

North York Moors National Park Authority
Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee
6 June 2016

Planning Service Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the outcome of this biennial Survey which gives users of the Authority's Planning system the ability to provide customer service feedback.

2. Background

- 2.1 The previous coalition Government abolished some of the historic statutory planning performance indicators and suggested it is up to individual Local Planning Authorities to decide whether and how often to undertake any 'performance management' indicators if they considered them useful for improving public services. They still require PS1/PS2 planning application timeliness returns upon which to adjudge whether Local Planning Authorities should be declared a 'Standards Authority' and to which sanctions apply.
- 2.2 The National Parks Joint Improvement Group (JIG) has previously considered the 'which and how often' matter of performance indicators including Planning Indicators and resolved it would be of mutual benefit to all English National Parks if the Planning Customer Satisfaction indicator was retained on a biennial basis. This Authority also continues to measure the satisfaction of users of other services.

3. Brief Details of the Survey

- 3.1 The survey is now carried out every two years. It comprises twelve standard questions agreed by all NP's together with question 13 being a free text box to allow respondents flexibility to provide comments. The sample size is either 10% of all recipients of a planning decision (subject to a minimum of 400) within the sample year or all those receiving a decision notice within a six month period. The sample period used was April 2015 to September 2015 inclusive. Where multiple applications were made by an applicant/agent only one survey form was sent out. A total of 234 questionnaires were sent out in January and reminders sent out in February with a total of 45 returned.
- 3.2 The headline indicator is derived from question 6. It asks the recipients against a scale of five statements to indicate their satisfaction level with the service. The statements are: very satisfied, fairly satisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, fairly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied. It has been agreed between the NP's that of those expressing an interest, only positive statements would be counted (very or fairly satisfied). The 2015 headline customer satisfaction level for this Authority is 93% of customers who were very or fairly satisfied with the service they received and this includes those who received refusals.

3.3 In previous years the free text comments have provided a useful guide to help drive customer service improvements. Some of the comments from this last survey include:

- Please maintain your excellent professional service standards.
- NYM planning staff are very friendly & helpful, same cannot be said for X or Y services (in other authorities).
- Would like to see statutory consultee and late letter information on your website for committee applications.
- The NYM Planning Team is the best in this whole area despite public spending cuts. They should be sent to Z to train other planners on how to do prompt and courteous service.
- Would like to use your online services but our poor broadband coverage does not permit which results in a 60 mile round trip simply to arrange mapping.
- Advice on which planning forms to submit is not always correct.
- Very pleased to also be advised on grant availability which we did not know about.
- Application charges for small developments should be waived.

3.4 The 93% figure and further information on the other Planning Performance indicators is included at Item 12 on this agenda. What is not obvious from the above list of issues is the sheer number of positive comments about excellent service; however this is reflected in the 93% satisfaction figure.

4. **Previous Surveys**

4.1 Surveys were carried out in the years: 2000/1 (84%) 2003/4 (74%), 2006 (81%), 2009 (76%), 20011/12 (87%) & 2013 (87%). The respective satisfaction results are shown in brackets.

4.2 The Authority's target for this indicator is 85% and the target has been met for third time during challenging financial times and following a year when full pre-application advice charging was introduced.

5. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

5.1 The resources needed to implement any improvements based on the above suggested changes can be met from existing budgets.

6. **Contribution to the National Park Management Plan**

6.1 The most relevant Management Plan policy in this respect is policy E3. It seeks to ensure new development will not have a detrimental impact on the landscape of the National Park. Engagement with customers of the planning service to ensure they are aware of strong planning policies of the Park which seek to avoid detrimental landscape impact and fostering the right kind of (sustainable) development is considered important to meet this Management Plan policy.

7. **Legal Implications**

7.1 None, the surveys are undertaken to help drive customer service improvements to the Planning service.

8. Recommendation

8.1 That Members note the content of the report.

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Background papers to this Report

File ref

1. NYM Planning Customer Satisfaction Survey

1062/6