



Annual Planning Performance Report 2016 - 2017



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Introduction

Planning Services

The statutory planning function in Doncaster sits within the Development Service section. The Development service consists of 5 teams, namely, Development Management, Technical Support & Improvement, Built and Natural Environment, Policy and Building Control.

All teams play a key part in delivering many Borough wide and corporate objectives: Helping to create a strong local economy; healthy, safe and vibrant communities; Ensuring the quality of Doncaster's built and natural environment is enhanced and protected; the number and quality of homes in Doncaster meets housing needs. Also delivering a modern, efficient and flexible workforce providing modern business and customer interactions.

Planning - Our Purpose

“To grant good development quickly without any unnecessary cost or delay”

To achieve our purpose and to adhere to our Borough wide and corporate objectives Doncaster Council has conducted a review of its current system, looking at the service demands, removing waste and ensuring we are adding value.

To measure this, Doncaster Council's Planning Department has made a commitment to the Planning Quality Framework (PQF), a Government backed initiative.

The PQF measures how successfully we deliver our service and is a catalyst to drive forward service improvement and evidence the effect of previous improvement / change decisions.

As Local Authorities we are very target driven. Targets are important, but opportunities are often missed to improve the customer experience, create more consistency and certainty and to avoid duplication and waste.

Our Commitment

To ensure we are delivering a quality, value for money service and ensuring that we are delivering what our customers want.

We may not be there yet, but the PQF is providing us with the vital information which is required to enable us to improve our service.

How are we performing?

Planning application and decision statistics

Local Planning Authorities report to Central Government on a quarterly basis in relation to the number of planning applications made and permissions decided.

Applications are categorised in to Major, Minor and All Other Developments.

The statistics demonstrate if the Local Planning Authority has decided applications within the statutory time period or within an agreed extension period.

Doncaster's statistics for 2016-17

	Major	Minor	Other
No. Of Decisions Issued	87	433	780
No. Issued Within Target or Agreed Extension	83	388	693
Government Target	60%	65%	80%
Percentage Issued Within Target	95.40%	89.61%	88.85%
Percentage fluctuation compared to 2015-16	+7.56%	+17.88%	+8.48%

For more detailed information relating to Local Planning Authorities performance please follow the web link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

What are the statistics?

Adhering to Government Targets is important but we need to ensure that we understand all aspects of our work that contribute to delivering our service.

The following statistics derive from the Planning Quality Framework (PQF).

The information from the framework enables us to understand our work, learning from the statistics, providing us with a real rounded performance story, knitting together useful pieces of information. Challenging ourselves in how we deliver our service.

The framework is an ongoing statistical and feedback process, providing a continual assessment and improvement tool which aids our service areas business planning process.

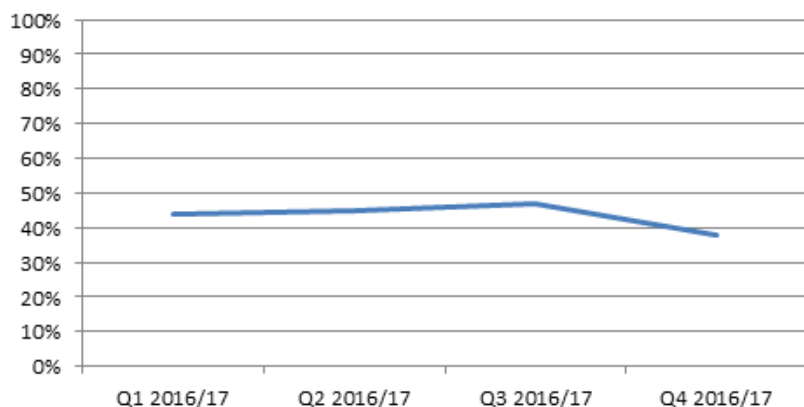
Key statistics for Doncaster 2016-17

How much work is valid on Day 1

This graph shows the proportion of applications that are valid on receipt and could therefore be worked on straight away.

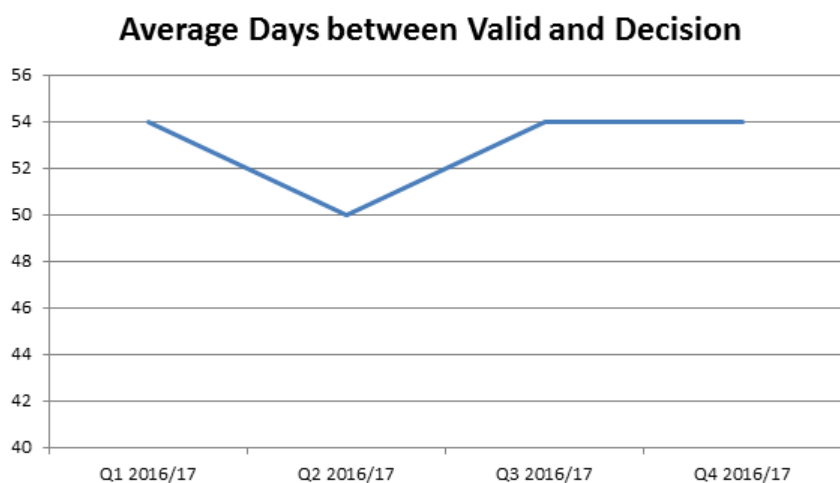
Invalid applications cause unnecessary delay to the applicant and to the Local Planning Authority. This is avoidable time and cost associated with making them valid.

Percent Valid on Day 1



Days from declared valid to decision issued

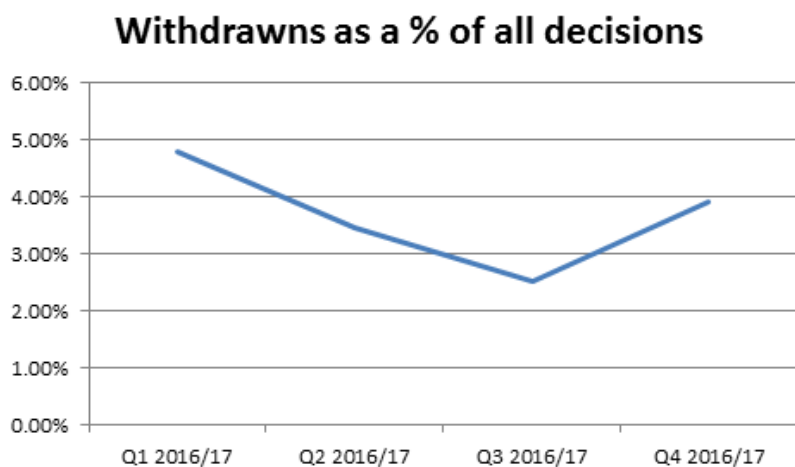
This shows the average number of days between all applications being declared valid and a decision notice being issued.



There has been a slight increase between the valid and decision date compared to 2015/16. There are a number of contributing factors. Firstly, the Planning Team have been faced with some resourcing issues. This situation is now under control and we are fully resourced moving in to 2017/18. Secondly, In 2016/17 we have dealt with many complex applications. Rather than being dictated to by Government targets and requesting withdrawals or resorting to refusals we have negotiated schemes resulting in better quality developments. At times this has resulted in applications taking longer to determine. To accommodate this extension of time requests have been agreed with the applicant.

Withdrawal Rates

This statistic indicates withdrawals as a percentage of all decisions. Rates of withdrawal are a 'waste' indicator, where possible should be reduced to near zero.

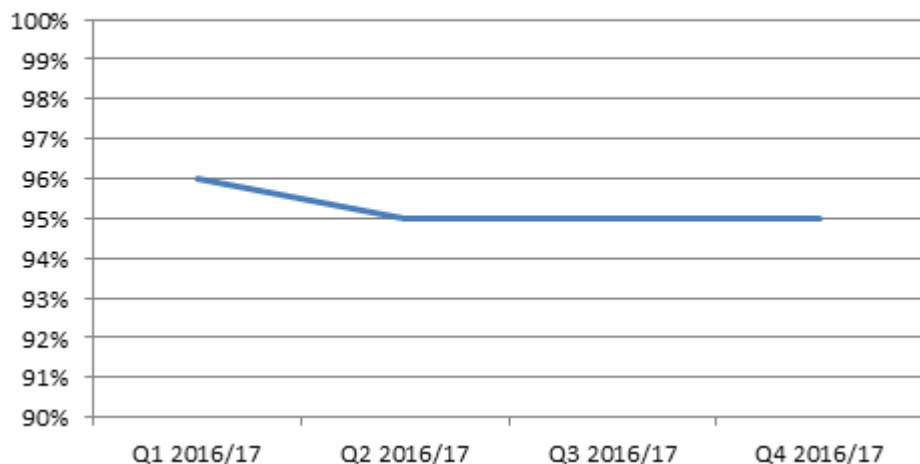


From Quarter 1 2016-17 we have seen a decline in withdrawn applications with a slight increase in quarter 4. Although still remaining below the 4.79% at the start of 2016/17

Approval and Refusal Rates

How often are we saying 'yes'?

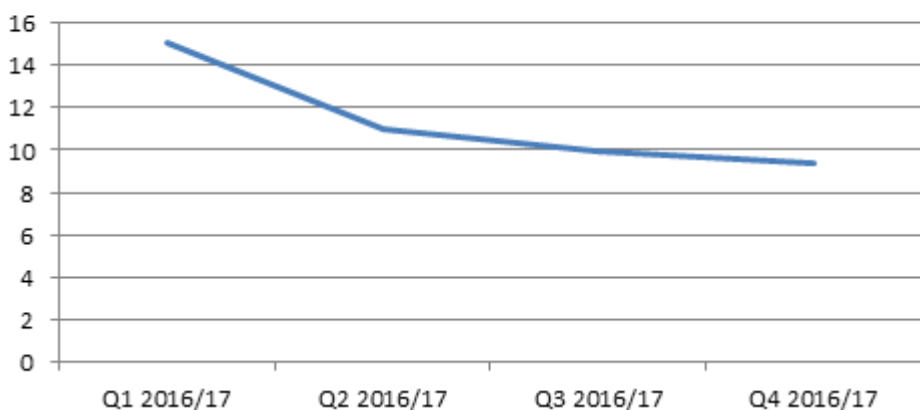
Approved as a % of all decisions



How quickly are we responding to permitted development enquiries?

We offer a permitted development enquiry service whereby we provide our customers with a guaranteed determination of whether their proposal requires planning permission or not. We aim to respond to all permitted development enquiries within 10 working days.

Average Days to issue a Permitted Development Enquiry

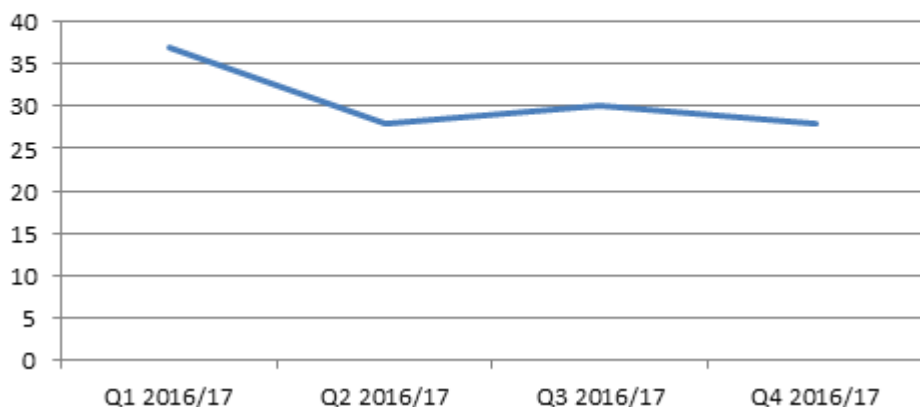


How quickly are we responding to pre-application enquiries?

We offer a pre-application enquiry service to our customers. We check whether permission is required and if it is we check that the customer is on the right lines before applying. By doing this the customer can save time and money and improve the chances of having their proposal approved.

We aim to respond to pre-application enquiries within 28 days although due to the complexity of some applications and the requirement to conduct consultation the process can take longer. As such we have reported the Median amount of time.

The Median days to respond to a Pre-Application enquiry



What our customers are saying?

Feedback is at the heart of the PQF. Alongside the performance information the Council take into consideration survey information provided by people that use the planning process allowing us to build a more rounded picture of performance and quality.

Surveys have been sent to Applicants, Agents and Neighbours (people who have commented on a planning application). The surveys are electronic, are application specific and are about the customers experience on that particular application, not a general satisfaction survey. The questions on the survey differ dependent on the category of customer, providing the Council with vital information to aid improving the service.

What you told us!

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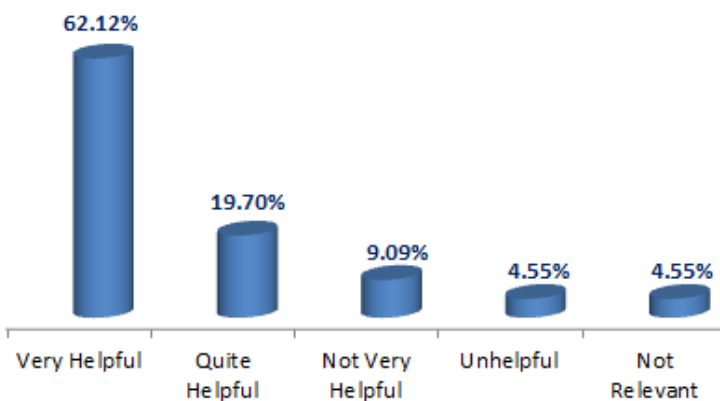
A selection of responses received from our customers.

Customers took part in the survey, which is a response rate of:

What our Planning Agents said....

12%

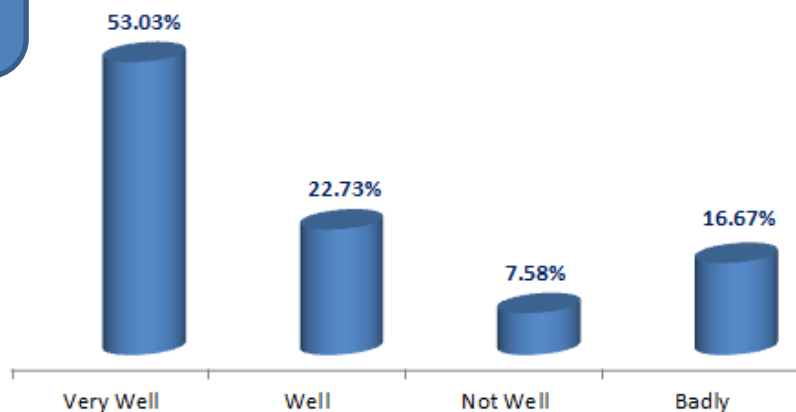
How helpful were the Council?



"The Officer looked at the application as soon as it was registered..."

"Too late decision"

How well did the Council manage the time taken to make a decision?



75% of agents felt the Council managed the time taken to make a decision well

We asked the Planning Agents how we can improve our service.

“Provide the resources required to meet your targets, ask for extension of time before they are required.”



“...validation tends to be fast and simple compared to other Authorities...”

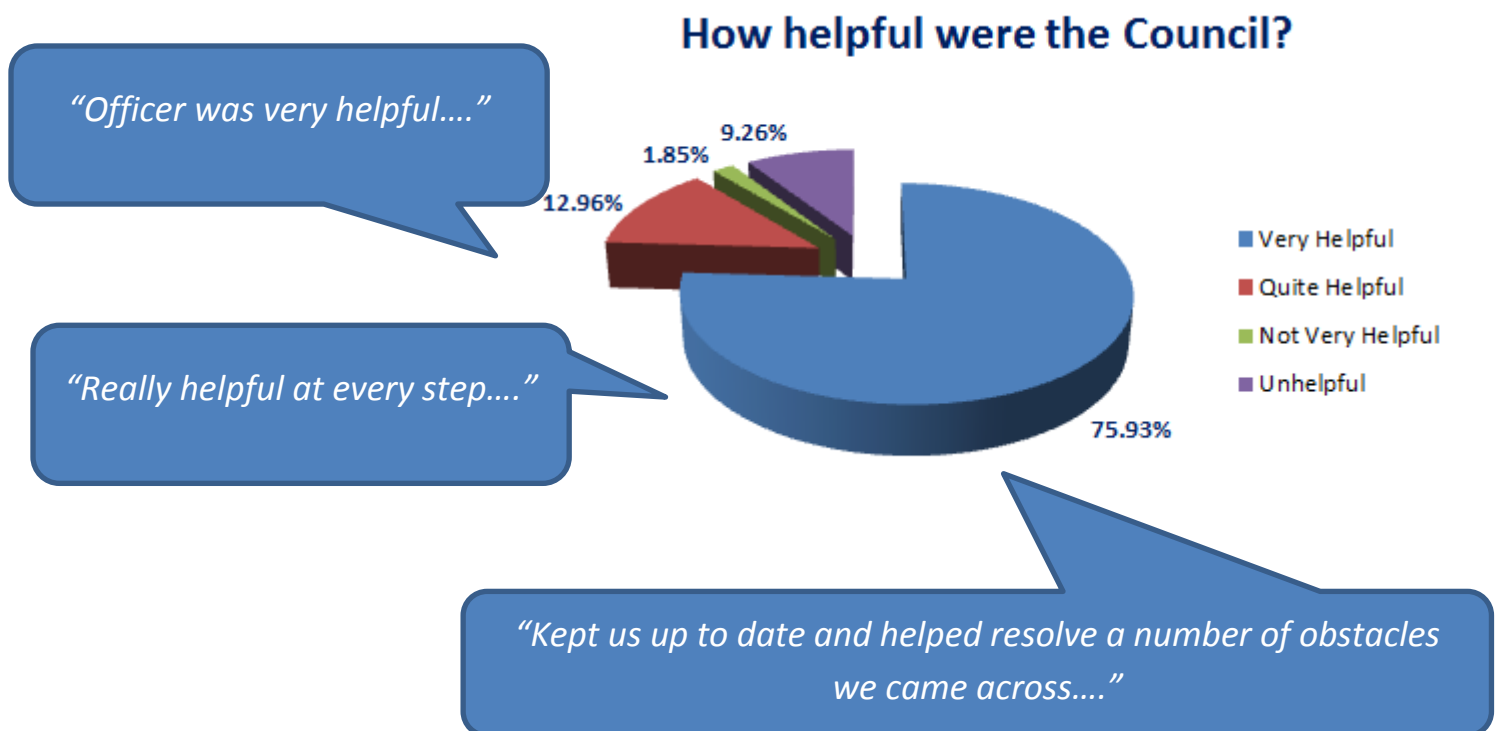
“Keep to decision date and inform clearly of any problems”

“Answer phones and respond to messages.....”

“...there is a requirement to give a decision within 8 weeks, but for small applications that do not have any problems, why do you still run the full 8 weeks.....”

“As always, the Planning Officers at Doncaster MBC are very straightforward to deal with.”

What our Planning Applicants said....



79% of applicants felt the Council managed the time taken to make a decision 'Very Well'

72% of applicants felt the Council explained the decision very clearly

We asked the Planning Applicants how we can improve our service.

“....the whole system was very straightforward and easy to use, particularly because it was online. This made the timescales short and responses were very prompt”



“....I think that some small domestic decisions could be made more quickly....”

“it would be helpful to provide feedback so that the applicant is reassured that progress is being made rather than nothing appears to be happening...”

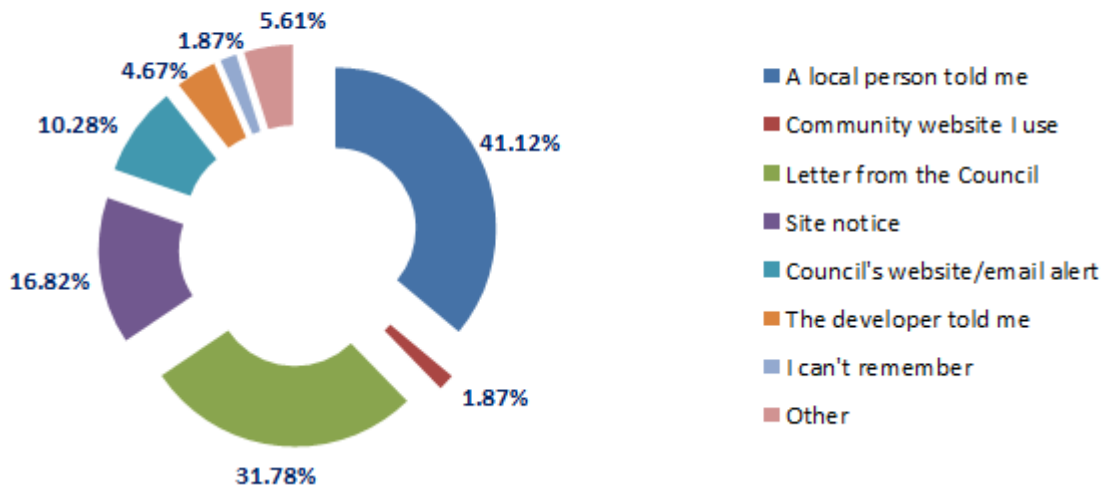
“...it was quite hard via the telephone system to get through to the appropriate person. Long waits and if that person isn't available you have to go through it all again”

“Just the process takes too long”

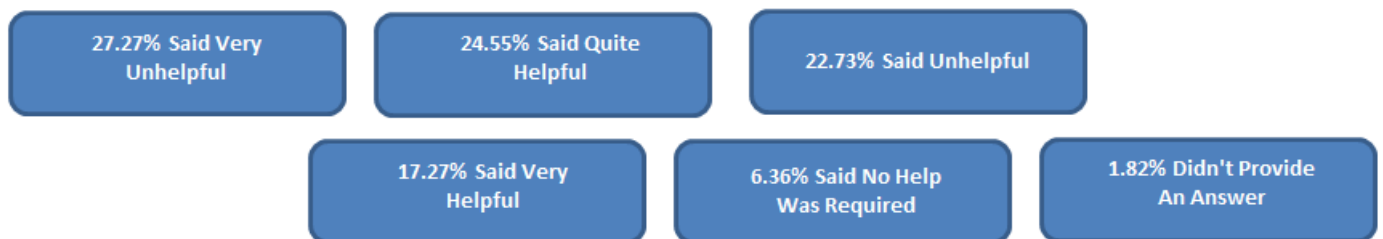
The views of Neighbours (people commenting on a planning application)

It is important for the Council to understand how people affected by a planning application feel. Asking the question of whether they felt they were engaged in the process and how they found out about Planning Applications.

How did you find out about the planning application?



How we assess planning applications can sometimes be difficult to comprehend. How well did we help you understand the planning process and engage with you?



42% of neighbours felt we got the balance right in making a decision quickly but also listening to people's views. **58%** state there is room for improvement.

57% of neighbours said the documents published on our website helped them to understand the proposal

We asked the people who commented on planning applications how we can improve our service.

“Make the planning applications more accessible via social media”



“Speak more to the community.....”

“Make Officers easier to contact”

“Website difficult to navigate”

“Listen to objectors”

“The decision was not widely known”

“It would have been nice to know what was happening. I commented and then didn’t know if I would be contacted for further information.....”

Service Improvements 2016-17

Within our 2015-16 Annual Planning Performance Report we identified what our action plan would be for 2016-17. The themes were as follows:

➤ **Improving the customer experience**

Reviewing our customer / business interactions, looking at how we can improve the customers experience at the first point of contact.
Ensuring that we are putting the customer at the centre of everything we do.
Delivering value for money – high quality service at low cost
Working in partnership
Having a passionate 'can do', open and 'one council' attitude.

Improve and expand on our website delivering what our customers are saying need to improve.

➤ **Permitted Development and Pre-application enquiry forms online**

Improving the customer experience ensuring all application forms are available to submit and pay online. Providing a modern, high quality and efficient integrated front office with all services on-line.

➤ **Continued Re-evaluation of our services**

Continue the programme of continuous improvement, responding to performance information, customer feedback and Government changes. With an ongoing assessment ensuring we are adding value to the purpose of our service and the customer experience.

➤ **Improvement to the Pre-Application process**

Responding to our customers. A good pre-application service is key to helping shape proposals or to identify early on schemes that may have fundamental planning concerns.

➤ **Building on existing working relationships**

Engaging with our partners and developers, going beyond the transactional approach.

So, what have we done about it?

Improving the customer experience

A programme of work has taken place in 2016-17 investing in staff training and development and introducing effective working practices between the front office and back office specialist teams, reducing avoidable contact and more effectively managing demand.

The Councils Contact Centre is aware of the services Planning provide and are now trained to direct customers to self-serve where possible. If Customer Services are unable to help the call is handed off to the Technical Support Team within Planning. All customers receive a call back within 24 hours.

Further improvements are still required and this remains a priority for 2017-18

A series of staff workshops were held in 2016 focussing staff on what our customers are saying about the service, where we need to improve and how this can be achieved.

The main areas of improvement echoed what our customers were already saying:

- The need to improve the first point of contact
- Improvements to the website, ensuring the content is fit for purpose and in plain English as well as ensuring the content is targeted for the audience

Internal task groups have been formed to focus on these areas.

As well as the ongoing programme of work relating to the first point of contact the service area are also looking at improving the communication that is sent to our customers. Ensuring that the content is fit for purpose and focuses the customer on the information they need to know, whether they need to respond and where to find further information. Cutting out the jargon.

The Planning web pages are going to be reviewed, ensuring the content is fit for purpose, expanding on the context, not just providing statutory and process

information, but also celebrating success, informing Doncaster residents and the business community about what is happening in the redevelopment of Doncaster. The group will also be assessing the ease of navigation and expanding the use of social media. All of this work will be carried out with specialist advice from our Web and Marketing Team.

Permitted Development and Pre-application enquiry forms online

As well as being able to report an alleged breach of planning online customers are now also able to submit and pay for pre-application enquiries, householder permitted development enquiries and commercial permitted development enquiries online. Broadening the number of submission channels to our customers, running efficient processes that are enabled by integrated technology that supports the reduction in wasteful activities, driving down transaction costs and providing value for money to our customers.

Continued Re-evaluation of our services

Change is important for any organisation because without change we would fail to meet the needs of our customers, respond to the change in technology ensuring best value is being achieved, enable growth within Doncaster and challenge the status quo on how we deliver our services.

The following improvements have been adopted in relation to how we deal with the process of planning applications:

- Over 75% of our planning applications are submitted via the Planning Portal. In 2016 we implemented an online Planning Portal connector. The connector enables the integration of the planning portal information in to the Councils back office systems. This enhancement saves the Department time in manually logging planning application information, resulting in applications reaching officers quicker, enabling them to assess the application within 24 hours of submission.
- Planning Officers no longer work in geographical areas. Providing a more fluid team approach to our work with the great benefit of planning applications still be assessed and driven forward from day 1. Removing the issue of applications waiting for Planning Officers to look at when they're on annual leave, delivering a more responsive team. The change also means that Officers obtain a broader planning experience. The exception to this is if an application is a resubmission, or if the application

has had previous pre-application advice. For consistency, the Planning Officer that dealt with the original application / pre-application, will deal with the newly submitted proposal.

Improvement to the Pre-Application process

The Council continues to welcome and encourage discussions before those proposing development submit an application for planning permission. The current statutory planning fees do not cover the cost of the pre-application advice but there are recognised significant benefits for both the applicant and the Council – not least by identifying planning issues and requirements at the earliest possible stage. Pre-application discussions provide greater certainty for applications about the likely outcome from the planning process, helping to improve the quality of design, encouraging greater public consultation and enabling the Council to process subsequent planning applications more efficiently.

In order for the Council to provide this discretionary service it has decided that a modest increase in the fee payable is required. For most part the threshold remain the same. However, the proposed fee changes has allowed for a re-structured ‘major’ pre-application service – the aim of which is to make it simpler and more cost effective.

For more information check out our webpage:

<http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/planning/pre-application-advice>

Building on existing working relationships

With the range of customers and stakeholders Planning deal with a task group is looking at our customer and business community feedback and making strides to move forward and be more pro-active in what we do for Doncaster and the wider community, raising our heads above the parapet. Currently the group are looking in more detail about what we do already, the benefits that this provides to the service, what other teams do and exploring the possibilities there are to improve and diversify.

Action Plan for 2017-18



The Planning Quality Framework is not a one off exercise. It's an on-going service improvement tool which will aid the Local Planning Authority to plan how it delivers its service.

Doncaster Council has made clear strides towards improving but there is still work to be done. We need to build more customer survey information to form a clearer representation although the information received so far has been instrumental in identifying our priorities moving forward.

Action Points for 2017-18

- **Continue improving the customer experience**
More work is to be done in relation to improving the customer service. Improving our communications to customers, improving our website, expanding the use of social media and continually reviewing the first point of telephone contact with customers.
- **Continued Re-evaluation of our services**
Continue the programme of continuous improvement, responding to performance information, customer feedback and Government changes. With an ongoing assessment ensuring we are adding value to the purpose of our service and the customer experience.
- **Building on existing working relationships**
Engaging with our partners and developers, going beyond the transactional approach. A Key Account (KA) relationship with a Planning Officer will seek to formalise our relationship, allowing us to give increased business support. Whether by understanding each other's direction of travel in terms of existing

or upcoming projects, explaining planning policy changes, exploring opportunities and providing/receiving constructive two-way feedback for continual improvement. Importantly, this will all be done in a friendly manner via a free-flowing exchange of information.

➤ **Improve the determination time on planning applications**

Issuing decisions as soon as possible without any un-necessary delays. As well as reducing the need to extend the Government target determination periods via an extension of time.

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