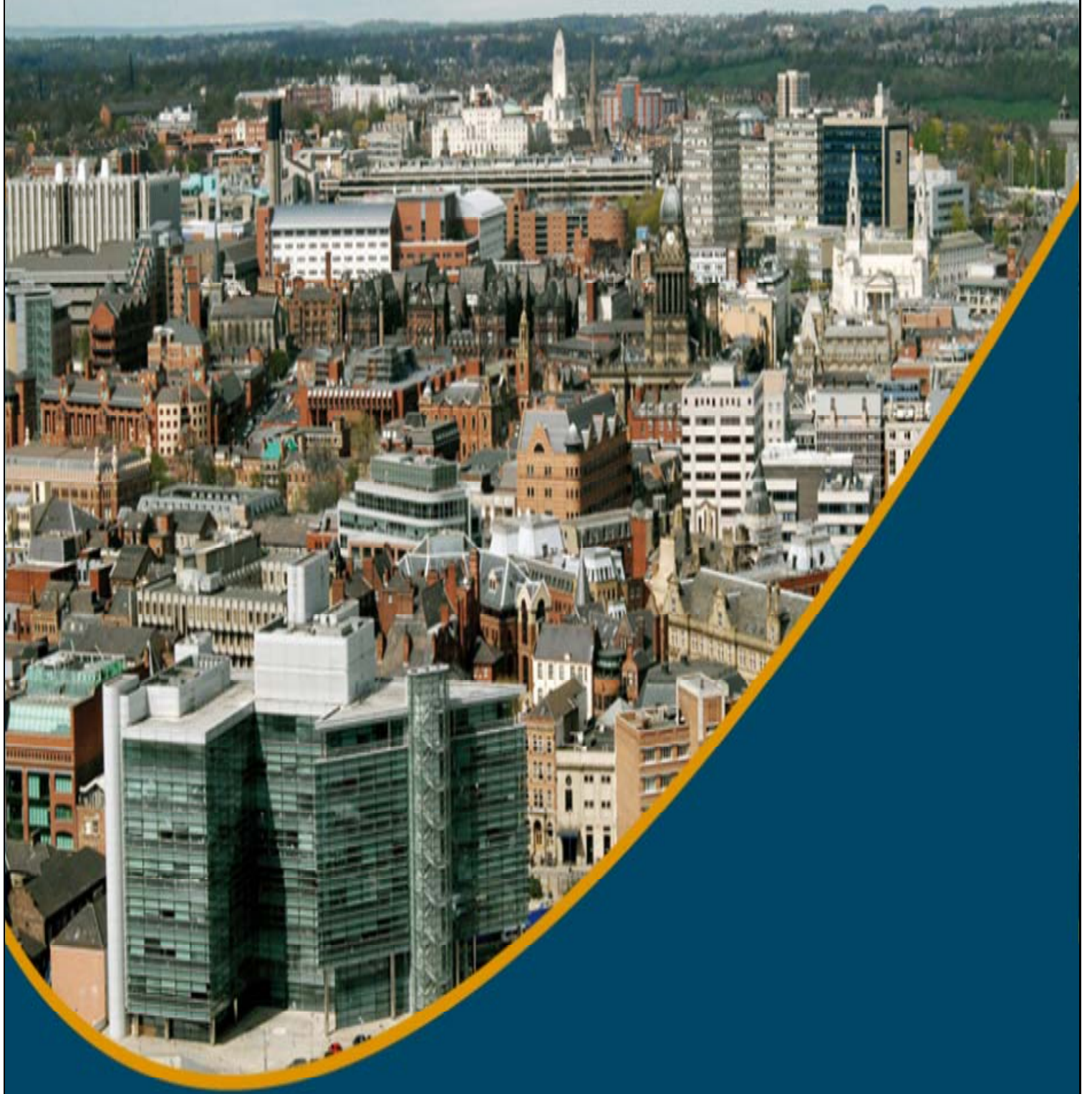




DEC Annual Report 2010-11



Development Enquiry Centre Annual Report 2010 - 2011

Foreword

The Development Enquiry Centre (DEC) has a distinct role within Planning Services to provide an initial point of contact by telephone, email and face to face for development related enquiries and to resolve those enquiries at the first point of contact. There is a commitment to maintain the service it provides.

DEC maintained their Customer Services Excellence award in 2009 and were successful in retaining the award following the first annual review in April 2010.

During 2010/11 there has been a significant down turn in activity on planning applications nationally and this situation has not improved. There have been severe budget pressures, loss of planning fee income and staff that have left the DEC have not been replaced. Further, staff in DEC have been utilised to provide staff resources to other work areas within the Planning Service. The Review of the Planning Service completed in March 2010 was agreed by City Development Management Team in November 2010 and has since been implemented. The Customer Services Manager Margaret Horton has taken up her new position on the structure and now has managerial responsibility for DEC and the planning administrative functions.

The staffing levels in DEC has reduced during the year. However, the staff are still meeting and exceeding all their targets for answering telephone calls, responding to emails and other written correspondence and in responding to complaints.

We have continued to build relationships with other services within City Development, the most notable being presentations which have been carried out in Building Control and Highways to give other officers information on aspects of Permitted Development. DEC officers also played a role at the Parish Council Conference earlier in the year, and have made visits, at Parish Council's

requests, to carry out presentations on DEC services at the Parish Council meetings.

In November 2010 the Council announced its plans to have a single point of contact for all face to face enquiries within the city centre rather than the 15 presently in operation, which has implications on the service the DEC provides to its customers. Reviews are currently underway to assess the feasibility of the face to face role of DEC being relocated to a central office.

Achievements

- We have continued to maintain and improve on the award for Customer Service Excellence, despite challenging staffing levels.
- Revenue from enquiries has generated £38,000
- We have visited Parish Councils in order to appraise them of any planning or permitted development issues they may have in their area.
- We have carried out presentations to building control and highways officers.
- We have continued to exceed our targets despite staffing levels being lower this year. Thanks have been passed on during one to one and appraisals with staff.

A note on data sources

The performance data contained in this report is based on three main sources: -

CRM Leeds (Siebel)	<p>All compliments and complaints for City Development are logged onto Siebel by the City Development Administration Team and Ombudsman complaints are logged here by the CSU Ombudsman Administration Team who are based in Westgate House.</p> <p>Telephone calls are also logged by the DEC staff where they pertain to an address. Avoidable contact data is also logged on this system.</p> <p>Written (letter) enquiries to the DEC are logged onto Siebel following the abolition of the Lotus Notes system at the beginning of 2010.</p>
MS Outlook	DEC use MS Outlook to register and distribute email enquiries.
CCM (Call Centre Manager)	<p>CCM logs all incoming calls into the DEC, the amount of calls which are queued and for how long, the time officers take to answer the calls and the time they spend speaking with the customer.</p> <p>This system also records the types of calls officers respond to and how many are resolved at first point of contact.</p>

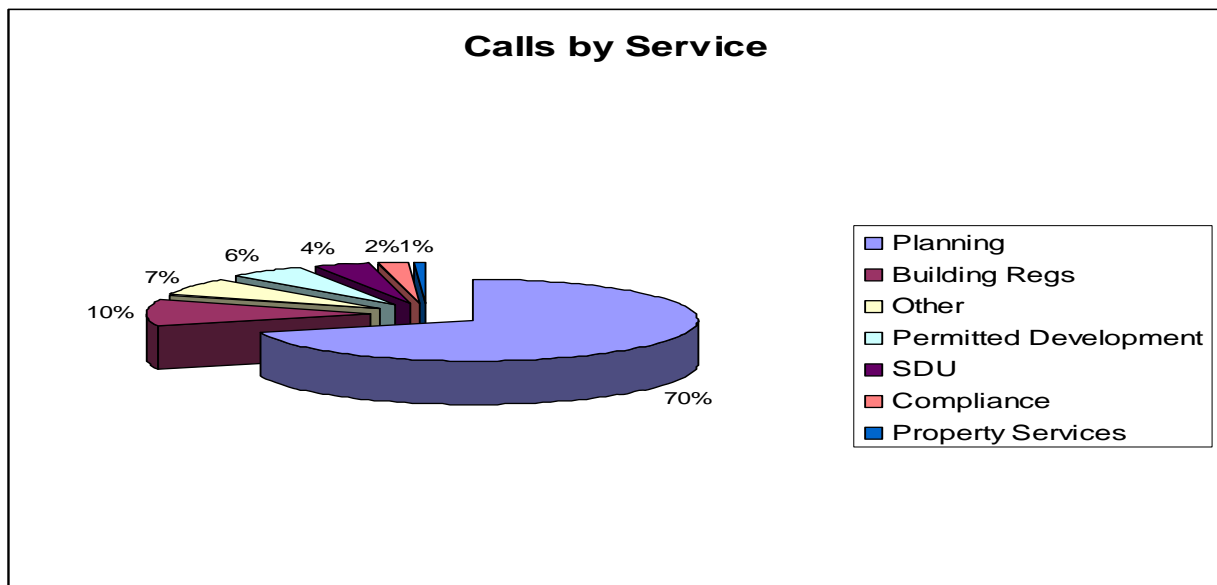
Key Facts

Performance

- 50,073 telephone calls were received by the Development Enquiry Centre
- 93.25% of all calls offered were answered
- 59.67% of all calls were answered within 20 seconds
- 85.53% of all calls were resolved at first point of contact.

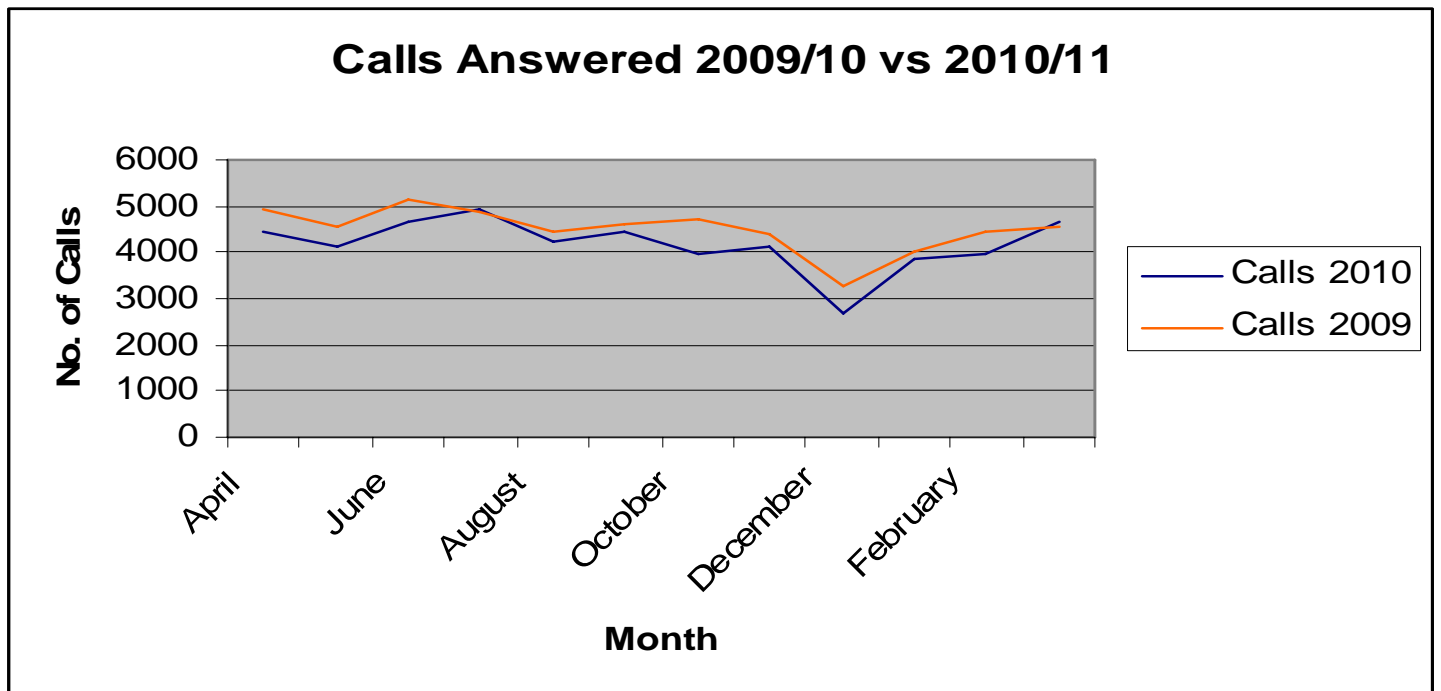
The average number of enquiries made each month was 4172 which equates to 962 each week. It should be noted that the service is subject to significant seasonal variations which can be seen in chart 2 below.

Chart 1 below shows the breakdown of enquiries by service area.



The volume of calls taken over the year reduced by 7.38% (3993 calls) compared to the previous year.

Chart 2 shows the variation in call volume each month and includes a year on year comparison.



Telephone answering performance continues to improve with 93.25% of the total calls offered answered compared with 91.89% for the previous year. This compares to a target of 92%.

59.67% of calls offered were answered in 20 seconds. This compares with 56.72% answered in 20 seconds in the same period last year.

85.5% of calls offered to the section were dealt with at first point of contact. This figure rises to 90.3% for planning services related calls.

Correspondence

During the year 4797 letters and emails were received. 4764 (99%) were responded to within 10 working days. Last year we received 4069. There has been an 18% increase in the number written contacts received.

The number of email contacts has increased to 3614 from 2148. This is an increase of 70% on the previous year.

The number of letters/enquiry forms received has reduced to 1183 from 1889, a reduction of 37%.

Face to Face

The number of recorded face to face contacts in the Reception at the Leonardon Building was 15,511 with 97% being resolved at the time of the customers visit. The majority of contacts (54%) were for pre arranged meetings and planning enquiries (18%).

The number of face to face contacts has reduced by 22% compared to the previous year.

Customer satisfaction

The DEC carries out surveys of its customers to monitor how the service is delivered and to identify areas for improvement. This year we have carried out mystery visits and telephone calls to our reception area and back office and emailed all customers who registered a permitted development enquiry. We also used 'Talking Point' for internal customers within City Development. The results of the surveys demonstrated that our customer satisfaction levels are improving year on year and identified areas where we can make further improvements.

Mystery emails

Mystery emails were sent to the DEC central inbox between 7th December 2010 and 16th December 2010. This was carried out by a member of the DEC staff who does not have any connection to the replies coming from the inbox itself.

The purpose of this survey was to assess the quality of the responses coming from the Development Enquiry Centre, and to compare them to the results of the 2009 survey to see whether the service has improved. Three of the 2010 emails were based on the worst resulting answers from the 2009 survey.

Overall, the responses were very clear and of the three emails which were based on the worst resulting answers in 2009, they were all responded to correctly in 2010. All the responses, following the adopted weighting system, were either Excellent or Good.

Permitted Development Service

In December 2010 a survey was undertaken by email to find out what the users of the service thought about their experience in establishing if planning permission was required for their development.

The results showed that we improved our service in two of the five categories. We performed as well in the other categories as in the previous year. The comments from the survey were constructive and we recognise there are areas where we can make improvements. From the issues raised we have carried out the following actions

1. We will do what we can to establish that there are no reasons why a scheme would require planning permission and also refer customers to the Planning Portal where you can find out if planning permission would be required.
2. We have reviewed our reply letters to ensure the answer is bespoke to customer's enquiries. Our reply letters have been checked previously to ensure they are in 'Plain English' and we will do this again.
3. Staff in the Enquiry Centre have been trained to be able to respond to enquiries about the need for planning permission on domestic dwellings and general planning enquiries. There is a Planning Officer and a Building Surveyor available for advice if the query can not be resolved by the Enquiry Centre. This approach enables the Building Control and Planning Officers to spend more time focusing on dealing with building and planning applications.
4. We have now added PDF format form to the downloads from our web site for completion to help in sending the form back electronically.

Customer Complaints and Compliments

The Customer Relations Team, based in the DEC, investigate and reply to complaints received about the Planning and Building Control Service. On

occasions are asked to deal with Highways and Sustainable Development complaints. The figures in this report represent all the services for which the Team respond to.

Stage 1 complaints numbered 103 down from 105 the previous year.

Stage 2 complaints numbered 41 down from 43 the previous year

There has been an decrease in official complaints received in Planning Services and Building Control as a whole by 5%. All the complaints were fully investigated by the Customer Relations Team and service improvements have been put forward for implementation.

Ombudsman cases numbered 27 up from 21 the previous year. 11 of the cases arrived from the Ombudsman closed as compared to 2 the previous year.

The Ombudsman are opening more cases as preliminary enquiries when seeking background information from the Council before deciding to investigate or not. When they decide not to investigate the case arrives closed.

Service Improvements

The Compliance Team have a target in the Service Plan of reducing the numbers of complaints received by 50% and are committed to using IT more effectively to achieve this over the period of the plan. They have also introduced a standard report format as suggested by the Ombudsman when closing cases.

A consistent way of dealing with Non Material Amendments to planning permissions has been agreed with planning officers

Each quarter complaints are discussed at Planning Services Leadership Team with communication and case management being common themes causing complaint from customers.

Ian Goodison
Customer Services Manager

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