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## Report of the Chief Planning Officer

### Scrutiny Board: Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 9 October 2007

Subject: Review of the Plans Panels

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<b>Electoral Wards Affected:</b>	<b>Specific Implications For:</b>
	Equality and Diversity <input type="checkbox"/>
	Community Cohesion <input type="checkbox"/>
	Narrowing the Gap <input type="checkbox"/>

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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to respond to the five key recommendations made in the Scrutiny Inquiry report into Planning Performance and update Scrutiny on the work undertaken so far.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Strategic Review of Planning and Development Services was undertaken last year. A report was presented to the Executive Board in June 2006, which endorsed the work undertaken so far. Five improvement themes were formulated, encapsulating the priority issues for the service. The 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*

2.2 The Inquiry report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2007 made recommendations pertinent to all these themes, but paid the greatest attention to the development of and support for Plans Panels.

## 3. SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Through recent work carried out as part of the review of the Plans Panels, which is

described fully later in this report, the five specific recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been addressed:

### **Recommendation 1**

#### *Reporting progress to the appropriate Scrutiny Board on the improvement themes*

Progress reports are presented to the City Development Scrutiny Board on a six monthly basis for Member consideration and comment on the implementation of solutions within the five improvement themes of the Strategic review of Planning and Development Services.

### **Recommendation 2**

#### *Development of non-compulsory training for all elected Members*

Non-compulsory training for Ward Members who do not sit on Plans Panel, but who may wish to refer matters to Panel has now been developed. This is to help the non Plans Panel Members to gain greater understanding of the planning process. The first briefing is scheduled for 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007. A copy of the training schedule is included as Appendix 1.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### *Consideration of the appropriateness and legality of Members sitting on Panels which do not cover their Wards*

Legal advice has been taken which has confirmed that it is not unlawful for Members to sit on Plans Panels which cover their wards. However, it is important that Members receive relevant training and clear guidance to ensure that they understand their 'dual role' and can act accordingly and measures to address this are identified later in this report

### **Recommendation 4**

#### *Develop new protocols for Ward Member consultation on pre-applications*

The revised Code of Practice reflects the changes of the planning reform agenda and now encourages Panel and Ward Member involvement at the pre-application stage, in appropriate cases, subject to the necessary probity and pre-determination safeguards, as set out in the Code.

A protocol for a consistent approach to pre-application discussions is in the course of being prepared and will be reported back when finalized.

In the interim, a Government leaflet *Positive engagement, a guide for planning councillors* and diary insert describing the dos and don'ts of Members engagement in planning has been sent to Plans Panel Members for their information.

### **Recommendation 5**

#### *Consistency of approach to pre-application presentations to Panel*

There needs to be more opportunities for pre-application presentations at all Plans Panels and for Members to be consulted on draft planning policy. The need for greater involvement in policy making reflects the recent Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) report *Councillor Involvement in Planning Decisions*, which recommends that “*authorities should consider the scope for Members of the Planning Committee to get more involved in policy-making, subject to their availability*”.

One way of achieving this is to reduce the number of smaller, or less sensitive applications which are currently going to Panel. This is a significant issue in creating capacity and will require changes to the Constitution, altering the circumstances where applications can be referred to Panels.

The changes have drawn on best practice from the City Centre Panel which already has robust processes in place for dealing with pre-application presentations. However, work is still ongoing to fully achieve this recommendation.

- 3.2 Additionally, in responding to the recommendations from the Scrutiny Inquiry report, the Chief Planning Officer indicated that a full review of the Plans Panel would be undertaken. The review would take a wider look at the processes and arrangements involved in the operation of the Plans Panels. Also, in doing so, it would feed into the other improvement themes.
- 3.3 The aim of the review is to improve the working relationship between all parties – the community, applicants, Officers and Members in relation to processes and outcomes to ensure confidence in the judgments made. This will be achieved through:
- A better decision-making process
  - Ensuring high quality decisions are achieved in a consistent way across the city
  - Ensuring the decision-making process is both cost effective and fit for purpose
  - Creating capacity for Members and Officers to engage in more pre-application discussions including for example more position statements and become more involved in shaping planning policies

The review reflects the desire of the service that the Panels should be a “shop front” for the development of Leeds which clearly communicates the ambition to “go up a league” and to signal a “can do city which is committed to delivering high standards of development.

If Plans Panels are to contribute to Leeds’ wish to “become an internationally competitive city with a high quality of life”, and to ensure that all the performance targets are met, this review must be owned and appreciated by the Plans Panels as well as Officers, Members and the development industry.

- 3.4 The Council has already demonstrated its commitment to continuous improvement and a number of changes have been implemented over the years and some more recently, since the Scrutiny Inquiry review. These include:
- Introduction of Central Plans Panel
  - Changes to the size of the Plans Panel to aid more effective decision making
  - Compulsory training for Plans Panel Members
  - Changes to the Code to reflect good practice in relation to Member attendance at site visits
  - Overhaul of delegation criteria to allow Panels to focus on the biggest and most

sensitive developments

- The review of public speaking and site visit protocols
- Development of pre-application presentations and workshops at Panel
- Investigation and trialing of alternate suitable venues for the Plans Panel meetings
- Provision of minutes of previous consideration at Panel meeting to the current Panel report as background papers
- Information to Panel Members on a weekly basis of new majors submitted and an estimate of the likelihood of it coming to Panel

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1 The review of the Plans Panels commenced in April 2007. The review has been very comprehensive and has used a range of methodologies including national guidance, Government advice and best practice from other planning authorities.
- 4.2 The Major Agents Forum and the Property Forum have also been consulted at various stages of the review.
- 4.3 There were two separate strands to the review, an in-house review taking into account the customers perspective of those who attend the Panel meetings through a customer satisfaction survey and a review with a wider remit undertaken by external consultants, Addison Associates.

##### **Customer Satisfaction survey**

- 4.4 The service undertook a customer satisfaction survey of all three Panels during June and July. The survey ran for two cycles of each Panel and tried to find out about the types of “customers” who attended the Panels and their experience of the Panels.
- 4.5 Fifty-eight questionnaires were returned and the main findings and analysis of the questionnaire is included as appendix 2.
- 4.6 A wide range of people completed the survey: developers, agents, interested parties, objectors, supporters and representatives of various interest groups.
- 4.7 There were several comments expressing satisfaction with the Plans Panels:
- *Support staff excellent, good reception facilities and efficient service*
- 4.8 On asking how their requirements were dealt with that day, customers commented:
- *Very efficiently and informatively*
  - *Clear cut, look forward to the next presentation*
  - *Very well thank you*
- 4.9 Nevertheless, despite the customers different interests and levels of knowledge of planning, a number of common themes emerged:

- Customers did not understand how the process worked
- Customers did not know who everyone was at the Panel meeting
- The need to focus debate on planning issues and ensure that balanced decisions are made on applications
- Audio and visual difficulties with the venue, depending on where people sat
- Uncertainty of the running order of the meeting

4.10 However, the main causes for complaint were that people did not understand the decision and that the meetings were too long and people did not know what time the items would be heard. In some instances, people who made this comment had to wait several hours for their application to be heard and were dismayed that they could not be informed even approximately when their application would be dealt with.

### **Consultancy**

4.11 Addison Associates were appointed to assist in the review. They are a consultancy specializing in promoting best practice in planning, sustainable transport and development. They are also the RTPI Planning Consultancy of the Year and have experience of involving Members in service improvements and of looking at over 200 planning standards authorities. They were therefore able to provide an objective view of the Plans Panels and compare with national best practice.

4.12 Addison Associates undertook a range of research and analysis based on attendance at one of each of the three Plans Panels, interviews with Members and representatives from the private sector, discussions with Officers and a facilitated workshop between Members and Officers in June. A second workshop in September was used to feedback the draft results of their findings.

### **Attendance at Panel meetings**

4.13 The consultants attended one of each of the Plans Panel meetings “incognito”, observing what went on and how business was handled. The Panel meetings were assessed against criteria for measuring what an excellent planning authority would look like.

4.14 The conclusions the consultants reached after observing the meetings unsurprisingly mirrored those from the customer satisfaction survey. However, additional comments were made about Member conduct (for example, leaving and returning to the room throughout the meeting), the quality of the Officer reports and presentations, and the need to focus debate on planning issues.

### **Initial Workshops**

4.15 A workshop was run in June between Officers and Members to consider the key issues facing the Panels and the operational principles for Panels. This workshop was also the opportunity to report back on the Consultant’s perspective on each of the Plans Panel meetings.

4.16 Through the Officer and Member discussion the main issues emerged as:

- The volume of business on the agendas and the lack of time to deal with key

matters e.g. pre-application items, as well as the uncertainty of the length of the meetings and when items would be discussed

- The lack of consistency across the Panels and the way they operated
- The poor quality of the accommodation creating problems for Members and the public
- The conduct of the meetings and the quality of debate and information provided

4.17 The workshop session concluded with the agreement of a list of key priorities for the service:

- Improve the venue and particularly the acoustics
- Revise the procedures and protocols to ensure consistency and performance of decision-making
- Improve the relationship between Members and Officers to ensure that the planning process is seen in a positive light by developers, agents, the public and applicants
- Revise the agendas in terms of order, content, timing and matters taken to Panel
- Reconsider the site visit arrangements
- Better communication between Officers and Members on development proposals as they pass through the process

Thereby improving the experience of those attending.

### **Interviews**

4.18 Addison Associates conducted a number of one to one interviews with some Members who were unable to attend the workshop. Additionally, representatives from the Property Forum were interviewed to gain their perspective on the operation of the Panels.

4.19 Addison Associates found that the stakeholder comments largely echoed each other in terms of the issues, although their perspective and the solutions they offered were different.

4.20 Members comments included:

- Inadequate time for pre-application discussion on more major and controversial schemes at the Panels and concerns about how Members could become effectively engaged at an early stage
- The uncertainty about the length of the meetings and when items were likely to be discussed
- The public and the applicants were very dissatisfied with the meetings, not only the arrangement of the agendas but the room, the acoustics, understanding what was happening and what decisions had been made
- The quality of the reports and information provided to Members was not always up to the standard required sometimes resulting in items being deferred for another meeting
- Officer and Developer presentations at meetings could be lengthy and poor: the main issues were not always identified
- Fewer applications should be on the agendas with a focus on those that are

significant and most controversial

- 4.21 The private sectors' main concerns were the wish for earlier engagement, more informed well-trained Members and Officers and a better understanding between Members of the Council and Officers about the complexities of the planning system.

#### **Feedback workshop**

- 4.22 Addison Associates produced a draft report describing their findings and during a workshop session in September, Members and Officers had the opportunity to comment and discuss the report. Largely, Members and Officers agreed that the recommendations and the areas for focus were the correct ones and agreed a number of key issues, including:

- Site Visits
- Pre-application protocol
- Creating capacity for pre-application presentations
- Rules of engagement for Officers and Members
- Presentations
- Members involvement in Policy Making
- Referrals to Panel of applications delegated to Officers
- Length of meetings

- 4.23 Addison Associates have now produced a final report and have been able to establish a number of principles, along with a series of actions and recommendations to address the issues. Appendix 3 is the full report from Addison Associates.

- 4.24 It was suggested that an action plan should be drawn up to progress the issues. A most positive outcome was the proposal that a joint Member and Officer working group would be formed to implement and monitor the action plan.

- 4.25 It was also agreed that a further feedback session for Members would be held to inform Members of the progress of the action plan and the review of the Plans Panel.

### **5. WORKSTREAMS**

- 5.1 At an early stage of the review it became apparent that many of the issues raised from the various sources echoed each other, whether that was the customers, private sector, Members or Officers.

- 5.2 For purposes of implementation, these issues have been arranged into generic workstreams: Conduct of the meetings, Content of the meetings, Pre-application capacity, Improving the customer experience, Officer-Member communication, Member training, Site Visits, Performance Management and Policy Making. A draft action plan has been developed describing the workstreams and the activities needed to make the necessary improvements, along with an indication of a short/ medium/ long timescale for implementation. The draft action plan is included as appendix 4.

- 5.3 Some of the actions which require Constitutional changes will need to be approved by
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the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee and changes to the Code will also need to be approved by the Standards Committee.

- 5.4 Some work has already commenced on the scoping of the themes and implementation of the action plan and this are set out below .

#### **Conduct of meeting**

- 5.5 Practical measures regarding the length and organisation of the Plans Panel meetings, such as introduction of breaks and timing of items will be reviewed. As the Code of Practice for determining Planning Applications requires Members to be present to hear the whole debate on an application if they are to vote, more robust minute taking to record who is and who is not present for an application has been introduced. There will be greater input from the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance), in her capacity as monitoring officer, to ensure the Code is being adhered to so as to reduce the risk of challenge of a decision if a Members leaves the room part way through the discussion. Further advice and guidance will be given to Members on this aspect.
- 5.6 The role of Planning Officers will also be refined to ensure that they provide an overall summary of the main points made during speaking and discussion, before the Panel makes a decision.

#### **Content of meeting**

- 5.7 This will include a review of the format and content of Officer reports to ensure they address the key issues and all material considerations and are more concise and user friendly. There are best practice examples available which the service will take into account when developing a new report format. The report will include the reasons for approval or refusal and provide a full policy background.
- 5.8 Similarly, Officer presentations will be looked at to ensure that they are not a repetition of the reports, but will provide a brief introduction to site and development, key issues and an update of what's new. The starting point will now be the expectation that Members will have read the reports and be fully familiar with any previously circulated reports.
- 5.9 Also, a number of Officers have now attended a presentation skills course.

#### **Pre-application Capacity**

- 5.10 There are an increasing number of pre-application presentation requests to Panel. The value of a pre-application presentation is in the early identification of any issues Members may have and to achieve an early positive steer to the developer on key issues, which should be addressed in the preparation of their schemes and consultations.
- 5.11 The development industry is very supportive to the principle of further opportunities for pre-application presentations at Plans Panel meetings.



- 5.12 The increase in capacity at Panel will also make it feasible for the presentation of “position reports” on some of the Major applications

### **Pre-application Protocols**

- 5.13 A “Charter” for pre-application discussions for the Strategic and Key Regeneration Projects is currently in draft form. This is based on the principles adopted in the Planning Performance Agreements, as advocated by the DCLG in the recent Planning White Paper. The Charter recognises that one of the keys to successful delivery of Strategic Developments and key regeneration projects is to improve communication between the Council, developers and other agencies involved in the development process to minimise delays reduce the possibility of receiving conflicting advice and to maximise certainty in the development process. Position reports on the Major applications subject to the pre-application Charter will also be presented to Members for information to achieve an early positive steer on key issues.
- 5.14 A protocol for charging for pre application advice for major application as defined by the DCLG is also being drafted. Its purpose is to improve the provision of advice to applicants and therefore lead to the submission of better applications.

### **Member training**

- 5.15 The revised Code of Practice reflects the mandatory requirement for Plans Panel Members to undertake and complete training in planning matters. There will be an one off session for new Members, an *Introduction to planning* and two further sessions for all Plans Panel Members: Policy Update and Governance and Conduct Update.
- 5.16 Attendance at the training sessions will be monitored and fed back to the Member Management Committee.

### **Improving the customer experience**

- 5.17 A number of changes will be introduced shortly including:
- An information leaflet for the public describing the Plans Panel process and what happens and showing who the Members are.
  - A Powerpoint slide showing the seating plan at Panel as the public enter the room
  - Chairs welcoming statement describing what will happen at the meeting
- Re-ordering of the agenda to ensure that those items with public speaking are dealt with first and items are not moved around on the agenda

### **Public Speaking Protocols**

- 5.18 There will be a review of public speaking protocols to ensure they are fair and equitable for all parties. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring the public stick to the three minute rule and should clearly focus on planning matters and that the deadline for notification of the wish to speak is adhered to. It is intended to provide comprehensive information stating clearly what is the procedure for public speaking.

### **Site visits**

- 5.19 Requests for site visits can occur at the Panel meeting, which causes a deferral and a

delay in the decision for that application. At Chairs briefing it will be decided which sites need a to be visited, meaning fewer “surprise” requests and therefore offers the potential for more timely decision making at the Panel meeting.

- 5.20 The Code of Practice has changed to strongly advise Members that they should attend all formal site visits if they wish to take part in the decision making process. A written record will now be maintained of which Members attends the site visits.5.21
- 5.21 The role of site visits and the requests for site visits from Ward Members will also be investigated to ensure that it is an effective use of resources.

### **Venue**

- 5.22 An audit of alternate venues to hold the Plans Panel meetings has been initiated due to audio and visual problems in Committee rooms 6 and 7. Rooms other than Committee rooms 6 and 7 have been used in the past, all with varying degrees of success. There does not appear to be an “ideal” venue and so an investigation is underway to see if there are solutions to improving the audio and visual technology used in the existing rooms.

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION**

- 6.1 In a bid to reflect the Council’s and services’ desire for *closer working, better services* it is the wish that a joint working group of Members and Officers is established to carry through the process and implement the previously described action plan. It is envisaged that the group will be a cross-party working group comprising Plans Panel Members and a non Plans Panel Member
- 6.2 Arrangements will be made for the monitoring and reporting of the progress on the action plan to both Plans Panels and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 7.1 Considerable work has been undertaken to implement the recommendations made in the Scrutiny Inquiry report, though it is recognised there is still work to complete in the areas of pre-application protocols and presentations. Similarly, further investigation is required on the composition of the Plans Panels. Both pieces of work are included in the action plan for progressing in the short to medium term.
- 7.2 The review of the Plans Panels has shown the need to improve the working relationship between all parties- the community, applicants, Officers and Members, both in relation to processes and outcomes, to ensure confidence in the whole process. Whilst changes and improvements have been made in the past, through the review, there is now a clear plan highlighting the further actions needed to substantially improve the performance of the service and to realize the ambition of *going up a league*.
- 7.3 There is a great deal of work still to be undertaken, however, Members should be reassured to note that Leeds is some way down the line of its change programme to

develop and enhance the role of the Plans Panel.

7.4 Specifically though, Members are asked to:

1. Comment on and note this report
2. Agree to forward the report and action plan, along with comments from the Board to the Plans Panel Members for discussion and comment
3. Endorse the suggestion for a joint Officer and Member working group to monitor the action plan
4. Receive an update report to Overview and Scrutiny on the finalized action plan in 6 months time

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Department of Communities and Local Government *Councillor Involvement in Planning Decisions*, January 2007

Department of Communities and Local Government *Planning White Paper Planning for a Sustainable Future* May 2007

Development Department *Planning a better Future- A Strategic change programme for Planning and Development Services in Leeds*. June 2006 Strategic Review

Overview and Scrutiny Committee *Planning Performance Final Scrutiny Inquiry Report*, March 2007

**MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (PLANNING) 2007/08  
FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

<b>Thursday 20 September 07 (1000-1600 hrs)</b>	<b>Design Best Practice Conference (Facilitated by Concourse)</b> (Joint Member/officer event)	Sullivan Room, Town Hall
<b>Friday 28 September 07 (0915-1200 hrs)</b>	<b>Training for Councillors on Planning Enforcement (Presented by Vivien Green, Trevor Roberts Associates)</b> (Event for all Members)	Carriageworks, Room 1
<b>Wednesday 3 October 07 (1200 – 1300 hrs)</b>	<b>Annual Governance and Conduct Update</b> (Compulsory for all Plans Panel and Licensing Committee Members and substitutes)	Committee Room 1, Civic Hall
<b>Friday 5 October 07 (0915-1230 hrs)</b>	<b>Annual Planning Policy Update (Presented by Jed Griffiths, Trevor Roberts Associates)</b> (Compulsory for all Plans Panel Members and substitutes)	Carriageworks, Room 1
<b>Monday 12 November 07 (1700-1800 hrs)</b>	<b>Annual Governance and Conduct Update (repeat session)</b> (Compulsory for all Plans Panel and Licensing Committee Members and substitutes)	Committee Room 1, Civic Hall
<b>Wednesday 28 November 07 (0915-1230 hrs)</b>	<b>Annual Planning Policy Update (repeat session)</b> (Presented by Jed Griffiths, Trevor Roberts Associates) (Compulsory for all Plans Panel Members and substitutes)	Carriageworks, Room 1
<b>Wednesday 12 December 07 (0915-1200 hrs)</b>	<b>A Briefing on Planning for Ward Councillors (Presented by Jed Griffiths, Trevor Roberts Associates)</b>	Carriageworks, Room 1

## Findings from the Plans Panel Customer Satisfaction Survey

### Background

In June and July a Plans Panel customer satisfaction survey took place. Surveys were made available to members of the public at two meetings of each Panel.

The forms were also sent to the Property Forum to get their views. The Property Forum indicated to which Panel their survey form related.

The survey attempted to find out a little about the types of customers who attend the panels and what they thought about the process.

It was hoped that the survey findings would provide useful evidence and information and show where a number of service improvements could be made. The survey feeds into the review of the Plans Panel project.

### Results and main findings

A total of 58 forms were completed:

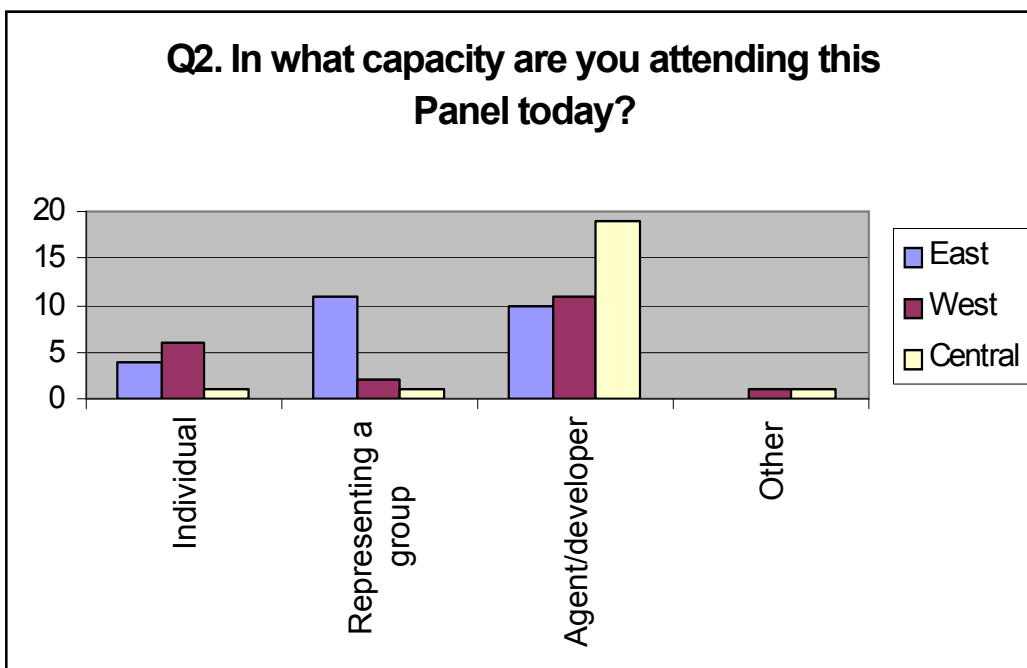
West 19	East 18	Central 21
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#### Q1. What was your reason for attending the meeting today?

The results showed that of those completing the forms it was almost evenly balanced with 46% saying that they were going to speak and 54% there as observers.

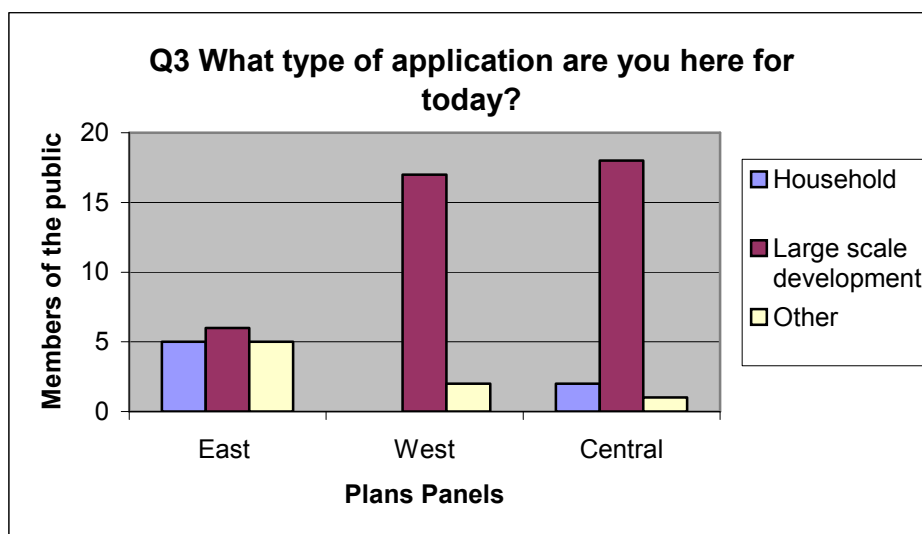
#### Q2. In what capacity are you attending this Panel today?

It is perhaps unsurprising to see the distribution of categories of people who were attending the Panels. There are high numbers of Agents/ developers present across all Panels, compared with individuals or representatives of groups. This can be seen especially at the Central Panel.



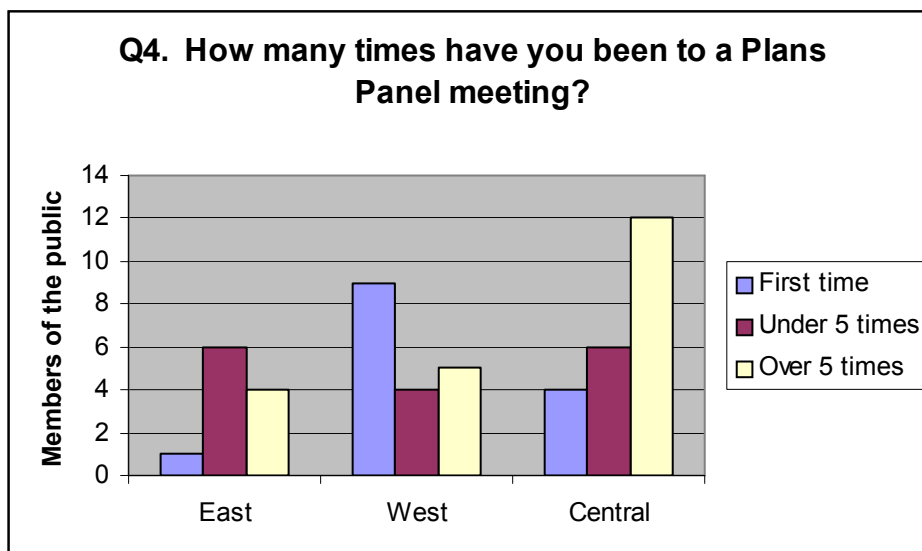
### Q3. What type of application are you here for today?

Again it is perhaps unsurprising given the large numbers of agents/ developers completing the survey, they said they were there about a major application.



### Q4. How many times have you been to a Plans Panel Meeting?

It appears that those completing the forms range from experienced Panel meeting attendees, usually the agents, who have been many times, to those for whom this was their first visit. This has implications for the type of information provided and how the meeting is run. Meetings need to be as customer focussed as possible and easily understood to cater for different needs- from those with limited knowledge of the planning system to those who are familiar with the process.



**Question 5** asked if speakers received information on the format and organisation of the meeting and how useful this was. The majority of respondents said it was good.

**Q6.** Was there any other information about the meeting, which you would have found useful?

By far the most common responses were about timing and the format of the meeting. Comments received were:

- *Timing of agenda to avoid sitting through other applications*
- *Having a running order sent with the other information*
- *An indication of length of time of the whole meeting and when particular applications would be considered*
- *Timetable*
- *Full agenda with timescales*
- *Advance issue of running order of applications for consideration*
- *Timings of agenda to avoid sitting through other applications*
- *Indication of length of time application would be heard*
- *When the application would be dealt with*
- *Full format*
- *Earlier notice of the running order*
- *That we would not be called when needed but would attend the whole meeting.*
- *Information regarding the exact format and that lots of other applications are considered at the same meeting*
- *Yes, reports that are available to the development officer from highways, Yorks Water etc, that the public don't see and which the Dev Officer bases his opinion*

**Q7. How long did you wait for the application to be dealt with today?**

The vast majority of respondents answered that it was in hours, rather than in minutes.

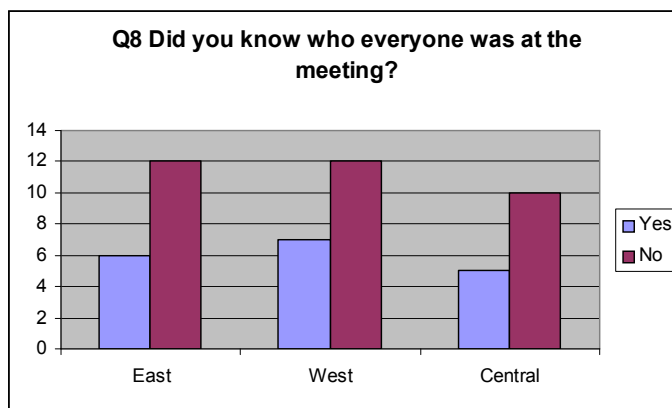
Connected to this issue, when asked for ways of making the process better several respondents further expanded on this point with the following:

- *Indication of the lengths of time*
- *An indication of length of time of the whole meeting and when particular applications would be considered*
- *Proposed timings for agenda items*

Time taken to hear the application, was the most frequently cited area for improvement.

**Q8. Did you know who everyone was at the meeting?**

Given the high number of people who had been before, it is quite surprising that the following responses were made:



Although the Members do introduce themselves at the beginning of the meeting, clearly, the message is not getting to some of the audience, for whatever reason. Comments connected to this were:

- *Have a seating plan showing Councillors and Officer names/ capacities (cannot read name labels from the back of the room)*
- *A seating plan with Panel members' names and designations would help*
- *The people at the panel should introduce themselves so members of the public know who they are*

**Question 9** asked respondents a series of questions and asked how strongly they agreed with them. Appendix 1 shows the results of East, West and Central responses. Anecdotally, we believe there is a significant problem with the venue generally and specifically in terms of hearing and seeing what is going on. The results show that the majority of respondents agreed with the statements *I was able to see what was going on* and *I was able to hear what was going on*. However, there were a few respondents who strongly disagreed with these statements and so it is justifiable to look at the audio-visuals in the room to find any improvements.

Some respondent did make the following comments:

- *Speakers/microphones didn't work*
- *It's fine as long as speaker is facing the mic and it is on*
- *Not good – struggled to hear- no mics on*
- *The venue is not good- too small, cannot view proceedings, no facilities and you cannot hear all that goes on*

**Q10. Were there any parts of the meeting you found difficult to follow?**

The following comments were made:

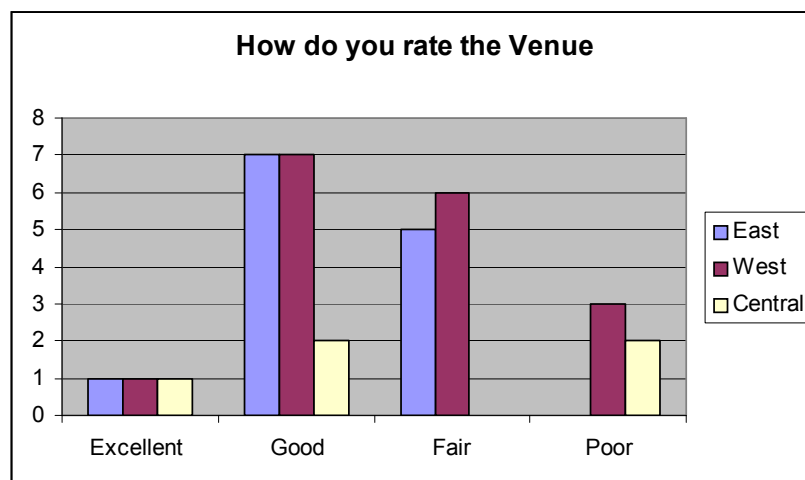
- *Final resolution*
- *Yes, continual jumping around on the agenda*
- *Whole process was very formal and intimidating*
- *That panel members too much influenced by central Government and grant monies. Panel members bias towards Government funding.*

**Question 11** was another rating question, appendix 2 shows the result of this.

The main area that received a negative rating was the lack of satisfaction with the availability of refreshments. Presentations, facilities and the discussion about the application all came out reasonably well.



Again, rooms 6 and 7 is commonly cited as a problem. The results below and in appendix 2 do not fully bear this out. However one commented *The venue was appalling*.



**Q12. Was the application in which you were interested approved, refused or deferred?**

There appears to be no correlation between those whose applications decision “went against them” and providing a very negative set of survey responses.

**Q13. Overall, how do you think we dealt with your requirements today?**

1.1 The following comments were made:

- Very efficiently and informatively
- *Poorly*
- *Perfectly*
- *Very well indeed*
- *We would have liked a public meeting*
- *Support staff excellent, good reception facilities and efficient service, member service not satisfactory*
- *Clear cut, look forward to the next presentation*
- *Yes, fair and reasonable*
- *Poor*
- *The Panel missed the key point that the first floor extension is determined by the footprint of the ground floor*
- *Well*
- *Very well thank you*
- *The people making the decisions need educating, I understood the reason for the decision, but I’m not sure they did*
- *Not well*
- *Reasonably satisfactory other than timing and appalling decision (decision deferred)*
- *Very well thanks*
- *A very long wait for a very short consideration*
- *Ok, but the length of time objectors have to wait before speaking is too much. Many will have lost interest or had to go home before it is their turn to speak*

It is reassuring to see that about 50% of the respondent comments were positive, however, this obviously leaves about 50% who did not feel that their needs were dealt with satisfactorily.

*Finally, respondents were asked for any further comments, these ranged from comments about their particular application and policy to specifically about the Plans Panel meeting proceedings:*

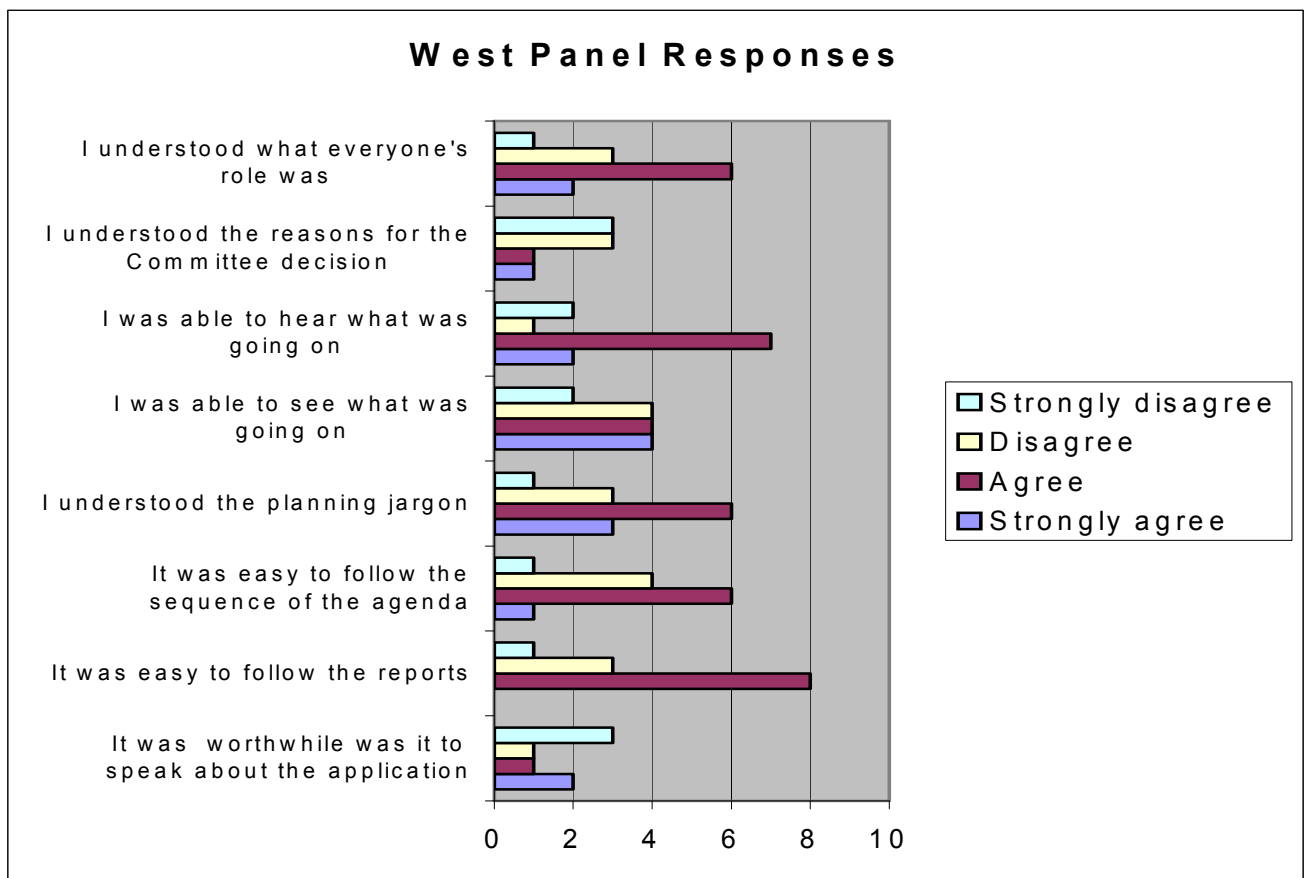
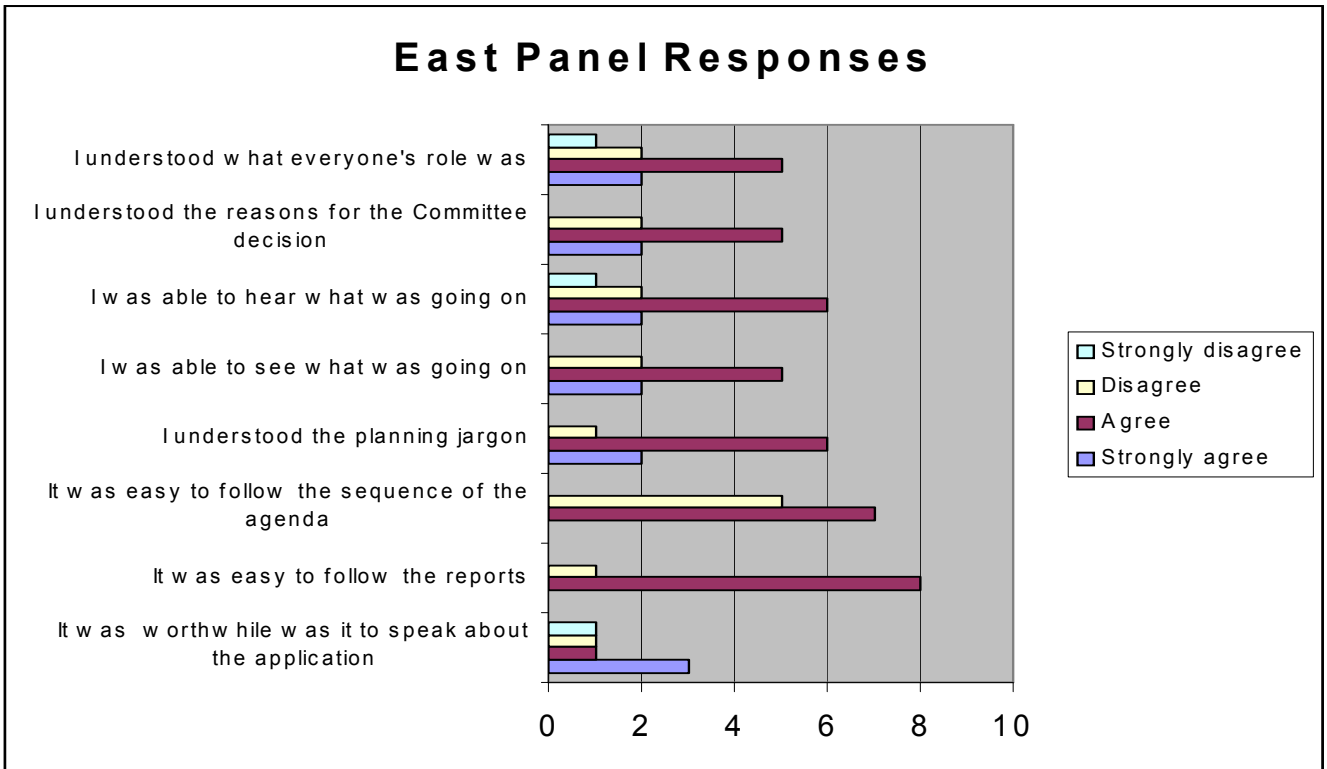
- *I do not like the delays at the start of these meetings, when I come to a meeting that starts at 1.30, I expect it to start at this time*
- *I found the meeting a bit confusing*
- *Limit the discussions by Panel to a certain timescale*
- *Not sufficient discussion on the pros and cons of the scheme and Panel not given chance to voice a change of mind for support of the scheme*
- *Good*
- *The whole planning process is a corrupt business stamping on the small occupants of Headingley- my objection letter was wiped from the folder. This process needs to be changed to be transparent (individual)*
- *I was not handed the documents when I entered the room and initially my colleague was refused until I insisted*
- *The Panel is bias towards low cost housing. This is a rubber stamp for any where, any reason if its low cost housing they will approve it*
- *Please get a coffee machine in this building!!*
- *Presentations are good provided they are permitted to finish their presentations without interruptions from Members*
- *There is sometimes clearly a distinct lack of understanding and knowledge by Members of the applications brought before them; and an inability to understand/ read drawings. All members should prepare for these committee meetings- committee members need to get rid of their subjective approach and be pragmatic and objective about urban regeneration in the City.*
- *Sitting in the audience is quite frustrating- sometimes one feels desperate to say something when listening to the Panel discussion!*
- *Very frustrating*
- *Plans Panels should be split into Major and Minor applications with different timings (same day if necessary). This would mean minor application parties do not have to sit through hours of contentious items before theirs are heard.*
- *Officers should take more of a leading role in advising on design matters to avoid design by committee in the worst taste. Leeds will not progress as an international city without improved design awareness.*

## **Conclusion**

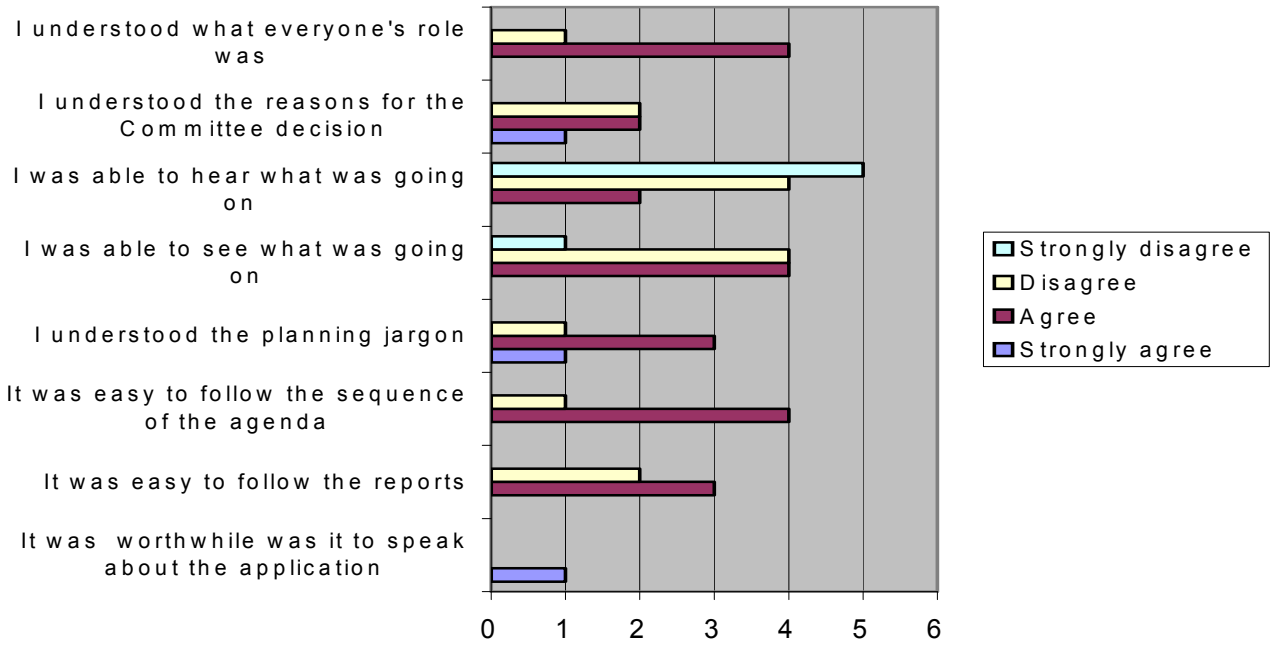
It is clear there are some clearly defined areas for improvement and these will be included in the service improvement action plan as part of the review of the Plans Panel.

Other criticisms may or may not be justified, however, this is the public's perception of the Plans Panels, and some work must be undertaken to address this poor perception.

How much do you agree with the following statements?



### Central Panel Responses



**Q11. Please rate the following:**

