

## Planning Services – 2013 Customer Satisfaction Survey Supplementary Report No.1 Planning Committee related feedback

This report summarises responses from the Planning Services 2013 Customer Satisfaction Survey that are related to the Planning Committee. The responses cover three groups;

- Comments from all respondents to the survey - Generally respondents were not asked specific questions about Planning Committee but may have made a comment
- Responses from Councillors and Parish & Town Councils who were asked specific questions
- Visitors to Planning Committee (PC) meetings who were asked specific relevant questions

The statistics in this report are based on the following survey response rates:

Parish & Town Councils:	16 responses from 37	= 43%
Councillors:	22 responses from 47	= 47%
PC Visitors:	8 responses from 40	= 20%
Others:	174 responses from 958	= 18%

### Regarding Planning Committee (PC) meetings

1. We asked Parish & Town Councils, Councillors and PC Visitors to rate the following in respect of PC meetings: (Q.23A)

The professionalism of the Planning Officer presenting the application

Cumulative rating	Rating	Parish & T Council	Councillors	Visitors	Variance
57%	Very or slightly good	25%	86%	38%	61%
13%	Neither good / poor	19%	0%	38%	38%
7%	Slightly or very poor	0%	5%	25%	25%
24%	Did not answer	56%	9%	0%	56%

The quality of the documentation presented

Cumulative rating	Rating	Parish & T Council	Councillors	Visitors	Variance
50%	Very or slightly good	25%	68%	50%	43%
15%	Neither good / poor	19%	14%	13%	6%
11%	Slightly or very poor	6%	9%	25%	19%
22%	Did not answer	50%	9%	13%	41%

The quality of the decision making

Cumulative rating	Rating	Parish & T Council	Councillors	Visitors	Variance
24%	Very or slightly good	13%	36%	13%	23%
13%	Neither good / poor	19%	5%	25%	20%
30%	Slightly or very poor	13%	45%	38%	32%
26%	Did not answer	56%	14%	25%	42%

2. We asked Parish & Town Councils, Councillors and PC Visitors if the [PC] process was fair and allowed the public a reasonable chance to ‘have their say’? (Q.23B)

Cumulative rating	Rating	Parish & T Council	Councillors	Visitors	Variance
50%	Yes	19%	73%	50%	54%
17%	No	13%	18%	25%	12%
13%	Don't know	25%	0%	25%	25%
20%	Did not answer	44%	9%	0%	44%

3. We asked Parish & Town Councils if they had attended a Swale Planning Committee meeting in the last 18 months (Q.22)

	Response
Just the Clerk has attended	0%
Some Parish Councillors have attended	56%
The majority of Parish Councillors have attended	0%
All of the Parish Councillors have attended	0%
None of the Parish Council has attended	38%

4. We asked Councillors if they had attended a Swale Planning Committee meeting in the last 18 months (Q.9)

	Response
Yes, as a Committee Member	55%
Yes, as a substitute Committee Member	23%
Yes, as an observer or representative of my constituents	14%
No	9%

5. We asked Councillors if they would like to change any aspect of the Planning Committee (Q.11)

Element	Response
The venue	5%
The timing	5%
The frequency	0%
The format	32%
No opinion	36%
Other*	18%
Did not answer	18%

(\*) Councillors stating ‘Other’ did not go on to explain their answer

6. We asked PC Visitors the following questions about their visit(s): (Q.19-22)

In what capacity did they attend the PC meeting?

	Response
As a private individual	50%
As a representative of a community group	13%
On behalf of my employer or business	13%
As an Agent acting on behalf of another party	13%
On behalf of a Parish or Town Council	13%
Other: Please give more details below	13%

What was their main reason for attending the PC meeting?

	Response
In support of an objection to a planning application	50%
To speak in objection to an application	13%
In support of a planning application	13%
To speak in favour of a planning application	13%
To observe the process only	13%
Other: Please give more details below	13%

Approximately how many times had they visited a PC meeting in the last 18 months?

	Response
Once	38%
1-2 times	25%
3-5 times	25%
6–10 times	13%
More than 10 times	0%

If they were there to listen to a decision on a specific application what was the outcome?

	Response
A decision was not made	50%
It was as I wanted	25%
It was NOT as I wanted	25%
I do not know	0%
Other: Please give more details below	0%

Did they gain a clear understanding of the decisions that were made?

	Response
No	37%

OVERALL, how did they rate the Planning Committee meeting?

	Response
V Good	0
Good	38%
Fair	38%
Poor	13%
V Poor	13%

7. We asked PC Visitors to rate the following elements related to their visit(s): (Q.23)

Rating	Very or slightly good	Neither good / poor	Slightly or very poor	Did not answer
Notification and arrangement of the meeting	100%	0%	0%	0%
The start time and punctuality	100%	0%	0%	0%
The conduct & behaviour of Councillors	63%	25%	13%	0%
The leadership and chairing of the Committee	63%	13%	13%	13%
The quality of sound and visual presentations	50%	25%	25%	0%
Any other prior communication	50%	13%	13%	25%
The comfort in the public gallery	50%	25%	25%	0%

## Regarding Planning Committee (PC) reports

8. We asked Parish & Town Councils, Councillors and PC Visitors if they agreed with the following statements about Planning Committee reports? (Q.24A)

Cumulative rating	% Who agreed with the following:	Parish & T Council	Councillors	Visitors	Variance
78%	They are clearly set out	56%	91%	88%	35%
76%	I regularly read PC Reports	63%	100%	38%	62%
76%	They provide me with sufficient detail	56%	91%	75%	35%
65%	They are written in a way that is easily understandable	50%	73%	75%	25%

9. We asked Parish & Town Councils and Councillors what if anything they would change in respect of planning committee reports? (Q.24B)

<u>Parish, Cllr</u>	<u>Comment</u>
C	[Use of] Plain English
C	I found Conditions are sometimes difficult to understand
C	Ability and knowledge of Committee members
C	More precedent of decisions in area of similar development written so that if decision goes against report we have a fair chance of winning any appeal
C	Sometimes there is not enough detail provided. We should resist getting lost in deep dialogue
C	Pictures or diagrams in with papers
P	Reports could be better indexed so a particular report can be more easily found. At the moment you have to search through all sections to discover a particular item.
P	Not sure where to find PC reports - unless you are referring to PC Minutes which I have answered as above
P	Reports could be more local
P	Please could Planning Committee Reports be emailed to Clerks
P	clarity and clear reasoning for decisions
P	We don't receive [PC reports]

## Regarding comments

10. We asked ALL respondents for any areas that they felt we should prioritise for improvement. These were then categorised and the following are considered to relate to Planning Committee....:

Agent, Parish, Visitor, Staff, Councillor, Business, Other	Comment categorised	Comment
C	Committee	(x3 comments) Avoid overlong and complex updates at planning meetings/No tabled items/Defer if possible
C	Committee	(X9 comments) Better presentation at Planning Committee (bigger, clearer pictures/visual aids/bigger screen etc.)
A	Committee	Committee procedures. Give Officers confidence to be brave with their professional advice
A	Committee	Members trusting recommendations made by their officers
A	Committee	Quality of Committee debate
A	Committee	Raise members understanding of planning matters
V	Committee	Share and make decisions with other Councillors [Planning Committee meeting attendee]
C	Consult	Better connection with Parish & Town Councils
C	Consult	Early contact with Ward Councillors on controversial applications. They may be able to help the service and process.
O	Consult	Give more time for local people to comment at meetings for major applications
O	Consult	(x11 comments) Give more weight / listen to the opinions of the local people affected by planning applications
O	consult	listen to elected councillors
P	Consult	SBC appear not to seriously consider any views of the community
B	Consult	Suggest decision makers actually do a visit a site and discuss available options before refusing planning permission
A	Consult	Take objections seriously
A	Consult	undertake more site visits
C	Decisions	50/50 applications should be recommended but given scope for decision to go other way if members decide not "hamstring?" us at Inspector Appeal
P	Decisions	Consistency in decision making can be improved
O	Decisions	ensure decisions are made objectively i.e. not in the councils interest only
C	Decisions	not be so positive in recommendation i.e. FIRMLY BELIEVE
O	General	Act as servants of the community and not the master. Support the elected representatives
O	General	change conservative attitudes
O	General	Refrain from putting pressure on elected representatives
A	General	We are in a recession whereby a greater number of applications should be granted permission
B	Service	Case Officers on Major Applications should NOT be on leave when they go to Committee

10. We asked ALL respondents for any additional comments they wished to make. These were then categorised and the following are considered to relate to Planning Committee.....:

Agent, Parish, Visitor, Staff, Councillor, Business, Other	Comment categorised	Comment
A	Comparison	RE Q17: COMPARISON - Swale was one of the poorer LPA's locally. Significant improvements have occurred. Good younger staff. Officers good. Committee one of the worst I have experienced in 25 years as a Town Planner
V	Committee	A lot of "don't know", "Nothing to do with us", "It's building regs", "Will have to see" "Temporary is subjective." Suggest info to support the officers is loaded on to the laptop so that they can look it up.
V	Committee	I have only attended one planning meeting at Swale House. I found the way that it was organised and run very amateur. The Chairman was disorganised with paperwork and the use of data projector was terrible. Some of the councillors comments were quite irrelevant and lacking in understanding
V	Committee	I have worked in the commercial sector for 30+ years and it is permitted for someone other than the Chair to read out the safety advice - try it
S	Committee	Improvements need to be made to the Council Chambers to improve facilities for all, particularly public - seats, air quality, visuals etc.
S	Committee	Process of Members making decisions at Planning Committee could be clearer, as easily misunderstood by public and members.
O	Committee	Re 16: IMPROVEMENTS - PLANNING COMMITTEE - Communication training for Councillors on the Planning Committee on how to talk to members of the public
O	Committee	Duplicate entry
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Chairman should restrain members from repetition and those merely indicating how they will vote
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Format of committee structure, presentation of planning applications to enable better understanding by the public attending at meetings
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Need to improve the visuals with several screens
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Planning Committee and public need better visuals and screens that they can all see the detail at committee meeting
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Planning is a critical public face - The way the committee & officers perform in public and the technology used could be much improved. The 3 minute rule needs to be reviewed
C	Committee	Re Q11: PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETINGS - Visual display (projector) is out of date and often poorly presented. It shows an amateur side of the Council - Not professional. Investment needed here
A	Committee	RE Q16: IMPROVEMENTS - I have found recent Committees difficult. Thew public gallery is uncomfortable, the public chat throughout the debate and some unfortunate comments have been made. I feel Committee needs to tighten up its procedures. Being able to see and be seen in the public gallery would help
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE - Ability and knowledge of Committee members
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - I found Conditions are sometimes difficult to understand
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - It is unfortunate that some members do not regularly read the agenda's and supporting reports/documents. This shows an unprofessional approach
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - More precedent of decisions in area of similar development written so that if decision goes against report we have a fair chance of winning any appeal
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - Pictures or diagrams in with papers
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - Some (Planning Committee) reports are too long
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS - Sometimes there is not enough detail provided. We should resist getting lost in deep dialogue
C	Committee	Re Q19: PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORTS -[Use of] Plain English
V	Committee	Seat was broken [reported by tp]
V	Committee	The Chairman seemed lost re the Agenda.
V	Committee	This meeting was much easier to follow