

BUILDING CONTROL PERFORMANCE 2007/2008

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Committee of the performance of Building Control in year 2007/2008

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 To assist members in monitoring and appraising the Building Control Service a review of workload and performance has been prepared and is appended to this report.

3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 The number of applications received reached 1150 in respect of Full Plan applications and 362 for Building Notice types, both showing decreases from the levels received in 2006/2007.
- 3.2 The decrease in numbers is predominantly in the area of domestic types of extension and may be the effect of instability as a result of fluctuations in interest rates over the last 12 months.
- 3.3 Large scale schemes in the City are still slow in coming forward to the point where a building regulations application is needed which has focused attention on the further development of partnerships to enable Building Control to seek out work outside of the City's boundaries to maintain levels of application numbers and fee income.
- 3.4 The number of Cavity Wall Applications fell from 3720 in 2006/2007 to 1167 which equates to a 69% decrease. The reduction is put down to the fact that a significant number of homes within the City have now had the cavity insulation process carried out.
- 3.5 Replacement window applications under the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA) show a slight decrease on the previous year with 2938 notices received against a figure of 3017 in 2006/2007.
- 3.6 From 2005/2006 records are required to be kept of applications received from the various organisations representing the electrical and gas industries in respect of domestic installations carried out by their members. In the case of notifiable electrical work numbers decreased

from 5358 to 4070 however for gas installations there was an increase from 3366 applications to 5042.

- 3.7 The number of Initial Notices received i.e. the number of applications received for work carried out by private building control bodies increased in all areas of work from 58 in 2006/2007 to 73 for 2007/2008. The number represents an exceptionally low level of just 4.8% of numbers of applications dealt with by the private sector which in terms of lost fee income equates to only 4% due to the minor nature of the works.
- 3.8 Concentrated efforts are made to provide a quality service to clients and high priority is given to the marketing and promotion of the Service both within the region and nationally. Building Control has a dedicated and effective Customer Forum which gives advice and support to the direction of the Service. It also keeps in touch with clients via media such as newsletters, guidance notes, training sessions, satisfaction surveys and corporate days to maintain a high profile with clients.
- 3.9 The number of site inspections carried out is recorded at 10954 and is slightly down on last year's total of 11376. The number still highlights the high levels of site activity largely due to the proportionately high number of Building Notice applications received. This form of application is made without the benefit of working plans and as a result requires greater levels of site supervision.
- 3.10 The statutory response time for the issue of a building regulation application decision is set in The Building Act 1984 as 5 weeks from the date of deposit. The need for swift response to submitted applications is recognised as well as the need to maintain high levels of quality in the decision making process.
- 3.11 Local performance indicators record 55% of applications processed within 10 working days and 97% attended to within 15 working days. Speed of response is recognised from consultation with clients to be a key element in the choice of service provider and therefore creates a focus for Building Controls service standards.
- 3.12 The extent of Building Control involvement in other areas is both wide-ranging and diverse.
- 3.13 Building Control continues to provide an emergency call out service both during and out of office hours for 365 days every year, responding to all building related emergencies. In 2007/2008 the number of emergency calls responded to was 40.
- 3.14 A local performance indicator for this essential service shows that 100% of calls received were inspected within 1 hour of receipt of call.

- 3.15 The Building Control establishment is currently fully staffed. However skills shortages in the area of qualified Chartered Building Control Surveyors have meant that posts in the past have been filled with personnel unqualified when appointed. The resulting commitment to the training and development of new members of staff places pressure on qualified staff who are required to divert their time to the training process and great care is needed to ensure that service levels in future are not affected as a direct result of this diversion. However the benefits of developing staff in-house helps to redress the national skills shortage problem and one that is currently affecting the whole of the building control profession.
- 3.16 Major challenges to the future performance of Building Control lie with the advent of new legislation in respect of sustainability issues. Notwithstanding the requirement to understand the complexity of the legislation there is also a challenge to employers to retain existing qualified staff in the face of recruitment programmes aimed at attracting surveyors to fill new positions such as energy performance assessors and home information pack assessors. This new legislation and the employment opportunities that arise has the consequence of seeing a further drift of qualified building control surveyors from local authorities to fill these new positions in the private sector. This drift together with the constant movement of staff from local authority to private sector building control needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that service levels are maintained.
- 3.17 Further concern arises about the pressures placed on staff to keep abreast of the wide-ranging changes that have happened or are about to happen to Building Regulations as a result of changing Government initiatives and changes in European law. Sustainability and the control of carbon emissions into the atmosphere are regulations now embedded within the body of Building Regulations and have resulted in intensive training of staff to take on board new skills and competencies.
- 3.18 A wide range of local performance indicators shows Building Control responses against varying targets to be very effective.
- 3.19 Building Control achieved 100% response to requests for same day site inspection where those requests are made before 10.00am on the day of inspection.
- 3.20 Data recorded for site workload indicates that 100% of active sites receive a minimum of 1 visit every 15 working days and that 100% of non-active sites receive a minimum of 1 visit every 3 months.
- 3.21 Building Control operates a quality management system which complies with the requirements of BS EN ISO 9001:2000 and which is audited on a monthly basis and inspected annually by BSI Management Systems. An inspection by BSI was carried out in March 2008 and commended the Service for its systems and procedures.

- 3.22 Further, Building Control has been awarded 3 Charter Mark Awards by the Governments Cabinet Office for excellence in service delivery.
- 3.23 The Service is also commended by Charter Mark for its work with the Sunderland Access Group to create an inclusive environment and for its continuing work with commercial partners under the Partner Authority Scheme. In addition, commendation was received for the development of the "submit-a-plan" website which was developed by Building Control and is now utilised by over 200 local authorities in England and Wales.
- 3.24 The Partner Authority Scheme was set up in 1998 by the Local Government Association, District Surveyors Association and the Local Authority National Type Approval Confederation (LANTAC). The Scheme allows for Partner Companies to choose their Partner Authority as the contact for the submission of all building regulation applications throughout England and Wales. Currently Building Control is partnered with 20 partner companies with the arrangement producing additional streams of income to the Service.
- 3.25 Under the Scheme Building Control has most recently been involved in a mixed development in Alnwick, regeneration work on North Shields fish quay, and mixed developments in the regeneration of the former Stannington Hospital and St Oswalds Hospice in Newcastle. Work in connection with a major scheme forming part of the Kings Cross regeneration in London is still ongoing. Previous partnerships have seen Building Control's involvement in hotel schemes at East Midlands Airport and Durham, refurbishment work to an entertainment facility in Southampton and housing development throughout Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.
- 3.26 The third Building Control Quality Awards were held at the Sunderland Stadium of Light in February 2008. Awards were made in the categories of Best Partnership, Best Access/Community Project, Best Housing Project, Best Small Builder and Best Regeneration Project. The ceremony was well received by all of the prize-winners and plans are in place to repeat the event in 2009. The winners in all of the categories were submitted into the regional awards held in April at Slaley Hall where the winners of our own Best Partnership Award, Miller Homes North East Limited and the Best Access/Community Project, Redbox and Balfour Beatty Construction Limited scooped the regional award and now go forward to the national finals to be held in London in the autumn.
- 3.27 As a member of Local Authority Building Control Services Limited, Building Control is able to offer a range of benefits from using the local authority as the building control service provider.

- 3.28 A full list of the value added services are listed in the document appended to this report and include such benefits as new housing warranties, Latent Gold defect insurance and a contaminated land warranty.
- 3.29 Under legislation contained within The Building (Local Authority Charges) Regulations 1998 local authority building control units are required to recover the costs incurred in the provision of building regulation charge earning work. The accounting is over a rolling 3-year period to acknowledge the cyclical nature of building construction.
- 3.30 The financial details of the trading operation are protected by the commercial sensitivity of the Building Control operation because of its competition with the private sector.
- 3.31 Since the advent of the regulations, Building Control has consistently made surpluses in its charging account which is part protected as a working surplus and part reinvested into the development of the Service. Despite a slight drop in application numbers in 2007/2008 fee income reached the budget target. The system is monitored and assessed under guidelines drawn up by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).
- 3.32 Customer satisfaction and feedback is viewed as being a crucial element in the delivery of a high quality, customer focused service and is carried out in many ways including customer forums, newsletters, meetings in reception or on site and written correspondence. Monitoring of customer satisfaction levels is carried out at 2 stages of the building control process. The first consultation takes place following the transmission of the application decision to the applicant, with a second consultation taking place following completion of works on site.
- 3.33 The 2-stage consultation process captures the 2 different elements of work and client at those points. In the first case consultation is generally completed by the architect or draughtsperson whilst the second stage is usually completed by the builder or developer.
- 3.34 Responses from the plan examination process indicate that 90% of clients confirm that the building control service provides value for money and 98% rate the overall plan examination service as either good or excellent.
- 3.35 With regard to the site inspection work 82% of respondents confirm that the Service provides value for money and 90% rate the inspection service as either good or excellent.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Building Control continues to provide a quality service to its customers as highlighted in the information included in this report. The award of, and maintaining of 3 Charter Mark issued by the Cabinet Office is a further demonstration of the commitment to excellence in service delivery.
- 4.2 Building Control has responded to the challenge imposed by competition across all areas of its work by focussing on the marketing and promotion of its service together with the maintaining of those high levels of service delivery.
- 4.3 The Service has addressed the scarcity of active major schemes within the City by fully embracing the principles of commercial partnerships to seek out and secure contracts outside of the geographical boundaries of the City which have produced rich streams of income into the Building Control account.
- 4.4 The national skills shortage within the building control profession is an area of concern and one where careful monitoring is required in an attempt to mitigate the potential effects of this skills shortage to the overall performance of the Service.

5.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report and of the Review of Building Control Performance document appended.