

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

8 October 2014

Report by Director of Environment

CUSTOMER SURVEYS OF THE PLANNING AND BUILDING STANDARDS SERVICE

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. This report considers the results of customer surveys that were conducted into the Planning and Building Standards Service earlier in 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and welcome the positive feedback from the public.

BACKGROUND

3. Two customer surveys have been carried out, one covering the **Planning Service** and one covering the **Building Standards Service** in order to gauge the customers' views of the service that they receive from us. The Planning Applications Committee does not have a remit with regards to Building Standards, however, we have included their results in this report for Members' information as it is so closely inter-related with the whole development management service that the Council offers to its customers.

REPORT

5. **Planning Customer Survey**

6. The overall results of the Planning customers survey are very positive and it is not considered that specific follow-up actions are necessary.

7. A summary of the results show:-

- a. 90% were either 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the time taken to speak to someone on the telephone (only one person said they were fairly dissatisfied, none were very dissatisfied) – this is up from 83% last year.
- b. 90% were either 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the time taken to get a response to a written enquiry (only one person was fairly dissatisfied, none were very dissatisfied) – this is down from 100% last year.
- c. 55% had used our online planning services. Of those who didn't use it, 86% of them answered simply that they "prefer not to", while two people said that they were unaware of the service.

- d. 90% were either 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the quality of information that they received from the Council (there were no dissatisfied expressions) – this is up from 83% last year.
- e. 77% were 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with how well staff did their jobs (two people were dissatisfied) - this is down from 89% last year
- f. 90% were 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' overall with the service that they received from the Planning Service (nobody expressed dissatisfaction) – this is up from 89% last year.

8. Summary of the comments that were made in response to the questions:-

a. Comments about the online services

Five people commented that it was good or easy to use; whilst one person said that it was not very good. Three people made specific comments or suggestions about how the services operate in practice (relating to the online submission of applications and the online submission of representations), most of which relate to the technical operation of the system which the Council cannot directly control.

b. What would you say about the quality of information that you received?

Two people said it was good and helpful. One person said that some of the information was wrong, inconsistent and not given in plain English. We are not aware of any information that is wrong and we do try to give information in as plain English as possible (given the complexities of the planning system) and to this end we publish online a number of 'briefing notes' which are written for public consumption.

c. Do you have any comments to make about the way staff did their jobs?.

A number of comments were made, both positive and negative. Someone said that they "*never seem to get someone who can give you an answer*"- but we have professional staff available to assist the public 35 hours a week. Someone commented that "*I don't think planning officers take public views into consideration*" – but that is not correct as all representations are assessed in *reports of handling*. One person said that "*Very basic errors were made. Out of 4 planning applications all were delayed due to mistakes by planning officers*" – we are not aware of the instances which are referred by this person so cannot investigate them in detail, but this does not seem to be a common experience.

d. Do you have any other comments about the service you received from East Renfrewshire?

As above, both positive and negative comments were made. Someone said that "*Planning officers should have power to tell malicious objectors to go away*" – but the Council has to take all representations seriously. Someone commented that the "*Online services were rubbish*" – but most feedback and statistics show that it is well used and largely welcomed by the customers. One person said that the "*Telephone service was not good*" – but we feel that we provide a very accessible and professional telephone service. Two people commented on timescales for receiving consents – but the statistics show that East Renfrewshire Council perform well in relation to timescales. Others comment that "*Staff were a really good help*" and "*Keep up the good service and very happy with online services*".

9. Building Standards Customers Survey

10. In 2013 the Building Standards Division of the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to develop and run the first national satisfaction survey. The survey was predicated on the need to obtain nationally consistent baseline data across all 32 local authorities in Scotland and to permit trends analysis in future years. The survey and analysis was carried out February to June 2014.

11. The Council supplied Pye Tait with customer names and email addresses and helped promote the survey to all of our customers.

12. Results were produced both nationally and for each individual local authority, see the headline results below.

HEADLINE INDICATORS	ERC	Scotland
OVERALL SATISFACTION		
Overall satisfaction with the service received (score out of 10)	7.8	7.5
MEETING EXPECTATIONS		
Extent to which the service met expectations (score out of 10)	7.9	7.4
Very/fairly satisfied with the timeliness of various aspects of the service	71%	65%
Kept very/fairly well informed about the progress of an application or submission	77%	63%
QUALITY OF SERVICE		
Strongly agree/agree to some extent that sufficient advice and guidance was received to meet needs	71%	73%
Strongly agree/agree to some extent that building standards service staff were polite and courteous	80%	88%
Yes - an inspection visit was undertaken by building standards staff	62%	61%
Very/fairly satisfied with the quality of the advice and guidance received from inspection staff	75%	82%
Yes – aware are of the need to notify the building standards service prior to commencing warrantable work	98%	98%
COMMUNICATIONS		
Would prefer to exchange written communication with building standards via email rather than hard copy letter (implies more customers want electronic communication)	84%	86%
Satisfied with the accuracy of written information (score out of 10)	7.9	8
Satisfied with the quality of written information (score out of 10)	7.9	8
ACCESSIBILITY		
Have visited the building standards section of the Council's website	80%	82%
Found the information they were looking for on the Council's website	88%	81%
Have visited the building standards service offices	49%	54%
Very/fairly satisfied with the reception service	59%	80%
Very/fairly satisfied with accessibility of staff	68%	75%

13. The above demonstrates a range of experiences, some of which were better than national averages and some poorer. As the survey involved a relatively small sample, the poorer responses represent a small number of people. However we shall be looking in more detail at all of the results and the specific comments made by the respondents.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

14. There are no financial or efficiency implications of the recommendations.

CONSULTATION

15. No consultations were undertaken.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

16. There are no partnership working implications..

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

17. There are no direct implications for the Council within this Report.

CONCLUSIONS

18. The generally positive feedback to our customer surveys is to be welcomed and shows that we are generally providing a good service to our customers. Improvement actions are to be produced regarding the Building Standards survey results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and welcome the generally positive feedback from the public to our Planning and Building Standards Services.

Director of Environment

Further details can be obtained from Gillian McCarney, Planning and Building Standards Manager, 0141 577 3116 gillian.mccarney@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

KEY WORDS

Planning; Customer Survey; Building Standards