

# Aberdeen City

## Areas for Service Improvement Planning

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### INTRODUCTION

The 'Delivering Planning Reform' document issued by the Scottish Government in October 2008, requires that planning authorities establish local forum to consider the quality of their planning service. It also stated that by the end March 2009 authorities must identify areas for service improvement and how best they be tackled. This process must be repeated annually. The following is our proposed service improvement plan.

### SERVICE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The key agencies (Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland, Architecture and Design Scotland, Transport Scotland and Scottish Water) were also required to produce service improvement plans and these have been done. The agencies' plans have informed this Areas for Service Improvement Plan (ASIP).

The Planning and Infrastructure Service Plan fits within a hierarchy of themed plans, including the Corporate Strategy and the Community Plan. The ASIP fits within the framework of the P&I Service Plan, in particular it relates to the Performance Standards (future performance) and analysis of user feedback.

In addition, an Improvement Plan (IP) has been prepared for the Planning and Infrastructure Service. This has itself been informed by the Single Outcome Agreement and sits below the Service Plan in the hierarchy of plans. This ASIP will be instrumental in achieving one of the main actions of the IP, namely, 'Delivering public services that are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs' and the associated 'sub-actions' relating, inter alia, to engagement, carrying out customer satisfaction surveys and e-planning.

Team Plans outline the teams' roles in achieving the aims of the Community Plan and revisions to these will pick up the relevant actions within the Improvement Plan.

## METHODS OF GATHERING FEEDBACK

A forum of local agents has been established for feedback on Development Management and Building Standards.

Questionnaires relating to the Development Management Service have been sent out with planning application decision notices and the responses used to inform ASIP. Up to now 62 forms have been submitted. These resulted in the following scores on scale 1 to 5, with 5 being very happy:

5	21 respondents
4	30 respondents
3	8 respondents
2	3 respondents
1	0 respondents

In addition, comments were made on 19 forms. Whilst some of these were positive, others are reflected in the actions suggested below.

Feedback on Development Planning is gathered via the existing Land Use Forum, the Homes Forum and the Environment Forum.

Future annual updates of this ASIP will take into account how the actions proposed below have addressed comments made in the various forum and questionnaires.

## AIMS - THESE ARE SPECIFICALLY IN RELATION TO USER FEEDBACK

- 1) To increase speed and certainty of decision making;
- 2) To improve efficiency of processes in dealing with pre-application and applications, including consultations with agencies and the public;
- 3) To facilitate greater and easier access to information about planning applications and decisions and how these are reached (transparency);
- 4) Improving the quality of decisions in order to ensure a high quality of design in the built environment and protection and enhancement of the natural environment; and
- 5) To be more proactive and positive in our relationship with developers and engage as widely as possible in the preparation of a Local Development Plan.

## ACTIONS

### 1 Speed of decision making

- a) Greater use of delegated powers – new Scheme of Delegation for planning applications and we will look at widening other existing powers to deal with other types of applications
- b) After August 2009, major applications will be checked in by Planning Officers. This will provide an earlier opportunity for initial checking of submitted information, with subsequent opportunity for earlier requests to applicants for any further information required.
- c) We will rationalise our consultations with key agencies.
- d) We will more closely monitor our speed of decisions on householder applications, examining carefully the need for further information, so that it is only requested where absolutely necessary and putting time restrictions on this.
- e) We will provide on-line and on-paper advice on the new planning legislation and its requirements, in order to help explain the changes to users of the planning system.

### 2 Efficiency

- a) We will increase the use of e-communications for consultations with agencies, receipt of applications and general correspondence
- b) As required by legislation, we will carry out neighbour notification on planning applications ourselves. The period for receipt of representations will be extended to 21 days.
- c) With the agencies - SNH, SEPA, Transport Scotland, Historic Scotland, Scottish Water and ADS - we will develop 'handbook' agreements to agree respective roles, improved service levels and working arrangements, to avoid duplication and overlap between agencies and our internal consultees.

d) We will improve our system for recording pre-application discussions and communications, in order to provide a smooth and consistent approach.

e) Where it is expedient we will take firm and swift action against unauthorised development. We will adopt and keep an up-to-date Enforcement Charter

f) Development Management will work closely with the Development Plan Team in forming policy for the new Local Development Plan, in order to ensure that policies are clearly worded, providing greater certainty for applicants and that our expectations are clearly described in relation to land allocations.

g) We will seek - earlier agreement of terms of planning gain agreements and other legal agreements.

### 3 Transparency

a) As required by new legislation, we will prepare 'Reports of Handling' for each planning application. We will make these clear and comprehensibly to non-specialists and clearly reference any documentation and legislation. We will give consideration to extending this to other types of applications.

b) As required we will web publish all extant planning applications, decision letters and Reports of Handling. We will extend this to historic applications as these build up. At a later stage we will web-publish responses from consultees and objection letters.

c) We will provide an on-line search facility for planning applications on an address or area basis.

#### 4 Quality of Decisions and Environment

- a) We will provide our staff with design training on a regular basis.
- b) We will ensure that specialist advice on landscape, conservation and historic buildings is available to us 'in-house'.
- c) We will update, prepare and web-publish supplementary planning guidance to provide more detailed advice on design and environmental issues.
- d) We will arrange training for Councillors, especially those on the Planning Committee, including on design matters and the new planning legislation.

#### 5 Positive Relationships and Engagement

- a) We will continue to respond positively to requests for pre-application discussion and advice.
- b) We will endeavour to increase the involvement of the key agencies in pre-application discussions.
- c) We will promote the use of processing agreements, as encouraged by the Scottish Government in association with the new planning legislation.
- d) We will actively seek feedback from agents and applicants and act to make improvements based on the feedback we receive. In particular, we will seek to respond positively to issues raised and suggestions made in the focus groups.
- e) We will analyse and respond to feedback received as a result of customer questionnaires.
- f) We will continue to investigate any complaints and to provide quick response to complainants in accordance with corporate standards.
- g) We will engage widely with communities and developers in the local development plan and masterplanning processes.

#### 6 Overarching

We will seek to develop our staff through the appraisal process and appropriate training.

If you require further information, please contact us:

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