

Planning Committee

26 May 2023

Agenda item number 13

Customer satisfaction survey 2023

Report by Planning Technical Support Officer

Summary

The Broads Authority's Planning Department has recently undertaken its annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, which again shows a high level of satisfaction with the planning service.

Recommendation

To note the report.

1. 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 formally with its service users to seek their views on the quality of the service. This is done through the use of a Customer Satisfaction Survey and is undertaken annually. The National Parks follow a similar approach, although they survey every two years. This report sets out the results of this engagement in 2023.

2. 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 1 January to 31 March 2023. A total of 60 survey emails and 1 letter were sent out. This is the standard methodology used by all of the National Parks over a given period of time. The contact details used were those submitted on the application form and recipients could respond either online or by returning the survey form.

2.2. As in previous years, 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 elements it did well and those which could be improved, as well as giving a general comments section. A copy of the survey is attached at Appendix 1.

3. Responses

- 3.1. Seventeen responses were received, representing a response rate of 27.9%. This is an increase of 8.6% compared to 2022 (19.3%). The response rate is considered encouraging, and on the whole the online survey continues to improve the number of responses received. It is more convenient to complete an online form as opposed to completing a paper copy which needs to be posted back to the Authority.
- 3.2. In considering the results from the questionnaire and assessing the level of satisfaction, the scoring parameters 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 is practically impossible to keep everyone satisfied at all times.
- 3.3. They therefore consider that a customer awarding a score of 4 or above (out of 5) is a satisfied customer. They also note that, on average, any measurement that shows a satisfaction level equal to or greater than 75% is considered exceptional. It should be noted that applicants for all decisions – approvals and refusals - were asked to take part in the survey. The scoring parameters are:

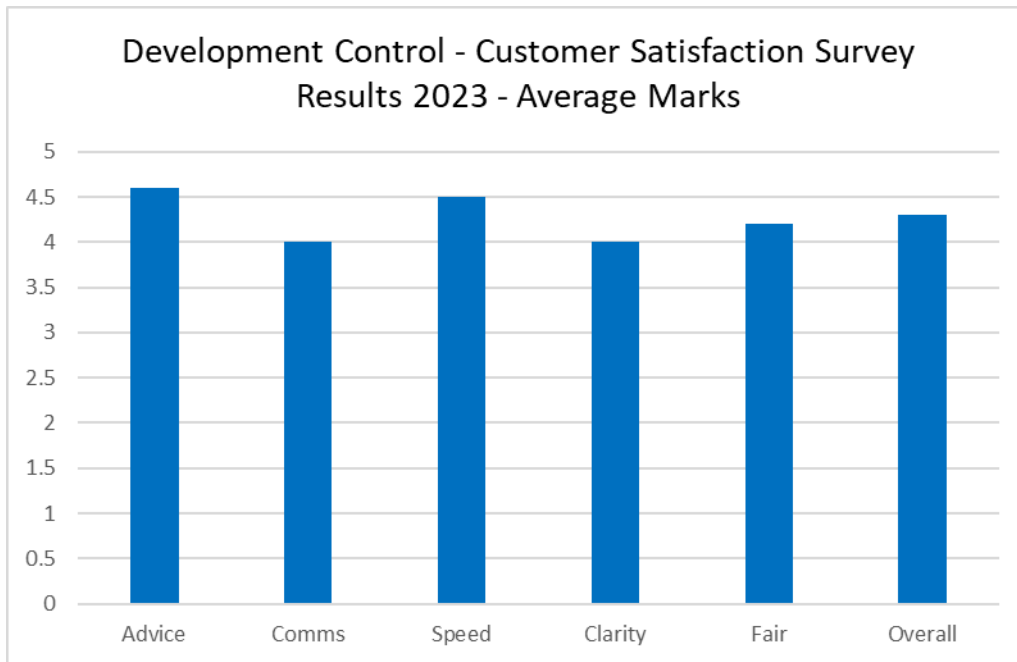
% Satisfaction	Qualitative Assessment	Comment
75%+	Exceptional	Little need or room for improvement
60% - 75%	Very Good	You are doing a lot of things right
45% - 60%	Good	The level of most successful companies
30% - 45%	Average	Bottom line impact is readily available
15% - 30%	Problem	Remedial actions required
0% - 15%	Serious Problem	Urgent remedial actions required

Customers were asked to rate the service on a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 the highest score.

- 3.4. The answers from respondents are shown below:

Area	5	4	3	2	1	No Answer
Advice	13	3	0	0	1	0
Communications	7	6	2	1	1	0
Speed of decision	12	3	1	0	1	0
Clarity of decision	8	4	3	1	1	0
Treated fairly	9	5	2	0	1	0
Overall	9	6	1	0	1	0

3.5. Average scores for the questions are shown in the following graph:



3.6. It is noted that 53% of respondents scored the service at either 4 or 5 out of 5 on all aspects, which is a 29% decrease on 2022. However, 4 of the 17 respondents scored 4 or 5 on all but one of the aspects.

3.7. The overall results are represented under the satisfaction parameters detailed at 3.2 as follows:



3.8. 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.

3.9. The things that were done well were identified as:

- Clear and concise advice

- Swift responses on queries
- Highly beneficial pre-application service
- Officers helpful with the validation process/requirement

3.10. The areas for improvement were identified as:

- Less strict consultees
- Schemes negotiated with case officer refused at Planning Committee
- Agree conditions with applicant/agent before imposing them on decision
- Speedier decisions without extensions of time

3.11. Seven of the seventeen respondents had no suggestions for improvements.

3.12. The areas for improvement have been noted for consideration, although it should be noted that many consultees are independent of the Broads Authority, so the case officer has no influence over their responses.

3.13. 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. Few of the respondents submitted answers for this section and, as with previous years, the majority of responses to this question echoed the comments made in the areas for improvement section.

3.14. The majority of the comments are likely to be in response to a particular experience or application type. Although this makes the feedback less easy to interpret, it is considered that these comments are mainly ideas of how to further improve the service offered, rather than criticisms of the Planning Department's performance.

3.15. The results of the survey are considered positive, although some caution should be exercised in interpreting them given the low numbers on which they are based. However, customers who have a bad experience are statistically between two and three times more likely to give feedback compared to those who are happy with their experience. Therefore, the low response rate may demonstrate that on the whole customers are broadly satisfied with the service received.

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Appendix 1 – Customer Satisfaction Survey

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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

- 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.