

Planning Committee

10.00am, Monday, 15 June 2015

Customer Engagement Strategy – Draft for Consultation

Item number	7.4
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All

Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval of the draft Planning and Building Standards Customer Engagement Strategy for consultation. When approved in final form, it will form the basis of how we consult on planning and building standards matters, what level of service we will provide for customer enquiries and how we will communicate with our customers. This will provide greater certainty for our customers.

Customers cover a diverse range of interests including the business community and community councils, applicants and agents, consultees and Government agencies and, of course, the general public seeking answers and advice. The Planning and Building Standards Service is a frontline service and, under the [Organise to Deliver](#) agenda, we need to consider how we can streamline our delivery of services whilst still ensuring we provide good customer service.

The draft customer engagement strategy includes how we will consult on plans, policies and guidance; how we will provide advice at pre-application stage; and how we communicate with our customers. A revised customer charter forms part of the proposals.

Links

Coalition pledges	P15, P28, P40
Council outcomes	CO23, CO24, CO25, CO26
Single Outcome Agreement	SO1

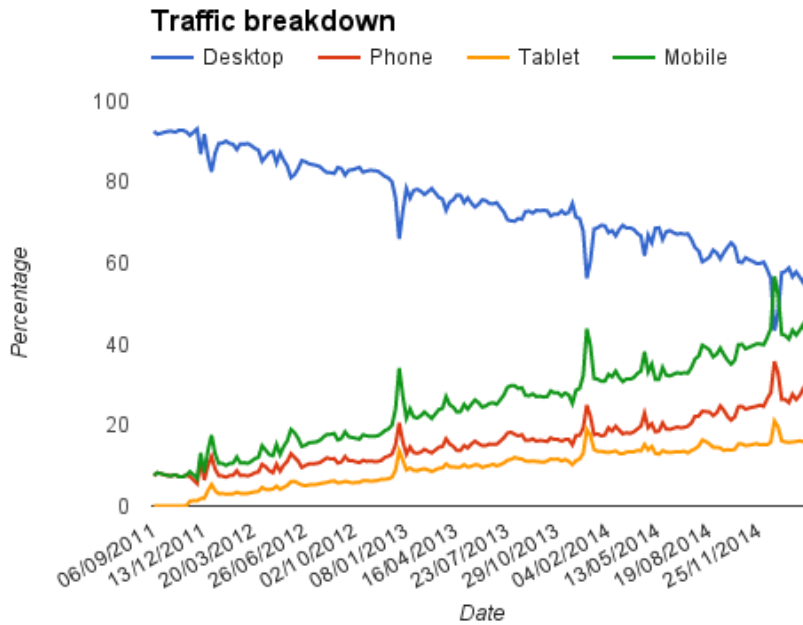
Customer Engagement Strategy – Draft for Consultation

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves:
 - a. the draft Customer Engagement Strategy for consultation; and
 - b. the draft Customer Service Charter for consultation.

Background

- 2.1 The Planning and Building Standards Service is a frontline service and interaction with a diverse range of customers is part of its core business. However, this interaction is currently delivered in the context of a service under pressure in terms of resources and the need to improve performance to meet Council and Scottish Government targets. Analysis of customer contact with the service indicates the level of demand for non-statutory services, such as pre-application advice, challenges our ability to meet customer expectations. Currently some pre-application services are only being provided using staff overtime.
- 2.2 In the preparation of the Development Plan, the service piloted new ways of engaging such as drop in sessions with community groups. These exercises received good feedback and illustrated that it is important to get our engagement processes working well to ensure communities feel informed and involved. Lessons have been learned from this process which will inform future plan preparation and how we engage on it and other policy guidance.
- 2.3 The Planning and Building Standards Service has always been forward looking in terms of new ways of working and Edinburgh was one of the first planning authorities to introduce an E-Planning system, allowing new ways of submitting applications and considerably greater access to planning information for the wider community. Now around 65% of planning applications and 25% of building warrants are submitted online. Almost all planning proposals are viewed online by interested parties with very few personal visits to the office to view drawings. However, whilst this channel shift has been successful, our customers are still largely seeking direct contact for pre-application enquiries and general enquiries rather than finding information online which may answer the question.
- 2.4 Government data indicates that around 82% of people in the UK have access to some sort of digital device such as a mobile phone, tablet or desktop. The graph below illustrates the change in how customers are accessing the Council website.



- 2.5 However, the [Edinburgh's People's Survey 2014](#) shows that citizens, in general, still prefer to contact the Council by telephone (47%), in person (25%) or email (18%). This is reflected in the frontline contact points for the Planning and Building Standards service, where we receive around 130 telephone calls and around 50 emails every day with general enquiries. These figures do not include all the general enquiries that go direct to individual officers and team mailboxes. Informal face to face contact is still available at the counter but this has reduced significantly over the years due to online systems and most face to face contact is with agents and is appointment based.
- 2.6 The Council's BOLD portfolio has been established as the overarching approach to change. The [Channel Shift business case](#) was set out in a report to the Finance and Resources Committee on 15 January 2015 and this is the approach that the Planning and Building Standards service is now seeking to implement. The aim is to move our customers from direct contact to online transactions for most non-statutory services. Coupled with an improvement in the information we provide online, this shift will free up resources to improve performance on our statutory functions such as preparing the Development Plan and processing planning and building warrant applications. Direct contact would still be available for those who are unable to access our online systems or need more detailed advice.

Main report

Engaging with our Customers

- 3.1 The planning system balances competing demands to make sure that land is used and developed in the public's long-term interest. Public participation is at the heart of the planning process and it is important that we have robust and

clear systems in place to ensure effective engagement on a range of subjects. Engagement means communication and consultation and experience has shown that the more we can engage our customers in a proactive way and at an early stage, the better informed they are. This can result in more constructive feedback to inform our policies, guidelines and decisions.

- 3.2 Statutory processes such as the Development Plan have consultation requirements and the Scottish Government asks us to take an innovative approach to broaden public engagement. The Council's Consultation Hub is one way of ensuring widespread and effective consultation but this should be in addition to bespoke events depending on the subject. The provision of high quality online interactive information can be especially effective in delivering complex messages and seeking feedback.
- 3.3 The Draft Customer Engagement Strategy sets out how we will consult on a range of planning proposals. It should be noted that there is no statutory consultations in terms of building warrants, but the way we deliver this service is an important part of the strategy and charter.

Customer Contacts

- 3.4 Our customers cover a diverse range of interests including the business community and community councils, applicants and agents, consultees, councillors, neighbours and Government agencies and, of course, the general public seeking answers and advice. Customers contact us by a variety of means – reception counter, phone, email, letter, via councillors and the Customer Contact Centre, using Twitter and commenting on the Planning Blog and via online transactions (enforcement breach forms, online comments in Public Access). Currently there are separate customer contact systems for Planning and Building Standards. A full time Planning help desk service is provided by a rota of planning officers to give general advice on planning matters by email, phone and customer visits to seek advice. In a similar way, a rota of Building Standards surveyors answer phones on building warrant matters and respond to customer visits in addition to their normal workload.
- 3.5 In 2014, an analysis of Planning help desk activities was undertaken for a four week period. The results showed the majority of contact was via telephone with 439 calls over that period. The number of emails was relatively small at 32 but this is because emails to the main Planning mailbox are screened by a planning technician and only passed to the help desk planner if it is a general enquiry that is not site specific. Otherwise enquiries are either answered or sent to the appropriate teams. The level of telephone and email contact compares with a total of 85 personal visits to the office to make enquiries in that period.
- 3.6 The analysis of the Planning help desk indicated that 62.6% of the enquirers were private individuals. Developers accounted for 19.5% and other professionals accounted for 16.7%. The results confirm that it is largely members of the public contacting us at the Planning help desk. The most

common enquiry was about information to assist making a planning application followed by whether a property is listed or in a conservation area. The Council website has information on both these subjects and includes an interactive search for conservation areas and listed buildings. It could be concluded that this type of contact is an example of where we can encourage our customers to move from direct contact to a self serve option where they can find the answer online.

- 3.7 Further work was done at the start of January 2015 on the number of general contact calls to the Planning and Building Standards service. General contact calls in Planning are answered by support staff aiming to answer the call rather than pass it to a planning officer. The general contact calls in Building Standards are answered by surveyors as part of the help desk service. The results showed that over a two week period, Planning received 675 calls and Building Standards 667 calls. 170 of the Planning calls were passed on to the Planning help desk and 101 of all calls were passed to individual staff members. The rest were either answered direct or passed to other service areas. Requests for skip and scaffolding permits were common as were enquiries about whether the building was listed or in a conservation area.
- 3.8 In April 2015, an analysis of generic email boxes was carried out and during one week the Planning mailbox received 85 emails and the Building Standards mailbox 55 emails. Emails covered a diverse range of subjects including general enquiries, comments on applications, retrospective works and requests for pre-application advice. Around 15% of emails were for other service areas – cycle team, commercial property sales, food hygiene – and matters that are outwith the Council's functions. Emails to the Planning inbox indicate that a number of customers have tried to phone us but have been unable to get through so the numbers of calls above only reflect those who have been able to speak to us; the overall numbers will be higher if we include this latent demand.
- 3.9 The current phone and email system is resource intensive and the Planning and Building Standards service is working with the BOLD transformational change team to look at ways we can encourage these customers to be directed to where they can find the information online. Once we are able to reduce the volume of contact this way, we can then potentially move our front line calls to the Customer Contact Centre where calls can be managed effectively. In this way we can improve our customer service by ensuring our customers get through when they need to and are directed to the right place first time. Direct contact with case officers on 'live' cases would still be a priority.

Customer Surveys and Informal Feedback

- 3.10 Customer Surveys and informal feedback are important to the design of any new service provision. Following the implementation of our new service structure in October 2014, we carried out an extensive survey of agents who use our service so we could highlight areas that needed to be improved as part of any new strategy. The survey highlighted the following:

- Agents want more face to face contact for small building warrant applications;
- More information on when officers work or are available for meetings and inspections should be provided;
- Quicker response times are needed;
- Online forms would allow information to be gathered more easily;
- Inconsistency of advice is a problem;
- Online building warrant system should be the same as for planning;
- Planning help desk phone not being answered;
- Online planning guidance not easy to find; and
- Improved communication skills required.

We have used this feedback to inform strands of the draft strategy including online forms, online guidance and access to the Planning help desk.

- 3.11 The Planning and Building Standards Service was re-accredited with Customer Service Excellence in November 2014 as part of the Services for Communities programme. Informal feedback was one area where the assessor felt we could use the information more constructively and the aim is to use social media as widely as possible to capture and share comments. Twitter and the Planning Blog form an important strand of the strategy.

Channel Shift – Communicating with our Customers

- 3.12 The Council's [Organise to Deliver](#) programme has Channel Shift as one of its top priorities. This means we are looking at all the contact points with our customers, including our new responsive website and email accounts, to make sure we are delivering our services through the right channels and in the right places.
- 3.13 As a service we currently use a variety of channels to communicate with our customers as detailed above. The availability of all these channels means it is very difficult to control the way the information is received and dealt with. Inconsistency of advice and delays in responses are common customer complaints as noted above.
- 3.14 The draft Customer Engagement Strategy aims to move a large proportion of our customers from direct contact by phone and email to online resources. If this cultural shift can be achieved, any cost saving that the service makes as a result of reducing direct contact would be used to address budget challenges as part of the BOLD transformational change programme. There would be no direct saving for the service and in order to improve performance on statutory work such as the Development Plan and planning and building warrant applications, non-statutory work such as the pre-application advice service would have to change.

Pre-Application Advice on Planning Applications and Building Warrants

- 3.15 Providing pre-application advice on planning applications and building warrants has been part of our service delivery for many years and is highly valued by applicants. The level of pre-application advice varies depending on the scale and complexity of the proposed development. Customers requesting this service can vary from first time enquirers to experienced agents and planning consultants. We know from discussions that their clients want them to contact the service to improve the certainty of the process. As there is no statutory provision for pre-application charging, the costs are borne by the Planning and Building Standards Service whilst there is considerable benefit for the agent and their clients.
- 3.16 Although online systems provide access to planning documents, guidance, historic records and links to regulations and other information, customers continue to contact the service with basic enquiries. Window enquiries are one area where window companies continue to contact us despite the availability of online advice. Quick guides on applying for various types of development are being drawn up to assist our customers and reduce the need for these forms of contact.
- 3.17 Following discussions with agents, it is proposed to introduce online enquiry forms as the main transactional channel shift change. Forms will be available for pre-application advice and general enquiries. The forms will make the process more efficient by ensuring that officers are provided with all the information needed to answer the enquiry, including directing our customers to an online resource.
- 3.18 Pre-application advice on major developments and other complex cases will remain a priority and direct contact is encouraged on these. Discussions are ongoing as to how this can be better resourced. However, for smaller developments, such as householder work, detailed information is already fully available online and this would not be a priority for direct advice. This would also apply to adverts and small listed building alterations. We will look at improving the quality of information including more interactive models for ease of access.
- 3.19 By changing the way we deliver the pre-application advice service in relation to small scale proposals, this would allow us to give greater priority to more complex proposals and improve inward investment to the City.

Information and Records

- 3.20 Public accessibility to information is an important part of our service delivery. The more we can increase online availability, the less we have to provide under Freedom of Information and Environmental Regulations. The service retains a large number of historic records which are regularly requested by customers for a variety of purposes such as buying and selling properties. Planning applications from 1991 are recorded on our online services with most documents available on all cases from 2003. Basic property information from the 1940s to

2000 is also online. The aim is to put as much information online as possible and recent changes have been made so that when a customer comes to view a microfiche, this is now converted to an online document.

- 3.21 Basic building warrant information is also available online but plans are only available via the Council's plan store and then only to specified individuals e.g. home owners. There is no proposal to change this as it is controlled by legislation.
- 3.22 There is sometimes a customer expectation that we will hold information on a particular subject when we have no requirement to hold it or it has been disposed of. Our records management system is in the process of being re-organised and our retention schedules will be updated to make it clear what we do hold and for how long. This will provide clarity for our customers on what information they can expect.

The Customer Journey

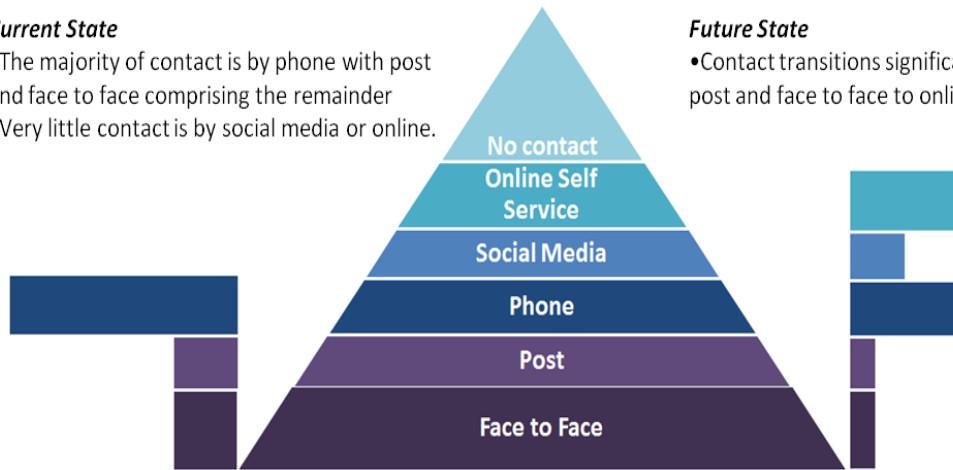
- 3.23 The service that our customers experience has in broad terms been the same for the last 20 years. We now need to review the journey that our customers take to use the service recognising the changing world where social media and online transactions are now part of daily life. Customer expectations are increasing but these expectations are often unrealistic in the context of a Council seeking to transform how it provides services and meets its strategic priorities. Only by changing the way we deliver our service to our customers can we achieve the service efficiencies we need to make to safeguard our core business priorities.
- 3.24 Currently the customer journey for many of our customers is based on the mid to lower sections of the chart below which is based on the Council wide service. As a service we already have a number of key online transactions such as applying for permissions, commenting on applications and completing enforcement breach forms. However, we need to deal with more of our business in this way. Our service needs to move from the current state in the chart below to the future state where the customers feels confident they will find the information themselves online whether it be via mobile, tablets or PCs/laptops. However, the aim is not to remove all contact but to provide a quality service for those who need to use our services. Face to face contact will remain an important part of our business to ensure we can deliver strategic outcomes for the Council.

Current State

- The majority of contact is by phone with post and face to face comprising the remainder
- Very little contact is by social media or online.

Future State

- Contact transitions significantly from phone, post and face to face to online and social media.



*Please note the bars represent contact volumes (illustrative)

Draft Customer Engagement Strategy

3.25 Appendix 1 sets out our draft Customer Engagement Strategy. This has seven main parts:

- Who are our Customers?
- What is Engagement?
- Consulting our Customers
- Communicating with Our Customers
- Planning Information and Records
- The Customer Journey of the Future
- A Timetable for action

3.26 The strategy puts forward proposals on each of these subjects making it clear how the current service is provided and how it will be provided in future. The main change is the promotion of the self serve customer, the improvement of online information, more use of social media to reach our customers, better engagement on plans and policies, a pre-application advice service which focuses on major developments and other complex proposals and the use of the Customer Contact Centre for frontline calls. The overall aim is to provide a better service for those who need to contact us and get our advice.

Draft Customer Charter

3.27 Appendix 2 is our draft Planning and Building Standards Customer Service Charter. This sets out in an easy to read way what customers can expect from our service. The document proposes service standards in relation to the following service provision:

- The Development Plan
- Making a planning application

- Commenting on a planning application
 - Making a decision on a planning application
 - Making a building warrant application
 - Making a decision on a building warrant application
 - Pre-application advice
 - Retrospective works
 - Information requests
 - Complaints
 - Data protection
- 3.28 A service charter has to be realistic about the service that can be provided. The standards set out are dependent on the success of Channel Shift and our customers experiencing our service in a different way. The charter would replace current separate Planning and Building Standards service charters.

Measures of success

- 4.1 A Customer Engagement Strategy that provides certainty for our customers on how we will consult and communicate and provide our service.
- 4.2 The delivery of service standards set out in the Customer Service Charter.

Financial impact

- 5.1 There is no direct financial impact arising from this report. However, in line with the Council's Transformational Change programme there are opportunities to deliver an improved service and cost savings by focussing resources on core business.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There are no perceived risks associated with this report. The report has no impact on any policies of the Council.

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The Equalities and Rights Impact Assessment indicates the following:
- The proposals will enhance participation, influence and voice as they promote better online services available to all whilst still allowing scope

for direct contact where still required. They also set out what service standards the customer can expect;

- There are no infringements of Rights under these proposals;
- There are no identified positive or negative impacts on the duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- The proposals promote the duty to advance equality of opportunity as they promote better and more accessible information systems which would benefit all whilst still ensuring any groups who need bespoke advice still have access to this service;
- The proposal to ask customers to self serve online may affect some groups such as those with disabilities and those of a different race. However, the strategy states that a direct service will still be provided for those who need it; and
- The proposals promote the duty to foster good relations as they make clear the service standards that can be expected and so promote understanding.

Sustainability impact

8.1 The impact of this report in relation to the three elements of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 Public Bodies Duties has been considered, and the outcome is summarised below:

- The proposals in this report will have no impact on carbon emissions because the report deals with customer engagement in the planning system;
- The proposals in this report will have no effect on the city's resilience to climate change impacts because the report deals with customer engagement;
- The proposals in this report will help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh because they promote they promote equality of opportunity by making services more easy to understand and accessible;
- The proposals in this report will help achieve a sustainable Edinburgh because they will assist the economic well being of the City by concentrating our resources where they will facilitate major development.

Consultation and engagement

9.1 A number of customer surveys have been undertaken to gauge what our customers currently think about the service. This has been instrumental in deciding on priorities and the actions we need to take to move forward.

9.2 A Customer 1st Project Board with external customers has given direction to the proposals and allowed us to promote the changes with confidence.

9.3 The Customer Engagement Strategy and the Customer Charter are in draft and a full consultation exercise will be taken forward if Committee agrees with the basis of the proposals.

Background reading/external references

- [Organise to Deliver: Next Steps](#), The City of Edinburgh Council, 11 December 2014.
- [BOLD business cases: delivering a lean and agile Council](#), Finance and Resources Committee, 15 January 2015.
- [Edinburgh People's Survey 2014](#)

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Links

Coalition pledges	<p>P15 Work with public organisations, the private sector and social enterprise to promote Edinburgh to investors</p> <p>P28 - Further strengthen our links with the business community by developing and implementing strategies to promote and protect the economic well being of the city</p> <p>P40 – Work with Edinburgh World Heritage Trust and other stakeholders to conserve the city’s built heritage</p>
Council outcomes	<p>C023 – Well engaged and well informed – Communities and individuals are empowered and supported to improve local outcomes and foster a sense of community.</p> <p>CO24 – The Council communicates effectively internally and externally and has an excellent reputation for customer care</p> <p>CO25 – The Council has efficient and effective services that deliver objectives</p> <p>CO26 – The Council engages with stakeholders and works in partnership to improve services and deliver agreed objectives</p>
Single Outcome Agreement	<p>SO1 Edinburgh’s economy delivers increased investment, jobs and opportunities for all</p>
Appendices *	<p>Appendix 1 – Draft Customer Engagement Strategy</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Draft Planning and Building Standards Customer Service Charter.</p>

APPENDIX 1

Planning and Building Standards

Draft Customer Engagement Strategy

1. Introduction
2. Who are our customers?
3. What is engagement?
4. Consulting with our customers
5. Communicating with our customers
6. Planning information and records
7. The customer journey of the future
8. A Timetable for Action

1. Introduction

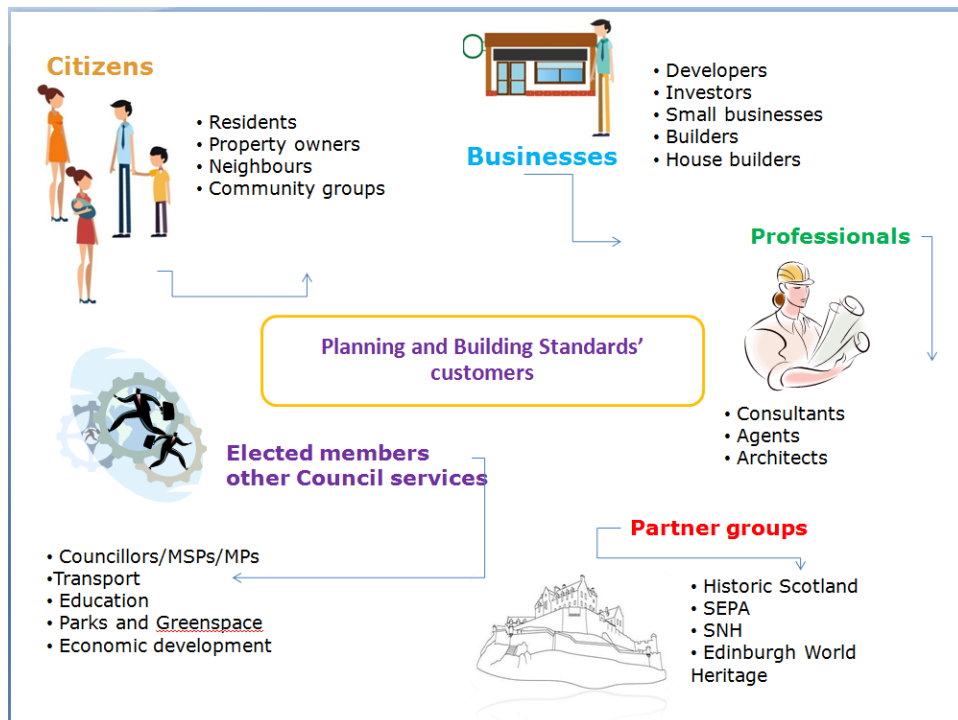
The Planning and Building Standards service is a frontline service with a diverse range of customers. The demand for our services has put pressure on our resources and we need to find ways of streamlining our delivery of these services whilst still ensuring we provide good customer service. We want to change the way we deliver our service and this draft Customer Engagement Strategy sets out how we intend to do this.

2. Who are our customers?

As a frontline public service, Planning and Building Standards has a wide range of customers. Some have direct contact with the service in terms of applying, commenting and engaging in a variety of planning and building warrant processes. Others experience the outcomes of these processes without formal contact. In other words, the buildings and spaces we help to create affect everyone.

Although we refer to those who come in contact with the service as 'customers', this has a broad meaning and is used to describe the various individuals, groups and organisations who interact with the service.

The range of customers reflects the great interest in how the City develops with all having varying needs. The table below provides a summary of our customer groups.



Our customers can also be split into those with whom we have:

Direct customer contact:

- Applicants / agents/developers/landowners applying for a variety of planning and building warrant related permissions
- Neighbours
- Community councils and amenity groups
- Residents or agents requesting pre-application advice
- Anyone concerned that the works are unauthorised
- Councillors and their assistants
- Citizens affected by the local development plan
- Complainants about any aspect of our service
- Other professionals and consultants
- Other Council services
- Partners such as Edinburgh World Heritage and Fire Scotland
- Other Councils and Government agencies
- Solicitors
- Students and other researchers

Indirect customer contact:

- Those who live, work and visit the buildings and spaces created through the planning and building warrant process
- Investors and employers from the outcomes of the planning process
- Future generations and new residents/businesses, all of whom benefit from decisions – schools, new housing, conservation of historic

buildings/areas, enhancing biodiversity and movement/transport changes.

Key message - our customer contact channels need to change

We have a wide range of customers, often with competing demands, who put pressure on our resources. We need to prioritise our service delivery in line with the Council's Transformational Change programme. This will mean focussing our services to those most needing our advice and directing others to online services.

3. What is Engagement?

This document recognises that different approaches are appropriate in different situations. In all cases the **communication** of information is essential to inform our customers of any proposed change or issue. The provision of information is a valuable end in itself and may be the only suitable action in certain circumstances, for example communicating factual information on the planning application process.

In many cases effective engagement will also include **consultation**. This involves providing a specific opportunity for our customers to express an opinion on a proposed area of our work to inform and enhance that work. It is generally a time-limited exercise and is followed with further communication on the engagement outcome.



Communication = Engagement

Communication + Consultation + Communication = Engagement

As part of our Customer Engagement Strategy, we want to improve how we engage with our customers so that they feel they have had a proper say in the development of the City even if they do not agree with the final outcomes.

4. Consulting our customers

Public participation is at the heart of the planning process and it is important that we have robust and clear systems in place to ensure effective consultation on a range of subjects. There is no provision whilst processing building warrant applications for public consultation.

The vision for Planning and Building Standards is to '*put our service at the heart of place-making in Edinburgh*'. A key component of good place making is involving the local communities in shaping the places they want to live, work and spend time in. Engaging with some groups can be challenging and we must reach beyond the usual 'stakeholders'.

A key aspect of effective consultation is getting the communication right at the beginning of the process to help raise awareness of the opportunity to comment and to respond to feedback.

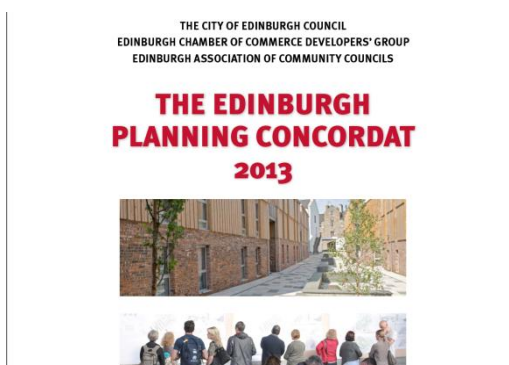
Development Plans - In preparing planning policy, the Scottish Government asks us to take an innovative approach to consultation and communication. Preparation of the Edinburgh Local Development Plan also requires a Participation Statement within our Development Plan Scheme and notification to neighbours of any newly proposed Plan that the Council reaches a settled view upon. We want to take forward this innovative approach by the production of interactive Development Plans which are easier to read online and to start bespoke and effective consultation early in the Plan process to ensure the key issues are understood and there is a chance to comment on them at an early stage.

Guidance - Planning guidance, whether statutory or non-statutory, requires effective consultation to ensure acceptance of the basic principles of the guidance and adds weight to our decisions. The Council's Consultation Hub is the central point for all our consultations. Anyone can sign up for the Hub and be notified of new consultations and we can also use the Hub to consult selected customers on specific topics. Customers can respond via the Hub. We will make use of the Council's Consultation Hub and bespoke training events to ensure participation is as wide as possible.

The screenshot shows the Edinburgh Council Consulting Edinburgh website. The header includes the Edinburgh Council logo and the 'Consulting Edinburgh' title. Navigation tabs include 'Consultation Hub', 'Find Consultations', 'We Asked, You Said, We Did', and 'Mailing List Signup'. The main content area is titled 'Student Housing in Edinburgh' and features an 'Overview' section with a brief description and a bulleted list of key issues. A sidebar on the right provides contact information for Ben Wilson/Irene Beautyman, key dates for the consultation (16 Mar 2015 to 24 Apr 2015), and other information such as the audience and interests. A thumbnail image of a modern building is also visible.

National and Major applications - Pre-application consultation is a mandatory aspect of national and major planning applications. One public event must be held, and advertised as per statutory requirements, and a Pre-Application Consultation report submitted with the planning application, detailing the level of engagement that has been undertaken.

We expect applicants to go beyond the legal requirements for consultation at pre-application consultation stage on national and major applications. The Edinburgh Planning Concordat sets out the current process for collaborative consultation but we want to go further and refresh the Concordat with more emphasis on effective consultation. In addition, we want to ensure processes are in place to analyse what difference the pre-application consultation has had in making the development better and post decision surveys will form a part of this.



Planning Applications - We notify neighbours next to the site of all planning applications and advertise certain applications via notices posted near the site and/ or in the local newspaper. This is in line with planning regulations and there is no intention to change this. There is no such legislative requirement for building warrants.

We also consult internal and external consultees to ensure that we have all the technical advice we need and working protocols will be updated to ensure that consultation requirement is clear.

How we will consult

- We will consult our customers on planning policy and guidance using the Consultation Hub where customers can:
 - ❖ Read an overview of what the consultation is about including contact details and links to relevant documents
 - ❖ Respond to consultations
 - ❖ Find out about any event linked with a consultation exercise
 - ❖ Read the next steps and actions to be taken when the consultation ends
 - ❖ Read the results from past consultations.
- We will use the Consultation Hub for the next Local Development Plan but we will also prepare a bespoke consultation strategy in line with the Participation Statement to ensure a structured and focused series of public events, particularly during the key consultation stages of the Main Issues Report. The strategy will include a Local Development Plan website with more helpful interactive digital information and the ability to comment easily online.
- We will consult on other planning guidance on the Consultation Hub but we will also design any additional consultation to reflect each topic and its particular audience.
- We will consult on national and major planning applications in line with the requirements of the refreshed Edinburgh Planning Concordat.
- We will refresh our working protocols including that between Planning and Neighbourhood Partnerships to ensure effective consultation happens on planning proposals.
- We will prepare a youth engagement strategy to ensure we consult young people.
- We will look at ideas for consulting hard to reach groups and implement these on individual projects.

5. Communicating with our customers

Edinburgh has always been a forward thinking Council in terms of innovation in Information and Communication Technology. We were one of the first to introduce an E-Planning and Building Warrants system, allowing new ways of submitting applications and considerably greater access to information for the wider community. Our use of social media, (Twitter and the Planning Blog) identifies us as a leading authority in this respect. However, emails and phone calls remain the main ways our customers contact us. The volumes of contact have increased over the years, and, in the context of a Council seeks transformational change in service provision, we want to look at different ways of serving our customers' needs.

Currently we provide a number of ways where customers can communicate with us. Through the increasing use of digital technology such as mobile phones, tablets and computers, we are seeing significant changes to how people consume and interact with information. Whilst we already make good use of this change in the information we offer, there are greater opportunities to expand the use of digital communications, increasing participation and improving accessibility. Taking existing customers from more traditional communication means to new online means – channel shift.



Current means of communication

- Printed material such as the Local Development Plan and associated documents
- Public meetings / forums/workshops
- Webcasting
- Letters
- Telephone calls
- Requests from councillors and MSPs
- Emails
- Reception counter
- Statutory notices and notifications
- Face to face meetings with customers
- [The Council's Consultation Hub](#)
- [Planning Blog](#)

- [Twitter](#)
- [Council website](#)

In effect, the customer has a wide range of means to get advice on various aspects of the development process. Managing these different channels can be resource intensive and the demand for direct contact is encouraged by the availability of this service even when much of the information is already online. Promoting a self serve culture will encourage Channel Shift in line with the Council's transformational change programme. Moving customers to find the information online will allow planning and building standards officers to concentrate on their core business.

However, this has to be balanced with the customers' needs and our role in managing the sustainable economic growth of the City. Giving a full advice service on major developments is still a top priority and there will still be complex building warrant, local developments and listed buildings cases where advice and guidance at face to face level is required. Advice on more straightforward cases will be dealt with on a case by case basis but the aim will be to direct the enquirer to the Council website for the information. This includes householder enquiries and particularly where professional agents want us to confirm whether a proposal needs planning permission or a building warrant; in many cases, they can make the assessment themselves and make the appropriate applications. If help is still needed, the enquirer will be directed to an online 'request it' form and prompted to provide the information we need for the enquiry.

Such as system means that we need to improve the information we hold on our website and make it fully accessible on digital devices.

Where legal confirmation is required, the enquirer will be asked to apply for permission or seek a certificate of lawfulness or a property inspection.

Key message - our communication channels are changing

Communication channels will change so that our customers are able to self serve to find the information they need. Information will be improved and online forms will be available if the customer has been unable to find the information and still needs advice from us. A full pre-application advice service will still be provided for major applications and other complex cases. We will make more use of digital technology to enhance the customer experience. We will review our email and phone contact channels to make them more efficient and customer friendly.

Future means of communication – possible new ways

- An interactive, fully online development plan on a bespoke website – no printing and posting of large documents
- Consultation Hub for all consultations
- Focused consultation events based on a consultation plan depending on the subject matter
- A refreshed email contact service with customer friendly, informative responses
- Increased use of social media (Twitter and the Planning blog) to inform customers about current planning and building standards issues
- An online form for enquiries and pre-application requests
- The current help desk service would be closed and an appointment based system would be provided after receiving the 'request it' forms
- A front counter service where the caller will be asked to complete an enquiry form and contacted with the information
- An email response service which directs our customers to an enhanced website experience where they will be able to self serve to find the answers they need
- An improved website with interactive links to help the customer find the information
- An efficient telephone service provided by the Council's Customer Contact Centre directing callers to information
- Direct contact with case officers or their managers on planning and building warrants applications that have been submitted
- Direct contact with officers responsible for policies and plans
- Webcasting, including training events
- Greater use of video (YouTube) to share information about the service
- Produce easy read 'quick guides' for a variety of common enquiries
- The development of 'apps' for mobile devices
- The development of an 'interactive house' to help customers decide if they need consent
- Help for those who cannot find the information they want online - this may be an email response or a call back.

6. Planning information and records

The service retains a large number of historic records which are regularly requested by customers for a variety of purposes such as buying and selling properties. Addresses of planning and building standards applications from the early 1990s are available through our [online services](#) with registers of planning information from the [1940s to 2000](#) also online. Detailed information on planning applications, including drawings and reports are available [online](#)

from 2003. Historic [drainage records](#) for large parts of the city are also available online. Otherwise, searches must be done of paper records for information and the enquirer is usually asked to come in and view the files. There is a charge for building warrants searches and copying and for copies of planning documents.

The information we hold will be in line with legislative requirements, our retention schedules and records management policy. We will publish information online in accordance with this and the Scottish Government's guidance on Publishing Information Online.

Other information not online can be subject to Environmental Information requests which are co-ordinated by the Council's FOI team. The Council gathers and processes information about citizens so that services can be delivered effectively and efficiently. The Council's '[Privacy Notice](#)' sets out what to expect when we collect information in line with the Data Protection Act, 1998 and other legislation and how we handle personal information.

7. Customer journey of the future

Currently the customer has a number of ways they can contact the service to receive information and advice. The graphic below of the Council wide service shows how this might change.



This would mean:

- The Planning and Building Standards telephone, email and face-to-face service will be given to those who need this contact, mainly for live planning and building warrant applications.
- Other services will be largely based on online transactions and information with customers self serving to find what they need.
- Telephone calls will be handled by the customer contact centre with callers asked to make online enquiries if they want to request planning or building warrant advice.

- Social media such as Twitter and the Planning Blog will be used to keep customer up-to-date with Planning and Building Standards news.
- The Local Development Plan will be easier to view on an interactive website.
- Consultation events, such as on the Local Development Plan and Conservation Area Character Appraisals will continue to use drop in sessions and public events to ensure as many people as possible are engaged in these processes.
- Request it forms for pre-application and general enquiries.
- Customers being directed to where to find the information and making applications based on their own assessment.
- Improved website information.

We will set out what our customer can expect in our Customer Service Charter.

The table below sets out number of scenarios before and after channel shift.

Before channel shift	After channel shift
Customers phone, email or arrive in reception to request basic information	Customers find this information themselves – improved online information Customers call the customer contact centre for general advice/information Customers complete online forms for request of information Contact channels reduced so enquiries can be managed better
Pre-application enquiries made by telephone, email or face-to-face	Customers will complete online form for more complex proposals and these will go to teams for a response Small scale proposals - customers self serve online
Viewing and commenting on planning applications by email and in writing	Public access improved functionality to view and submit comments = more people using this method
Applying for various planning and building standards permissions	Increased use of planning submissions online Building Standards online submissions through eBuilding Standards
Online mapping – desktop based	Online mapping improved to allow access from mobile and table devices = more self serving

8. A Timetable for Action

The strategy will take time to deliver. The success of it depends on a cultural shift by all parties involved but crucially the online information systems of the Planning and Building Standards service needs to be better so the customer can find what they need. The action programme below sets out indicative dates to progress the strategy.

ACTION	INDICATIVE DATES
Planning Committee considers draft strategy	15 June 2015
Consultation on draft strategy and charter	August 2015 to October 2015
Preparation of online enquiry forms	July/August 2015
Refreshed Edinburgh Planning Concordat - consultation, drafting and approval	June to December 2015
Channel shift implementation to change contact channels	June 2015 to March 2016
Working protocols with consultees	May 2015 to March 2016
Youth Engagement Strategy	By October 2015
Customer testing of finding information on our website	June to August 2015
Improvements to website information	September 2015 to March 2016
Approval of final strategy and charter	December 2015
Communication of changes	January to March 2016
Planning help desks stops	March 2016
Implementation of online forms	March 2016
Move calls to Customer Contact Centre	July 2016
Easy to read quick guides	August 2015 to March 2016
Interactive house	By July 2016
Interactive development plans	By March 2017

Mobile 'apps' on the need for planning permission	By March 2017
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APPENDIX 2

**Planning and Building Standards
Customer Service Charter:
Delivering a Customer 1st Service for the Future**

**The City of Edinburgh Council
2015**

CONTENTS

What this Charter does

What you can expect when contacting the Planning and Building Standards Service

Policy Framework

The Strategic Development Plan

- what you can expect from us

The Local Development Plan

- what you can expect from us

Planning Applications

Making a planning application

- what you can expect from us

Commenting on someone else's application

- what you can expect from us

Making a decision on a planning application

- what you can expect from us

Building Warrants

Making a building warrant application

Making a decision on building warrants

Seeking Advice

Retrospective Works

Environmental Information Requests

Complaints

Data Protection

Contact Us

What this Charter does

This Charter explains what the Council's Planning and Building Standards service does and what its customers can expect from us. It begins by setting out **what you can expect from us** when contacting the service and then more specific standards linked to our three main responsibilities which are:

Planning

- To prepare a **policy framework** that sets out how land should be developed and our natural and built environment protected;
- To consider and make decisions on applications for **planning permission**, listed building consent and other types of application and investigate breaches of planning control to ensure the development of our City is properly managed;

Building Standards

- To consider and make decisions on building warrant applications, completion certificates and property inspections to secure the health, safety, welfare and convenience of users and achieve sustainable development.

What you can expect from us

If you contact us by telephone:

- Council staff will answer within 5 rings
- We will help you with your query on the spot if we can
- The officer will return your call within one working day of their return
- We will direct you to where you can find further information online, including online enquiry forms

If you email us:

- We will respond to your first contact within 2 working days or tell you if we need longer
- ensure our response is free from jargon and easy to understand
- direct you to where you can find further information online, including online enquiry forms

If you leave us a comment on Twitter or the Planning Blog:

- We will respond within 2 working days if needed
- Consider whether we need to make service improvements to address concerns

If you write to us:

- will respond to you within 10 working days or tell you if we need longer
- ensure our response is free from jargon and easy to understand
- direct you to where you can find further information online, including online enquiry forms
- translate information into large print, other languages or Braille if needed.

If you visit us:

- one of our staff will give you information that meets your needs or direct you to where you can find it online, including online enquiry forms
- see you within five minutes of your appointment time
- have friendly public offices, with clean and tidy waiting areas

Policy Framework

What the Planning System does is set out by the Scottish Government in legislation, guidance and advice. Further information is available at www.gov.scot/planning

Scottish Government legislation requires that all Councils prepare a document setting out principles for where development of land will be allowed and where buildings and green spaces will be protected. These are called **Development Plans**. In Edinburgh, the Scottish Government requires that this Development Plan be made up of two documents: the Strategic Development Plan and the Local Development Plan.

The Strategic Development Plan for Edinburgh and South East Scotland sets out broad principles for the future use of land over a 20 year period on matters that cross Council boundaries. This includes key topics such as how many new houses are required, how they should be spread across the area and whether green belt land should remain as green belt. This document is not prepared by City of Edinburgh Council but by a partnership of the six Councils in the area called SESplan. It must accord with the Government's Scottish Planning Policy.

The Strategic Development Plan - What you can expect from us

The Strategic Development Plan is prepared, and consulted upon, by SESplan (see above). We will advise you to contact them directly if we cannot answer your questions about it. Further information is available at www.sesplan.gov.uk

The Local Development Plan for Edinburgh contains detailed policies and proposals that must follow the principles set out in the Strategic Development Plan. The document sets out policies and proposals for the future use of land and the protection of the natural and built environment over a 10 year period. This includes key topics such as identifying sites for housing to meet the requirements set out in the Strategic Development Plan discussed above. Preparation of the document begins with the main consultation stage where the Council produce a Main Issues Report presenting options, and asking for your input on how they meet the requirements set by both Scottish Government policy and the Strategic Development Plan.

The Planning and Building Standards Service can also prepare more detailed guidance, for example on design, which forms part of the Local Development Plan but is prepared at a later time. This is called Supplementary Guidance and must meet Scottish Government requirements on preparation, participation and adoption.

The Local Development Plan - what you can expect from us

The programme for preparing the Edinburgh Local Development Plan and details of all opportunities to comment on it can be found in a document called the Development Plan Scheme at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/localdevelopmentplan. We will update this document annually.

We will use a range of ways of making sure there are opportunities to comment on future plans including using the Council's Consultation Hub, drop in sessions, interactive website information and workshops. We will be led by what communities find most informative.

As stated above, the "Development Plan" for the city consists of the Strategic Development Plan and the Local Development Plan. Planning applications must be decided in accordance with the Development Plan unless there are important planning reasons for an alternative decision.

Planning Applications

This charter explains what you can expect to happen when you want to **make an application for planning permission or other planning consents** and when you want to **comment on someone else's application**. It then explains what happens when **making a decision on a planning application**.

All planning applications are classified in terms of scale and importance of the type of development that is being proposed. National developments are proposed by Scottish Government, are of Scotland wide significance, and are the top tier in the hierarchy. Below national developments are major developments which are of a size and scale to be considered of major importance. Examples might be a shopping centre, a business park or a large scale housing development. All development proposals which are not national or major are classed as local developments. Examples are house extensions, small scale housing development of less than 50 houses and changes to the use of a property.

Anyone proposing a national or major development must carry out **pre-application consultation** with the local community to allow them to be better informed and to have an opportunity to contribute their views to the developer prior to submission of a planning application. Developers must submit a **Proposal of Application Notice** with details of that consultation at least 12 weeks before they want to submit a planning application. Further information is available on our [major applications web page](#).

Pre-Application Consultation - what you can expect from us

We will assess Proposal of Application Notices in accordance with the [Edinburgh Planning Concordat](#), a document that sets out how the Council, communities and developers should work together on major developments.

We will expect developers to carry out more than the minimum consultation for more complex and contentious cases and we will encourage developers to set up websites to allow communities to access the information and make comment more easily.

Making an application for planning permission, and all types of applications, is quicker when done online and it helps to avoid many of the reasons for applications not being valid on receipt.

- Online applications are submitted via the Scottish Government E-planning website at www.eplanning.scotland.gov.uk .
- Should you wish to submit your application on paper, all types of form can be downloaded from the E-Planning website.

As well as applications for planning permission, there are many other types of application depending on what it is you are proposing. Further information is available in the Council's guide to [Validation of Applications](#). If you are unsure what type of application you should apply for, you can visit our webpage on [Permissions for Development](#) where you will find this information.

If you are unsure whether you need planning permission or other consents, we can direct you to online information and you can then decide whether to make an application.

The completion and submission of planning application forms, and all other types of application, can be submitted by applicants themselves or using a professional agent, such as an architect.

Making an application for planning permission – what you can expect from us

Within 4 working days, we will check your application and advise you of any problems after this check. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that their application is submitted correctly and further information on the process and what should be submitted is available in the Council's guide to [Validation of Applications](#).

Within 10 working days of a valid application being received, we will send you an acknowledgement letter and inform you of the planning officer who will be dealing with it and the timescale for making a decision.

If a professional agent is used to submit a planning application, we will deal with the agent rather than the applicant in all discussions and negotiations. It is the responsibility of the agent to keep their client informed of progress and of any requirements of, or delays to, the process.

Within 15 working days of a valid application being received, we will carry out neighbour notification and consult on the application, where it applies. Notification involves sending a letter to all postal properties within 20 metres of the application site giving details of the proposal and highlighting that comments must be made to the planning service within 21 days from the date of the notification letter. Some applications are also advertised in the Evening News and a site notice is put up nearby.

Within 20 working days of a valid application being received, we will visit the site and inform the agent if any changes are required **within the next 5 working days** unless it relates to a major application or a particularly complex issue, which may take longer.

Applicants can make changes to their scheme during the course of the application. If these are significant, we will ask for a new application. We will only arrange for neighbours to be re-notified if

the changes raise new planning matters. Applications can be tracked on the [Planning and Building Standards Portal](#) for any amendments.

Planning Performance Targets

90% of approved major developments within the year to show added value quality improvements

90% of householder applications determined within 2 months

75% of non-householder applications determined within 2 months

75% of listed building consent applications determined within 2 months

Commenting on someone else's planning application

If you wish to look at a planning application or decision, or make a comment on an application, you can do so via the [Planning and Building Standards Portal](#). Your comments cannot be treated as confidential for a number of reasons:

- if the application is refused, the applicant needs to know about objections if deciding to appeal;
- the closeness of an objector to the application site may be an important factor in the decision; and
- comments on an application are part of the background papers and have to be available under Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Acts.

Only comments relevant to planning issues can be considered as part of the assessment of the planning application. Relevant planning issues include:
- traffic and parking - appearance of the area - impact on a conservation area - setting or character of a listed building - loss of significant landscape features - noise and disturbance - effect of cooking odours - loss of sunlight or daylight – overshadowing - privacy.

We cannot consider comments on non relevant planning issues, such as:
- loss of private view - effect of the development on property values - building regulation matters.
Racist remarks may be forwarded to Police Scotland.

Our guide to [Commenting on Planning Proposals](#) outlines how to ensure you make a valid comment.

Comments must be received within 21 days of the date of registration, neighbour notification letter, or advertisement in the press, whichever is later. Extra time is given for public holidays and if the application has an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Commenting on someone else's planning application – what you can expect from us

You will receive an automatic email acknowledgement when commenting online using the Planning and Building Standards Online Service.

We will send you a letter acknowledging receipt if you comment by letter.

We will consider all comments on applications provided they are submitted on time and the comments are relevant to planning issues. We will only consider late comments if they raise important planning matters that were not previously considered.

We will make your comments known to the agent but we will not make your personal details available at that time.

We will only re-notify you of changes to the application if they raise new planning issues: changes can be tracked on the [Planning and Building Standards Portal](#).

We are unable to discuss the merits or demerits of a case with objectors or other third parties when an application is being considered as this may affect the objective assessment of the proposal.

We will inform you of the decision on the planning application.

We will make all comments publicly available online but we will redact personal information such as email addresses, phone numbers and signatures. Comments will be taken offline 6 months after the decision is issued.

We will deal with requests for comments to be taken offline before 6 months as sympathetically as possible.

Making a decision on a planning application

Once the application, including the responses from consultees, and public comments, has been assessed by the planning officer, a report of handling is prepared. Decisions on planning applications are taken in one of two ways. In some cases, the decision can be made by planning officers and is referred to as a “delegated decision”. Delegated decisions make up the vast majority of all decisions and enable quicker decisions on simpler cases. They are usually the less contentious, smaller applications, but can include those to which individuals have objected or which are being recommended for refusal.

In other cases the planning officer makes a recommendation to the Development Management Sub-Committee or a full Council meeting in some circumstances and the decision is then taken by the City’s councillors.

Making a decision on a planning application – what can you expect from us

We will notify you or your agent **within 4 working days** of the decision being made.

We will notify all those who have made comments on the application **within 4 working days** of the decision being made.

We will place a copy of the decision notice and the report of handling on [Planning and Building Standards Online Services](#)

If a scheme needs to be changed after the decision, we will assess the proposals to see if they raise any new planning issues which might change the substance of the consent. If so, we will ask for a new planning application. If the changes do not raise any new planning issues which change the substance of the consent, we will vary the consent; neighbour and other interested parties will not be notified of these changes but they can be tracked on [Planning and Building Standards Online Services](#).

Planning permission last for 3 years although we can make a Direction for it to be longer and shorter.

If an applicant is unhappy about a delegated decision taken on a local development, or the application has taken longer than the legal time limit, they can request a review by the [Planning Local Review Body](#)

In all cases which cannot be decided by a Local Review Body, the applicant has the right to appeal to Scottish Ministers. Further information is available at www.eplanning.scotland.gov.uk

There is no 3rd party right of appeal in Scotland and we will direct any aggrieved parties to our Report of Handling which explains the reasons for our decision. We are unable to respond if you think the decision was wrong. However, you can complain if you thought our processes or procedures were wrong (see below).

Building Warrants

What the Building Standards System does is set out by the Scottish Government in legislation, guidance and advice. Further information is available at www.gov.scot/buildingstandards. There is a separate [National Customer Charter](#) for Building Standards.

You should be aware that to carry out work which requires a Building Warrant, without first having obtained this type of approval, is an offence in terms of Section 8(2) of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003.

Making a Building Warrant Application

Before you carry out any building work to your building, you should check if you need a [building warrant](#). Most work needs a building warrant which you must get before starting work otherwise there will be legal complications if you want to sell your property.

If your work is going to cost less than £70,000, you can apply for a building warrant online. You will need to register in order to submit an application including plans. This is free and only takes a couple of minutes. Applications for work costing more than £70,000 must be submitted by post or delivered in person to the Department.

You can download our [guidance on making a Building Warrant application](#), along with our Building Warrant fees list showing how much your application will cost.

Making a Building Warrant Application – what you can expect from us

Within 4 working days, we will check your application and advise you of any problems after this check. Alternatively, we will let you know your application is valid and is being progressed.

Building Standards Performance Targets

90% of first reports on building warrant applications, telling you if you need to make changes to your proposals to comply with current building regulations to be issued within 20 working days.

Making a Decision on a Building Warrant Application

The City of Edinburgh Council will grant a building warrant if they are satisfied that the building will be constructed in accordance with the building operations regulations and the building standards regulations. A warrant for demolition will be granted if the requirements of the building operations regulations will be met.

Making a Decision on a Building Warrant – what you can expect from us

We will seek to minimise the overall average time taken to grant a building warrant measured from the date of lodging to the date of granting the warrant.

Building Standards Performance Targets

80% of building warrants, if the drawings are altered to the Council's satisfaction, to be issued within 10 working days.

90% of requests for a completion certificate to be responded to within 5 working days.

90% of requests for a site inspection in relation to a completion certificate to be responded to within 5 working days.

Seeking Advice

The Council is committed to giving advice on a range of planning and building warrant proposals.

Seeking Advice – what you can expect from us

If you have a general enquiry about a planning or building warrant matter, we will ask you to complete an online form so we can get more details of what you require. As part of this process, we will advise you to where you can find the information online.

If you are seeking advice on a particular proposal, we will ask you to complete a pre-application advice form so that we can ensure we have all the information we need to be able to give advice. As part of this process, we will advise you to where you can find information online.

We will then send the enquiry to the team for the area.

We aim to respond within 10 working days.

Where the enquiry relates to small scale proposals, we will generally not give direct advice but we will tell you where you can find advice online.

We will arrange a more formal response for more complex proposals.

Requests for meetings will be handled by team managers and these will be decided based on the complexity and/or size of the proposals.

Professional agents will normally be advised to do their own assessment and make the appropriate applications.

Retrospective Works

We understand that sometimes work is carried out and there is no record of permission. This can be particularly frustrating when you are trying to sell your house.

In relation to Planning:

If the works were done more than 4 years ago to your house, they are then legal under planning law but if you need a formal letter to confirm this, you will need to apply for a [certificate of lawfulness](#). Other types of development such as a change of use, other than to a house, have a longer period (10years) before they become legal.

It may be that the works did not need planning permission but again you need to apply for a certificate of lawfulness if you want legal confirmation.

If you have a listed building and have done work to it without consent or confirmation that you do not need consent, you should read our guidance note on [Selling Your Home](#) or apply for listed building consent if this is insufficient. We do not issue letters of comfort.

You can check online whether work has consent using our [online services](#) or [historic planning records](#).

Finally, if you are concerned that work has been carried out without permission, please fill in an [enforcement breach form](#) so we can investigate. You can find out more about Enforcement standards in our [Enforcement Charter](#).

In relation to Building Standards

If you do not have a building warrant or a certificate of completion, there are various ways you can get this sorted. See our service standards below.

Retrospective works – what you can expect from us

In all cases, the target response time is 10 working days.

We will direct you to our online systems if you want to check whether work has permission.

We will direct you to our [enforcement breach form](#) if you think work has been carried out without either Planning or Building Warrant consent.

In relation to Planning

We will advise you to apply for a [certificate of lawfulness](#) if you need a legal decision on whether planning permission is needed.

We will direct you to our guidance on [Selling Your Home](#) if work has been done to your listed building without consent. Alternatively you can apply for [listed building consent](#) as we do not issue letters of comfort.

In relation to Building Standards

We will ask you to apply for a [property inspection](#) if the work is of a minor non-structural nature and was carried out before 1st May 2005 and you do not have a building warrant for the works. There is a charge for this.

We will ask you to submit a [Completion Certificate Where No Warrant Was Obtained](#) if the work was carried out on or after 1st May 2005, together with plans and the relevant fee.

We will ask you to apply retrospectively using our [confirmation of completion service](#) if you have a building warrant but do not have a completion certificate.

Information Requests

The Planning and Building Standards Service holds a great deal of information. Some has to be kept in perpetuity, but other information is only kept in accordance with a records retention schedule. Under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 the Council is obliged to keep schedules of what records we keep and for how long we keep them. You can check if we've already published the information that you want on our [Access to Information webpage](#) .

Anyone has a right to request information from a public authority. Many planning applications and certain data relating to building warrants are available online on our [Public Access](#) system and you may find the information you want there.

If you cannot find the information you want online, you can make an Environmental Information Request (EIR). Please ask us in writing using the [online form](#) on our website or by email or post. EIR requests are dealt with centrally within the Council and Planning and Building Standards will send any information requests to that unit for processing.

Information Requests – what you can expect from us

We will hold information in accordance with our records retention schedule.

We will make information available online in accordance with the [Council's publication scheme](#)

We will send any environmental information requests to the FOI team for processing and you will receive a response within 20 working days.

Complaints

We will consider all complaints made about **the way** in which your planning application, building warrant, enquiry or comment was dealt with. However, disagreement with a decision of the Council will not, in itself, be a ground for complaint and in many situations there is a separate procedure for an applicant to appeal against such decisions. As such we will not discuss the merits or de-merits of a decision and we will direct you to the Report of Handling which sets out the reasons for the decision.

The quickest way to sort things out is to talk to the officer concerned. However, if this does not work our formal complaints procedure has two stages:

- frontline resolution
- investigation

Frontline resolution

We will respond to your complaint within five working days. We aim to resolve your concerns within this timescale. If we need more time, we'll let you know. If you are not satisfied with our response you can ask us to review your complaint.

Investigation

We will appoint a senior Council officer to review your complaint. We will tell you who the Council officer is and respond within 20 working days. If your complaint is complex, we may be unable to resolve your concerns within this timescale. Instead we'll contact you to agree a different date.

If you are still not satisfied, you can then contact the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman \(SPSO\)](#)

Complaints – what you can expect from us

If you make a complaint:

We will aim to resolve it on the spot;

We will respond to you within five working days if we can't resolve it straight away;

We will investigate your complaint if you are still not satisfied, and give you a final response within 20 working days unless we need longer.

Data Protection

When handling personal data the Council must do so fairly and lawfully in accordance with the Data Protection Act. There is a requirement for us to provide public information on how planning

Planning and Building Standards Customer Service Charter for the City of Edinburgh Council

decisions were taken. If you are thinking of lodging a planning application, or commenting on a planning application, but do not wish your contact details to be placed in the public domain then you should consider asking your architect, or a solicitor, to lodge the application or representations on your behalf. Their contact details would then be shown in place of yours.

Personal signatures, e-mail addresses and telephone details will be removed from our online records. Where appropriate other “sensitive” personal information within documents will also be removed prior to publication online. However, all other information relating to a planning application may be publicly available. In relation to Building Standards only those people with a defined interest are able to have copies of Building Warrant approved plans.

If you are unhappy that information about you is published in connection with a planning application please contact the Council at planning@edinburgh.gov.uk and, depending on the nature of your concern, we will consider what we can do about the matter.

Data Protection – what you can expect from us

We will comply with the Data Protection Act when we publish information.

We will redact any personal email addresses, phone numbers, signatures and other personal information from our online records.

We will consider whether we can remove information from our website if you are not happy about its publication.

Contact Us

Phone the Council on 0131 200 2000

Planning Enquiries

planning@edinburgh.gov.uk

Building Standards Enquiries

buildingwarrant.applications@edinburgh.gov.uk