



NHS Scotland

Model Meeting Paper Template
Completion Guidance

	Date	Detail of change	Author
Draft Version 0.1	Dec-19	-	National Board Secretaries Group

1 NHS Scotland Meeting Paper Guidance

These instructions have been prepared to help the authors of all reports and explain how to use the Model Meeting Paper Template for reports to the Board, its committees and senior management meetings.

They provide guidance on:

- issues to consider when deciding whether and how to submit a paper to a meeting,
- achieving the desired result,
- format and structure of papers including protective markings, and
- timing of submission of papers.

2 Introduction

For any decision-making group to be effective, it needs to be given information in a form and of a quality that is appropriate to enable members to carry out their duties.

A Board performing to its full potential needs sufficient, timely, accurate and relevant information. A good set of Board or Committee papers is essential for effective governance. A well-constructed set of papers gives an overall picture of the organisation at a point in time and highlights the decisions that need to be made at a particular meeting.

Board, Committee or group members rely on these papers to provide them with the right information so they can make informed decisions. The papers are also a formal record of the decision making process.

To ensure papers are fit for the purpose of any meeting, they should be appropriate for the audience, not overly lengthy or too detailed and are well laid out.

A well written paper will be structured appropriately within major template headings, read like a written conversation, and anticipates and answers Board members' questions.

The author should write with the audience in mind, so the purpose of the report and the issue for the organisation is clear at the beginning

The author's discussion may include a summary of actions that have occurred, not a step by step account.

3 Issues to consider when deciding whether and how to submit a paper

3.1 Purpose of the report

The purpose of a report for the Board or one of its committees will be concerned with corporate governance, and should aim to either:

- 1) **Provide assurance*** on something, or
- 2) **Provide information and/or options** so that the Board or committee may make a decision on something, e.g. approval of a strategy or a business case.

*Assurance is “confidence based on sufficient evidence that internal controls are in place, operating effectively and objectives are being achieved.”

The Model Meeting Paper Template will prompt you to tell members that the paper is for:

- Awareness;
- Decision; or
- Discussion.

3.2 Achieving the desired result

In order to achieve a desired result, please think carefully about the decision(s) the meeting is being asked to take.

3.3 Is the report ready to come?

Appropriate involvement and engagement must have taken place, and appropriate group approvals secured, before the paper reaches the Board or a Committee.

3.4 For managers preparing papers, has your Director seen and approved the paper?

A Board member or an Executive Director should approve a report before it is presented to the Board or a committee.

3.5 What other issues should be considered?

The Board is responsible for taking forward the strategic aims and objectives agreed by Scottish Ministers, to ensure that its services are safe, effective and person centred.

It provides effective leadership, direction, support and guidance to the organisation and ensures that the policies and priorities of Scottish Ministers are implemented.

One of the key roles of every Board member is to provide a strong 'challenge function', carefully scrutinising plans and underlying assumptions before decisions are taken.

When deciding whether to submit a paper, please consider the following questions:

- **Why the issue is being brought to the meeting?**

It is important to have a clear idea of why an issue needs to come to a particular meeting. What corporate risk or strategy objective is being addressed? Are you confident that the purpose of the report will be a governance issue, or is it a matter which executive management should decide?

- **Is it of significance to merit the group's time?**

For example, is it an issue which has significance across the Board? Does it change service policy? Does it have significant cost or reputational implications? Is the issue relevant to the remit of the committee, or appropriate for discussion at the Board?

- **Does the issue need to be decided by the Board or another group?**

Some decisions have to be made by the Board as set out in the Standing Financial Instructions' Scheme of Delegation (e.g. contract awards over £1m in value). However, for other decisions it will be more appropriate to be considered by someone else (Governance Committee or Executive Director)?

- **Is the matter urgent?**

If the matter is urgent, please seek advice from the Board Secretary. It is helpful to discuss a proposed paper with the Executive lead or Chair of the meeting at an early stage in order to establish whether it is suitable for inclusion on the agenda and how it should be presented.

- **What other areas should be considered?**

Where a paper is coming to the Board or to a committee for decision, discussion, or awareness, the Board requires "assurance" that:

- there are sufficient processes to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty, Fairer Scotland Duty and that these have been carried out properly,
- there are processes to gather and use evidence such as data or engagement with people from different protected characteristics groups, and
- there is a procedure for publication of the impact assessments associated with this.

- Where a paper is coming to the Board or Committee for approval.
- As well as the assurance described above, the Board has to demonstrate that it has paid due regard to Equality Impact Assessment.

The information required must be sufficient for members to understand the impact on equality and the actions taken, to be assured about evidence including engagement as well as plans for monitoring impact.

It is unlikely to be sufficient for the Impact Assessment or similar to be attached. Whilst this supports the assurance element, it does not necessarily ensure the Board or Committee has its attention drawn to the relevant information for decision-making.

- Once a proposal has been agreed and implemented, the meeting may receive updates

- **Stakeholder engagement**

It is a legal duty to encourage public involvement, see NHS (Scotland) Act 1978 link below for further information:

[National Health Service \(Scotland\) Act 1978](#)

Reports should outline what involvement and engagement has taken place (or will take place) with key stakeholders. This will highlight and give assurance that specific stakeholders are aware of the plan or project, as well as ensure there is strong and widespread understanding of the direction of travel, aims and priorities set out.

4 Format and structure of papers

4.1 Model Meeting Paper Template

The “Once for Scotland” Model Meeting Paper Template can be used in one of two ways:

- as a report document in its own right; or
- as a cover paper/Executive Summary to a larger document.

This will provide Boards with the flexibility needed to effectively use the template to meet local needs.

Logos

The NHSScotland logo is included as standard as it applies to all Boards. Where Boards wish to use their own logo, the Board Secretary should change the logo before circulating the template for use.

Populating the template

Adapted from the original version developed by the United States Navy, the SBAR communication tool is widely used in healthcare.

S = Situation (a concise statement of the problem)

B = Background (pertinent and brief information related to the situation)

A = Assessment (analysis and considerations of options)

R = Recommendation (action requested/recommended)

The SBAR tool:

- Is easy to use.
- Enables information to be communicated accurately,
- Encourages assessment skills,
- Prompts provision of the right level of detail,
- Ensures thinking has happened before the message is communicated.
- Ensures the recipient knows what to expect.

Further information on the SBAR Communication Tool is available at:

<https://improvement.nhs.uk/documents/2162/sbar-communication-tool.pdf>

4.2 Report writing guidance

Plan your writing

- Be clear about why you are writing.
- What do you want to achieve?
- What action do you want your reader to take?
- Before you begin writing, ask yourself 'who is my audience?' Your audience will influence the way you write.
- Picture your readers if you can – try and put yourself in their shoes.
- Organise all the information your reader needs in logical order that will make sense.

Structure your writing

- Keep to the essentials. What message do you want to get across? Make your purpose clear to the reader early on.
- Get to the point quickly. The first few paragraphs should summarise the key points. For example: who, what, why, where, when and how.

- Think carefully how to present the information.
- If there is a lot of information, use headings to break up your writing into sections.
- Careful use of illustrations and flow charts can help your reader sort out complex information.
- Lists can help to simplify complex information. Bullet points can help to make information stand out.
- Remember – be consistent in the way you lay out information.
- The average sentence length should be around 15 to 20 words. Vary the length. Very short sentences are good for making punchy points. Each sentence should contain one main idea.
- Paragraphs should be made up of a group of sentences with a common theme.
- Before submitting your report, re-read it, or ask someone else to do so, to ensure the information is clear and easy to understand.

Your writing style

- Imagine you are talking to your reader. Your writing style will immediately become more warm, personal and conversational. Refer to the reader as you and the organisation as we.
- Do not use gender specific words such as manpower (use workforce or employees).
- Use everyday English. Remember you are writing to inform, not to impress.
- Avoid legalistic and pompous words.
- Do not use jargon that your reader might not understand. Explain any technical terms that you may need to use.
- If you use acronyms, write them out in full and put the acronym in brackets. For example: Senior Management Team (SMT)
- Use simple words to make things clear for your reader, such as “near” rather than “in the vicinity, ” “use” instead of “utilise” etc

5 Timing of submission of papers

The Board Secretary will establish arrangements within your Board for you to submit your final reports for Board and committee meetings. It is essential that you submit your reports by the required deadline. This gives the chair of the meeting the opportunity to review the reports in advance of the meeting before the reports are issued. The secretary can also distribute the meeting pack to the members in good time for them to prepare for the meeting.

Please let the Board Secretary know as soon as possible if there are any issues meeting the deadlines.

6 Further guidance

For further guidance or advice, contact:

((Name))
Board Secretary (or other title)
NHS xxxx

Appendix one - Content checklist

Does the issue need to be decided by the group?	
Is the paper ready to come to the group?	
Is there enough information that members can make a decision with confidence?	
Are the key messages clear so that everyone understands the same message?	
Is there enough information to support the key messages?	
Is all the information relevant or does it include 'nice to know' information as well?	
Is there enough analysis?	
Is the language suitable, i.e. is it clear and simple without any jargon?	
Where options are presented, are there clear reasons for the preferred option(s)? Are the risks clearly identified? Are the finances and facts accurate?	
Are fact and opinion clearly differentiated?	
Is the proposal in line with the Board's strategy?	
What communication and engagement has taken place or is needed with stakeholders?	

Appendix two – Formatting checklist

Font	Arial	
Headings	Size 14 bold and sentence case	
Sub headings	Size 12 bold and sentence case	
All other text	Size 12 regular and sentence case	
Line Spacing	Single	
Justification	Left (ragged margin)	
Text colour	Select automatic colour. Colour text should only be used where it significantly adds to understanding (i.e. graphs)	
Version Control	All documents should be in line with Document Control and Naming Conventions guidance, which includes the format for page numbers.	
Acronyms	Spell these out in full the first time and follow up with the shortened version in brackets. Thereafter the acronym should be used.	
Abbreviations (add local information to bullet list)	Spell these out in full the first time and follow up with the shortened version in brackets. Thereafter the acronym should be used. The following should never be abbreviated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NHSScotland 	
Tense	Stick to the same tense and keep it simple.	
Postholders	Refer to job titles and not by personal name.	
Dates	For consistency across papers, the following format for dates should be used in all papers: 1 January 2016.	
Terminology	Ensure that a glossary is included or provide an explanation on first use in Board paper.	
Changes	Generally, tracked changes should not be included on any papers but you should highlight any changes made to the original paper presented in the cover paper. In some circumstances it may be relevant to include changes in this way.	
Protective markings	All Board papers are public and do not need to be protectively marked. Boards with a private session should classify papers by using a header message on every page as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board Official or Board Sensitive 	
Patient / Personal / Sensitive information	If you have any questions in respect of patient/personal information, to ensure that all information is treated appropriately and confidentially, advice should be sought from the Caldicott Guardian.	

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