



# HEREFORDSHIRE SATISFACTION SURVEY 2007

## PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE & CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

**CABINET**

**24 JANUARY 2008**

---

### **Wards Affected:**

County-Wide

### **Purpose**

To summarise the findings of the recent survey and the corporate actions that will be taken as a result.

### **Key Decision**

This is not a Key Decision.

### **Recommendations**

**THAT Cabinet note the results of the survey and approve the actions outlined in paragraphs 21 to 26**

### **Reasons**

Customer satisfaction should be at the centre of every authority's improvement programme. Satisfaction levels generally are not high across the country although it varies between services. Top performing authorities generally manage combine quality service provision with high levels of customer satisfaction. Satisfaction levels will become even more important under the Comprehensive Area Assessment from 2009. The authority should take action to improve its satisfaction ratings where this is required.

### **Considerations**

#### **The background**

1. Local authorities have had a statutory duty to conduct best value general surveys every three years, the last being in 2006. This authority also conducts a similar survey in the intervening years to provide more recent information to inform service improvement planning. This report relates to the latest survey, which was conducted in autumn 2007.
2. The survey covers best value indicators for a number of council provided services

---

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

such as waste collection, cultural and recreational facilities and venues and complaints handling. It also tracks residents' perceptions of a broader range of issues including the quality of life in Herefordshire.

3. The survey data has been weighted to correct for over or under representation of citizens based on a number of demographic factors (for example, age) according to the Audit Commission methodology for the statutory surveys.
4. The full report on the survey is attached at appendix 1. It includes the detailed results of the survey together with the results for previous years - as far back as 2000 for some indicators. Where available, comparison is made with median and quartile results for all English authorities up to the latest available (2006).
5. The full report on the survey was distributed to CMB and heads of service in December. A summary article will be published in the January edition of Herefordshire Matters and the report will be made available on the Council website at the same time.
6. The Department for Communities and Local Government is currently consulting on a successor to the best value general survey – the one conducted in 2006 is the final one in that form. Planned for introduction in autumn 2008, it is called the new Place Survey and will be radically different. It will focus much more on residents' perspectives on living in Herefordshire rather than the service related topics previously included.

### **Summary of findings**

7. 1,578 completed questionnaires were returned from the 3,954 successfully delivered to households across the county, giving a response rate of 40% which is fairly typical for this type of survey.
8. The majority of the indicators have not changed significantly since 2006, a few have improved and fewer still have deteriorated.
9. At 44%, the **overall satisfaction with Herefordshire Council** has not changed significantly since 2006 when it was 43% and in the bottom quartile of English authorities. This was the same quartile position in 2000 and 2003.
10. When considering how various aspects affecting **quality of life** are perceived to have changed over the last three years:
  - The most positive aspects are education provision, sports and leisure facilities and access to nature. In each of these cases more respondents feel these have got better rather than worse.
  - The worst are the level of traffic congestion (where for instance 4% say it has got better, 74% say got worse), wage levels / local cost of living, affordable decent housing, and road and pavement repairs.
11. A large majority (79%) of residents were satisfied with their **local community as a place to live**. This is similar to the 2006 result.

12. Of the eleven aspects of **anti-social behaviour** included in the questionnaire, one has improved - fewer respondents find drug use or dealing a problem in their local area. One has deteriorated - more respondents consider attacks on people due to skin colour, ethnic origin etc to be a problem in their local area and the remainder have not changed significantly.
13. The "Respect Agenda" score, which is a composite of several of the anti-social behaviour aspects, has not changed significantly since 2006 and therefore maintains the improvement seen since 2003.
14. **Ease of access to services** has improved for three services out of fifteen (dentist, sports / leisure centre and cultural / recreational facility), and deteriorated for one (post office).
15. With regard to **waste services**, since 2006, satisfaction with household waste collection has improved (82% to 88%) and there has been no significant change with litter clearance (66%) or local recycling facilities (70%). Satisfaction with doorstep recycling has fallen from 69% to 63% and the local tip from 87% to 79%.
16. There has been no significant change with the satisfaction of users of the 5 aspects of **cultural and recreational services** included. (sports / leisure facilities and events, libraries, museums and galleries, theatres / concert halls, and parks and open spaces).
17. The two most commonly used **sources of information** about Herefordshire Council are information provided by the Council itself followed by the local media. In 2006 the same two were the most popular, but the local media was top.
18. 20% of respondents had contacted the Council with a complaint. Of these, 27% were satisfied with the way it was handled. The apparent drop in satisfaction with **complaints handling** (from 36% in 2006) is not significant (The sample size of around 300 complainants requires a large difference to be statistically significant). In 2006 Herefordshire Council was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quartile of all English authorities.
19. 17% of respondents **volunteered** their unpaid help to groups, clubs or organisations in the last 12 months for an average of 2 hours or more per week. This is not significantly different from 2006.
20. 30% of respondents felt they could **influence decisions** affecting their local area. This score has not changed significantly since 2006.

### **Action plan**

21. The results of the survey are being communicated to members, officers and the public – see the communications plan in paragraph 27 below.
22. Directors and heads of service will use the survey findings to further inform their service improvement planning. To provide further insight, the full report also includes analysis of the results by factors such as respondents' age, gender and the rurality of the area in which they live.

23. The Herefordshire Voice citizens panel programme complements the satisfaction survey and will be used to further investigate specific aspects of the findings. These will be selected based on aspects where more information is needed in order to better understand what actions are required to improve the satisfaction ratings.
24. Customer feedback produced by surveys such as this is a valuable source of information for public services such as the Council. In common with many authorities, we do not currently make sufficient use of such data. To go some way to rectifying this, the Council has agreed to join a project sponsored by the Regional Partnership for Improvement and Excellence that is designed to identify and share best practice.
25. Looking to the future, the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment means that central government and regulatory bodies will be emphasising customer's opinions in their judgements of local authorities and their partners. The new Place Survey will be one of their key sources of comparative customer data but it will not cover all aspects. This is an additional reason for the Council to develop a full range of customer data and use it in a demonstrable way.
26. As part of its continuing programme of improvement, the Council will need to make explicit efforts to maintain high satisfaction levels where they exist and increase them where required. There is already some information from national studies that identifies the main drivers of improved satisfaction. These include aspects of what is referred to as 'street scene' and simply communicating what is being done. In future it will be necessary to focus both on those actions that are important, as well as those that make a real difference.

### **Communications plan**

27.
  - Basic results published to CMB and Heads of services 26<sup>th</sup> November – done
  - Full report published to CMB and heads of service 19<sup>th</sup> December – done
  - News and Views article published – 7<sup>th</sup> January
  - Report to CMB – 14<sup>th</sup> January
  - Leader's briefing – 15<sup>th</sup> January
  - Summary e-mailed to Members and full report referenced (internet) – 16<sup>th</sup> January
  - Hard copies available to members – 16<sup>th</sup> January
  - Herefordshire Matters article published – 21<sup>st</sup> January
  - First Press article published - 25<sup>th</sup> January
  - Included in member's seminar - 25<sup>th</sup> February

### **Financial and Legal Implications**

There are no financial implications. The survey is funded from with the base budget of the policy and performance service as is the citizens panel. Action by individual service will be funded from their base budgets

There are no legal implications although there is a requirement to conduct the survey currently every three years and it is expected that it will also be a requirement that the replacement survey is conducted, probably annually.

## **Risk management**

The authority has to comply with Government requirements. In addition a failure to address levels of customer satisfaction will damage its reputation locally, regionally and nationally as well as having a potentially adverse impact on future inspection scores, partnership working etc.

## **Alternative Options**

The alternative would be to ignore the results or appear unwilling to learn from them. This would incur the risks outlined in the preceding section.

## **Consultees**

None. This is a report of a survey whose content is largely prescribed by central government. Any consultation will be on the types of response required and their timing. Where necessary, this will follow Cabinet approval of this report

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1

Herefordshire Satisfaction Survey 2007 – Full report – Issue 1, December 2007.

## **Background Papers**

Appendix 1 above