

**Project Name** Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan 2009

**Local Authority** Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire & SDPA

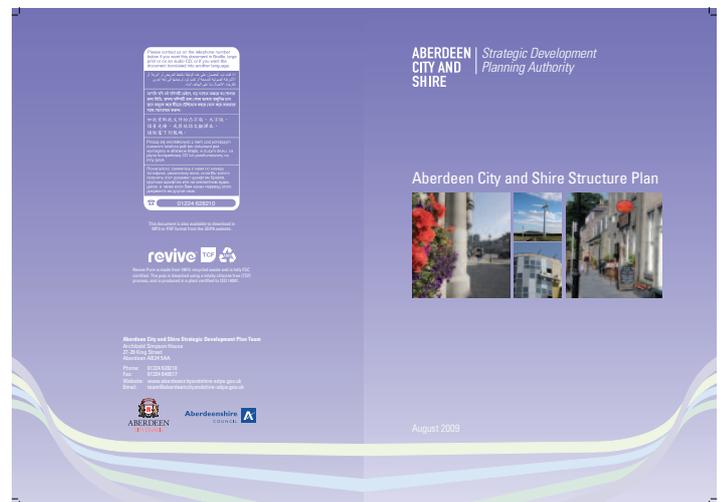
**Date Completed** August 2009

**Web links** [www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk](http://www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk)



## Project Summary

When the timing of preparing a new Structure Plan for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire coincided with the Scottish Government's reform agenda, the team worked at making the Structure Plan more strategic and visionary, as well as easier for stakeholders and communities to understand and engage with. The Structure Plan is the only one in the UK to get a Crystal Mark for Plain English and won a commendation at the Scottish Quality in Planning Awards 2009. The Plan is also "a positive response to the Scottish Ministers' desire for succinct development plans."



## Issue/Challenge

- To take on board the Scottish Government's messages about producing short, focused, action-oriented and accessible documents, with more up-front consultation and engagement.
- To clearly express a vision for the area and identify how it would be delivered.
- To ensure that, rather than being designed to sit on a shelf, the new Structure Plan would be read and used.

## Different/new way of working

- Halfway through working on the structure plan, a new joint dedicated team was formed to provide the strategic planning function for both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils - the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Planning Authority (SDPA).
- The team worked with two charities - the Plain English Campaign and the Grampian Society for the Blind.
- All key documents prepared as part of the structure plan process were reviewed by the Plain English Campaign and received Crystal Marks. This included the development plan scheme, issues report, newspaper advert, draft plan, finalised plan and approved plan.
- An audio version of the Structure Plan was prepared by the Grampian Society for the Blind to make it more accessible to the visually impaired. This is available on the website as an MP3 file and on audio CD.

### Resource implications

- As well as the significant commitment required to produce a structure plan, the team spent money and time on a Plain English review - with the review process typically taking between a week and a month, depending on the length and nature of the document.
- The cost of preparing the Structure Plan in audio format was £130 and took less than a week.

### Key Outcomes

- Having the Structure Plan written in Plain English was widely appreciated. A large proportion of people's responses noted that the Plan was easy to read and many welcomed this.
- People also appreciated the commitment the team showed to engaging the whole community - and not just the professional community - on the future of the north east.
- Writing in Plain English taught the team a lot about writing a text that is easy to understand, yet retains the meaning that they want to convey - in an accessible fashion.

### Lessons learnt/tips

- Use the voluntary sector to improve service provision at a limited cost, making the Plan more accessible to the community. For example, £130 for an audio version of the Structure Plan wasn't a significant amount of money, yet it broadened the scope of access to documents - this is something the team plans to repeat in the future.
- A Plain English review can be difficult to fit into tight schedules for Plan preparation, but it can be achieved with effective project management.

David Jennings  
Strategic Development Plan  
Manager

*"There is no reason why planners shouldn't be able to write planning documents in a way that is accessible to everyone, without using planning jargon and gobbledegook."*



**Plain English Campaign**

Fighting for crystal-clear communication since 1979



### Further information

[www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk/  
DevelopmentPlan/StructurePlan.asp](http://www.aberdeencityandshire-sdpa.gov.uk/DevelopmentPlan/StructurePlan.asp)

### Relevant planning policies

- Circular 1/2009: Development Planning, Scottish Planning Policy and PAN 3/2010: Community Engagement