

## Results of the Survey of Planning Enforcement Complainants November 2008

The sample selected were those people who had made a complaint about an alleged breach of planning conditions between 1st April and 30th September 2008, where the case had been investigated and closed. 228 people were selected in this way. 121 completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 53%.

### Summary

The nature of this service inevitably means that many of our customers will ultimately be dissatisfied with the outcome of our investigations so a satisfaction rate of 53% (satisfied or very satisfied) is considered a positive result. It is also very pleasing to see the results from Q5 on the attitude of staff.

The main theme of the dissatisfaction concerns communications at all stages of the investigation, acknowledgement, feedback on progress and final outcome. This is an area where we will seek to improve and this will be tested by a further survey next autumn.

This survey is the first of its kind that this Council has carried out and there is very little comparable data to be found from other authorities. Huntingdonshire District Council has carried out a similar survey which was not as targeted as ours and had a disappointing response rate. However the issue to come out of their survey was criticism of their communications which led to them employing extra administrative support.

### Results

Q1 How did you raise your enforcement concern?

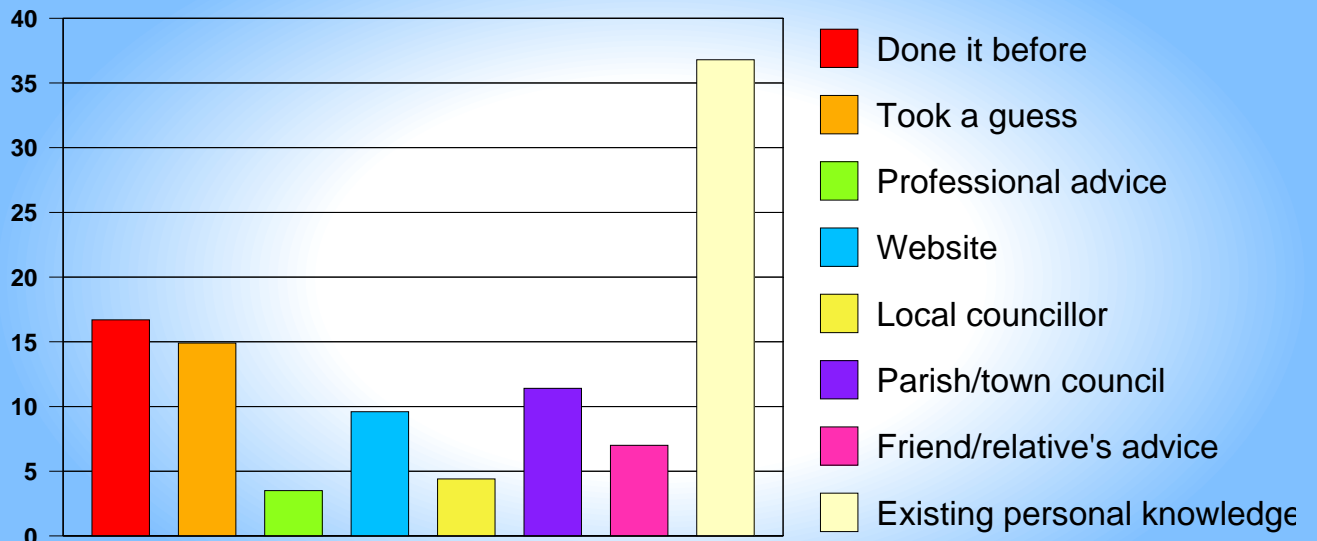
| Analysis % Respondents                             |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Base</b>  | <b>100.0%</b> |
| <b>How did you raise your enforcement concern?</b> |               |
| <b>Telephone</b>                                   | 60.8%         |
| <b>Letter</b>                                      | 24.2%         |
| <b>Email</b>                                       | 11.7%         |
| <b>In person</b>                                   | 3.3%          |
| <b>On the website</b>                              | -             |
| <b>Other</b>                                       | -             |

Q2 Did your original concern relate to a submitted planning application?

| Analysis % Respondents  |               |
|---|---------------|
| <b>Base</b>   | <b>100.0%</b> |
| <b>Did your original concern relate to a submitted planning ...</b> |               |
| <b>Yes</b>  | 36.1%         |
| <b>No</b>   | 54.6%         |
| <b>Don't know</b>   | 5.9%          |
| <b>Not applicable</b>   | 3.4%          |

### Q3 How did you find out how to report your concerns?

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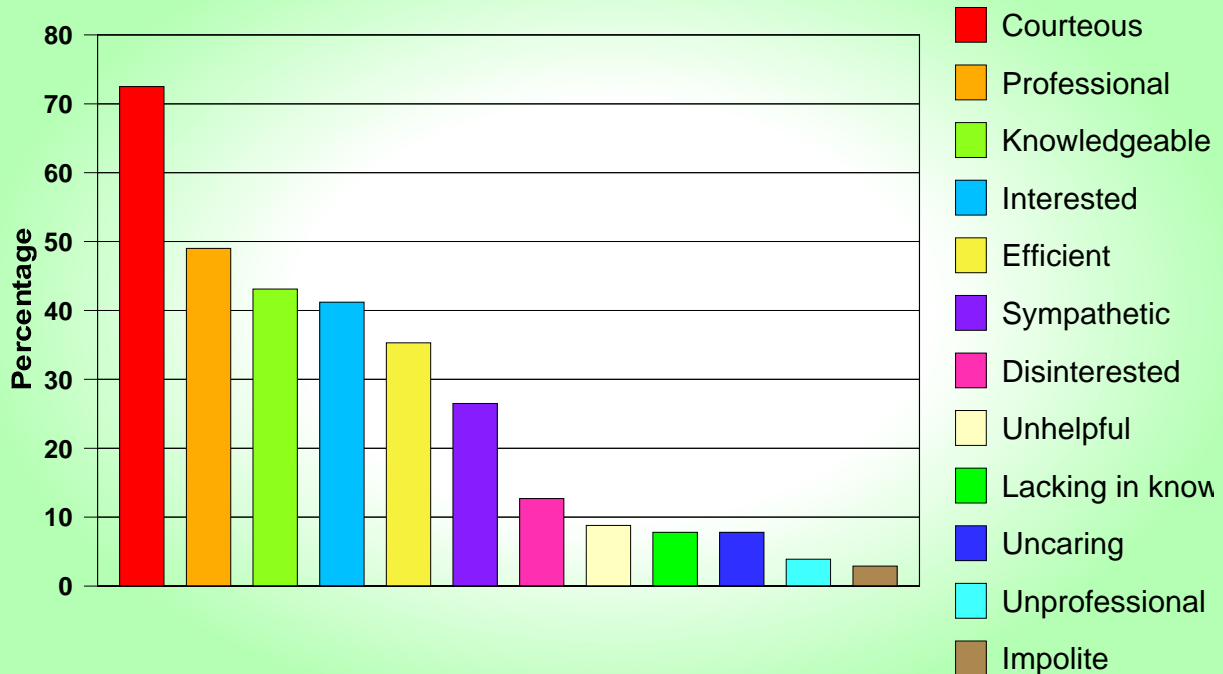


### Q4 Did you receive an acknowledgement of your concerns?

| Analysis % Respondents                               |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Did you receive an acknowledgement of your concerns? |        |
| Yes  | 83.1%  |
| No   | 13.6%  |
| Not applicable                                       | 2.5%   |
| Don't know/can't remember                            | 0.8%   |

**Q5 If you had direct contact with a member of the staff in the enforcement team, how did you find their response?**

How did you find the attitude of staff in the enforcement section?



**Q6 Did you receive all the information you needed about your enquiry?**

| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Did you receive all the information you needed about your... |        |
| Yes  | 64.3%  |
| No   | 35.7%  |

**Comments:**

Not surprisingly it was the people who answered No who made additional comments.

Some typical comments:

*Wanted legal requirements - told there were none*

*No final conclusion to complaint represented*

*None received*

*Nothing done*

*I asked for enforcement action re conditional planning approval - still not done*

*Did not understand enforcement process*

*No follow up except confirmation letter*

*I was sent a form to complete*

*Told no planning permission needed - nothing we can do*

*Had acknowledgement but no info re concerns*

*We had to do all the chasing and were unsure of protocol*

*I asked for a site visit and report*

*Failed to address concerns accurately. Ignored follow up emails*

*Negative response and no action by council*

**Q7 Were the letters you received from the Council clear and easy to understand?**

**Comments:**

Some typical comments:

*None received*

*no letter as yet*

*No letters*

*There seemed to be a consistent inability to understand the problem email reply*

*Didn't want to do anything though they investigated as it would not be popular*

*Emails with incorrect and unhelpful information*

*No letters received*

| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Were the letters you received from the Council clear and ... |        |
| Yes  | 90.4%  |
| No   | 8.7%   |
|  | 1.0%   |

**Q8 If you had to leave a message was your call returned in a reasonable time?**

| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Do you feel you received sufficient feedback during the i... |        |
| Yes  | 54.1%  |
| No   | 45.9%  |

**Comments:**

*Initial letter of complaint was never acknowledged. No communication of progress. We were left in limbo. Most unprofessional business practice*  
*By writing a concluding letter on the final outcome*

*Arrangements made by an officer should be kept. Promised a visit to discuss but promise not kept*

*By speaking to me on the phone when you received my letter*

*A simple phone call giving me some information. Instead I had to keep ringing and getting passed around*

*It would have been better to have had notice of the Councils actions on any report*

**Q10 Irrespective of the outcome of the investigation, were you satisfied with the service?**

| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Irrespective of the outcome of the investigation, were yo... |        |
| Yes  | 67.0%  |
| No   | 33.0%  |

**Comments:**

Some typical comments from those people who were dissatisfied:

*Of all the issues only the easy one was dealt with. The others have never been addressed to date*

*No final conclusion advised as above*

*My direct questions were not answered*

*Would like to know what to do next*

*I was not entirely convinced but had to accept the outcome  
 Nobody wanted to give me an answer and I was always told I would be contacted  
 There was no investigation  
 Felt ill-informed - passed off as a neighbour dispute  
 Service helpful however advisor was constrained about info given  
 Disagreed with result  
 Outcome was pre determined  
 Whole period was treated as if signed and sealed. Nothing I could do  
 There seems to be a presumption that the public know the process - some confusion at your end too  
 No letter so I don't know the outcome  
 Took a long time and chase email required  
 Under resourced section, email from officer stated 'resources are limited'*

**Q11 Do you understand the outcome of the investigation?**

**Comments:**

*In as much as it was a fob off  
 as already stated  
 There has been a change of use  
 without planning permission  
 But not acted on  
 Presume the investigation is on going  
 never told outcome*

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Analysis % Respondents                              |        |
| Base  | 100.0% |
| Do you understand the outcome of the investigation? |        |
| Yes   | 73.4%  |
| No  | 26.6%  |

*Officer said no evidence of commercial vehicles at address. Of course if visited during the day this  
 not received correspondence  
 Can't remember - think I gave up  
 Not aware of outcomes  
 Further investigation needs to be done  
 There was no investigation. Majority are approved due to cost implications of appeal*

**Q12 Do you consider that the investigation was carried out in a reasonable time?**

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Do you consider that the investigation was carried out in... |        |
| Yes  | 72.9%  |
| No   | 27.1%  |

**Comments:**

*Could have been quicker  
 4 months is too long  
 Very slow, work has been completed irrespective of outcome  
 Don't know if investigation carried out what investigations  
 Too short to give proper consideration  
 Took too long but reasonable for your busy dept*

*We were told a date for a finish and it was 2 months later*

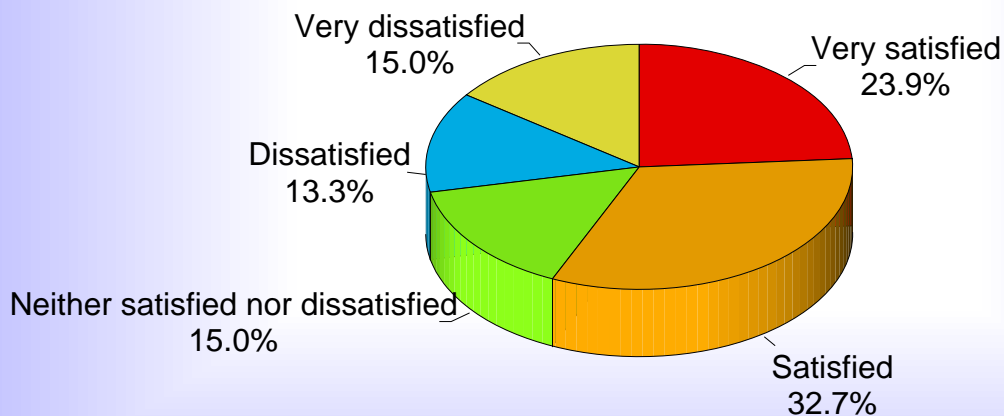
*on going for several months*  
*After 1st visit nothing happened*  
*5 weeks to deal with my complaint - poor service*  
*My enquiries needed action and by the time it was done it was too late*  
*I have no way of knowing as 6 months between calls*  
*Was told they had visited and case closed*  
*Took over 1 month to get a reply*  
*All too quick and clearly the tenant knew what was happening*  
*A simple issue has take 7 months, some emails were never answered*  
*insufficient resources*  
*It took over a year*

Q13 Do you consider that you were treated fairly and sensitively?

| Analysis % Respondents                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Base   | 100.0% |
| Do you consider that you were treated sensitively and fai... |        |
| Yes  | 75.0%  |
| No   | 25.0%  |

#### Q14 Overall satisfaction

Overall, how satisfied are you with the service you received?



### **Q15 - Additional Comments**

73 additional comments were received. These have been categorised as follows with examples:

#### Comments in praise of the service - 9:

*Wealden planning dept is fantastic. Helpful, nearly always available to give help and advice on any planning issue*  
*Officer was lovely and dealt with enquiry quickly*  
*Very professional service*  
*It is sad that you have to send a questionnaire to find out how good you are*

#### Comments critical of the service - 20

*Feel let down by your service*  
*Very dismissive and not sensitive*  
*Utter waste of time in contacting Planning. Waste of time and expense*  
*There was no investigation I was asked to keep a log and take photos - unfortunately I work to pay my council tax for you to do investigations*  
*Mistakes all round yet we were the ones to suffer & our lives have been totally upturned*

#### Comments critical of the communication/feedback - 9

*In our experience officers in the planning dept do not always respond to telephone messages nor keep to arrangements made*  
*Dissatisfied as not aware of any outcome*  
*I have had no contact apart from initial confirmation letter*  
*Although my initial enquiry as acted upon almost immediately no one contacted me for ages to let me know the outcome*  
*I have never been told the outcome or what the landlord was required to do*

#### Comments that matters have not changed as a result of the investigation - 16

*The field shelter has only been moved once.*  
*Still advertising the business despite no planning to run one.*  
*Please investigate further - there is still motor activity*  
*The buffer zone behind the Mews East Hoathly still waits to be planted*  
*I feel frustrated that nothing could be done about my complaint*

#### Comments that the Council needs more powers - 5

*Concerned that there is not legal requirements in this district..*  
*Enforcement staff seem to have their hands tied by crazy planning laws and procedures. All of which protect those who don't comply*  
*Policy tied poor Mr Moons hands*  
*You need more funding*  
*No sanction no fine for person who broke planning conditions - you could do with more power!*

#### Miscellaneous Comments - 14

*Staff are professional but Councillors are not and ignore correspondence*

*I feel my neighbour turned a garage into a bedsit for financial gain. has he paid tax for this?*

*We discovered that allotments set up by Parish council do not need planning permission*

*I was told on the phone that taking people to court was not liked therefore they did not consider this necessary*

*Web site could be clearer has become confusing and distorted*

### **What we will do next**

1. We are looking to change our procedures for keeping the complainant informed.
2. We will try to ensure that every complainant (where we have the contact details) is informed by letter or phone call when the investigation is closed.
3. We will update our website with more information and guidance to help people who believe a breach of planning rules has taken place.
4. We will rewrite our guidance leaflet in plain English and make it more user friendly.