

Customer Satisfaction

Report by Head of Planning and Planning Technical Support Officer

Summary: The Broads Authority's Planning Department has recently undertaken a Customer Satisfaction Survey and held an Agents' forum, both of which show a high level of satisfaction with the planning service. This report provides details.

Recommendation: That the report be noted.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As part of its commitment to best practice in delivery of the planning service, the Broads Authority as Local Planning Authority (LPA) engages regularly with its service users to seek their views on the quality of the service. This usually occurs annually (although most of the National Parks now undertake this on a two yearly cycle) and takes the forms of a customer satisfaction survey and the holding of an Agents' forum.

1.2 This report sets out the results of this engagement in 2017.

2.0 Customer satisfaction survey

2.1 The customer satisfaction survey was undertaken by sending a questionnaire to all applicants and agents who had received a decision on a planning application during the period 1st January and 31st March 2017. A total of 54 survey forms were sent out. This is the standard methodology used by all of the National Parks over a period of time. The contact details used were those submitted on the relevant application form.

2.2 The questionnaire asked the recipients to respond and rate the service in respect of the following areas:

- 1) Advice prior to, and during, the application process
- 2) Communication on the progress of the application
- 3) Speed of Response to queries
- 4) Clarity of the reasons for the Decision
- 5) Being treated fairly and being listened to
- 6) The overall processing of the application

2.3 The survey also gave the opportunity for users to rate the service on things it did well and things which could be improved, as well as giving a general comments section. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 1.

- 2.4 Seventeen completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 31.5%. This is an improved response rate compared to recent years, however, more can be done to encourage a higher response rate and this will be explored for next year's survey. This will give a better understanding of the level of satisfaction of the customers.
- 2.5 In considering the results from the questionnaire and assessing the level of satisfaction, the scoring parameters used are based on information published by Info Quest, a company that specialises in customer satisfaction surveys and analysis. These note that a goal of 100% satisfaction is commendable, but probably unattainable as people tend to be inherently critical and it's virtually impossible to keep everyone satisfied all the time, and consider that a customer that has awarded a score of 4 or above (out of 5) is a satisfied customer. It should be noted that applicants for all decisions – approvals and refusals were included. They also note that, on average, any measurement that shows a satisfaction level equal to or greater than 75% is considered exceptional. The scoring parameters are:

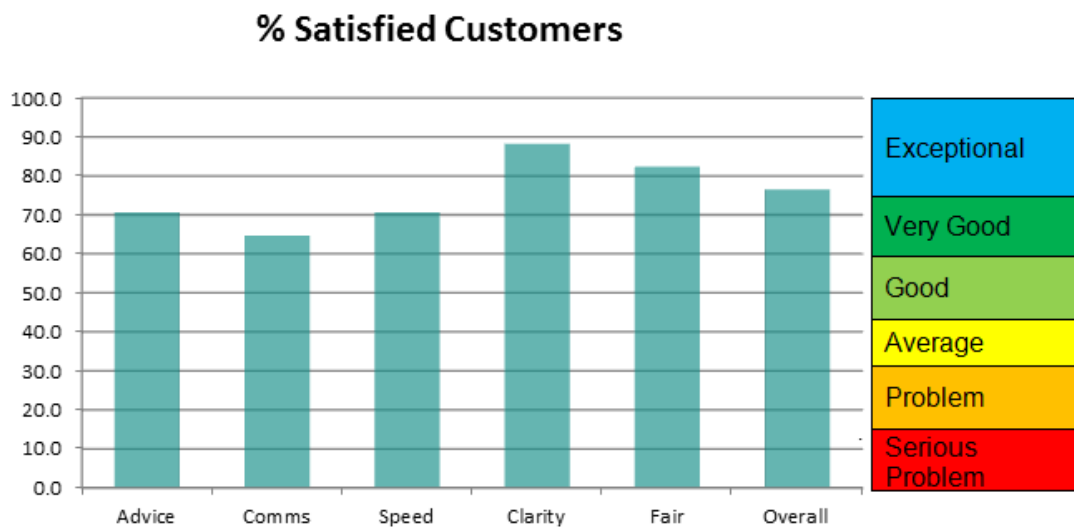
% Satisfaction	Qualitative assessment	
75% +	Exceptional	There is little need or room for improvement
60% - 75%	Very Good	You are doing a lot of things right
45% - 60%	Good.	Most successful companies are at this level.
30% - 45%	Average.	Bottom line impact is readily attainable.
15% - 30%	Problem.	Remedial actions are needed
0% - 15%	Serious Problem	Urgent Remedial actions are needed

Results of the customer satisfaction survey

- 2.6 The questionnaire asked customers to rate the service on a scale of 1 – 5, where 5 was the highest score. The results are as follows:

Question	Score 1 – 5 and number of respondents					
	5	4	3	2	1	No answer
1 Advice	9	3	2	1	0	2
2 Communications	7	4	4	0	2	0
3 Speed of response	10	2	3	0	1	1
4 Clarity of decision	11	4	1	1	0	0
5 Treated fairly	11	3	1	0	2	0
6 Overall	9	4	3	0	1	0

- 2.7 It is noted that over 50% of respondents scored the service at either 4 or 5 out of 5 on each of the aspects. The overall results are represented under the satisfaction parameters detailed at 2.5 as follows:



2.8 The survey also provided an opportunity for customers to comment on what the planning team did well, and where improvements could be made. These comments are summarised, respectively, below.

2.9 The things that were done well were identified as:

- Approved the application
- Helpful approach
- Friendly approach
- Answered the phone
- Prepared to discuss the application
- Communication around need for planning permission
- Engaged in discussion around materials
- Continue to provide an excellent service
- Pre-application procedure very helpful
- Accept postal submissions
- Prompt responses
- Clear and concise presentations at Planning Committee

One customer recorded that nothing was done well.

2.10 The areas for improvement were identified as:

- Determine simple applications before 8 week deadline
- Discuss concerns promptly to allow a quick resubmission
- Allocate to another officer if case officer is on holiday
- Simplify application processes
- Website can be hard to navigate
- Ensure Planning Committee Members have read the papers

One customer noted that there needed to be better communication and understanding and that they had found the whole process demoralising and stressful and hoped never to have to go through it again.

- 2.11 The areas for improvement are noted, and will be considered, although a number of them – for example the simplification of the process – are beyond the control of the planning team.
- 2.12 The final question on the form sought suggestions on what other improvements could be made more generally, with the question designed to pick up examples of best practice from elsewhere. No such examples were provided and the comments around areas for improvement were broadly as above.
- 2.13 Overall, the comments received were useful in highlighting particular areas, but it was clear that in a number of cases the detailed comments were as a direct result of a single, particular application and the experience (for good or bad) may not be representative of an ‘average’ application. This suggests the more extreme results, both for good (“The Broads Authority are probably the best Authority Planning Department that I have ever dealt with ...”) and bad (“Things we did well – nothing”) should be treated with some caution.

3.0 Planning agents’ forum

- 3.1 In common with many other LPAs, the planning team hosts a regular planning forum for planning agents. The standard format is for it to comprise a half day (usually a morning) with presentations from officers on changes to planning legislation since the last forum, updates on the work of the planning team and any new projects or process changes and a summary of progress on the Local Plan. There is usually also an item on some aspect of development in the Broads, for example the local list, or the importance of materials, and then an opportunity for questions and answers at the end. It is also a good opportunity to ask the agents for any feedback on the service, and this is done both on the day at the event and prior to the session as part of the invitation letter.
- 3.2 This year’s agents’ forum was held on 21 April. It was attended by 15 planning agents, many of whom regularly submit applications to the LPA.
- 3.3 The invitation letter asked agents to advise what they thought the LPA did well and comments were received from 6 attendees. The things that these agents felt are done well may be summarised as follows:
 - Approachable and helpful
 - Obtainable
 - Communicate well
 - Solution focused
 - Setting out the case and explaining issues
 - Meeting planning deadlines

- Protecting our buildings and environment
- Enforcement

One agent commented that the LPA did 'everything' well.

- 3.4 The invitation letter also asked agents to advise what could be improved on and responses were received from 4 attendees. The areas for improvement were identified as follows:

- Image
- Demonstrate efficiency
- Take a more proactive response to development and look for solutions
- Give early indication of officer recommendation
- Facilitate twin tracking of application with EA consent notification and works licence.

One agent commented that that there was 'not much' that could be improved on.

- 3.5 The areas for improvement are noted, and will be considered, although it should be noted that the LPA has no ability to facilitate twin-tracking of applications that are made under separate legislation and processes.
- 3.6 In respect of the event itself, there was an open discussion of development within the Broads. The free pre-application advice was commented on positively, and the approach to design and materials was welcomed. All of the 11 agents who completed the feedback form agreed that the session was useful and a number of very positive comments were received, including

"Excellent - keep on going";

"Always informative – some other LPAs could learn something"; and

"Covered a lot of information very efficiently"

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 The planning process is highly prescribed and tightly regulated and LPAs have little discretion as to its operation. Planning is also a process which affects individuals directly and can have a major bearing on where and how people live, work and manage their lives. Consequently it is a process on which people often have strong opinions.
- 4.2 The results of the customer satisfaction survey and the feedback from the agents forum demonstrate a generally high level of satisfaction with the planning service at the Broads Authority. This is welcome, although it some caution needs to be exercised given the small sample size.

Background papers:None

Appendices:	Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Customers
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Customer Satisfaction Survey

Your comments on the Broads Authority's Planning Service.

The Broads Authority is doing a brief survey of people who have submitted planning applications to us and is asking them for their feedback on the quality of service they received. The comments that we receive are really important to help us understand what we do well and what we need to improve. We know these sorts of questionnaires can be time consuming to complete so we have kept it really simple, but if you want to add further details (or even email or telephone with further comments) these would be very welcome.

Thanking you in anticipation of your feedback.

Yours sincerely

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Please tell us about your overall satisfaction level around:

5 = very good 4 = good 3 = okay 2 = poor 1 = very poor

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|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | The advice and help you were given in submitting your application | _____ |
| 2 | How well you were kept informed of progress on your application | _____ |
| 3 | How promptly we dealt with your queries | _____ |
| 4 | How clearly you understood the reasons for the decision | _____ |
| 5 | Whether you felt you were treated fairly and your views were listened to | _____ |
| 6 | The overall processing of your planning application | _____ |

Please tell us about:

7 Things we did well

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8 Things we could improve

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9 Any other things we could do to improve the service

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Thank you for your time in completing this.