

BUILDING CONTROL PERFORMANCE 2009/2010

REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Committee of the performance of Building Control in year 2009/2010

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

Workload

- 3.1 The number of applications received reached 806 in respect of Full Plan applications and 247 for Building Notice types, both showing decreases from the levels received in 2009/2010.
- 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 a general recession which affected the building industry more than most.
- 3.3 Attention is focused 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 slightly increased from 779 which shows a decrease on the level of 1207 received in 2008/2009.
- 3.5 In an attempt to minimise the financial shortfall in income from the reduction in application numbers secondment of four members of staff has taken place in recent months. This has been possible whilst also ensuring service level has not diminished and the ability to continue to be competitive has been maintained.
- 3.6 Replacement window applications under the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA) show an increase on the previous year with 2522 notices received against a figure of 2013 in 2008/2009.

- 3.7 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 increased to 4250 from 3554 and for gas installations there was an increase from 3912 applications to 4565.
- 3.8 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 64 in 2008/2009 to 78 for 2009/2010. The number represents an exceptionally low level of just 7% of numbers of applications dealt with by the private sector which in terms of lost fee income equates to only 2% due to the minor nature of the works.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 The number of site inspections carried out is recorded at 7261 and is down on last year's total of 10603. The decrease is in line with the general reduction in the number of applications being received.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 Local performance indicators record 94% of applications processed within 10 working days and 99% 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 Control's service standards.
- 3.13 The extent of Building Control involvement in other areas is both wide-ranging and diverse.
- 3.14 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 2009/2010 the number of emergency calls responded to was 39.
- 3.15 A local performance indicator for this essential service shows that 100% of calls received were inspected within 1 hour of receipt of call.

- 3.16 Staff are being kept 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.

#### Performance

- 3.17 A wide range of local performance indicators shows Building Control responses against varying targets to be very effective.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 Building Control operates a quality management system which complies with the requirements of BS EN ISO 9001:2008 and which is audited on a monthly basis and inspected annually by BSI Management Systems. An inspection by BSI was carried out in April 2009 for re-registration and commended the Service for its systems and procedures.

#### Recognition

- 3.21 Building Control has previously been awarded 3 Charter Mark Awards by the Governments Cabinet Office for excellence in service delivery. This award is now replaced by the Customer Service Excellence Award which and this too was achieved in June 2008 jointly with Development Control. This is held for a 3 year period.
- 3.22 The Building Control service was specifically commended for its sophisticated understanding of the needs and expectations of the service's various customers. This is used effectively to make sure that the services delivered continue to change and evolve in order that we continue to meet the needs and expectations of customers.
- 3.23 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 17 partner companies with the arrangement producing additional streams of income to the Service.

- 3.24 The fifth Sunderland City Council Building Excellence awards were held at the Sunderland Stadium of Light in February 2010. Awards were made in the categories of Best Partnership, Best Housing Development, Best Domestic Extension or Alteration, Best Commercial Building, Best Social Housing Development, Best Small Builder, Best Community Building and Best Educational building.
- 3.25 In the Local Authority Building Control Regional Building Excellence awards Sunderland was successful in three of the eight categories submitted. Sunderland University's City Space building picked up the award for best commercial building, Beckworth Mews, Silksworth the best social housing award and the partnership with Gentoo won the category of best partnership. These will go forward to the LABC National Awards to be held in London later this year.

#### Business Model

- 3.26 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.
- 3.27 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.
- 3.28 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.
- 3.29 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.

#### Customer Satisfaction

- 3.30 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.

- 3.31 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.
- 3.32 Responses from the plan examination process indicate that 100% of clients confirm that the building control service provides value for money and 100% rate the overall plan examination service as either good or excellent.
- 3.33 With regard to the customer feedback questionnaire issued at completion of work 96% of respondents confirm that the Service provides value for money and 90% satisfied with the overall service.
- 3.34 The results of an independent customer survey carried out in 2008 indicate that Building Control staff are friendly, helpful and courteous with the majority of users happy with the service provided.

#### 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 and now the Customer Service Excellence Award which is maintained every year. is a further demonstration of the commitment to excellence in service delivery.
- 4.2 Building Control has responded to the challenge imposed by competition and reduction in available work across all areas of its work and the down turn in the construction industry 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 significant streams of income into the Building Control account.

#### 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.