

South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

Customer Service Survey May/June 2012

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1 Executive Summary

This purpose of this report is to acquire feedback from our customers on the services we provide. The 2010/11 survey revealed that owners felt they had not been included in the building control process. It was a service aim through 2011/12 to engage more with owners and keep them informed on their build.

The survey revealed that this aim has been achieved with 47% of respondents being owners. Though overall the service received positive feedback several areas for improvement have been highlighted and have been set as targets for this years' delivery plan.

Within the partners survey forms an additional question was included to gauge interest in a focus group. Unfortunately only five partners responded to this question of which four were interested in quarterly meetings at lunch time. This was not an adequate response to base the focus groups on and so further information will be gauged through one-to-one meetings with their main STG contact.

2 Methodology

A postal survey was conducted during May and June 2012 by the administration team on applications received between 01 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. A total of 573 individuals were made contact with of which 115 responded (20% response rate). The respondents covered the three authority areas to which we provide the building control service (Gravesham, Medway and Swale).

3 Survey Results

There were two types of survey forms that had identical questions except the survey which went to our partner designers/architects had an additional question related to focus groups. This was

done to take the opportunity to gauge our partners' interest in participating in this type of feedback session.

3.1 Q1: Have you used our service(s) before?

Of those that returned the survey 60% were previous users of our service with 40% as new customers.

3.2 Q2: In which capacity do you use the Building Control service?

Of those whose contact with our service was not their first occurrence; architects/designers were the greater users with 80% of new customers classified as Owners. The main target audience of this survey was Owners hence architects, designers, builders and developers not featuring high.

Who used the service	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Architect/Designer	46	7	30
Builder	10	9	10
Developer	1	0	1
Owner	25	80	47
Other...	17	4	12
Base: all respondents (n=115)			

3.3 Q3: What part of the service have you come into contact with?

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of services provided. Of those asked 115 chose to answer this question. Those respondents new to building control mainly contacted the office to book site inspections (85%), frequent users are split between the plans examination (75%) and site inspections (61%).

Aspect of the service	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Plans examination	75	28	57
Site inspection	61	85	70
Administration	42	13	30
Calculation checking	39	13	29
Other	1	0	1
Base: all respondents (n=115)			

3.4 Q4: Rate the service delivery?

Of those who responded to the survey 97% answered this question. On all areas of service delivery 86% to 96% of customers found the service Good to Excellent. With the highest number of respondents being owners this is an excellent result. One respondent felt that the availability and attitude of staff needs to improve.

Service	Poor	OK	Good	Very Good	Excellent
	% of respondents within survey				
Advice given	1	6	12	41	41
Availability of staff	2	8	17	33	40
Attitude of staff	3	7	17	39	34
Local knowledge	1	6	13	42	40
Speed of plans examination	1	4	10	47	39
Number of site inspections	1	6	19	40	34
Quality of service	1	4	10	47	39
Overall value for money	5	9	20	40	26
Base: all respondents (n=105)					

3.5 Q6: If a regular user has the quality of service:

It is not only important in knowing that you are providing a good service but whether that service has improved or more importantly declined and if so where. 53% of respondents answered this question with the 31% seeing an improvement in service delivery. Of the two respondents (3%) that saw a decline no reason was given. On reviewing their other ratings service delivery was rated Good to Very Good and staff found to be helpful, efficient, punctual, fair and practical. Overall service impression scored Very Positive and Positive. With no comments recorded I am unable to determine what part of the service they feel has declined.

Quality of service	
	% of respondents within survey
Improved	31
Remained unchanged	66
Declined	3
Base: all respondents (n=61)	

3.6 Q8: How do you find the Building Control staff?

Respondents were asked about their communication and interaction with staff. Whether they used the service frequently or were a new customer over 52% found the service provided was fair, efficient and helpful. Staff were found to be knowledgeable and practical in seeking solutions. Of the 3% that found the service unapproachable only one gave a comment that the speed of plan checking/issuing decision and giving advice needs to be improved. Reviewing their responses on aspects of the service two of the three rated the service Good to Excellent with only one rating service delivery between Poor to OK. As all types of applications were surveyed this may have been from a regularisation (enforcement action).

Staff	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Helpful	90	76	84

Staff	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Efficient	72	52	60
Punctual	43	59	50
Fair	61	52	55
Flexible	58	20	60
Practical	70	30	54
Difficult	0	0	0
Knowledgeable	64	46	57
Officious	6	2	4
Unapproachable	4	0	3
Base: all respondents (n=115)			

3.7 Q9: What is your overall impression of the service?

Respondents who had used the service before had a positive impression with 87% rating the service Positive to Very Positive on overall service delivery with 94% overall rating Positive to Very Positive. The one negative response was again from the respondent who felt that the availability and attitude of staff needed to improve.

Overall Impression	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Very positive	55	37	48
Positive	32	41	36
Average	9	15	11
Negative	0	0	0
Very negative	1	0	1
Base: all respondents (n=115)			

3.8 Q10: How important are the following features of a Building Control service?

Quality of service featured as the most important with 95% of respondents rating it as Important to Very Important. 93% felt that provision of advice at one point of contact was Important to Very Important. Impartiality of the service was rated high with 85% respondents rating it as Important to Very Important. The location of the service was also rated highly with 81% of respondents rating this Important to Very Important.

Features of service	Very Important	Important	Not very important	Not at all important	No opinion
	% of respondents within survey				
Cost of service	41	40	12	1	6
Public accountability	33	42	16	0	9
Quality of service	78	17	0	2	3
Locally based	50	32	11	3	4
Impartiality	40	45	10	0	5
Clearly defined inspections carried out at all key stages	40	51	3	0	7
Provision of advice on all aspects of project at one point of contact	56	37	4	0	4
Base: all respondents (n=108)					

3.9 Q11: Have you used or are you aware of following services offered via STG Consultancy?

96% of the respondents to our survey were aware of other services we are able to offer through the consultancy. The majority of respondents (55%) were aware of SAPs, EPCs and CSH which may be more to do with the fact they all relate to new dwellings and if they are creating new dwellings they would have required to obtain a SAP and EPC and in some cases a CSH.

Consultancy	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Standard Assessment	27	0	27

Consultancy	Yes	No	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
Procedure (SAP)			
Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)	15	0	15
Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH)	13	0	13
Simplified Building Energy Model (SBEM)	9	0	9
Access Statement	5	0	5
Fire Risk assessment	9	1	10
Party Wall	8	1	9
Display Energy Certificates (DEC)	3	0	3
Condition Survey	4	0	4
Base: all respondents (n=110)			

4 Equality and Diversity

In order to evaluate whether we are providing fair access to our service along with the survey questionnaire customer were sent an equality and diversity monitoring sheet. Following the comments from Joint Committee in 2011 to the June 2011 review the monitoring sheet was shortened to information that would be of use to the service. Of the 115 who responded to our building control survey 88% completed or partly completed the Equality and Diversity Monitoring survey.

4.1 Q1: What is your gender?

All respondents answered this question with Males forming the largest group with 83% of contact being from them.

4.2 Q2: Which category best suits your age range?

The majority of our contacts fell between 55 - 64 age range.

Age range	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 or above	No answer
	% of respondents within survey						
Male	0	2	14	13	39	30	1
Female	0	12	12	35	18	18	6
Overall	0	4	14	17	36	28	2
Base: all respondents (n=101)							

4.3 Q3: Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person / or enquiring on behalf of a disabled person?

Though the main respondents were related to non-disabled works with an overall of 93% responding as No this was largely due to ceasing to send survey questionnaires to owners where disabled works took place. This decision was taken due to telephone calls from these owners who, due to the nature of the work, did not get involved in the development and were unable to provide feedback. The developers for these works tended to be the same companies. In 2011/12 building control received 315 disabled applications which equated to 18% of applications received that year.

Disabled enquiry	Yes	No	No answer
	% of respondents within survey		
Male	5	95	0
Female	3	14	0
Overall	7	93	0
Base: all respondents (n=101)			

4.4 Q4: Please choose one option only (the one that best describes your racial/ethnic origin)

Though White British at 95% was the largest group which utilised our service during the 2011/12, 5% covered a variety of other groups.

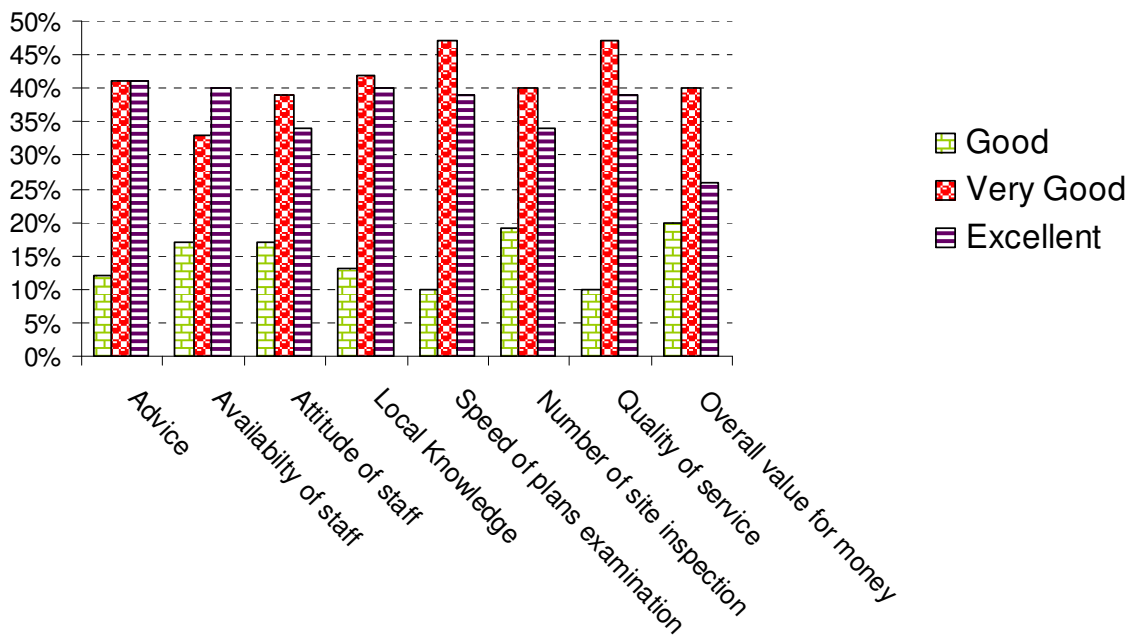
Race and ethnicity	Male	Female	Overall
	% of respondents within survey		
White British	95	94	95
Multi-Ethnic			
White Irish			
White & Black African	1		1
Any other White background			
Asian or Asian British	2	6	3
Indian	1	0	1
Caribbean			
Any other Ethnic background			
Other: Arab			
Base: all respondents (n=101)			

5 Summary of Findings

5.1 Service Delivery

With owners being the target for this years' customer survey, it was a good result to receive the highest number of respondents from this category group. On all areas of service delivery 86% to 96% of customers found the service Good to Excellent. One respondent felt that the availability and attitude of staff needs to improve. Knowledge of staff, speed of plan checking and number of site inspections all scored between 93% and 96%.

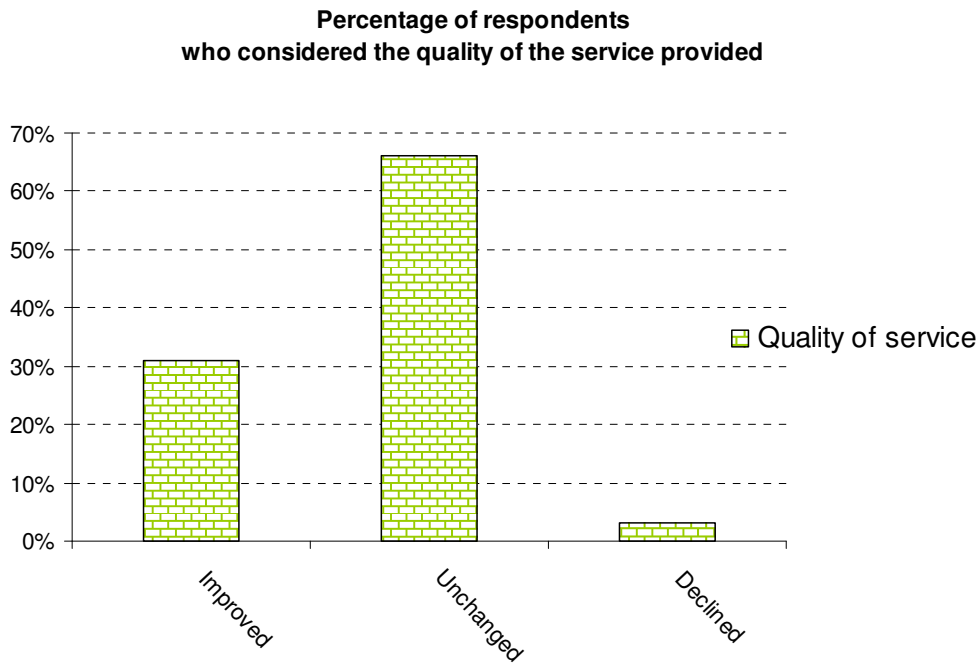
Percentage of respondents who considered these services Good to Excellent



5.2 Quality of Service

It is not only important in knowing that you are providing a good service but whether that service has improved or more importantly declined and if so where. 31% of respondents have seen an improvement in service delivery while 66% feel the service level has remained the same. Of the two respondents (3%) that saw a decline no reason was given. On reviewing their other ratings

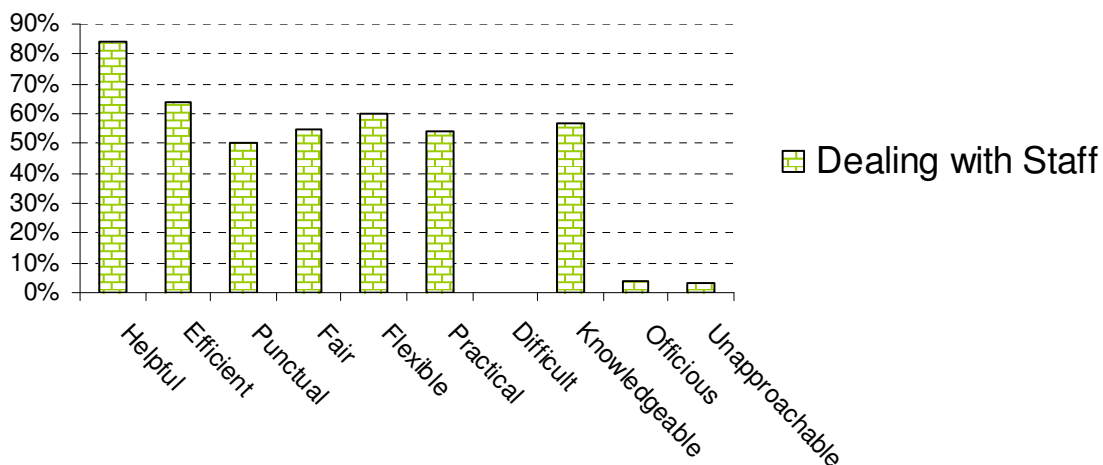
service delivery was rated Good to Very Good. I am unable to determine what part of the service they feel has declined.



5.3 Building Control staff

Respondents were asked about their communication and interaction with staff. 84% felt that staff were helpful with 60% to 64% feeling that the staff were efficient and had a flexible attitude. 54% to 57% found the staff to be knowledgeable and practical in seeking solutions. Of the three that found the service unapproachable only one gave a comment stating “that the speed of plan checking/issuing decision and giving advice needs to be improved”. Reviewing their responses on aspects of the service two of the three rated the service Good to Excellent with only one rating service delivery between Poor to OK. As all types of applications were surveyed this may have been from a regularisation (enforcement action).

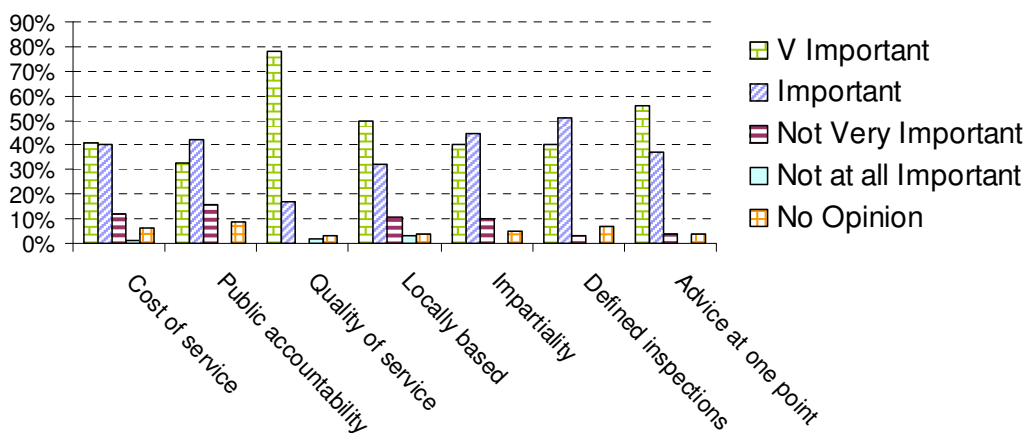
**Percentage of respondents
who considered the quality of the service provided**



5.4 Important Features of Building Control

Quality of service featured as the most important with 95% of respondents rating it as Important to Very Important. 93% felt that provision of advice at one point of contact was Important to Very Important. Impartiality of the service was rated high with 85% respondents rating it as Important to Very Important. The location of the service was also rated highly with 81% of respondents rating this Important to Very Important.

Important features of Building Control



5.5 Comments from customers

Within the survey customers were asked for their comments at three specific points. The first comment asked what aspect of the service did they find particularly good. Of the feedback four topical areas appeared; 52% felt the advice from staff was excellent with a personal service with comments such as, “able to get advice and guidance over the phone and in person - very quick response” and “very good advice helped with my build”. 72% felt the attitude of staff was good - “availability of staff, punctuality of staff, knowledge of staff”. 39% considered flexibility of inspections and the ability to provide solutions added value to their project – “flexibility and assistance in discussing alternative methods of compliance to the regulations”.

The second comment asked for what improvements they felt were required. Of the feedback 22% of respondents provided comments, however, 65% of these were complimentary such as “all is very good and difficult to point to improvement”. 40% highlighted areas for improvement such as “removal of unnecessary conditions from approvals”, “responses can be variable” and “there could be a better reception area at your offices”.

The third comment asked for any other comment they wished to make. 21% of respondents commented overall with 89% feeling the service they received was excellent - “pleased with help received and believe good communication from department helped. Some time people need a little help pointing in right direction and look to see all departments being helpful and take the stress out of the situation”. Two comments emerged for improvement the first asked for a possible online site inspection booking service and the second “speed of service may be affected by amount of consultancy services”.

6 Conclusions

Though there was only a 20% response to the postal survey this was a successful return as previous postal surveys have only accomplished a 2% response. The survey also reached our target audience of owners with 47% of responses received from this group. The skills, knowledge and attitude of staff have all been highlighted by customers as excellent with their ability to be flexible and reach solutions likewise being praised.

The quality of the service customers received needs to be maintained as this featured the highest at 95%. Retaining one point of contact is important to customers with 93% rating this as Important to Very Important. The location of the service is also important to customer with 81% feeling the service needs to be local.

Improvements do need to be made with a one comment noting that “site surveyors to be consistent in procedures”. Consistency has been highlighted as an aim in this years’ delivery plan. Speed of plan checking was also noted - “plan checking and speed of reply” as an area for improvement. Meeting the plan checking targets has also been set as a priority for this year. Unfortunately due to the location and setup of the offices we are unable to make any changes to the reception area but this will be taken under consideration when the partnership needs to relocate at the end of Medway Council’s tenancy of building.

Within the partners survey forms an additional question was included to gauge interest in a focus group. Unfortunately only five partners responded to this question of which four were interested in quarterly meetings at lunch time.