

# Development Enquiry Centre

## Our Achievements

### **Development Enquiry Centre retains Customer Service Excellence Standard April 2011.**

The City Development Enquiry Centre based in Leonardo Building have retained their Customer Service Excellence Award.

The team provide advice on development related matters to members of the public by telephone, email and face to face. The Development Enquiry Centre were originally awarded the National Standard for Customer Service Excellence in April 2009, one of the first in the country to gain the new award, and undergo an external assessment each year to ensure the standard is being maintained.

Chief Planning Officer, Phil Crabtree said "We are delighted that the Development Enquiry Service has retained this Standard, it shows our commitment to providing the highest quality of service to customers as possible in these challenging times. The many compliments we receive in the comments book are testament to the high regard that the public have for our staff".

The standard is part of a national Government initiative that aims to raise the quality of service to customers by testing the ability to deliver the things which customers think are important- timeliness, quality of the service, professionalism and staff attitude.

The Development Enquiry Centre has been working to make its services better for customers by finding out what customers would like and then putting the changes into place wherever possible. Customers of the enquiry centre have been helping to make improvements through their comments and suggestions and by talking to the service about what they need. Changes have been made to the information available for customers in easy to understand leaflets and the information provided on the internet, training for staff is delivered to ensure that accurate information is given out and there are easier ways of getting in touch with the service.

Please find set out a summary of the services we provide and performance we have achieved during the past year.

## What are our service standards?

What do we do

We provide information and advice on:

- The planning system and making a planning application
- Current and previously decided planning applications
- The Unitary Development Plan and other planning policies
- Building regulations
- Council land and buildings for sale or rent

We have computer terminals where you can view basic details of all planning applications made since 1974.

With 24hrs notice we can provide a planning history on a site back to 1948.

You can see details of the Unitary Development Plan and other planning policies, listed buildings and conservation areas.

We hold details of Council land and buildings for sale or rent.

## **What you can expect from us – our service standards**

1. Answer more than 90 per cent of public telephone calls to the Development Enquiry Centre.
2. Ensure that 80 per cent of enquiries to the Development Enquiry Centre are resolved at first point of contact (in person or by telephone);
3. Acknowledge emails within 1 working day;
4. Respond to your written enquiry within ten working days;
5. Make current planning files available to you, on the same day.

However, as some files are stored off site it may take up to 5 working days to make the file available .

## Our Performance

### 2011 Annual performance Key Facts

#### Telephone Performance

- 52,521 telephone calls were received by the Development Enquiry Centre
- 92% of all calls offered were answered
- 57% of all calls were answered within 20 seconds
- 87% of all calls were resolved at first point of contact.

The average number of enquiries made each month was 4376 or 1094 per week.

#### Correspondence

During 2011 we received 5555 letters and emails. 98% were responded to within 10 working days. In 2010 we received 4271 and responded to 99% within 10 working days. There has been a 30% increase in the number written contacts received.

The number of email contacts in 2011 has increased to 4502 from 3043 in 2010. This is an increase of 48% on the previous year.

The number of letters/enquiry forms received in 2011 has reduced to 1053 in 2010 from 1228, a reduction of 14%.

#### Face to Face

The number of recorded face to face contacts in the reception at the Leonardo Building was 12,846 with 97% being resolved at the time of the customer's visit. The majority of contacts (60%) were for pre arranged meetings and planning enquiries (15%).

The number of face to face contacts has reduced by 17% compared to the previous year.

### Your Views On Our Performance

Your Views fall into three categories

**Comments** - If you've got an idea for improving our services we want to hear from you. Perhaps you can suggest how we can provide better value for money or do things differently in future. Just tell us and we'll look into your suggestion, see how it might work and then let you know what we're planning to do.

**Complaints** - Unfortunately things do sometimes go wrong. So if you're not happy with one of our services or the way we have dealt with you, we want to know. This gives us the opportunity to put things right and, where appropriate, change the way we work to improve our services. We always try and resolve complaints on the spot, but where that is not possible, they will be investigated and then we'll tell you what we plan to do about it.

**Compliments** - It's always nice to get a pat on the back, and by telling us when we do a good job we can ensure that the staff responsible are properly thanked. It also helps us to identify areas of best practice that other teams within the council can use to help them deliver their services. All compliments are acknowledged and we let you know if we've been able to use your compliment to improve service delivery.

You can contact us at [DEC@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:DEC@leeds.gov.uk)

## Customer Service Monitoring 2011

The Development Enquiry Centre care about the service we provide, so we welcome and encourage your comments. Below you will find a number of useful statistics, including the number of compliments, complaints and comments we received during the last year.

Month - 2011	Complaints Received	Comments Received	Compliments Received	Ombudsman Complaints Received
January 2011	0	2	2	0
February	0	6	2	0
March	0	2	0	0
April	3	6	1	0
May	0	6	4	0
June	0	13	11	0
July	0	4	3	0
Aug	0	3	3	0
September	0	7	5	0
October	1	4	0	0
November	0	2	2	0
December	1	3	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0</b>

In 2011 we received 5 complaints about the service. Information on the nature of the upheld complaints and the actions we took in light of the complaint are below

1. Caller was waiting on the telephone to get through to the Enquiry Centre. We apologised and investigated the use of call answering time being given to customer while they are waiting for the call to be answered. Unfortunately our IT package does not support this function. We wrote to the customer to explain why we could not access this facility.
2. A response to an email enquiry did not include advice on making a pre application submission and on reflection should have done. DEC staff reminded to include a reference to this service where appropriate.
3. Meeting room in reception too cold for a meeting. Civic Buildings staff asked to leave room door ajar so ambient reception area room temperature can improve air temp in meeting room. Customer contacted to apologise and advised the steps we were taking.

The Development Enquiry Centre has not received any Local Government Ombudsman complaints in 2011.

The comments were taken from our book in reception, and anyone leaving adverse comments is responded to, providing they leave their contact details. There were 2 adverse comments in 2011. The Development Enquiry Centre continues to survey customers.

The results of our latest customer surveys are shown below.

### **Development Enquiry Centre (DEC) Internal Customer Survey Aug 2011**

#### **Background**

This is the second round of the internal customer survey which is to follow-up from the previous one conducted in February 2011. This second survey was done to see whether the issues which our internal customers highlighted as problems in February have been addressed.

Again, the survey was rolled out via the Council's 'Talking Point' system and all responses were given on-line, via an email sent to the internal staff group email addresses. These were:

- Planning Services officers (Planners and administration)
- Building Control officers (Surveyors and administration)
- Planning Compliance officers
- Sustainable Development Unit officers
- Forward Planning officers.

The survey was run between the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011 and the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2011 (1 work week) contained the same questions as last time, and took approximately 2-5 minutes to complete (depending on how much input was given in the text boxes).

#### **Results, main findings and comparison with previous survey**

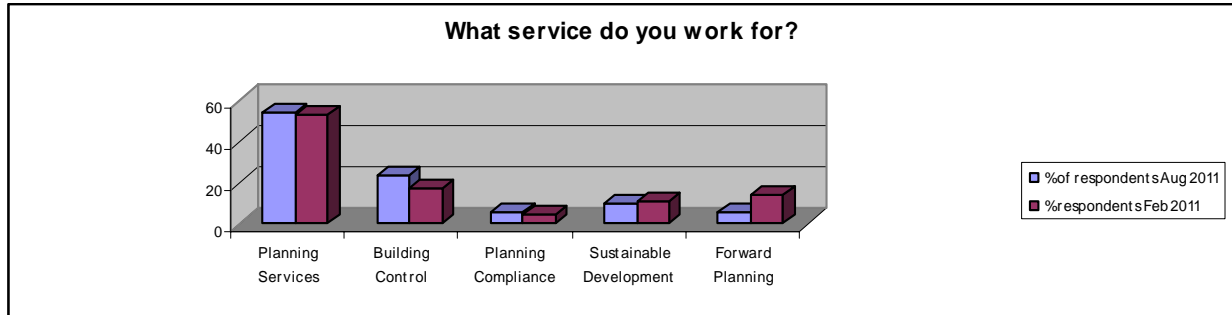
A total of 47 officers accessed the survey. This is a drop from 95 in February, but this could be down to it being the Summer holiday period. Again, the report writer was privy to the results which show individual results and comments, and therefore able to determine from which departments the comments were coming from. However, no officer names were included in the result data.

*Q1: Which service do you work for?*

<b>There were 47 responses to this question</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Planning Services	25	54%
Building Control	11	24%

Planning Compliance	3	6%
Sustainable Development	5	10%
Forward Planning	3	6%

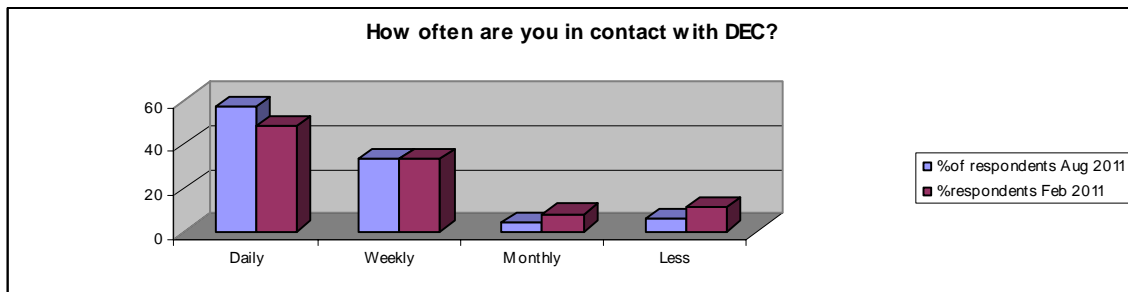
Graph shows comparisons with previous survey.



Q2: How often are you in contact with the DEC?

There were 47 responses to this question		No of respondents	% of respondents
Daily		27	57%
Weekly		15	33%
Monthly		2	4%
Less		3	6%

Graph shows comparisons with previous survey.



Q3: On what types of issues are you in contact with DEC for?

We received 39 responses to this question and the main themes are set out below.

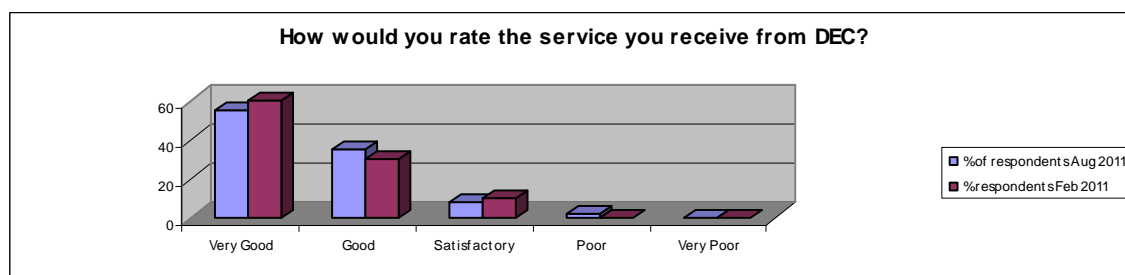
- Planning applications and pre-applications
- Duty planner enquiries
- Compliance complaints
- BC fee enquiries
- Site visit booking for BC/general enquiries
- Meetings / customers in reception

These are many of the same themes which were highlighted last survey.

Q4: How would you rate the service you receive from DEC?

There were 40 responses to this question	No of respondents	% of respondents
Very Good	22	55%
Good	14	35%
Satisfactory	3	8%
Poor	1	2%
Very Poor	0	0%

Graph shows comparison with previous survey.



If a respondent rated us as 'satisfactory', 'poor' or 'very poor' they were asked why they rated us as such. The 4 responses were:

- Failure to take messages properly, obtain information on new cases, constantly ring other officers' numbers rather than take a message (Rated the service as 'Poor') – Planning Compliance
- No comment. (Satisfactory) – Planning Services
- Sometimes they do give out wrong fee information or check to see if application handed in over counter is signed (Satisfactory) – Building Control
- Because I don't have daily dealings with them I can't make a proper judgement (Satisfactory) – Planning Services

*Q6: If there was ONE area you think DEC could improve on, what would it be?*

We received 28 responses to this question, the most common themes set out below.

- Can't think of any/none.
- Not enough information being sought before transferring calls.
- Learn difference between PD, duty planner and pre-application questions.
- Ring the right officer.
- Take messages when officers are not in.
- Issues with building control fees.

*Q7: Are there any other services you would like to see DEC offering / General comments?*

There were 20 response to this question. Some of these have been edited for ease of reading.

- A decent one.
- No, DEC staff already work exceptionally hard under a great deal of pressure.
- No, but I do consider the proposals currently under discussion to relocate DEC to a separate site and/or integrate them with a general 'contact centre' to be retrograde.
- Pre-app service.
- I get everything I require from DEC at present.
- A back up site visit service for those times when an officer is struggling to view a site in time.
- Generally very good service – would be a shame to lose DEC if the current proposal to merge them with other customer services comes to fruition.
- Could, or indeed are, simple BC enquiries be dealt with by DEC? Are you getting enough training from BC?
- Promotion of Leeds City Council Building Control Services.

## **Conclusion**

Once again, 90% of internal customers rated DEC as Very Good or Good. Therefore, the DEC staff can be confident that they are still providing a service which is both appreciated by other members of staff, and constantly acknowledged as providing a service which internal officers rate highly.

More than half of the staff who responded this time, albeit a lower number than the last survey, were in contact with the DEC on a daily basis. In a change of theme from the previous survey, officers seemed to be in touch with DEC most often for general planning, pre-application and duty planner enquiries. However, this is probably a reflection on the fact that the most respondents were from Planning Services.

The previous survey highlighted an issue with DEC staff not having an awareness of who does what in Forward Planning. Of the three respondents from Forward Planning, no adverse comments to this effect have been highlighted. Given this, the conclusion here is that the training which Forward Planning provided to DEC in light of the last survey has been taken on board by officers.

However, officers from planning services and building control have highlighted issues with not enough information being sought before transferring calls, calls being put through to incorrect officers and also problems with building control fees and general issues.

Overall, however, the satisfaction rating has remained a constant 90%. Again this needs to be applauded given the full time equivalent in DEC is still averaging out at around 6 officers.

## Development Enquiry Centre – Reception Area Customer Satisfaction Survey July/August 2011

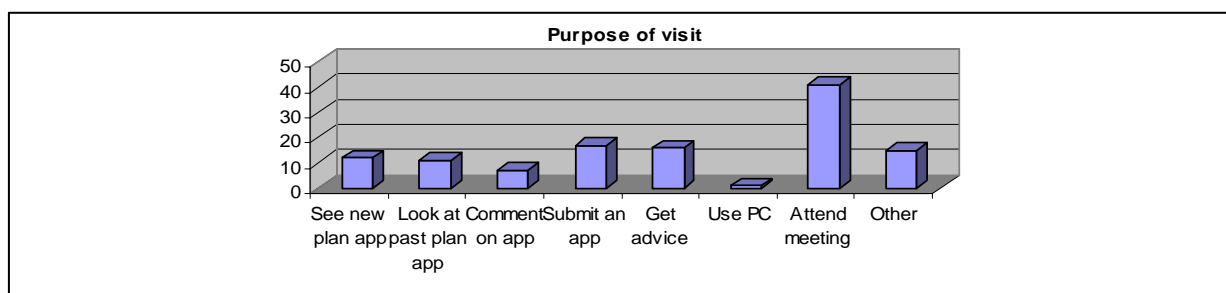
### Background

During the months of July and August 2011, a customer satisfaction survey was conducted in the main reception area of The Leonardo Building, 2 Rossington Street, Leeds, LS2. Staff in the Development Enquiry Centre presented the forms to all customers that visited the reception.

The survey attempted to find out what customers thought about their experience when visiting the Development Enquiry Centre and the ways we could improve the services that we offer.

Below are the results and the main findings of the survey which was conducted. A total of 130 forms were presented, with 129 being completed (all or in part). There was 1 customer who refused a survey form. For the first time, customers were also given a basic equality monitoring form to fill in. Of the 129 survey forms which were filled out, 88 people also completed the equality monitoring form in some way.

### Q1: What is the purpose of your visit?



The results showed that customers visiting the Enquiry Centre were visiting for a wide range of purposes. The most common purpose being to attend a meeting with 34%, although this is a drop on last year. The next most common purposes were to submit an application (14%) and to get some advice (13%).

Comparisons with previous surveys:

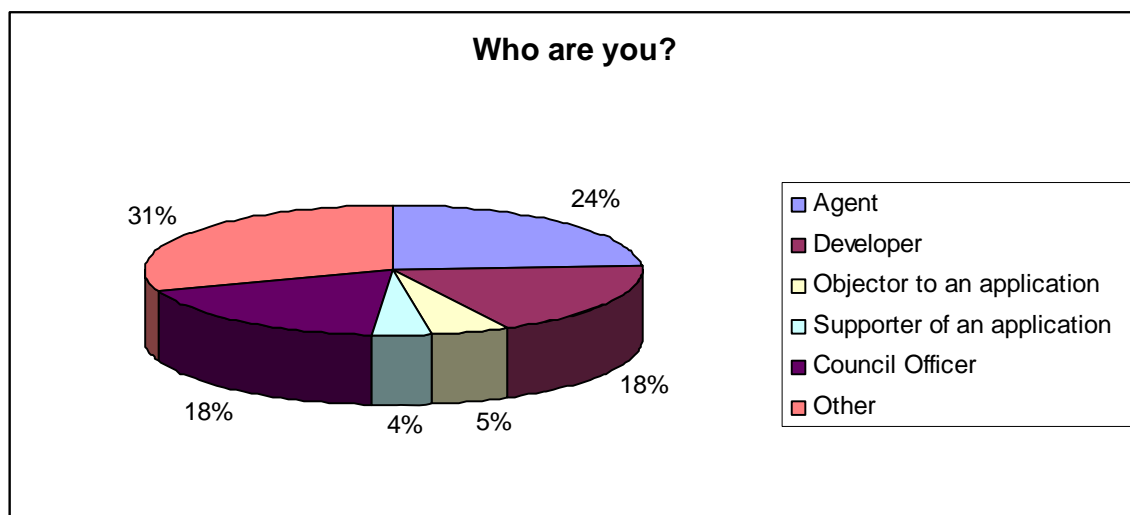
What is the purpose of your visit?	2009 %	2010 %	2011 %
Look at a current planning application	22	10	10
Look at a past planning application	11	8	9
Comment on an application	4	3	6
Submit an application	17	9	14
Get some advice	20	8	13
Use the PCs	5	5	1
Attending a meeting	15	48	34
Other	8	8	13

13% of people recorded the purpose of their visit as 'Other'. The reasons are listed below:

- Filming
- Training
- Dropping keys off for a colleague
- Xerox engineer
- Investigation
- Delivering a planning application
- To query business rates bill
- Delivering a letter
- NVQ assessor

It is interesting to see that the percentage of people coming in to submit a planning application, coupled with getting some advice has gone up again on 2010. However, people coming in to use the PCs has dropped dramatically on the previous two years.

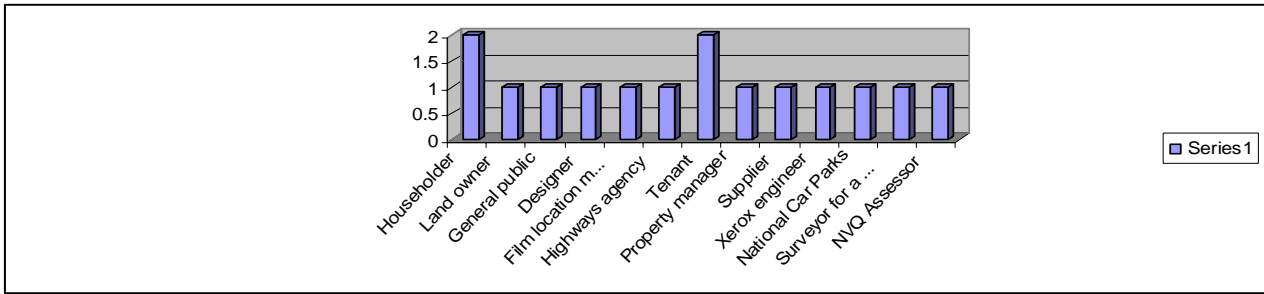
**Q2: Are you: An Agent, Developer, Objector, Supporter, Council Officer or Other?**



When compared to the previous two years' surveys, the results are broadly the same.

Who are you?	2009 %	2010 %	2011 %
An Agent	23	21	24
Developer	17	18	18
Objector to an application	11	9	5
Supporter of an application	4	6	4
Council officer	6	19	18
Other	28	26	30

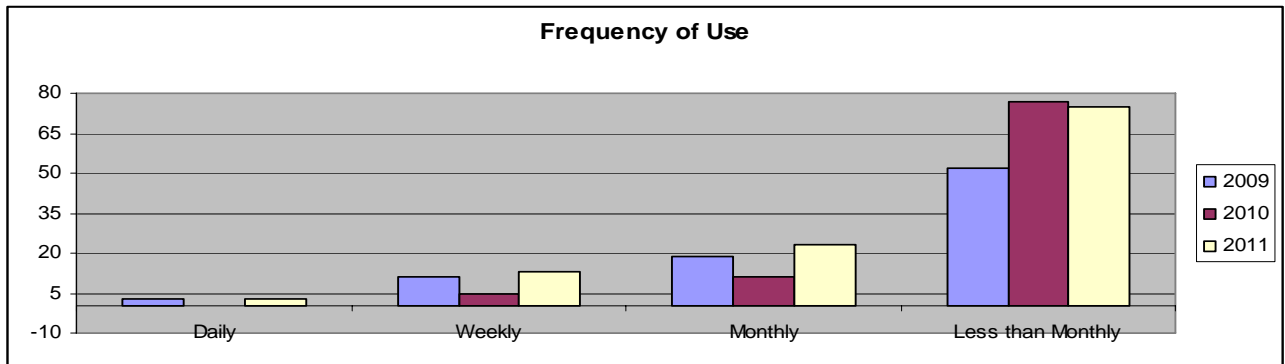
Of the respondents who entered 'Other' into this category, the results are below:



This is a more varied range of 'other' respondents than in the 2010 survey where the bulk of the 'other' visitors were property owners and from the Environment Agency. The latter probably being because of a meeting being held at the time. There was no analysis of this category in 2009.

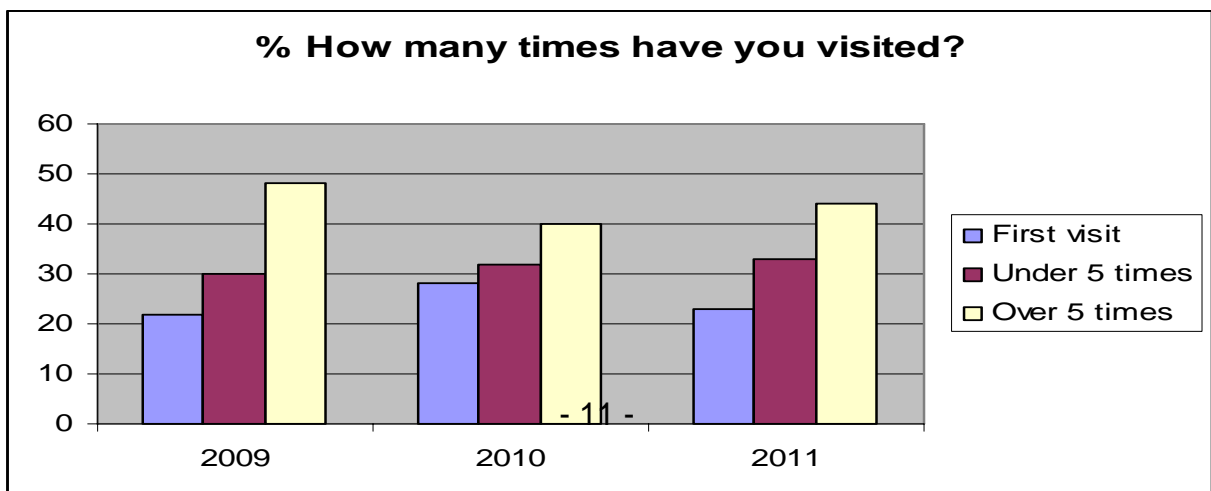
**Q3: How often do you use the Development Enquiry Centre?**

The majority of people used the Development Enquiry Centre less than monthly at 66%, then monthly, with 20%. Weekly was 11% and daily 3%. This is comparable with the previous two years' surveys.



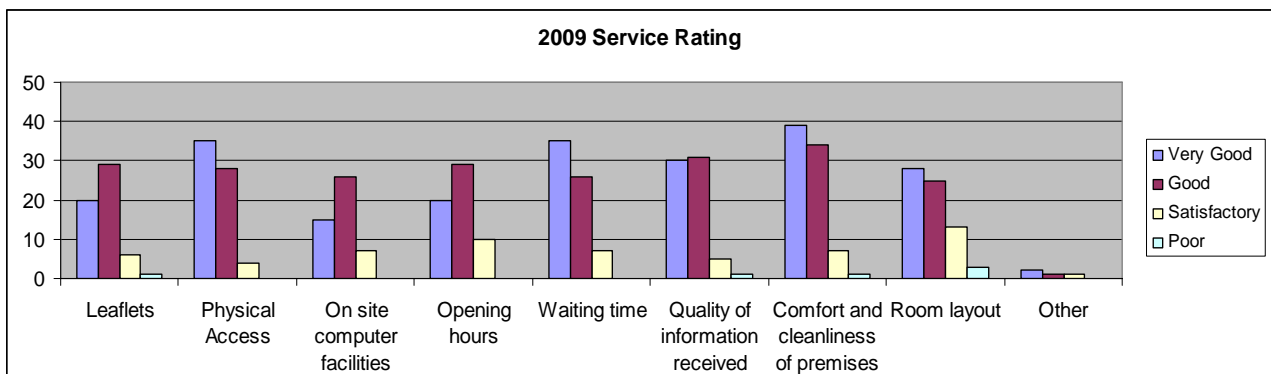
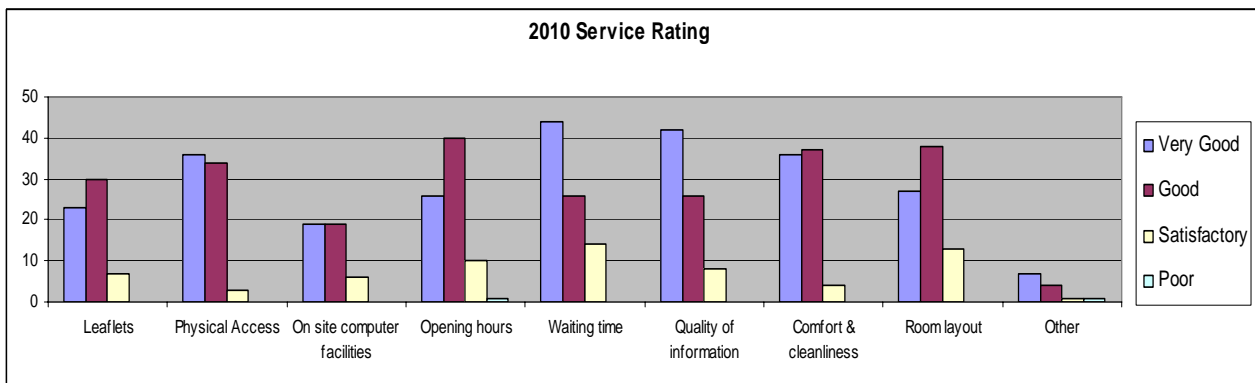
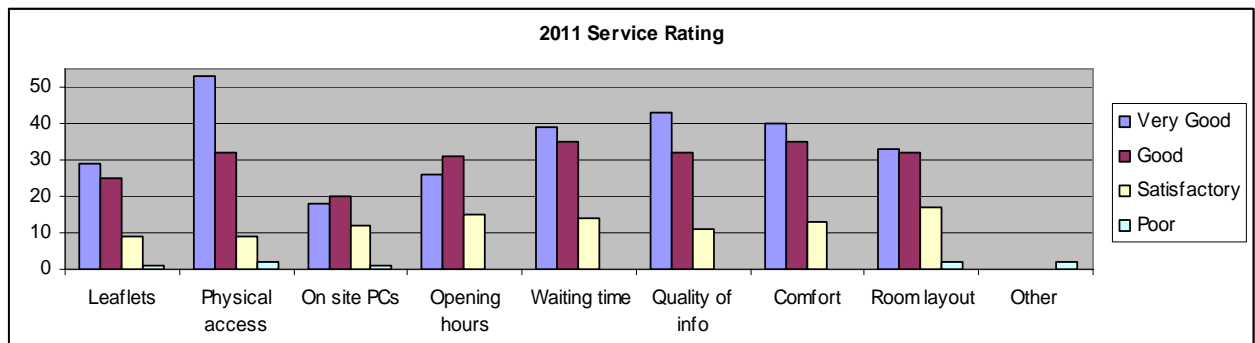
**Q4: How many times have you been to the Development Enquiry Centre?**

Again, results are comparable with the previous years' survey with over 75% of customers having visited us before. 23% said it was their first visit.



**Q5: How did you rate the service?**

Customers were asked to rate the service they received from the physical access into the building to the quality of information received from staff and the comfort and layout of reception itself.



The quality of information has steadily increased, which is commendable. The 'very good' waiting time perception has decreased slightly from 2010. However, this

seems to have been evened out by the 'good' category for this having increased. Opening hours, on-site PCs and physical access received 'poor' ratings this time around, compared with none the previous two years.

There were two 'Other' comments which were both rated poor, and the respondents gave the following reasons for their comments as:

1. Access to historic (pre-74) files 1 week!
2. Length of time trying to get in touch with someone on the main switchboard.

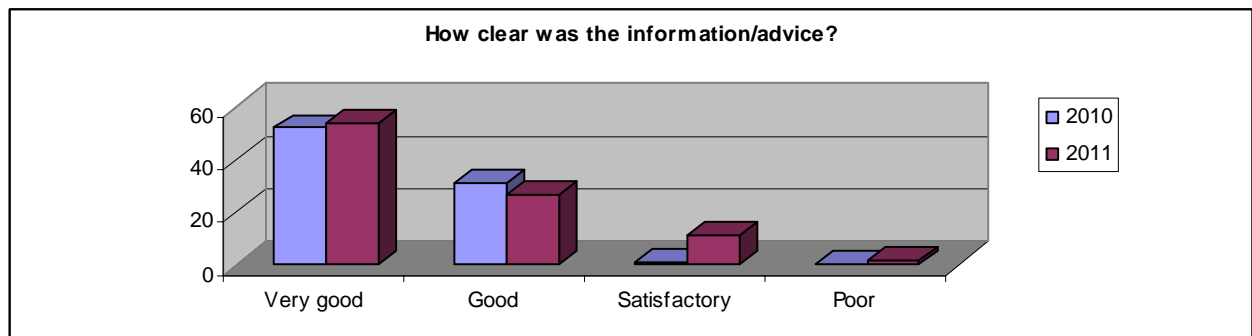
**Q6: Please rate your satisfaction levels with our staff.**

On trend with the previous two years' surveys, our customers rated their satisfaction with the staff as good or very good. Unlike 2010, the correlation between good and very good has widened, with very good coming out on top. None of our customers rated their satisfaction level as poor, which is an improvement on 2010.



**Q7: How clear was the information or advice you received today?**

82% of people surveyed responded to this question. 76% of people rated the clarity of the information they received as good or very good. Over half of these rated it as very good. This is directly comparable with the 2010 results. There is no data on this from 2009.



**Q7a: If you rated the info or advice as poor, please tell us why.**

Two respondents gave feedback for their poor rating to question 7. These were:

1. Haven't had the info I asked for yet.
2. Unfortunately, information relating to a modification had not arrived on the file.

**Q8: In which area is it most important for DEC to improve?**

The respondents who filled in this section gave the following comments:

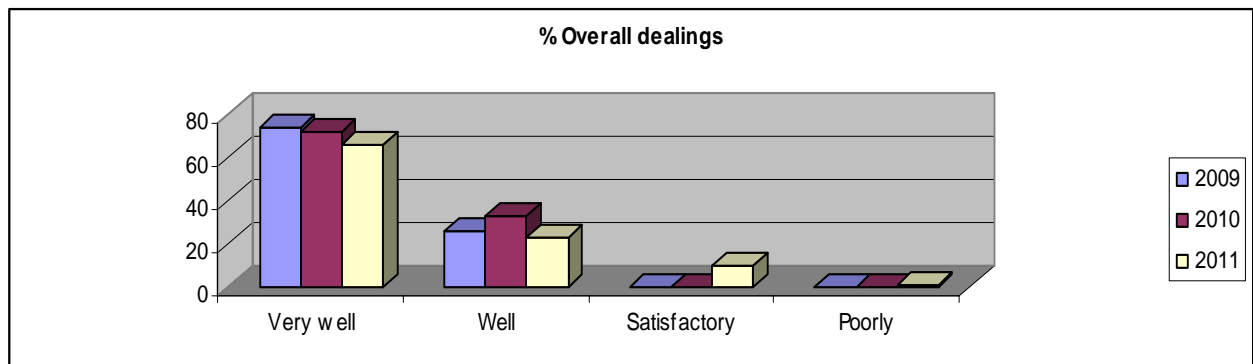
1. Signage on staircases/public areas.
2. Clear on-line advice about which officer covers which area and his/her contact details.
3. Parking.
4. Leave it as it is.
5. More staff and a coffee machine.
6. Speed of answering telephone. Only rated speed and information on 10a for when answered!
7. Better computer points for visitors.
8. Not used it enough.
9. Support in ensuring files are updated.
10. Can we have the drinks machine back please.
11. Stop using abbreviations on your surveys!
12. Land registry details.
13. Room availability.

Compared with the comments in last years' survey, issues with meeting rooms and the coffee machine seem to be the most common.

**Q9: Overall, how do you think we dealt with your requirements today?**

79% of people surveyed answered this question.

Again, comparable with the 2010 and 2009 results, with 66% of our customers answering 'very well' and 23% 'well'. A slight downturn on the previous surveys where no-one thought we were satisfactory, as 10% of customers rated us as 'satisfactory' this time around. 1% thought that overall the service was 'poor'.

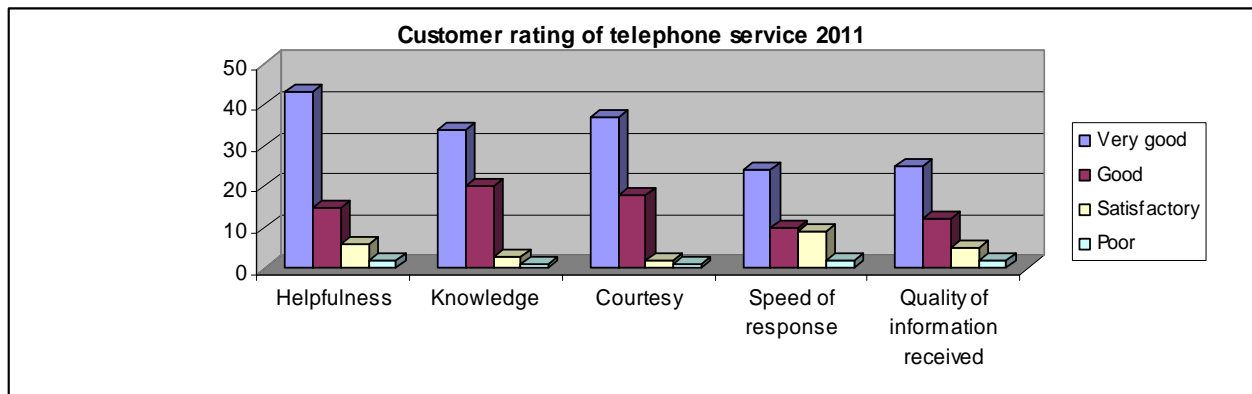


**Q10: Have you ever telephoned the Enquiry Centre?**

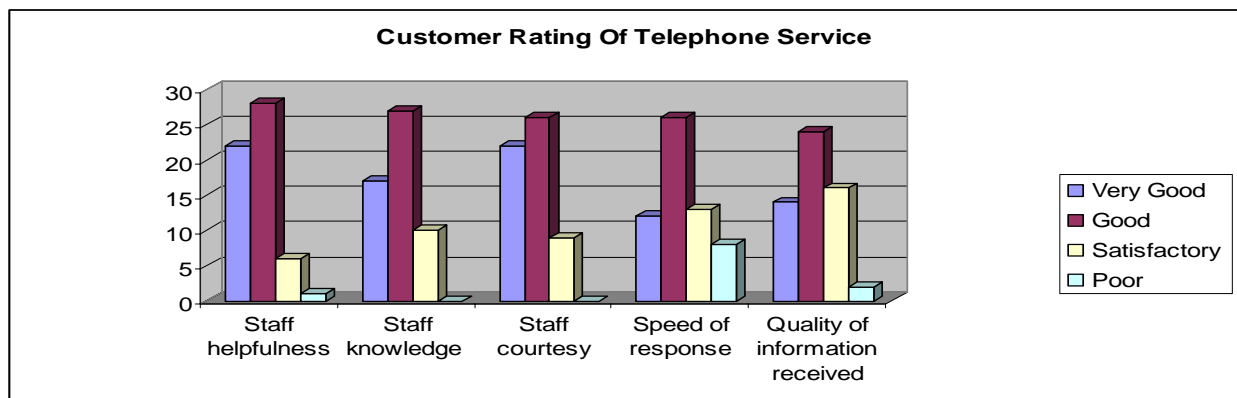
This was a slight change in questions from the 2010 survey. Q10 previously had asked how we could improve customer’s experience. However, this was thought to be the same as question 8 and was omitted this time around.

Of the 82% of respondents who answered this question, 58% told us that they had telephoned the Enquiry Centre before. This is in comparison with 69% the previous year.

**Q10a: If yes, please rate the: Staff helpfulness, knowledge, courtesy, speed of response and quality of the information received.**



Compared with 2010:



Overall customer satisfaction levels in this area have improved on the previous year. Although it may wish to be noted that because the categories ‘Speed of Response’ and ‘Quality of information received’ were over the page, many people did not fill these in, despite filling in the previous three.

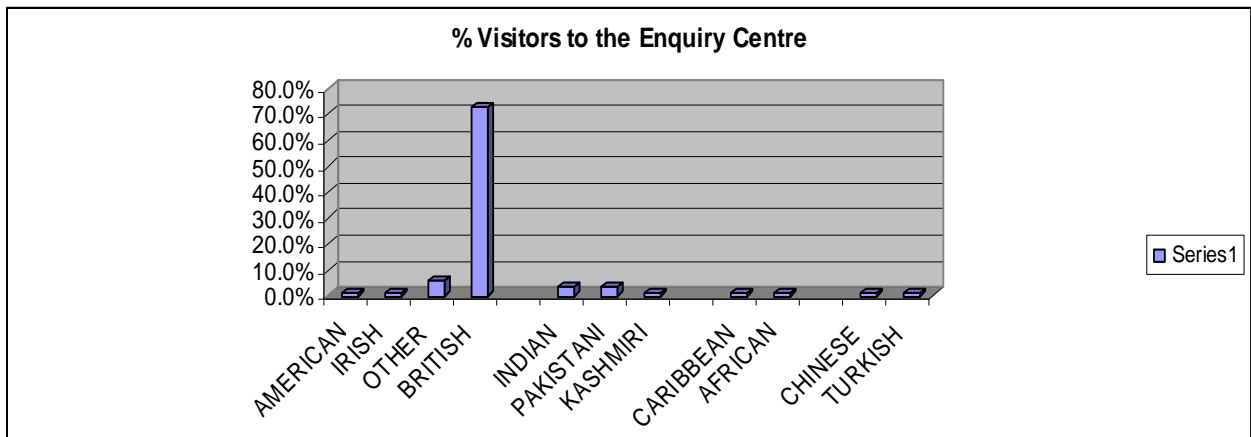
There was a final section asking if people wanted to make any further comments on the service. The responses received for this were:

1. Leeds City Council – DEC very good overall, no need for change.
2. No external post box for out of hours submissions.
3. It may be useful for the survey to be available on-line through Talking Point.
4. Excellent service first class staff/first class support staff.
5. The service provided is excellent and helpful and staff are very helpful too.
6. It would help customers in full time employment if the DEC were open for longer hours each day.

### **Equality Monitoring Results**

Of the 88 people completing these forms as visitors to our service, 70% were male and 30% were female. The average age came out at 45. However, there was a wide age range visiting the DEC from people in their early 20s to people in their late 70s.

Ethnic breakdown:



There are no comparisons as this is the first time the Equality Monitoring forms have been handed out during the reception survey.

### **Conclusion**

Once again a large majority of the customers visiting the reception area of the Enquiry Centre rated their experience of the service as very good. This is despite many changes which have happened in the reception area to both staffing and layout following the previous survey.

Areas which customers would like improving have not, in general, changed; and many of them are services which have been lost due to cost measures – such as the loss of the coffee machine (water is still available).

Overall the Development Enquiry Staff can be assured that they are providing a constantly excellent service, on both reception and the telephones.

With regard to equality monitoring, it is good to see a wide range of people from different backgrounds using the service. However, the results of this survey follow with the equality results of the email and permitted development surveys which have

been carried out which show the majority of our customers are male, white and in their mid-forties.

### **Mystery emails December 2011 to Development Enquiry Centre.**

10 mystery emails were sent to the DEC central inbox between 5<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

The purpose of this survey is to assess the quality of the responses coming from the Development Enquiry Centre, and to compare them to the results of the 2009 and 2010 surveys to see whether the service has improved. Two of the 2011 emails were based on the worst resulting answers from the 2010 survey. A further scenario was worked out from a minor complaint from a planning officer which was highlighted in October 2011.

#### **Section 1. Customer Service Style**

Overall the responses with regards to this section were excellent. However, one email was not responded to. Therefore, for the purposes of this report it was marked as 'poor'. The full list of scenario comments can be found at the end of this report. In only two of the nine responses received did the CSO prompt for re-contact if there were further issues or if they needed further information. It is subjective as to whether this is required, but it is a drop on last years' results.

Three responses did not use a salutation, and officers need to be reminded to do this.

#### **Section 2. Professional Style Response**

Was the response spelled correctly?

Weighted outcome: Excellent

2009 excellent 2010 excellent.

Was the layout professional?

Weighted outcome: Excellent

2009 & 2010 excellent.

Was the tone of the response courteous?

Weighted outcome: Excellent

2009 & 2010 excellent.

Draw attention to attachments to the email (where appropriate)?

Weighted outcome: Excellent (cannot mark down for when not required)

Good in 2009, excellent 2010.

Was the language professional?

Weighted response: Excellent

2009 & 2010 excellent.

#### **Section 3. Technical Enquiry**

Was the response clear and easy to understand? (No jargon, acronyms, written in plain English).

Weighted outcome: Excellent

2009 & 2010 excellent

Was the response comprehensive and accurate?

Weighted response: Good

Neutral in 2009, Good 2010.

What was the quality of the overall response?

Weighted response: Excellent

2009 & 2010 – good (**Improvement**)

### **Conclusion.**

On average the response time was 2 days, which is well within the 5 day target stated on the auto-response. However, one email was not responded to (as far as the customer was concerned). This is cause for concern as any emails which are forwarded on to other officers appear to the customer as not having had a response as other officers do not have the same timescale to respond. Despite this being brought up in a team meeting, the issue is still prevalent.

Overall, of the email responses received there were only some minor issues with familiarity of the response – one officer responded to the customer using her first name when the email was signed off by the customer in a more formal manner; and one customer's name was spelled incorrectly. One email could have done with making the customer aware that the house was in a Conservation Area. Because this was not done, the writer cannot be sure this was checked.

Three responses did not draw attention to attachments, because attachments were not required, therefore they have not been marked down for this.

The information presented in the responses, however, was excellent and met with the scenario's best responses which were prepared along with the text of the enquiry emails. This is reflected in that the overall quality of responses has improved on the past two years' surveys from **good to excellent**.

### **Suggested areas for continued improvement.**

- Make mention that customer's house is in a Conservation Area when encouraging them to check the PD advice on the Planning Portal so that they are aware of this when reading the guidance on the portal.
- When forwarding an email to another officer for a response, copy the customer into that email so they know it has been forwarded on; OR respond to the customer separately telling them who the email has been forwarded to and that they will receive a response back directly from that officer in due course.
- Use of salutations when responding to customers.

Ian Goodison  
Customer Services Manager  
Planning Services

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