



THE CABINET

A G E N D A

Date: Thursday, 17TH March 2005

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Venue: The Small Hall
Stourport High School
Minster Road, Stourport-on-Severn

**AGENDA ITEM 8.1.
BUILDING CONTROL BUSINESS PLAN 2005-2006 APPENDIX**



Wyre Forest District Council

Planning Health & Environment Division

Building Control Section

Business Plan

2005 - 2008

Web Site: www.wyreforestdc.gov.uk Tel: 01562 732531 Fax: 01562 732556

Building Control Section, Planning, Health & Environment Division, Wyre Forest District Council
Duke House, Clensmore Street, Kidderminster, Worcestershire DY10 2JX
E-Mail: building.control@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Planning, Health and Environment Division

**Building Control Section
Business Plan 2005-2008**

APPENDIX 1

Area Map

CONTENTS

Introduction and Context	Page 1
Key Service Aims and Objectives	Page 3
Building Control Function	Page 4
Building Control Market	Page 5
Forces for Change	Page 6
Issues Affecting Performance	Page 9
The Cost of the Building Control Service	Page 12
Service Targets	Page 13
Future Challenges	Page 15

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING, HEALTH and ENVIRONMENT DIVISION

**BUILDING CONTROL SECTION
BUSINESS PLAN 2005 – 2008**

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Wyre Forest District presents a varied mix of urban and rural environments, including areas of natural beauty, outstanding architecture, canal and riverside amenities and numerous retail, commercial, tourist and leisure businesses. The three towns of Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley form a triangle within the District and are surrounded by a number of outlying villages and hamlets.

Covering an area of seventy-five square miles, it has a population of approximately 97,000. The District is dissected by the River Severn with land to the east forming part of the West Midlands Green Belt and land to the west being designated as being of Great Landscape Value and containing part of the Wyre Forest from which the Council derives its name.

The Building Control Section, which is situated at Duke House in Kidderminster, forms part of the Planning, Health and Environment Division, and is responsible for carrying out its duties under the Building Act 1984 to ensure that development complies with the Building Regulations.

The Council's vision is "**Building a Better Future**" and the Building Control Section, whilst established as a separate business unit, sees itself at the centre of a dynamic Authority.

The British Standards Institute award of BS EN ISO 9001:2000 to Building Control for its Quality Management System confirms the Section's commitment to service delivery and customer satisfaction.

The Council is fully committed to the principles of best value. As such, Building Control has drawn up this Business Plan within the context of the Council's range of linked plans and strategies that underpin the way in which we deliver our services.

The District's first Community Strategy sets out shared visions and priorities, and links very closely with the Council's Corporate Plan, which outlines the Council's values and identifies how it will conduct it's business in order to deliver it's strategic aims and objectives.

The Building Control Service operates within the Corporate Plan Organisational Theme of Delivering Quality Services and within the Service Theme of Managing the Local Environment, where the key policy area of Development Assessment and Building Control **'aims to guide and promote development in accordance with adopted plans, regulation and policies, which contribute to a safe, sustainable, attractive and accessible environment'**.

The Planning, Health and Environment Division produces an annual service business plan, explaining how it's own services work towards achieving the strategic aims and priorities as defined in the Corporate Plan. Feeding into this is Building Control's own Business Plan, which translates the Divisional Plan into more specific targets and actions.

KEY SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the Building Control Section is to provide a value for money Building Control service based on clearly defined outputs, programmes and budgets which, through its well informed decisions, creates and maintains a safe built environment within the Wyre Forest area.

In particular, the Building Control Section aims to :

- Recover all relevant costs through charges over a rolling three year accounting period.
- Fulfil the statutory functions of the service as defined by the Building Act 1984 and the Building Regulations 2000, and as set out in the 'Level of Service' document, which we are committed to continually review following the publication of the Building Control Performance Standards Document.
- Actively market the Service through the Building Control Local Marketing Strategy.
- Focus on the speed, efficiency and quality of service delivery.
- Continually assess and review our practices and procedures as part of our ISO 9001 Quality Management accreditation.
- Act in an open, fair and professional manner based on best current advice and working practices.
- Continually look for new ways of operating and broadening the scope of the service that are clear, understandable, user-friendly and meet the needs of our customers.
- Work in partnership to promote sustainability and energy efficiency in new development.
- Continually develop the human resources of the Section to ensure up to date, high quality professional advice is provided in carrying out the Building Control function on the Council's behalf.
- Continually improve the information systems and technology used to support the provision of better quality services.
- Monitor and review resources, performance and costs including those divisional and central recharges made by others to ensure that value for money leading to the continuation of the service is achieved
- Continue to improve upon our co-ordinated approach to the provision of Development Control and Building Control functions through the Development Team Approach.

BUILDING CONTROL FUNCTION

The Building Control Section remains functionally separate but has a close working relationship with the Development Control Section, improving the links necessary and desirable for effective development monitoring and more flexible operational management.

Under the supervision of the Building Control Manager, the Building Control Section provides a full range of services which are designed on the basis of four area teams (*see APPENDIX 1*).

Key Components of Building Control

- The examination, approval or rejection of submitted plans, specification and other relevant information
- The inspection of building work in progress for which an application has been received
- The keeping of adequate records in relation to plan vetting and site inspection matters
- Taking enforcement action in respect of breaches of the Building Regulations
- Control of dangerous structures
- Demolition
- Providing advice and guidance on related issues, i.e. energy conservation, licensing
- Development monitoring via a Service Level Agreement between Building Control and Development Control.

BUILDING CONTROL MARKET

The Building Control service has a specific range of customers who purchase their services in a competitive market. In addition, there are a range of beneficiaries, such as the general public, who benefit indirectly from the Council's Building Control function, which seeks to achieve reasonable standards of health and safety and to ensure that the Council's duties and liabilities under the Building Act 1984 are adequately fulfilled.

We are committed to achieve these aims through effective partnerships with internal and external bodies such as other Local Authority divisions / sections and the Fire Service, Police Authority and other professionals.

Our customers include agents, individuals and organisations submitting Building Regulation applications, the Enforcement function of Development Control, and other sections of the Council such as Environmental Health.

The Section has good customer relations and is receptive and responsive to their needs. This is borne out in the positive feedback from the joint Building Control / Development Control Focus Group meetings and the Section's biennial Customer and User surveys (see APPENDIX 2) which are used to improve service provision and strengthen the existing marketing strategy. As can be seen, results from the surveys were very positive; the majority of people found Wyre Forest Building Control to provide a good all-round value for money service in a practical and friendly manner.

FORCES FOR CHANGE

Government Attitude

It is long standing Government policy to open up the work of Local Authority Building Control (L.A.B.C.) to competition. Approximately 70% of the work carried out by L.A.B.C. is estimated to be fee earning work which is directly attributable to the processing of applications. This has been sample tested and verified but needs to be further analysed during the Plan period through the full use of timesheets if the Section is to adjust to the pressures of an increasingly competitive environment. The Government has confirmed the view that local authorities should recover **all of these relevant costs** associated with fee earning work. At the same time both residential and commercial work is open to competition from an ever-increasing number of Approved Inspectors.

Legislation

The former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in consultation with the Local Government Association have devolved charges for Building Control Services in accordance with the Local Government Association's Model Scheme from the 1st April 1999. The Building (Local Authority Charges) Regulations 1998 provides that there is a requirement for the Building Control Section to demonstrate **full charge recovery over a three year rolling period**. The Section is committed to meeting this challenge whilst not compromising the quality of service delivered. Initially the standard charges were adopted, but it has been agreed that these may vary by + or – 10% without reference to Committee in order to ensure that the Section remains competitive. Indeed, due to the Section's achievement in realising not only full cost recovery over the initial 3 year period, but also producing surpluses on every year since 1999, the charges for 2005 / 2006 are likely to remain at the same level as that established in April 2003.

Economic Climate

In spite of the general unpredictable economic climate within the building industry, the number of Building Control applications has increased over the last 3 financial years. This situation is constantly monitored as it has direct consequences on the financial viability of the Section over the Plan period. Substantial opportunities exist locally with various town centre commercial projects, industrial opportunities and large-scale residential schemes and much emphasis will continue to be given to winning this work.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

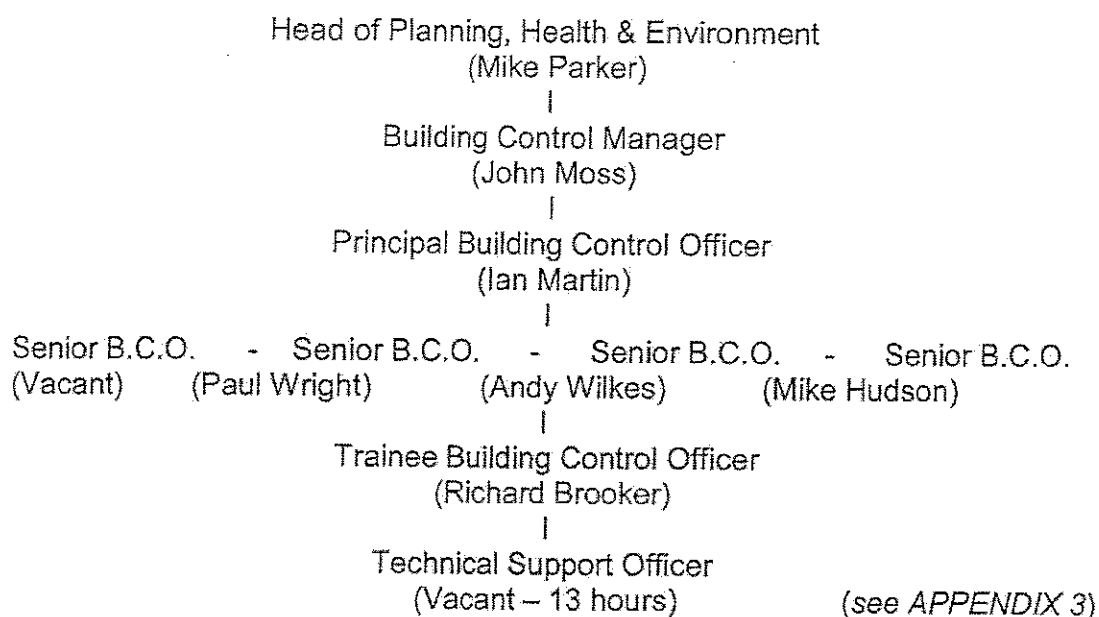
In September 2004 the Council underwent its formal C.P.A. inspection by the Audit Commission and has been found to be a 'fair and improving' Council. In order to ensure continuous improvement the Council has developed an Improvement Plan following the outcome of C.P.A. The Building Control Section recognises the role it plays in supporting improvements to the services the Council offers and will respond positively in supporting the C.P.A. Improvement Plan.

Best Value

Under the umbrella of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (C.P.A.) there is still an emphasis on achieving the principles of 'best value' in service delivery. The District Surveyor's Association has done much in recent years, through the Level of Service Model Guide document and Quality Management Toolkit, to promote a customer orientated quality approach with many authorities now providing excellent examples of good practice. The Worcestershire and Herefordshire County Group of Chief Building Control Officers has, and will continue to be, increasingly used for benchmarking purposes. The Building Control Section is aware of its need to compete for work in a limited market, provide quality services and to demonstrate 'Best Value' to its customers, and in doing so it will continue to draw upon the experience and practices of others, together with its own marketing strategy to respond positively to this challenge which will ultimately benefit its customers. Better communication with our customers and users of the Building Control service is already being achieved through our Newsletter, Advice Leaflets, Guidance Notes, User Surveys and Focus Group meetings.

The Audit Commissions Inspectors' findings and recommendations report of January 2003 on Wyre Forest District Council's Planning Services, commented on the fact that **'an efficient and effective building control service is provided'**. This report, together with our established plans and strategies, are used to drive forward continuous improvement in the service we provide to our customers.

The Structure of the Building Control Section



The Building Control Section is a relatively small and autonomous team operating as a business unit and consisting of the Building Control Manager, Principal Building Control Officer, four Senior Building Control Officers and a Trainee.

General back up is provided by staff in the Technical Support, Secretariat and Administrative Services, and 13 hours from a dedicated Technical Support Officer.

The closer working relationship with the Development Control Section has produced stronger links between professional disciplines, providing development monitoring opportunities and a single development contact through the Development Team Approach. As mentioned in the Audit Commission's Best Value report ' **the close working relationship between building control, development control and enforcement has also contributed added value to the planning process**'.

Strength and Weaknesses of the Building Control Section

A S.W.O.T. analysis was undertaken recently with the Building Control staff as part of the Best Value process and Divisional Business Plan annual review. A version of the 2004 / 2005 analysis is shown in (see APPENDIX 4).

ISSUES AFFECTING PERFORMANCE

Work Trends and Pressures for Change

The work and income of the Building Control Section are directly related to the state of the U.K. economy and strength of the construction industry.

Following a period of recession and stagnation, the Building Industry has experienced a steady upturn in economic health which, although concentrated mainly in the South East, has shown its effects in the West Midlands and Wyre Forest. Workflow to the Section also benefited from Building Society flotations and competitive loan rates as people have spent money on improving their homes.

There is little doubt that the U.K. economy has stabilised now, with low interest rates giving rise to confidence within the construction industry. However, sustained growth should NOT be expected in either application numbers or income derived from charges.

Performance Chart

Number of Building Control Applications including Full Plans and Building Notices (excluding Resubmissions and Cavity Fill)																			
Schedule					Schedule					Schedule					Schedule				
1	2	3	4*	5*	1	2	3	4*	5*	1	2	3	4*	5*	1	2	3	4*	5*
30	300	311	31	9	45	431	323	53	21	39	478	340	64	13	46	397	295	105	12
TOTALS: 681					TOTALS: 873					TOTALS: 954					TOTALS: 856				
Year: 2001 / 2002					Year: 2002 / 2003					Year: 2003 / 2004					Year: 2004 / 2005#				

*4 Exempt *5 Multi-Schedule 2004 / 2005# (to Feb 05)

Number of Reported Dangerous Structures				
	33	31	21	28
Year	2001 / 2002	2002 / 2003	2003 / 2004	2004 / 2005#

A register of all Licensing and Public Entertainment Applications dealt with by the Section has been maintained since 1998 but, prior to this, although formal records were not kept, a considerable amount of time was taken up with processing and filing the large number of applications received annually. However, from February 2005, the new Licensing Act 2003 comes into force and it will be a matter of time before we know the likely effect on the workload of the Section.

Number of Regularisation Applications				
	16	25	19	49
Year	2001 / 2002	2002 / 2003	2003 / 2004	2004 / 2005#

2004/2005# (to Feb 05#)

The amount of enforcement cases handled by the Section over recent years is very few in number due to the positive approach taken towards achieving compliance throughout the construction period. Wherever possible problems are dealt with at an early stage in an effort to avoid delays and enforcement, as an option, is only used as a last resort. This is consistent with the Council's Pro-Active Planning Enforcement Policy.

Human Resources

Quality services depend totally upon quality employees. The efforts of employees are recognised by the Council's vision for the future and its commitment is shown in the Investors in People award.

Demand

The number of staff required is directly related to the amount of work undertaken, which equates simply on the one hand to the number of applications received. This demand in relation to the fee earning work also depends on the level of service, which is specified from time to time in the Level of Service document. Additional demands arise from non-fee earning work such as dangerous structures and demolitions, which only Local Authorities are empowered to undertake, and work to provide access and facilities for disabled people, which is exempt from fee payment and accounts, annually, for approximately 10% of all Building Regulation applications received.

The District Surveyors' Association provides a basic formula for assessing staff levels in relation to the national level of service document which they produced and which Wyre Forest has interpreted at the local level. The formula which they provide indicates that, along with most other Authorities, we operate slightly below a full staff complement.

Supply

Work levels have increased and remain strong. The experience and local knowledge of staff is essential to enable the Section to respond to the new challenges faced by changing legislation and increasing competition. Investment in the staff, the Section's most important asset, is vital to maintain and strengthen the Service. There is a pressing need to ensure that salary rates for the Section's staff are attractive in comparison with other Local Authority Building Control services and private Approved Inspector organisations, in order to retain and recruit appropriately experienced and qualified staff. At present the Section employs four fully qualified officers with one in the process of obtaining corporate professional membership and the Trainee about to commence a relevant degree course.

Training

Wyre Forest District Council is committed to 'Investors in People'. Staff training and development is very important and staff are guided through the system of Employee Development Review (EDR) to ensure that they remain conversant with legislative changes and procedures relative to Building Control. In this way, Building Control officers and support staff will be supported in training opportunities and initiatives designed to ensure continuing professional and personal development relevant to the delivery of the Building Control Service, the Planning, Health and Environment Division Service Business Plan and the Corporate Plan.

Recognising that the recruitment of qualified officers has been particularly difficult in recent years, the Building Control Section has invested in a Trainee Building Control Officer in order to succession plan for the future.

Additionally, staff have been trained in Health and Safety issues, with the emphasis on safe working practices and procedures.

External Consultations

An integral part of the plan vetting service relates to statutory consultations with Fire Prevention Officers from Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade. This arises when Building Regulation applications relate to premises designated under the Fire Precautions Act 1971, i.e. offices, shops, industrial buildings, hotels and boarding houses. The consultation relates to means of escape in case of fire provisions and, at present, approximately 7 – 8% of all Building Regulation applications require Fire Officer consultation.

THE COST OF THE BUILDING CONTROL SERVICE

Costs

The gross budget cost for the whole Building Control Service in 2003 / 04 was £328,680, with an income of £273,139 giving a net cost of £83,570. This Business Plan concerns itself, primarily, with the fee earning work where the costs of the Service have to be balanced by the income derived from charges levied. This information is presently commercially sensitive.

Financial Year	Fee Earning Applications Received*	Estimated Value of Work (£)
2001 / 2002	681	19,106,284
2002 / 2003	821	26,923,000
2003 / 2004	642	29,870,577
2004 / 2005**	751	21,640,993

*includes Regularisation and Building Notices

**to February 2005

Other Sources of Income

With competition increasing in the Building Control market, it is important for the Section to look at ways of achieving income from other sources. At present the Section performs a site monitoring function for Development Control, for which an annual payment is received. Also, under Local Authority Building Control's Partner Authority Scheme, Wyre Forest Building Control has Partnership Agreements with four local businesses, which enables the Section to receive plan charge income on applications made to other local authorities. The Section will seek to further develop their involvement in this scheme and, in the meantime, other areas of possible revenue will be pursued whilst continually seeking out opportunities to promote the Service to existing and potential customers.

SERVICE TARGETS

Performance Management

Wyre Forest Building Control is committed to providing quality services in line with the principals of Best Value. The Section has recently been awarded BSI EN ISO 9001:2000, confirming it's commitment to being cost effective and responsive to the needs of its service users. The Section has set out the high standards of service against which it will be judged in the Level of Service document. A Local Marketing Strategy and Section I.T. Strategy have established action plans which set out areas for improvement and development within pre-determined time scales.

The existing computer system generates ad-hoc management reports for monitoring purposes, with each officer having their own workstation and access to the Building Control databases. However the Section is committed to embracing into its practices and procedures future Management and DIP/Workflow systems, which are to be introduced at Divisional level, and the replacement, in 2005, of the Paradox system.

The following performance indicators and management standards, (*see APPENDIX 5*), are based on those drawn up by the District Surveyors' Association and form the basis against which we will monitor our performance, internally and externally benchmarking against other local authorities and Approved Inspectors.

Performance against these targets will be monitored and reviewed periodically to ensure that we continue to provide the best possible services within available resources.

Performance Indicators and Standards

Attached in *APPENDIX 5* are the performance indicators (I) and management standards (S) together with the target. Performance against the targets will be the subject of on-going appraisal and review as part of the Section's quality management auditing programme and the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan. Quarterly summary figures are produced and displayed in reception and on the Internet as part of the Section's quality management system. Performance is also reported twice yearly as part of the Business Plan monitoring procedures.

Marketing

Given the competition that the Section faces, Wyre Forest Building Control Services require effective marketing to maintain and extend its customer base. A Marketing Strategy has been developed from the initial foundations already laid with the User / Customer surveys, Focus Group meetings and Newsletter publications. A market profile of customer needs, service provision and cost effectiveness forms the basis of the strategy with the objective of maintaining and extending our market share. The Strategy is continually being reviewed to check progress against the action plan and targets set, and to ensure continued adequate funding is available.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

The biggest single challenge faced by Wyre Forest Building Control is to continually break even within the three year Plan period arising from local charge setting. Anticipating demand is difficult, but what is clear is that with competition on the housing and commercial fronts, it will be a challenging time to maintain our existing market share. The Section has to be increasingly cost conscious as income is directly related to applications, which are both volatile and susceptible to the fortunes of the construction industry, which would respond quickly to any persistent downturn in the U.K. economy.

The Building Control Section is also developing a pro-active approach to marketing not only to 'fight off' competition, but to potentially win back and retain customers from competing service providers.

The Plan is a living document and will evolve over time responding particularly to market forces. It also has to relate to the Planning, Health and Environment Divisional Service Business Plan, Building Control Marketing Strategy and Building Control I.T. Strategy, all incorporating Building Control's actions and targets set out in *APPENDIX 6*.

As progress is made along the life cycle of this Plan, it is envisaged that creative measures and partnering agreements will have to be explored to reduce on-costs and central recharges to ensure Best Value in service delivery.

