

Report on	A proposed Customer Survey to gain feedback about the Planning Department from the perspective of agents.
Date of Meeting	7 th November 2023
Reporting Officer	Ellen Gilbert, Roisin McAllister
Contact Officer	Dr Chris Boomer.

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To agree that a survey by questionnaire distributed to agents would be an appropriate method to obtain qualitative and quantitative feedback regarding the operations of the Planning Department with emphasis on Development Management and the new planning IT system. Results from the customer survey to inform our service improvement plan.
2.0	Background
2.1	Members will be aware that the Planning Department in Mid Ulster District Council is operating a different IT system compared to the other 10 councils across Northern Ireland. We wish to establish the views and opinions of agents in relation to our new IT system as well as Development Management procedures and service provision.
2.2	The survey is targeted at agents who have submitted planning applications to the Council and are therefore engaged with the planning department – development management section and have experience the new IT system. Feedback from agents will help to understand levels of satisfaction in terms of the service provided, functionality and usability of the new IT system, views on development Management procedures, how the Planning Department is performing compared to the 10 other councils, as well as identifying any issues, key areas and methods for improvement.
2.3	The new IT planning system was introduced in June 2022. It is therefore an appropriate time to conduct a customer satisfaction survey as the IT system is now well established with both agents and planning staff having adequate time to adapt to using the system. The Development Management section is supported by the IT system so these areas interrelate and a survey focusing on both would be fitting.
2.4	The Council and Planning Department continually strive toward excellence and the customer survey will directly inform our service improvement plan. It will allow us to take into consideration views of agents and tailor services toward improvement.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	Staff across the planning department have been consulted on the survey with questions posed tailored in response in effort to obtain data which will best inform service improvement.
3.2	The survey focuses on the following key themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing times • IT computer system • Communications • Transparency and decision making
3.3	The draft questionnaire has been collated and is attached in Appendix 1. It will be distributed via email with an online link to 'surveymonkey' (an online questionnaire platform) to several agents as part of a pilot study at the end of October / start Nov.
3.4	Feedback received from the pilot study will be used to finalise the questionnaire before it is issued to a wider pool of agents. A list of email addresses of those who use have submitted planning applications to Council have been obtained.
3.5	The Planning department have sought advice in relation to GDPR and have been advised that distribution to agents can proceed given this is not market research. Direct engagement with agents via email will help to encourage a higher rate of response.
3.6	Approximately a week before the survey is due to go live in mid November, the Marketing and Communications team will publicise our customer survey on social media and on the Mid Ulster Council website. This will continue for the duration of the survey in attempt to reach as wide an audience as possible.
3.7	At the end of the survey there is an opportunity for agents to leave their name, organisation, and email address. This is not mandatory, and the survey can be completed anonymously if desired.
3.8	For agents who wish to complete the survey but don't have access to emails and/or a computer then hard copy can be obtained upon request to ensure it is accessible for all agents. The results from any completed hard copies would be extracted manually by a member of the planning department and integrated into the conclusions from the surveys completed electronically.
3.9	The pilot survey has been tested and requires approximately 10-15 minutes to complete which is considered a reasonable timeframe to expect agents to engage with the process.
3.10	The layout of the answers has also been formatted largely with tick box answers with additional provision to elaborate should they wish. This helps to ensure that

<p>3.11</p> <p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p>	<p>the survey provides both quantitative and qualitative answers, in other words statistical information supported by detailed reasoning.</p> <p>The survey will be run over a period of 4 weeks, with an anticipated opening date of Friday 17th November and closing date of Friday 15th December. This ensures the survey is closed before most agents would finish work for Christmas holidays, but the window is long enough for an appropriate number of responses to be compiled.</p> <p>After the close of the survey and the responses analysed, the conclusions will be fed back to members. The responses will also inform into the Planning Service Improvement Plan and provide evidence to support the information discussed within.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>The pilot survey is currently ongoing and as a result minor changes to the survey may be required. This will ensure the questions are written in such a way that agents can easily understand what is required of them and that the range of answers is identified appropriately.</p> <p>Any changes to the final questions are likely to be minimal. Therefore, the Committee is asked to delegate to the Service Director the final detail wording of the questions used within the survey at the close of the pilot survey.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: N/A</p> <p>Human: N/A</p> <p>Risk Management: N/A</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: N/A</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)

5.1	That the Planning Department issue a customer survey to agents to aid service improvement and the Service Director be delegated authority to make final changes to the draft Customer Survey Questionnaire attached in appendix 1.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 – Copy of Pilot Survey Questions



Mid Ulster District Council Planning Customer Survey

Within Mid Ulster District Council, we strive to continually improve our Planning Department by gaining feedback. With the installation of our new Planning Portal last year, we are seeing continuous changes towards IT and how this can benefit those working within the Planning Department, as well as our customers. We wish to gain a greater insight into how agents are using the IT system alongside the submission and processing of planning applications.

We ask that you complete the questions below open and honestly so we can strive to make meaningful changes to the systems and services we offer.

1. How satisfied are you with the service provided by the Planning Department of Mid Ulster District Council

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If you are not satisfied, please explain why

2. How satisfied are you with the time taken to process planning applications from date validated to date of decision?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If you are not satisfied, please explain why

3. How satisfied are you with the provision and usability of the new IT system incorporating planning portal and public access system?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If you are not satisfied, please explain why

4. How satisfied are you with the communication you receive from Mid Ulster District Council Planning Department?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- If you are not satisfied, please explain why

5. How satisfied are you with the transparency of the decision-making process used by Mid Ulster District Council to determine planning applications?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If you are not satisfied, please explain why.

6. How satisfied are you with consultee response times?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If you are not satisfied, please explain why:

7. Have you submitted a planning application online through the Planning Portal on the Mid Ulster District Council website?

- Yes
- No

If not, please explain why

8. Do you find our online forms easy to complete?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If not, please explain why

9. Do you find it easy to make a payment online to accompany a planning application through the Planning Portal?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If not, please explain why

10. Is the submission of applications online through the Mid Ulster Planning Portal your preferred method compared to submission in hard copy?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If not, please explain why

11. Can you make any suggested improvements to the planning portal including online forms, payment system and/or technical issues that you may have experienced which have not been resolved?

12. Are you registered to use Mid Ulster District Council's Public Access System for Planning?

- Yes
- No

If not, please explain why

13. Do you find the tools to track and receive updates on planning applications via the Public Access System useful?

- Yes
- No

If not, please explain why

14. Do you find the tools to view, search and comment on planning applications via Public Access useful?

- Yes
- No

If not, please explain why

15. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

A planning application submitted to Mid Ulster District Council's Planning department should be made invalid when insufficient detail or information to access the application is provided.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

16. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Mid Ulster District Council provides adequate opportunity to allow agents to revise plans in order to obtain planning permission.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

17. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The Case Officer should request amendments to plans as and when requested by consultee bodies.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Revisions to plans should only be requested after all consultee replies are returned and a group decision has been made.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

19. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Additional surveys should only be requested after all consultee replies are returned and a group decision has been made.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

20. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

It would be better if decision making was sped up by further limiting agents opportunities to provide revised plans.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

21. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Professional planning staff generally provide helpful advice.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

22. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Staff within the planning department return my calls and emails.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

23. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Agents and objectors have adequate opportunity to present their views to the Service Director of Planning and/or at Planning Committee meetings.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

24. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Planning Applications with an objection should be presented at Planning Committee.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

25. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Applications recommended for refusal should be given the opportunity to be deferred for further consideration before a decision is made.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

26. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Applications should only be deferred where there is additional information presented which has not already been considered.

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

27. Compared to the other 10 Councils in Northern Ireland, how would you rate Mid Ulster District Council's planning department in the approachability of its staff and availability of advice?

- Much better
- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- Much worse

28. Compared to the other 10 Councils in Northern Ireland, how would you rate Mid Ulster District Council's planning department in the transparency of its decision making and how it makes sure everyone's views are considered?

- Much better
- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- Much worse

29. Compared to the other 10 Councils in Northern Ireland, how would you rate Mid Ulster District Council's planning department in terms of the ease of use of the Planning Portal and Public Access.

- Much better
- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- Much worse

30. Compared to the other 10 Councils in Northern Ireland, how would you rate Mid Ulster District Council's planning department in terms of the overall service provided?

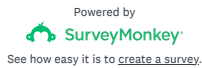
- Much better
- Better
- About the same
- Worse
- Much worse

31. Any other comments or suggestions for improvement can be noted here:

32. Thank you for completing this survey, the answers can be treated as anonymous, but if you wish to leave your name and email address to receive additional information or feedback regarding the survey you are welcome to do so below.

Name	<input type="text"/>
Company	<input type="text"/>
Email Address	<input type="text"/>

Done



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