



ESSEX QUALITY REVIEW PANEL

ESSEX PLANNING OFFICERS ASSOCIATION



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APPLICANTS' GUIDE

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1.0 Introduction

Introduction to the Essex Quality Review Panel

The Essex Planning Officers Association in partnership with Place Services has established the Essex Quality Review Panel (EQRP).

Essex is one of the UKs fastest growing regions through its close links to London as well as its well-defined infrastructure and economy, the built environment is developing fast and the requirement for high quality design has never been as important.

The EQRP will ensure delivery and promotion of high-quality new developments through the creation of good design, sustainability, and improved quality, creating better places and environments to work and live in the County.

A Quality Review Panel provides a well-established method of offering independent and impartial guidance on the design of new buildings, landscapes, and public space.



The Echoes, Grays - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

The Purpose of this Document

This EQRP document is a guidance for those working within the applicant side of planning and development. The document details how the quality review process works, as well as incorporating suggestions on how applicants can get the best value from the EQRP.

Quality Review Panels are a well-established way of improving the quality of design outcomes in the built environment, and it is now recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as quoted below:

“138. Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. The primary means of doing so should be through the preparation and use of local design codes, in line with the National Model Design Code. For assessing proposals there is a range of tools including workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large-scale housing and mixed-use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”



St Chads, Tilbury - image courtesy of Kilian O'Sullivan

Our Principles & USP

The Panels objective is to encourage high quality design, sustainability, environmental infrastructure and community coherence within Essex.

Each panel will be individually tailored to suit the projects aims and outcomes where panel members will be called upon to reflect the need and requirement of an application. The EQRP does this by not only striving to improve the quality of architecture, urban design, landscape and highway design, but also considering the wider aspects of what makes a fully cohesive community. Other elements such as heritage, health and wellbeing, sustainable energy, and public art are all incorporated. This is what separates the EQRP from more traditional Design Review Panel formats.

The panel will be available to all who would wish to use it, and is expected to be of particular aid where quality and design is at the forefront of discussions at pre-app stage or earlier.

All feedback provided by the Panel will be made in accordance with the set review principles stated within this section of the document.

For the EQRP to succeed, it must be carried out using a robust, yet transparent and collaborative process. It must also offer consistently high standards in the quality of its advice. These standards can be summarised in the key eleven principles.



Beaulieu, Chelmsford - image courtesy of Tate Hindle

Quality Review Principles:

1

Independent – it is conducted by people who are unconnected with the scheme’s promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that conflicts of interest do not arise.

2

Expert - the advice is delivered by suitably trained people who are experienced in design, who know how to criticise constructively and whose standing and expertise is widely acknowledged.

3

Multidisciplinary - the advice combines the different perspectives of architects, urban designers, town planners, landscape architects, engineers and other specialist experts to provide a complete, rounded assessment.

4

Accountable- the Quality Review Panel and its advice must be clearly seen to work for the benefit of the public. This should be ingrained within the panel’s terms of reference.

5

Impartial - the advice is informed by independent experts, people who are unconnected with the scheme’s promoters and decision makers, and it ensures that any potential conflicts of interest are managed in an open and transparent way.

6

Transparent – the panel’s remit, membership, governance processes and funding should always be in the public domain.

7

Proportionate – it is used on projects whose significance, at either a local or national level, warrants the investment needed to provide the service.

8

Timely - the advice is conveyed as early as possible in the design process, because this can avoid a great deal of wasted time. It also costs less to make changes at an early stage.

9

Advisory - the Quality Review Panel does not make decisions, but it offers impartial advice for the people who do.

10

Objective – it appraises schemes according to reasoned, objective criteria rather than the stylistic tastes of individual panel members.

11

Accessible – its findings and advice are clearly expressed in terms that design teams, decision makers and clients can all understand and use.



The Team

Place Services have created, manage and deliver the services offered through this panel.

Place Services are a leading public sector provider of integrated environmental assessment, planning, design and management services. Their combination of specialist skills and experience means that they are uniquely qualified to help public organisations meet the requirements of the planning process, create practical design solutions and deliver environmental stewardship.

Place Services' experience and skills demonstrate the drive for high quality design throughout Essex and the UK.

Contact Us

We're always interested to hear from you regarding the EQR, regardless if you want to provide us some feedback, become a panel member or just interested in finding out more surrounding the Panel, you can contact us in the following ways:

Essex Design Guide

Email: essexdesignguide@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 6840

Website: www.essexdesignguide.co.uk/qualitypanel



Panel Manager - Jason Yates

Email: jason.yates@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 7271

Mobile: 07740901097

Jason's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQR, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



Panel Manager - Sam Williams

Email: Sam.Williams@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 3136

Mobile: N/A

Sam's current role involves serving as the Panel Manager of the EQR, working with multiple local authorities across the county to deliver a bespoke quality review service.



Panel Coordinator - Joe Feeney

Email: joseph.feeney@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 032 2838

Mobile: N/A

Joe serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Rosie Follett

Email: Rosie.follett@essex.gov.uk

Telephone: 0333 013 9493

Mobile: N/A

Rosie serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



Panel Coordinator - Neha Patil

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Telephone: 0333 013 9313

Mobile: N/A

Neha serves as the Panel Coordinator for the EQRP working alongside the Panel Manager, maintaining the services of the EQRP on a day-to-day basis.



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2.0 Value of Quality Review Panels

Value of Design and Quality

It is evident that well designed and high quality places are essential in achieving and attracting people to live, work and play within Essex regardless of political control or authority.

High quality design is essential to:

- Improve quality of life
- Provide a setting to attract business and encourage job creation and growth
- Make places accessible no matter the background, age or ability
- Cut down on anti-social behaviours
- Provide active design through sustainable methods of transport
- Utilise green energy and water efficiency through changing climates
- Provide a quality of space to attract skilled people, investment and visitors

Improves Speed

The use of the EQR panel members' expertise can help to resolve potential design issues and overcome conflict, therefore saving time and helping to progress a project through the planning process.

Increases value in good design

The EQR offers a fresh perspective on designs, helping to address issues with viability and efficiency, as well as providing alternative design solutions that are yet to be explored within a scheme.

Increased consensus across different parties

The EQR facilitates engaging collaboration amongst different parties, to reach agreements over design vision and development of project schemes.

Improves quality

The EQR process can ensure an improvement in design quality, identifying ways to enhance a scheme, and becoming an integral part of the development control process.

3.0 The Quality Review Process

When to Engage with the EQRP

Panels are best undertaken at an early stage of the design process. This ensures a design is flexible in responding to comments and observations through the panel process. Alternatively, a design should also be developed enough to allow a panel to comment and discuss the concept, approach and details.

From experience we have discovered that panels organised following a validated planning application are tightly restricted, or limited to any design changes, and these instances a panel process can become redundant.

Panels can be requested by the applicant or Local Authority case officer through the website - [Book a Panel](#).

Please note, not all planning applications require a Quality Review Panel - if you would like to discuss a particular planning application or project, please contact the Panel Manager. We generally recommend that panels are submitted which qualify as either strategic, major or complex schemes, as well as projects that may require input following unresolved design discussions.

The Panel management team are happy to discuss applications to assess the need and value a Quality Review Panel would bring to your scheme.



Formats of Review & Costings

Panel charges are based on a non-profiting basis which is comparable to national Quality Panel rates.

It will be down to the Panel Manager and Panel Chair to determine whether a site visit will be required. Site visits will be required for large / sensitive / significantly located / or other impactful applications. Managing the Quality Review Panel through the Covid-19 lockdown period has meant that we have become adept at running virtual Quality Reviews. We will continue to offer this approach when best suited to the review request.

Please see EQRP costings listed below, along with the table detailing what these prices include:

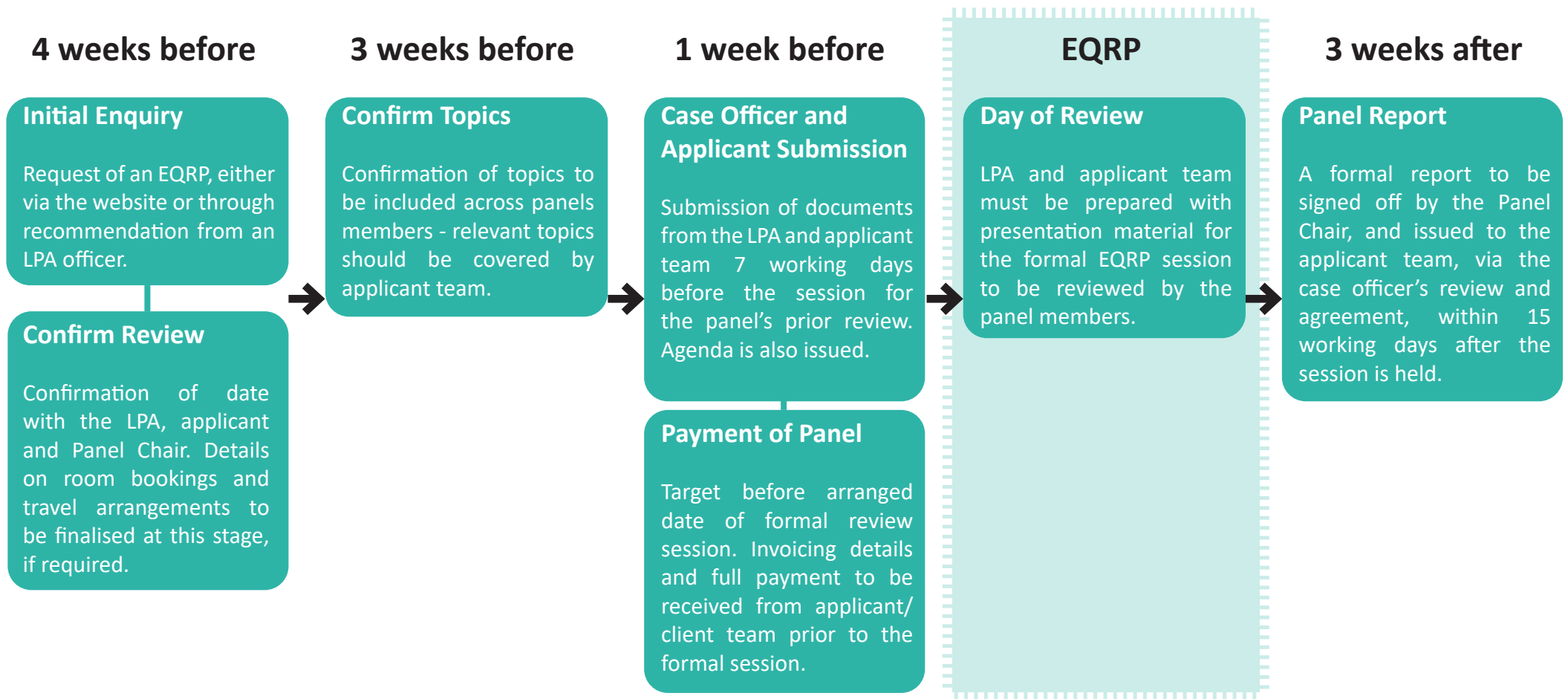
- **Online Panel** - £4,450.00 + VAT*
- **Half-day Panel**- £5,850.00 + VAT*
- **Full-day Panel**- £7,150.00 + VAT*

* Please note that panel charges are non-negotiable and subject to availability.

Types of EQRP Review

	Online Panel (4 Hours)	Half-day Panel (4-5 Hours)	Full-day Panel (7 Hours)
Full Panel (4 members, 1 Chair)	●	●	●
Site Visit		●	●
Meeting Room Hire		●	●
Projector		●	●
Wifi		●	●
Refreshments (tea, coffee, water)		●	●
Lunch			●
Panel Administration	●	●	●
Panel Report	●	●	●
Microsoft Teams/Zoom Hosted	●		

Timetable of Standard EQRP Process



4.0 Expectations For a Review

Pre-submission documents to the Panel

As outlined within the guidance it is encouraged that panels are held at an early stage to the design process. In terms of typical pre-submission documents, we have found that working drawings, models and contextual information are more useful rather than fully detailed proposals to demonstrate the projects context, narrative and approach. The overarching aim is to provide the panel team with enough information to gain a clear understanding of the applications constraints and opportunities. This allows the applicant team to focus on key areas within the presentation as opposed to focusing on basic information which can be covered in the pre-submission documents.

In addition, we would like all applicant presentations for Panels which include housing proposals, ideally to be structured around the Building for a Healthy Life methodology, which is recognised as a valid methodology in Section 12 of the NPPF. The intention is for this structure to incorporate the typical list above in one integrated presentation.

All pre-information packs and presentation documents would be required to be submitted 7 working days prior to the Quality Review Panel. Submitting the documents would be issued via the Panel Manager, who would distribute to the Chair and Members selected for the panel. It is requested that documents are issued electronically in a suitable format (typically PDF).





STANDARD AGENDA

1. SITE VISIT/REVIEW
2. CASE OFFICER BRIEFING
3. APPLICANT PRESENTATION
4. CLARIFICATIONS
5. PANEL DISCUSSION
6. CHAIR SUMMARY
7. LPA/APPLICANT FEEDBACK
8. REPORT

Presentation Methods and Approach

The below list provides guidance on typical presentation structure for a panel review:

- Narrative of the design and project, including the design development
- Contextual analysis
- Aerial imagery of the site and context
- Layers of urban form, topography, listed buildings & conservation areas.
- Site plan showing the extent, area and ownership of the application site.
- Character assessment
- Landscape analysis and design approach
- Proposed plans, elevations, sections and layouts of proposed built form.
- Wider contextual sections and elevations. Site wide.
- Photo montages and visualisations
- Architectural approach and material palettes
- 3D material including illustrations, walkthroughs and models.
- Building for Healthy Life methodology.
- Sustainability strategy, typically including sustainable travel, energy in use, embodied energy and material selection.

Virtual Panels

Should a site visit not be undertaken, we request the applicant team present a virtual site visit through the use of photos, videos, drone footage and aerial imagery.

We appreciate different projects require varying methods of presentation. We have outlined suggestions below for your consideration:

- **Projection (PowerPoint or similar)** - This is a good method of presenting information on a large backdrop.
- **Display Boards**- We would recommend a limit to 10 A1 boards per panel.
- **Drawings and Plans** - We recommend that all drawings and plans are presented in a sufficient scale and easily viewed in a panel format.
- **Models** - These are encouraged as they can communicate a design or concept clearly and efficiently.
- **Aerial Imagery/Drone Footage** – These are highly encouraged for online panel sessions where site visits may not be possible.

To get the most of Panel sessions, we would like to see:

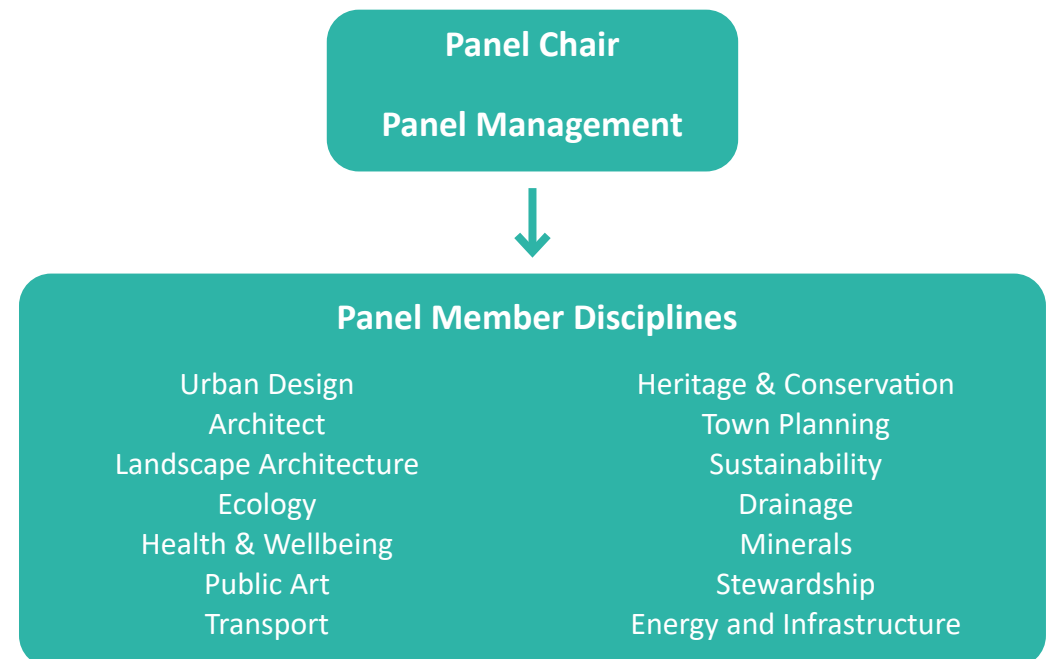
- **Image focused presentations**, addressing the site context and evolution of the proposal
- **Hi-resolution visuals and site plans**, to communicate the proposal to the Panel
- **Design analysis and development**, as opposed to Design Access Statements
- **Efficient timekeeping and concise information** presented for clarity to panel members
- **Practise and prepare** before presenting to the Panel to maximise the meeting



Disciplines Covered Across the EQR Panel Pool

The EQR includes a wide range of specialists. All panel members and Chairs have key experiences and links to Essex through their personal and professional backgrounds. This ensures each panel is constructed to provide high-quality advice for applicants and their teams.

The panel structure comprises of the following:





What to Expect within a Panel Report

The Quality Review Panel will be monitored by the Panel Manager who will be recording discussions to form the panel report. A panel report will be drafted by the Panel Management team, reviewed and signed off by the Panel Chair. We aim to issue all reports within 15 working days, sent to the applicant via the LPA.

The panel report is an advisory document within the planning process and the applicant and team should consult planning officers to agree how to respond to comments and suggestions within the report. The panel report will be made public once a planning application is submitted. All reports relating to the Quality Panel and related pre-application discussions will be submitted in line with local authorities approach to publishing officers advice to ensure transparency.

Responding to the Panel Report

Providing a considered response to a panel letter is important in accompanying an application. The panel may provide a range of comments and recommendation which both respond well to the emerging proposals but, again, may conflict with wider agendas and constraints. It is important for applicants to fully consider all points made, where feedback should be produced providing a response and/or justification to the report. This will demonstrate commitment to the QRP process and clearly outline areas of improvement and enhancement.

Please remember that the NPPF gives the opinions of Quality Review Panels weight in planning decisions. Where quality review opinion differs from that of statutory consultees, it is important to remember that in most cases the advice of statutory consultees is not mandatory.



5.0 FAQ's

Can we carry out follow-up reviews for certain panels?

Larger, more complex sensitive projects usually benefit from more than one quality review panel session. For example, a first review at the concept stage and another when more detailed designs have been developed. The EQRP are supportive of follow-up reviews and would always strive to ensure that a majority of the panel pool remain the same.

Can we request an EQRP on behalf of the LPA?

Quality Review Panels are a collaborative process, all request for a Panel should be made in agreement with the Local Planning Authority.

How does the Pre-application Process work alongside the EQRP?

Pre application advice for any application will be considered and reported to the Panel as part of the briefing stage. We encourage pre application meetings as they play an important role in the evolution of an application. The Quality Review Panels advice will seek to build upon the pre application discussions.

What happens if we disagree with the Quality Review Panel findings/letter?

Again, Quality Review Panels are a collaborative process, the issued letter summaries the Quality Review Panel meeting and Panel members input. The letter will not include anything that wasn't raised and discussed in the Panel itself. The Panel includes time for applicants to respond to comments and questions which will be considered when summarising recommendations.

How far in advance can I book an Panel?

The panel operates to the financial year but slots can be booked all year round.

6.0 Declarations & Conflict of Interest

Confidentiality

All information submitted to the EQRP will be treated as strictly private and confidential; only being shared with Panel members to be used for its intended purpose.

We do not publish copies of feedback documents and written feedback is only provided to the LPA and applicant teams. If the EQRP's feedback is submitted to the local authority as part of a planning application, the LPA may choose to make the feedback document public in addition to the other planning documents.

If you have a particularly sensitive project and there is need for additional measures to ensure confidentiality, then please discuss this our Panel Manager.

Conflicts and Declaration of Interest

It is important that the panel's independence and professionalism is maintained and respected during the review process. It is essential to avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest in relation to any schemes that come before a panel.

All panel members are requested to identify at an early stage any possible conflicts of interests and to ensure suitable action is taken to avoid or resolve these. Information regarding the panel will be circulated in advance of the review to allow panel members to identify and declare any potential conflicts of interests before the process begins.

Where a conflict of interest is raised and declared, it will be asked that the panel member is to step down from a review. Where a declaration of interest may be sufficient it will be requested a panel member are to contact the panel manager to discuss.



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