

Results of the agents mini survey
(Applications determined 01/04/08 – 30/06/08)

This is the latest of these 'mini' surveys which for continuity reflect the questions previously used in the Government's Triennial survey.

The scores from the previous two surveys are also shown.

The survey was sent to 100 Applicants and Agents selected at random from applications had been determined in the 3 months April to June 2008

46 completed surveys were returned, two more than on the earlier surveys

Summary

Overall the results of this survey suggest a slight upward trend in satisfaction levels. The details in question 3 reveal that whilst the positive responses of 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' show only a slight improvement, the negative responses of 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' have fallen more steeply showing a positive move into the neutral range.

This trend is also reflected in the breakdown of overall satisfaction where the number of applicants who are satisfied, despite an unsuccessful application, has increased.

Results

Q1 Status of Applicant

Status	Current Survey %	Survey 2 %	Survey 1 %
Private Individual	30	25	16
Agent	70	72	79
Other		3	2

Q2 Type of application

Type of application	Current Survey %	Survey 2 %	Survey 1 %
Householder	58	48	<i>not asked</i>
Listed Building or Conservation Area	16	9	
Residential development	14	11	
Business or Industry	6	14	
Other	6	18	

Q3 asked about several elements of the service provided by the Planning Department before and after submission of the application. Colour coding indicates the trend of responses, i.e. green for a positive trend, red for negative and amber where there is no change. Neutral responses (*neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*) are not shown.

	Agree			Disagree		
	Current survey	Survey 2	Survey 1	Current survey	Survey 2	Survey 1
The planning officers gave me the help I needed	44	58	55	22	22	19
The specialists gave me the help & advice I needed	27	13	29	27	50	38
Council kept me informed	48	43	45	29	45	31
Council dealt promptly	59	50	40	19	25	24
Planning Officer (PO) was helpful	67	67	50	10	15	7
I was satisfied with the availability of my PO	55 <i>new question</i>			21		
Understand reasons for the decision	64	67	67	11	18	17
Treated fairly	51	56	50	14	21	17

Q4 Overall satisfaction (BVPI 111)

	Current survey %	Survey 2 %	Survey 1 %
Very Satisfied	24	34	34
Satisfied	36	25	25
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	16	16
Dissatisfied	22	9	18
Very Dissatisfied	7	16	7

The overall satisfaction rate as calculated for the old BVPI would be 60%.

Q5 Success of application

83% successful – both earlier surveys were 86%.

Amongst respondents whose most recent planning applications had been successful, 71% are satisfied (same as earlier surveys) whilst amongst those whose planning applications had been unsuccessful only 43% are satisfied but this figure is much higher than earlier surveys.

Q4 and Q7 Comments

Q4 asked specifically for suggestions for ways in which we could keep the agent or applicant better informed.

The main themes that emerged here were for more communication where amendments are likely to be required for a successful outcome and more use of email, examples:

*Advise on minor adjustments if possible
perhaps a phone call when app has been checked to advise if likely to be granted or if changes required to get a pass
Talk to us before making a decision.
Planning dept need to communicate regarding aspects of proposed works that need to be reappraised prior to the application decision
Some early warning of potential problems if it is heading for a refusal*

*Use emails rather than post particularly if to advise that an application is invalid
Make as much info available re new and changing regulations by email
email us with your intended site inspection date just in case we wish to discuss the project in more detail
emailed notification of changes to the app
Use of email - this can then be forwarded to clients*

But there were also suggestions that increased contact is not necessary:

*Letters OK. as an agent a single page on the web that shows progress of all our apps at a single glance would be superb
Probably not as its all on the web
Easier to access on line would be better
Existing arrangements appear OK*

Q7 asked for any other comments:

Working with WDC this year has been much easier than in previous years - we have submitted fewer apps this year but have found them to be validated more promptly with much less fuss than before

*The planning officer,*** was very helpful but appeared to be too much in the hands of the conservation officer who needs to join the real world and take a more sensible approach*

*Although officers were very helpful and communicative there was a large disparity between the advice given at pre-application stage and to the subsequent application made resulting in long delays and unnecessary waste
Communication during application process very good but a long waiting time to get pre-app advice*

The professed willingness of the building inspectors to give advice before submission of the application was not forthcoming i.e it was refused

We would point out that we requested that our application be discussed but nobody contacted us. Application was initially refused but later approved after amendments to proposal negotiated with Planning dept. This in our opinion resulted in unnecessary delay in commencement of our extension

Queries regarding validation could be speeded up by the use of email

Rather than being policy centric & focussed on targets it would be better if the LPA were more applicant centred. Quick decisions are not seen as being the best decisions but are perceived as a tick box culture. It is very difficult to get a discussion with officers and when they do take place being able to rely on what officers say. I have said all this before but nothing seems to change.

In recent times officers seem to be inclined to give advice based on what the applicant would like to hear however they can be misleading by not being completely open or helpful. A straight answer to a question would be better and constructive help to improve the applications chances of a favourable outcome would be much appreciated

Obtaining the listed building consent was straightforward but discharging the conditions was very difficult in fact a nightmare

Actions taken as a result of this survey.

1. We are currently looking at how we can develop improved systems to allow for more resources to be diverted towards pre application discussions. (This will come from the review currently under way with external consultants Addisons) . We will also need to consider the findings of the recently published Killian Pretty Review - Nov/08
2. We have created a Development Manager post which will also allow for greater pre application discussions.
3. The Planning Surgeries have been rationalised which will assist agents and applicants wishing to book meetings with Planning Officers
4. A review of the validation criteria (six months from implementation) is also underway to assist in streamlining the registration process (see also Addisons and Killian Pretty Reviews)