

# Planning Committee

2.00pm, Wednesday, 26 June 2024

## Annual report on the Pre-Application Advice Service

Executive/routine  
Wards

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee agrees:
  - 1.1.1 That the proposed changes to the Council's pre-application advice service and the proposed charges for providing pre-application advice be implemented from 1 July 2024; and
  - 1.1.2 That a follow-up report be brought to Committee 12 months after the implementation date.

**Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

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## Follow up report on the pre application advice service

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report describes the progress of the updated pre-application advice (PAA) service implemented in April 2023, and proposes minor amendments to the service to take account of the experience gained during the last 12 months of operation. These amendments include a limitation to the use of pre-position statements.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 PAA is advice to a prospective applicant before a planning application has been submitted. The Council offers two tiers of PAA, generic and bespoke. Generic advice is provided without charge on the Council website and via the planning helpdesk, which customers can use to inform themselves of the likely acceptability of a given proposal. Bespoke advice is tailored advice on a specific proposal, based on information provided by the customer.
- 3.2 Whilst PAA is not a statutory planning function, the Council provides this service to support the efficient operation of the planning system, as it can help improve the quality of applications received and provides a level of additional certainty to customers. Importantly, PAA is provided strictly without prejudice to the Council's determination of any subsequent planning application.
- 3.3 Since July 2019, the Council has charged for providing bespoke advice with the objective of achieving overall cost recovery, where charges for PAA are set at a level that is to equal the cost of providing the PAA service.
- 3.4 In Q1 2023, the Council reviewed the way in which it provides PAA, with a view to improving the quality of the service received by applicants. This resulted in changes to the pre-application advice service, standardising the offer to customers, and ensuring its long-term sustainability.
- 3.5 In the interest of the continuous improvement of the PAA service, it was agreed that a report would be returned to Committee presenting the results of 12 months of implementation.
- 3.6 A pre-application working group was established to review the service and it engaged with customers and officers who provide the pre-applications service.

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 The responses from customers show that PAA service is a positive, giving clear advice and providing value for money. The Planning Service will continue to engage with customers and monitor any feedback as part of the pre-application working group and make any necessary improvements to the service.
- 4.2 The feedback from officers is that the standardisation of the service is a good reference point and assists in setting expectations on the level of service being delivered to the customer.
- 4.3 However, issues have been identified with the preposition discussion. This option is aimed at customers requiring a high-level view from Planning (for example, customers considering purchasing a site who are seeking a general opinion on the development potential of the site) and is not appropriate for customers with more developed proposals requiring detailed information or complex advice.
- 4.4 Customers, using this service, are typically looking for more detailed design comments or advice on additional information once in discussion with officers. This is putting additional pressure on officers that is not resourced for in terms of officer time for delivery. It is therefore proposed to remove this service and continue with the three levels of service, Local development (small), Local development (medium) and Major/national development.
- 4.5 It is also proposed to streamline the target for issuing the advice letter across all three levels of service from the current target of 20 working days to 10 working days as set out in Appendix 2.

## 5. Next Steps

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- 5.1 Should Committee agree the recommendations, the changes to the PAA service will be implemented from 1 July 2024.
- 5.2 Progress will be reported to Committee in Q2 2025.

## 6. Financial impact

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- 6.1 The charging schedule fees is set at a level which is estimated would cover the annual cost for providing the PAA. The income from the pre application advice service in 2023/2024 on validation was £314,987 compared with £184,518 in 2022/2023. This is the cost to the Council's planning service of providing PAA plus the cost of input from other Council service areas. These charges will be reviewed in 12 months to ensure they accurately reflect the true costs to the Council.

## **7. Equality and Poverty Impact**

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- 7.1 As the report is not making recommendations which have equality or poverty impacts, there are no impacts on equality arising from this report.

## **8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications**

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- 8.1 As the report is not making recommendations that have climate or nature emergency implications, there are no impacts on these matters arising from this report.

## **9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact**

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- 9.1 The Council has engaged with customers about the success of the PAA service. Customers have been requested to complete feedback surveys since July 2019 and customer forum were held in March 2021 which included discussions on the PAA service.
- 9.2 This will continue to be sought from customers and incorporated into any future changes to the PAA, as well as reported onto committee.

## **10. Background reading/external references**

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- 10.1 Changes to the pre-application advice service, [24 March 2023](#).

## **11. Appendices**

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- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Pre-application advice service: Existing charging schedule.
- 11.2 Appendix 2 – Pre-application advice service: Proposed charging schedule.

## Appendix 1 - Pre-application advice service: Existing charging schedule

Category	Fee including VAT	Standard service
<b>Householder developments / advertising and signage / simple changes of use</b>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council website-based resources to enable self-service.</li> </ul>
<b>Local development (small)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 to 11 residential units</li> <li>Less than 1,000m<sup>2</sup> class 4/5/6/other/mixed space</li> </ul>	£330	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desktop review by case officer of information submitted electronically.</li> <li>Formal advice letter provided within a target 10 working days of registration.</li> </ul>
<b>Local development (medium)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12 to 49 residential units</li> <li>1,000m<sup>2</sup> to 9,999m<sup>2</sup> class 4/5/6 space</li> <li>1,000m<sup>2</sup> to 4,999 m<sup>2</sup> other/ mixed space</li> </ul>	£1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 hour inception meeting with case officer; date to be agreed within 10 working days.</li> <li>1 hour accompanied site visit by case officer.</li> <li>1 hour follow-up meeting with case officer.</li> <li>Advice letter to be provided within a target 10 working days of follow-up meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional meetings as required and agreed between case officer and applicant will be charged at £660 per hour for the Local development (medium) Category. This sum reflects the cost of the meeting itself and the associated cost of preparatory and post-meeting work.</b>		
<b>Major/national development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50 or more residential units</li> <li>10,000m<sup>2</sup> or more class 4/5/6 space</li> <li>5,000m<sup>2</sup> or more other/ mixed space</li> <li>A site size of 2 hectares or more</li> <li>Other criteria per the <a href="#">Hierarchy of Development Regulations 2009</a></li> </ul>	£1,320	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 hour pre-position discussion with case officer, team manager, and other relevant Council officers.</li> </ul>
	£12,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 hour inception meeting with case officer and team manager; date to be agreed within 10 working days.</li> <li>Accompanied site visit by the case officer.</li> <li>2 hour meeting with case officer, other relevant Council service areas, and statutory external consultees if required.</li> <li>2 hour follow-up meeting with case officer and other relevant service areas.</li> <li>1 hour wrap-up meeting with case officer.</li> <li>Advice letter provided within a target 20 working days of wrap-up meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional meetings for a Major/national development will be arranged between the case officer and applicant, and a bespoke charge agreed.</b>		
<b>Where a proposal is of exceptional complexity or scale then it may be necessary for it to be dealt with in another category, or for Major/national developments a bespoke charge agreed. This will be at the discretion of the planning authority. Information on fee exemptions can be found in the Customer Service Guide.</b>		

## Appendix 2 - Pre-application advice service: Proposed charging schedule

Category	Fee including VAT	Standard service
<b>Householder developments / advertising and signage / simple changes of use</b>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council website-based resources to enable self-service.</li> </ul>
<b>Local development (small)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 to 11 residential units</li> <li>Less than 1,000m<sup>2</sup> class 4/5/6/other/mixed space</li> </ul>	£347	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desktop review by case officer of information submitted electronically.</li> <li>Formal advice letter provided within a target 10 working days of registration.</li> </ul>
<b>Local development (medium)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12 to 49 residential units</li> <li>1,000m<sup>2</sup> to 9,999m<sup>2</sup> class 4/5/6 space</li> <li>1,000m<sup>2</sup> to 4,999 m<sup>2</sup> other/ mixed space</li> </ul>	£1,575	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 hour inception meeting with case officer; date to be agreed within 10 working days.</li> <li>1 hour accompanied site visit by case officer.</li> <li>1 hour follow-up meeting with case officer.</li> <li>Advice letter to be provided within a target 10 working days of follow-up meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional meetings as required and agreed between case officer and applicant will be charged at £693 per hour for the Local development (medium) Category. This sum reflects the cost of the meeting itself and the associated cost of preparatory and post-meeting work.</b>		
<b>Major/national development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50 or more residential units</li> <li>10,000m<sup>2</sup> or more class 4/5/6 space</li> <li>5,000m<sup>2</sup> or more other/ mixed space</li> <li>A site size of 2 hectares or more</li> <li>Other criteria per the <a href="#">Hierarchy of Development Regulations 2009</a></li> </ul>	£12,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 hour inception meeting with case officer and team manager; date to be agreed within 10 working days.</li> <li>Accompanied site visit by the case officer.</li> <li>Up to a 2 hour meeting with case officer, other relevant Council service areas, and statutory external consultees if required.</li> <li>Up to a 2 hour follow-up meeting with case officer and other relevant service areas.</li> <li>1 hour wrap-up meeting with case officer.</li> <li>Advice letter provided within a target 10 working days of wrap-up meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional meetings for a Major/national development will be arranged between the case officer and applicant, and a bespoke charge agreed.</b>		
<b>Where a proposal is of exceptional complexity or scale then it may be necessary for it to be dealt with in another category, or for Major/national developments a bespoke charge agreed. This will be at the discretion of the planning authority. Information on fee exemptions can be found in the Customer Service Guide.</b>		