

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING (DEVELOPMENT CONTROL) COMMITTEE

13th JANUARY 2009

Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey - 2008

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| OPEN | |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: | Head of Planning, Health and Environment |
| CONTACT OFFICER: | John Baggott – Extension 2515 John.Baggott@wyreforestdc.gov.uk |
| APPENDICES: | None |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the outcome of the 2008 Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey and to agree a further Survey in 2010.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the findings of the 2008 Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey be noted, and that a Development Control Customer Satisfaction Survey be undertaken in 2010.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will be familiar with the biennial development control service audits which have previously taken place in 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2006. These audits (now referred to as Customer Satisfaction Surveys) ensure that we understand what our customers require from this service and help us to seek 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.

- 3.3 The 2008 Survey has relied upon the tried and tested methodology of sending questionnaires to certain sections of our customer and stakeholder group. This year we targeted:-
- Members of the Public attending Planning (Development Control) Committees.
 - Applicants who have recently submitted planning applications and received their decision notice.
 - Neighbours who made representations on recent applications, with particular emphasis upon website usage for viewing and commenting upon applications.
 - Parish Councils.
 - Visitors to the Worcestershire Hub and the Planning Duty Officer.
- 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; 2006 targeted neighbours, Parish Councils, members of the public attending committee and those registering to speak and also Members.

4. FINDINGS OF THE 2008 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 might be considered satisfactory, it must be remembered that the actual number of responses is relatively small.

4.2 Members of the Public attending Committee

Questionnaires completed 1 [at November and December 2008 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 and the actual report "excellent", with the officer presentation and the quality of visual presentation considered 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 was unsure as to whether 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 good.

4.3 **Applicants who have recently submitted planning applications (Determined between September and October 2008)**

Questionnaires sent out 85 Responses 22

Of the total number of respondents, 95% were happy that their application had been handled with reasonable speed. 32% of the respondents' applications were determined by the Planning (Development Control) Committee, with the remaining 68% determined via Officers' Delegated Powers. Of those applications determined by Committee, only 29% of applicants actually attended Committee, and of those no one had registered to speak. No comments were provided regarding Committee proceedings.

32% of respondents left a message with the voicemail facility for a specific case officer, and of these 86% stated that they had received a response to their message.

4.4 **Neighbours who had commented on applications determined between September and October 2008**

Questionnaires sent out 63 Responses 26

73% 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. 27% found out about the application by word of mouth. None of the respondents claimed to have found out via a report in the paper.

Only 23% of respondents inspected the plans at The Hub before they commented on the application. An encouraging 69% claimed to have viewed the plans via the Council's website, but only 23% actually submitted comments on-line, with 73% preferring to rely upon the submission of a letter.

81% of neighbours objected to the application and although 46% felt that their comments had been properly considered, 30% did not know if the application had been amended to take account of their views prior to the application's determination.

Only 11.5% of the respondents attended the Planning (Development Control) Committee and of these 33% spoke under the public speaking procedure. All of the respondents who attended were satisfied with the committee proceedings.

4.5 **Parish Councils**

Questionnaires sent out to all Parish Councils Responses 8

100% felt that they had sufficient information to respond to consultations with 62.5% feeling that they had sufficient time to respond, with just 12.5% responding electronically via e-mail. 87.5% felt that relationships with Development Control Officers were good or improving, compared to 100% for the last audit in 2006. 87.5% felt that the comments of the Parish Council were clearly and correctly contained within committee reports. 37.5% felt that the profile in the district of Development Control was good or improving whilst 12.5% felt that it was in decline. The remaining 50% felt that there had been no change.

Of those respondents who left a message with the voicemail facility for a specific case officer (50%), 100% received a response to their message.

4.6 **Visitors to the Worcestershire Hub**

Questionnaires were handed out to visitors to The Hub who made use of the Duty Planning Officer during November/December 2008

Responses 8

62% of visitors had been to The Hub before. 37% of respondents had visited to inspect a planning application, with 37% visiting to seek planning advice. None of the respondents had visited in order to make a complaint.

75% of respondents felt that the attitude/politeness of Customer Services staff was excellent. 75% felt the attitude/politeness of the Duty Planning Officer was excellent and 25% felt that it was good. 100% of respondents felt that the information/advice provided was either excellent or good.

A single comment suggesting how we could improve our service, namely the improvement to the speed and responsiveness of computers located at The Hub for improved ease of viewing plans.

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 2008 Survey continues to show that the Planning, Health and Environment Division provides a quality service.
- 7.2 It is very pleasing for me and officers connected with the development control service to receive such positive feedback. That said we must not rest on our laurels, and the feedback is useful in ensuring that when necessary, the service is able to adapt 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)