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**\*\*\*\*\*\*\* Council’s Pre Applications Service**

**Assessment questionnaire**

This questionnaire is based on the 10 Commitments to effective pre-application engagement developed by a cross sector group of stakeholders in the development industry – builders and developers, local authorities and statutory consultee organisations.

In assessing whether your existing pre-application service meets these commitments, you will help to build a consensus about altering the service to make it a service that prospective applicants will want to use

* because it helps them to reduce the time and cost of going through the planning process
* because it helps to deliver better developments
* because it responds to their needs and constraints as well as those of the council and community.

In answering the questions below, it would be helpful to cite examples where these will help the discussion about how you can improve your council’s pre-application service.

**Does your council’s pre-application service:**

**1. Enable sustainable development to proceed efficiently from proposal to completion**

1. Do you know whether most prospective applicants use some form of pre-application advice?
2. Do you have clear, readily accessible information about the pre-application services that you offer? Is this highlighted on your council website with contact details provided?
3. Is pre-application work seen as having the same importance/ status as dealing with applications?
4. What is the attitude that your officers bring to pre-application discussions? Do they see their job as primarily a kind of preliminary check for proposals that are brought to them or as an opportunity to improve developments by finding solutions so that a development can proceed?
5. Do your decision makers take any account of discussions held at pre-application stage?

**2. Offer a range of pre-application services to developers, making sure that each choice can be delivered in a timely, effective manner; proportionate to the size of the proposal**

1. Do you offer a menu of kinds of pre-applications advice so that prospective applicants can get the advice that suits the scale of development and complexity of the issues?
2. Does that offer include standard advice notes to deal with the routine queries without the need for face to face meetings?
3. Does your offer include the “quick chat” option of a duty planner, and/or the option for written advice/guidance?
4. For complex development is there an option for face to face meeting(s) where a proposal can be discussed with a range of stakeholders whose opinions will influence the consideration of a planning application?

**3. Help potential applicants to select the level of engagement necessary to deal with the issues raised by the proposal**

1. Is it clear to the prospective applicant what each level of service involves, how they can access such services, how much time these will take, what if any costs are involved and what information is required from the customer?
2. How are you able to respond to the varying needs of a prospective applicant: such as someone coming to you very early in the development process with just conceptual proposals as opposed to someone with more detailed proposals?
3. How do you involve the leadership of the council in proposals that have a strategic or political aspect to them?

**4. Demonstrate that your pre-application services are good value for money, whether or not you make a charge to the prospective applicant**

1. What information do you have about theway that pre-application discussions are currently provided?
2. Do you know what it costs the council to provide each kind of pre-application discussion (in average/ballpark terms)
3. Have you any customer perspective on how worthwhile your current services are?
4. Do you know whether you currently meet the timetable promises for providing pre-application advice?
5. Can you prove that for applicants that have taken up the offer of pre-application discussions get through the application process more quickly and with a higher rate of success?

**5. Co-operate to bring together the right people to address all of the development issues**

1. Do you offer to bring other stakeholders into the conversation? Do you have established relationships with other stakeholders within the council and outside such that they are willing to participate in pre-application meetings with you?
2. Do you have a situation where the officers who attend pre-application meetings are empowered to make commitments in regard to the scale of development/ complexity of issues of the proposal under discussion?
3. How do you deal with conflicts that may sometimes arise between different interests within the council so that in pre-application engagement you are able to speak with one voice for the council?
4. How do you manage getting timely responses from all the relevant stakeholders and consultees?

**6. Have an open exchange of information.**

1. What is your policy on confidentiality on pre-application discussions?
2. Is this clearly set out for the prospective applicant?
3. Is it clear what information you require from the prospective applicant before a discussion? How do you communicate this?

**7. Be collaborative; the requirements of all parties should be given consideration**

1. How do you manage the process of pre-application discussions? Do you offer Planning Performance agreements so that both you and the developer ( and other appropriate participants) can all reach an understanding about what will be involved and how long the process will take?
2. Do your officers routinely ask the prospective applicant if they have any special needs or constraints that may influence the process e.g especially contractual or finance issues that may jeopardise the likelihood of getting a scheme delivered.

**8. Provide an opportunity for councillors to be actively involved in pre-application discussions**

1. How do council members find out whether pre-application discussions are taking place on a site in their ward?
2. What currently happens when a large potential investor requests a meeting with the leader or chief executive to discuss a potential development? How is the resultant discussion recorded and passed on?
3. What are your existing arrangements for council members to be engagedin pre-application discussions?
4. Do you have procedures for the planning committee to an early sight of important schemes before an application is received?

**9. Engage with local communities about development proposals**

1. What means do you use to make sure that the community have an opportunity to be engaged in the early development of development proposals?
2. Do you know whether community groups in your area generally feel that they have enough opportunity to discuss proposed development schemes with you or with a prospective developer? (you could consult colleagues whose job it is to work with community groups or draw information from wellbeing surveys)
3. If neighbourhood planning is taking off in your area, do you have a protocol for making sure that those parishes or neighbourhood groups are invited to be participants in pre-application discussions in their area so that their plans and aspirations are fully taken account of early in the design process?

**10. Maintain an agreed record of information submitted, advice given and any agreements reached**

1. It is important that pre-application discussions are conducted in as transparent a way as possible, and that there is a clear record of advice given and any agreements that are reached during discussions. Do you have a clear process for recording advice and agreements and maintaining this information against a site record?
2. Do you have a clear protocol for how/when this record of discussion is made public?