



**Planning and Building Standards
Consultation, Communication and
Engagement Strategy**

June 2021

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Introduction

Having good, meaningful communication is key to ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of all aspects of a service and for the provision of excellent customer service and satisfaction.

It is important we listen, consult and communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with our communities, agents, developers, partners and colleagues to promote mutual understanding and respect and to ensure we deliver the best possible service to all our customers.

This Consultation, Communication and Engagement Strategy sets out how South Lanarkshire Council's Planning and Building Standards Service will consult, communicate and engage with residents and other audiences who have an interest in planning and building standards work within the area. It covers a three year period from 2021 to 2024.

Our Strategy has been developed within the background of the restrictions necessary as a result of Covid19 which has limited the amount of traditional consultation and engagement we can carry out. At the same time we have developed new methods of keeping in touch with customers and we expect these new ways of working to become established.

Background

South Lanarkshire is one of Scotland's most diverse areas, covering 1,772 square kilometres of land and with a population of about 319,000 people. It has the fifth largest population and is the eleventh largest authority area in Scotland. The authority area spans through central and southern Scotland, straddles the upper reaches of the River Clyde from the City of Glasgow boundary extending into the Southern Uplands at Leadhills. It extends east at Forth and Biggar and west to Thorntonhall and Drumclog. The main towns in South Lanarkshire are Rutherglen, Cambuslang, East Kilbride, Hamilton and Lanark.

South Lanarkshire's Planning and Building Standards (PBS) Service sits within the Planning and Economic Development Service and is part of the wider Community and Enterprise Resource. The Resource includes Roads and Transportation Services, Fleet and Environmental Services Facilities and Waste and Grounds Services.

Following a comprehensive service review, the PBS Service was restructured in August 2020. The work of PBS is undertaken by three teams comprising a Headquarters (HQ) team and two Area Office teams, each led by an Area Manager. This is detailed in the Assets section.

Both Planning and Building Standards have achieved **Customer Service Excellence (CSE)** recognition annually since 2014. CSE is the principal way in which we measure our progress towards achieving optimum customer service for the people and businesses in South Lanarkshire. At the most recent review in January 2021, Planning were awarded 15 'compliance plus' ratings, with three 'partial compliance' ratings remaining. At the same time Building Standards were fully compliant and achieved 12 compliance plus ratings.

New planning legislation was introduced in 2019 with the aim of reforming the planning system, including empowering communities to make decisions that support and sustain them. Measures include changes to the way in which communities participate in the planning process and the ability for community bodies to prepare Local Place Plans.

The Council also has a legal duty to prepare a Local Development Plan for the area. We are required to carry out public consultation and engagement at several stages of the process. We set out how we will do this in the Development Plan Scheme which is updated every year.

The processing of planning applications includes the statutory requirement for the Council to notify residents in properties that adjoin an application site. This allows those potentially affected by a proposed development to make representations. Advice on the grounds for objecting to an application and list of matters that cannot be taken into account is provided on the Council's website, which can be accessed using the following link [Commenting on a planning application](#). All comments received are considered when making a decision on an application and may result in changes being made to the proposal. However, an application can be approved if it meets policy even if objections are received. All representations made are summarised and commented upon in the case officer's report. The case officer will be available to explain proposals and decisions made on them.

Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment Screening completed for the strategy found that the Strategy would have a positive impact for people and organisations who use the Planning and Building Standards Service. This includes people in protected characteristics groups, as identified in the Equality Act, 2010.

We have consulted with our Access Panel when preparing this Strategy and taken account of their views within both the Strategy and the Action Plan.

Anyone requiring information in another language or format can contact us to discuss how their needs can best be met by emailing equalities@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Environment

We prepared and submitted a pre-screening statement for the Strategy at an early draft stage in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act, 2005. The statutory Consultation Authorities (Historic Environment Scotland, NatureScot and Scottish Environment Protection Agency), agreed that the Strategy was unlikely to have significant environmental effects and, therefore, a full Strategic Environmental Assessment was not required.

Strategic Context

National

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, which received Royal Assent in July 2019, introduces for the first time, a definition of the purpose of the planning system. This includes anything that achieves the national outcomes (within the meaning of Part 1 of the Community Empowerment Act 2015). This means that the needs of all people have to be considered when making decisions and this is particularly important when planning for the places in which people live, work and relax. A number of changes have been introduced by the Act which will lead to greater community involvement in the planning process.

The Local Development Plan sets out the Council's land use strategy for South Lanarkshire. When preparing our new Plan from late 2022, the new Act requires us to consult and engage much more widely than we currently have. The views of children and young people and the needs and aspirations of local communities especially will be an important part of this. We will also seek to develop new approaches to consultation particularly taking advantage of electronic communication and new technology. A Digital Strategy for Planning was launched by the Scottish Government in November 2020 which will transform the ways in which people can get involved in planning. Our action plan will be developed in response to these changes.

The 2019 Act also introduces the ability of community bodies to prepare a Local Place Plan for their area giving them opportunity to develop proposals for the development and use of land in the place where live by focussing on their aspirations as well as their needs. The Local Place Plans are required to conform to the Local Development Plan. The new Local Development Plan will have to consider any registered Local Place Plans which will enable communities to have a more direct role in the decisions that influence their place. A Local Place Plan also provides a framework for communities to take forward community actions themselves. In advance of this the Planning Service is developing a closer working partnership with the Council's Community Participation team.

Local

The work of the PBS Service is underpinned and guided by the Council's Plan 'Connect' and its vision to 'improve the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire'. Connect establishes five ambitions, three of which have direct relevance with the Planning and Building Standards Service.

These are:

- Promote economic growth and tackle disadvantage
- Make communities safer, stronger and sustainable
- Achieve results through leadership, good governance and organisational effectiveness.

To realise its ambitions, the Council has set out 11 objectives. The PBS Service contributes significantly to the achievement of five of these:

- Improve the availability, quality and access of housing
- Improve the road network, influence improvements in public transport and encourage active travel

- Work with communities and partners to promote high quality, thriving and sustainable communities
- Support the local economy by providing the right conditions for inclusive growth
- Support our communities by tackling disadvantage and deprivation and supporting aspiration.

Resource and service action plans establish a strong link between the Council's strategy and the delivery of services. In the case of the PBS Service, our day to day activities are directed to achieving the following Resource objectives:

- Ensure an adequate supply of housing land is maintained.
- Provide Planning and Buildings Standards services which guide and control physical development and land use in the area.
- Sustain the quality of our town and neighbourhood centres.
- Work with developers and public and private sector partners to deliver the Community Growth Areas City Deal project.
- Provide services which help local communities to become more sustainable.
- Regenerate and bring back into use vacant and derelict and contaminated land.

The corporate Communication Strategy, published in 2019, sets out how the Council will continually strive for meaningful, two way communications with all residents and other audiences in an increasingly digital world. Structured around the five 'As' of **Aims, Audiences, Activities, Assets** and **Analysis**, the principal purpose of the Strategy is to support the delivery of the Council Plan. This Planning and Building Standards Strategy introduces the sixth 'A' of **Actions** which will set out how we will deliver improved customer experience and satisfaction.

Aims

The benefits of effective communication for organisations and their customers have long been recognised. Key benefits identified for the Planning and Building Standards Service are:

- **Policy and service planning:** Raises knowledge and understanding of local needs and priorities and helps to ensure resources are better targeted to prevent waste, duplication and fragmentation.
- **Performance management:** Helps to gauge customer experience and perception of the Service and what went well and what could be improved.
- **Service delivery:** Establishes how the Service can be more responsive to the needs of customers and how it can optimise its services in terms of relevance, accessibility, equity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Planning and Building Standards' goal is to have good, effective and meaningful communication with all our communities and customers. To realise this ambition, we aim to:

1. Have a **co-ordinated approach** to consultation, communication and engagement.
2. Be **inclusive** to everyone in our communities.
3. Improve the **capacity** of our customers, including local communities to engage fully with us.
4. Develop our Service using **customer feedback** on their experience.

Audiences

The Planning and Building Standards Service is responsible for a number of statutory functions. This includes carrying out neighbour notification and other publicity on planning applications and the preparation of the development plan, as well as consultation with key agencies and other Council services. We also aim to engage and communicate with customers on a wide range of matters.

It is essential that the Planning and Building Standards Service has effective communication with all its customers, communities and other stakeholders and particularly with traditional 'hard to reach' people. This requires that the appropriate method of consultation, communication and engagement is used to ensure optimal effectiveness.

As a frontline public service, we have a wide range of customers, including those who engage directly with us and those who are impacted on the decisions we take in our plan making and in our planning and building consents processes. Our customers include:

- **Residents** applying for planning permission and building warrants, their **agents** and **representatives**.
- **Developers, landowners** and **planning consultants** applying for planning permission, building warrants or seeking to get sites included in the Local Development Plan.
- **Neighbours**, and in some cases, the **wider community** who may be impacted by proposals contained in planning and building warrant applications or by proposals in the Local Development Plan.
- Community Councils, community groups and interest groups.
- **Elected Members**, including Councillors, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the UK Parliament.
- **Community Planning Partners**, other Councils and Government agencies, including, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Enterprise and Transport Scotland.
- **Corporate colleagues**, for example, those in housing, roads and economic development.

In terms of plan making, the PBS Service also regularly consults, communicates and engages with this full range of customers at various stages of the plan making process.

Activities

In line with the Council's 'Digital First' approach, the majority of PBS's communications uses digital methods. However, to ensure that all customer groups, including older people, are fully involved and included, traditional methods are still deployed, where appropriate.

The Service uses a wide range of communication methods, principally:

- **Electronic communication:** The majority of written correspondence to and from our customers is by email, as this is quick, cost effective and environmentally friendly. It also provides an audit trail for both us and our customers and facilitates electronic file maintenance. Where required or requested, we are happy to provide information by traditional methods.
- **Website:** The PBS Service has dedicated webpages within the corporate website. We regularly review and update our webpages with information and advice on all aspects of planning and building standards work. Appropriate signposting is also provided to related agencies and work streams.
- **Web portals:** Planning has its own portal, known as Public Access, on the Council website where current planning applications and those that have had a decision can be viewed. Representations can also be made using this facility. Information on planning enforcement notices and planning appeals can be found on the website together with details of building warrant applications.
- **Customer Service Centre:** Customers are able to reach officers by telephone. A duty rota system is in place so that officers are always available to take enquiries.
- **Customer satisfaction surveys:** All customers who apply, object or appeal for planning or building consents are automatically invited to complete a customer satisfaction survey which asks about their experience and how they think the service they receive can be improved. Feedback from these surveys is used to inform service delivery and development. A link to the surveys is included within all planning staff's email footer.
- **Social media:** Working collaboratively with corporate communications, we regularly post updates about our activities on the Council's Twitter and facebook accounts.
- **Focus groups, workshops and events:** Held with particular communities of interest to discuss a wide range of issues. For example, an annual event with agents regarding key

changes in planning and building standards legislation and to discuss and provide feedback on customer service experience.

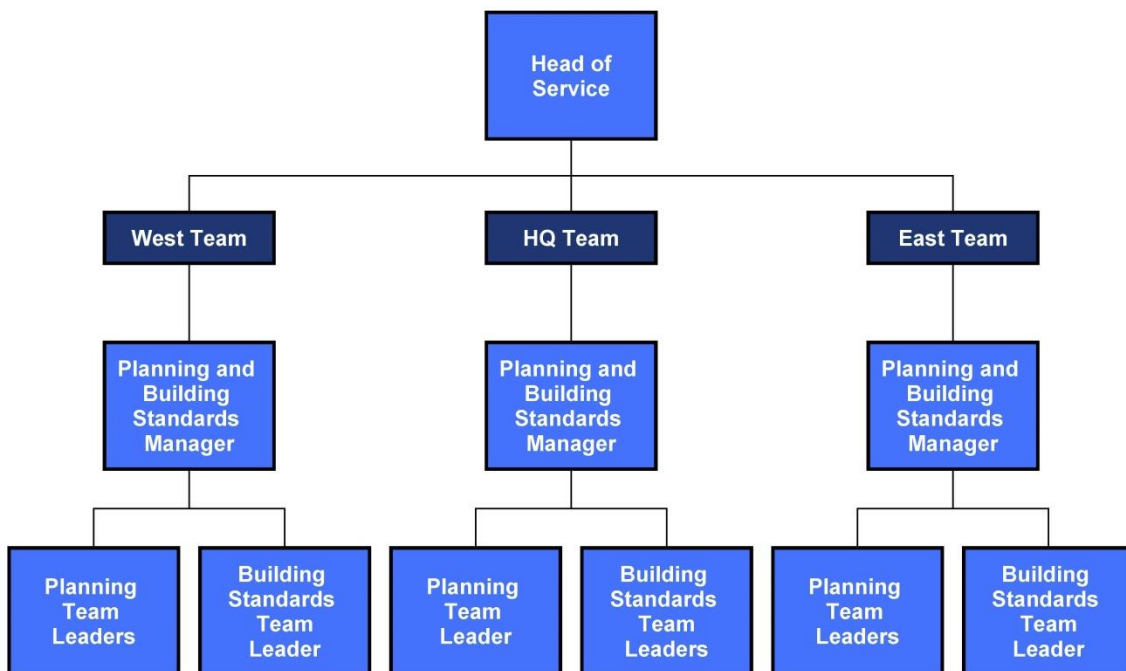
- **Forums and Panels:** The Service is represented on a number of forums and panels led by community and interest groups, covering a wide range of issues within South Lanarkshire.
- **Place Standard Tool:** A recognised method of structuring conversations about the physical and social aspects of place which can be conducted digitally or in a face to face group. The tool has been used by PBS as part of the engagement process for developing the Local Development Plan and to inform other activities. The tool is due to be refreshed in 2021 and forms an important part of the Scottish Government’s thinking on how to involve communities.

Assets

Arguably the greatest asset an organisation has is its people and this is undoubtedly the case for Planning and Building Standards. Our staff are highly trained, professional, approachable and committed to providing excellent customer service and care. This is continuously reviewed and monitored at regular one-to-one meetings and during bi-annual performance appraisal discussions which focus on a behaviours framework. Our staff are encouraged to develop and enhance their skills and knowledge through training, development programmes, continuous professional development, on the job learning and mentoring.

The following table shows the current structure of the Service. It comprises two area teams (East and West) together with a Headquarters team. All three teams are managed by a Planning and Building Standards Manager. Each team has separate Team Leaders covering planning and building standards. The area teams are predominantly responsible for the processing of planning applications and applications for a building warrant together with pre-application discussions. The Headquarters team includes a number of functions including policy development, enforcement, strategic environmental assessment, performance management and technical support, including our GIS mapping function. It also deals with applications for waste management, minerals and renewable energy and the inspection of new development as part of the completion process.

Planning and Building Standards Staff Structure



The Service's building warrant and development management case system and supporting document management system is provided by IDOX. This is the same platform as all local authorities in Scotland which allows for joint working and learning from best practice as well as the option to react quickly to legislative changes. It provides improved functionality and helps to share the cost burden for future development.

The current IDOX Uniform system provides:

- A casework management system for planning applications, planning appeals, Planning Local Review Body cases and enforcement cases.
- A casework management system for building warrants, completion certificates and enforcement cases.
- A link to the Scottish Government e-development portal from which applications for planning and building standards can be made directly to the Uniform system.
- An integrated document management system holding all associated plans and documents relating to planning and building standards casework.
- Public Access – our online service that allows the viewing of documentation and plans relating to planning applications received by the Council. It allows comments to be made to planning applications and provides details of planning appeals and formal enforcement cases. It also provides details of building warrants.

A decision was also taken by the Council to move to a corporate record management system and as such, Planning and Building Standards were one of the first Services to move to the use of Objective Navigator. This holds all our non-casework documentation and allows easy access to and sharing of documents within the Service and across other Council Resources which have implemented the system.

During the Covid19 restrictions all officers have been working from home and continue to be available to customers and partners by email and mobile phone. In addition, extensive use has been made of Microsoft Teams to hold meetings with customers.

Analysis

In order to evaluate the success of our strategy we will conduct and analyse regular customer satisfaction surveys and benchmark our performance with others. We will listen to what our customers and staff tell us about their experience and their views as to how we can improve or enhance our approach.

Customers are able to make comments, compliments or complaints about the service they have received from us. We use this information to try and improve our services to prevent the same issues happening again. Information about our complaints procedures is available on our website, accessible from the following link [Comments, compliments and complaints procedure](#)

Actions

From customer feedback and continuous review of our customer service delivery, we have identified a range of actions to sustain, improve and enhance how we communicate, consult and engage with them. Our Customer Service Action Plan, set out in Appendix 1, will be reviewed, updated and reported annually and will cover the lifetime of this strategy. It is set out in four themes:

- **Communication:** verbal, written and personal
- **Accessibility:** approachability and friendliness of staff
- **E-development:** operation of the national e-development portal and SLC Public Access
- **Service quality:** maintain high levels of service quality.

Appendix 1

Planning and Building Standards Consultation, Communication and Engagement Action Plan 2021 – 2022

No.	Action	Date required	Responsibility	CSE Criteria reference
1. Communication – verbal, written and personal				
1.1	Ensure staff are aware of and use customer service standards in relation to responding to customer enquiries by telephone and in writing.	Ongoing	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	4 – Delivery
1.2	Provide an electronic newsletter for agents, developers and other targeted customers which includes information and links to relevant information and events on a national, regional and local level. This could also include information about the staff who deliver the service.	Quarterly from March 2021	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	3 – Information and Access
1.3	Review and update as required information and advice on the Council's website. Where appropriate, invite agents and developers to review draft information before it is published.	From March 2021	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	3 – Information and Access
1.4	Use Council website to carry out public consultation, where appropriate.	Ongoing	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	4 – Delivery
1.5	Use social media and Council website to highlight events, for example, hearings and committee meetings and changes in building regulations and planning legislation.	Ongoing	PBS Managers	3 – Information and Access
1.6	After Committee issue standard 'interim letters' to representees advising of the Committee decision subject to a legal obligation or financial contribution which will delay issue of the decision notice.	Ongoing	Planning Managers Support Team	4 – Delivery

No.	Action	Date required	Responsibility	CSE Criteria reference
1.7	Publish changes in fees following review by the Scottish Government.	As required	PBS Manager HQ	3 – Information and Access
1.8	Provide a ‘Guide to Planning’ for Community Councils including advice on the planning and building standards systems and how we will communicate and consult with them.	July 2021	PBS Manager HQ	3 - Information and Access
1.9	Publish the Development Plan Scheme.	June 2021	PBS Manager HQ	3 - Information and Access
2. Accessibility – approachability and friendliness of staff				
2.1	Advise staff when compliments of their service are received, including nominations to corporate customer service awards, when appropriate.	Ongoing	Head of Service PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	2 – Culture of the Organisation
2.2	Continue to promote both formal and informal pre-application discussions and site visits between officers and customers.	Ongoing	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	4 – Delivery
2.3	New procedure to be rolled out to officers and customers involving standard form for pre-application enquiries and comprehensive pro-forma response.	December 2021	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	4 – Delivery
2.4	Ensure all new staff have customer service training as part of their induction.	As required	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	5 – Timeliness and Quality of Service
2.5	Deliver a CPD session to all Planning and Building Standards staff on the importance of delivering excellent customer service and meeting or exceeding our Customer Service Standards.	December 2021	PBS Manager PBS Team Leaders	2 - Culture of the Organisation
2.6	Explore opportunities to increase visibility of Planning Officers onsite during construction phase.	September 2021	Planning Managers Planning Team Leaders	2 – Culture of the Organisation
2.7	Prepare and deliver awareness session on the use of the planning portal to the Access Panel.	December 2021	Planning Managers	3 – Information and Access
2.8	Prepare and deliver session to the Access Panel on the planning system.	September 2021	Planning Managers	3 – Information and Access

No.	Action	Date required	Responsibility	CSE Criteria reference
2.9	Prepare and deliver awareness session on the use of the planning portal to Seniors Together.	October 2021	Planning Managers	3 – Information and Access
2.10	Prepare and deliver session to Seniors Together on the planning system.	October 2021	Planning Managers	3 – Information and Access
3. E-development – operation of the national e-development portal and SLC Public Access				
3.1	Continue to signpost to agents, developers and other customer's e-development information and guidance on how to best use the national planning portal, including the uploading and saving of documents.	Ongoing	HQ Manager HQ Team Leader	3 – Information and Access
3.2	Continue to accept paper copies of larger documents as an alternative to using the portal.	Ongoing	BS Team Leaders	1 – Customer Insight
3.3	Provide and regularly review online guidance note on how best to use SLC Public Access.	Ongoing	PBS Managers	3 – Information and Access
3.4	Provide and regularly review simple online guidance on the planning process for the public, ensuring it meets Plain English standard.	Ongoing	Planning Managers	3 – Information and Access
4. Service quality – maintain high levels of service quality				
4.1	Retain and improve Customer Service Excellence accreditation.	Annually	CSE Group	2 – Culture of the Organisation
4.2	Continue to review and analyse annual customer service satisfaction surveys.	Annually	Head of Service PBS Managers CSE Group	5 – Timeliness and Quality of Service
4.3	Provide teams with overview of customer survey findings and facilitate opportunity for staff to discuss and respond.	Annually	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders CSE Group	2 – Culture of the Organisation
4.4	Organise and facilitate annual agents and developers network event.	Annually	HQ Manager CSE Group	1 – Customer Insight

No.	Action	Date required	Responsibility	CSE Criteria reference
4.5	Report to agents and developers outcome of customer surveys and update on action plan.	Annually	HQ Manager CSE Group	1 – Customer Insight
4.6	The importance of customer service quality is emphasised in the induction of new staff.	Ongoing	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	2 – Culture of the Organisation
4.7	Customer service attitudes, behaviours and actions are discussed with individual officers at their annual Behaviours Framework and Performance Appraisal meeting.	Biannually	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	2 - Culture of the Organisation
4.8	The availability of a wide range of Customer Service training through our Learn on Line facility is discussed and promoted with individual officers at their annual Behaviours Framework and Performance Appraisal meeting.	Biannually	PBS Managers PBS Team Leaders	2 – Culture of the Organisation
4.9	Review current working practices with Roads and Transportation Services and develop a revised protocol for dealing with application consultation and discharge of conditions.	Ongoing	Head of Planning Planning Managers	4 - Delivery
4.10	Hold a CPD session, jointly with Roads colleagues focusing on improving the customer journey in relation to planning.	By December 2021	Planning Managers Roads Managers	1 - Customer Insight
4.11	Investigate possibility of joint Planning, Building Standards and Roads event.	September 2021	PBS Managers Roads Managers	1 - Customer Insight
4.12	Arrange and facilitate joint Planning, Building Standards and Roads event.	By December 2021	PBS Managers Roads Managers	1 - Customer Insight
4.13	Deliver a programme of CPD sessions for staff on relevant issues to maintain and improve high level of knowledge base.	By December 2021	PBS Managers	5 – Timeliness and Quality of Service
4.14	Consult with staff and customers on the Planning and Building Standards Consultation, Communication Strategy prior to its approval by Committee.	By May 2021	PBS Managers	1 – Customer Insight
4.15	Update and review the Development Management Charter.	September 2021	Planning Managers	5 – Timeliness and Quality of Service