



Isle of Man
Government

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Consultation Summary & Department Response

Planning & Building Control Customer Survey

January 2023

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture

Planning and Building Control Directorate

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document summarises the results of a consultation which was carried out in 2022 and sets out how the Department intends to respond to the feedback received.
- 1.2 The Built Environment Reform Programme (BERP) was launched in July 2022. This set out actions across a number of areas including simplifying access to the planning system and improving the planning process, including publishing a Customer Charter. The Charter sets out the standards we want to be able to achieve, and the programme provides the mechanism to ensure the resources, processes and prioritisation is in place to meet those standards. The Charter is a living document and so will itself be informed by that work looking at those resources, processes and prioritisation. It includes a commitment to publish more detail about the approach to, and timescales for these changes early in 2023 and in the meantime are committed to identifying and implementing incremental improvements where possible. To inform this work we launched the Customer Survey.

2.0 THE SURVEY

- 2.1 **We Asked** – The survey **was published on the Government Consultation Hub and ran from 21.09.22 to 16.11.22**. It was publicised by a number of methods including Press Release/Social Media, Reference on planning decision letters sent out and E-mails to the opt-in Planning User Group. The survey included a number of questions about topics including which services people used and how they rated the service received, finding information (including about our reception and website) and suggestions for improvements.
- 2.2 **You said** – there were 110 responses to the survey, including 71 from members of the public and 27 from Developer/Applicant/Agent/Architects. This report sets these out in more detail, but a number of key issues/themes can be identified:
- **Speed** - The importance of timely decision making and correspondence;
 - **Consistency** - The importance of consistent advice and consistent service standards;
 - **Communication** - The need to ensure effective communication, including keeping people up-to-date with applications; and
 - **Purpose** – differing views about the purpose of officers/the planning system and consequently questions about the broad approach taken to service delivery.
- 2.3 The results are set out in more detail in appendix 1.

3.0 OUR RESPONSE

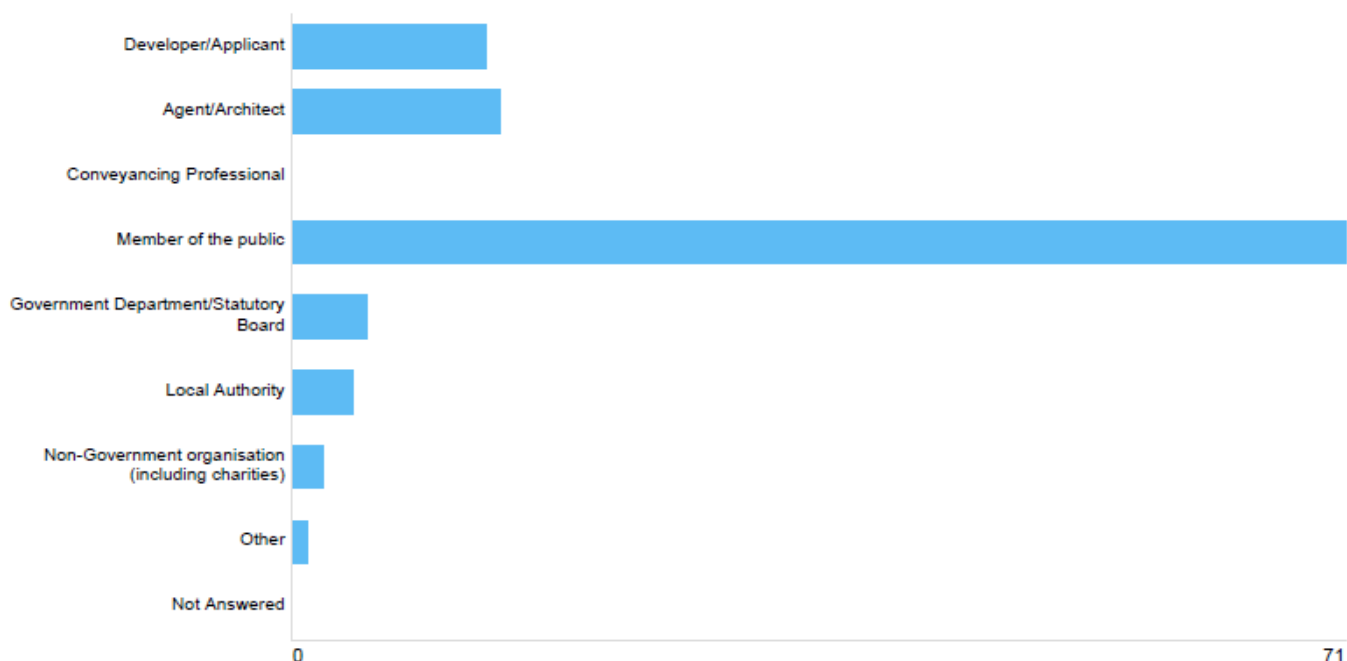
- 3.1 **We Did** - The survey results are very helpful in understanding what aspects of the service are particularly valued for people, what is currently done well and what areas are priorities for improvement. The results of the survey have been discussed with staff and a number of actions have been identified. Some of these are about informing how we progress/prioritise activity already planned as part of the BERP and some of these are additional actions. Our response is set out in more detail in appendix 2.

Appendix 1 - Survey Results

We asked in what capacity people were completing the survey (results below).

In what capacity are you completing this survey?

what capacity are you completing this



We asked how often people used our services. As set out below, most common was general queries.

	Weekly	Monthly	Less Than Monthly	Total (Weekly, Monthly and Less Than Monthly)	Not in Last 12 months
General query	4	15	57	76	34
Planning applications	14	6	52	72	38
Property searches	14	14	31	59	51
Pre-application advice	3	7	45	55	55
Building Control applications	4	8	34	46	64
Building Control site inspections	3	9	23	35	75
Planning Enforcement	1	4	26	31	79
Registration of Historic Buildings	0	1	15	16	94

We asked, **"How would you rate the level of service you have received?"**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Total Excellent – Fair (%)
Property Searches	9	27	11	3	2	47 (90%)
Building Control Applications	11	19	12	1	8	42 (82%)
Queries about whether something requires a planning application	9	19	23	12	12	51 (68%)
Submitting a planning application	11	13	24	9	17	48 (65%)
Commenting on a planning application	6	21	23	13	14	50 (65%)
Pre-application advice	8	21	18	11	17	47 (63%)
The procedure for discharging a condition	0	3	17	6	7	20 (61%)
Attending a planning committee meeting	2	12	11	9	10	25 (57%)
Registration of buildings	0	4	6	0	9	10 (53%)
Making a request to investigate an alleged breach of planning control	2	2	6	8	17	10 (29%)

We asked, **"How easy is it to find information?"**

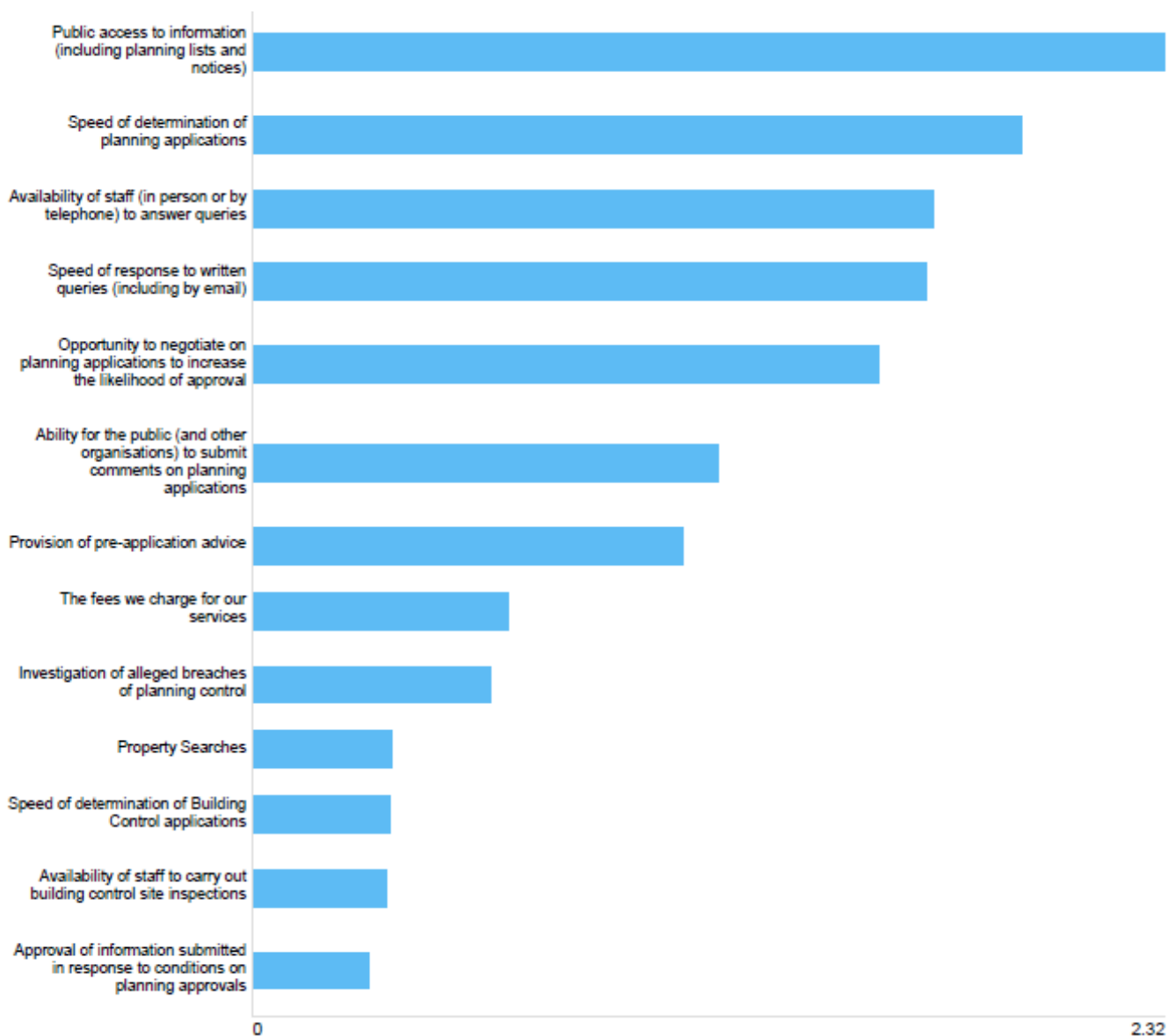
	Very Easy	Easy	Difficult	Very Difficult	Total Very Easy/Easy (%)
At the Counter	13	28	7	8	41 (73%)
Website	14	37	30	18	51 (52%)
Meeting/Site Visit	5	16	16	10	21 (45%)
Writing (inc. email)	6	32	29	20	38 (44%)
Telephone	6	26	27	16	32 (43%)

We asked a free text question about how our website could be improved, and there were a variety of suggestions. Common themes were around:

- Navigation/Links/Search Engine should be improved
- Language should be simplified/consistent
- Content could be improved/expanded
- Viewing Applications/Plans should be improved
- Finding Applications should be improved

We asked **“We have limited resources and therefore it is important that we focus on delivering the services which are most important to our customers. To help us to do this, please choose and rank the top 5 in terms of importance to you, with '1' being the most important”**

It was noted that some respondents noted that everything was equally important.



We asked, **“What would be the most effective way to let the public know when planning applications have been submitted?”** in a free text box and the common answers are below. It is noted that we did not provide any examples/information to support this question and there are some methods that are common in the UK but not used on the Isle of Man. If this question is included in future surveys it might be better to provide options with more supporting text.

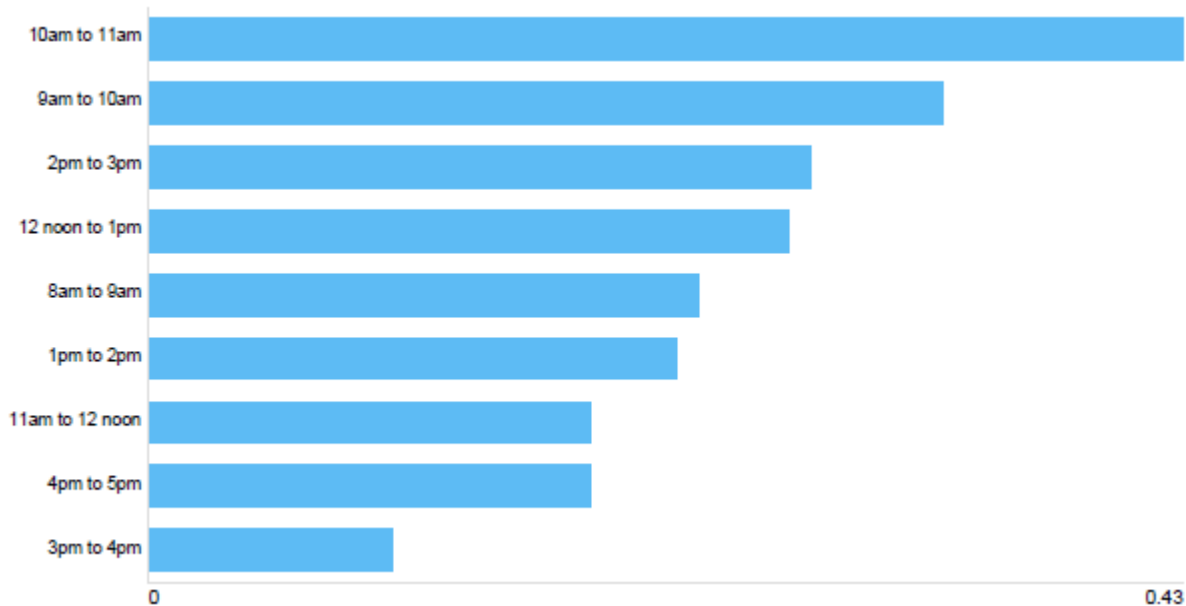
- Website/Weekly List
- Newspapers
- Site Notices
- Current System is fine
- Social Media
- Sign-Up Alerts
- Write to nearby properties

We asked, **“If you have visited our reception counter in the past 12 months, what was your main reason for doing so?”**

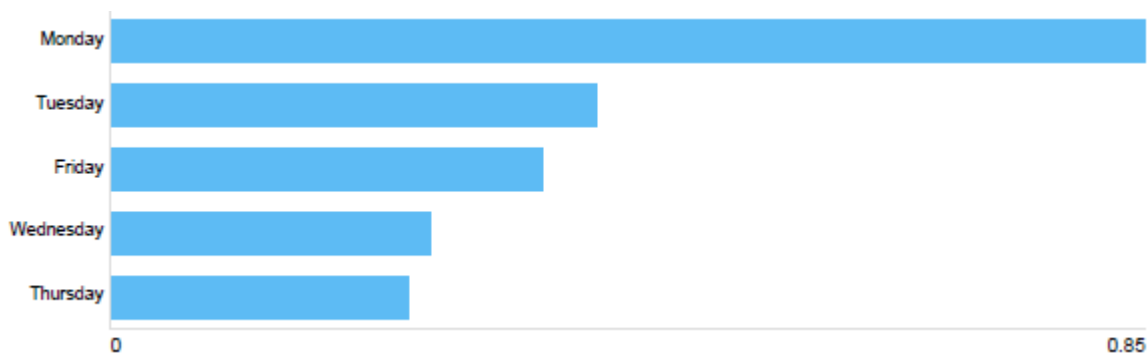
Reason	No.
Submitting a planning application	24
Pre-application advice	22
Building Control applications	15
Planning history investigation	12
Queries about whether something is Development or Permitted Development	6
Other	6
Commenting on a planning application	4
Discharging a condition	3
Property Searches	3
Registration of Buildings	3
Making a request to investigate an alleged breach	0

N.B. 55 respondents had not visited the reception counter in the last 12 months.

We asked, **“What times of day would you prefer to visit our counter? Please select the two most convenient times”**.



We asked, **“If you needed to, which days would you prefer to visit our reception counter? Please select your top two preferred days”**.



We asked, **“Do you find our social media content useful (e.g. our Facebook page)?”**.

Of those that used social media and followed our content they indicated –

Response	No.
Not Useful at All	18
Slightly Useful	12
Extremely Useful	7
Moderately Useful	6

We also included a free text box about social media and a number of comments were received, including around:

- It is inappropriate/not needed
- Wasn't Aware of It/Poor Profile
- Not engaging/lack of content

We asked, **"How would you rate the following over the past 12 months?"**

N.B. In the process of considering the results it was noted that the options of "Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor" would have been better as, "Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Very Poor" and this would also have aligned with the earlier question. We will review these options in future versions of the survey.

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Total Excellent – Fair (%)
The attitude of our staff	10	13	21	23	19	67 (78%)
The usefulness of advice we gave	10	8	16	22	25	56 (69%)
Overall quality of customer service	8	7	14	26	30	55 (65%)
The clarity of communication	8	7	13	26	31	54 (64%)
The overall outcome	9	7	15	19	33	50 (60%)
How you were kept updated by our staff	6	7	6	24	37	43 (54%)
The length of time taken to resolve your issue	4	7	10	17	48	38 (44%)

We asked, **"Would you like to give any further feedback on the service provided by our staff?"**

this was a free text box and responses included themes such as:

- Too Slow
- Poor Customer Care
- Inconsistent Advice/Service
- Need more staff/more experienced staff

We asked, **“How do you think we could improve the existing services we provide?”** this was a free text box and responses included themes such as:

- Improve Speed
- Be more positive/helpful
- More Staff/Improve Training
- Improve Communication
- Proportionate approach for developments
- Simplify process/less bureaucracy
- More consistent advice/decisions
- More Permitted Development
- Improve Pre-Application Advice
- Decision Making Process/Transparency/Probity
- More consistent service
- More Enforcement
- Improve website
- More opportunity for negotiation

We also asked whether there were any services we provided that were no longer required or any new services we should provide. Overall, the comments suggested that we should focus on better delivery of existing services.

Appendix 2 – Our Response

- A2.1 The survey results are very helpful in understand what aspects of the service are particularly valued for people, what is currently done well and what areas are priorities for improvement. The results of the survey have been discussed with staff and a number of actions have been identified. Some of these are about informing how we progress/prioritise activity already planned as part of the BERP and some of these are additional actions.
- A2.2 As part of the BERP at the time of launching the survey we had also published the Customer Charter, launched a Major Applications Process and published more Performance Data. We will keep these under review.
- A2.3 Since launching the survey, a number of actions have been completed including:
- We have now published additional guidance for applicants in relation to economic benefit, to help applicants to include information within applications to explain the material economic benefits for the planning process. This is alongside a process agreed with the Department for Enterprise to act as a formal consultee in the process to help provide technical advice.
 - We have now published additional guidance on ecological information to support applications, to help applicants to understand the information likely to be required as part of a planning application upfront and therefore avoid delays later on
 - We have published an Operational Policy on planning publicity (including Neighbour Notification and Planning Committee, both of which will go live at the beginning of January, and the Planning Notification Service, which will go live later in 2023). This also clarifies the approach in relation to the Description of Applications and the responsibilities of applicants to ensure this is accurate. To help with this we have published Guidance on Descriptions
 - We have now published a form and clarification of the process for Approval of Information Required by Conditions (with a dedicated e-mail)
- A2.4 The numbers fluctuate, but we receive around 1400 applications a year. There will always be a number of 'live' applications and we have set ourselves the target of running with 300 pending applications. On the 08.07.22 there were 456 pending applications. Since the beginning of September we have used additional temporary staff and focused on addressing the number of pending planning applications (i.e. post validation and pre-decision notice) and on 26.01.23 there were 344 pending applications. We will continue to work to monitor and reduce this further. Through the BERP it will be important to improve efficiencies and ensure sufficient resources to ensure the workload can be addressed in a timely manner.
- A2.5 In response to the survey a number of actions have been identified, as summarised below.
- We will review staffing resources and functions moving forward, and review the Customer Charter to ensure there is a consistent understanding of the purpose/role of officers. As part of this we will look at how to improve staff training, development and support, including carrying out training to improve customer care skills and ensure consistent service delivery.
 - We have reviewed the counter opening times and also the times when a Duty Planner is available – to both ensure that the timings focus on the times that our customers have said are most important to them and also to allow resources to be re-focused on other areas

which have been highlighted as important, such as responding to queries and processing planning applications (including the new Neighbour Notification service).

- We have made further targeted changes to the website and will continue to identify and implement improvements to this, with a focus on improving navigation and clarity. We are exploring ways for how customers can more easily track the progress of their applications.
- We will review our IT systems to improve workflow management and deliver efficiencies.
- We will explore ways we can front load the planning application process to identify issues/requirements for additional information sooner to avoid delays later.
- We will review other aspects of how we deliver services including social media, how we deal with general planning queries and the fees we charge.

A2.6 In addition to the above we are looking at ways to encourage ongoing feedback and to identify and implement incremental improvements to our services. As part of this, we are carrying out 1-to-1 meetings with consultees and our most frequent customers to seek more detailed feedback on improvements that can be made. We will also work with other Departments in the delivery of wider aspects of the BERP, including reviewing Permitted Development. We will repeat the customer survey on a regular basis to help us to review progress and identify future improvements.