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REPORT TO:	Development Control Committee	AGENDA ITEM:	5
DATE OF MEETING:	23 March 2004	CATEGORY:	DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Deputy Chief Executive	OPEN	
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Tony Sylvester (5743)	DOC:	
SUBJECT:	Planning Customer Satisfaction Survey	REF:	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE:	DC01

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### 1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the report be noted and that the Committee accept the Recommendation for Action contained in the report.

### 2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise the Committee of the results of the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) Survey recently completed and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

### 3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The following report was completed by the Institute of Public Finance on behalf of the Local Planning Authority which undertook the survey in accord with the requirement of BVPI 111. The Authority set a target of 80% of customers satisfied with the service. The findings show that this target was exceeded (a total of 83% being the proportion satisfied overall).

#### **South Derbyshire BVPI Planning Survey 2003 Interpretative Report**

### 3.2 Survey statistics

A total of 1784 surveys were sent out to 800 applicants (initial mailing together with two reminder mailings) to achieve 438 valid responses. This represented a 55% response (438/800).

The sampling frame covered applications that had been decided between April and September 2003. *Note agents could only be counted once and their applications beyond the first decision in the period were discarded in line with ODPM survey requirements.*

Fieldwork took place between November 2003 and January 2004 in line with ODPM specifications - mailings being sent at 4 weekly intervals from the beginning of November 2003, and in December and January to non-responders to the first mailing.

### 3.3 Nature of Applications

Individual householders submitted two-thirds of applications overall (66%), agents 16% and businesses 13%. Individuals accounted for 87% of householder applications, 66% of listed building applications, and 55% of residential developments.

Businesses accounted for 61% of business developments. Agents accounted for 26% of residential development applications and 21% of business developments. *Note; the figures for agents are probably an underestimate as agents could only be counted once.*

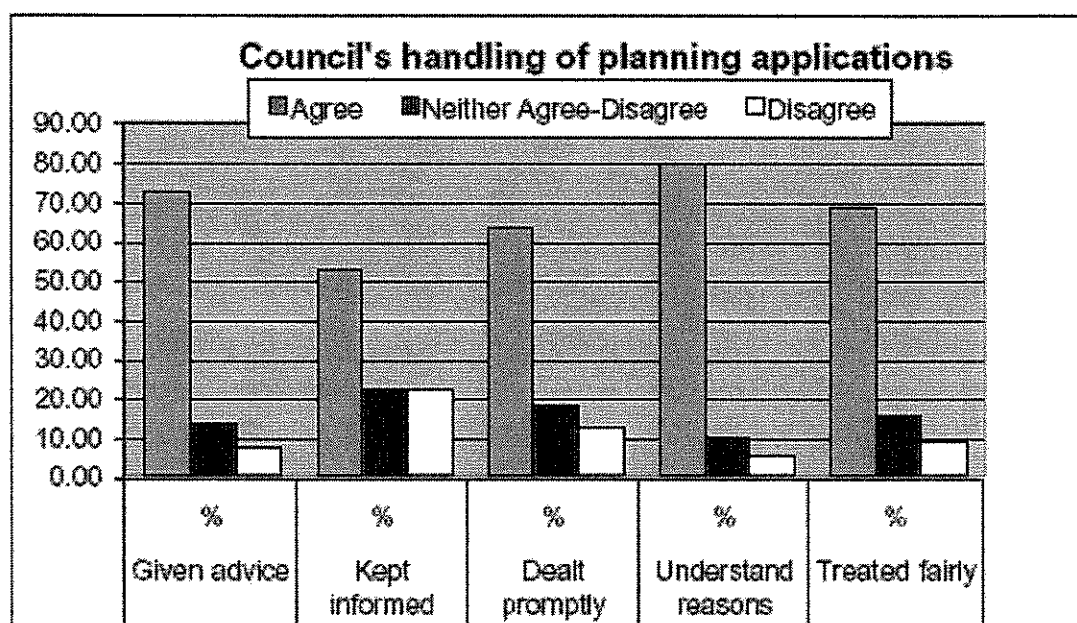
56% of applications were householder applications and 19% for residential developments.

Over half (55%) had previously applied for planning consent.

In the last six months over eight in ten of applicants had applied for between one and five planning consents. 3% had applied for over five planning consents in the last six months. This rose to 8% applying for over five planning consents over the last year.

### 3.4 Performance and Satisfaction

#### Council's handling of planning applications

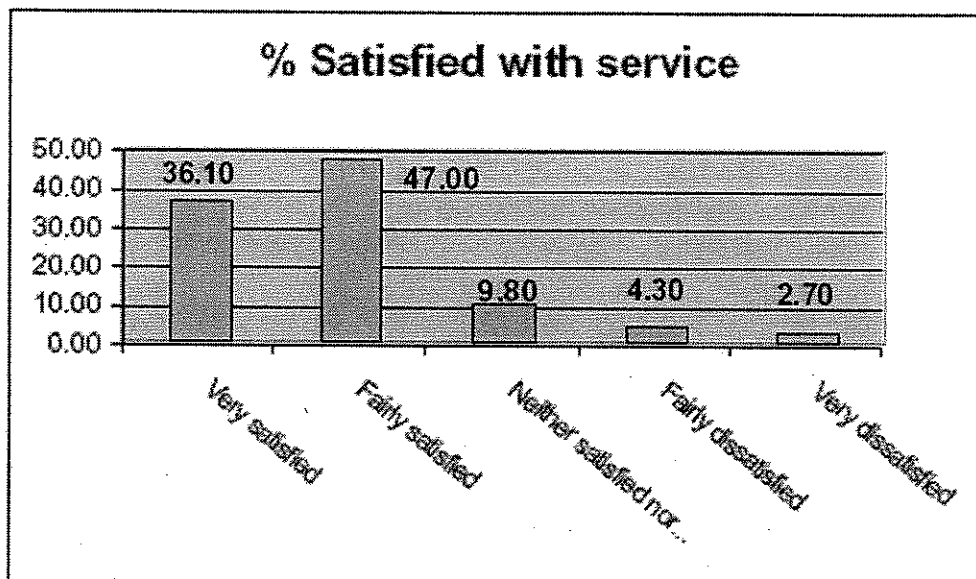


South Derbyshire scores very well for most factors. Customers agreed that they were treated fairly (68%), had been given help and advice to submit the application (72%), and understood the reasons for the decision (79%). For the other two factors, 63% agreed they were dealt with promptly but only 52% believed the council kept them informed of progress.

For two of the five factors examined, around two in ten felt neither one way nor the other about whether they were being kept informed of progress (22%) and whether the council dealt promptly with their enquiries.

The main area needing minor improvement by the council was shown to be keeping customers informed of progress (where 22% *disagreed* they were kept informed).

### 3.5 Satisfaction with the Service Provided



Scores were very high for the BVPI question. Over one third (36%) were very satisfied and nearly half (47%) were fairly satisfied with the service provided by the council in the processing of its planning application. This adds up to a total of 83% satisfied overall.

10% felt neither one way nor the other. A small 4% were fairly dissatisfied and 3% very dissatisfied giving a total of 7%.

When satisfaction is cross-tabulated with whether the application was accepted or refused, there are some differences in opinion. Of those whose application was granted, 87% were satisfied overall, but of those whose application was refused, only 41% were satisfied overall.

Conversely, of those whose application was granted, only 5% were dissatisfied overall, but of those whose application was refused, as many as 34% were dissatisfied overall.

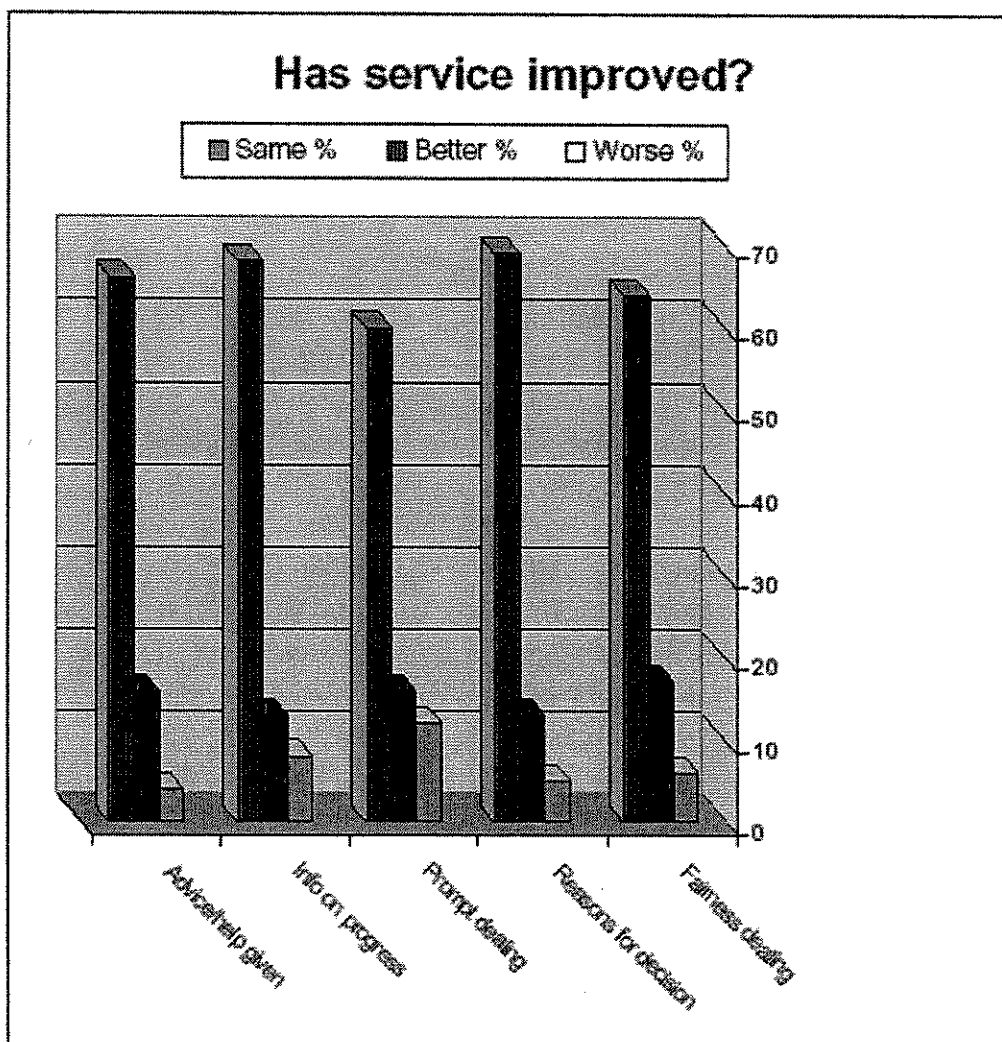
#### Satisfaction by whether application granted or refused

<i>NB Figures rounded up</i>	Granted consent %	Refused consent %
Very satisfied	39	9
Fairly satisfied	49	31
Neither/Nor	8	25
Fairly dissatisfied	3	19
Very dissatisfied	2	16
<i>Base: 424 replying</i>		

The BVPI margin of error for the satisfaction question was + or – 3.5% at the 95% confidence level (based on 55% response rate to the survey). This is exceptionally good (ODPM target was + or - 5%)

Note; 92.5% of the applications were granted consent and 7.5% were refused which puts the results in context.

### 3.6 Elements of the Planning Service – Has Service improved?



It is clear that South Derbyshire's service has stayed mainly the same over the last three years. This is the case across all factors – advice and help given to submit application (68% say has stayed the same), information given about progress of application (68%), promptness of dealing with application (60%), clarity of reasons for decision (69%) and fairness dealing with application (64%).

Those saying the service had improved varied between 13% for information about progress of application and clarity of reasons for decisions to 16% for advice and help given with application, promptness of dealing with application and fairness of dealing with application.

Those saying the service had worsened varied from 4% for advice and help given with application to 8% for information about progress of application and 12% for promptness of dealing with application.

### 3.7 Demographics

The demographics showed that applicants were mainly men aged 35 to 54. About half were employed and another third self-employed (as would be expected with agents and business owners). Of most interest was the ethnicity where 96.4% were white and the remainder 3.6% non-white including 2% of Indian origin.

### 3.8 Recommendations for action

Generally speaking customers seem to be very satisfied with the service provided

by South Derbyshire. If the service is viewed as good it can be difficult to make major improvements, hence applicants finding it has remained the same. It is those whose application is refused that have a degree of dissatisfaction (34% of refusals were dissatisfied with the service), and they are in a small minority. The recommendations would be to maintain the service at present levels but to improve the levels of promptness of dealing with applications, and keeping applicants informed of progress.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

4.1 None arises from this report. It is envisaged that the recommendations made in the report can be implemented utilising current or committed resources.

#### **5.0 Conclusions**

5.1 The report demonstrates that, in general, customers seem to be very satisfied with the Planning Service provided. However, it is proposed that further improvements should be continued and that comments received should be used to inform decisions regarding the nature of those improvements.

#### **6.0 Background Papers**

6.1 IPF Report of Findings

