

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**PLANNING (DEVELOPMENT CONTROL) COMMITTEE**

**8TH AUGUST 2006**

**Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey - 2006**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>	Head of Planning, Health and Environment
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Clare Eynon – Extension 2515 : Duke House, Clensmore Street, Kidderminster
<b>APPENDICES:</b>	None

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the outcome of the 2006 Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey and to agree a further Survey in 2008.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND to Cabinet that**

- a) **the findings of the 2006 Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey be noted.**
- b) **a Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey be undertaken in 2008.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Members will be familiar with the biennial development control service audits which have taken place in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2004 previously. These audits (now referred to as Customer Satisfaction Surveys) ensure that we understand what our customers require from this service and help us to continue to improve the service.
- 3.2 Past surveys have helped inform and shape the Best Value Review of the Planning, Health and Environment Division and assist with the work on Comprehensive Performance Assessment which is currently taking place.

3.3 The 2006 Survey used the same methodology as previously with questionnaires being sent out to certain sections of our customer and stakeholder group. This year we targeted:-

- Members of the Public attending Planning (Development Control) Committees
- Neighbours who made representations on recent applications
- Parish Councils
- Members of the Public who had registered to speak at Planning (Development Control) Committees – but were unable to do so under the Protocol for public speaking
- Members of the Public who had spoken at Planning (Development Control) Committee under the Public Speaking scheme
- Members of the Council

A User Satisfaction survey of visitors to Duke House Reception was also conducted between March and April 2006.

3.4 Previously the 1996 Audit was, being the first, a comprehensive survey of all users; 1998 targeted applicants, agents, neighbours, Parish Councils and Members; 2000 targeted applicants, neighbours, Parish Councils, reception visitors and internal support services; 2002 targeted applicants, neighbours, Parish Councils, reception visitors and also Members; 2004 targeted applicants, neighbours, Parish Councils, reception visitors and those members of the public who attended committee or registered to speak at Committee.

3.5 It should be noted that a separate customer satisfaction survey to provide information for the Best Value Performance Indicator will also be carried out later in 2006 and Members will be advised of the outcome of that survey separately.

#### **4. FINDINGS OF THE 2006 SURVEY**

4.1 Full details of the survey results forming the basis for this report together with sample questionnaires are available upon request from the Development Control Manager. Whilst the survey response rate is satisfactory, it must be remembered that we are dealing with a relatively small number of responses.

#### **4.2 Members of the Public attending Committee**

Questionnaires completed.... 1 [at March and April meetings of the Planning (Development Control) Committee].

The single respondent attended Committee because there was an application which may affect him/her in some way. The respondent did not view the committee agenda on the Council's website prior to the meeting. The respondent found the content of the agenda, the officer presentation and the quality of visual presentation all to be 'good'. There was public speaking at the meeting attended and the respondent felt that he/she could hear the speaker(s) clearly. The respondent did not feel that the speaker(s) influenced the decision taken by the committee and also felt that the quality of debate upon the application he/she was interested in was poor.

**4.3 Neighbours who had commented on applications determined between March – April 2006**

Questionnaires sent out ..... 113 Responses .... 54

Nearly sixty seven percent of neighbours who responded found out about applications by way of a letter sent to them, from a site notice posted at the site or a press advert. Over 29% found out about the application by word of mouth and 2.7% found out by a report in the paper.

50% inspected the plans at Duke House before they commented on the application. Of those visiting Duke House 63% received assistance in understanding the applications (58.8% spoke to a planning officer and 41.2% spoke to reception staff) and 94.1% were satisfied with the service provided. 37% viewed the application on the Council's website and 30% commented on-line.

81.5% of neighbours objected to the application and although 51.9% felt that their comments were properly considered, 42.6% did not know if the application had been amended to take account of their views.

Only 31.5% of the respondents attended the Planning (Development Control) Committee and 23.5% spoke under the public speaking procedure. Half of the respondents were satisfied with the committee proceedings.

**4.4 Parish Councils**

Questionnaires sent out to all Parish Councils Responses .... 7

One hundred percent felt that they had sufficient information to respond to consultations and 85.7% felt that they had sufficient time to respond. 100% felt that relationships with Development Control Officers were good, compared to 50% for the last audit in 2004. 85.7% felt that the comments of the Parish Council were clearly and correctly contained within committee reports. Fifty seven percent felt that the profile in the district of development control was good whilst 42.9% felt that it was poor or there had been no change.

For those respondents who have attended a Planning (Development Control) Committee, 50% felt that the process to express their views on an application was very good and the other 50% felt that it was adequate.

Of those respondents who left a message with the voicemail facility for a specific case officer (71.4%), 100% received a response to their message. This demonstrates that the voicemail system is working effectively compared to when the previous survey was carried out in 2004 .

**4.5 Members of the public who registered to speak at committee, but were unable to do so**

Questionnaires sent out - 15      Responses .... 3

Over sixty six percent heard about the Public Speaking Scheme from either the neighbour notification letter or from the Council's website. 33.3% found heard via other means. 33.3% found the leaflet very helpful and the others had not seen the leaflet before registering to speak.

Although unable to speak at the meeting, 66.7% still attended the meeting. 50% attended as an objector and 50% as applicant. 33.3% felt that their comments would have changed the committee decision if they had been allowed to speak, 33.3% felt that they wouldn't and 33.3% felt unsure. 50% rated the overall quality of the public speaking adequate and 50% rated it poor. Nevertheless 100% would register to speak again on a planning application.

One respondent suggests that applicants/agents be given a right to speak at Committee even if there is no objector.

**4.6 Members of the public who spoke at Planning (Development Control) committee**

Questionnaires sent out - 36      Responses .... 34

Nearly sixty five percent heard about the Public Speaking Scheme via a letter that was sent to them, 8.8% from the Leaflet, 2.9% from the Council's website and 2.9% from a friend or colleague. 20.65% heard by other means. 73.5% found the leaflet either fairly helpful or very helpful. 26.5% had not seen the leaflet before registering to speak.

73.5% of respondents attended the meeting as an objector, 14.7% as a supporter and 11.7% as applicant/agent. 64.7% felt that Members of the committee listened to what they were saying and 53.1% felt that their comments influenced the committee decision. Only 54.5% felt that they contributed to the decision-making process.

64.7% felt that 3 minutes was sufficient time to convey their views to the committee. 91.2% felt that the way the Committee was organised to accommodate public speaking was either very good or satisfactory.

94.1% felt Council staff were very helpful (79.4%) or fairly helpful (14.7%) when they registered to speak. 64.7% found staff very helpful and 26.5% fairly helpful on the day of the Committee. Only 8.8% found staff not helpful at all.

#### **4.7 Members of the Council**

Questionnaires sent out to all members Responses .... 14

78.6% of the respondents have sat on either Planning (Development Control) or Planning (Enforcement) Committees and 64.2% described their knowledge of development control as either adequate or very good.

57.2% of Members felt that the level of debate during Planning (Development Control) Committee was adequate or very good with 42.9% believing it "*could be better*". 57.1% felt that public speaking has improved the quality of decision making at the Planning (Development Control) Committee.

71.4% felt that officer presentation was very good and 28.6% adequate. 78.6% of Members felt that the quality of visual presentation was very good or adequate and 21.4% felt that it could be better. With regards to the quality of committee reports, 92.9% felt that the quality of the Part A reports was good and 78.6% felt that the quality of the Part B reports was good.

84.6% of Members felt that the Planning (development control) service was acceptably regarded in the community with 46.2% seeing the image as improving over recent years. 46.2% felt that there had been no change and 7.7% felt that the image of the service had declined. With regards to balance of the speed of processing planning applications and the quality of the decision, 71.4% felt that the balance was about right, 7.1% felt that the process should be speeded up and 7.1% felt that more time should be taken to improve applications. Although 75% of Members felt that the Council's stance on taking enforcement action is about right, 25% felt that too little action was being taken.

#### **4.8 Visitors to Duke House Reception**

Question cards handed out to visitors during March/April 2006  
Responses .... 5

From the reception user satisfaction survey, only 20% of visitors had been to the Duke House before. The main purpose for visiting Duke House was to inspect a planning application (40%), 40% visited for research purposes and 20% came to seek planning advice. None of the respondents came to make a complaint.

100% felt that the attitude/politeness of reception staff was excellent. 80% felt the attitude/politeness of planning staff was excellent and 20% felt that it was good. 100% of respondents felt that the information/advice provided was either excellent or good. With respect to access to professional information, 66.7% felt it was excellent and 33.3% felt it was good.

No comments were made as to how we could improve our service.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no financial implications.

**6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no legal or policy implications

**7. CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 The 2006 Survey continues to show that the Planning, Health and Environment Division is offering a quality service.

7.2 It is very pleasing for me and officers connected with the development control service to receive this positive feedback. The feedback is useful in ensuring that when necessary, the service adapts to meet customer expectations.

**8. CONSULTEES**

8.1 None

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9.1 None (copies of the original survey return can be inspected upon request)