
DEVELOPMENT CONTROL USER SATISFACTION SURVEY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report summarises the results of the latest Development Control User Satisfaction Survey.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Government requires Local Planning Authorities to undertake a Satisfaction Survey of Users of the Development Control Service every three years.
- 2.2 The latest Survey was carried out at the end of 2003. Upon completion, the Survey results must be submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

3 SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

- 3.1 The arrangements for the survey are set out in detailed guidance, from the ODPM, including the specific questions that must be included in the questionnaire.
- 3.2 For the majority of Authorities, the survey is carried out as a 'sample' survey of planning applicants and agents. However, given the total number of applications in the survey window (April to September 2003), the Rochford survey was carried out as a Census.
- 3.3 The satisfaction survey is targeted at users and, therefore, the total number of questionnaires sent out does not equate to the total number of applications. Applicants who submitted multiple applications during the survey window were only asked for their views on one occasion. A total of 319 questionnaires were sent out and 183 were returned.
- 3.4 In terms of the type of application that was submitted, the results were as follows:-

Householder	58
Business/Industrial	14
Residential	15
Listed Building	2.5
Other	11

3.5 The survey asked several questions about the Council's handling of applications. The results were:

a. Given advice and help needed to submit application correctly,.

Strongly Agree	16.5%	68.7%
Agree	52.2%	
Neither	17%	
Disagree	3.8%	
Strongly Disagree	2.7%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	7.7%	

b. Kept me informed about progress of application

Strongly Agree	8.8%	58.3%
Agree	49.5%	
Neither	19.8%	
Disagree	14.3%	
Strongly Disagree	5.5%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	2.2%	

c. Dealt promptly with queries

Strongly Agree	12.3%	66.5%
Agree	54.2%	
Neither	17.3%	
Disagree	8.4%	
Strongly Disagree	3.4%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	4.5%	

d. Understand reasons for the decision

Strongly Agree	15.2%	77%
Agree	61.8%	
Neither	8.4%	
Disagree	7.3%	
Strongly Disagree	2.2%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	5.1%	

e. Treated fairly and viewpoint listened to

Strongly Agree	14.8%	67.5%
Agree	52.7%	
Neither	15.9%	
Disagree	7.7%	
Strongly Disagree	1.1%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	7.7%	

3.6 The key question asked in the Survey was in respect of the overall satisfaction with the service provided in processing the application. The Survey shows that 76.4% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided. (Neither 13.7%, fairly dissatisfied 6.6% and very dissatisfied 3.3%).

3.7 The final set of five questions in the Survey sought to obtain respondents' views on whether the service had improved over the three-year period since the last survey. Clearly, applicants who had not submitted more than one application to the Authority would not be in a position to answer the question. The results were as follows:-

a. Advice and help provided to submit application

Better	21.4%	75.5%
Stayed the same	54.1%	
Worse	2%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	22.4%	

b. Information provided about progress of application.

Better	14.4%	75.2%
Stayed the same	60.8%	
Worse	6.2%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	18.6%	

c. Promptness with which queries were dealt with

Better	21.6%	76.2%
Stayed the same	54.6%	
Worse	4.1%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	19.6%	

d. Clarity of reasons for decision

Better	15.5%	76.3%
Stayed the same	60.8%	
Worse	6.2%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	17.5%	

e. Fairness with which application was dealt with and viewpoint listened to

Better	16.7%	74%
Stayed the same	57.3%	
Worse	5.2%	
Does not apply/ Don't Know	20.8%	

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1 The Council set a target for overall satisfaction with the Planning Service at 80%. The Survey results show that satisfaction level was 76.4%. This does not quite meet the 80% target figure but is, nevertheless, a very good result and demonstrates that a significant majority of users are positive about the service provided.
- 4.2 In respect of the five questions relating to the Authority's handling of applications (Paragraph 3.5), the result relating to keeping applicants informed about the progress of their application requires further investigation.
- 4.3 All applicants are sent an acknowledgement letter within a couple of days of the receipt of a valid application. Case Officers then contact applicants to discuss any issues emerging from site visits or responses from neighbour consultations. However, the majority of applications are determined within eight weeks and many do not require further information from the applicant. Therefore, following the acknowledgement letter, which provides an expected date for decision, the next communication from the Authority is likely to be the Decision Notice.
- 4.4 There is a considerable administrative overhead in issuing letters to applicants, consultees, and so on. In this case, there is no justification to send out letters to applicants just to say "the application is progressing satisfactorily to a decision". Nevertheless, it is proposed to carry out a review of procedures to see if any improvements can be made.
- 4.5 The questions dealing with service improvement (Paragraph 3.7) show that the quality of service delivery over the last three years has been maintained and in several cases about a fifth of respondents that the service had

improved. Again, it is considered that, overall, the responses to these questions are very positive.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to comments from Members, the results of the 2003 Development Control Satisfaction Survey be noted.

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Background Papers:

Development Control User Satisfaction Survey results.

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