

DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AND CRIME PANEL SCRUTINY WITNESS CHARTER

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel (PCP) recognises the need to support witnesses attending scrutiny meetings and task groups, and the valuable contribution that expert witnesses make to the scrutiny process.

The Witness Charter and the Guidelines for Witnesses set out:

- What witnesses can expect when attending a PCP or task group meeting;
- The steps that will be taken to keep witnesses informed about the procedure; and
- What will be expected of witnesses throughout the scrutiny process.

The PCP will:

1. Let witnesses have details of the time, date and place of the meeting at which their evidence is to be taken.
2. Let witnesses have information about why they have been invited to attend a PCP or task group meeting and the matters which the scrutiny body might wish to ask them about.
3. Provide witnesses with copies of all relevant reports, papers and background information.
4. Ensure that witnesses are introduced at the start of a meeting.
5. Ensure that all witnesses are treated with courtesy and respect.
6. Ensure, where appropriate, that witnesses are provided with information about claiming witness expenses.
7. Ensure that witnesses are informed of any actions recommended as a result of a scrutiny review.

1. Who will be present at a scrutiny meeting?

PCP meetings are held in public and the press and media may be present. The PCP and any task groups may also have co-opted members, who are usually representatives of specialist organisations or groups. An officer from the Host Authority will also be present at the meeting as well as a committee services officer who will take the minutes of the proceedings.

2. Scrutiny meetings

PCP meetings are normally held in the Council House in the City Centre. However, sometimes it may be more appropriate for Task Group meetings, to be held at 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 PCP or task group in private. We will let you know in advance if this is the case.

To help you prepare, a Host Authority officer will advise you before the meeting of the areas that the PCP or task group will focus on. The Host Authority officer will also be able to give you advice on the format of your evidence, 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.

3. Giving evidence

The main aim of inviting witnesses to meetings is for the PCP to gain information and consider different experiences about a particular issue or concern. On the basis of the evidence received, any task group will make judgements and recommendations to the PCP, and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

PCP meetings are attended by perhaps 15 to 20 people and these meetings tend to be more formal than task groups which are smaller to encourage a more relaxed 'round-table' discussion.

You will normally be given a specific time to attend a PCP or task group to give your views and answer any questions. Every effort will be made to keep to the times allocated. When your item is reached, the Chair will invite the councillors and co-opted members 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 committee or task group. A Host Authority officer will contact you to give advance notice of any requests and discuss what is required with you.

4. Witness requirements

If you have any particular requirements or access needs to enable you to give evidence, please contact the Host Authority officer before the meeting so arrangements can be made in good time. If you need information in other formats, for instance in large print or on tape, please let us know as soon as possible.

5. After you have given evidence

Once you have finished giving evidence and there are no more questions, you can leave the meeting. Occasionally witnesses may be asked to stay to contribute to any following items or discussions.

Your evidence (together with that of other witnesses) will inform any conclusions and recommendations that the PCP or task group makes, and these are usually contained 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 PCP, which will make a decision on any recommendations contained in the report.

6. Witness expenses

If you are attending a committee or task 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 allowed to claim an allowance for the care of a dependant relative. You should, wherever possible, obtain receipts for any expenditure. The Host Authority officer will be able to advise you on making a claim for expenses.

7. 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 Host Authority officer following the meeting.