

**15.0 Planning Service Consultation Response**

**Kevin Jones**

<b>Report to:</b>	National Park Authority Date of meeting: 12 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
<b>Report Title:</b>	Planning Services Consultee Satisfaction Survey Results
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<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	The purpose of this report is to update members on the result of the recent Development Management consultee satisfaction survey which was undertaken with Consultees and Community Councils.
<b>Enclosures</b>	<a href="#">Enclosure 14</a> – Result Graphs  <a href="#">Enclosure 15</a> - Consultee Survey Results Tables  <a href="#">Enclosure 16</a> - Summary of comments received  <a href="#">Enclosure 17</a> - Example of survey
<b>Background Papers</b>	Planning Services Consultee Survey 2013
<b>Public Interest Test</b>	N/A
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>That Members note the contents of the report and the responses received from Community Councils and other Consultees in relation to the recent Planning Services satisfaction survey which was undertaken on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and endorse the minor operational revisions/reviews proposed by Officers.</b>

**15.1 Introduction**

As part of our work on the “Excellent Planning Service” the Planning Department recently conducted a survey with Community Councils, Statutory and Non-statutory consultees and Unitary Authorities to gauge the perceptions and experiences of our consultees with the aim of helping us further develop our service and understand their individual priorities in relation to Town & Country Planning within the National Park. The undertaking of this survey was detailed in the report to the NPA Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2012.

Members will be aware that the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority planning service already obtains feedback from both applicants and agents on a regular sample survey basis. The following survey results attempt to capture feedback from another

sector of stakeholders in the planning process. Members should also note that questions relating to the planning service have also been included within the wider residents' survey with the aim of gathering further valuable feedback.

The results of this survey alone and in isolation should therefore be viewed with some caution as on its own, it represents only certain sector of stakeholder views of the service. There are regular feedback mechanisms already in place to obtain satisfaction levels for Architects, Agents and Applicants, in addition to any results obtained from the wider residents' survey. The results from this survey must therefore be taken in the round with these other surveys mentioned and as always in Development Management, an understanding that the Service must operate within a legislative and procedural framework which can dictate many of our actions.

Officers are also not aware of other such surveys undertaken by other Planning Authorities in Wales so unlike data collection on a National level such as that collected by Welsh Government or the Planning Officers Society Wales, there is no direct comparability with other Authorities in terms of the survey results.

The survey questions are reproduced for members' information in [Enclosure 17](#).

## 15.2 Methodology

The survey was sent electronically enabling all Community Councils and consultees to either email their surveys back to us or alternatively complete the survey on-line via our web site. Additionally we also sent a copy of the survey by post to Community Councils to enable them to complete the survey by hand if preferred and to overcome any potential problems with internet connections (an issue identified to us in the past by some Community Councils) within the National Park area.

The survey questions are reproduced for members' information in [Enclosure 17](#).

This report presents the analysis of the results of targeted questioning of our consultees and community councils and feedback on a range of topics designed to understand how the service provided by the Planning Service is perceived. This information will form part of the work with the Service during the Planning for Excellence Programme. In conjunction with other survey information the results provide information for further discussion between Members and Officers to shape the future planning service with the Statutory Purposes of the National Park and the Authority objectives toward the National Park Management Plan also in mind.

## 15.3 Return Rates

The following tables detail the return rates for the surveys collectively and also separately.

### **Total number of surveys and response rates for Consultees, Community Councils and Local Authorities.**

<i>No. of Surveys sent</i>	<i>No. of Responses received</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
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195	30	15%
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The survey can be further divided into Community Councils (CC), Statutory and Non Statutory Consultees (SB) and Unitary Authorities. We have separated out the representations submitted by Local Community Councils within the Park so that we can gauge their local level of satisfaction rather than the more professional view or response from consultees who may be more remote from the National Park.

#### **Number of surveys and response rate for Community Councils**

<i>No. of Surveys sent</i>	<i>No. of Responses received</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
49	14	29%

#### **Number of surveys and response rate for Consultees (including Unitary Authorities)**

<i>No. of Surveys sent</i>	<i>No. of Responses received</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
146	16	11%

As can be seen from the above tables, 14 responses were received from Community Councils and 16 responses received from consultees. Of the responses received, 13 were received by post, and 17 were submitted electronically, giving a further guide to the increased value of electronic communications.

#### **15.4 The Results**

The results obtained from the questions are represented numerically in the tables below in [Enclosure 15](#).

**Question 1** asked for the views of the organisation responding as to the importance they placed on various functions or parts of the planning service undertaken. By gauging what parts of the planning service has higher or lower priority to our stakeholders will enable us to consider perhaps more carefully in future what areas of planning we can also give priority to further development or what parts of our service, within the boundaries or requirements of the legislation, we could perhaps do less of in the future and use our resources more effectively. It is important to note that the survey did not ask the respondent to give a rating on the current

performance of this Authority in respect of each of these service/task areas , though the additional comments made by a few respondents can be usefull in identifying any concerns.

As can be seen from the results, Community Councils, Consultees and Unitary Authorities all put a high priority on the following functions:-

1. Formal enforcement action by the Authority to rectify a breach of planning control
2. Ability to view details of planning applications on the internet
3. Ability to access planning information on the internet
4. Contact with the Planning Case Officer

A much lower priority is put on :-

1. Regular Community Council Cluster Group or Consultee liaison meetings and;
2. Formal (charged for) pre-application advice
3. Public Speaking at Planning Committee.

The above result is encouraging in its prioritisation of the enforcement function as this is one of the priority areas of improvement within the Planning Service. The particular response also points to the development of a robust enforcement service which takes formal action to resolve breaches of planning control as of high importance. In this, the Service has over the last ten months again been serving a number of formal actions in terms of serving Enforcement notices, planning contravention notices, Breach of condition notices, Prosecution and even Direct Action to resolve a breach of control.

Also of high priority are the provision of electronic planning services enabling access to planning services and application details on-line. Our planning service fairs well in comparison with other LPA's in terms of the electronic offer and the ease of online applications is contributory to the planning excellence measure of application submissions via the portal. The system is under regular improvement in terms of the content available and Officers are also looking towards possible improvements in terms of ability to make electronic payments in future.

Whilst none of the functions carried out by the Service scored less than an average 2.5 (on a scoring of 1 being least important and 5 being most important) it is surprising that facilities such as public speaking at committee and regular liaison group meetings should have produced the low total scores they have. However, when looking at the difference in response between community councils and other consultees, the survey reveals community councils place higher value on such service attributes as public speaking at committee, web casting service and regular liaison contact than do other consultees in the planning process.

The low score for the charged for pre-app service is not surprising for this group of stakeholders in the service as it is something targeted directly at applicants or agents. With regard to issues such as contact with the planning case officer, this is seen as highly important by respondents and in the additional comments, 2 of respondents highlight some concerns in this area. The current system of Planning Customer Service Officer contact being the first point of contact has been established as a

successful way of enabling Case Officers the time to progress their cases. Other technical issues in terms of physical constraints of the office in terms of the number of individual phone lines or meeting space also impacts on the access to individual case officers. Most queries in relation to information /interpretation requests on planning applications are successfully handled in most instances by the Customer Service Advisors as an efficient and effective means of the Service dealing with enquiries. In terms of physical barriers to access, Officers have recently been issued individual work mobile phones for site safety/lone working reasons and as a replacement for aging digital cameras which should also improve access opportunities.

**Question 2** on the survey relates to the satisfaction of the Service in terms of the planning applications process relative to a consultee interaction to that process. The result can be seen in the table in [Enclosure 15](#) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> graph in [Enclosure 14](#).

Consultees were asked if they were satisfied with the way in which their comments were summarised within Officer reports; How satisfied they were that the BBNPA had then shown consideration of the comments made and how satisfied they were in terms of customer experience of the contact they have had with BBNPA Planning Service within the last 12 months. Finally, consultees were asked to give an overall service satisfaction score to the Brecon Beacons National Park Planning Service.

Customer service was given the highest score by all three (Community Councils, Consultees and Unitary Authorities) groups, ranging from an acceptable standard of service to very satisfied with the customer service provided. From the perspective of their individual organisations they were asked to rate the planning service operated by the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority overall. In terms of the overall satisfaction with the service, the lowest score given by Community Councils at 2.9 (3 being Acceptable) and Unitary Authorities. Other Consultees however, rated the overall service at 4 (4 being Satisfied).

**Question 5** responses have also been grouped with this table as again this question asked for satisfaction levels from those questioned in terms of their satisfaction with deadlines set for response times to consultations. Question 5 was carefully worded to inform the respondent that the Planning Service had to operate with reference to the legislative and procedural framework giving an indication that, traditionally, BBNPA Planning service gave consultees slightly longer time periods in which to respond than the Regulations required us to do. Unitary Authorities seem least happy to respond within timescales (scoring only 2.6) and in general, this would correlate with Planning Case Officers experiences of obtaining slow consultation responses from some of our constituent unitary authorities (eg. Highways, Environmental Health, Housing, Education). There is little the National Park Authority can do in terms of extending standard consultation deadlines further, as such consultation periods affect overall planning performance in terms of the percentage of applications processed within 8 weeks. Electronic consultation is already available to all Unitary consultees to aid in the process speed and efficiency but it is also clear from the additional comments received that the respondents to the survey have been the Planning sections of the Unitary Authority and it is unclear if the response to all questions is from just the planning perspective or from the Authority as a whole. The situation in terms consultee response performance within

the planning process could be monitored regularly to identify any particular consultee blockages in future.

Within the results reported in the graph and table, there is a clear difference between the group scores with higher rating in all instances coming from the consultee group. Officers would advance that this may be due to factors such as the nature of these consultees (including groups such as CADW, Environment Agency and CCW, Welsh Water etc) may be better set up in their ability to respond to consultation as part and parcel of their operations. Officers would also surmise that their scores may also be a little higher as being national organisations, they will be in position to compare the interactions and service qualities of the National Park with other Services they deal with on a regular basis.

**Question 3** asked about the consultee organisations' level of confidence in the Authority that its Service is implementing policy appropriately and operating within the rules and guidance set down in legislation and national planning policy. Again, consultees having a wider overview of the service rate us highly at 4.1 whilst Community Councils and Unitary Authorities rate us much lower at 2.6 and 2.8 respectively. Officers consider more work needs to be done with the Community Councils in terms of training and developing an understanding of the planning system in which we must operate and the way in which we make decisions. This is echoed by work carried out by WG in November 2012 on public perceptions of the planning process which gave account of poor perceptions and lack of understanding of Planning services in Wales generally.

**Question 4** of the survey asked specifically in terms of the planning excellence measures developed by Officers, the appropriateness of each of the measures in defining the 'excellent planning service'. Remembering that the current survey results come from selected parts of the Planning Service Customer Base, Consultees, Unitary Authorities and Community Councils, the above graph below (3 and 4 Planning Excellence) reveals the results of the individual questions on the appropriateness of the excellence measures. The key measures or indicators of the service have been rated by Consultees, Unitary Authorities and Community Councils below, point 1 being rated as the most appropriate and 7 being the least appropriate:-

1. The ability to access the Planning Service electronically e.g. through the ability to submit applications on-line or view application details
2. Added value through delivering a formal pre-application advice process or by negotiated improvements to proposed development during the course of an application
3. Added value through negotiation of S106 Legal Agreements as part of planning decisions to mitigate for the effects of development or provide community gain where appropriate
4. Quality of decision making through the successful defense of the Authority Decision at Planning Appeal
5. Community Engagement and participation through offering training, attendance at public meetings and engagements by planning staff

6. Regular survey to determine direct customer (applicants and agents) satisfaction and confidence in the service provided
7. Speed of determining planning applications (NB the BBNPA has set itself a target of 70% of all applications determined within 8 weeks)

None of the measures put forward were viewed as inappropriate to use as measures of the excellent planning service. Overall Community Councils, Consultees and Unitary Authorities indicate ability to access the Planning Service electronically as the most appropriate measure. Officers may give further consideration in future to developing additional measures to cover our electronic services in future as at present, the current measure focuses largely upon the submission of electronic applications via the planning portal, a measure which is in large part outside of the Authority control.

Amongst this stake holder group as a whole, the speed of determining applications (an established key Government performance measure of Service for many years) is the least appropriate measure of an excellent planning service overall, though in separating the results into the sub-groups, Community Councils rated this highly in terms of appropriateness for the measure.. Regular engagement through the amount of training events, liaison meetings and other public meetings in terms of proactive planning approach to communicating our service scored highly here in terms of appropriateness from Community Councils and Consultees as did notions developed of Added Value of the Planning Service and community gains through the Section 106 process. The individual results can be seen in the graph in Enclosure 14 and tables in Enclosure 15..

Questions 2, 4, and 5 also gave opportunity for additional comments to be made by respondents. A table containing the comments made and a summary of the key comments is given at [Enclosure 16](#).

## **15.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the survey represents an attempt for the first time in the planning service to obtain feedback from a critical stakeholder group within the planning process. The data recovered will in future inform Officers and Members in decisions as to targeting development of certain aspects of our service and if the survey is refined and repeated periodically, could form a base line for measuring an improved service. However, the survey limitations (in terms of this being only one stakeholder group) should be kept in mind in proposing changes to the service and further information from the wider all park residents survey and the periodic applicants/agents survey need to be looked at also so that rounded view of feedback is obtained.

In response to the survey, there are some small scale changes Officers are considering which should be without impact to the wider service;

- Review the options for improving contact with officers, and the ways of managing expectations of consultees and community councils having ready access to officers when available.
- Further Planning training sessions for Community Councils. As an excellence measure, Officers already have follow-up cluster group training sessions timetabled to commence on the 18<sup>th</sup> July.
- Review and Improve planning web pages to ensure they are user friendly, up to date and contain full and useful information. Work has commenced on the review of the Enforcement web pages which should be complete by end of Q2.
- Investigate other options for taking payments online. Work has begun on this by the Customer Services Supervisor in conjunction with Finance Officers looking at the likes of 'paypal'
- Consider refining and repeating the survey, perhaps on 3 year intervals.

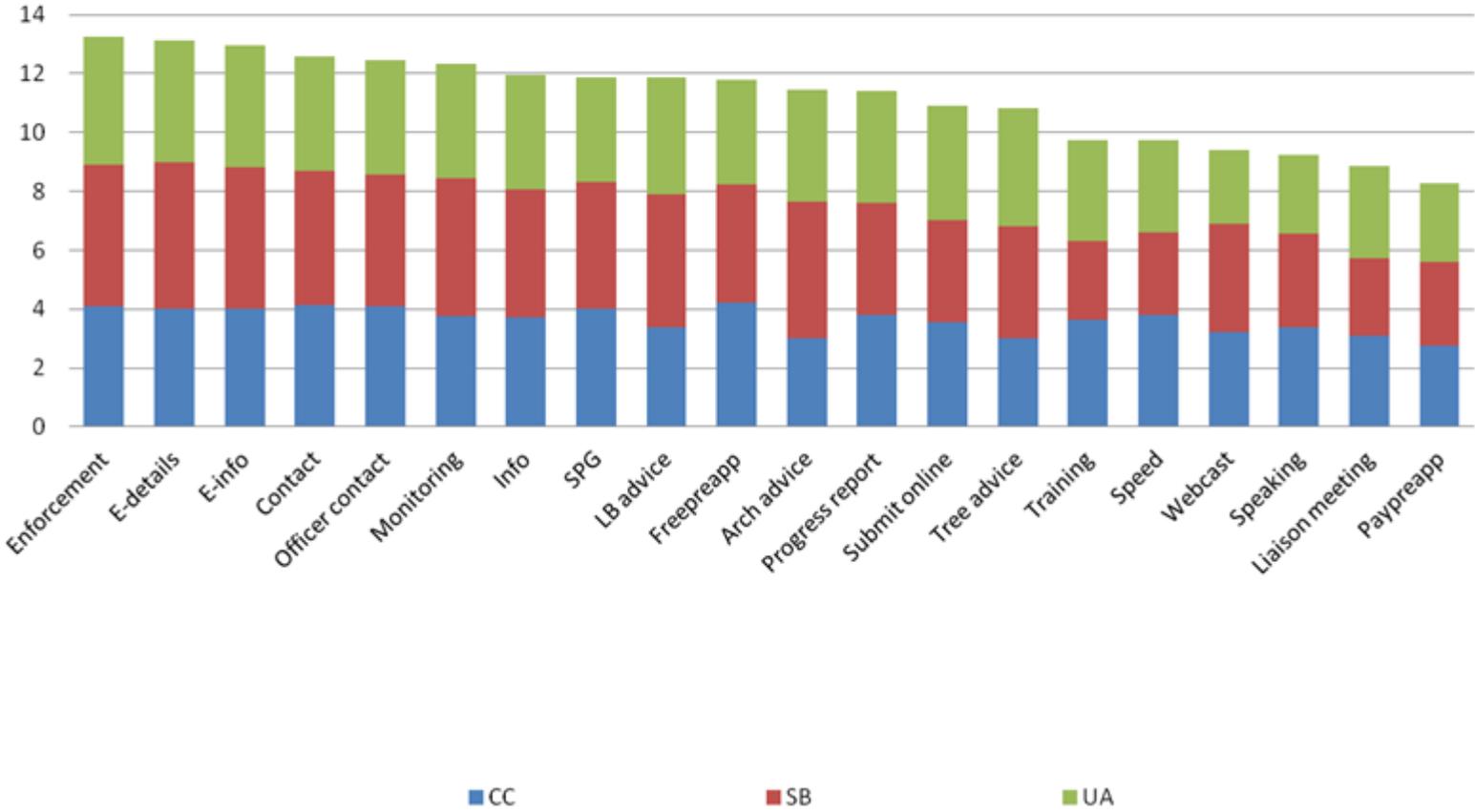
<b>Corporate Implications</b>	
a) Financial, Staffing and Improvement	<p><u>Finance</u> There is no additional cost to the Authority for this work</p> <p><u>Staffing</u> There will be ongoing staff time commitment in the Planning Services Department.</p> <p><u>Improvement</u> The results of the surveys will underline the Authorities commitment to Planning Excellence.</p>
b) The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012: Procurement of services over £173,934	Not applicable.
c) Human Rights	It is not anticipated that the consultee survey will have any impact on the Human Rights Legislation.
d) Sustainability Appraisal	It is not anticipated that the consultee survey will have any impact on Sustainability.
e) Biodiversity Impact	It is not anticipated that the consultee survey will have any impact on Biodiversity.
f) Contribution towards mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change	It is not anticipated that the consultee survey will have any impact on Climate Change
g) National Park Management Plan	

Actions	
h) Background Papers	Planning Services Consultee Survey 2013
i) Which Corporate Goal(s) does the recommendation support?	<p>1.</p> <p><u>Theme 4</u>: Raising awareness and understanding of the Park</p> <p><u>Theme 5</u>: Building and maintaining sustainable communities, towns and villages</p>

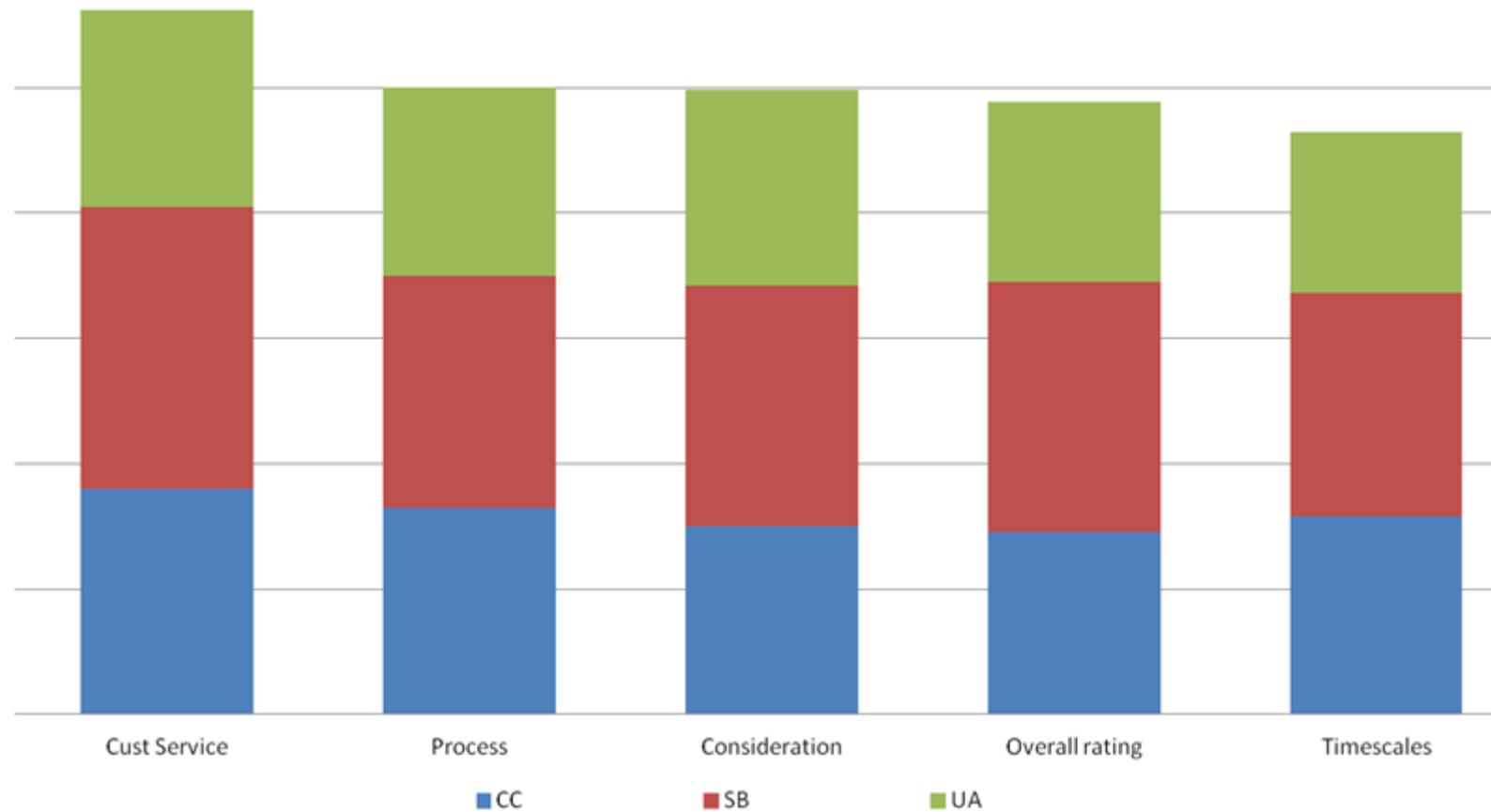
**RECOMMENDATION:** That Members note the contents of the report and the responses received from Community Councils and other Consultees in relation to the recent Planning Services Consultee survey which was undertaken on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013 and endorse the minor operational revisions/reviews proposed by Officers.

RESULTS

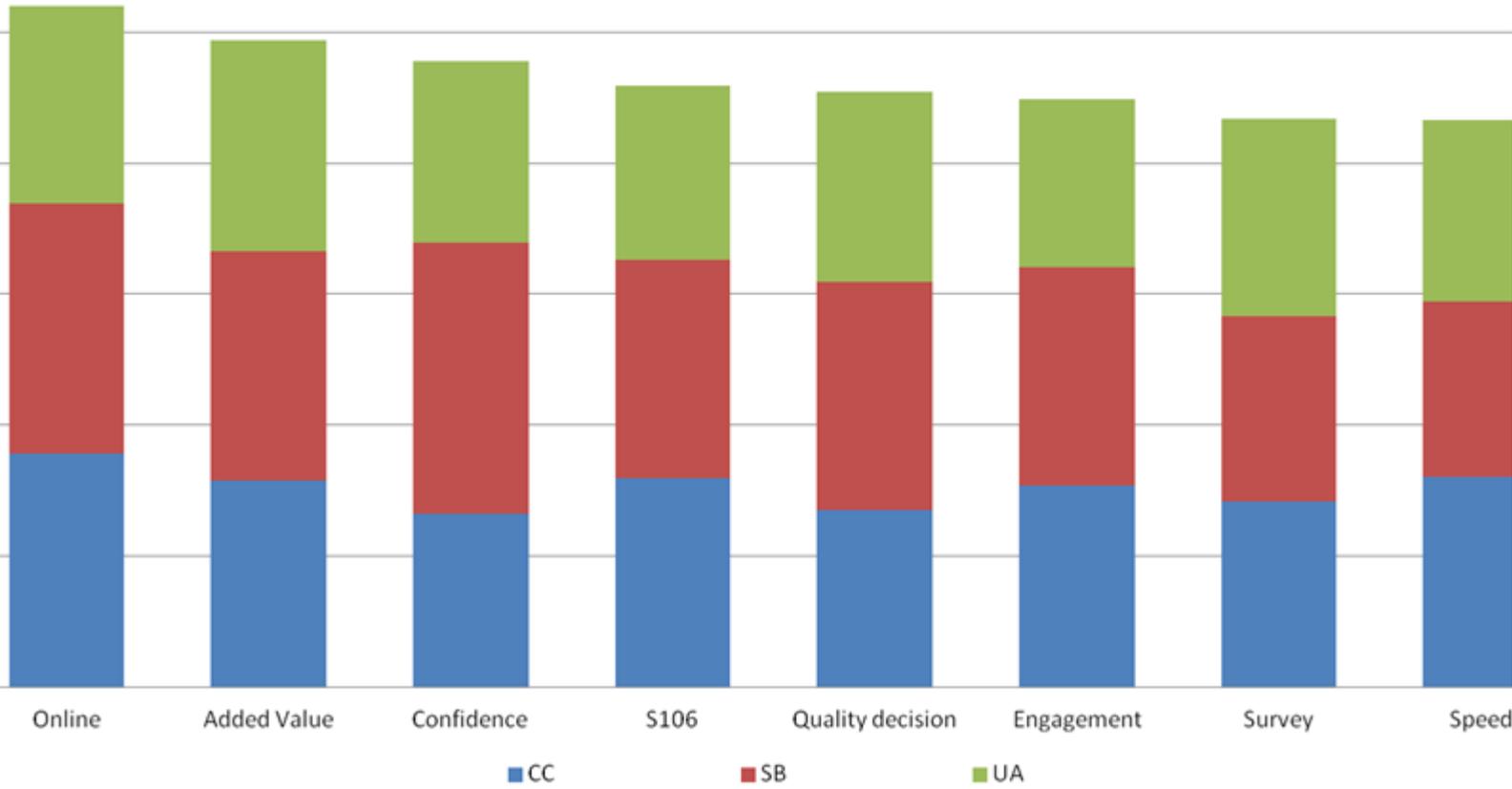
1. Prioritising Functions



## 2. Satisfaction



**3 & 4. PLANNING EXCELLENCE**  
**Levels of Service**



## Reports for Information

**Detailed Results Tables**  
Results from Question 1 on  
survey -  
Prioritising Functions

	Community Councils	Consultees	Unitary Authorities	TOTAL
<b>Enforcement</b>	4.1	4.8	4.3	<b>13</b>
<b>E-details</b>	4	5	4.1	<b>13</b>
<b>E-info</b>	4	4.8	4.1	<b>13</b>
<b>Contact</b>	4.1	4.6	3.9	<b>13</b>
<b>Officer contact</b>	4.1	4.5	3.9	<b>12</b>
<b>Monitoring</b>	3.8	4.7	3.9	<b>12</b>
<b>Info</b>	3.7	4.3	3.9	<b>12</b>
<b>SPG</b>	4	4.3	3.6	<b>12</b>
<b>LB advice</b>	3.4	4.5	4	<b>12</b>
<b>Freepreapp</b>	4.2	4	3.6	<b>12</b>
<b>Arch advice</b>	3	4.7	3.8	<b>11</b>
<b>Progress report</b>	3.8	3.8	3.8	<b>11</b>
<b>Submit online</b>	3.5	3.5	3.9	<b>11</b>
<b>Tree advice</b>	3	3.8	4	<b>11</b>
<b>Training</b>	3.6	2.7	3.4	<b>9.8</b>
<b>Speed</b>	3.8	2.8	3.1	<b>9.7</b>
<b>Webcast</b>	3.2	3.7	2.5	<b>9.4</b>
<b>Speaking</b>	3.4	3.2	2.7	<b>9.2</b>
<b>Liaison meeting</b>	3.1	2.7	3.1	<b>8.9</b>
<b>Paypreapp</b>	2.8	2.8	2.7	<b>8.3</b>
	<b>73</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>72</b>	

**Results from Question  
2 on survey -  
Satisfaction with the  
Planning Service and  
question 5 - Timescales**

	Community Councils	Consultees	Unitary Authorities	TOTAL
<b>Cust Service</b>	3.6	4.5	3.1	<b>11</b>
<b>Process</b>	3.3	3.7	3	<b>10</b>
<b>Consideration</b>	3	3.8	3.1	<b>10</b>
<b>Overall rating</b>	2.9	4	2.9	<b>9.8</b>
<b>Timescales</b>	3.2	3.6	2.6	<b>9.3</b>

**Results from Question 3 on survey - Confidence**

	<b>Community Councils</b>	<b>Consultees</b>	<b>Unitary Authorities</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Confidence</b>	2.6	4.1	2.8	9.6

<b>Results from Question 4 – Excellent Planning Service.</b>		<b>Community Councils</b>	<b>Consultees</b>	<b>Unitary Authorities</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>Online</b>	3.6	3.8	3	10
	<b>Added Value</b>	3.2	3.5	3.2	9.9
	<b>S106</b>	3.2	3.3	2.7	9.2
	<b>Quality decision</b>	2.7	3.5	2.9	9.1
	<b>Engagement</b>	3.1	3.3	2.6	9
	<b>Survey</b>	2.8	2.8	3	8.7
	<b>Speed</b>	3.2	2.7	2.8	8.7

## Reports for Information

Area	Question	Community Council AVG	Question	Consultee AVG	Question	Unitary Authority AVG
Prioritising Functions	Freepreapp	4.21	E-details	5.00	Enforcement	4.33
	Contact	4.14	E-info	4.83	E-info	4.11
	Officer contact	4.08	Enforcement	4.83	E-details	4.11
	Enforcement	4.08	Monitoring	4.67	LB advice	4.00
	E-info	4.00	Arch advice	4.67	Tree advice	4.00
	E-details	4.00	Contact	4.57	Info	3.89
	SPG	4.00	Officer contact	4.50	Contact	3.89
	Speed	3.79	LB advice	4.50	Submit online	3.89
	Progress report	3.79	Info	4.33	Officer contact	3.89
	Monitoring	3.77	SPG	4.33	Monitoring	3.89
	Info	3.71	Freepreapp	4.00	Progress report	3.78
	Training	3.64	Progress report	3.83	Arch advice	3.78
	Submit online	3.54	Tree advice	3.83	Freepreapp	3.56

	Speaking	3.38	Webcast	3.67	SPG	3.56
	LB advice	3.38	Submit online	3.50	Training	3.44
	Webcast	3.23	Speaking	3.17	Speed	3.11
	Liaison meeting	3.08	Speed	2.83	Liaison meeting	3.11
	Arch advice	3.00	Paypreapp	2.83	Paypreapp	2.67
	Tree advice	3.00	Training	2.67	Speaking	2.67
	Paypreapp	2.77	Liaison meeting	2.67	Webcast	2.50
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Cust Service	3.60	Cust Service	4.50	Consideration	3.13
	Process	3.29	Overall rating	4.00	Cust Service	3.13
	Consideration	3.00	Consideration	3.83	Process	3.00
	Overall rating	2.90	Process	3.71	Overall rating	2.88
	Online	3.56	Confidence	4.14	Added Value	3.22
<b>Excellent planning service – appropriateness of</b>	Speed	3.21	Online	3.83	Survey	3.00
	S106	3.18	Added Value	3.50	Online	3.00

<b>measures.</b>	Added Value	3.15	Quality decision	3.50	Quality decision	2.89
	Engagement	3.08	S106	3.33	Confidence	2.78
	Survey	2.83	Engagement	3.33	Speed	2.78
	Quality decision	2.69	Survey	2.83	S106	2.67
	Confidence	2.64	Speed	2.67	Engagement	2.56
	Timescales	3.15	Timescales	3.57	Timescales	2.56