

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Collaborative Peer Review Workshop

Facilitation Guidance

Cohort 1

May 2024

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper provides briefing for facilitators of the collaborative peer review workshop organised as part of the National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). It will also be of use to peer reviewers participating in the workshop.
2. It aims to provide support and suggestions on what could help make the peer review workshop session work best. This paper will be developed as the learning is generated through the NPIF pilots.
3. This document adds to guidance already produced including:
 - a performance assessment and improvement action plan template
 - a good practice case study template
 - a [Miro board](#) for sharing feedback
 - a context spreadsheet showing links between attributes, contributory factors, prompts and outcomes frameworks
4. These – and this document - can be found online on the [NPI pages of Improvement Service website](#).
5. The NPIF is project managed by the National Planning Improvement team (NPI), based in the Improvement Service. The key contacts for participating authorities are:
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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF COLLABORATIVE PEER REVIEW

6. Peer collaborative improvement is the chance to support one another in addressing common issues across the sector and improving the overall performance of the sector.
7. Success is dependent on creating and sustaining high levels of mutual trust, confidence, cooperation, and collaboration to allow effective peer-led improvement to take place.
8. All involved will respect the confidentiality of all documentation provided and the content of the workshop.

Aims

9. The peer review process and workshop should allow for a constructive discussion on what improvement actions the planning authority should put in place, based upon an assessment they have undertaken of how they feel they are performing against the 12 attributes of a high performing planning authority.
10. The meeting should take place under the Chatham House Rule which means that anything said in the meeting should not be attributed publicly to the person who said it without their permission. The meeting will not be used to discuss individual planning applications or development plan policies, but rather will focus on the proposed Improvement Action Plan.
11. The workshop should be forward looking, allowing participants to contribute ideas and solutions that support the planning authority to improve. It should not lead to a situation where the action plan is being negatively criticised without an offered solution or where the planning authority is defending its proposed improvement actions.

Focus

12. The key question to be considered at the collaborative peer review workshop will be:

What improvement actions should the planning authority take?

13. The workshop should focus on reviewing the draft Improvement Action Plan produced by the planning authority. This will include a set of actions that they have identified. These will have been graded by the planning authority in terms of importance and will set out the timescales anticipated to undertake each action. An example of the form is set out below.

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	
2. The planning authority has a value and supported workforce	

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action	Owner	Importance	Timescale	Resources
What action will you take?		High	Short term – 1 year	
What will the outcome be?		Medium	Medium term – 3 years	
		Low	Long term – 3+ years	

ROLES

The role of the facilitator

14. The facilitator should take a ‘content neutral’ approach. This means that they do not enter into discussion around the improvement actions but rather concentrate on ensuring that all participants are able to take part in the discussion, and that they engage constructively. They should keep the discussion focused upon the draft Improvement Action Plan and keep the programme on time.

15. In doing this the facilitator should:

- clearly set out the purpose of the workshop at the start, making sure that all participants are fully aware of what you aim to achieve
- highlight that their role is ‘content neutral’
- ensure that peer reviewers understand their role and the role of others involved in the workshop
- set the tone for the meeting, emphasising the need for constructive engagement that focuses on providing solutions and problem solving
- outline the programme and timings and ensure that all participants are ‘signed up’ for this

16. The workshop may not have the time to be able to cover every improvement action included in the planning authority's draft Improvement Action Plan. If this is the case, the facilitator will need to agree with participants what actions are covered through looking at what has been prioritised and the impact each may have.

The role of the host authority

17. The workshop should allow the planning authority to set out their draft Improvement Action Plan, based upon their assessment of each attribute.

18. In doing this the planning authority should highlight the key improvement actions to be discussed at the workshop. Setting out how their performance assessment has led to their identification and prioritisation and how it envisages them being implemented. The planning authority may see a role for other workshop participants in the implementation of the improvement action and, if so, this should be highlighted and discussed.

19. It is not for the planning authority to 'defend' its draft Improvement Action Plan, but to provide the reasoning behind the identification of its improvement actions, to listen to feedback provided by peer reviewers and to discuss ways forward.

20. The final decision on the content of the final Improvement Action Plan lies with the planning authority as its owner. However, any major disagreements with peer reviewers should be noted.

21. It is envisaged that the benefits for the planning authority will include:

- It receives focused and specific support and challenge around those services or areas which have been identified as in need of development or improvement, from colleagues and stakeholders with understanding and expertise in the local context and landscape
- It provides an opportunity for the host local authority to engage in a 'deep dive' on its performance and opportunities for improvement
- It provides value-for-money, with planning authorities and others - helping each other to provide improvement support at a lower cost than is available through external consultancy

The role of peer reviewers

22. The peer reviewers in the workshop will have been chosen to provide a particular perspective on how to support the planning authority to improve, based upon their experience and knowledge. They should be able to provide valuable input.

23. Peer reviewers should aim to engage in purposeful discussion which supports peer collaborative improvement, for example, through reflective questioning to determine and or confirm the evidence-base in the host planning authority's self-assessment. This will help to facilitate change, by supporting the planning authority identify areas for improvement and aid its capacity to change. They should take the role of critical friend, providing supportive, robust, and constructive challenge to help drive improvement.
24. In doing this peer reviewers should look to apply their specialist knowledge and expertise to the host planning authority, sharing examples of good practice for their own experience, and providing an external perspective. They should focus contributions on the planning authority's identified actions for improvement. They should not discuss individual planning applications or development plan policies.
25. The benefits for peer reviewers include:
- It facilitates peer reviewers to gain new insights on how planning authorities operate and to bring back learning to their own organisation in ways that both improve outcomes and drive efficiency
 - It allows them to bring their experience to the discussion and be used constructively to support improvements
 - It assists with personal and professional development

The role of the National Planning Improvement (NPI) team

26. The NPI team may have a number of roles, depending on the structure and format of the workshop.
27. In some cases, a member of the NPI team will facilitate the workshop and will undertake this role as per the guidance above.
28. In every workshop, an NPI team member will introduce the background and broader ambitions of the NPIF. This will set out details on the role of the NPI team, the background, aims, and broader process involved in the NPIF.
29. They will also be a peer reviewer at each workshop, thereby:
- providing a critical friend role in giving constructive feedback and advice on the planning authority's Improvement Action Plan
 - highlighting relevant good practice that they are aware of from broader work
 - providing advice on the process and supporting the facilitator to deliver the workshop

PROCESS

Pre-workshop arrangements

30. The participants in the collaborative peer review session will have been chosen by the planning authority. It is envisaged that it will comprise a group of around 12 people to allow for a balance of considered perspectives and to make the workshop manageable including representatives from the host planning authority, the partner/ peer planning authority, other relevant functions within the host local authority or national park authority that have a bearing on how the planning authority works, partners and stakeholders such as statutory consultees and Key Agencies, users and beneficiaries of the planning system and the NPI team.
31. A meeting invite will be sent out by the planning authority, and they will decide if they are hosting face to face or online.
32. All involved in the workshop will be sent materials at least 7 days in advance that will provide context for the discussion and give participants time to familiarise themselves with the Improvement Action Plan and discuss it with colleagues. This will include:
 - Agenda
 - Briefing document – see appendix 1 for suggested briefing template
 - The planning authority’s draft Improvement Action Plan, that sets out actions identified from the performance assessment. These actions will be given a priority rating
 - The planning authority’s draft performance assessment document. The performance assessment is included for participants as background to make them aware of the narrative and data that the planning authority has pulled together in assessing its performance which has in turn led to the identification of improvement actions
 - A list of participants in the workshop

Example of workshop programme and agenda

33. The workshop is expected to be a morning or afternoon session, the following sets out an example of what the structure could look like.

EXAMPLE AGENDA

1:30pm – Arrival - Tea and coffee

2pm – Introductions

- Participants introduce themselves and what perspective they are bringing to the session

2:10pm – Context

- Facilitator sets out
 - the purpose of the workshop
 - the role of the facilitator
 - the role of peer reviewers
 - the tone of the workshops in being constructive and focusing on providing solutions and problem solving
 - the programme and timings
- National Planning Improvement Team sets out the context
 - the role of the NPI team
 - the background to the development of the NPIF
 - the broader aims and objectives of the NPIF
 - the NPIF process and stakeholders
 - the importance of the pilots

2:30pm – Planning Authority talk through the Improvement Action Plan

- Planning Authority set context on how the Improvement Action Plan was developed and the improvement actions it contains

3pm – Peer Review of the Improvement Action Plan

- Group to answer the question – **What improvement actions should the planning authority take?**
- Some prompt questions:
 - What actions should be given highest priority?
 - Do you think there is anything missing from the Improvement Action Plan?
 - Are there any actions you want to offer your support on with delivery?
 - Where are there opportunities for more joined up working and collaboration?
 - Do you know of any more case studies of best practice the planning authority should highlight?
- The facilitator should decide if they wish to use any specific tools and techniques during the workshops. Some suggestions that could be used include using coaching questions, the 1,2,4, all approach that aims to generate ideas by gradually

encouraging team members to think, first individually, then in pairs and then increasingly in large groups, breakouts, [Mentimeter](#) or voting. A useful guide to facilitation techniques can also be found [here](#). Section 4 of the document outlines a range of methods of participation.

4:30pm – Summary and next steps

- Facilitator summarises the discussion and key take aways
- Sets out the next steps going forward
- Notes that a survey will be sent to participants for their feedback on the workshop

Taking a record of the workshop

34. You will want to ensure that the main points of the workshop are recorded. It is envisaged that this will include:

- who facilitated the workshop
- when the workshop was held - date, time etc.
- who attended the workshop and what organisation they represented
- what changes were suggested to the improvement action plan
- any areas of disagreement and between whom

35. A suggested template for notes is at Appendix 2. Recording the presentation can be undertaken using MS Teams. You may also want to assign a note taker.

POST MEETING

36. After the peer review workshop, there will be an Improvement Action Plan that has been 'tested' with users and stakeholders. The planning authority can then update the draft Improvement Action Plan, performance assessment and good practice case studies where this is felt to be appropriate and in the light of the peer review discussion.

37. A final decision on the Improvement Action Plan and performance assessment lies with the planning authority, though their report should highlight any areas of major disagreement that have been discussed at the peer review workshop.

38. After the workshop, a survey will be issued to participants by the National Planning Improvement Team.

39. The finalised Improvement Action Plan should be shared with the participants. It is suggested to hold another workshop 6 months after the peer review to share the progress on the improvement action plan.

Appendix 1: Template briefing letter

Peer collaborative review workshop brief

planning authority name

date and location

You are invited to *planning authority name*'s peer collaborative review workshop, as part of the National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF).

The NPIF is being piloted in 2024/25 and you can find out more about the process on the [National Planning Improvement \(NPI\) teams webpages](#).

Preparation

In preparation we ask that you read over the performance assessment and the improvement action plan sent to you by **

Purpose

During the workshop we are asking you to consider:

What improvement actions should the planning authority take?

You will be asked to comment on the improvement action plan and advise any possible improvement actions based on your experience and knowledge. We hope this to be a constructive conversation where you can advise and challenge, with a solution-focused approach to improvement.

Output of the session

By the end of the workshop, we hope to have an agreed improvement action plan that has been 'tested' with users and stakeholders.

Following the session, the performance assessment and improvement action plan will be updated where appropriate by the planning authority and sent to the NPI team.

Reflection

As the National Planning Improvement Framework is being piloted, we are asking participants for feedback on how they found the process. This will be undertaken through a short post-workshop survey.

Appendix 2: Template workshops notes

Peer collaborative review workshop brief

Planning Authority	
Date and Location	
Facilitator	
Participants	
Agreed improvement actions	
Agreed amendments to improvement actions	
Areas of disagreement on improvement actions, between whom	

The Improvement Service

The Improvement Service (IS) is the 'go-to' organisation for local government improvement in Scotland. The IS was established in 2005 as the national improvement organisation for Local Government in Scotland. We were set up to deliver improvement support that would help councils to provide effective community leadership, strong local governance and deliver high quality, efficient local services.

Our purpose is to:

- Provide leadership to Local Government and the wider system on improvement and transformation
- Develop capability and capacity for improvement within Local Government
- Deliver national improvement programmes for Local Government and partners and support councils to improve at a local level
- Provide research, data, and intelligence to inform Local Government policy-making and decision-making and to drive improvement
- Deliver national shared service applications and technology platforms
- Broker additional resources from out with the sector to support the delivery of Local Government's priorities.
- We do this by providing a range of transformational change, performance and improvement support, data and intelligence services and digital public services.

We ensure that all the work we deliver is firmly focused on achieving our vision and purpose, and on adding value for local authorities, for the Local Government family and for our broader group of diverse stakeholders.

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