

REPORT TO: BEST VALUE SUB COMMITTEE – 26 FEBRUARY 2002

REPORT ON: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE ROAD CONSTRUCTION CONSENT SERVICE WITHIN THE PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 161-2002

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on the Best Value Review of the Road Construction Consent service provided within the Planning & Transportation Department.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Sub Committee:

- a agrees the outcome of the review as contained in this report
- b notes those areas identified for continuous improvement in Section 13 of this report

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The review accounts for 1.15% (£95,800) of the Department's revenue budget and is 3.2% of the total review expenditure planned in the Department in this Financial Year.
- 3.2 There is a level of income from supervision of the on site works which is accounted for in the above figures.

4 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications arising out of this report.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no Equal Opportunities implications arising out of this report.

6 DEFINITION OF THE SERVICE TO BE REVIEWED

- 6.1 The Council has statutory responsibilities as Roads Authority under the terms of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 to adopt a new road constructed in accordance with any construction consent granted and to ensure that roads which are to be added to the List of Public Roads are constructed to the required Council specifications.
- 6.2 The service includes the processing of applications for construction consent for new roads, checking the applications to ensure the proposed layout, geometry and construction details are satisfactory and to supervise the construction of prospectively public roads.

- 6.3 The work is carried out within a team consisting of a Senior Engineer, a Senior Technician, a Technician and a Clerk of Works located within the Development Quality Section of the Building Quality Division.

7 JUSTIFICATION FOR REVIEWING THIS SERVICE

- 7.1 This service is being reviewed as part of the overall coverage of all services within the Council. The team is now part of the Development Quality section of the Planning & Transportation Department but was not included within the Best Value Review of that service.

- 7.2 The review should also indicate that the section is providing a good efficient service to all customers.

8 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- 8.1 The Review Team consisted of John Black, Review Team Leader (Personnel & Management Services Dept), a Lead Officer, Mike Giblin, Senior Engineer (Planning & Transportation), Team Members Iain Ross and Angus Moir (both Planning & Transportation).

The review was conducted through:

Postal questionnaires to all customers/stakeholders

Postal questionnaires to some other Local Authorities as a benchmarking exercise.

9 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- 9.1 Principal Stakeholders/Customers:

Internal

Elected Members

Convenor of Planning & Transportation Committee

External

Developers

Consultants

General Public

- 9.2 Critical Success Factors:

Consultation was carried out with the above customers and the following critical success factors agreed:

Speed of service

Competency of officers

Customer Care

The consultants were asked to state what they see as the important factors of the road construction consent service and to record this in relation to speed, accuracy and customer care.

10 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

10.1 In the road construction consent procedures it is rare for developers to apply direct for the consent and most commonly they will use a consultant to act on their behalf. It was therefore felt that it would be more suitable to question the consultants rather than the developers although in some of the replies these are one and the same. Questionnaires were sent out to a sample of nine consultants to ascertain customer comments.

10.2 Six replies were received and this is considered to be suitably representative for conclusions to be drawn.

10.3 Copies of the questionnaires and tables of the responses are attached to the report.

a Speed of Service

The consultants were asked to state how satisfied they were with the time taken to process an application and three out of the six were very satisfied while the remaining three were satisfied.

b Competency of Officers

All consultants value the pre application discussions which are promoted by the City Council and when questioned on the level of advice given and the competency of the staff they all responded that they were very satisfied on both counts.

All consultants felt that the speed of the service was the most important factor while accuracy of information and advice given was also ranked highly.

c Customer Care

Customer care was seen as the least important factor.

When asked if there were other factors only one consultant gave a response and they felt that consistency and pragmatism were important factors in the service provided.

11 RESULTS OF COMPARISONS

11.1 Benchmarking with Comparable Councils

11.2 Questionnaires were sent out to six comparable Local Authorities as a benchmarking exercise. Four replies were received.

11.3 Of the four replies received all these Councils undertake pre-application discussions with developers/agents and find that these discussions are of benefit to both parties.

- 11.4 Three of the Councils deal with the applications under delegated powers with only one of these setting a timescale for processing the application. The other Council that reports the applications to Committee sets a 6 week timescale from the date of approved drawings being received. Dundee City Council sets a timescale of 8 weeks from the date the application is first registered. The timescale set by this Council includes any discussions prior to the submission of final drawings. When analysed closely this equates to a period of around 4 weeks from the date of approved drawings being received which means a faster service delivered by Dundee City Council in relation to the other relevant authority.
- 11.5 To ensure that there are no conflicts created between any planning application and a road construction consent application, the road construction consent application is not referred to Committee until planning permission has been granted. On occasion this may extend the period of processing a particular application although all points may be agreed within the required timescale. Two of the four other Councils also operate this policy.
- 11.6 Dundee City Council currently has in place a checklist to ensure that all information required for an application is submitted correctly and there are set procedures to follow for each step of the road construction consent process from registering the application to effectively adopting the roads. Of the four Councils who replied, only 2 have a checklist but all four have set procedures in place.
- 11.7 There is currently no mechanism in place for Local Authorities to charge for the road construction consent process. The Scottish Executive is however investigating this matter and has recently sought the advice of the local authorities as to whether each authority feels a charge should be levied for the service. Dundee City Council responded stating that there should be a charge and from the questionnaire survey, three of the other authorities feel that they should be able to charge for the service.
- 11.8 Legislation is however in place for charging developers for any inspection of the roadworks as they progress, although there is no set method of charging established by the legislation. Dundee City Council charges on a time and mileage basis along with three of the other authorities. The other authority charges on a percentage of the road bond value.
- 11.9 Other information/details regarding the process can be found in the Review Audit file.

12 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 12.1 As the road construction consent process is a statutory function of the Council under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 no option appraisal is required and this is replaced by the benchmarking exercise detailed in previous sections of this report.
- 12.2 This confirms that the Best Value option is to continue with this service in house subject to the following continuous improvements.

13 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

13.1 Critical Success Factors

a Speed of Service

The turnover of applications is similar to that of other councils where the applications are reported to Committee prior to approval being given. It is therefore proposed to ensure that the average time taken to process applications is within the eight week period specified and there will be continuous monitoring of the standards of performance achieved. While in some circumstances this is not achievable due to other planning related issues regarding the application, the main factor to be accounted for is that the application is approved as soon as possible after planning consent is granted. Over recent years (1996-2000) the average time taken to process the applications has been 10 weeks with 57% of all applications being considered within the eight week period.

The above critical success factors and proposals for continuous improvements shall be monitored annually by means of a similar questionnaire exercise to relevant customers and stakeholders. A report shall be prepared on the monitoring exercise and will be submitted to the relevant Committee one year from the date of approval of this report. The aim of the monitoring is to ensure that the level of service currently provided is maintained or improved and the proposed target of applications considered within eight weeks is 75%.

b Competency of Officers

There is overall satisfaction with the professional advice given by officers of this department and it is proposed to continue this level of satisfaction by ensuring that the relevant officers continue to develop their knowledge of the subject matter through relevant training and keeping up to date with current policies and procedures. The procedures currently in place for processing and monitoring of the road construction consent applications are considered to be satisfactory. However these will also be monitored to ensure that the procedures are being followed correctly and that they are relevant to the process.

c Customer Care

As shown in the appraisal above customer care is seen as the least important factor in the road construction consent process from the consultants viewpoint. Customer care is rated highly by this Department and this will be achieved by adhering to the current procedures in place and reviewing them regularly to ensure they are still relevant. The aim for this element of the service is to maintain the level of customers who are very satisfied with the service and increase the number of satisfied customers to be very satisfied. Currently 50% of the consultants who responded are very satisfied with the service and it is proposed to achieve a target of 67% by the date of the next review.

14 CONSULTATION

14.1 The Director of Planning & Transportation has been consulted on this report.

15 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Best Value Submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland December 1997. Policy & Resources Committee – 11th December 1997.

A Stephen
Chief Executive

12 February 2002

IGSM/IR/MG/EH

Dundee City Council
Tayside House
Dundee

Appendices

Benchmark Questionnaire
Benchmark response table
Customer Questionnaire
Customer response table

**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
BEST VALUE REVIEW – ROAD CONSTRUCTION CONSENTS
BENCHMARK QUESTIONNAIRE**

Council:

How many RCC applications have you dealt with each year since January 1998?

1998	1999	2000
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Do you hold pre-application discussions with developers/agents?

Yes	No
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If yes, who benefited from these discussions?

Council	Developer/Agent	Both
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Do you have a target timescale for processing applications?

Yes	No	If yes, how many weeks?
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Is each road construction consent application reported to Committee for approval prior to the granting of consent?

Yes	No
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Do you have a checklist for processing applications?

Yes	No
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Do you have set procedures to follow for each step of the road construction consent process (from application to adoption)?

Yes	No
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Do you charge for the processing of a road consent applications?

Yes	No
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If yes, how is this charge calculated?

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If no, do you feel Local Authorities should charge for the road construction consent service?

Yes No

Do you charge for the inspection of road construction consent applications during the construction of the new roads?

Yes No

If yes, how is this charge calculated?

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Do you have any additional; comments on the road construction consent procedures you feel are relevant?

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	Council A	Council B	Council C	Council D	Dundee
No. of Applications					
1998	23	64	42	18	30
1999	26	79	30	21	24
2000	30	43	47	10	29
Pre Application Discussions					
Who benefited					
Council					
Developer					
Both	X	X	X	X	X
Target timescale					
Yes (no. of weeks)	6	6			8
No			X	X	
RCC to Committee for approval					
Yes		X			X
No	X		X	X	
Planning prior to RCC					
Yes	X	X	X		X
No				X	
Checklist					
Yes	X	X			X
No			X	X	
RCC procedures					
Yes	X	X	X	X	X
No					
RCC charge					
Yes					
No	X	X	X	X	X
Should LA charge for RCC					
Yes		X	X	X	X
No	X				
Charge for inspections					
Yes		X	X	X	X
No	X				
How are charges calculated	Time & mileage	Time & mileage	3.5% of bond	Time & mileage	Time & mileage

**DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL
BEST VALUE REVIEW – ROAD CONSTRUCTION CONSENT
CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRE**

Company Name:

The main factors to be addressed by this review are the speed of the service provided by Dundee City Council, the customer care and the competency of the officers. The following questions therefore relate to these factors.

How happy were you with the time taken by Dundee City Council to process the application(s)? (Circle one number)

Not Satisfied				Very Satisfied		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Dundee City Council feels that pre-application discussions are valuable in the processing of applications. Is it normal practice for you to hold pre-application discussions with officers?

Yes No

If pre-application discussions were held, how satisfied were you with: (Circle one number)

	Not Satisfied				Very Satisfied		
advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
personnel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What do you feel the important factor regarding the road construction consents service is?

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree		
speed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
accuracy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
customer care	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please suggest any other factors you feel are important which are not listed above.

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Do you have any suggestions/comments on the road construction consent procedure followed by Dundee City Council? (A flow chart detailing this procedure is attached)

	A	B	C	D	E	F
How happy with time taken to process application (1-7)	5	5	5	6	7	6
Are pre application discussions normally held Yes No	X	X	X	X	X	X
If pre application discussions held, how satisfied were you with Advice (1-7) Personnel (1-7)	7 7	5 5	6 6	6 6	7 7	7 7
What are important factors re RCC service Speed (1-7) Accuracy (1-7) Customer Care (1-7)	6 7 7	6 6 4	5 5 5	7 7 5	7 7 7	7 7 7
Any other factors?	X	X	X	Consistency Pragmatism	X	X