

Communities and Local Government: Guidance to staff on Ministerial submissions

Submissions

Guidance on the general standards that should be observed for submissions.

- Submissions process
- Format for submissions

Submissions process

Submissions give Ministers advice so they can make decisions.

Submissions need:

- a. A clear purpose, relating to Ministerial objectives.
- b. Clear and realistic timing.
- c. A range of options for decision.
- d. Concise, logical evidence to back up the options, explained in clear language.

- Use the Departmental templates to format your submission
Submissions template.
- Private Offices are happy to advise on content and timing. Make use of their understanding of Ministerial preferences, interests and working methods.
- Submissions should be less than 3 pages long unless unavoidable.
- Combine several related decisions into one submission if possible.
- Use annexes to provide information and evidence that amplifies or substantiates your submission.
- Consider discussing with Ministers whether there are some decisions that might be dealt with at official level.

Consultation within the Department

1. Ensure that you involve Press Office, Finance, Legal and Analysis as needed from an early stage in producing your submission. This is so that they can be involved in developing realistic options and sound risk assessment. Where appropriate, their advice must be clearly stated.

2. Consult the Strategy and Performance Directorate on issues where they have been working with Ministers and the Board.

3. Any possible financial and legal impacts must be clearly outlined in the submission. These must be discussed with Finance or Legal in advance.

4. Submissions to the Secretary of State with significant cross-Departmental financial, organisational or presentational implications may need to be cleared with the Permanent Secretary. You should seek advice from his office if you think that may be necessary.

5. All decisions regarding strategy, policy development and policy implementation should undergo a screening for impacts on the Department's public duty to promote race equality and equality for disabled people.

6. Deputy Directors should ensure they see all substantive advice being put to Ministers, and Directors General and Directors should satisfy themselves on particularly important matters.
7. Major submissions, namely those with significant cross-cutting, policy, delivery, financial or management implications, should be copied to all Ministers, the Permanent Secretary and the Board (using the 'Communities and Local Government Board' e-mail group).
8. Private Offices will keep an eye open for cross-cutting issues which may not have been taken fully into account in submissions and will help remedy this, for example by widening the copy list or suggesting further consultation.

Timing

1. Give Ministers time - don't expect decisions overnight unless Private Office expressly agrees to this.
2. Please also give your colleagues enough time to consider your submission before sending it to Private Office.
3. Urgent, lengthy or sensitive submissions should be discussed with Private Office at least a week in advance. In the case of politically sensitive issues, the Special Advisers' Private Office should also be consulted.
4. Please call Private Office if you are going to miss a deadline.
5. Urgent is not a default timing - it must be clearly justified and explained to Private Office. Unless in extreme circumstances, you should be able to anticipate a submission's timing at least a week in advance.
6. 'Urgent' may be applied to decisions which will impact on legislative programmes, statutory instruments, Ministerial engagements, cross-Government Cabinet level work or previously agreed launch dates of publications.
7. After you make a submission, especially with a tight deadline, please ensure you, or an appropriate colleague, are available to answer questions from Private Office.

Special Advisers

1. Substantive policy issues, particularly those that are likely to be politically sensitive, highly visible to external stakeholders or require sensitive communications handling should be cleared through the Special Advisers' office.
2. Find out which Special Adviser deals with your area of work and establish a good working relationship with the Special Advisers' Private Office. They may also direct you to the Ministers' relevant policy advisers.
3. For a submission requiring advice or comment from the Special Advisers, please specify which areas require their attention, what you need and when you need it by.
4. Contact the Special Advisers' Private Office if you have any questions on working with them.

Submitting

1. Submissions should be addressed to the “Secretary of State” or to the appropriate Minister using first name and surname. Except where there are good reasons, submissions to the Secretary of State should be routed via other Ministers. In all such cases, the Secretary of State's Private Office should see an advance copy. Submissions to the Secretary of State should be copied to the Permanent Secretary, the Advisers' office and the Board (using the e-mail group).
2. If possible, provide hard flagged copies of submissions to Private Offices. When sending electronic copies of submissions please send the e-mail in the same name as the author of the submission.
3. Submissions made to Private Offices in either paper or electronic format will normally be put to the Minister in the next available Box. Private Office will relay any Ministerial comments – the aim is to do so within 1 day of the Minister reaching a decision.

Responses

1. Where a note or e-mail is sent to report the Minister's response or decision, the paper submission will not normally be returned, and will be disposed of by Private Office. The policy Division must therefore ensure that a copy of the submission, and any comments reported, are filed on the appropriate registered file or accredited shared drive.
2. If Ministers make a comment on a side copy of a submission this will also be reported back to the Division either by a Private Secretary note or e-mail and this should also be placed on the registered file or accredited shared drive. Again this will be the responsibility of the policy Division.

Feedback

1. From 3 December we are piloting a new way of giving feedback on submissions. We will use a simple checklist to provide systematic feedback on each submission and also to compile quantitative data about performance across the Department (as we do already for correspondence).
2. But at times the judgement as to what is a good submission needs to be quite sophisticated. A checklist cannot capture all of this, so we propose more structured quarterly discussions between PO and managers to capture these subtleties and agree standards

Format for submissions

As a rule, submissions should not exceed 3 sides, excluding the copy list and annexes. They should be free standing with enough information and argumentation to enable the Minister to form a view and make a decision. More detailed factual background and analysis should be placed in annexes. The body of the submission should cross-refer to any annexes, pointing out where Ministers can find more detail.

Use the standard format for submissions

Use the special submission template in Word.

Title - make it very short but meaningful.

Issue - say briefly (maximum three lines) what the submission is about.

Indicate which PSA targets are most closely affected. Do not attempt to summarise the argumentation - this section is purely to give the reader the frame of reference for the recommendations.

Recommendation - say what the Minister is being invited to do or agree. Avoid phrases like "That you agree the proposals set out below". If there is more than one recommendation, list them separately with cross-references to the relevant paragraphs in the text below. Ensure that all decisions that are required are referred to here, not in the main body of the submission. Make sure you include any controversial or sensitive matters. In some cases, it may be appropriate to deal with minor issues in an annex.

If a discussion is proposed, say so here. If there is no action, make clear that the submission is for noting. If a letter is to be sent, point this out here. Timing - say when a response is needed. Other than in exceptional cases, plan your work to allow Ministers at least 3 working days to consider, and longer if the subject is complex or the submission with annexes is lengthy. You should never plan on securing clearance overnight. If you need clearance of a document, such as an Explanatory Memorandum, by a fixed deadline, consider sending a draft to the Minister, pending receipt of the final version. If you use terms such as "Urgent" or "Immediate" in this section you will need to explain why.

Financial implications - All submissions made either to Ministers and/or the Permanent Secretary, and which have financial implications must be cleared by Finance. The submission must state explicitly, under a 'Clearance' section that would normally follow the 'Consideration', that it has been agreed with Finance.

Where the implications are significant in their nature, the submission should be routed through (rather than cleared by) Finance. In these cases, Finance will add a covering note on the financial implications before the submission is forwarded to Private Office.

In all cases, a proper assessment of the financial implications must be either agreed with, or provided by the relevant Finance Advice Team or Administration Budgeting Team contacts in Finance Advice and Administration (FAA) division. FAA will undertake to involve others in Finance where appropriate.

Presentational/Legal/Other Implications - all policy decisions require presentation to a general or a more specialist audience. In consultation with the Directorate of Communication always note what the presentational implications are or might be. Do not leave this discussion until the stage of the public announcement.

Any legal, Parliamentary or other key implications should be identified, and must have been agreed by lawyers, Parliamentary or others concerned before the recommendations are firmed up. The submission should record this fact and any outstanding issues.

Also consider flagging up other key issues for the Department - for example, major implications for sustainable development, or for devolution or European Union policies or relations.

Equality Impacts - All decisions regarding strategy, policy development and policy implementation should undergo a screening for impacts on the Department's public duty to promote race equality. The duty to promote disability equality became law on 1 December 2006 and any policies implemented after that date need to undergo a similar disability impact assessment. It is also advisable to screen policies for age and gender impacts also. Those policies that do seem likely to have an impact on our duty to promote race equality or on any of the other equality issues should undergo a full impact assessment.

Details of any equality impact assessments carried out along with equality impacts identified should be set out in this section of the submission. Where no impacts are identified a rationale should be given. If an assessment has not been carried out yet arrangements for carrying out equality impact assessments should be set out. Guidance on how to conduct race impact assessments can be found on the Equality and Diversity Unit's Intranet Pages.

Consideration - set out here the most important advice and argumentation as briefly as possible, cross-referring to annexes where appropriate. As far as possible, order the text to follow the issues identified at the start of the submission. The advantages and disadvantages of each main option should be set out clearly, leading to a firm recommendation. Where helpful, assess the likely risks and practical effects of different options.

The implications for delivery should be covered. This might include how a proposal is to be delivered, who is to deliver it and how delivery will be monitored and risks assessed and managed. The submission should state whether the delivery agent (an agency, NDPB, local government, the voluntary sector or the private sector) has been consulted and summarise their views on the proposed approach.

If you think there are specific or complex issues that would benefit from a discussion, the reasoning should be outlined in this section. There may be benefit in proposing an early meeting with Ministers to discuss potentially difficult issues.

Use best practice in presentation

Present in Arial, 12 point and with single line spacing. Individual Ministers may have their own requirements; please refer to Ministers' Working Practices. Lay out submissions clearly so that they are easy to read - for example, making use of short paragraphs dealing with one issue at a time. Do not cram pages by reducing margin sizes.

Avoid jargon, limit the use of technical terms and use plain English. An acronym should always be spelt out in full, with the acronym in brackets, the first time it is used.

Most submissions can be sent by e-mail. Submissions which are e-mailed should be clear and easy to put together. Paper copies should be sent where documents are unavailable electronically or multiple attachments need flagged.

E-mail documents intended for the Minister should be sent to the Minister's e-mail address, and not to Private Secretaries' personal e-mail addresses. List in order and describe e-mail attachments in the covering e-mail, with an indication of their length in pages and the action required.

To: Submissions should be addressed only to the minister that is considering it. If it is to be routed through more than one minister it should be sent to them separately. If your submission is urgent or requires a significant policy decision you should discuss it in advance with the Private Office

From: **Name**
Division
[This should be the same as the name on the e-mail that sent the submission]

Location:

Tel:

Date:

Copies: Could include:
PS/Other Ministers
PS/Peter Housden
Advisers
Finance
Press Office
Legal
Chief Scientist

TITLE [POLICY AREA: SUB TITLE]

Summary

1. One paragraph explaining the objective of the submission and summarising its content.

Timing

2. Routine (response required within 5 days), Urgent (response required within 2 days) or Immediate (response required as quickly as possible). With an explanation of why and a clear indication of what date a response is needed by and why.
3. Any other timing considerations.

Recommendation

4. A clear recommendation [Generally: 1 - Agree that....; or 2 - Note that...]. Often helpful to outline options and set out pros and cons.

Background

5. Generally no more than 2 paragraphs clearly explaining the background to the issue.

Considerations

6. This should be no more than 2 A4 sides and should set out any other considerations such as: links/conflicts with other policies (including other departments and where appropriate it should include advice from: finance; communications; analysts; advisers; legal; or equalities.

Finance

7. All submission with financial implications should be cleared by Finance, and Local Government Finance if relevant. In addition, you should talk to your LMAT team to establish if your submission needs to be routed through the Finance Director and/or the Permanent Secretary before coming to ministers.

Communications

8. You should consider the communications/press implications of announcements/releases. This section should be agreed in advance by the press office. Where there is likely to be significant media interest timing needs to be agreed with strategic communications.

Equalities

9. Are there equality implications for this policy?

Legal

10. Are there any legal implications for this policy?

Advisers

11. All submissions to the Secretary of State must be considered by the team of special advisers first.

Analysts

12. Are there economic/analytical implications? Has any Impact Assessment been cleared by the Chief Economist and is their statement of endorsement included in the submission?

Index of annexes

1. Letter to
2. Key date from.....
3. Paper about.... By
4. Previous submission of ..(date) to from ...

Name
Division
Annexes

If possible, all annexes (except letters) should be attached to the main submission. Letters should be formatted correctly and attached as a separate document.