

Development Enquiry Centre Consultation Strategy



Document Control	
Version 1.0	October 2007

Scheduled Updates	
October 2008	MH
October 2009	HC
October 2010	

Other Updates	
January 2010	

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1. Why Consult?

The need to consult with members of the public and service users and non-users is becoming more and more important with the onset of Best Value and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Under the Local Government Act (2000) Leeds City Council has an obligation to 'consult and seek the participation of such persons as they consider appropriate'¹.

Extensions to the Council's duty to involve local people in key decisions have come into effect from April 2009.

We are aware of the value of consultation and see it as an opportunity rather than simply a duty. There are a number of benefits to consultation:

- Encouraging our stakeholders to become more fully involved in the decision-making process
- Assisting decision-making about policies, priorities and strategies
- Targeting DEC services more closely to what people want, avoiding what they do not want
- Increasing responsiveness to DEC customer needs
- Improved take-up of services
- Potential problems with changes to services can be identified early
- Improving local democracy
- Improving the council image
- Improving community understanding of council work
- Generating new ideas
- Testing out proposed ideas before implementing them
- Monitoring quality of performance
- Promoting sustainability in improving existing services and introducing new ones
- Helping the community

With all of these in mind the Development Enquiry Centre (DEC) will consult with stakeholders using a variety of tools and methods, appropriate to the needs of its customer groups on a range of topics and issues.

2. What are we trying to achieve

- We recognise the importance of carrying out consultation amongst service users and non-users wherever it is appropriate. This will make sure that services meet local people's needs and are delivered in the way that local people consider to be appropriate.
- We need to identify consultation requirements as part of the business planning process.
- When taking decisions about service aims and the way that we deliver them, we need to take into account the views of our customers and other stakeholders, whether internal or external to the council.
- Any consultation exercise needs to be robust, follow best practice and be of the highest possible quality within available resources.

- We need to feed back the findings of all consultation to those who participated, as well as any action to be undertaken as a result.
- We need to keep local people informed of progress towards actions agreed as a result of consultation.

3. Values in consultation

To ensure consultation with service users and stakeholders is a meaningful experience, we have formulated some consultation standards. They are:

1. We are committed to involving service users and stakeholders in the planning and delivery of the DEC
2. We value the involvement of service users and stakeholders
3. Service users and stakeholders will have an equal opportunity to get involved.
4. We are committed to continuously improving the way we inform and consult with service users and stakeholders.
5. We will be clear about what we will consult with service users, stakeholders and providers on and when and how this will be achieved.
6. We will be aware of the limitations and constraints of any consultation exercise
7. We will ensure service users and stakeholders are clear about confidentiality

4. Who will we consult?

DEC has a variety of stakeholder groups with which to consult. Due to the nature of the work we have both internal and external customer groups. Each group has different characteristics and so will need to be consulted with in different ways appropriate to their needs.

4.1 Stakeholder groups

Below are some of the main stakeholder groups that may be consulted. It is recognised however that these groups are not necessarily homogenous. Sub groups or smaller segments may exist within the main groups and measures will be taken during consultations to further identify the most appropriate means and tools to make consultation as effective as possible.

- Councillors
- Development industry
- Residents- applicants, objectors, interested parties, students, general public
- City Development services- internal customers
- DEC Staff

5. What will we consult on?

We will consult with customers and stakeholders on:

- Service reviews
- Planning for the future
- Service improvements
- Prioritisation of future developments
- Service performance

6. How will we consult?

There are a wide variety of tools which will be used, depending on the topic for consultation and the stakeholder groups to be consulted. Additionally, the method of consultation will be chosen depending on the type of information we need to illicit from it, for example quantitative data requiring facts and figures or more qualitative information understanding what people think.

In addition to the proactive consultation methods employed, we will also use reactive tools to collect customer views and comments, including complaints, letters and emails.

6.1 Consultation methods

Below lists the types of consultations in we will engage and the frequency of that consultation. The chart also describes the feedback mechanisms.

Consultees	Consultation areas	Method	Frequency
Major Agents	Satisfaction levels New services Performance levels	Major agents forum	Quarterly
Householder Agents	Satisfaction levels New services Performance levels	Householder agents forum	Quarterly
General public	Customer Satisfaction New services Performance levels	Survey Complaints Complements <i>Let Us Know</i> leaflet Letters Comments book Display board	Annual Ad hoc Ad hoc Ad hoc Ad hoc Ad hoc Monthly
DEC Staff	Operational service improvements Individual training needs Update on the Service Improvement Plan	EFQM Away Days Appraisals Team meetings Project Team and DEC meetings	Annual Annual Annual with 6 month review Weekly Quarterly

The main consultation methods however which will be used are:

- External customer questionnaire survey
- User Forums

These methods represent the most effective, value for money way to gain information from a variety of customer groups.

6.1.1 External customer questionnaire survey

Due to the large population size of customers of DEC (based on footfall figures) a customer satisfaction survey has been deemed to be the most appropriate method for consulting with the general public. The survey allows

the gathering of information on the types of customers, their needs and wants as well as their thoughts and feelings on the service and it's staff.

The sample size for the annual customer survey will be based on the footfall figures. In order to assess the confidence level it is imperative to obtain a sufficient number of completed questionnaires in relation to the visitor count and we will hoping to achieve the target of $\pm 5\%$ error level.

The questionnaire will comprise closed and open questions as well as ranked questions (Likert scale) to measure intensity of attitudes. Responses will be weighted so as to be able to sum the responses for each question.

The survey will be run on an annual basis, asking the same questions so that performance trends can be measured and publicised.

The first survey was run in November 2007 and has been carried out two further times, with a survey scheduled in September 2010.

6.1.2 User Forums

Both user forums: the Major Development and Householder Agents meet on a quarterly basis with a pre-agreed agenda and are very useful consultation groups. Whilst the User forums are not just for DEC customers, issues relating to service provision are taken to the forums for discussion.

The Major Development forum comprises representatives of major agents operating in the area and also representatives from Planning Aid, Leeds Civic Trust and Parish Councils. The forum therefore represents a wide and diverse range of customer groups with different service needs, for example Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant and the Parish Council representing the views and needs of local people rather than developers.

Wider consultation will also be taken with the larger Householder stakeholder group, around 140 agents, which represent a sizable proportion of the development industry operating in Leeds.

Further information and the methodologies employed are included in the appendices.

7. Reliability

We will ensure that the consultations are as representative as possible, ensuring reliable data.

By adopting a robust methodologies we aim to reduce potential biases in the results and in the selection of the samples being survey. A $\pm 5\%$ error level is aimed for in the external customer satisfaction survey and the sample for the internal interviews is selected randomly.

The user forum members are a mixture of self-selected members plus invited members from the total population of the development industry in Leeds.

8. How we will feedback the results?

We will ensure that the results of any consultation exercise will be fed back to the consultees. The stakeholders who took the time to participate or respond will be informed how their views and involvement have affected the decision.

The methods used to feedback will largely depend on the stakeholder group involved in the consultation. We will ensure that the right method for feeding back is chosen, to ensure the best possible levels of inclusion.

Results will be published honestly and highlight where we can improve as well as where we have done well.

This is not an exhaustive list, but some of the methods to feedback include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council's Internet Pages• Councils Intranet pages (for internal consultees)• Leaflets• Publications• Posters• Council Committee meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Displays• Media articles• Forums• Meetings• Newsletters• Display screen in DEC• Internal meetings
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9. What we will do with the results?

All the results will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be not shared with any third parties. The consultation results will only be used in the manner in which

We will feedback the information to you in the most appropriate way. Depending on the consultation, we may use the results in shaping future policy and decisions. The information may also be used to implement new services

We will also say which ideas and suggestions will not be used and say why.

10. Review of the Strategy

The consultation strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis to assess the following:

- Participation and completion rates
- Reliability of results
- Quality of feedback information
- Representative results
- Changes in the economic climate

The strategy will also be assessed to ensure that the methods chosen for consultation lend themselves fully to as wide participation as possible and that the results and findings of the consultations can be used in future service improvement activity

An environmental scanning exercise will be carried out annually to ensure that the economic and political factors in particular on the development industry do not have an effect on the types of customer groups with whom the DEC is serving.

The downturn in the economy has meant that the number of customers to the DEC has decreased but the types of customers using the service remain the same, just in reduced numbers.

Customer satisfaction Survey in DEC

Purpose

- to establish who DEC's customers are
- to establish the needs of DEC customers
- to assess the satisfaction level of customers visiting DEC
- to identify areas for improvement
- to identify areas for improvement as described by customers

Methodology

An annual customer survey will be run for the period of a week.

Dedicated members of staff will be timetabled to ask customer to complete a customer survey. Staff will also go through the survey with customers where appropriate.

Each form will be numbered and a record kept of the number of forms distributed on the daily record sheet.

Refusals must be counted and the questionnaire that has been refused should have a red R on the top right hand corner and not handed out again. This is so our sample size is representative and we can assess the confidence level, that is the reliability of the answers we are receiving.

It may be necessary to survey into a second week in order to achieve the target number of completed questionnaires. If this is the case, the questionnaires, where reasonably practical, should be issued over all the days we are open.

Sample size

As this will be a census survey every visitor to DEC will be asked to complete a form.

The sample size will be calculated based on the weekly footfall in DEC. The questionnaires will be split evenly across the week to reduce any bias.

It is important on order for the data to be reliable that there is a sufficient number of completed questionnaires in relation to the visitor count. An error level of $\pm 5\%$ has been set to ensure the responses are representative. The target number of questionnaires distributed includes individuals refusing to take part (usually about 33%).

Staff should continue to ask customers to complete the forms until the target number of completed forms per day have been completed. Once the target has been reached it is advisable to stop surveying.

Daily count form

Each day daily count forms need to be completed to keep track of the number of completed forms and the number of refusals.

The information we need is the number of the first survey used that day, the number of the last form used that day, the number of refusals and the number of completions per day.

Evaluation and Feedback

The results of the questionnaires will be analysed for areas for improvement and common themes. Analysis will also be carried on out on different customer types, to see if there is correlation between user types and satisfaction levels.

Feedback will be posted in DEC and on the Internet and a leaflet will be produced of the analysis of the questionnaires and areas for improvement.

Development Enquiry Centre

Customer Satisfaction Survey

We are conducting a survey to find out about your experience in the Development Enquiry Centre as we are looking for ways to improve the quality of our services. We would be grateful if you could take a few moments to fill in this survey form. Your answers will help us to make improvements and your answers will be treated in confidence.

1. What is the purpose of your visit? (please tick)

- Look at a current planning application
- Look at a past planning application
- Comment on an application
- Submit an application
- Get some advice
- Use the pcs
- Attending a meeting
- Other (please state)

2. Are you:

- An Agent Supporter of an application
- Developer Council Officer
- Objector to an application Other (please state)

3. How often do you use the Development Enquiry Centre?

- Daily Monthly
- Weekly Less than monthly

4. How many times have you been to the Development Enquiry Centre?

- First visit Under 5 times Over 5 times

5. Please rate the following aspects of the service:

	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Leaflets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On site computer facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opening hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waiting time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of information received	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfort and cleanliness of premises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Room layout	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please state)

6. Please rate your satisfaction levels with our staff

	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Staff helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff courtesy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. How clear was the information or advice you received today?

Very good Good Satisfactory Poor

8. In which area is it most important for DEC to improve?

.....
.....

9. Overall, how did you think we dealt with your requirements today?

Very Well Well Satisfactorily Poorly

10. How could we improve your experience?

.....
.....

10. Have you ever telephoned the Enquiry Centre?

Yes No

10a. If yes, please rate the

	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Staff helpfulness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff courtesy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speed of response	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of information received	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please feel free to add anything further in the space below.

If you wish to be entered into the prize draw for £50, please leave your contact details here:

.....

Thank you for your time.

Householder Forum Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Householder Forum

Problem Statement

A Strategic Review of Planning and Development Services was undertaken last year, service improvements were endorsed by Executive Board and five improvement themes were identified as follows:-

- 1. Capacity building and working with the private sector*
- 2. Realising a definitive officer view*
- 3. Development and support for Plans Panels*
- 4. Information and communication technology*
- 5. Improved customer services*

The Householder Agents forum will provide an opportunity for closer working for mutual benefit and provide the chance for agents to influence and comment upon proposed service improvements .

Objectives

- To provide a forum for two-way discussion of service issues, subjects and new initiatives between Officers of LCC and agents operating in Leeds
- To provide an opportunity for agents to provide feedback on service improvements and suggest future improvements
- To provide an opportunity for agents to have issues raised for discussion

Stakeholders

- Officers and Planning Managers from LCC involved in dealing with householder planning applications
- Householder Agents

Scope

- The focus of activity will be on service improvement and the improvement of customer services
- The forum shall not discuss individual submitted planning applications
- The forum will operate as a consultative group from which appropriate suggestions and ideas may form part of future changes and improvements to the service. The decisions for service improvement will rest with the service

Operation

- The Forum will meet on a quarterly basis. Additionally, meetings may be convened for specific issues.

- Membership of the forum will be limited to 15 agents or less and will rotate on a 12 monthly basis.
- An agenda and papers will be circulated in advance of each meeting
- The agenda of the Forum meetings shall be structured according to subject or work and all members of the forum may request items to be included on the agenda.
- Agenda items should be forwarded not less than one week in advance of the meeting to the Business Support Manager, Planning and Development Services
- The Forum shall be chaired by the Head of Planning Services
- Minutes shall be circulated within two weeks of the meeting
- Meetings will normally last no longer than 2 hours.

Sub-groups and ad hoc groups

- Ad hoc groups may be established for specific issues with the agreement of the forum
- Sub-groups may be established at the request of the Forum to cover Forum matters targeting a particular set of topics

Major Agents Forum Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Major Development Forum

Problem Statement

A Strategic Review of Planning and Development Services was undertaken last year, service improvements were endorsed by Executive Board and five improvement themes were identified as follows:-

1. *Capacity building and working with the private sector*
2. *Realising a definitive officer view*
3. *Development and support for Plans Panels*
4. *Information and communication technology*
5. *Improved customer services*

The major development forum will provide an opportunity for closer working for mutual benefit and provide the chance for developers and other stakeholders to influence and comment upon proposed service improvements.

Objectives

- To provide a forum for discussion of service issues, subjects new initiatives and between Officers of LCC, major developers and other stakeholders operating in Leeds
- To provide an opportunity for major developers and other stakeholders to provide feedback on service improvements and suggest future improvements
- To provide an opportunity for developers to have issues raised for discussion by the forum

Stakeholders

- Officers and Planning Managers from LCC involved in dealing with major planning applications
- Representatives from the development industry and their agents
- Representatives from local community and interest groups

Scope

- The focus of activity will be on service improvement and the improvement of customer services
- The forum shall not discuss individual planning applications
- There are no decision making powers granted to the forum. Any decisions for service improvements will rest with the service. However,

where appropriate comments and ideas from the forum may form part of future changes and improvements

Operation

- The Forum will meet on a quarterly basis. Additionally, meetings may be convened for specific issues
- An agenda and papers will be circulated in advance of each meeting
- Membership of the forum will be limited to approximately 15 members and will rotate on a 12 monthly basis
- The agenda of the Forum meetings shall be structured according to subject or work and all members of the forum may request items to be included on the agenda
- Agenda items should be forwarded not less than one week in advance of the meeting to the Business Support Manager, Planning and Development Services
- The Forum shall be chaired by an independent chair
- Minutes shall be circulated within two weeks of the meeting
- Meetings will normally last no longer than 2 hours

Sub-groups and ad hoc groups

- Ad hoc groups may be established for specific issues with the agreement of the forum
- Sub-groups may be established at the request of the Forum to cover Forum matters targeting a particular set of topics