

## HEREFORDSHIRE SATISFACTION SURVEY

**Report By: Director of Corporate and Customer Services**

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To consider the results of the recently completed survey and how it should be used to inform future work programmes.

### Financial Implications

2. The actions proposed are funded from existing budgets so no new financial implications are anticipated

### Background

3. 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 internally for service planning purposes, externally for our performance assessments and also central to the authority's improvement plan. Potentially they are a very useful to inform scrutiny work already underway in any committee and / or a way of selecting topics of interest to the public for further scrutiny and / or policy development work.
4. It is particularly important that the Authority does address the questions raised by the survey results since 'perception' type indicators such as these are a likely to become a vital element of the proposed comprehensive area assessment. They are also central to the wider direction set for local government in the recent White Paper.
5. 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 organisation responsible for those services remains relatively weak. Improving public perceptions is not easy and will become an even greater challenge in future. Under the White Paper proposals, 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.
6. 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 have, once again met all the required standards and conducted the survey at considerably lower cost than when it was produced under contract.
7. 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 and also by partners. Planning and library services were covered by separate surveys but summary results are included here.

### **Best value indicators**

8. 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 locally 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.
9. 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 upon its creation.
10. If the same thirteen indicators are compared with the New Unitary Benchmarking [NUB] group the picture is somewhat similar. 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 8. The NUB average for overall satisfaction – 50% - is also below the single & upper tier average.
11. While a significant number of the results have improved since 2003, there is no room for complacency either locally or nationally and the results should 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**

12. 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.

13. 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.
14. 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%
15. 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. Most of these services are perceived to have improved.
16. As would be expected, given the headline indicators for public transport information and the local bus service mentioned in paragraph 8 earlier, the more detailed picture for these services shows greater variability with some results improving and other staying the same or declining slightly.
17. 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.
18. Overall satisfaction with planning services, personal social services & education services has 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%.
19. 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 itself [35%]. The most common method of contact is by 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**

20. 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 does 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 may have explained some of the previous differences between authorities and between these current results and previous years. However in 2006, for the first time, every authority had to survey by post.

21. There are a number of actions being taken. The research team will produce 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 are central to the 'place-shaping' role envisaged by Sir Michael Lyons and will be as important in future as continuing to improve our absolute and relative results. These data will be available for the Committee from the research team to inform discussions about the Committee's work programme in the summer.
22. 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 those that possibly contribute to 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.
23. The results of the survey were reported to Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> March and their initial observations will be reported to the Committee as part of considering this report.

## RECOMMENDATION

**THAT the Committee:-**

- (a) notes the survey results and the actions being undertaken;**
  - (b) receives a further report in three months time when it considers its future work programme;**
- and**
- (c) requests all other scrutiny committees to consider the data relevant to their areas of responsibility and to take appropriate action.**

## 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

<b>CORPORATE HEALTH</b>	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV3: % satisfied with the way the Authority runs things	59%	48%	49%	<b>43 %</b>
BV4: % satisfied with the handling of complaints	34%	29%	31%	<b>36 %</b>

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

<b>PUBLIC TRANSPORT</b>	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV103: % satisfied with the provision of public transport information	47%	48%	41%	<b>48 %</b>
BV104: % satisfied with the local bus service	47%	51%	36%	<b>49 %</b>

<b>CULTURE AND RECREATION</b>	2000	2003	2005	2006 Score
BV119A: % satisfied with sports and leisure facilities	54%	49%	49%	<b>58 %</b>
BV119B: % satisfied with libraries	69%	68%	64%	<b>70 %</b>
BV119C: % satisfied with museums and galleries	53%	48%	42%	<b>45 %</b>
BV119D: % satisfied with theatres and concert halls	58%	57%	52%	<b>48 %</b>
BV119E: % satisfied with parks and open spaces	65%	67%	66%	<b>69 %</b>