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To: Jo Tunstall
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23 July 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Complaint Investigation (Stage 1) about Public Consultation Event (Ref number 101000563363)

Thank you for your complaint that we received on 23 June 2025.

We take all complaints and feedback seriously so that we can improve the services we offer.

Your complaint has now been investigated at Stage 1 of our Corporate Complaints Policy (see: [Complain about a council service | Sheffield City Council](#)) and I am writing to you to inform you of our findings:

Your complaint

As summarised in my acknowledgement letter of 9 July, your email set out seven areas where you felt the Local Plan drop-in consultation events held at Chapeltown Methodist Church and St Mark's Church Grenoside were invalid. These were: intimidating security conduct; harassment and interference with residents; junior and uninformed planning officers; patronising and dismissive behaviour by council staff; highly unprofessional conduct of the Head of Service Mr Johnson; Lack of transparency and structure; and offensive use of sacred venues.

To resolve your complaint, I understand that the outcome you are seeking is for the Council to withdraw the consultation; issue a formal public apology; open an independent investigation into council officer and security staff behaviour; conduct a new consultation; and confirm in writing how the complaint is logged, investigated and actioned.

Summary of my findings

I have investigated the points made in your complaint. My conclusion is the drop-in events were ultimately sound, and therefore your complaint has not been upheld. However, I acknowledge that the proposed additional site allocations have caused a lot of concern, stress and upset amongst the affected communities, and wanted to

assure you that they will now be examined by the independent government planning inspectors.

Detailed findings

I have reviewed the design and delivery of the consultation on the Local Plan Proposal for Additional Site Allocations, including the drop-in events held at Chapeltown Methodist Church and St Marks Church at Grenoside.

Intimidating security conduct

The decision to use security stewards at the drop-in events was taken after completing a risk assessment, and in discussion with the Council's health and safety officer. The aim of the stewards was to ensure that event venues did not become overcrowded and that events remained orderly, which was important for the well-being of both staff and members of the public. Each event had three stewards present, usually based at the entrance and on the side of the room. An experienced company was appointed to provide the stewards, who have a track record from other events e.g. 'off the shelf festival of words' literary festival. I believe the use of stewards was appropriate in this situation, given there was potential that large numbers of people might attend and concerns that venues could become over capacity or face disruption.

Harassment and interference with residents

I was sorry to hear your account that an attendee was told not to get involved with supporting a distressed resident. I have spoken to some of the officers present at the event. Although they did not witness this comment, they did recall that the resident was distressed and assured me that she was offered the chance to speak with a senior officer about her concerns with the Local Plan.

Junior and uninformed planning officers

I have reviewed staffing for the event, and all officers present at the drop in event worked in the strategic planning or development management team. They therefore had relevant expertise and had been fully briefed about the consultation. While these officers were equipped to answer questions about key elements of the Local Plan, there were instances where they were asked detailed technical questions. In these cases, officers were instructed to refer members of the public to the large volume of supporting information available online or to use the consultation email address. I am sorry if this meant some residents could not get answers to all their questions by speaking with officers at the event, but it was important to ensure people received accurate information.

Patronising and dismissive behaviour by Council Staff; Highly unprofessional conduct of the Head of Service, Mr Johnson.

I have spoken to some of the officers who attended these events, and their account of the event is that staff were professional and engaged with members of the public. I have also reviewed the training materials for staff which emphasise the importance of professional behaviour including active listening and not dismissing residents' concerns. The Head of Service does acknowledge that he occasionally had to set boundaries with members of the public to maintain a respectful and productive

conversation; for example, if they were getting physically close or refusing to let planning officers answer questions. This was appropriate to ensure the well-being of council staff and enable other residents to participate in the event. He also acknowledges that he sometimes had to look around the room or pause conversations to go and support more junior staff. This was part of his role as the Head of Service and was not intended to come across as him being disinterested or hard to engage.

Lack of transparency and structure

I have reviewed the materials that were used on the display boards at the event, which are also available online. These were displayed in a large format on two different display boards at the events, to make it easier for people to view. They were designed to distil key information and present it in a way that is accessible to members of the public, with more detailed technical information available on the consultation website. The displays set out: what's happened so far; why greenbelt sites are now being considered; what happens if we don't find more land; how are homes shared across Sheffield; how were sites chosen; what about traffic, schools and services; and how can I have my say. They also included detailed maps of the proposed sites. Please do let me know if you believe there was specific incorrect information on these maps so I can make sure this is raised with the planning team for comment.

I have reviewed the use of name badges by council officers. Officers were not given name badges at the first drop in event at Chapeltown Methodist Church, although they did have badges identifying them as council employees. However, following feedback from this event, officers were provided with name badges at all subsequent events.

Your complaint referenced the fact there was no Q&A forum available at the drop-in events. The design of consultation events is based on a balance of different factors. In this case, the consultation opted to use drop-in events because they can be open for a longer time period (improving access for those with work or personal commitments); can be less intimidating for people who do not want to speak in public; and can enable people to have conversations with officers that are tailored to their areas of interest of concern.

Offensive use of sacred venues

I have reviewed the consultation strategy and decision to hold some of the drop-in events in local churches. The choice of venues for consultation events was a balance between location, accessibility, and availability. On this occasion, the Council wanted to prioritise holding events in areas of the city that were affected by the proposed new sites. The council were therefore restricted to using venues that were accessible and available for 4 hour time slots in these specific locations. All the churches advertised themselves as available to book for community events and were booked in-line with the church's own policies on room hire. I acknowledge your feedback that holding a consultation event in a church could be alienating for those who were of different faiths or no faith. I understand the Council didn't receive any concerns about the choice of venue in advance and I also want to reassure you that there were a range of other ways for people to participate, including a drop-in event held in the Winter Gardens in the City Centre, by attending their Local Area Committee, and by accessing the drop-in event materials online and asking questions using the advertised email address.

Wider consultation

While your complaint focused on the drop-in events at Chapeltown Methodist Church and St. Mark's Church Grenoside (which I have covered above), you also expressed a concern that the wider consultation is invalid and tokenistic. I wanted to set out ways that information was available to the public, including:

- The consultation document was available online; in public libraries; and at Sheffield City Council's Howden House. The detailed underlying annexes were also available online and at Howden House.
- The display materials from the drop-in events were available online; and drop in events were held at 7 different locations across the city including in the City Centre.
- As well as attending drop-in events, residents could ask questions using the advertised email address or telephone number; and through their Local Area Committee.
- All responses to the consultation have been sent to the planning inspectorate because it is the inspector – not the council – who will examine the proposed additional sites.

While my conclusion is that the consultation events were ultimately sound, I do acknowledge that you strongly disagree to the proposed additional site allocations and that they have caused a lot of concern, stress and upset amongst the affected communities. I wanted to assure you that they will now be examined by the independent government planning inspectors.

I hope that this letter answers your complaint as fully as possible, and that you are satisfied with my response.

However, if not, at this stage you do have the right to ask for your complaint to be reviewed by a more senior manager.

To request this please contact me, or contact Customer Services on 0114 27 34567, giving details of why you are not satisfied and what further action you wish to be taken.

We would ask that you do this within the next 28 calendar days.

Finally, at Sheffield City Council, your satisfaction is what we value the most. By participating in our survey, you will help us improve our services. This short survey, takes only a few minutes to complete and is available here: https://forms-sheffield.squiz.cloud/form/auto/complaints_survey

Yours sincerely



Jonathan Clifton
Director of Strategy and Communications