



PROGRAMME OFFICER TRAINING – BASIC COURSE

APPOINTMENT

This is the responsibility of the Council. Ideally we would suggest that the Programme Officer should be appointed at publication stage. (Publication means put out for Public consultation for statutory 6 week period).

The Programme Officer **MUST** be in place at submission of the Local Plan.

PINS will not appoint an Inspector unless the Programme Officer is in place.

POs must remain in place until receipt by the LPA of the Inspector's final report.

Confidentiality forms. Beware of inadvertently disclosing any details regarding the Inspector.

FIRST STEPS

It is a good idea to meet the Inspector as early as possible. Before this meeting try to get as much of the following information from the Council as you can. It is recommended that you make careful notes of what the council tell you and who/when they told you.

- What are the major issues likely to arise
- sScale of representations and prediction of complexity of the examination. (TELL PINS)
- What is the council's database like and how are the representations being referenced and collated. For PINS purposes the referencing system **MUST** as a minimum have four elements:
 - i. Unique number for each representor
 - ii. Unique number for each representation
 - iii. Which policy/part of the plan does the representation relate to
 - iv. To which of the tests of soundness the representation refers.

Examples

019/02/E4/1

Representation by the Home Builders Federation (019), their second representation, relates to Policy E4 and they are challenging it on the grounds that it fails tests of soundness 1.

019/03/H1/2

Representation by the Home Builders Federation (019), their third representation, relates to Policy H1 and is being challenged on the grounds that it fails test 2.

So if the Home Builders Federation have challenged 10 policies/parts of the plan there will be 10 entries in the data-base all under representor reference 019

NOTE: You must be able to manipulate the data-base to meet requests from the Inspector. For example "I want to see all the representations from the Home Builders Federation" or "Please can I see all the Representations relating to Policy H1." The software must allow you to do this.

Test of Soundness Complications.

All Boxes ticked, no boxes ticked, wrong boxes ticked on representation form. This WILL happen. Make sure that the software can cope with this problem, i.e. if nothing in the box, the system doesn't crash.

Additional Fields

You will need additional fields over and above what PINS requires as a minimum. The Council will probably want extra fields anyway. For example does the representor want to appear at the examination, have they confirmed attendance, have they submitted any additional material requested or what is the representation about/issues raised.

- What IT equipment will be provided for the Inspector
- Is the Council going to be represented by an advocate at the examination
- Who will be on the Council's team and who should you contact in the first instance.
- Do the Council foresee any staffing complications, e.g maternity leave and do they have the situation covered.
- Size of the web site – have the Council ensured that there is enough capacity – Blyth Valley had to copy and transfer their website 3 days before the opening of their hearing sessions because of the amount of information that needed to be stored – e.g Regional Spatial Strategy, PPGs and PPSs and all documents since the start of the LDF process not to mention representations! Now using a site of **3GB**.
- What core documents will be provided. You must keep a list of these. This will grow as the examination progresses. You will need copies of the core documents for the library and for the Inspector.

Core documents will vary depending on the plan to be examined but could include for example, the Council's 'Housing Needs Assessment' and the Council's 'Urban Housing Capacity Study.' It is also necessary to place the core documents (or links to them) on the council's website.

- What accommodation is to be provided for you, the Inspector and for the Examination.

The Council may well not be able to answer these questions in full. However, by asking them you will be alerting them to sort out matters they need to think about. You will also be showing them that you know what you are doing and that you will not be prepared to be messed about by them.

MEETING THE INSPECTOR

Arrange this as soon as you can through PINS. You may need to be proactive. This is an important meeting. Go into it with as much of the information detailed above as possible.

Tell the Inspector that you have asked these questions of the Council even if you have not had any answers.

What you need to find out from the Inspector

- How is he/she happy to be contacted – weekends, office hours, by post, email etc
- Date of Pre-Hearing Meeting – if one is to be held
- What material the Inspector wants sent
- Agree letterheads, complimentary slips, acknowledgements etc. Note that these should NOT include the Council's logo etc. You are paid by the Council but you work to the Inspector.
- How does the Inspector want correspondence kept, filed
- How should representations be kept, e.g. lever arch files, boxes etc
- How much use will the Inspector make of IT
- What stationery/equipment does the Inspector want
- How many copies of representations does the Inspector want, where (to home) and when
- Inspectors expectations regarding your working hours
- How does the Inspector want the document library ordered
- Room layout preferences

- Wording for Pre-Hearing Meeting invitation, questionnaire and any follow-up questionnaire or any other correspondence which the Inspector requests
- Your role at the PHM (if held) and at the Examination (note taking)

PREPARING THE PROGRAMME

This will now centre around the matters and issues identified for further discussion by the Inspector.

Aim is to programme anyone who wants to appear in the most effective way.

In the past a generous approach was followed. This is no longer possible. Now there is a much more extensive use of round table/joint sessions. Also the Inspector may be firm about appearance dates and times.

Inspectors work in different ways:

- Daily times
- Days of the week
- 3-4 weeks followed by break. This is essential for all but particularly the LPA

Allocations for Hearings

The Inspector will begin by allocating those who wish to be heard to one of the main matters or issues. Representors with an interest in similar issues, policies and geographical areas will be invited to the same hearing session. The PO will provide assistance in the allocation process. Anyone who wishes to be heard but whose concerns do not fit with the main issues will be allocated to a minor matters session at the end of the hearings. The PO should explain to such representors that their concerns do not go to the heart of the Inspector's issues, to give them an opportunity to review whether they still wish to be heard or have the matter dealt with by way of written representations. Written representations carry the same weight as those heard at the hearing.

An initial draft programme should be ready for the PHM. This will inevitably be revised several times.

Be pro-active. Prompt parties about submission dates for any extra material requested by the Inspector. Keep a list of what the Inspector has requested.

Send reminders. Phone parties if worried about attendance.

Be tough about time allocated to parties.

Keep everyone informed about changes to the Programme.

WHILE THE EXAMINATION IS ON

- Get there EARLY. There is likely to be a late rush of people waiting to see documents, photocopy etc.
- You will get to know some of the participants quite well. Always remain unbiased and always give a very clear impression that you are completely impartial. Do not let any irritation show. Remember you are part of the Inspector's team and NOT part of the Council's team.
- You will find it interesting to sit in on some of the sessions but make sure that you leave a note telling people where you are.
- Stay until the end of the session.
- Make sure that any documents handed in are referenced, included on the document list, filed correctly and placed in the document library.
- Get papers ready for the next session.

POST HEARING

You will be needed for a short time on a full time basis to prepare the final documentation e.g. attendance lists, appearances, document list etc. This depends on what the Inspector wants.

Thereafter there may be a need for the programme officer to work part-time. The Examination will not close until the Inspector's report is ready.

Arrange with the Inspector what is required and how to contact you etc