Guidance for Programme Officers

Local Plan Examinations

June 2019
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INTRODUCTION

1. This document provides practical guidance on the role and responsibilities of a Programme Officer (PO) during the examination of a local plan. It takes account of the 2019 National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG); and it is consistent with the procedural guidance issued by the Planning Inspectorate: Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations. POs should be familiar with this document. The document also reflects the recent experience of POs, Inspectors and other Planning Inspectorate staff involved in the examination process.

2. This document constitutes advice only with no statutory status. However, in the interests of consistency and efficiency, the Planning Inspectorate encourages all appointed POs to adhere to its general principles.

3. The Framework advises that the planning system should be genuinely planned, with succinct and up-to-date plans providing a positive vision for the future of each area. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) invest substantial time and resources in preparing their plans, including engaging with all sections of the community in their development. The examination is the final stage in the plan-making process and so the Planning Inspectorate endeavours to run these as quickly and efficiently as possible. The PO has a central role in this process.

QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE PROGRAMME OFFICER

4. The PO is responsible for the day to day administration of the examination before, during and sometimes after the hearing sessions. The various tasks involved require excellent organisation, good record keeping; attention to detail; a willingness to learn new skills; and the ability to use a range of IT software.

5. Notwithstanding that they are employed by the LPA, the PO is an independent officer of the examination working for and reporting to the Inspector only. The PO provides the channel of communication between the Inspector, the LPA and the other participants in the examination outside of the hearing sessions and this requires them to be, and to be seen to be impartial, calm, patient, tactful, confident and, when necessary, politely firm. A PO must be a good communicator in person, on the telephone and in writing. They must be able to work alone and to take decisions in relation to their areas of responsibility, referring to the Inspector when in doubt.

6. The Planning Inspectorate holds a list of experienced professional POs who LPAs might choose to appoint. LPAs might also appoint someone internal, but in order to avoid any real or perceived conflict of interest, such a person must not be part of the planning team and must not have been involved in any way in the preparation of the plan to be examined. The Planning Inspectorate runs training courses periodically for both new and experienced POs.
THE PROGRAMME OFFICER & THE INSPECTOR

7. The Inspector is appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct the examination and so it is the Inspector who will decide upon the format and content of the process. In this context, the primary role of the PO is to organise and administer a cost-effective and efficient examination under the direction and guidance of the Inspector. Whilst taking responsibility for their work, the PO must keep the Inspector informed about important correspondence/developments which might have a bearing upon the process; and they must be flexible to adapt to the Inspector’s working style.

8. Because the PO provides the link between the Inspector, LPA and participants, it is essential that they are in post when the plan is submitted for examination. Indeed the Planning Inspectorate will not appoint an Inspector until the LPA has supplied the name, address, email address and telephone number of the PO. However, it is beneficial for the PO to be in post when the plan is published for public consultation (under Regulation 19) or as early as possible, because they could then be involved with managing/organising representations, the website and the document library from the outset. The examination website should be up and running upon submission and certainly by the time the Inspector is appointed.

9. The workload of a PO can fluctuate considerably throughout the examination process and LPAs should be aware of this when allocating funding. As a guide, a PO’s work might increase from one day per week if appointed at the Regulation 19 Stage, to 2-3 days per week at the submission stage, to full time during the hearing sessions. Once the hearing sessions have closed, the PO should be retained on at least a part-time basis until the Inspector’s Fact Check Report is delivered. After the hearings, the Inspector is likely to need to communicate regularly with the LPA in relation to the Main Modifications to the Plan. Problems can arise if there is no direct line of communication between the Inspector, the LPA and (if necessary) other representors.

10. The Inspector and PO will work closely together during the examination and so it is important for a good relationship to be established as soon as possible between them. The Inspector will usually make initial contact with the PO shortly after his/her appointment and, thereafter, it is important that the PO is easily contactable at all times by the Inspector, by email and telephone. The tight timescales involved in the examination process mean that often, information must be provided, and decisions made, quickly.

11. It is imperative that both the Inspector and the PO remain independent from the LPA and other participants for the duration of the examination. Any contact must be strictly work-related. The Inspector will not communicate directly with any party outside of the hearing sessions and so all correspondence will go via the PO. The Planning Inspectorate will write to advise the PO that the Inspector’s work and personal contact details must not be disclosed to anyone, either during or after the examination.

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Key Commitments of a Programme Officer

12. Having regard to the above, a PO must be able to make the following commitments to the examination process:

- To understand that the Inspector drives the examination process and to support him/her to do so;
- To have sufficient capacity to deal with work pertaining to the examination when required, including at short notice;
- To remain independent of the LPA and other participants for the duration of the examination, including socially.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXAMINATION AND THE ROLE OF THE PROGRAMME OFFICER

13. The purpose of the examination is to enable the Inspector to determine whether the submitted Plan has been prepared in accordance with the relevant legal requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended); to determine if it is “sound” (see below); and ultimately to prepare a report for the LPA to recommend whether or not the Plan should be adopted.

14. In assessing “soundness”, the Inspector will consider the plan against the tests set out in paragraph 35 of the Framework. These are that a plan should be:

- Positively Prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs, and is informed by agreements with other authorities so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- Effective – deliverable over the plan period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.

15. The tables below provide an overview of the examination process and highlight the PO’s role and key tasks at each stage. Each task is covered in more detail in the following section. The timescales provided are indicative because examinations vary considerably in respect of their circumstances and complexity. For example, setting the hearing dates could be affected by the availability of a suitable venue. If an examination has to be ‘paused’ to allow further work to be done, this will lengthen the process significantly.
Stage 1: Submission to Opening of Hearings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Tasks/Actions</th>
<th>Indicative Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submission of Plan to the Planning Inspectorate</strong></td>
<td>1-3 weeks from submission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PO is in post. Unless working from home, suitable office accommodation, separate from those involved in the examination, will be needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PO becomes familiar with:</td>
<td>Within 5 weeks of submission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Representor database;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Examination library;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Examination website; and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Possible venues for the hearings. Suitability and availability should be checked early on.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PO gathers initial information from LPA which might be of assistance to Inspector e.g. LPA availability and venues for hearings; details of legal representation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Planning Inspectorate appoints Inspector.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspector makes contact with PO.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PO writes to representors advising them that the examination has commenced and providing basic details about themselves, the Inspector, the examination website and document library.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspector’s Initial Assessment &amp; Organising the Hearings Programme</strong></td>
<td>3-6 weeks after appointment of Inspector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspector commences assessment of legal compliance and soundness.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Inspector might have formal or informal questions for the LPA. PO manages this correspondence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PO is likely to receive queries from representors. The PO must decide what to refer to the Inspector and what to answer directly, but if in doubt, always ask the Inspector.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspector identifies the Matters, Issues &amp; Questions for discussion at the hearings (MIQs) and prepares a guidance note for participants and a provisional hearing programme. In these documents, the Inspector will ask representors to advise the PO about whether they intend to participate in the hearings. Often, the LPA and other participants will also be invited to submit written statements in advance of the hearings. The PO should be aware of any relevant deadlines.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- PO liaises with LPA to confirm hearing dates, ensuring that a suitable venue is available as well as office accommodation for themselves and the Inspector.
- (Exceptionally, if the Inspector has serious concerns about either the Plan or procedural matters, it might be necessary for the PO to assist in arranging a pre-hearing meeting or an early hearing session).
- PO publishes the MIQs, guidance note and provisional hearing programme on the website and notifies participants. Often, the Inspector will allow a brief period for representors to highlight any key omissions from the MIQs.
- PO reminds LPA to give 6 weeks formal notice of the start of the hearings.

**Updating the Hearing Programme & Managing Written Statements**

- PO to update the hearing programme to reflect the confirmed participants. This can be a time-consuming task. Concerns about large numbers of participants should be raised with the Inspector.
- PO receives written statements by the deadline, organises and references them, and provides them to the Inspector without delay. They should also be published on the website.

**Preparing for the Hearings**

- Inspector finalises the hearing programme and might prepare agendas based on the statements and confirmed participants. PO publishes these on the website.
- PO makes final administrative arrangements for the sessions. This could include ensuring the availability of a sound system; printing and photocopying facilities; water etc. at the venue; providing name plates for participants; and arranging parking for themselves and the Inspector.

**Commencement of Hearing Sessions**

- The number of hearing days will vary depending on the nature of the plan at examination. Some sessions might be split over several weeks/phases.
- The PO should be available throughout the hearing sessions to assist the Inspector and to deal with queries from the LPA and participants. It is good practice to be the first to arrive for the hearing session, and the last to leave.
- It is likely to be necessary for documents/correspondence to be made available and added to the document library.
Stage 2: Main Modifications & Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Tasks/Actions</th>
<th>Indicative Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• It is likely that some issues of soundness or legal compliance will have arisen during the examination process. LPAs can ask the Inspector to recommend Main Modifications (MM) to the Plan to rectify this.</td>
<td>To be agreed between the LPA and Inspector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The PO must remain in post to manage correspondence between the Inspector and LPA while the MMs are being finalised.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The LPA must carry out consultation and possibly Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the MMs. The PO is required to provide the responses to the Inspector and publish them on the website.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Inspector will be preparing his/her report during this time, but cannot finalise it until after the consultation responses on the MMs have been considered.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Stage 3: Quality Assurance, Fact Check & Final Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Tasks/Actions</th>
<th>Indicative Timescale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The Inspector’s report is subject to an internal peer-review process.</td>
<td>Up to 6 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The report is then sent, by the Planning Inspectorate, to the LPA for “fact-check”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Inspector addresses any factual matters raised by the LPA and his/her final report is then dispatched.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>The PO can be released at the fact-check stage, but it is preferable for them to remain until the final report is delivered given there may be enquiries from participants.</strong></td>
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ROLE/KEY TASKS AT EACH STAGE OF THE EXAMINATION

16. The summary above demonstrates that the nature and intensity of the PO’s involvement will vary throughout the examination process. The following section provides more detail in a number of key areas.
Stage 1

Office Arrangements for the PO and Inspector

17. Initially, if the LPA and Inspector are content with the arrangement, the PO might be able to work from home. However, the PO must be able to access and manipulate the representor database, examination library and website remotely. They must also be able to speak to the LPA, and gain access to relevant documents, without delay.

18. Whether or not working from home is possible, office accommodation for both the PO and Inspector should be secured for the duration of the hearing sessions, well in advance. Often it is necessary for the PO and Inspector to share an office. The office should be:

- Close to the venue for the hearings.
- Solely for the PO and Inspector rather than shared with other local authority functions.
- Equipped with the usual desk, chairs and stationery etc. Reliable mobile phone and broadband signal should be available, and access to printing and photocopying facilities is also required.

The Hearing Venue

19. The LPA must provide an appropriate venue for the hearing sessions. This must be accessible by public transport and suitable for people with disabilities. The room and associated facilities must be capable of accommodating all participants, members of the public observing, the press and, if necessary, additional administrative resources. Careful thought should be given to the likely number of people wishing to attend, either as participants or observers, to ensure that the room will be large enough. Increasingly the number of participants wishing to take part in any one session can significantly exceed 20.

20. The room layout for the hearings will usually comprise a 'U'-shaped table arrangement for the participants facing the Inspector who, ideally, should be on the same level. Therefore, a formal Council Chamber will not always be appropriate. Seating for observers should be provided to face the Inspector (see Annex 1). The room should be equipped with an appropriate sound/PA system – a roving microphone will not be sufficient. Where possible, it should also have wifi to allow participants to access the examination library.

21. The PO should check the suitability of the venue at an early stage in the examination process.

The Representor Database

22. The LPA is responsible for establishing a database to record all the representations related to the examination (i.e. those made at the Regulation 19/20 stage). An Excel spreadsheet is usually sufficient but an Access
database might be used. If the LPA is using a web-based database such as ‘Objective’, this can be exported into either Excel or Access for ease of use. POs in post before the plan is submitted should note that, while they might become familiar with the representations, they should not analyse their content – this is the role of the LPA. The LPA should also decide which representations are “duly made” and only those which are should be sent to the Inspector.

23. The representor database should be capable of being updated and manipulated by the PO. It should be structured so that representations can be organised in a variety of ways to assist the Inspector in determining the most efficient way of carrying out the examination. The database should be able to provide the following information, sorted in alphabetical, numerical, policy, paragraph, or site reference order:

- Names and addresses of representors;
- Names and addresses of agents, and who they are representing;
- Representations seeking changes to the plan;
- Representations supporting the plan;
- Representors wishing to appear before the Inspector;
- Representors relying upon written representations.

24. The database should have a mail-merge facility.

25. The numbering system for referencing representations is not prescribed, but it should be simple and logical, based on the following:

- **A personal reference number:** To identify the person(s) making the representation. Each person, group, or organisation should have an individual reference number, e.g. starting at 0001.

- **A representation reference number:** To identify each representation made by each person/group etc. These should be distinguishable from the personal reference numbers.

- **Plan paragraph, policy or site reference** to which the representation relates.

26. An example might be: 0001/5000/ENV1 (Personal Ref/Representation Ref/Policy Ref). The PO should work with the LPA to ensure that the system is appropriate.

**Data Protection**

27. Clearly, by having access to and making use of the representor database, the PO will have responsibilities for the security of personal information pertaining to individuals who have commented on the Plan. This commonly includes names, addresses and contact information. Advice on data protection is provided in an annex to the Service Level Agreement between the Inspectorate and the LPA. This should be borne in mind when establishing the channels of communication between the PO, the Inspector and the LPA, including the email address/account for the PO.
The Examination Library and Website

28. The PO should ensure that the LPA keeps the examination library and website up to date. The former must include all documents submitted to the Inspector such as the plan itself, the evidence base, relevant local and national policy documents and the representations. All documents should have a unique reference number and the library should be easy to navigate. It is helpful to provide direct links to national documents such as the Framework and PPG.

29. As the examination proceeds, it will be necessary to add documents to the library and they in turn must be given a logical title and an appropriate reference number. Examination documents are often prefixed ED, or something similar. The Inspector’s MIQs, guidance notes and programmes will need to be added as will any hearing statements, final agendas and new evidence. Formal communications between the Inspector and the LPA and/or other participants will also need to form part of the library, but informal correspondence between the Inspector and PO should not automatically be added. If the PO is unsure about whether a particular document should be placed on the website, the Inspector should be consulted.

30. It is essential that participants are able to access the examination library through the examination website. This usually forms part of the LPA’s website, although sometimes it can be difficult to find. Thus the PO should ensure that it can be located quickly and easily and that it is simple to use.

31. Once the examination has commenced, the website will be the principle source of information for those involved. It must therefore be informative and new documents should be posted promptly. The PO should ensure that arrangements are in place to enable the website to be updated quickly as requested by the Inspector. The website should have sufficient capacity to hold a large number of documents and be capable of being updated quickly. A failure to keep the website up to date could result in participants being disadvantaged by a lack of relevant information. It is also a statutory requirement that all relevant information is publicly available.

The PO’s Correspondence

32. The PO will send an initial letter (usually by email) to participants advising them that the examination has commenced and providing information about themselves, the Inspector, the website and the document library etc. An example letter is provided at Annex 2. It will be necessary to write to participants again once the Inspector’s MIQs, guidance note and hearing programme are available (see Annex 3). Thereafter, participants will generally need to refer to the website for up to date information, but the PO will still need to respond to queries from the LPA and individual participants.

33. It is important that the tone and appearance of any written or email correspondence reflects the impartiality of the PO. Council/LPA headed paper and logos should not be used.
Other meetings

34. The hearings will usually be the only sessions which are held in public. However, on rare occasions, the Inspector may decide that one of the following is necessary:

Pre-hearing meeting – to inform participants about procedural arrangements for the hearings and examination. In most cases, this information can effectively be provided through a guidance note, so a meeting will only be needed if the examination is unusually complex.

Technical seminar – may be held if there are any especially complex technical issues. The aim is to provide the Inspector and participants with a clearer understanding of any complex technical evidence.

Exploratory meetings – in the past, these were sometimes held where the Inspector identified significant problems early on. However, they have fallen out of use because Inspectors tend to find an early hearing session a more effective means of discussing and resolving the issue.

35. If such a meeting is to be held, the PO will need to do the following, and keep the website up to date:

• Book the venue, having regard to the advice on appropriate venues above;
• Write to all representors advising them of the date, time and agenda of the meeting and asking them if they intend to attend;
• Approximately 2 weeks before the meeting, confirm attendance and check that the venue booked is still suitable;
• Circulate any guidance notes/other materials prepared by the Inspector before the meeting;
• Publish any notes of the meeting prepared by the Inspector on the website in a timely fashion.

The Hearing Programme and Participants

36. Keeping the hearing programme up to date is an important task of the PO. The Inspector’s guidance note will ask participants to advise the PO which sessions they wish to attend by a specific date. The PO should populate the programme with the expected participants, noting that the right to participate in a hearing extends only to those who have proposed changes to the submitted Plan in a representation made at the Regulation 19 stage. The starting assumption is that only those who have a right to be heard should attend. This does not include those who are seeking to be involved for the first time or those who support the plan. This is to help ensure that the process is manageable. In addition, the assumption is that the LPA is responsible for its own plan and for defending what is in it.

37. However, an exception should be made for a Member of Parliament wishing to attend a hearing to represent their constituents, even if they did not make a representation. In such cases, it would be reasonable for the PO to ask the MP what they wish to speak about and to make the Inspector and LPA aware.
It will also be helpful for the PO to send the MP the Inspector’s guidance note. The Inspector can also request the participation of particular organisations or people if that would assist the examination – this can often include Government bodies such as Natural England, for example. In addition, the LPA can choose who it puts forward to defend its plan and in some cases it may ask a developer or site promoter to assist with that.

38. The Inspector should be told if large numbers of people wish to participate in particular sessions. Hearings with more than 20 participants can be difficult to manage and so alternative options might need to be explored. These could include asking participants with similar views to nominate a spokesperson; or splitting the session to cover different issues separately. Another alternative is to run the same session twice.

**Preparation for the Hearings**

39. The Regulations (Reg 24) require that the LPA gives 6 weeks notice of the opening of the hearing sessions to anyone who made representations at the Regulation 19/20 stage. The PO should check that this has been done. It is good practice to publish the guidance note at this stage along with the draft MIQs and programme. It is also good practice to allow a brief window for people to comment on any key omissions from the MIQs.

40. The Inspector will finalise the programme and agendas (if any) for the hearing sessions having regard to the written statements he/she invited previously. Consequently the PO should be aware of the deadline for the submission of statements and it can be helpful to remind participants in good time. Once the statements are received, they should be referenced and sent to the Inspector in his/her preferred format as quickly as possible. They must also be published on the website along with the hearing programme and any agendas prepared by the Inspector.

41. The PO should also use the time before the hearings open to make any final administrative preparations:

- Bookings for the venue and office accommodation should be checked. The PO should visit the venue before the hearings commence, and the Inspector might wish to do so as well;
- Practical arrangements for access to the venue, parking and refreshments for the Inspector should be made (although the Inspector will not expect the LPA to provide lunch);
- Water should be available for all participants during the sessions;
- Name plates for participants in the hearing sessions should be made. Stiff card with printed names (large enough to be seen by the Inspector) will suffice.

42. In the run up to the hearing sessions, the PO is likely to get an increasing number of queries from participants and members of the public. The PO should be available to deal with these in a timely manner.
The Hearing Sessions

43. The hearings themselves are an important part of the examination process. The Inspector will have completed the desk-based assessment of the Plan and will be seeking to clarify any remaining issues concerning soundness at the hearings. In particular, the Inspector will be looking to use the hearings to explore particular soundness issues and what might be done to put things right – which could involve further evidence and/or changes to the plan (main modifications).

44. The hearings will take the form of a structured discussion which the Inspector leads, inviting contributions from participants at the appropriate time. They will be inquisitorial rather than adversarial and so there will not normally be any formal presentation of cases, or cross-examination. If a participant requests that the more formal cross-examination procedure is used in relation to a particular issue, they should expect to make a strong case for the Inspector’s consideration, well in advance of the opening of the hearings.

45. Participants may bring professional experts, Barristers or solicitors with them, but they will be treated as any other participant. Furthermore, if space is limited, participants with multiple team members might be required to “hot-desk” so that they neither dominate proceedings, nor take up seats needed for others at the table. However, there is no need to take an overly strict approach on this if there is room at the table.

46. Whilst it varies between Inspectors and events, hearings are usually held over 3 days per week to allow sufficient time for preparation in between. If the programme is long, it will often include a break, perhaps after the sessions concerning strategic matters.

47. The PO should expect to be available during every session, but it might not be necessary for them to be present in the room for the duration of each one. This matter should be discussed and agreed with the Inspector. However, the PO should expect to be present at the beginning and end of each session to deal with any questions arising, particularly concerning the availability of documents.

Stage 2

Schedule of Main Modifications & Reporting

48. It is likely that some issues of soundness or legal compliance will have arisen during the examination process. LPAs can ask the Inspector to recommend Main Modifications (MM) to the Plan, which are essentially changes to the Plan, to rectify any problems. Most Plans are subject to such a request.

49. Following the hearings, the LPA will be required to draw up a schedule of all the MMs proposed which the Inspector is reasonably sure need to be made to the Plan. Finalising the schedule will require the input of the Inspector and the PO must therefore remain in post to manage any exchange of drafts between the Inspector and LPA. This can be a time-consuming stage. It is not carried out in public but it is possible these exchanges could be subject to
a Freedom of Information request. Furthermore, the LPA is required to carry out consultation and possibly Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment of the MMs. The PO will be required to provide the consultation responses to the Inspector and publish them on the website.

50. The Inspector is likely to start writing his/her report while the MMs are being prepared and consulted upon but it cannot be finalised until after this process is complete. Indeed, while unusual, it could be necessary for further hearing sessions to be arranged to discuss matters raised in the MMs consultation responses. This would be subject to the same considerations as the main block of hearing sessions (although on a much smaller scale) and would need to be advertised for 6 weeks in advance to comply with the Regulations.

Stage 3

The Inspector’s Report

51. Once complete, the Inspector’s report is subject to an internal peer-review process. It is then sent, by the Local Plans Team at the Planning Inspectorate, to the LPA for “fact-check”. When the Inspector has made any necessary amendments, the final report is dispatched. Whilst the PO can be released at the fact-check stage, it is best if they remain in post until the Inspector’s final report is with the LPA. That is when the examination ends.

Handover to the LPA

52. Before leaving their post, the PO should ensure that the LPA is familiar with any modifications which might have been made to the representor database or document library and that it has full and free access to the system.
ANNEX 1: ROOM LAYOUT FOR HEARINGS
Dear Representor,

**Examination of the *(name of Plan)***

I am writing to you because you have made representations concerning the *(name of Plan)* published by the Local Planning Authority under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

The Secretary of State has now appointed Inspector *(name and qualifications)* to carry out the independent examination of the Plan. The Inspector will determine whether it has been prepared in accordance with the relevant legal requirements and whether it is ‘sound’ i.e. positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

I have been appointed as the independent Programme Officer to assist the Inspector with all administrative aspects of the examination and my contact details are set out above. Outside of the hearing sessions which form part of the examination, the Inspector does not have direct contact with either the Local Planning Authority or Representors. Therefore, all communications with the Inspector will need to take place through me.

The Inspector is currently appraising the Plan, the associated evidence and the representations submitted at the Regulation 19 stage, and I will be in contact again when I am able to provide further information on the examination process, including the timing of any hearing sessions. This might not be for a number of weeks.

All information concerning the examination will be made available on the examination website which can be accessed via the following link: *(provide link)*.

I am your point of contact throughout the examination process, and if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me. However, if you would prefer not to receive any further information on the examination, please let me know and I will remove your details from the notification list.

Yours sincerely,

*(Name of P.O.)*
Dear Representor,

Examination of the (name of Plan)

I wrote to you on (date of introductory letter) to inform you that the examination of the (name of Plan) had commenced. I can now advise you that the hearing sessions forming part of the examination will open on (date of first hearing) at (venue).

The Inspector has published the following documents concerning the examination, including the hearing sessions:

(Likely documents as follows)
- Inspector’s Guidance Note
- Inspector’s Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs)
- Provisional Hearing Programme

The Inspector’s Guidance Note explains the procedures which will be followed during the examination. It also sets out the arrangements for submitting pre-hearing statements if you wish to do so and requires you to inform me if you intend to participate in the hearings by (date).

The Inspector’s MIQs identify the main issues of soundness and legal compliance upon which the examination will focus, including during the hearing sessions; and the provisional programme sets out the expected dates for the sessions. However, this is subject to change and you should refer regularly to the examination website:

(website link)

Please find below the key dates for the examination:

(Likely important dates below)
- (Date): Deadline to advise me that you wish to participate in the hearings.
- (Date): Deadline for the submission of pre-hearing statements (for both
electronic and hard copies).

- **(Date):** Date of first hearing. For subsequent hearing dates, please refer to the Provisional Programme.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

*(Name of P.O.)*