



REPORT FOR DECISION

Agenda Item	
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MEETING: PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
DATE: 10 February 2004
SUBJECT: Customer Satisfaction Survey
REPORT FROM: Development Manager
CONTACT OFFICER: Tom Mitchell

TYPE OF DECISION: Council
REPORT STATUS: FOR PUBLICATION

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

The report summarises the results of a customer satisfaction survey undertaken with applicants and agents for planning applications.

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED OPTION (with reasons):

The Committee is recommended to note the report.

IMPLICATIONS -

Financial Implications and Risk Considerations N/A

Corporate Aims/Policy Framework: N/A

Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes No

Are there any legal implications? Yes No (see paragraph)

Considered by Monitoring Officer: Yes Comments

Statement by Director of Finance and E-Government: N/A

Staffing/ICT/Property: N/A

Wards Affected: All

TRACKING/PROCESS**DIRECTOR: Phillip Allen**

Chief Executive/ Management Board	Executive Member/ Chair	Ward Members	Partners
Scrutiny Panel	Executive	Committee	Council

1.0 Background

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issued instructions for a survey of Planning Applicants and Agents as part of a national effort to benchmark levels of satisfaction with the planning application service.

The result is to be used as the Best Value Performance Indicator 111 and is a percentage figure for those satisfied with the service provided in respect of determining planning applications.

Bury together with several other Greater Manchester authorities, together with Blackpool and Blackburn commissioned Beacon Research (an independent company) to undertake the survey and produce a report on the results. (a copy is attached to this report).

The survey covered a sample of different 445 applicants and agents based on all applications received between 1st April and 30th September 2003, and the response rate was 50.7% giving 226 responses.

Similar data (although the questionnaire was in a different format) was last produced for the year 2000/1 when the level of satisfaction was 83.9% and those dissatisfied were 9.1%.

Survey Results

The overall level of satisfaction and hence the BVPI 111 figure for 2003/4 is 79%. The level of "dissatisfaction" is 9.1%, 12.4% being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Hence 90.9% were not dissatisfied with the service. The report notes that successful applicants were more satisfied than unsuccessful applicants.

In general more applicants thought the service has got better than worse. However in the area of providing information about the progress of an application there is an indication that applicants are less satisfied. The difficulty of providing information to applicants is generally a common theme with all planning authorities.

Some concerns have been expressed about the speed of the Council's response to queries. There has been a reduction in the speed of decision making since the summer, which may be reflected in the survey results.

There is always a tension between providing improved speed of decision making as required by National Performance Indicators and giving a higher quality service, attentive to the needs of the applicant. In striving to meet performance targets, by applying a stricter regime for processing applications, it is to be expected that there may be a reduction in satisfaction levels.

For the purposes of comparison, information has been requested from other members of the Greater Manchester Development Control Group, to date I have received results from 4 other Authorities:

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
Bury	79%	9.1%
Blackpool	67.9%	20.1%
Wigan	74%	14.2%
Bolton	73.9%	20.1%
Blackburn	78%	14.3%

Although not all authorities have supplied their results, the comparison with authorities who have, is favourable.

2.0 Conclusion

Although a lower figure than the 2000/1 figure the Bury “score” is considered to be good. It is of course the case that we wish to improve the service and the perception of satisfaction of our customers, with this in mind we are endeavouring to provide service improvements which includes:

1. In the coming months the “back office” computer system is to be changed and the replacement system will have a web based module which will allow applicants to have access to part of the data base which will give more information in respect of application progress.
 2. We are about to adopt a guide to for house extensions which should give clarity to the Council’s stance on proposed developments.
 3. We are to produce checklists for applications which make it clear what is required of applicants.
 4. A Planning Charter is to be produced which will publicise our service commitments and standards and make the processes more transparent.
 5. The Council are to install a new telephone system which will provide for improvements in responding to telephone contacts.
 6. Within the next 2 months staffing levels will be returned to normal establishment levels.
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List of Background Papers:- Report by Beacon Research (attached)

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