

Scrutiny Witness Charter

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council recognises the need to support witnesses attending select commissions and scrutiny working groups and the valuable contribution that witnesses make to the scrutiny process.

This witness charter and the guidance for witnesses sets out:

- what witnesses can expect when attending a select commission or scrutiny working group
- the steps that will be taken to keep witnesses informed about the procedure
- what will be expected of witnesses throughout the scrutiny process

The Council will:

- let witnesses have details of the time, date and place of the scrutiny meeting at which their evidence is to be taken.
- let witnesses have information about why they have been invited to attend a select commission or scrutiny working group and the matters which the scrutiny body will wish to ask them about.
- provide witnesses with copies of all relevant reports, papers and background information
- ensure that witnesses are introduced at the start of a meeting
- ensure that all witnesses are treated with courtesy and respect
- ensure, where appropriate, that witnesses are provided with information about claiming witness expenses
- ensure that witnesses are informed of any steps recommended as a result of a scrutiny review.

Guidance for Witnesses

Who will be present at a scrutiny meeting?

Select Commission meetings are normally held in public and the press and media may be present. Members of the select commission or scrutiny working group are elected councillors. Some select commission or scrutiny working group also have co-opted members, who are usually representatives of specialist organisations or groups. The select commissions and most of the working groups are chaired by a councillor. A scrutiny officer will also be present at the meeting as well as a committee services officer who will make notes or 'minutes' of the proceedings. Other officers from Rotherham MBC may also be present.

Scrutiny meetings

Select commission or scrutiny working group meetings are normally held in the Town Hall on Moorgate Street. However, sometimes it is more appropriate for meetings to be held in other locations depending on the issues being considered. We will write to you to let you know where the meeting is to be held.

Occasionally, if sensitive or confidential information is being considered, we may be required to hold the select commission or working group in private. We will let you know in advance if this is the case.

To help you prepare, the scrutiny officer will advise you before the meeting of the areas that the select commission or scrutiny working group will focus on. The officer will also be able to give you advice on the format and answer any queries you may have about the meeting. A copy of the agenda and any relevant papers will be sent to you prior to the meeting.

Giving evidence

The main aim of inviting witnesses to meetings is to gain information and consider different experiences about a particular issue or concern. On the basis of the evidence received, the select commission or working group will make recommendations.

Select commissions are often large meetings, with approximately 20 people attending. Because of the numbers, these meetings tend to be more formal. The working groups however, are smaller to encourage a relaxed 'round-table' discussion. You will normally be given a specific time to attend a select commission or working group to give your views and answer any questions. You may be asked to take a seat outside the meeting room until you are called to give your evidence. Every effort will be made to keep to the times allocated. When the item comes up, the chair will invite the councillors and co-opted members present to ask you and any other witnesses, questions on the issues outlined. If you are not clear about a particular question, please ask for clarification. In certain circumstances, you may be invited to submit written evidence prior to the meeting or asked to give a short presentation to the select commission or working group.

A scrutiny officer will contact you to give advance notice of any requests and discuss with you what is required.

Witness requirements

If you have any particular requirements or access needs to enable you to give evidence or participate, please contact the scrutiny officer before the meeting so arrangements can be made in good time. A number of the meeting rooms in the Town Hall are installed with a hearing loop system and rooms are accessible for wheelchair users or people with mobility impairments.

There is a ramped entrance to the Town Hall and a lift to each of the floors.

On occasions select commission and working groups may meet in other venues and every effort will be made to ensure that these will be fully accessible.

After you have given evidence

Once you have finished giving evidence and there are no more questions, you can leave the meeting. However, occasionally, witnesses may be asked to stay to contribute to the discussion in case there are issues brought up by other people attending the meeting. If you are attending a select commission, witnesses are welcome to stay for the entire meeting.

Your evidence (together with that of other witnesses), will inform any conclusions and/or recommendations that a select commission or working group makes. These are usually submitted in a written report. If a report is produced you will receive a draft copy and have an opportunity to comment on the factual accuracy of your contribution.

A scrutiny report will normally be submitted to the Council's Cabinet who will make a decision on any recommendations contained in the report.

Witness Expenses

If you are attending a select commission or working group as a witness, you are entitled to claim reasonable travel expenses (for instance bus fares or mileage and parking). If you are a carer you are also able to claim an allowance for the care of a dependent relative.

You should, where possible, obtain receipts for any expenditure. The scrutiny officer will be able to advise you on making a claim for expenses.

Feedback

We value your time and the contribution you make. If you have any comments, whether positive or negative, about your experiences as a witness or the scrutiny process in general, please contact the scrutiny team:-

scrutiny.works@rotherham.gov.uk