

## REPORT

To: GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE		Subject: ADMINISTRATION SERVICE PLAN - DEVELOPMENT OF PROPERTY ENQUIRY SERVICE
From: DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION		
Date: 25 <sup>th</sup> September 2002	Ref: JAF/AC	

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise the General Purposes Committee of the outcome of the survey of existing users of the property enquiry service as part of its proposed development to improve service provision and performance.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The General Purposes Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2001 approved of the Administration Service Plan for the years from 2001 to 2004 and that Plan included, as part of the Modernising Government Agenda, the further development of the Property Enquiry Service in light of a survey of existing users. The results of the survey are intended to be used to extend the accessibility of service provision by improved marketing of the service and publishing the range and availability of the service to other potential customers.
- 2.2 At the meeting of the Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2002, it was reported that the survey of existing users was underway. It is intended that the survey should lead to the provision of a service commitment to users on the importance which the department places on their enquiry and to evidence the standard which users can come to expect from the department in this regard.

**3. Considerations**

- 3.1 Property Enquiry Certificates are an essential part of dealing in the property market and the income generated from the provision of this service is significant. While there are agencies outwith the local authority who are working in the same service provision, the Council must maintain its part of this service by recognising that this information is vital to those in the property market.
- 3.2 The Certificate contains information received from a number of service departments and includes whether -
- the dwellinghouse meets the 'tolerable' standard and has all of the standard amenities;
  - it is the subject of a Closing Order or a Demolition Order;
  - it is in a Smoke Control Area;
  - it is affected by any other environmental or pollution issues;
  - the dwellinghouse has been the subject of an Improvement or a Repairs Grant;
  - the carriageway, footpath/footway, verge have been adopted for maintenance purposes;
  - there are any road proposals affecting the property;
  - the property is affected by Building Regulations;
  - the property is subject to enforcement notice; compulsory purchase; other planning type agreements or directions; or Tree Preservation Order;
  - the property is in a Housing Action Area or a Conservation Area; or is a listed building;
  - the property or adjoining properties have been the subject of planning applications and
  - what is the zoning in the Local Plan;

3.3 Water and sewerage services are excluded from Property Enquiry Certificates as this information has to be obtained from Scottish Water.

3.4 Listed below are details of the number of property enquiry certificates processed -

Year	Applications	Income (£)	Performance Indicator	% in Target Time
1996/1997	861	51,660	31 days	69%
1997/1998	694	41,640	31 days	89%
1998/1999	654	41,202	14 days	85%
1999/2000	710	44,730	14 days	87%
2000/2001	768	49,920	14 days	97%
2001/2002	1,006	65,390	14 days	95%

3.5 Also listed is a breakdown identifying the areas of the Council for which enquiries are received -

Year	Central	North	South	Total
1997/1998	212	147	335	694
1998/1999	153	190	311	654
1999/2000	240	171	299	710
2000/2001	222	196	350	768
2001/2002	341	224	441	1,006

#### 4. Survey

4.1 The survey was designed to elicit information from users on -

- the frequency of their use of the service;
- how they requested information;
- how satisfactory was the information supplied;
- whether they used any of the alternative sources for property enquiry certificates;
- how the Council's service compared with that of the external agencies;
- whether the performance indicator and turnaround time for responses was satisfactory;
- how they viewed the service.

4.2 261 firms of solicitors/agents used the property enquiry service in 2001 and it was this group who were targeted with the survey questionnaire. The response to the survey questionnaire was poor. However, it did show from the survey forms returned that 75% of the users had previously made use of the service, with the remaining 25% being new users of the service in 2001.

4.3 The results of the survey have indicated -

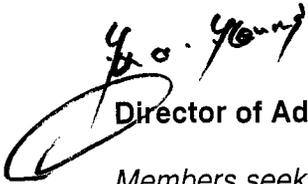
- The largest group use the service up to 5 times per annum;
- 70% of the users preferred to use either Legal Post or DX for requests, with only 4% using the Royal Mail;
- 78% were satisfied with the speed of delivery of the certificate; 87% with the quality of information; and 65% with the clarity of the certificate;
- 70% of the respondents to the survey questionnaire also used one or more of the alternative property certificate providers;

- in terms of cost and information provided, the Council's service was comparable with that of the external provider, but did not rate so highly in terms of delivery time.

4.4 Indications are that the Council's property enquiry certificate provides good value for money in its present form. However, while the Council is in terms of price competitive, adverse factors include external agencies' ability to provide certificates more speedily and the format of the certificate which might be improved to compare with the tabular response of the external agencies. Investigations are underway with a view to addressing these areas of concern.

## 5. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the terms of the report.



**Director of Administration**

*Members seeking further information on the contents of this report should contact John Fleming, Head of Central services, on extension 2228.*