

Harlow Building Control service charter

Building Control policy document

The Council's policy in the exercise of its statutory duty to perform the Building Control function is to enforce the Building Regulations in its district. In carrying out the function the Council has adopted the principles laid down in the Building Control Performance Standards. The Council is concerned to ensure that the needs of customers of the Building Control Service are recognised and met. It is essential therefore that the various customer groups clearly understand what they can expect from the service if they are to continue to acknowledge its value to the local community.

The Local Authority Building Control Service is open to competition from the private sector inspectors. This Charter is established to assist in retention of the substantial market share of the business that local authorities enjoy at present. Growing customer awareness of the private sector competition will be combated with an excellent service in terms of service provision and local knowledge.

Resources

The Council has agreed an establishment for the Building Control Service as listed below:

- Building Control Manager x1
- Senior Building Control Surveyors x 1 and
- Building Control Technical Officer x 1

At times of staff shortage due to holidays, sickness or vacancies building control staff are to use their professional skill and judgment, taking due account of all relevant factors, to determine an appropriate inspection regime. If necessary appropriate consultants will be appointed by the Chief Building Control Surveyor.

The Council has resolved to make charges for the building control function under the Building Regulations as detailed in its charges scheme currently in force.

The Building Control Service provides a rapid response to regulate, inspect, control and advise on dangerous or potentially dangerous structures and works of demolition.

Application services

To assist with the design process and the plan examination process later the Building Control Service offers pre-application advice and assistance. The service

extends to all aspects of the Regulations but often proves most useful with matters relating to means of escape, fire precautions and facilities for disabled people. Advice concerning the procedures for making an application will also be given. A administration charge may be levied where applications are subsequently withdrawn.

Assessment of plans

A fast, efficient and accurate plan processing will be provided to enable customers to proceed with the works with the minimum delay. Customers will have the assurance, where the Full Plans service is used, that the approved plans will show compliance with the relevant regulations.

All Building Regulations applications will be examined for compliance with the Regulations currently in force and allied legislation, taking into account responses to statutory consultations. Decision, as appropriate, will be issued within the prescribed statutory periods.

During processing and assessment of plans the applicant or his/her agent will be informed:

- whether or not the charge received is sufficient or excessive
- that the plans have been registered and correct charge acknowledged
- where the plans show non-compliance with the Regulations
- of views of statutory consultees
- of conditions under which plans have been approved
- of remedies available in the event of a dispute
- of the name and contact facilities for the examining surveyor and
- of the time limits within which a response to queries would be advantageous.

A record of the application plans and deposited information will be kept for future reference and continuity of control.

All Initial Notices, Plans Certificates and Final Certificates given under the Building (Approved Inspectors etc.) Regulations 2010 will be examined and a decision given within the prescribed statutory period. Records will be kept as entered in the Initial Notice Register.

All structural and other calculations will be checked for compliance with the relevant legislation.

Site inspections

The duty of care that the Council has to make inspections of works in progress will be carried out in a manner which is sufficient, efficient, accurate and helpful, minimising any delay to the customer and his/her agents.

Inspections of building work will be made at each stage for which a statutory notice is received as required by Regulation 16 of the Building Regulations. Inspections will also be made at other stages where it is considered that additional inspections are desirable. The site inspection regime should take full account of relevant factors:

- the degree of detail on drawings and design information
- nature of the work
- experience/attitude of the builder
- complexity of project and rate of build
- unusual or high risk features
- reliability of notification arrangements and
- key construction stages.

Relevant factors will be assessed at the commencement of the project and regularly reviewed as the work proceeds.

Records of each inspection will be made and kept, identifying the work inspected and any non compliance. Where the application has taken the form of a Building Notice and no detailed plans are available for the work the inspection regime and records will be more stringent and detailed.

The extent to which any works contravene the regulations will be notified to the builder and/or owner within seven days of the problem being noted. Any notice to this effect will identify the nature and extent of the contravening works, measures considered necessary to remedy the situation and give a time limit within which remedial works are to be carried out. Where appropriate mechanisms for resolving disputes as to whether the works comply with the regulations or not will be described.

Statutory consultees will be notified of any significant departure from the plans noted during the inspection phase.

Certificates of completion

When the Council are satisfied that works comply with the substantive requirements of the Building Regulations, a completion certificate will be issued to the applicant. Where the Council is statute bound to do so a copy of the certificate will be sent to the fire authority.

Archiving records

Records of the service provided to an individual project by the Building Control Service will be retained with deposited plans and details. Approved plans for works which have not commenced within three years of the date of deposit may be declared of no effect in accordance with Section 32 of the Building Act 1984.

Qualifications

Professional staff will hold or be pursuing a recognised and appropriate professional qualification (e.g. CBAE, RICS, I.Struct.E.).

Continuing professional development

The Building Control Manager will ensure that staff are kept conversant with changes in legislation, construction methods and the Building Control profession. Current experience and knowledge will be maintained through the Continuous Professional Development Scheme.

Review of performance

The Building Control section will regularly review its performance in the delivery of its service, taking into account Best Value principles with the aim to continually improve the service provided. To this end the section has adopted quality management principles to ensure that improved standards are achieved.

Business ethics

As a Service operating in competition with the private sector the section will observe the highest standards of business ethics at all times.

All documents relating to Building Control matters will be written in plain language. The service will have due regard to the needs of ethnic and minority groups. All customers will be treated positively, equally and helpfully.

All complaints about the way building control matters have been handled will be acknowledged in seven days and will be promptly and thoroughly investigated in accordance with Harlow Council Policies. A response stating the outcome of the investigation and any action the Council propose to take as a result will be sent to the complainant. Information will be given on how to progress any complaint which remains unresolved.

Policy review

The above Charter will be required in the light of significant changes to:

- building control legislation and
- the volume of building work in the district.

The Charter will otherwise be reviewed at intervals not exceeding two years.