

ICT – Customer Services – Business Systems

Local Land Charges – BVPI 179 2005/2006

Overview:

Searches are required to be turned around within 10 working days. These timings are calculated from the following working day the application is received until the date of despatch. For the financial year 2005/2006, EFDC managed to achieve a YEARLY turnaround of 52% whilst most other Local Authorities achieved at least 90%. The figures shown below are the % of searches returned within 10 working days, split by month during 2005/06.

APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
76.19	3.66	4.12	35.62	81.12	64.25	97.25	91.81	96.55	33.07	7.81	28.97

A number of issues have contributed to these statistics.

- **External agency performance.**
 - Highways
- **Internal services performance.**
 - Environmental Health (EH).
 - Building Control (BC).
 - Development Control - carried out by LLC Staff (DC).
 - Local Land Charges (LLC)
- **Resource issues.**
 - Local Land Charges
 - External agencies
 - Data cleansing issues - Northgate M3 planning system.

Listed below are all the stages involved in processing a LLC search, with the approximate turnaround for the last quarter.

1. Highways 6-10 Days
2. EH 9 Days
3. BC 2 Days
4. DC 6 Days
5. LLC – Processing/Collation 2 Days

These actions are **concurrent** except for the final LLC collation stage.

The ultimate aim is to integrate LLC fully into the M3 planning system and use the NLIS system (solicitors can both apply and receive a response via the internet) to it's full potential. However, full implementation/integration has been delayed due to EFDC's previous planning consultant identifying that LLC data was accurate, but not appreciating the manual intervention required to convert this data into the spatial (map based) format required by Northgate M3 system

It is estimated that it will be at least 6 months before the data will be in a suitable condition to integrate into the M3 system. Once completed, this will undoubtedly help to improve performance, but as can be seen by the October, November and December figures, 90% turnaround can already be achieved, provided external agencies respond suitably.

Further IT enhancements are continuing to be developed to assist, with the current testing of an automated email link to be used to send applications and scanned plans directly to Highways. The full benefit of this is of course dependant on Highways nominating a dedicated group/person who will deal with these types of request and who have the technology (scanner etc.) and skills to respond in the same manner.

Risks:

Land Charges (LLC) are required to liaise with a number of agencies/services to acquire the required information. As can be seen from the above, these agencies/services appear to be the major cause of the delays experienced.

- Highways:
 - There is no SLA in place.
 - Recent split from EFDC appears to have resulted in Highways becoming very disjointed, with overworked staff and no clear management responsibilities for EFDC LLC searches.
 - Applications are currently **posted** on a DAILY basis from EFDC. Responses are returned in batches, not daily, by **post** from Highways.

- Environmental Health:
 - There is no SLA in place.
 - Normally turnaround was very good (approx 2 days) but since the implementation of 'wheelie bins' (January 2006) staff that usually deal with LLC searches appear to have been instructed to prioritise on telephone call complaints. The statistics in the table above seem to confirm this, with October to December being very good and then dropping again dramatically.

- Other internal services performances are acceptable and can be more easily monitored/controlled by LLC.

- Resource issues:
 - LLC staff are being seconded to assist in the data cleansing of the 1948-1974 data instead of doing their normal work.
 - LLC staff are being seconded to assist in the rationalisation of the LLC register.

- If the aforementioned problems are not rectified immediately, a bad start to 2006/2007 will result in another poor BVPI next year, as it will not be possible to recover from even a small number of bad monthly results.

- The proposed back scanning of hard copy planning files for the M3 system is due to commence April/May 2006. This necessitates files going off-site. LLC

require access to many of these files on a daily basis. These files will need to be returned and this will result in a further delay in the DC performance area.

- 1 temporary member of LLC staff's contract is due to expire September 2006.

Recommendations:

- Arrange a HIGH LEVEL meeting between EFDC and Highways to set up an SLA (with penalties), formalise working practices and identify staff responsible for dealing with EFDC searches.
- Ensure Highways have hardware (scanner/PC) to receive and return emailed searches from EFDC.
- Enquirer undertakes highways searches direct. This will probably not be a popular option, but EFDC need to decide whether to focus on providing a full and comprehensive service or just comply with Government regulations.
- Employ Mouchel Parkman (ECC Appointed Agents who hold the highway records), to process highways searches. They have a good reputation and an SLA with the highways service. They currently provide highway information for the following;
 - Uttlesford
 - Maldon
 - Tendring
 - Castle Point
 - Rochford
- LLC to continue monitoring response times to identify any future potential problems more quickly.
- Investigate the possibility of integrating the EH system with the Planning system – This would be a long-term objective.
- Train LLC staff to carry out EH searches using the current EH system. This may speed up searches but will put extra strain on LLC staff resources.
- Establish whether Legal and Admin is the correct service for Land Charges to reside in. LLC seems to sit within planning in most other LA's.

Conclusion;

- As can be seen from the above, turnaround statistics will only be as strong as the weakest link in the process.
- Although an integrated planning system will improve turnaround, currently the biggest delays are with the Highways and Environmental responses as identified above.