

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC

Report By: Director of Corporate and Customer Services

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To consider the results from recent user satisfaction and Herefordshire Voice surveys. To decide if there are emerging themes that would merit further investigation as part of the Committees ongoing work programme or if it wishes to examine how the available data is being used to inform service delivery in a number of services.

Financial Implications

2. There are no financial implications

Background

3. As reported to the Committee on 26 June, following consideration of a number of possible themes for the future scrutiny programme, Members expressed an interest in pursuing how well the Council was doing in responding to customers. This report provides some brief information on the available sources of customer views but focuses on some recent results from the authority's research programme. This information is intended to help the Committee decide if there are any emerging themes that merit investigation in future or where it wishes to examine just how customer data are being used.
4. The Council obtains feedback from the public in a variety of ways; through front line services, correspondence and telephone calls, through specific consultations, from elected members, MP's, local media, individual events and, of course from complaints. There is a corporate complaints process and some individual services – most notably social care – have additional statutory obligations relating to complaints. The various complaints processes are currently being reviewed to ensure a consistently high standard across the authority. The Corporate Management Board will consider the matter this month. In addition, the bi-monthly Integrated Performance Report (IPR) will, in future, cover complaints across the authority and supplement the existing, directorate lead, reporting.
5. The planned introduction of a customer relationship management system will be a major step towards bringing together and reporting all the various forms of customer data in a systematic manner. However, in the absence of such an authority wide approach, the annual user satisfaction survey conducted by the Council's research team, is currently one of the few consistent, statistically valid, sources of customer data that is available to establish public opinion and track its changes over time.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Tony Geeson, Head of Policy and Performance on 01432 261855

6. All Councils are required to conduct a user satisfaction survey every three years to establish inter-authority comparisons as part of the Best Value regime. The last such survey was in 2003 and the 2006 survey returns are being analysed with the results due in the spring. The national survey informs processes like the CPA and provides benchmarks for best value indicators for all local authorities. This survey is tightly specified and subject to quality checks by the Audit Commission. In line with best practice this Council started to conduct additional surveys in both intermediate years, beginning in October 2005. The local surveys allow us to measure and monitor progress much more closely and to ask a number of other questions tailored to Herefordshire. These can form the measures for Local Public Service Agreement and / or Local Area Agreement targets.
7. Key findings **about the Council** from the 2005 survey are as follows:
 - Around half of respondents [49%] are satisfied with the way the Authority runs things overall [a similar proportion to 2003] and 23% are dissatisfied.
 - 54% of respondents felt that they were kept well informed by Herefordshire Council, a slight increase from the 2003 figure
 - Of the 19% of respondents who had complained to the Council in the last 12 months, 31% were satisfied with the way in which it had been handled [similar to 2003] while 53% were not, a slight decrease since 2003
8. Key **general findings** from the 2005 survey are that:
 - 80% of respondents are satisfied with their local community as a place to live
 - With regard to quality of life aspects, most are perceived to have deteriorated. The biggest deterioration in the last three years is perceived to be traffic congestion and wage levels / local cost of living.
 - Anti-social behaviour is now seen as less of a problem than in 2004. In all types of anti-social behaviour listed there has been a marked decrease in the proportion of respondents who think each is a problem in their local area.
 - Perceived ease of access to various local services has stayed at similar levels in most cases since 2003.
9. Amongst the **key findings relating to individual services** are that:
 - Satisfaction with local recycling facilities has increased since 2003 while satisfaction with kerbside recycling collection has decreased.
 - Satisfaction with the provision of public transport information and local bus services have both decreased.
 - Satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities, and parks and open spaces has remained steady while satisfaction with other cultural and recreational services has decreased.
10. Following these individual service results, the 14th Herefordshire Voice survey in July 2006 focussed on cultural & recreational services, public transport and included a series of locally important questions on volunteering as part of the LPSA. The object of the follow-up, detailed, survey was to determine in greater detail the reasons and factors leading to the dissatisfaction levels summarised in paragraph 9 above and to obtain specific suggestions for improvement to include in future service planning. Key findings for the services concerned are set out in the sections below.

Culture

- Respondents thought the aspect of libraries most in need of improvement was the range of books, followed by opening hours, information about the services and the range of films and talking books.
- 61% of respondents were satisfied with libraries and library services overall.
- Respondents thought that the aspect of museums and galleries most in need of improvement was the variety of exhibitions, followed by the frequency with which permanent exhibitions were changed and the space available for displays.
- 40% of respondents were satisfied with museums and galleries overall.

Sport and Leisure

- Respondents thought the aspect of sport and leisure most in need of improvement was the quality of the facilities, followed by information about the services, availability for use and value for money.
- 43% of respondents were satisfied with sports and leisure facilities overall.

Parks and Open spaces

- Respondents thought the aspect of parks and open spaces most in need of improvement was accessibility to footpaths, followed by information about the facilities and services and the maintenance of playgrounds.
- 69% of respondents were satisfied with parks and open spaces overall.

Public Transport information

- Of the various sources of public transport information, the booklets and information at bus stops are most used, the most in need of improvement and most preferred sources.
- Overall around 40% of the panellists are fairly or very satisfied with the provision of public transport information compared with 15% who are fairly or very dissatisfied.

Local Bus services

- Over half the panellists had not used local buses in the last 12 months.
- Of the respondents who use the bus service, the most common main reasons was when they were unable to use their own transport [33%] followed by avoidance of the need to park [17%] and due to not driving [13%].
- Of the respondents who don't regularly use the bus service, the main reasons for not doing so was that buses are too infrequent or not at the right times [25%]. Next most common was the convenience of – or simply possession of – their own car.
- Frequency of service and being able to rely on arriving on are the most commonly identified high priority improvements needed.
- Overall a third of panellists are fairly or very satisfied with the bus service and 15% fairly or very dissatisfied.
- 60% of users are fairly or very satisfied compared with 15 who are fairly or very dissatisfied.

NB The recent Local Government White Paper indicated that local bus services were one area that might benefit from increased local input in future.

11. More details about these panel findings, or the original 2005 survey can be given at the meeting. When the 2006 survey results are available it will be possible to compare how the Council is regarded by its customers relative to other local authorities. When the access to services information – referred to in paragraph 12 below - has been analysed, this may also be of interest to the Committee.

12. The next Herefordshire Voice survey is already underway and will be completed in early January. This is focussing on a key finding in paragraph 8 - access to services. The intention is to better understand the nature of any difficulties the panellists have in getting to the services they need. This includes dentists, doctors surgeries, local hospitals, chemist, library/mobile library, the Courtyard, a cinema, swimming pool and sports / leisure facilities.
13. In summary, there is a considerable amount of data available should members wish to use it as a starting point in selecting areas of service or public concern for their future scrutiny work programme. Equally the Committee could consider how the available data is currently being used to improve a selected range of services. Finally, given adequate lead in times, future local surveys could also be used to provide information during a piece of scrutiny work.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee consider the range of data available and the recent results and agree what, if any, areas they wish to consider in their future work plan.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Herefordshire Annual Satisfaction Survey 2005 – 2006 Summary Report Issue 3
- HV0607 The 14th Herefordshire Voice Survey report of July 2006.