



Doncaster
Council



Annual planning performance report 2017-2018

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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 continually reviews its processes and performance as well as obtaining feedback from its customers.

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.

Doncaster adopts a performance framework which embraces continual development.

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 performance framework 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.

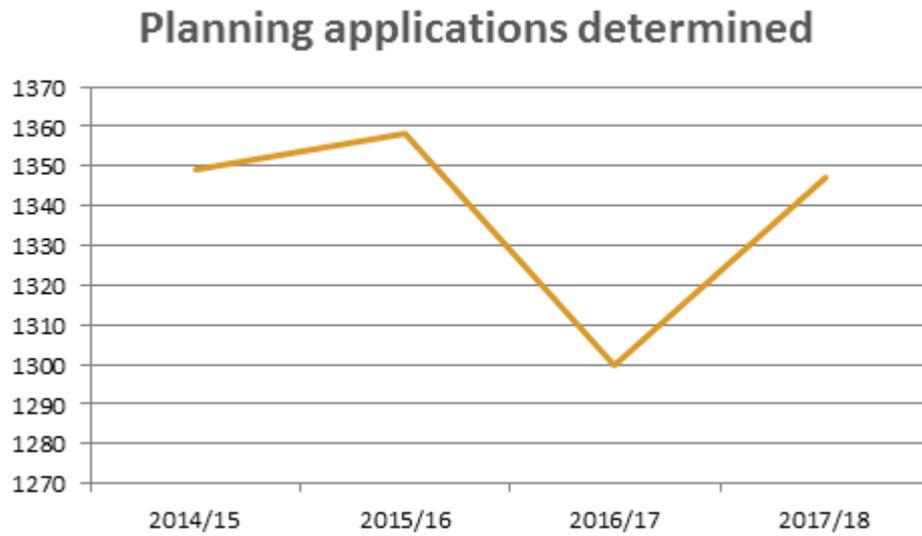
Applications are categorised in to Major, Minor and All Other Developments.

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 2017-18

| | Major | Minor | Other |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| No. Of Decisions Issued | 68 | 465 | 815 |
| No. Issued Within Target or Agreed Extension | 64 | 428 | 757 |
| Government Target | 60% | 70% | 70% |
| Percentage Issued Within Target | 94.12% | 92.04% | 92.88% |
| Percentage fluctuation compared to 2016-17 | -1.28% | +2.43% | +4.03% |

How many decisions have we determined in previous years?



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 our performance framework.

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.

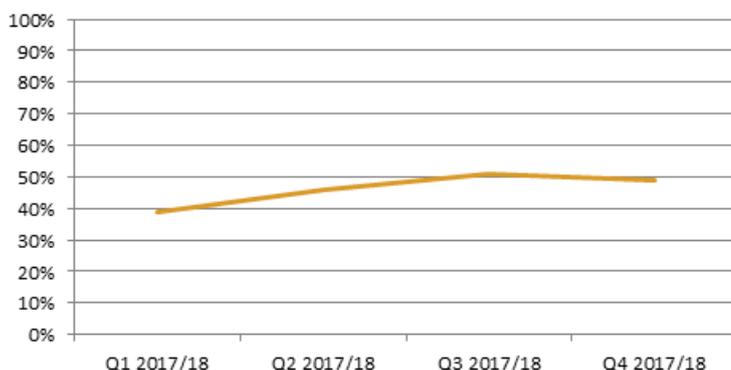
Key statistics for Doncaster 2017-18

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.

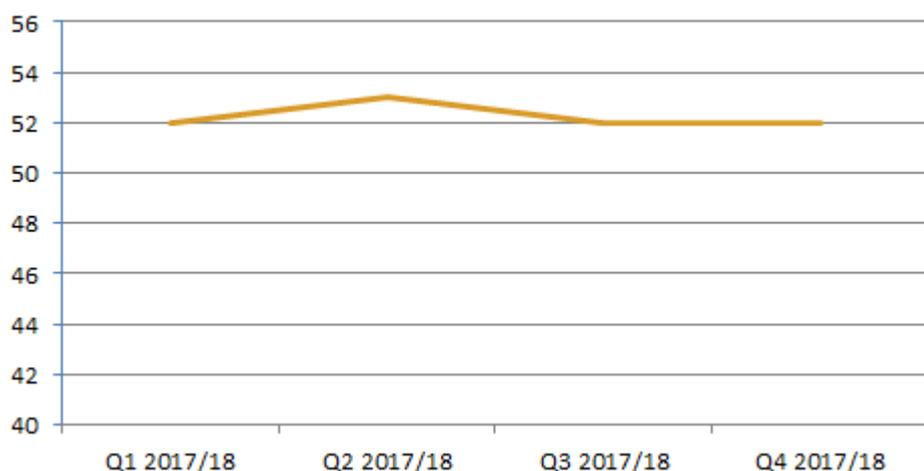
% Valid on Day 1



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.

Average Days between Valid and Decision



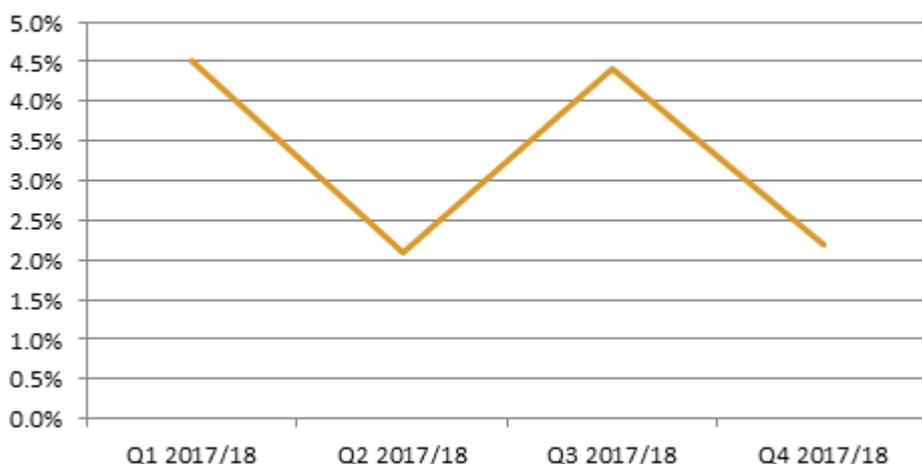
The average days between valid and decision still remains below the Government stipulated 56 days. Where applications are of a more complex nature or require further negotiations the effective use of extensions of times are utilised.

There is still improvement to be had whereby some applications could be decided quicker. One of the ways the Planning Service propose to invest the 20% planning fee increase is to further resource the planning department, resulting in a more achievable workload for officers to focus on.

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.

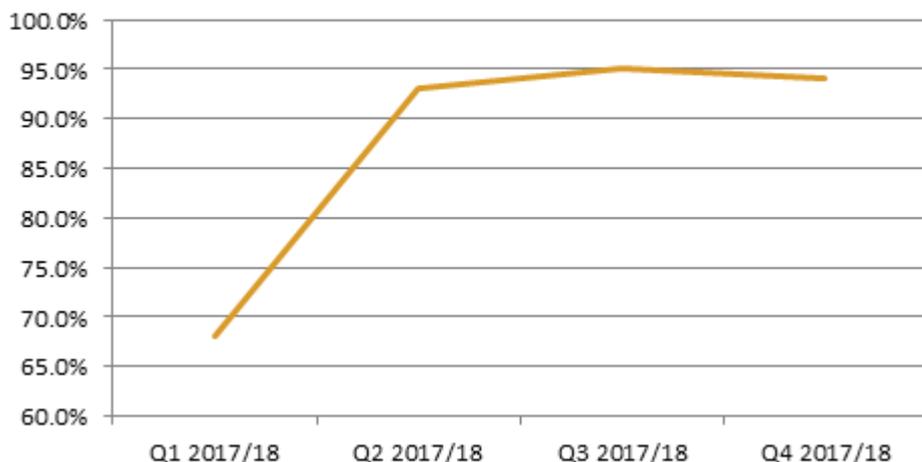
Withdrawals as a % of all decisions



Approval and Refusal Rates

How often are we saying 'yes'?

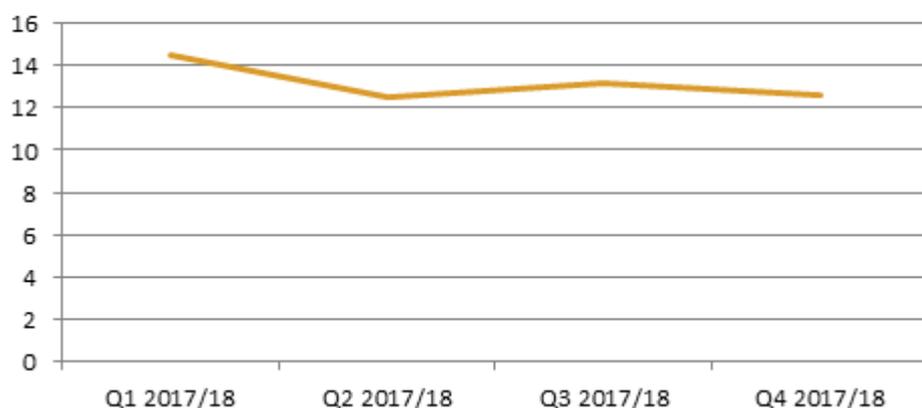
Approved as a % of all decisions



How quickly are we responding to permitted development enquiries?

We offer a permitted development enquiry service whereby we provide our customers with a professional opinion as to 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 decision

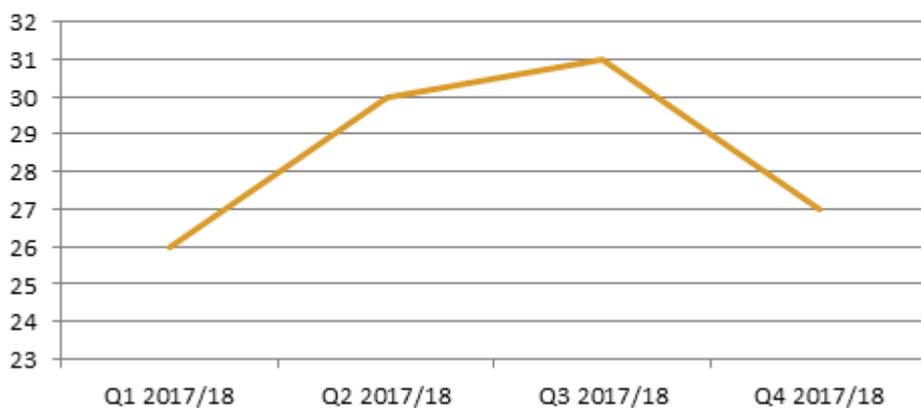


How quickly are we responding to pre-application enquiries?

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 our framework. 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!

283

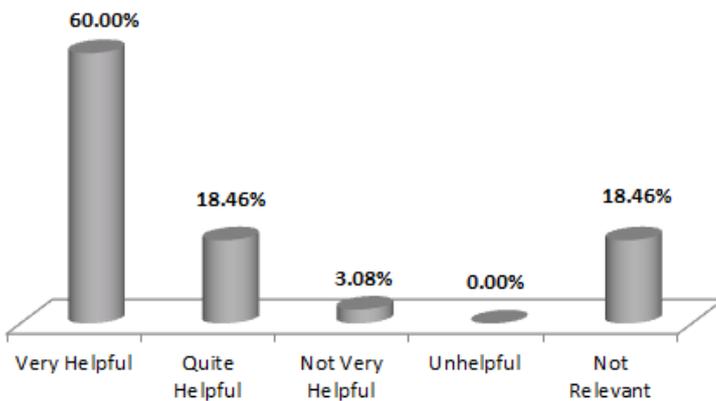
A selection of responses received from our customers.

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

11%

What our Planning Agents said....

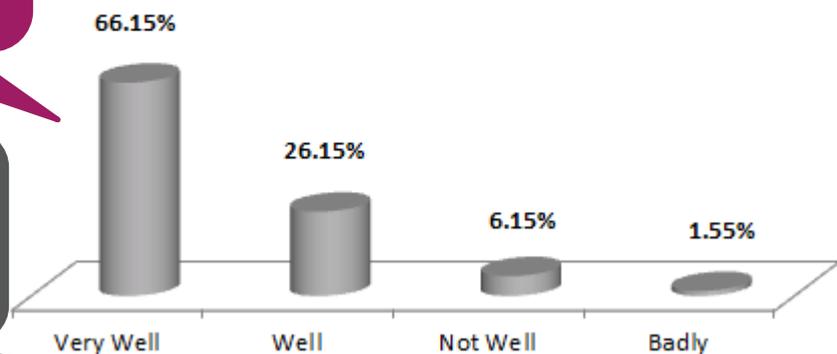
How helpful were the Council?



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

"Our quickest decision yet"

"Issued within timescale but slight delay due to advertising requirement"



100% of agents felt the Council explained its decision clearly

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

“I have nothing but praise for the constructive manner in which Doncaster dealt with our applications”



“Do not put applications on the ‘back burner”

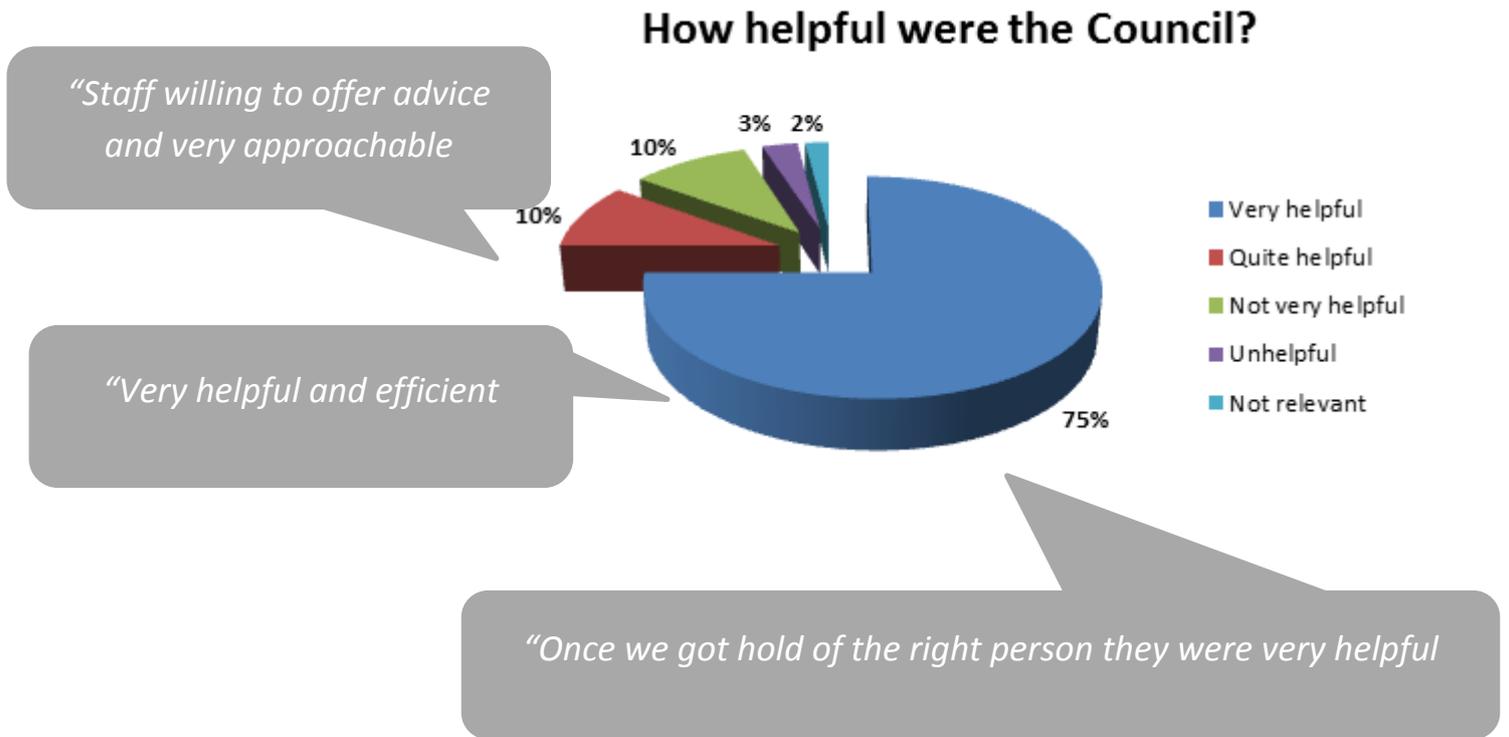
“.....process dealt with speedily and professionally”

“Very impressed with the service and the officers approach in meetings”

“The current system of not knowing which officer deals with a particular area is unhelpful. Difficult to make phone and email contact with officers directly.”

“I found no reason to give bad comment”

What our Planning Applicants said....



61% of applicants felt the Council managed the time taken to make a decision ‘Very Well’

76% of applicants felt the Council explained the decision very clearly

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

“....very happy with service provided”



“Respond to emails and telephone calls when left....”

“Pre-Application got ‘lost in the system’”

“Found the whole experience straightforward, quick and simple.....”

“Planning and Building don’t appear to communicate...”

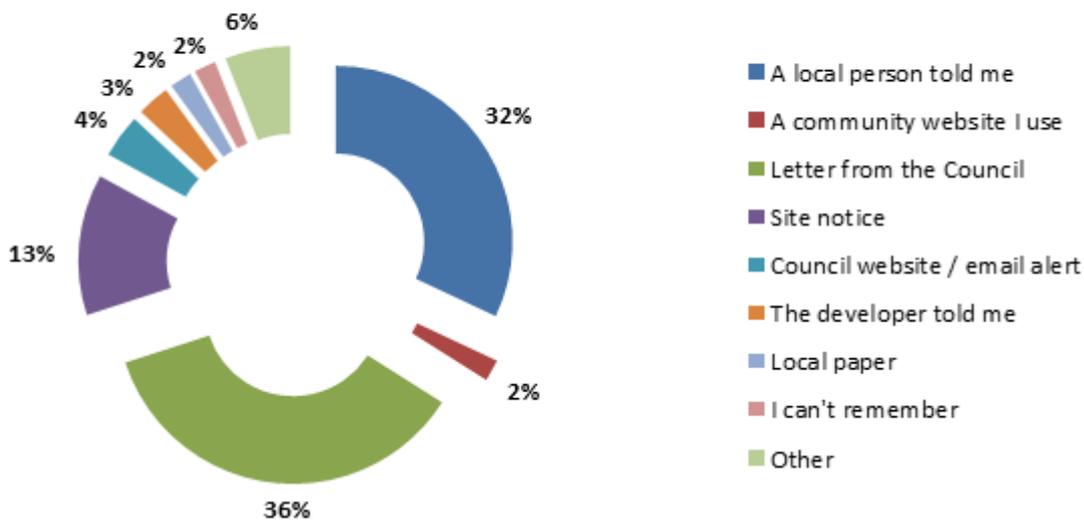
“Staff answering the calls need to be more knowledgeable”

“....extremely helpful...”

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 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?



44% of neighbours felt we got the balance right in making a decision quickly but also listening to people's views. **56%** state there is room for improvement.

68% 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.

“It would be better to keep all the for/against the action informed of the decision made”



“The experience was good.....”

“Communicate, communicate, communicate”

“There should be confirmation of receipt when comments are sent”

“Listen to people”

“Let us know if and when an appeal or further applications are submitted and whether we can comment on these”

“...more emphasis should be made making the public aware of planning applications in their area.”

Service Improvements

2017-18

Within our 2016-17 Annual Planning Performance Report we identified what our action plan would be for 2017-18. The themes were as follows:

- **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.

So, what have we done about it?

Continue improving the customer experience

Following the programme of work that took place in 2016-17 the Councils contact centre staff are supporting planning customers by responding to basic enquiries and signposting customers to online services. In 2017/18 this equated to 66% of calls received via the Councils contact centre. The Planning Technical Support Team provides a triage service if customer services are unable to help the customer with 34% of these calls being passed to the Planning Service. With all customers being able to speak to the appropriate Department at the first point of contact.

Correspondence to customers have been updated 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 unnecessary jargon, using plain English and adopting a more personal approach.

Customers said that they felt as though they were not informed about the progress of an application after they had made a comment to the Planning Service. We have listened to feedback and we now acknowledge people's comments when they have been received by email. This email acknowledgement confirms we have received the customers comments as well as providing useful information on how the customer can track the application and be notified when a decision has been made as well as informing them how they'll be involved in the event of an appeal being lodged in the event of a refusal.

Improvements have been made to the planning web pages with the promotion of online services. Ensuring customers can easily access online channels, providing a quicker, cost effective service. Currently Doncaster Councils Planning Service offer the following online services with the following uptake:

| Online Service | % of applications received via online channel in 2017/18 |
|---|---|
| Householder permitted development enquiry | 33% |
| Commercial permitted development enquiry | 43% |
| Pre-application planning enquiry | 28% |
| Planning application | 79% |

Improvements have also been made to the Planning Applications Online landing page:

www.doncaster.gov.uk/planningapplicationsonline

In 2017/18 Planning Applications Online ranked in the top 10 pages on Doncaster Council's website ranking at number 4 with the site reaching 108,234 page views.

It's a popular page and it needs to deliver what our customers need. As such the page layout has been reviewed with information being organised in to drop down menus with the aim of managing the amount of information visible within the page. More emphasis has been placed on how you access the site as well as easier access to the online user guide which provides detailed information on how to use Planning Applications Online, how to track certain planning applications as well as setting yourself up for email notifications when a planning application is submitted that fits your bespoke search criteria.

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.

As a service we continually measure our customer feedback and performance and action areas of concern and improvement as well as celebrating success.

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

- In 2016/17 we made changes to how planning applications were allocated where previously applications were allocated on a geographical basis a change was made whereby there was a more fluid approach where applications were split on a broader basis of the eastern and western part of the Borough. We've seen great benefits to this where planning officers are dealing with a larger range of applications as well as removing the issue of applications waiting to be looked at when an officer is on annual leave. In 2017/18 this principle was extended to permitted development and pre-application enquiries.

Building on existing working relationships (Key Account)

In mid-2017, we wrote out to a number of developers and agents to begin establishing a number of Key Account relationships with our planners. In total, 40 Key Accounts have been established by allocating our more regular customers to individual planning officers. The allocation was based on the nature of the proposals usually submitted by our customers. So major builders have been allocated to Principal Planning Officers and agents who normally deal with small-scale extensions having been paired up with Planning Officers. The intention of this relationship is to be a first point of contact within Development Management to allow free-flowing and friendly discussions to take place on projects that may be at a conception stage, to help assist with any frustrations that may be being encountered with a current application or to just generally keep each other apprised on future directions of travel in terms of projects, policy changes, new legislative requirements and so on. As we become more familiar with this approach we aim to roll this out further. Feedback to date has been really positive and we will continue to work in this way to the benefit of our customers, ourselves and the Borough as a whole.

Improve the determination time on planning applications

Local Planning Authorities have two major performance parameters these relate to speed and quality of planning decisions. Speed being judged on the adherence to government targets of making a decision on a planning application within 13 weeks for a major development and 8 weeks for a non-major application, unless an alternative extension is agreed with the applicant. Extensions to the government target try to be avoided but on occasions there is a need to commit more time to the application and between the applicant and the Local Planning Authority it's deemed an extension is necessary.

The number of extensions agreed is monitored and managed. Within 2017/18 we have seen a 24% reduction on the use of extension of times from 2016/17 with the number of extensions of times in 2017/18 being 363 for the reporting period.

Action Plan for 2018-19



The performance framework Doncaster adopt 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 always work to be done. Performance information as well as feedback from our customers is instrumental in identifying our priorities moving forward.

Action Points for 2018-19

➤ **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.

➤ **Investment of 20% fee increase**

The Governments Housing White Paper included a commitment to allow Local Authorities to increase planning fees by 20% from the 17th January 2018; which must be invested in the planning department. The Council confirmed its intention to increase fees by 20%

Within 2018/19 the additional income will be spent on improving the service, focussing on the areas of condition discharge, pre-application advice, internal specialist advice and increased capacity to deal with the pipeline of major redevelopment projects. These areas have been recognised by service users

and providers as being where significant service improvements can be created.

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