

National Planning Improvement Framework

Attribute 9: The planning authority has good Customer Care



A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.

Pre-Application Advice

The Council welcomes early engagement with all applicants and developers prior to the submission of any application. The submission of informed, detailed and comprehensive applications results in quicker decision making and better quality of developments once the application is submitted. The Council offers a chargeable pre application advice service for major and local development, whilst a free pre-application advice service is available for householder proposals and for proposals by not for profit community organisations and registered charities. The pre application advice is intended to guide and inform the formulation of development proposals.

The benefits of pre application advice is to understand how policies and guidance will be applied to the development proposal and identifying at an early stage where there is a need for specialist input for example traffic requirements or site investigations. At present pre application advice provides an assessment of the planning merits of a proposal, how the proposal relates to key local plan policies and guidance, details of submission requirements, advice on the likely timescale for completing the planning process and outline of the material planning issues. Details of the pre application advice service is provided on the Planning website together with the cost and the timescale for response. The pre application advice is largely provided through a written response. 52 formal written requests received during 2023/24 and 41 issued during years 2023/24 with some pre application request's withdrawn or failed to provide a fee.

The pre application service is presently under review to encourage a more collaborative approach and it recognizes the need to establish a more bespoke pre-application process: one which reflects the different needs of different applications to provide a greater take up and move away from solely written responses. It will enable joint working between the applicant and local planning authority and require the input from different services within the Council and external stakeholders. This more bespoke pre application process would seek to support applicants in the development of the larger and more complex proposals in terms of achieving more placemaking benefits.

It is recognized that by frontloading the process through a more robust pre application service with early and effective consultation and engagement, this will assist in avoiding delays and difficult situations during the planning application process.

The Council also offer Processing Agreements for all National or Major applications and also for complex local developments. Details of the Processing Agreements process is available on the Planning Website. A Processing Agreement is used to set out the key processes in determining the application, identifying what information is required and from whom and sets the timescales for the delivery of various stages of the process. It is recognized that there are a number of benefits of Processing Agreements such as greater transparency in decision making, greater predictability and certainty over the timing of key stages. A total of 27 Processing Agreements were received in 2023-24.

The Council also sends out a link to a customer survey with each decision notice issued and the survey is available online at [Customer Care Survey: Planning Application Process · East Ayrshire Council \(east-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/customer-care-survey). However there has been a low take up with applicants and agents completing the survey with applicants/agents preferring to speak directly to the Case Officer/Manager/Chief Planning Officer if they are happy or dissatisfied with the process or Service they have received. Due to the low return from the survey no issues have been raised. There has been no returns so far for 2024 and 4 for 2023. The results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offered by the planning authority.

Engagement with Developers and Communities

The Council has invested in a new Community Engagement Tool –Engagement HQ Surveys which provides community engagement in a modern clear and digital way to gather community responses and turn them into action. It allows a range of question types, the addition of visual aids such as maps, photos as well as other graphics. Survey responses can provides data and meaningful feedback and input from our communities on matters of interest to them. Engagement HQ provides helpful diagrams, graphs and analysis tools to capture patterns and trends across different community segments. Free text responses can be further analysed using ‘Text analysis’ when enables responses to be tagged with themes and key words and then extracted.

The flexibility of the platform allows the Council to tailor its surveys in order to obtain the most efficacious and meaningful responses from the target community. This flexibility facilitates the creation of surveys which are accessible, convenient and informative for the public.

Engagement HQ has been used to consult on the Draft Loudoun Castle and Estate Supplementary Guidance document. This was a six week public consultation which will influence the finer detail of the Draft Supplementary Guidance document and inform the future decision making in Loudoun Castle – A listed Castle and associated Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape.

During the Draft Loudoun Castle and Estate Supplementary Guidance consultation, the Council requested some additional feedback around navigation of the document, use of visuals/illustrations and photographs, as well as the method of engagement in order to understand how to improve similar consultations in the future. This will allow the Council to more effectively engage our communities, ensure that we are reaching a range of groups and maximising opportunities for comment.

The Council intends to utilise Engagement HQ more in the future as a means to engage and consult with our communities, in conjunction with other Services in a more clear and concise digital way. The results, comments and feedback can be easily analysed. It has been used recently to consult other service users of the current GIS system and to get views of existing and potential service users for a new GIS platform.