

BUILDING CONTROL PERFORMANCE 2008/2009

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 2008/2009

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 868 in respect of Full Plan applications and 278 for Building Notice types, both showing decreases from the levels received in 2008/2009.
- 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 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 slightly increased from 1167 in 2007/2008 to 1207 which equates to a 3% increase.
- 3.5 Replacement window applications under the Fenestration Self-Assessment Scheme (FENSA) show a decrease on the previous year with 2013 notices received against a figure of 2398 in 2007/2008.
- 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 4070 to 3554 and for gas installations there was an decrease from 5042 applications to 3912.

- 3.7 The number of Initial Notices received i.e. the number of applications received for work carried out by private building control bodies decreased in all areas of work from 73 in 2007/2008 to 64 for 2007/2008. The number represents an exceptionally low level of just 5.5% 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 10603 and is slightly down on last year's total of 10954. 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 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 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 2008/2009 the number of emergency calls responded to was 25.
- 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 has 1 unfilled post at Building Surveyor level. Previously 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.

Future Challenges

- 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.

Performance

- 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 April 2009 for re-registration and commended the Service for its systems and procedures.

Recognition

- 3.22 Further Building Control has 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, which prompted a letter from the Prime Minister congratulating both services on being among the first 100 organisations in the country to receive this new award.
- 3.23 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.
- 3.24 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 22 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 user 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. In addition we have been involved in the construction of the of the multi award winning Wild Bird Sanctuary building at Saltholme, Stockton on Tees.
- 3.26 The fourth Building Control Excellence awards were held at the Sunderland Stadium of Light in February 2009. Awards were made in the categories of Best Partnership, Best Social Housing Project, Best Small Builder,, Best Commercial Building under £1million, Best Commercial Building over £1 million, Best Housing Project under 11 units, Best Housing Project over 10 units, Best Healthcare Building, Best Sustainable Project and Best Educational building.
- 3.27 The winners in all categories were submitted into the regional awards held in June at Newcastle Gateshead Hilton Hotel and the winners in

the regional awards are automatically entered into the national awards which will be held in London in the autumn. These will include Gentoo Construction for the Best volume Housing Scheme and Best Social Housing along with Best Partnership with Jane Darbyshire and David Kendal Architects.

- 3.28 At the national awards in October 2008 Sunderland Building Control's partnership with Miller Homes North East won the Best Partnership Award. In addition the Sunderland Aquatic Centre received a commendation in the category of Best Community Building.

Business Model

- 3.29 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.
- 3.30 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.
- 3.31 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.
- 3.32 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.
- 3.33 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. A drop in application numbers in 2008/2009 has resulted in a failure to reach the budget target. Building Control Surveyors are carrying out work for other sections in order to reduce the costs of running the Building Control Service. This will protect the high level of service given and staff levels within the service. At the end of this financial year Building Control has registered a drop in building regulation applications which has resulted in a failure to reach the budget target.

Customer Satisfaction

- 3.34 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.

- 3.35 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.
- 3.36 Responses from the plan examination process indicate that 96% 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.
- 3.37 With regard to the customer feedback questionnaire issued at completion of work 89% of respondents confirm that the Service provides value for money and 90% satisfied with the overall service.

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 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 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.