of the Panel.
- whether it is an online, half day, or a full day review.
- The address of the site and a brief description of what is proposed.
- The area of expertise for which we are seeking advice from you.
- The deadline by which you should RSVP. This will normally be within 5 working days of date of the email.

Online reviews usually take 4 hours, half day reviews are 4.5 hours long and full day reviews run for 7.5 hours. You will receive renumeration accordingly (see later).

If you consider there may be a conflict of interest, you should raise this with the Panel Co-ordinator.

On receipt of a positive RSVP, you will receive a holding diary invite by email.

EQRP STRUCTURES: SELECT A PANEL OPTION, REVIEW FORMAT, AND PANEL TYPE

The Panel Chair, Panel Manager, and LPA will recommend the most appropriate panel option, format, and type, and confirm the agreed structure with the applicant prior to the review.

OPTION	SINGLE PANEL OPTION	TWO PANEL OPTION	
FORMAT	<p>FORMAL REVIEW</p> <p>Formal Session involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LPA and Applicant briefing in advance and on the day • Two rounds of Panel comments • Panel Chair Summary • LPA and Applicant feedback • Recommended for all reviews 	<p>WORKSHOP REVIEW</p> <p>Collaborative Session involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LPA and Applicant briefing in advance and on the day • Single rounds of Panel comments • Structured discussion involving all • On 3 or 4 Key themes decided by the Panel Chair based on Briefing and Comments • Panel Chair Summary • Recommended for larger and more detailed reviews 	
TYPE	ONLINE	HALF-DAY IN-PERSON	FULL-DAY IN-PERSON
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Panel (4 members and 1 chair) • Microsoft Teams Hosted • Panel Administration • Panel Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Visit • Meeting Room Hire • Projector • WiFi • Refreshments • Full Panel (4 members and 1 chair) • Panel Administration • Panel Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site Visit • Meeting Room Hire • Projector • WiFi • Refreshments and Lunch • Full Panel (4 members and 1 chair) • Panel Administration • Panel Report <p>(Recommended for larger and more complex schemes)</p>

*Please note that the panel type of a Follow-Up Focussed Review is fixed as an online 2.5 hour session.

4.0 The Agenda Pack

The Agenda

If the Panel is **Online**, this will include:

- A formal emailed diary invite with joining details for, and length of, the Teams meeting.
- This will include a 15 minute Pre-meet.
- The full list of attendees from the Panel, LPA, and Applicant Team – including their areas of specialism.
- The full details and biographies of all Panel members.
- The Agenda for the session- sample agendas are included over the page.

If the Panel is **In- Person**, this will also include:

- A diary invite, including location of the venue and meeting point.
- Directions to the venue and meeting point for the session.
- Location of nearest station and whether transport to the venue can be arranged from there.
- Parking Arrangements.
- The Site Location.
- Travel Arrangements between the site and the venue.
- Details of the site visit, including, if required, a route, and instructions regarding health and safety and hi-vis clothing.
- A risk assessment covering the site visit.

Please note that the meeting point and venue may not always be the same as in many cases it makes sense to meet on site and conduct the site visit first. If you have any queries or suggestions regarding the route or any of the above, please contact the Panel management as soon as possible.



AGENDA PACK

WHAT YOU WILL RECEIVE 7 WORKING DAYS BEFORE

AGENDA

- AGENDA
- JOINING INSTRUCTIONS
- DIRECTIONS TO VENUE AND MEETING POINT
- SITE VISIT DETAILS
- SITE VISIT ROUTE
- RISK ASSESSMENT

LPA BRIEFING

- SITE DETAILS
- PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT
- PLANNING HISTORY
- APPLICANT ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY
- CONCERNS RAISED/ADDRESSED
- SCHEME PLANNING ASSESSMENT
- CONCERNS/QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

APPLICANT BRIEFING

- CONTEXT ANALYSIS
- CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
- RELEVANT REPORTS
- DESIGN NARRATIVE
- PLANS, SECTIONS & ELEVATIONS
- 3D VIEWS
- QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

THIS BRIEFING CAN BE SUPPLEMENTED BY YOUR OWN RESEARCH



STANDARD AGENDA

1. SITE VISIT/REVIEW
2. CASE OFFICER BRIEFING
3. APPLICANT PRESENTATION
4. CLARIFICATIONS
5. PANEL DISCUSSION
6. CHAIR SUMMARY
7. LPA/APPLICANT FEEDBACK
8. REPORT

Welcome and Briefing by the Panel Manager (5 minutes)

At the venue or online, the Panel Manager will formally welcome the Panel, LPA, Applicant, and observers. They will provide background on the QRP and outline the session rules.

For Online sessions, please note:

- Keep microphones muted when not speaking.
- Raise your hand for questions; the Panel Chair will address these after each presentation.
- Observers will be muted.

The Panel Manager will then run through the agenda and structure of the day. The agenda ensures everyone has an opportunity to contribute, the Panel can question the LPA and Applicant, and all parties can provide feedback at the end.

There is a significant amount of content to cover. Therefore we would ask you to closely follow the agenda and guidance to keep the session on time and well-structured.

Introductions (5 minutes)

Directed by the Panel Chair, you will be encouraged to briefly introduce yourself, relate your area of expertise and your biography. This usually takes less than a minute for each Panellist.

The Local Planning Authority and then the Applicant teams will then briefly introduce themselves including their area of expertise.

Case Officer Briefing and Panel Questions to the LPA (15 minutes)

The Case Officer, and if needed the Design Officer, will present their briefing, which you will receive beforehand. They will outline concerns with the scheme and specific questions for the Panel to address.

During this briefing, we encourage you to take additional notes, particularly of their questions, to help you formulate your comments for the Panel Discussion later in the session, and any questions and clarifications you have for the next section.

It is important, for the smooth running of the meeting that the Case Officer is not interrupted by questions or comments at this stage.

As directed by the Panel Chair, you will then have an opportunity to question the Case Officer and Design Officer about their briefing and concerns. The goal is to gather information that will inform your Panel Discussion later.

It is tempting to make comments at this point. However, you should avoid making comments during this stage. Save them for the recorded Panel Discussion. Commenting now reduces time for essential questions and limits input from other panellists.

Chair Summary (5 minutes)

The Chair will provide a clear and concise summary of the Panel's feedback, drawing together themes from each specialism and linking them to issues identified by the LPA and Applicant. This summary should align with National and Local Policy and good practice, offering constructive advice to improve the scheme's quality.

Plenary Session – Applicant and LPA Feedback (30 minutes)

The Panel Manager will lead this session, inviting the Applicant first and then the LPA to share feedback on what they have heard. This is their opportunity to ask questions and clarify the Panel's comments.

The purpose is to encourage an open, transparent, and structured dialogue between the LPA, the Applicant, and the Panel. This ensures advice is clearly understood and the report can be amended if needed. Feedback should remain brief and focused to keep the session on track and useful for all parties. By addressing comments during the meeting, the aim is to avoid post-meeting feedback, which can be difficult to manage once everyone has left.

Session Close

At the end of the session, the Panel Manager will thank all participants and explain that Place Services will prepare the report within 15 working days using a recording of the discussion to ensure accuracy. The draft will be reviewed by panel members and the Chair before being sent to the LPA. Once the planning officer confirms the report accurately reflects the session, it will be issued to the applicant.



6.0 Payment of Panel

Payment Details & How Payment is Issued

Payment rates for **Panel Members'** involvements with the EQRP are as follows:

- Online session: £375.00 + VAT
- Half-day session: £475.00 + VAT
- Full-day session: £575.00 + VAT
- Two Panel option (**Half-day + Online**): £663.00 + VAT
- Two Panel option (**Full-day + Online**): £763.00 + VAT

Payment rates for **Panel Chair'** involvements with the EQRP are as follows:

- Online session: £450.00 + VAT
- Half-day session: £625.00 + VAT
- Full-day session: £700.00 + VAT
- Two Panel option (**Half-day + Online**): £960.00 + VAT
- Two Panel option (**Full-day + Online**): £1095.00 + VAT

NB: The fees include travel and any expenses occurred

In order for payment to be released we require an invoice to be uploaded online through the ECC Marketplace portal – a step-by-step guidance of this process can be provided upon request from the Panel Manager. Once an invoice has been uploaded, payment can then be released. As a member you would have been issued an email to both sign up as a supplier (including login details) and to provide the required payment details.

Should there be an ongoing issue with regards to payment, we ask that you use the following contact details for our Service Centre to resolve matters; this includes outstanding payments and/or queries regarding this system. Please copy in both the Panel Manager and/or Coordinator for the panel session to ensure this can be tracked.

Email: ap.servicecentre@essex.gov.uk
Telephone: 0330 135862



8.0 FAQ's

What if there is conflict between panel members?

Panel members are asked to reveal any conflicts of interest prior to be allocated a panel review. If conflicts are identified, alterative panel members will be sort.

How can I recommend colleagues/other professionals to join the panel?

We are always open to new individuals joining our ever-growing pool of experienced panel members. If you have a suitable recommendation for a colleague or other professional to become an EQRP member, then please get in contact with the Panel Manager with the relevant contact details provided in this document.

How can I leave the panel?

As above, please get in contact with the Panel Manager if you are thinking of leaving the EQRP as a Panel Member.



9.0 Declarations & Conflict of Interest

Confidentiality

All information submitted to the EQRP will be treated as strictly private and confidential; only being shared with Panel members to be used for its intended purpose.

We do not publish copies of feedback documents and written feedback is only provided to the LPA and applicant teams. If the EQRP's feedback is submitted to the local authority as part of a planning application, the LPA may choose to make the feedback document public in addition to the other planning documents.

If you have a particularly sensitive project and there is need for additional measures to ensure confidentiality, then please discuss this with our Panel Manager.

Conflicts and Declaration of Interest

It is important that the panel's independence and professionalism is maintained and respected during the review process. It is essential to avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest in relation to any schemes that come before a panel.

All panel members are requested to identify at an early stage any possible conflicts of interests and to ensure suitable action is taken to avoid or resolve these. Information regarding the panel will be circulated in advance of the review to allow panel members to identify and declare any potential conflicts of interests before the process begins.

Where a conflict of interest is raised and declared, it will be asked that the panel member is to step down from a review. Where a declaration of interest may be sufficient it will be requested a panel member are to contact the panel manager to discuss.

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County Hall, Chelmsford
Essex, CM1 1QH
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