

## Report for Resolution

**Report to** Executive  
8 July 2009

**Report of** Head of Planning and Regeneration

**Subject** Planning Service Standards

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### Purpose

To agree to interim service standards for the planning service. Subject to approval the standards will be implemented and monitored from 1<sup>st</sup> September and will be reviewed in early 2010.

### Recommendations

That the interim service standards for the planning service (set out in Appendix 1) be agreed, published on the web site and made available to planning customers.

### Financial Consequences

The level of service proposed in the interim service standards can be delivered from within the current resources of the planning service.

### Risk Assessment

The need to improve the Planning Service has been recognised by the Council previously and this has been underlined by the 2008 Audit Commission Inspection of Planning Services. Failure to respond to the Audit Commission recommendations poses reputational risks to the Council.

### Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to directly achieve the corporate objective to “implement the Planning Improvement Plan, including improving customer service” as well as indirectly other corporate objectives:

- Produce a programme to improve the accessibility of our services
- Implement corporate customer care standards for all services, including contracts

Executive Members: Councillor Morrey - Sustainable City Development  
Councillor Brociek-Coulton – Residents and Customer Care

**Ward: All**

### Contact Officers

Graham Nelson

01603 212530

**Background Documents**

Audit Commission report of Inspection of Planning Services (July 2008)

Planning Improvement Plan (Phase 2) Project Plan, 2009

## **Report**

### **Background**

1. The report produced following the inspection by the Audit Commission of Norwich City Council's planning services in 2008 contained 3 main and a greater number of subsidiary recommendations. Many of the recommendations have now been responded to and improvements to the service have been delivered. These have resulted in considerable and sustained improvements to planning performance as measured by government key performance indicators.
2. More recently progress regarding planning improvement has been reviewed and a further version of the planning improvement plan (PIP2) has been agreed in accordance with the corporate approach to project management with the aim of delivering an excellent planning service. In order to do this projects are being brought forward to respond to all outstanding matters raised in the Inspection report that have not already been addressed. Projects are being undertaken to: improve customer service; to re-engineering development management systems; to improve value for money; to improve the working of Planning Applications committee; and to review the planning enforcement function.
3. This challenging work programme is being delivered in-house to a timetable that covers the remainder of the year.

### **Interim Service Standards**

4. As part of the project aimed at delivering improved customer service a number of surveys are being undertaken about satisfaction and expectations from the service. This will include analysis with hard to reach groups and will take a number of months until results are known. Following analysis, service standards to meet customer needs will be developed and brought forward for member endorsement in early 2010. This will respond fully to the Audit Commission recommendation to improve customer focus by "Developing and promoting service standards that reflect the needs of users across all service elements and monitoring them to ensure they are met".
5. In view of the time that has elapsed since the publication of the Audit Commission report it is considered that this is too long to wait before the publication of the service standards and therefore it is proposed to bring forward interim service standards. These interim service standards have been developed following a review of best practice elsewhere. They have been subject to limited consultation with the Developers' Forum and have been subjected to internal scrutiny to ensure that they are consistent with corporate standards in style and content.
6. The basic level of service proposed in the interim standards seeks to describe the level of service that the service is considered to be resourced to provide in current circumstances. The exception to this is the proposal to introduce planning surgeries which is proposed to be introduced from 1<sup>st</sup> September on a trial basis and arises from a staff suggestion. A number of complaints have been received from members of the public unable to gain

professional planning advice from planning reception (a level of service we are currently able to give).

7. The proposal is to introduce a twice weekly surgery session where members of the public and small business can 'drop in' and get the informal views of planning officers on initial proposals. The number and timing of these sessions will be reviewed in the light of their popularity. Views from staff about this proposal were positive and the expectation is that these sessions should be able to be staffed from a voluntarily rota. Arrangements to facilitate the session on early Thursday evening (signage, revised cleaning arrangements) should be possible to put in place at minimal or no cost. If endorsed sessions should be able to commence in September and steps will be taken to gain feedback about their success.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Norwich City Council Draft Interim Planning Service Standards**

(proposed to be implemented from 1st Sept 2009)

#### **The service that we provide .....**

##### **The planning service – core services**

The main aim of the Planning Service is to help deliver high quality, sustainable and appropriate Development, and to maintain and improve the city's natural and built environment by:

- Determining all forms applications submitted as required under planning legislation.
- Delivering a Local Development Framework.
- Protecting and enhancing Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.
- Providing general planning and related advice to the public, and owners and developers.
- Making and reviewing Tree Preservation Orders and determining applications for tree works.
- Dealing with Planning Appeals.
- Planning Enforcement.

##### **Our customers**

Our direct customers include people applying for planning permission, people making comments on applications or plans, businesses, councillors, other services within the council, statutory bodies, interest groups, and other organisations interested in planning applications and the local planning policy and plan-making. More indirectly everyone who lives in, works in or visits Norwich is affected by planning.

##### **Our responsibilities to you .....**

When dealing with planning issues there are some things we can and cannot take into account. How we do this must be open to public scrutiny. Within these limits, whenever and however you contact us, we will:

- listen
- treat you the way we would like to be treated – with dignity, courtesy and respect for your confidentiality
- provide information when you need it and in a way you understand
- identify ourselves and give you our names
- tell you what we are doing and why.
- train our staff to provide the best possible service at all times, taking the time to get it right first time, every time.
- ensure that we understand and respond to differing needs, particularly in relation to age, disability, ethnic group, gender, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

##### **Your responsibilities to us .....**

To enable our staff to help, we would like you to:

- provide us with the information we need and inform us if it changes
- let us know if you cannot attend an appointment
- show us respect and courtesy.

## **Responding to you .....**

If you contact us by telephone, we will:

- Answer 85% of all telephone calls made to the service within 5 rings, or, where the officer is not available, divert the call to voicemail which will give details of an alternative contact source or facility to leave a message.
- Respond to telephone messages within one working day.

If you contact us by letter or e-mail, we will:

- Aim to respond or acknowledge all letters and e-mails with 5 working days. Where more detail is needed we will ask you as soon as possible.
- We aim to respond to 90% of all general correspondence within 15 working days of receipt. In the cases where a response is not possible within the timescale we will explain why this is the case.

If you request a home visit for reasons of limited mobility, we will:

- aim to see you within five working days.
- show you council identification when visiting your home or premises.

If you access our services by the internet, we will:

- aim for our website, [www.norwich.gov.uk](http://www.norwich.gov.uk) to be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- if we know there is a problem, we will let you know.
- enable you to view and comment on current planning applications and consultations online.

## **Planning Reception**

Planning reception (on the 2nd floor of City Hall) is open from 8.45am-5pm Mon-Fri. At reception you can:

- view details of planning applications being dealt with and those that have been determined.
- view planning decision notices and Section 106 agreements.
- pick up the forms you need to apply for planning permission and find out basic information about the planning service.
- drop off completed forms and applications.

If you need anything more than basic general advice, for example advice on making planning applications, design or planning policy issues, you can either write to us or attend a planning surgery. Surgeries are for householders and small businesses for guidance on the need for planning permission and general advice. They take place on Tuesdays 9.30am-1pm and Thursdays 3pm-6.30pm at Planning Reception (City Hall, 2nd Floor). You will be able to have a 15 minute appointment to discuss your proposals. Officers will be able to give advice on general planning matters, for example:

- planning applications received (explanation of plans to neighbours);
- householder extensions and alterations;
- shopfronts;
- minor alterations, extensions or changes of use;
- advertisements; and

- general guidance on the Council's policies and standards.

## **Planning Applications**

When you submit a planning application to us we aim to deliver the following standards:

- to determine applications as soon as possible. Normally this is will be within 8 weeks, or 13 weeks for a major application. Where we will not meet these timetable we will let you know how long it will take.
- when you submit a planning application to us we will check the information submitted and where all necessary material is present we will formally register the application, acknowledge it and let you know the case officer dealing with it within 5 working days. Where the application is incomplete or invalid we will let you know this within 5 working days.
- following a decision being made in accordance with an officer recommendation we will issue a decision letter within 3 working days of the decision date (unless a planning obligation remains to signed).
- notify neighbours or people who have made a representation within 3 days of the decision issued dated.

We will also:

- update the list of planning applications we have received and decisions we have made on a weekly basis.
- make sure these are available at our offices and on our website.
- continue to maintain and update the planning services website to keep users informed about our service and about any changes to procedures, e.g. legislation and fees.

## **Before submitting a Planning Application**

We encourage people to contact us before submitting planning applications. Pre-application advice is given free of charge.

For relatively straightforward applications, within 15 working days of us receiving written, basic information, including sketch plans we will provide a written response on development proposals covering:

- Providing details in relation to validation requirements;
- Notification of the fee needed to support the application;
- Basic written information on planning policy considerations;
- Further contact points for any specialist advice that may be required.

The 15 working day period will not apply to Environmental Impact Assessment screening and scoping opinions to which statutory time periods apply and for which no fee is charged.

For larger or more complicated applications different standards will apply. Please contact us to discuss your needs and we will advise you of how we can support you.

## **Planning enforcement**

When a complaint is received by the council concerning a possible breach of planning control, we will make an initial assessment of the urgency or possible harm to land, buildings, the environment or neighbours within 1 day of receipt. There are three priorities and these will set the time we take to respond to different complaints – this also reflects their urgency and the available resources to investigate them.

These are our target times to respond to planning enforcement complaints:

- High priority: loss or damage to irreplaceable assets such as listed buildings or protected trees, serious effects on highway safety, unauthorised demolition of buildings.
  - Acknowledge complaint within 1 working day of receipt
  - Investigate all complaints and advise complainant and contravener of the next steps to be taken within 2 working days of receipt
- Medium priority: significant impact on residential amenity, impact on important townscape or landscape.
  - Acknowledge complaint within 5 working days of receipt
  - Investigate all complaints and advise complainant and contravener of the next steps to be taken within 10 working days of receipt
- Low priority: development that may not need planning permission, development that may receive planning permission anyway.
  - Acknowledge complaint within 5 working days of receipt
  - Investigate all complaints and advise complainant and contravener of the next steps to be taken within 20 working days of receipt

## **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with our service we would like to know. We encourage complaints as this gives us the information that helps us to improve our services. If you do want to complain, please contact us using one of the below means, and we will:

- aim to acknowledge your complaint within five working days.
- aim to give you a full response within 15 working days.

## **Building Regulations**

Building Control services are provided on behalf of the Council by CNC Building Control Consultancy. Please contact them direct if you have a query regarding the Building Regulations:

CNC Building Control Consultancy  
Thorpe Lodge  
1 Yarmouth Road



NORWICH  
NR7 ODU

**Telephone:** 01603 430100

**Email:** [enquiries@cncbuildingcontrol.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@cncbuildingcontrol.gov.uk)

**Fax:** 01603 430541

For more information about building control in Norwich and applications forms for work visit the [CNC Building Control website](#).

**If you wish to contact us please .....**

Please telephone: 0344 980 3333 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

Minicom: 01603 212587 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

Fax 01603 213015

E-mail: [planning@norwich.gov.uk](mailto:planning@norwich.gov.uk)

Write to: Planning Services  
Norwich City Council  
City Hall  
Norwich  
NR2 1NH

Visit us at: Planning Reception (8.45am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

2nd Floor  
City Hall  
Norwich  
NR2 1NH

If English is not your first language, or you have a sensory impairment, and you need help we can arrange translation or help with speech and text.

