HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

HEREFORDSHIRE SATISFACTION SURVEY

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET **22ND MARCH, 2007**

Wards Affected

Countywide.

Purpose

To report to Cabinet the results of the recently completed survey and the actions being taken to follow these up.

Key Decision

This not a key decision.

Recommendations

THAT

(a) the survey results be noted; and

(b) the actions in paragraphs 19 and 20 be approved.

Reasons

1. In line with best practice, the Authority conducts an annual satisfaction survey. Every three years this doubles as the best value general survey required by Community and Local Government. The data are important for service planning purposes, our performance assessments and central to the authority's improvement plan.

2. Addressing the issues raised by this survey is particularly important as 'perception' type indicators such as these are a vital element of the proposed comprehensive area assessment. They are central to the wider direction set for local government in the recent White Paper. Overall satisfaction with authorities nationally has tended to lag behind satisfaction with individual services for a number of years. One reason is that the link between the services received and the correct identification of the responsible organisation remains relatively weak. However, improving public perceptions such as these will become an even greater challenge in future. Authorities will need to manage their accountabilities both as leaders of the public sector in an area and as commissioners for specific services much more actively & consistently than in the past.

3. The data have been validated by the Audit Commission and weighted to correct over and under representation on a number of demographic factors. A range of comparisons is now becoming available nationally. The research team should be commended for once again meeting all the required standards, comfortably exceeding the required response rate, not having any results amended by the Commission and conducting the survey at considerably lower cost than when it was produced under contract.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Tony Geeson, on (01432 261855)

4. The survey covers best value indicators, tracks perceptions of the Authority's service delivery and the quality of life in Herefordshire. In addition some optional questions have been included from previous surveys together with some that provide local indicators. The data are used by the Council but also by partners. Planning and library services are covered by separate surveys but summary results are included here.

Considerations

Best value indicators

5. Summary data for the best value indicators are given in Appendix A. These cover corporate health, waste, public transport as well as culture & recreation. Leaving aside distinctions between the results for the general public and service users [who generally rate services more highly]; Herefordshire is ahead of the single and upper tier authority average in nine of the thirteen main indicators for which comparisons are currently available. The authority's data largely mirrors national trends. For instance the percentage of complainants satisfied with the handling of complaints has risen to 36% while the average is 32% and rising. The four main indicators which are currently lower than the single and upper tier average are satisfaction with local bus services, with the provision of public transport information, with parks and open spaces and, importantly, with the authority overall.

6. Although it is generally agreed that local authority performance has improved significantly in the last decade there is evidence that public expectations have risen still faster. This may help explain why overall satisfaction with single and upper tier authorities nationally has fallen from 61% in 2000/1, to 53% in 2003/4 and 51% in the current survey. Herefordshire's figures are 59%, 48% and 43% notwithstanding high levels of support for the newly established unitary authority.

7. If the same thirteen indicators are compared across the New Unitary Benchmarking [NUB] group a somewhat similar picture emerges. Herefordshire scores higher than the NUB average in five, is essentially equal in four and has lower scores in the same four indicators described earlier in paragraph 5. The NUB average for overall satisfaction – 50% - is also below the single & upper tier average.

8. While a significant number of these indicators have improved since 2003, there is no room for complacency either locally or nationally and these results simply give added impetus to the drive to improve Herefordshire's overall indicator score. Both absolute & relative performances as well as the direction of travel are important locally & nationally.

Other perception and quality of life indicators

9. The survey asked respondents to list up to five factors that make somewhere a good place to live. The most popular factors were, health services [50%], the level of crime [49%], affordable decent housing [43%], education provision [32%] and the level of traffic congestion [30%]. This response is very similar to the 2003 findings. Only education provision is a 'new' top five choice. It is interesting to note that these factors are not only the responsibility of one organisation and are frequently addressed by partnerships. Respondents were also asked to select for this area those factors they felt most needed improving. Again the level of traffic congestion [48%] and affordable decent housing [30%] featured in the top five but so did road / pavement repairs [39%], activities for teenagers [38%] and public transport [25%]. These may point to areas where the authority can act to improve its overall perception scores. Four of these five 'need improving' factors also scored highly in the previous survey in 2003; further reducing the level of crime is no longer a top five issue and has been replaced by public transport

although the scores remain close.

10. Turning to changes in the quality of life net improvements are perceived [more people saying things have got better than worse] in education, access to nature & sports and leisure facilities. The level of traffic congestion, wage levels & local cost of living, road and pavement repairs, affordable decent housing and the level of crime are felt to have got worse. Again these factors are similar to the views expressed in the last survey. Overall 69% of respondents are satisfied with the local area as a place to live.

11. When access to services is examined respondents had the most difficulty with theatres / cinemas [only 47% finding it fairly or very easy to access] followed by dentists [54%], local hospital [57%] council or neighbourhood office [58%] and sports / leisure facilities [64%]. All other facilities listed were felt to be accessible by at least 2/3 of those who responded, in some cases e.g. local shops by over 85%

12. Satisfaction levels with the more detailed aspects [i.e. below the headline best value indicators described earlier and in Appendix A] of household waste collection, doorstep recycling and local recycling facilities show a consistent, relatively high, level of satisfaction both in this survey & in 2003. Responses to questions about the local tip are a variable but overall, still high. All these services are perceived to have improved.

13. As would be expected, given the headline indicators for public transport information and the local bus service mentioned in paragraph 5 earlier, the more detailed picture for these services shows greater variability with some results improving and other staying the same or declining slightly.

14. Detailed results for sports / leisure facilities, libraries, museums & galleries, theatres & concert halls and parks & open spaces show that, since 2003 usage has remained broadly constant or is rising and satisfaction amongst users of these services is, in all cases, higher than the public at large.

15. Overall satisfaction with planning services, personal social services & education services have been low for a number of years across the country but satisfaction levels amongst users of these services are considerably higher in all cases and always exceed 50%.

16. Finally; turning to information about the Council and its services, the public feel particularly well informed about how to pay bills and how & where to vote but poorly informed about what is being done to tackle anti-social behaviour locally. The public find out about the Council from the local media [38%] and via information from the Council [35%]. The preferred method of contact is telephone [63%] followed by 'in person' [31%]. Satisfaction with various aspects of customer service is in all cases over 60%. The public generally believes that the Council treats all types of people fairly, is working to make the area cleaner & greener and a better place to live but gives lower scores currently to issues like value for money, efficiency, promoting residents interests and acting on their concerns. There may be a need to provide more information on these non-service issues and these views may be linked to the national trend for higher service scores than authority wide ones.

Conclusions and Actions

17. The Local Government Association [LGA] has been running a 'reputation' campaign aiming, in part, to strengthen connections between authorities and the services provided. Herefordshire should utilise this valuable source of information and advice. The Council's service performance continues to justify its CPA rating but the overall satisfaction score des not adequately reflect this service performance. It is important to understand exactly what lies behind this contradiction locally and eliminate it. Local factors may play a part,

adverse publicity at the time of any survey is known to effect results, and this is one of the issues that officers and members will need to address in the months ahead. Equally survey methods are known to play a part in the results obtained with face-to-face surveys yielding higher overall satisfaction scores than postal surveys. This factor alone may explain some of the differences in the comparisons beginning to emerge from the Audit Commission.

18. There are a number of actions being taken. These are described in paragraphs 19 and 20 below. The costs of these will be met from within existing budgets and no new financial consequences are expected.

19. Following usual practice, the research team will be producing a detailed analysis of all the results, including the growing number of comparisons. It will be possible, eventually, to provide analyses in a variety of ways; for instance by age group or area. Understanding and addressing differences within the County like these are central to the 'place-shaping' role envisaged by Sir Michael Lyons and will be as important in future as continuing to improving our absolute and relative results.

20. More specifically the early rounds of the 2007 Herefordshire Voice panel will be used to identify the underlying reasons behind some of the key results including the overall satisfaction score. As mentioned previously, the LGA reputation campaign has used IPSOS/MORI to gather data on those issues that particularly affect public satisfaction and these data will also be analysed for lessons that can be applied locally. Evidence can also be gathered from relatively high performing authorities and we have scope to share Herefordshire's experience in those areas where we perform well.

21. The results of the survey will be reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee [30th March] along with any initial observations Cabinet wish to make.

Risk Management

These survey results are important in the short term for a number of inspections and audit reports and, as previously noted, are predicted to be a fundamental part of the comprehensive area assessment that will replace the 'harder test' of the CPA. The authority's response will have a significant bearing these & the authority's wider reputation.

Alternative Options

Not to take any specific action.

Consultees

CMB have considered these preliminary results and their views incorporated in the report. As part of the follow up actions being proposed staff, users and the general public will be consulted both on the results and appropriate follow up actions.

Appendices

1 Best value performance indicator results.

Background Papers

Best value user satisfaction surveys 2006 -07 – Communities and Local Government. February 2007

Herefordshire satisfaction survey 2006 - summary data

APPENDIX A

Best value performance indicator results

Corporate Health	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV3: % satisfied with the way the Authority runs things	59%	48%	49%	**43 %**
BV4: % satisfied with the handling of complaints	34%	29%	31%	**36 %**

Waste	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV89: % satisfied that the Authority has kept the land clear of litter and rubbish	59%	62%	65%	**66 %**
BV90A: % satisfied with the waste collection service overall	79%	89%	88%	**82 %**
BV90B1: % satisfied with the provision of local waste recycling facilities	60%	67%	74%	**70 %**
BV90C: % satisfied with the local tip	58%	82%	79%	**87 %**

Public Transport	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV103: % satisfied with the provision of public transport information	47%	48%	41%	**48 %**
BV104: % satisfied with the local bus service	47%	51%	36%	**49 %**

Culture and Recreation	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV119A: % satisfied with sports and leisure facilities	54%	49%	49%	**58 %**
BV119B: % satisfied with libraries	69%	68%	64%	**70 %**

Culture and Recreation	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV119C: % satisfied with museums and galleries	53%	48%	42%	**45 %**
BV119D: % satisfied with theatres and concert halls	58%	57%	52%	**48 %**
BV119E: % satisfied with parks and open spaces	65%	67%	66%	**69 %**