

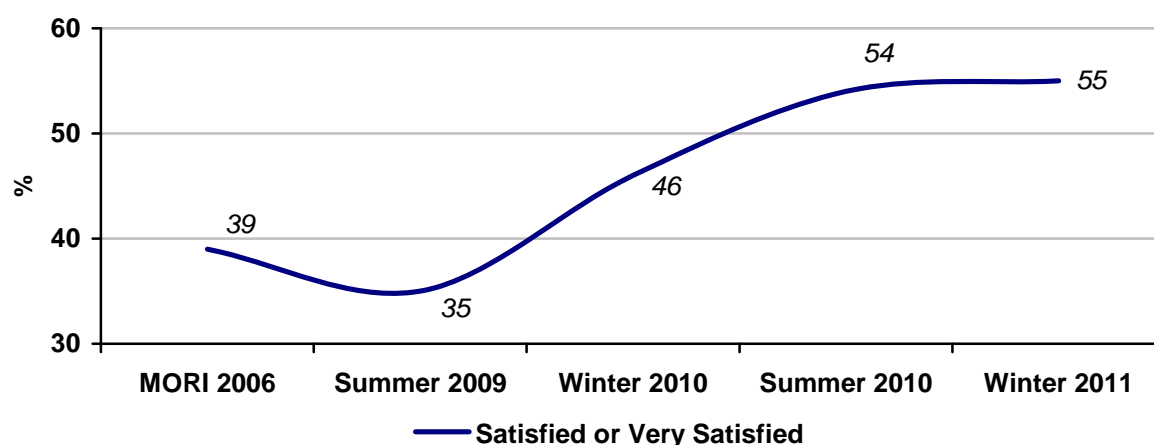
Planning Applicants and Consultees Customer Satisfaction Survey 2009/10 and 2010/11 Outcomes

Executive Summary

The Hackney Planning Service has undergone a number of changes during 2009/10. These changes are aimed at improving customer satisfaction and the efficiency of the service. As a gauge to measure the perceptions and experiences of our customers, and the results of our recent changes, a series of surveys have been carried out. These surveys have been conducted at half year intervals, beginning in Summer 2009 and concluding in Winter 2011.

The four consecutive surveys have shown a sustained and improving trend in customer satisfaction – improving from a base position of 35% in Summer 2009, to a final result of 55% in Winter 2011.

Diagram 1 - General Satisfaction with Hackney Planning Service



1 Introduction

This report presents the final analysis of the results of 4 bi-annual surveys undertaken between Summer 2009 and Winter 2011 as part of the Planning for Excellence Programme. Increased customer satisfaction is a key indicator and success measure for the Programme. To assess our progress towards a commitment of enhancing customer satisfaction from 39% to 55% by 2011, bi-annual surveys were undertaken for Planning Applicants and Neighbourhood Consultees. These surveys are used to, not only record the change in customer perceptions of the Planning Service, but also to drive the development of the Service, as part of a comprehensive suite of indicators used by the service.

The 39% baseline quoted above was obtained through the IPSOS Mori Survey of 2006. It was based on two questions. The first was directed at applicants and asked them to rate the Planning Service, the second was a question to the general community on their thoughts on the Service.

The survey outcomes discussed in this paper are the result of targeted questioning of our customer base and feedback on a range of topics designed to understand how the service provided by the Planning Service is perceived by its customers. This information has informed work within the Service during the Planning for Excellence Programme. A section of identified future actions has been included at the end of this report.

2 Methodology

The survey has undergone various changes in line with altering processes including increased electronic delivery of the survey, among other reasons. The most recent survey draws on the experience to date of the previous three surveys.

Firstly, approximately 50% of the surveys were sent electronically, with the remainder posted. This change was made to increase the response rate, and reduce the cost of the survey. Both outcomes were realised with a significant increase in response rate – up from 136 in Winter 2009 to 454 for Summer 2010; an increase of 318 surveys returned. This response rate remained broadly similar in Winter 2011, however, as there were a lower number of surveys sent out, the total number of returns did reduce. Percentage wise there was a slight fall from 15.5% in Summer 2010 to 13% in Winter 2011. Statistical significance increased slightly, due to the lower number distributed.

Secondly, a change was made to the Summer 2010 Survey and retained for the Winter 2011 Survey with the introduction of a forced choice to key satisfaction questions through removing the 'No Opinion' option. This change was primarily made as previous responses had high levels of 'No Opinion', in excess of 30%. The result was that respondents had to make a clear distinction between satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Thirdly, the Summer 2010 and Winter 2011 surveys were only sent to consultees who had provided comments on a planning application.

The final change, involved some rewording of the consultees survey in light of the significant increase in electronic submission of comments.

Two surveys were distributed. The first targeted planning applicants, the second was a different question set specifically designed for neighbourhood consultees. The most recent survey, being Winter 2011, was sent to -

- Applicants who had decision made between June 2010 and December 2010.
- Consultees who had expressed an opinion on a planning application in the period June 2010 – December 2010. Surveys were not sent to those who had not expressed an opinion.

Similar time periods were used for previous surveys.

The surveys were sent to recipients together with a Monitoring Form so that the Planning Service could better understand the demographic composition of its customer base.

3 Return Rates

The following tables details the return rates for planning applicants and neighbourhood consultees.

Table 1: Number of surveys and response rates for planning applicants

Period	No. of Surveys	No. of Responses	Response Rate	Margin of Error (95%)
Summer 2009	440	70	16%	+/- 11
Winter 2010	640	61	10%	+/- 12
Summer 2010	809	88	11%	+/- 10
Winter 2011	774	69	9%	+/-11

Table 2: Number of surveys and response rates for neighbourhood consultees

Period	No. of Surveys	No. of Responses	Response Rate	Margin of Error (95%)
Summer 2009	2346	120	5%	+/- 9
Winter 2010	1726	75	4%	+/- 11
Summer 2010	2126	366	17%	+/- 5
Winter 2011	1013	158	16%	+/-7

4 Survey Results and Analysis for Planning Applicants

4.1 About Our Planning Applicant Customers

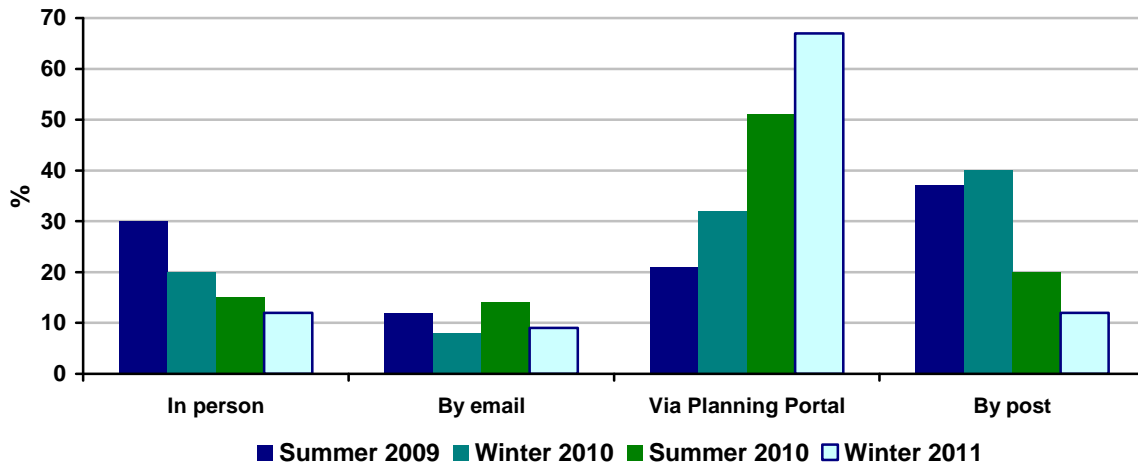
In the final survey, responses were received from 69 customers, of these, 71% were agents, and 29% direct applicants. 45% of respondents submitted 3 or more applications per year.

The responses were split 73% male, 26% female, with 78% of respondents identifying themselves as white British. The next largest ethnicity being white Irish with 65% return rate. No respondents reported that they considered themselves disabled. In terms of faith, the responses were split between Christian 38%, Atheist 30% and not stated 20%. 78% of respondents reported that they were heterosexual. For further detailed information on our customers see Section 8.

4.2 Submitting Applications

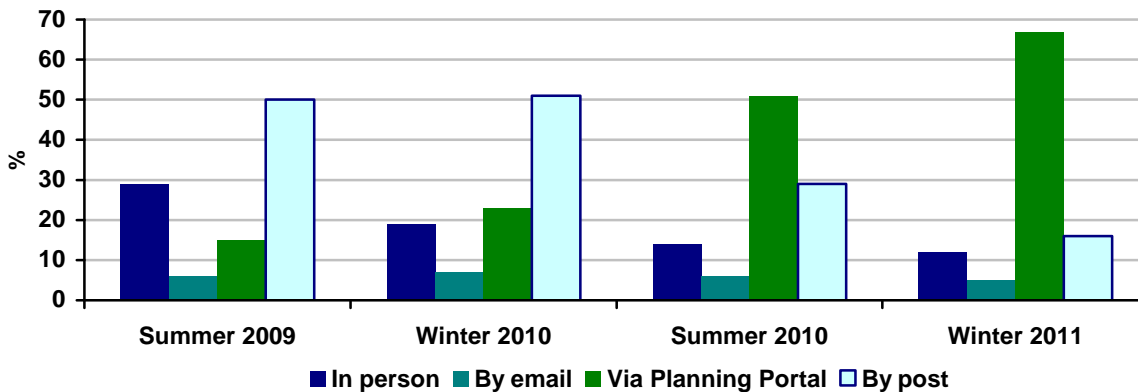
The preferred method of submission has seen a significant change from previous surveys, possibly reflective of the predominantly electronic delivery method of the survey. The most popular response has switched from post to use of the Planning Portal. This method accounted for 67% of how they had submitted their most recent application and for their preferred method. Use of the Planning Portal has consistently improved over the survey period, from an initial rate of 21% to 67%. This is substantiated through our Local Indicators monitoring which shows 42% of all applications are being received via the Planning Portal. All other methods of submitting applications have dropped substantially.

Diagram 2: Preferred method of submitting applications



Overall satisfaction with the Planning Service was lower among Portal users, than for other ways of submitting applications (46% satisfied compared to 55%). This may be influenced by the lower proportion of approvals among Portal users being 68% compared to other submission methods which had 94% approval. Why this variance in refusals for Portal applications is occurring requires more investigation. This is the first survey response set where the preferred method of submitting an application closely correlates to how they are actually submitting their applications.

Diagram 3: How your last application was submitted



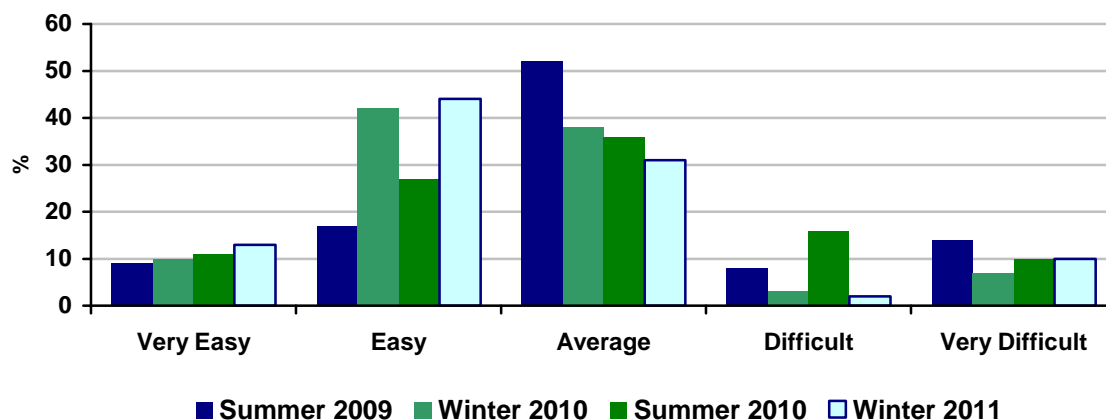
4.3 How easy is it to apply?

It is clear from responses to *Question 4: How easy was the process of submitting an application?* – that it is still a difficult procedure for some applicants regardless of the method used. The high proportion of professional applicants (agents) responding to the survey, 71%, is underlined by those identifying the process is ‘very easy’ or ‘easy’, 57%. The survey had a large proportion of applications that were prepared by professional agents and submitted by the Portal, which accounts for the swing towards the process being seen as easy, as agents are experienced in the process which is fundamentally the same across England and Wales.

In number terms, 8 applicants found the process ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’, and of these 5 were individual applicants. While ‘very difficult’ remained consistent at 10% of all responses, ‘difficult’ dropped from 16% in Summer 2010 to 2% in Winter 2011. The survey does not present any evidence that the actions taken by the Planning Service, such as the

pre-application service, is affecting the perception that applying for planning permission is becoming easier. The nature of the 1APP form, may limit the work that the Service can do to simplify the process further.

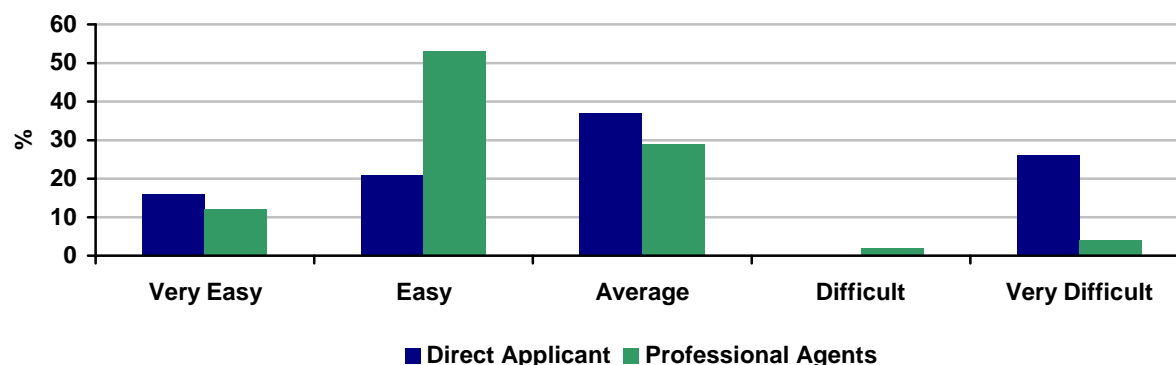
Diagram 4: Ease of submitting an application



Applicants were asked to recount their experience in submitting applications. Most of those who responded highlighted that while submitting an application was easy, follow through on how the application was progressing was lacking.

Analysis of the difference in experience between direct applicants and professional agents shows that professionals find the process less difficult than those who are applying for themselves. This suggests that the Planning Service should focus on assisting individual applicants to a greater degree.

Diagram 5: Ease of submitting an application – direct applicant v professional agent



4.4 Dealing with Our Customers

The following dataset is probably the most effective in providing an overview of the Planning Services' overall 'direction of travel' for responding to our customers needs. It is important to note that the "No Opinion" option was removed in the last two surveys, to create a forced choice. The positive turn-around since Summer 2009 in relation to how we are perceived by applicants, is evident.

Improvement was seen in all areas leading up to the latest survey in Winter 2011. It now appears results are levelling out with few altering from previous results. The exception is 'being kept informed of progress throughout the life of the application', which saw a fall of 9% down to 36%.

The most concerning results are the levels of professionalism identified, which while seeing just a 1% improvement is still below the Winter 2010 result of 63%. When analysed against customer types, evidence points to agents, more than private applicants, feeling that the Planning Service was not providing a professional service. This is reinforced by the fact that less than 10% of agents felt 'very strongly' that their queries were promptly dealt with, as opposed to 11% of applicants; and 31% of agents 'strongly disagreeing' to the same question. This remains an area of concern for the Planning Service. These latest results show that 52% of customers were satisfied with the way they were dealt with during the application process and is a 1% drop on the previous survey results.

Table 3: Dealing with our customers

Period	Question	Strongly Agree and Agree	No Opinion	Disagree and Strongly Disagree
Summer 2009	My application was dealt with in an appropriate and professional manner.	28%	25%	47%
Winter 2010		63% Increased by 35%	5% Reduced by 20%	32% Reduced by 15%
Summer 2010		58% Reduced by 5%	Response option removed	42% Increased by 10%
Winter 2011		59% Increased by 1%	Response option removed	41% Reduced by 1%
Summer 2009	I was given the advice and help I needed to submit my application.	30%	26%	44%
Winter 2010		53% Increased by 23%	21% Reduced by 5%	26% Reduced by 18%
Summer 2010		61% Increased by 8%	Response option removed	39% Increased by 13%
Winter 2011		61% No Change	Response option removed	39% No Change
Summer 2009	I was kept informed of progress throughout the process.	24%	8%	68%
Winter 2010		39% Increased by 15%	22% Increased by 14%	39% Reduced by 29%
Summer 2010		47% Increased by 8%	Response option removed	53% Increased by 14%
Winter 2011		36% Reduced by 9%	Response option removed	64% Increased by 9%
Summer 2009	It was easy to contact my case officer.	27%	21%	52%
Winter 2010		44% Increased by 17%	24% Increased by 3%	32% Reduced by 20%
Summer 2010		53% Increased by 9%	Response option removed	47% Increased by 15%
Winter 2011		58% Increased by 5%	Response option removed	42% Reduced by 5%

Summer 2009	The Council dealt with my queries promptly	23%	19%	58%
Winter 2010		36% Increased by 13%	30% Increased by 11%	34% Reduced by 24%
Summer 2010		49% Increased by 13%	Response option removed	51% Increased by 17%
Winter 2011		48% Reduced by 1%	Response option removed	52% Increased by 1%
Summer 2009	Average across all questions.	26%	20%	54%
Winter 2010		47% Increased by 21%	20% No Change	33% Reduced by 21%
Summer 2010		53% Increase of 6%	Response option removed	47% Increase of 14%
Winter 2011		52% Reduction of 1%	Response option removed	48% Increase of 1%

Blue results – where we were sitting based on the first survey.

Green results – identifies and improvement.

Red results – identifies a backward slide in improvement.

4.5 Pre-Application Advice

The Planning Service offers pre-application advice to its customers in two ways; for larger application a paid for service is offered with detailed advice provided in 30 days, and for smaller applications a free service giving advice in 15 days is offered.

The survey shows that 65% of applicants had received pre-application advice and 91% of these made use of the free service. To gauge how the pre-application service was perceived by applicants, they were asked if they had made use of the service and if so, how they rated the service provided, including its value for money.

Overall, the response to the pre-application service was good, 63% of service users felt that the pre-application service is helpful and worthwhile. Of concern, is the percentage of those who would make use of the service again fell from 85% in Summer 2010 to 71% and only 50% of those who used the chargeable service felt that it was good value for money. This down from 62% in the Summer 2010 Survey.

4.6 Understanding Our Decisions

Over the last 2 years our approval rate for applications has remained consistent at approximately 75% granted and 25% refused. For those responding to the Winter 2011 Survey, 79% had been granted and 21% had been refused. When asked if they *understood the reasons for the decision*, 64% and 76% respectively 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed'. It is interesting to note that while the refusal rates for respondents was 21%, only 15% 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the decision. The following table summarises responses to this question set.

Table 4 – Understanding our Decisions and Clarity of Information

Period	Question	Strongly Agree and Agree	No Opinion	Disagree and Strongly Disagree
Summer 2009	I understood the reasons for the decision made on my application.	54%	14%	32%
Winter 2010		76% Increased by 22%	9% Reduced by 5%	15% Reduced by 17%
Summer 2010		76% No Change	Response option removed	24% Increased by 9%
Winter 2011		81% Increase of 5%	Response option removed	19% Decrease of 5%
Summer 2009	The decision notice and reasons for approval or refusal were easy to understand.	54%	19%	27%
Winter 2010		74% Increased by 20%	10% Reduced by 9%	16% Reduced by 11%
Summer 2010		77% Increased by 4%	Response option removed	22% Increased by 6%
Winter 2011		86% Increase of 9%	Response option removed	14% Decrease of 9%
Summer 2009	Conditions attached to the notice were clear.	38%	36%	26%
Winter 2010		71% Increased by 33%	17% Reduced by 19%	12% Reduced by 14%
Summer 2010		88% Increased by 17%	Response option removed	12% No Change
Winter 2011		85% Decrease of 3%	Response option removed	15% Increase of 3%
Summer 2009	I received information about how to appeal against the decision notice.	52%	21%	27%
Winter 2010		67% Increased by 15%	22% Increased by 1%	11% Reduced by 16%
Summer 2010		88% Increased by 21%	Response option removed	12% Increase by 1%
Winter 2011		88% No Change	Response option removed	12% No Change
Summer 2009	The decision I received was expected.	48%	28%	24%
Winter 2010		68% Increased by 20%	12% Reduced by 16%	20% Reduced by 4%
Summer 2010		67% Reduced by 1%	Response option removed	33% Increased by 13%
Winter 2011		69% Increase of 2%	Response option removed	31% Decrease of 2%
Summer 2009	Average across all questions.	49%	24%	27%
Winter 2010		71% Increased by 22%	14% Reduced by 10%	15% Reduced by 12%
Summer 2010		79% Increased by 8%	Response option removed	21% Increased by 6%
Winter 2011		82% Increase of 3%	Response option removed	18% Decrease of 3%

As with the results for dealing with our customers, significant improvement occurred between Summer 2009 and Winter 2011 in relation to our decision making and the information we provide with our decision notices. Across all questions, with the exception of conditions being clear which dropped by 3%, all other questions have increased by 40-50%.

It is not expected 100% of applicants understand or concur with their decision, considering approximately 25% have their application refused. However, results generally indicate that decision notices, associated conditions and information about appeals is more readily understood.

4.7 Overall Satisfaction for Planning Applicants

The Winter 2011 results show a drop in overall satisfaction by the applicant customer base, from a peak of 57% in Winter 2010, to 49% in this latest survey. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction was quite equally split between private applicants and agents. At the extremes there are more applicants 'very dissatisfied' compared to 'very satisfied', yet by comparison the number 'satisfied' is much better than 'dissatisfied'. It is clear the number of 'dissatisfied' and 'very dissatisfied' is unacceptable. The ability to change this result, together with moving respondents from 'satisfied' to 'very satisfied' is a significant challenge.

Overall the trend since Summer 2009 is a positive one, with the Winter 2010 survey showing the largest increase in satisfaction across all four surveys.

Diagram 6: Winter 2011 Overall Planning Applicant Customer Satisfaction

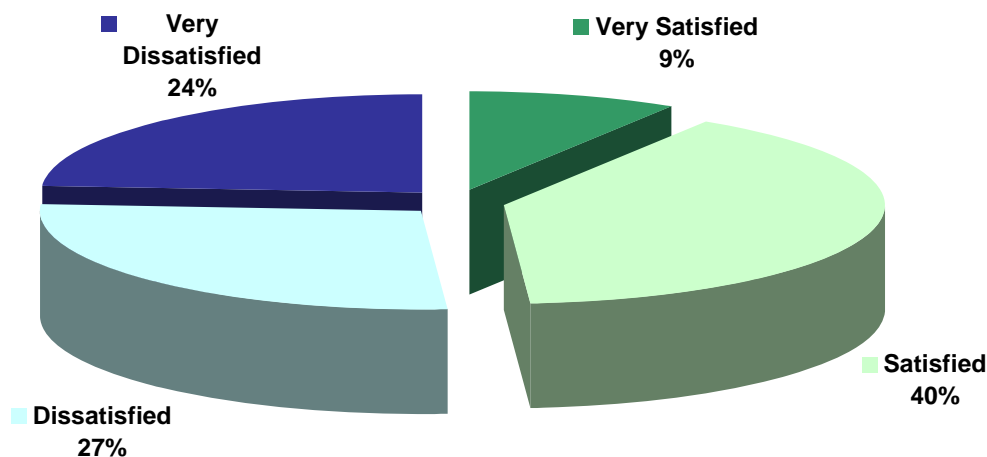
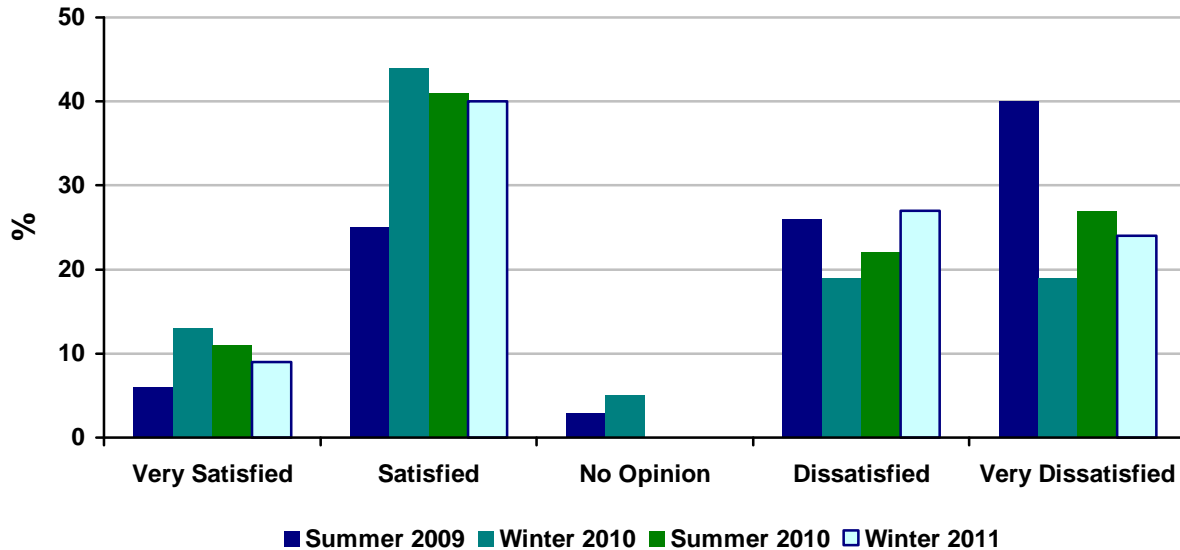
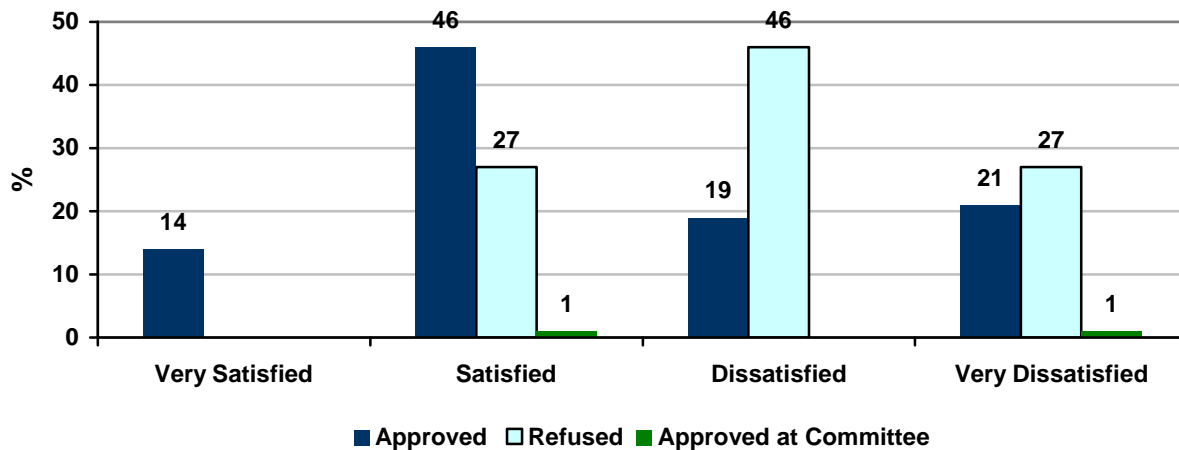


Diagram 7: All Surveys Overall Planning Applicant Customer Satisfaction



Of continuing concern, is the level of dissatisfaction among those who received an approval. When analysed by success of the application, those whose application was refused are in the majority of those who stated they were ‘very dissatisfied’. Conversely, of those whose application was approved, 36% stated they were ‘dissatisfied’, of which 15% were ‘very dissatisfied’. The results for approved/refused and level of satisfaction are shown in Diagram 8 below.

Diagram 8: Level of Satisfaction compared to Approval or Refusal of Application



5 Survey Results and Analysis for Neighbourhood Consultees

5.1 About our customers

The age of neighbourhood consultees was well distributed across all groups, with no specific clustering. The largest age band to respond was those aged 30-39 at 26%. The gender split was 60% female and 40% male. In relation to ethnicity, 69% were white British and 13% Orthodox Jewish. With regard to the religious beliefs, 26% responded that they were Christian, 16% were Orthodox Jewish, and 36% Atheist. 10% of respondents classified themselves as disabled and 71% classified themselves as being heterosexual.

5.2 Consultation Letters and Ease of Making a Submission

As with the Summer 2010 survey, the Winter 2011 Survey was only distributed to consultees who had submitted comments on planning applications and the question set was modified slightly to account for the diverse ways consultees are made aware of a planning application and the variety of ways they provide comments.

When asked *'what prompted you to send a submission to us'* the largest response came from those who had received a Planning Notification Letter, with 85% and 78% for Summer 2010 and Winter 2011, respectively. When asked if *'the letter was easy to understand'*, 90% in both surveys agreed it was. Other methods of hearing about a planning application consultation included 11% read the Public Notice on the street, 3% saw the Public Notice in Hackney Today, and 4% had found it through a web search.

Hackney website, among others search engines are clearly a valuable resource for consultees. Corporate ICT Web Team have identified that Planning Explorer is consistently in the top three web pages on Hackney's website.

87% of respondents states it was 'very easy' or 'easy' to comment on an application. This result is similar to the previous surveys which averaged 85% stating it was 'very easy' or 'easy' to comment on an application.

A repeated theme from previous years surveys was the difficulty that consultees had in accessing individual officers, either by telephone or e-mail.

5.3 Preferences for Making a Submission and being advised of an Application

The Winter 2011 results saw a continuation of the significant shift away from traditional posted comments to electronic responses; with email and via the web site, being the more favoured options. The addition of a 'Make a Comment' link in Planning Explorer has had a marked affect on use of the website for application submissions.

Details Page for Planning Application - 2011/0375

Site Address 69 Stoke Newington Road, London N16 8AD

Other Information Available for Planning Application - 2011/0375

[Application Dates](#)

[Application Checks](#)

[Application Meetings](#)

[Application Site History](#)

[Consultees Details](#)

[Application Documents](#)

Application Progress Summary

Application Registered 03-03-2011

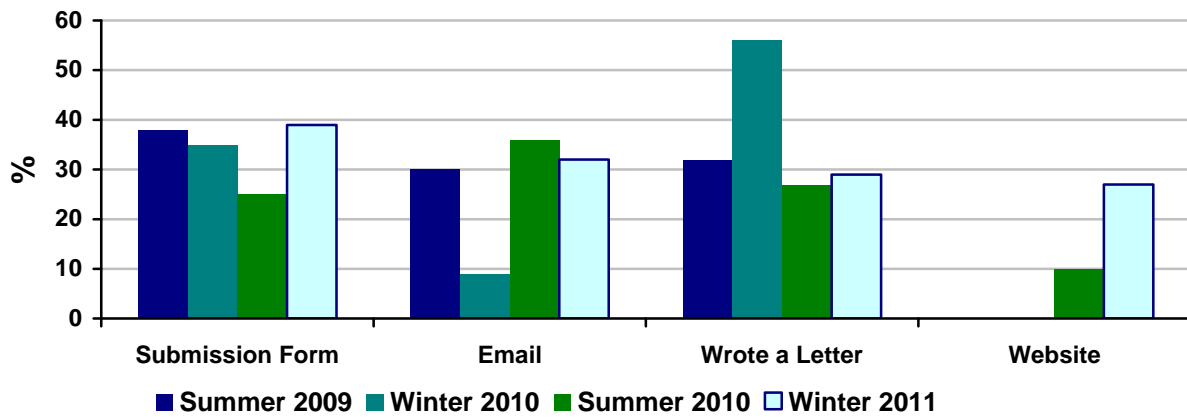
Comments Until 24-03-2011 [Add Comments Here](#)

Date of Committee

Decision

Appeal Lodged

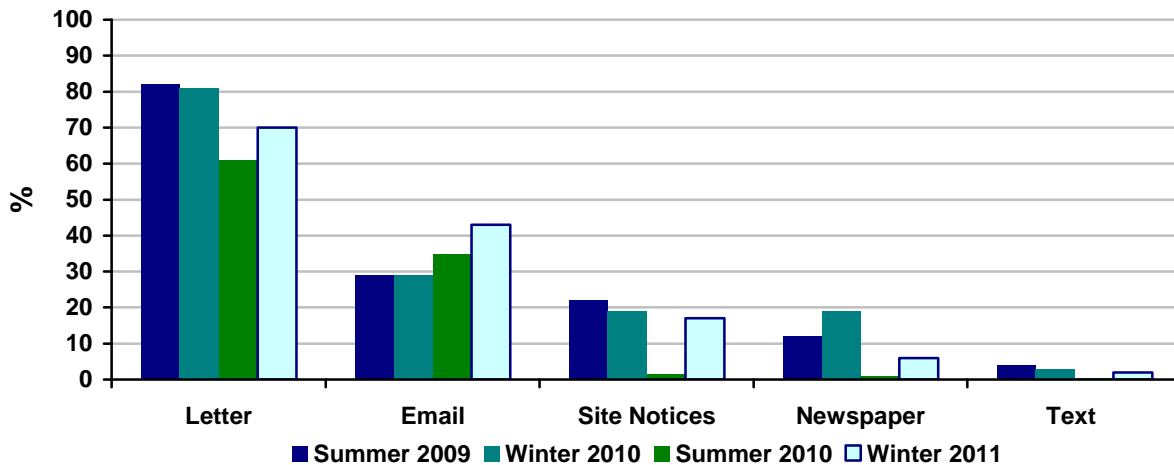
Diagram 9: How did you submit your comments?



Note – Website was not offered as an response in Summer 2009 or Winter 2010.

When asked how they would like to be notified about a new application, receiving a letter remains most popular method, with contact by email increasing in popularity. Traditional mass notifications, such as site notices and adverts in the paper are significantly less popular, reflecting a desire for personal and direct communication, rather than a notice that may or may not be seen.

Diagram 10: How do you prefer to be contacted about planning applications?



Likewise only 1% of respondents said they did not wish to be notified about new applications in their area. This is a clear sign that residents, either rental or owner, are interested in development in the borough, which is a healthy sign within the local community.

5.4 Value of Consultation

45% of consultees do not feel that their views are properly considered by the authority; this remains consistent with previous survey results. The reasons given for this response, were –

- the application was decided contrary to the views expressed by the consultee;
- they did not receive notification of how, or if their views, were received or incorporated into the decision making process.

Results indicate that approximately 50% of consultees feel the authority still has some way to go in demonstrating how it has listened to the views expressed by the public.

When asked *do you know the outcome of the planning application you commented on*; 42% stated they did in the first survey of Summer 2009. This increased significantly to 78% in Winter 2010, followed by a drop to 56% in Summer 2010 and the last survey had a slight increase to 62%.

In the final survey, 51% of those that knew the outcome of the application received an outcome letter, 24% found out from another person and 12% referred to the Hackney website. The remaining 19% selected the 'other' option, which included e-mails and attendance at Planning Sub-Committee. Consistency needs to be improved in the despatching of outcome letters to all consultees. It is expected that this process will be improved by the use of automated e-mailing to all those consultees who provide their e-mail details. We will consistently demonstrate transparency in our decision making processes, and further improvements will be made in ensuring the comments received, decision notices, the Officers report and approved plans are promptly available on the Council's website.

5.5 Overall Satisfaction for Neighbourhood Consultees

The "No Opinion" option was removed in the Summer 2010 survey, resulting in an increase in both the satisfied and dissatisfied options.

The results for Winter 2011 are identical to those of Summer 2010 which show overall satisfaction ('very satisfied' and 'satisfied') remains at 57%. This is an increase of 18% on the previous two surveys of Summer 2009 and Winter 2010, which had included a 'no opinion' option.

Of interest, is 61% of the Orthodox Jewish community were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the overall service provided. This suggests that the Planning Service is meeting the consultative needs of this particular group.

Diagram 11: Winter 2011 Neighbourhood Consultee Customer Satisfaction

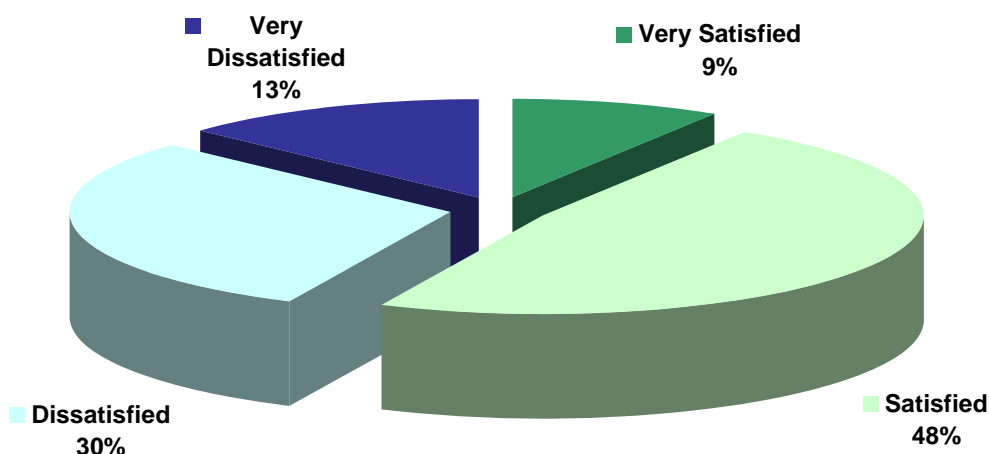
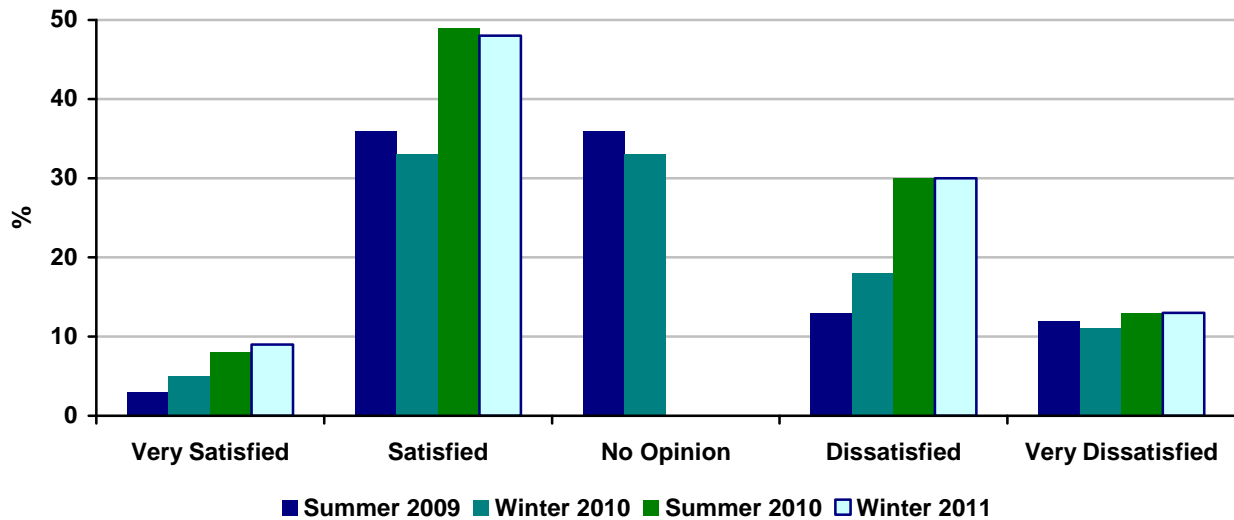


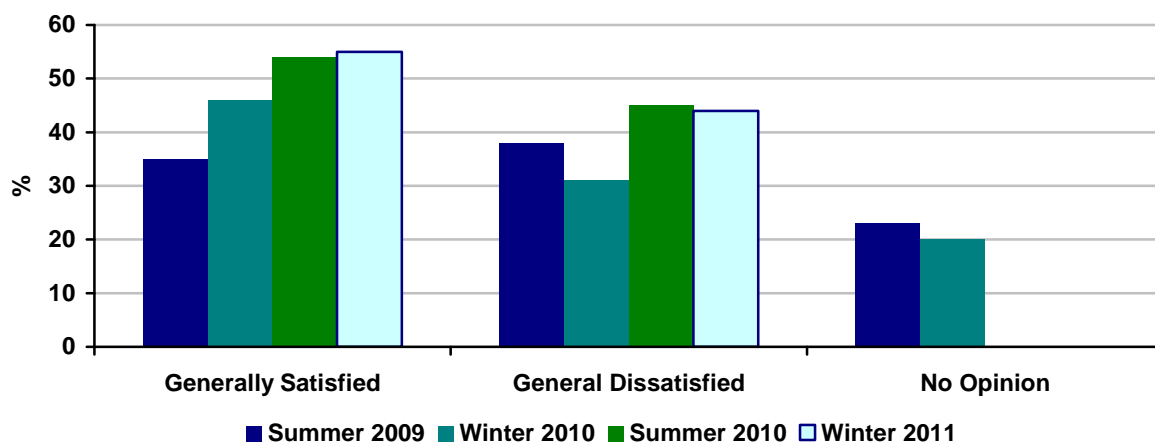
Diagram 12: All Surveys - Neighbourhood Consultee Customer Satisfaction



6 Conclusion - Overall Satisfaction in the Planning Service

Diagram 13 below provides the combined planning applicant and neighbourhood consultation customer satisfaction results. This indicates that overall customer satisfaction has increased to 55% and has met the Corporate Plan target. This is an increase of 8% since the Winter 2010 survey. The removal of the ‘no opinion’ option has clarified the views of satisfaction. It should be noted that respondents that skipped the question reduced from 10% in Summer 2010 to 1% in the final survey. While, it is a positive result for respondents to clarify their views, the reduction in ‘no response’ has resulted in ‘generally satisfied’ increasing by 8% and ‘generally dissatisfied’ increasing by a greater margin of 14%.

Diagram 13: Customer Satisfaction Levels



Note – No Opinion removed as a response in Summer 2010 or Winter 2011 surveys.

7 Recommendations for Further Action

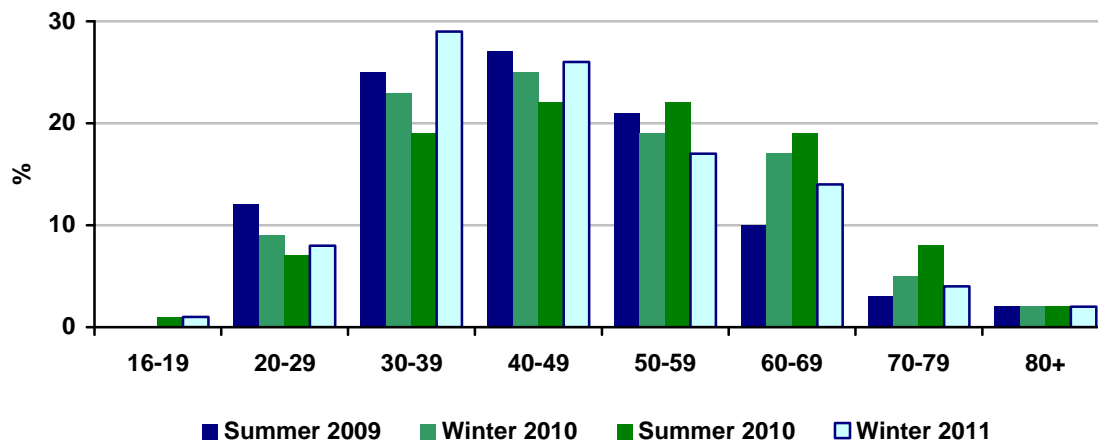
- Consider additional ways to assist individual, rather than professional agents, to apply for planning permission.
- Review the options for improving contact with officers, and the ways of managing expectations of applicants and consultees having ready access to officers.
- Review the way in which public consultation is reflected and documented in the decision making process.
- Explore, through phone contact, the reasons for the levels of dissatisfaction reported by “successful” applicants.
- Undertake quality control measure to ensure that post decision making processes are fully implemented.

8 Monitoring Information from Applicants and Consultees

The following information is provided as a means of understanding our customer base. 189 monitoring forms were returned in Winter 2011 survey, which represents a 83% return rate.

8.1 Age Groups

Diagram 14: Age Groups



8.2 Sex and Sexuality

The Winter 2011 survey had an almost equal response from males, 49%, and females, 51%. This a slight change to the previous survey which had 43% male and 57% female.

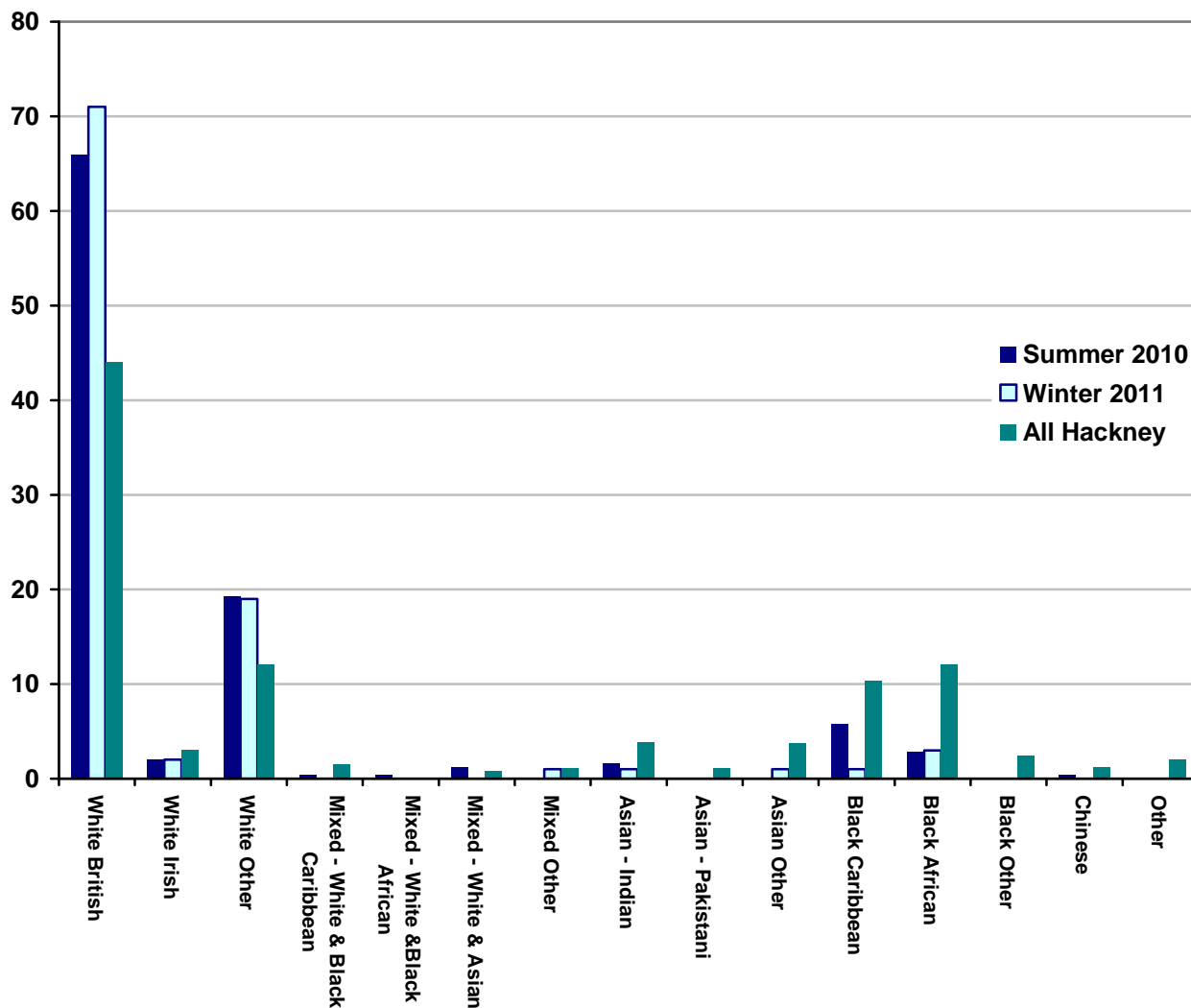
In the Summer 2009 and Winter 2010 surveys, the majority of respondents were heterosexual, accounting for 74% and 78% respectively. This figure fell slightly in Summer 2010 to 64%. Those responding as bi-sexual was 3%, gay 6% and lesbian 2%, being a

reduction across all groups. 24% responded 'not stated' being an increase from previous surveys.

8.3 Ethnicity

The overall picture of ethnicity in Hackney is comparable to the results of monitoring collected during the surveys.

Diagram 15: Ethnicity



This data would suggest that the survey, compared to the all Hackney position, is over representative of White British and White Other backgrounds, and under representative of those from Asian, Black Caribbean and Black African backgrounds. It is not possible to understand from these results if this is the result of under-engagement with these groups, or because they are not as active in responding to planning consultations as other ethnic groups.

8.4 Disability

7% of respondents have a disability; this is down from 17% in Summer 2010, 22% in Summer 2009 and 14% for Winter 2010. The proportion of the Hackney Population in receipt of disability living allowance was 5% in 2008.

8.5 Beliefs or Faiths

Diagram 16 below details responses received to the question that best describes their belief or faith.

This data suggests that compared to the All Hackney profile, and over the course of the surveys Christian and Muslim communities have been under-represented and the Atheist and Orthodox Jewish/Charedi communities over-represented.

Diagram 16: Beliefs or Faiths

