



Planning Service Customer Service Action Plan 2009/2010

July 2009



An Agency within the Department of the

Environment

www.doeni.gov.uk

Planning Service Customer Service Action Plan 2009/2010

Planning Service is committed to continually improving the services it provides, and places significant importance on the views of its customers. The Customer Service Action Plan focuses on key areas of service identified by customers and stakeholders, and sets out actions to improve our services within the current business year.

Customer feedback received through the 2008 customer survey has been carefully considered and used to develop the Customer Service Action Plan for 2009/2010. The Action Plan seeks to complement and build on the initiatives already underway, including new web-based tools, streamlined consultation and pre-application discussions. Equally it seeks to ensure that the actions undertaken are realistic and achievable within the timeframe in the context of existing resources.

The key areas to be addressed include:

1. The perceived inexperience of planners.
2. The inconsistency of planning decisions across the Agency.
3. The speed of the planning process.
4. The period of time involved for statutory body consultation.
5. The inaccessibility of planners, particularly during pre-application.
6. The lack of communication throughout the planning process.

The Action Plan set out below details the key areas for improvement, planned actions, and target dates for delivery. At the end of the 2009/10 business year, progress against the Action Plan will be evaluated and reviewed.

In addition to the Action Plan more fundamental changes will be brought about for the medium to long-term, most noticeably through the reform of the planning system. This is being taken forward through the consultation document: 'Reform of the Planning System in Northern Ireland: Your chance to influence change'.

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Key Areas	Actions	Target Dates
Improve Planners' knowledge and experience	Implement a competence based professional development programme for planning officers to ensure they have the specialist competencies required to carry out their responsibilities effectively and efficiently.	31-3-2010
Reduce inconsistency in planning decisions across the Agency	Provide planners with appropriate policy directives, advice and guidance, especially on areas of new planning policy.	31-3-2010
	Planning Managers to promote, monitor and manage consistent implementation of planning policy across the Agency.	31-3-2010
Speed up the planning process and better manage consultations	Planning Managers to monitor, manage and review as appropriate improvement to the development management performance arising from:	
	- streamlined council consultation arrangements.	31-3-2010
	- promoting the use of pre-application discussions and evaluate the impact of the scheme.	31-3-2010
	- implementing proactive project management approach to application processing (Good Practice Guide)	31-3-2010
	- agreeing Service Level Agreements with consultee organisations and monitoring and managing their response performances.	31-3-2010
Improve accessibility to and communication with planners	Planning Managers to establish regular engagement with agents and developers and to convene bi-annual discussions with key users at Regional and Divisional levels.	31-10-2009
	Review and improve the NI Direct telephony arrangements.	31-3-2010
	Increase the access to online information and services through the Planning Service website.	31-3-2010
Improve responsiveness to customers' concerns	Monitor and report on the Agency's compliance with the NICS Customer Services Principles and agree with senior management action for improvement.	30-9-2009
	Monitor and report on the nature of customer	31-3-2010

	<p>complaints/comments and agree with senior management action for improvement.</p> <p>Monitor correspondence performance to agree with senior managers actions to ensure timely responses of good quality.</p>	<p>31-3-2010</p>
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Improvement initiatives

During the period 2007/08 the Planning Service implemented a customer service action plan aimed at improving the level of customer service provided by the Agency. In addition, Planning Service established a significant reform programme which included a range of short-term improvements that have been introduced over the last year and continue to be taken forward.

The short-term improvements involve the introduction of new practices and greater use of modern technologies. The Agency's website has been redesigned to meet best practice standards and the evolving needs of our customers. A number of new tools have been developed and introduced, such as: a planning advice system to assist in compiling applications; a fees calculator; a system for applicants and agents to monitor their application; and a development plan viewer, which enables users to view development plans on the internet.

Planning Service has introduced a new Streamlined Council Consultation Scheme, which is designed to enable non-contentious applications to be processed more quickly. Regarding planning applications involving more significant development proposals, the Agency has introduced a Pre-Application Discussions approach designed to help improve the quality of applications and speed up the process of determining applications.

The Agency will be introducing a continuous customer feedback survey through the Website, which will be used to further inform service improvements.