

Planning Committee

Item

28 July 2011

Report of Head of Environmental and Protective Author Vincent Pearce

Services X282452

Sarah Fleming survey analysis

Title Information item. The second in a series of quarterly progress reports on

actions to improve customer service within the Planning Service

covering the period 1 April 2011 to 30 June 2011.

Wards affected

All wards

This report concerns the reporting of progress within the Planning Service on improving the quality of customer service it delivers

1.0 Decision Required

1.1 Members are asked to note this report

2.0 Reasons for Decision

2.1 This relatively new reporting subject is presented to Members in line with the Planning Service's long standing commitment to report on and comprehensively manage all aspects of its performance. Officers are perpetually mindful of the Planning Committee's well established desire to monitor the operation and effectiveness of the development management function and its goal to encourage continuous improvement and responsiveness to changing demands.

3.0 Alternative Options

3.1 Not reporting such matters when it is committed to transparency would undermine the credibility of the Service just when there is clearly a changing national environment of greater public scrutiny and expectation that is being driven by the 'Localism' agenda. Such an option has not been countenanced by the Service.

4.0 Supporting Information

4.1 Planning Service Improvement Plan 2011. (as updated Jun '11)

5.0 Introduction

- 5.1 In the interest of being accountable to the public and because of a desire to be the most open and accessible service within the Council the Planning Service presents a quarterly report to the Planning Committee detailing the progress it is making in terms of improving the quality of customer service it provides.
- 5.2 The report will look at a number of indicators and outcomes to gauge how well it is doing and these will focus on an analysis of feedback from users of the service rather than self-

appraisal. The idea being regular, systematic and comprehensive customer satisfaction testing and subsequent changes to further respond to changing customer expectations.

5.3 So what sort of things will the report look at?

- A look at new initiatives introduced to improve accessibility to information
- Analysis of complaint monitoring data.
- Customer questionnaire analysis
- Customer service centre (CSC) performance (Planning Service related)

6.0 Update on actions

6.1 Within the past 3 months the following steps have been taken along the road to improving the quality of the service provided by the Planning Service (this list is not exhaustive but gives a flavour of the breadth of such initiatives):-

6.2 Staff:

- Staff end of year performance appraisals completed. (action being taken where performance was below expectation)
- New personal & performance objectives set for the year ahead (2011-2012)
- Each planning officer has been out and had 1:1's with parish clerks as the first stage of building new working relationships with parish & town councils.

6.3 Complaints:

6.4 Table 1 below provides the full breakdown customer complaints handling in respect of the Planning Service. No other service within the Council reports such information or makes it publicly available via a report such as this. This report is also published on the Council's Planning Service web-site.

Complaints 1.6.11 – 30.6.11				Action required	Overall since 1.4.11				
Comp rec'd	No. resolved in time	No. resolved outside	Out stand ing but in time	Out standin g and out of time	Total receiv ed	Total resolved	Tot res in time	% in time	% in time for same period last year
4	1	0	2	1	7	9	7	78%	54%

TABLE 1: 'Complaints handling' performance analysis (latest month + from 1 April

- 6.5 The Service has continued to improve its performance in terms of ensuring that customers who have made a complaint get a timely response. (It should be noted that 'resolved' does not mean an acknowledgement or holding reply was sent. To qualify as 'resolved' the complainant has to have been sent a full and detailed reply). This dramatic improvement has been the result of comprehensive performance management of the complaint process and staff awareness training.
- 6.6 It is interesting to take a look at a breakdown of the types of complaint being received because the picture has always been distorted somewhat by complaints made in respect

of the final planning decision taken being included within the statistics for complaints about service quality or process errors. Members familiar with the planning system will know that the planning system frequently raises passions, frustrations and anger that are not easily calmed if a decision doesn't go in the favour or one of the parties involved.

6.7 The analysis of complaint types is shown in Table 2 below. It should be noted that two-thirds of complaints related to matters within the control of the Service and after investigation it was found that of the four cases that fell into a category over which the service has control the complaint was valid in 2.5 of them. (0.5 = part upheld part dismissed). Ie 62.5%. Appropriate action was taken in each case which included an apology to the customer.

Type of complaint	No.	% of total	Complaint upheld (U) Dismissed (D)
Unhappy with officer's attitude	2	33.3	2 (U)
Unhappy with level of customer	2	33.3	1 (U)
service given			0.5/0.5 (U/D)
Allegation of procedural mistakes	0	-	-
Unhappy with decision/outcome	1	16.6	1 (D)
Escalated complaint	0	-	-
Unhappy with system policy or procedure	1	16.6	1(D)

TABLE 2: Type of complaint 1 April - 30 June 2011

6.8 Planning workshops

- 6.9 On 31 May, 1 June and 14 June well attended Member planning workshops were held by the Planning Service (a series of either half day or whole day interactive sessions). Members serving on the Planning Committee (or wishing to act as substitutes) are required to receive such training/refresher workshops every two years by The Council's Constitution in order to be or remain eligible in such a capacity. The Planning Service presented a similar session for members in one of the Kent authorities.
- 6.10 Members who attended the sessions and are therefore up to date with training are, Councillors:-

Christopher ARNOLD (X)
Nick BARLOW (*)
Lyn BARTON (*)
Kevin BENTLEY
Mary BLANDON
John BOUCKLEY
Nigel CHAPMAN
Peter CHILLINGWORTH (X)
Barrie COOK
John ELLIOTT (X)
Annie FELTHAM (+)
Stephen FORD (X)
Continued......

Note:

- (x) denotes currently serving Planning Committee member
- (*) Cabinet member
- (+) new councillor

Bill FRAME

Mike **HARDY**

Marcus HARRINGTON (+)

Pauline **HAZELL**

Peter **HIGGINS**

Theresa **HIGGINS** (X - Deputy Chairman)

Sonia **LEWIS** (X)

Michael LILLEY

Sue **LISSIMORE**

Jackie **MACLEAN** (X)

Richard MARTIN

Ann QUARRIE

Will QUINCE (+)

Henry **SPYVEE**

Laura SYKES (X)

Julie **YOUNG**

Note:

- (x) denotes currently serving Planning Committee member
- (*) Cabinet member
- (+) new councillor

6.11 Parish and town council liaison

6.12 May and June saw the inaugural liaison sessions with the following councils all of whom accepted an invitation to join the new initiative:-

Abberton & Langenhoe

Aldham

Chappel

East Donyland

Eight Ash Green

Fingringhoe

Great Horkesley

Langham

Layer de la Haye

Little Horkesley

Messing-cum-inworth

Wakes Colne

West Mersea

Winstred Hundred

- 6.13 The initiative stems from feedback from what tend to be the smaller councils at the Town & Parish Forum that sometimes Planning resource seems to get concentrated on the urban areas or larger town & parish councils where new development levels are significant. The aim is to meet at least twice a year (at 6 monthly intervals) to share information, explore particular local planning issues, communicate changes in process and/or legislation, explain particular aspects of the planning system, build effective lines of communication, foster good working relationships, put faces to names and to listen to feedback about how the quality of service delivery by the Planning Service to parish councils can be improved.
- 6.14 Arrangements are currently being made with the parishes that previously attended for the December 2011 round of sessions.

6.15 CSC' (Customer Service Centre) – Planning related performance

6.16 The Customer Service Centre (CSC) based in Angel Court is in many ways the Planning Services front-line when it comes to direct customer contact. The CSC

provides huge support to the Planning Service in that it intercepts and resolves a significant number of what tend to be general planning enquiries from customers. The sheer volume of traffic successfully handled varies from 500 calls to 1000 calls per month and this has provided the Planning Service with capacity to improve its own performance in other areas and has given the public quick and easy access to general advice. The CSC and Duty Planner system complement each other. Regular users of the Planning Service and applicants have access to direct dial telephone numbers for planning officers and so do not have to go via the CSC as their enquiries tend to be specific. The Planning Service continues to benefit from the excellent support delivered by the CSC.

6.17 Tables 3 & 4 below reveal just how much support is delivered by the CSC and this is all contributing to delivering better and better service quality. This allied to the self help capability of the planning web-site is delivering greater and easier access to planning information.

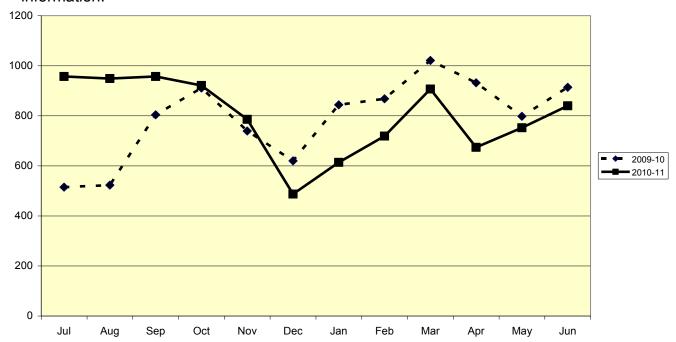
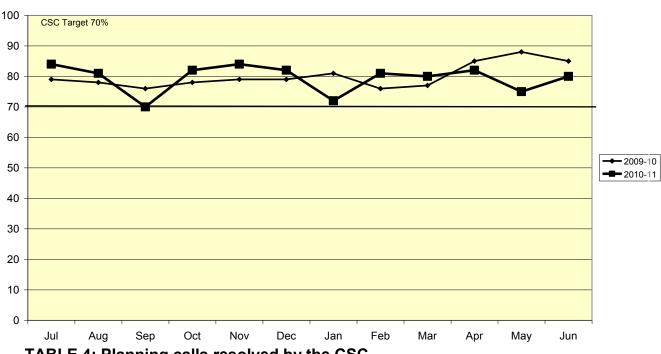


TABLE 3: Planning calls answered by the CSC



6.18 Customer Surveys

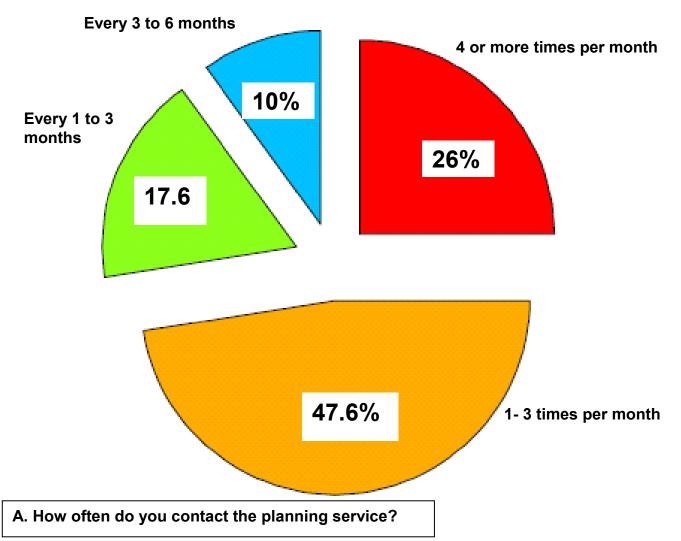
- 6.19 The quarter under review saw the completion of a pioneering set of customer surveys undertaken as the first stage of regular sampling by the Planning Service with support from the E&PS Customer Relationship Officer, Sarah Fleming.
- 6.20 Those surveyed were:-

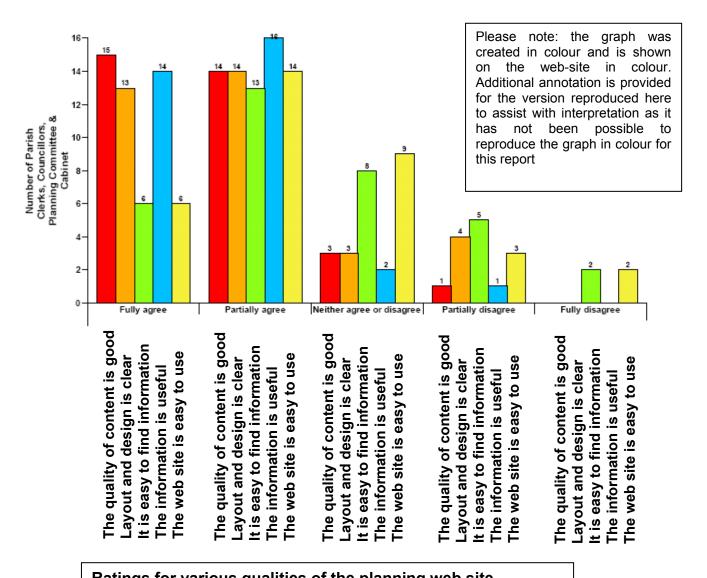
The Cabinet
All other members
All Town & Parish Councils
Major Developers working in Colchester
Planning Agents working in Colchester

It is intended to re-survey each of the above in 6 months to chart progress in improving the quality of service delivered by the Planning Service. Survey data was collected in a variety of ways between the various groups and consisted of face to face interviews, on-line questionnaires and postal questionnaires.

and ongoing surveying of applicants post decision and complainants is underway.

6.21 This report will take a closer look at the combined analysis of results from Cabinet, other members and town & parish councils via a series of graphs and comments panels.



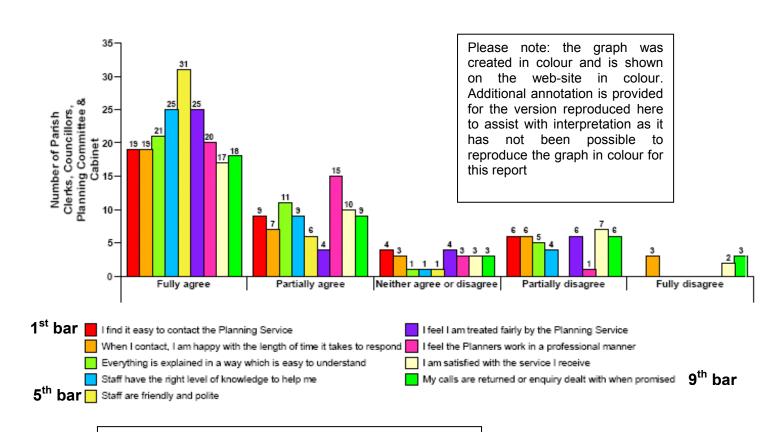


Ratings for various qualities of the planning web site

Please elaborate on the ratings above where you wish to give actual examples

- The Website is hard to explain to others, it's difficult to view the plans online and difficult to get to the plans in the first place (too many steps)
- It takes time to locate information but once found the information is useful
- Not used enough to elaborate
- Better than Tendring & Essex County Council
- The website is too big, not up-to-date
- Old maps were a lot better. New maps more difficult to use
- The links to application documents often do not work. There are many pages of the website that have large white areas at the top of the pages
- No
- Not easy to find the particular application you are seeking, and it often crashes. Once found, the system is good but availability is a problem
- Sometimes problems when system 'down'. Cannot access or view planning applications
- Difficulties with finding contact details for persons/departments
- When click on email alerts plans are not available. Pointless not up to date, wait until it
 is up to date
- Generally ok. It was difficult to find planning applications, but this is now better (perhaps too many clicks- isn't this the most sort after info? Shouldn't it be on front page?) Difficult to find info like - "is it a listed building?"

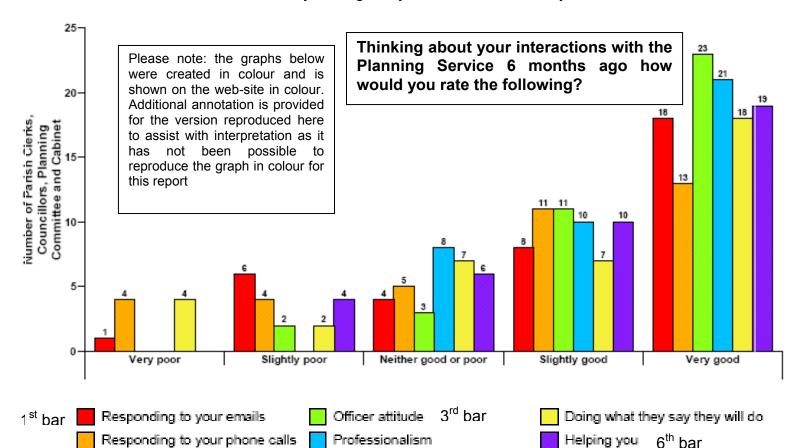
- 1. Website would be easier to read if documents were in date order. 2. Comments which
 are received electronically are difficult to read due to format
- The website is excellent when it's working; it sometimes goes down at mysterious times (e.g. Sunday evenings)
- Decision notice not always available. Some larger apps are difficult to navigate through amendments not always clear. Plans need to be properly identifiable. Useful if info gets lost in post
- The files can be very big and slow to load -- pictures would be useful
- The first time one tries to use the website it is very difficult to find the relevant information. I had this difficulty even though I was on The Planning Committee. It must be very difficult for the public especially those not comfortable with computers and in my experience that is a lot of people
- The website is cluttered, poor and slow. For instance some of the pages within planning have massive white space at the top of the page and you have to scroll down to find the info
- Has improved. Now pretty good. Sometimes on-line applications are not up to date and plans difficult to download
- Application summaries would be good brief description of application so don't need to click through all the links. Loading PDF's not always quick (especially on dial up) also if using mobile device
- Answers above in the context of viewing apps
- Within the new applications screens you get blank screens that you need to scroll down to get to information - not everyone knows that and residents give up

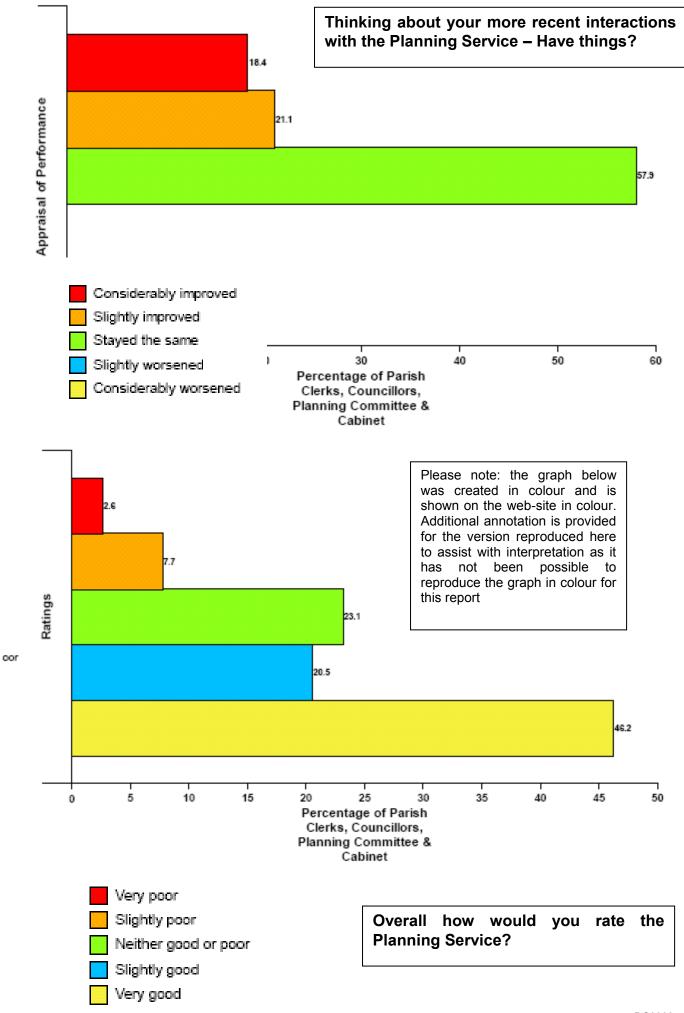


Ratings based on contact with the Service

Please elaborate on the ratings above where you wish to give actual examples

- Frequently Parishes are not consulted when they should be e.g. Fairfields Farm app in Fordham
- No. 7 & 8. The parish clerk is generally very happy with the service provided by planning there is however a recent incident which casts a shadow this relates to the nonattendance of the Planning Services Manager at the recent Annual Parish Assembly. (otherwise these would be fully agree)
- No. 5. Switchboard polite but don't have knowledge
- No. 7. Don't feel I can comment on this
- No. 1. Very rarely get to speak to officers immediately
- Frustrations arise when promised phone call is not made or emailed questions are not answered
- Generally replies are good. Karen Syrett V. good. Sometimes no reply from DC officer. When commencing on apps, Parish gets a standard reply rather than substantive reply
- Depends who is available at time
- Sometimes email gueries are not responded to in timely manner
- E mails are often answered slowly -- have we enough staff?
- Service levels are generally poor and I have genuinely seen no improvement in the 4
 years I have liaised with the department
- I have fully documented my past complaints to Vincent and Beverley
- Sometimes a sharper response would be appreciated
- Phone call responses are often slow or non existent. Depending on the application we feel you get different treatment
- I have found that calls aren't always returned, but this has improved recently
- Depends on who you speak to, some good/some tardy and have failed to get back.
 Leadership and management have recently improved
- Easy to contact as a 'Leader'. Different experience as a Cllr. Differs by officer not achieving consistency
- Difficult to get hold of and don't call back. Worries about response residents must get if a
 Cabinet Member can't get answers. Messages on out of office that say back 3rd March
 and its 20th March, in this day and age why can't the officers carry mobiles?





- 6.22 So what do the surveys indicate? Well it is clear that the Service is beginning to build its reputation for delivery of improved customer service performance and that in many areas the Service is strong but still too much of the quality rating sits in the band that can be considered satisfactory. The aim of the service is to excel in all areas of customer service even with the pressures and challenges that face it.
- 6.23 Some pockets of less than expected performance have arisen and these are being pursued but overall there is very little evidence of poor overall performance. Further customer service initiatives are planned for the months ahead and it will be interesting to see what trends emerge in terms of the Services ability to perform at a high level of customer service.
- 6.24 Members will also have noted from the companion planning performance report that planning application performance is now at the highest level it has ever been and this in itself reflects a high level of customer service to all those who have been submitting applications this year.
- 6.25 The survey group being considered in this report was asked for training topic ideas for the forthcoming year and these are listed below:-

If you answered 'How to use the planning website' what in particular would you want to focus on?

- Members need to know more. Train members how to find and look at an application online. (Clerk has certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy; some clerks have this, but not all)
- How to make the system easier to use
- How all information relating to Wivenhoe can be accessed in 'one' hit
- How Planning Officers think
- How to log and check on line

If you answered 'Planning Policy' what in particular would you want to focus on?

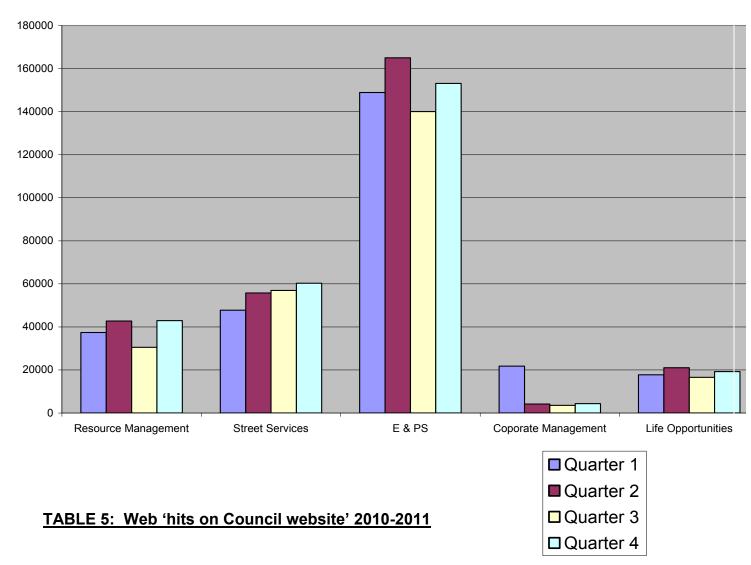
- Members need to know how previously made policy decisions effect decisions made on applications
- An update on LDF's
- The Parish Council commented on LDF and suggested extension to VE Boundaries but had no further feedback and explanation why suggestions were not included
- Why are applications allowed when there is a policy preventing the development
- Up-dates on latest policy
- Development Policy
- Great Horkesley e.g. is the village design statement still valid?
- How policy impacts on application/decision making
- Degree of rigidity/flexibility with which core strategy and SASD are applied
- Understand the policies more as this gives confusion in meetings
- Matching the policy against peoples expectations
- If I didn't know I'd go look and would know where to look, could be a way of training Members – point at info don't try and teach it all. Try levels of Training – Novice, Intermediate, Planning Committee Member

If you answered 'Other' please give details

• Others more relevant to the Councillors. Councillors should have good knowledge of all

7.0 The planning web-site

7.1 The planning service web-pages are the most frequently accessed of any operated by the Council. The number of 'hits' (the times that a page is accessed) during 2010-2011 varied between 140000 and 165000. That is phenomenal traffic and represents a huge level of accessibility. It is therefore unsurprising that occasionally (2 -3 times a month) we receive a complaint about the web-site. Tables 5 & 6 below describe the trends.



_			
	2009	2010	2011
1st	Jobs	Planning	Planning
2nd	Planning	Jobs	Jobs
	Recycling &		Recycling &
3rd	Waste	Council Tax	Waste
4th	Council Tax	Housing	Council Tax
5th	Tour Series	Elections	Housing

TABLE 6: Most popular web areas on Council web-site 2009,2010 & 2011

8.0 Financial implications

8.1 None

9.0 Strategic Plan References

9.1 Further improving the customer service performance of the Planning Service (Development Management) has been identified within the Service as a priority. The Planning Service contributes to all of the Councils key objectives.

10.0 Risk Management

10.1 The risks associated with this report mainly revolve around reputation of the Service and knock on consequences for the Group and The Council by association.

11.0 Publicity Considerations

11.1 None

12.0 Human Rights Implications

12.1 None.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 None.

14.0 Health and Safety Implications

14.1 None.