

# THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

28.10.10

## 2010 Performance Survey Results

Report by the Chief Executive

Agenda Item	
Report No	

### Summary

The Annual Performance Survey carried out in June/July of this year was sent to the new Citizens' Panel of 2354 people, designed to be representative of the adult population. With 1,586 responses (67% response rate), the results can be generalised to the adult population of the Highlands. This year we have better information on differences in opinion among different groups within the population.

High levels of satisfaction continue to be found in contacting the Council and with services provided. 92% of respondents find it easy to contact the Council. 69% of requests are felt to be dealt with on the first point of contact and 67% feel very or fairly satisfied with information provided. Satisfaction levels remain high for most types of contact but there remains room for improvement in the privacy for personal visits, in waiting times for written responses and in handling complaints. 83% of respondents are satisfied with Council services. Most service areas (37/42) have positive net satisfaction scores and significant increases (5%+) from 2009 are found in 30 service areas, with many scoring the highest since the survey began. A range of children's services, culture and leisure provision, outdoor activities, the Registrar service and burials and cremations all show 20%+ increases in net satisfaction.

On balance the Council is viewed positively as: friendly; maintaining good quality local services; helpful; environmentally friendly; a fair employer; telling local people what it is doing; and being aware of people's needs. The Council is viewed negatively in: treating all residents fairly; listening to local people; providing value for money; being efficient; representing people's views; and involving people in how it spends its money.

Highland communities are regarded as even more safe and even better places to live in compared to previous years and higher levels of people volunteering are reported.

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Council's Programme gives a commitment that:

'We will continuously review our performance to improve the way in which Council services are designed and delivered. We will do this by measuring our progress, reporting on it publicly and listening to our customers and communities.'

One way of gauging public opinion of Council services is through the annual public performance survey. The survey is also important evidence for external scrutiny, particularly for the audit of Best Value. The Best Value 2 audit (2010) used the survey as evidence of high customer satisfaction and contributed to the findings that the Council is self aware and aware of the needs of its communities.

1.2 The results not only give a sense of public opinion, but as this is the 8<sup>th</sup> survey, it also shows changes in public perception over time. When the survey results are combined with other performance information, they help to identify where services are performing well and where improvement activity should be focused in the

Council. The areas covered in the survey are:

- Contact with the Council;
- Satisfaction with services;
- Community Life including attitudes to community safety, volunteering and Gaelic language.

This year the questions on community life were reduced in order to accommodate questions on budget savings ideas. These will be reported later and combined with the qualitative analysis of feedback from face to face discussions (ward forums, other stakeholder forums, partner meetings and focus groups) and written feedback (letters, petitions and blog comments and e-mails). Some analysis has already been reported at the TECs Committee meeting last month.

- 1.3 For 2010 the survey was sent to the new Citizens' Panel. The results were analysed independently by the UHI Centre for Remote and Rural Studies. The survey report is appended.
- 1.4 The survey provides feedback, which can be generalised to the Highland population as a whole, on how the Council is perceived. It provides some insights into views at the Ward level. However it should be noted that the survey is not, and should not be seen as, the only information sought on customers' views. It does not replace the need for service or site specific surveys and other forms of customer feedback. The results at Ward level may be useful for considering topics for further discussion at Ward Forums in some areas.
- 1.5 To get a balanced and robust view of performance it is important to consider this survey information alongside other performance information including:
  - Customer feedback targeted to those receiving the service (e.g. through stakeholder forums, focus groups or specific consultations);
  - Customer feedback at the point of use (e.g. Council housing repairs survey and Service Centre follow up surveys);
  - Statutory Performance Indicators;
  - Other quantifiable data and indicators of service performance, including the corporate performance indicators reported separately to this meeting of the Council for the Strengthening the Highlands Programme and the Single Outcome Agreement;
  - Professional opinion and practitioner views;
  - Feedback from regulatory activity, inspections and audits;
  - Contact customers have with elected members, including through Ward Forums.

Performance information from a range of sources provides the evidence base for self evaluation in the Council. A member briefing on self evaluation is scheduled for February 2011.

## **2. Methodology, scope and new analysis**

- 2.1 It is not practical or necessary to survey everyone in the population to gauge public mood. By constructing the Citizens' Panel from a random sample of the population and ensuring it has enough people involved and closely aligned with the socio-economic profile of the region, survey results can be generalised to the population as a whole. Recruitment to the Citizens' Panel was successful, with 2354 involved. Survey forms were posted or e-mailed to the panel (depending on their choice) and 1586 responses were received (similar to previous surveys). This provided a 67% response rate and a sufficient number of responses for there to be very high levels of confidence that the results can be generalised to the population as a whole.

Further information on the construction of the Citizens' Panel and the confidence levels achieved is found in section 1 of the report.

- 2.2 The methodology used does limit the representation in terms of :
1. Very local results – although information is available at a Ward level, the sample size is not large enough for results to be seen as representative of Ward views, but analysis by Corporate Management Area (x 3) is available.
  2. Using the electoral roll - only those aged 18 and over registered on that roll may be surveyed, so views of young people aged under 18 are excluded. Other means of engaging with this age group exist, for example through Highland Youth Voice and surveys in schools.
  3. A postal survey – only those able to read the survey form or write would be able to respond fully, potentially excluding people with literacy and numeracy difficulties, people with sight impairment or people who do not have sufficient English language reading and writing skills. It should be noted that panel members requiring different print size or different language provision were supported to take part. Four focus groups on the budget consultation questions were arranged for people with disabilities, rather than relying solely on the written questionnaire.
- 2.3 The first section of the survey report provides a profile of the respondents. In keeping with previous years, the pattern of responses is consistent: young people are under-represented and women are slightly over-represented. 10.5% of the respondents regard themselves as having a disability. 91% of respondents have lived in the area for over 5 years.
- 2.4 To compensate for under-representation in responses, the survey results have been weighted by gender and age.
- 2.5 Having screened the survey approach and questionnaire for its impact on equalities groups, improvements were made to the questionnaire and an analysis by equalities group was commissioned. Far more information is available on the responses by different group within the community especially around satisfaction with services, as noted in the appendix to the attached report. Too few responses were received from ethnic minority groups to enable separate analysis; however notable differences are:
- People unable to work, with disabilities or not owning their home had more contact with the Council over the past year compared to the survey population as a whole.
  - As their most recent contact a higher proportion of men than women contacted the Council to make a complaint.
  - People aged over 75 years and people with disabilities are more likely to make contact by visiting an office or Service Point and are least likely to contact by using computer. They are also less likely to favour using more telephony and internet services instead of face to face contact.
  - Older people (75 years+) place greater importance on library services and pavement maintenance.
  - Older people (75years+) and women rate contact with the Council more positively in terms of helpfulness of staff, staff understanding what is wanted and overall satisfaction with service given.
  - Treating all residents fairly is a quality more highly valued for people with disabilities, while providing value for money is less important.
  - People resident for less than 5 years in the area tend to have higher levels of satisfaction.

### **3. Key findings**

#### **3.1 Contact With the Council**

63% of respondents had contacted the Council in the previous year. Most contact with the Council is still to make an enquiry, with new residents and unemployed people more likely to make this contact. Fewer contacted the Council to make a complaint, request a service or make a payment compared to last year; although older people, people with disabilities, those unable to work and non-home owners were more likely to request a service. Most contact continues to be by telephone. A sizeable but declining proportion of contact is still face to face by visiting a Service Point or an office and personal visits are favoured by older people (75 years+) and people with disabilities. Most face to face contact is through Service Points. A growing number of people report making contact by e-mail (an increase from 4% to 15% of respondents used this method since 2006). Very little contact is made with the Council in Gaelic (less than 1% of all contact). The Council continues to encourage public engagement through Gaelic through a guarantee to reply in Gaelic to correspondence; use of bilingual reports documents and forms including surveys of the Citizens' Panel; regularly publicising the fact that the public can communicate with Council staff orally in Gaelic.

#### **3.2 Key indicators of perception on contact show:**

- 69% of requests made to the Council were dealt with on the first point of contact. This has increased from 67% in 2006 but decreased from 71% in 2009. This compares with a figure of 88% of requests dealt with at first point of contact overall within the customer service network as recorded via the CRM system, with the service centre dealing with 77% for the Service Centre.
- 65% of respondents felt that the service given at point of contact was good; the lowest figure in the past four years (70% in 2007) but those rating the service as poor has not grown overall and is lower than in 2007 (12% compared to 14%).
- 67% were very or fairly satisfied with information provided, the highest figure since the survey began and up from 60% in 2006; with only 6% dissatisfied. The net satisfaction score on information provided has increased steadily from 50% in 2006 to 61% in 2010.
- 92% of respondents feel it is easy to contact the Council, an increase from 90% in 2006 and slightly down from 93% last year.
- Retired and unemployed people are more likely to be satisfied with Council services but people with disabilities are more likely to be dissatisfied (although still high at 81% satisfied).

**3.3** Satisfaction levels remain fairly high for most aspects of contact with the Council. Over the past four years, improving trends are seen in the helpfulness of staff, waiting time, facilities for people with a disability, opening hours and speed in answering telephones. Notable decline is found in views on privacy (especially among women and people with disabilities) and some decline is found in how well staff understood what was wanted and in the ability to reach the right person. The length of time taken to receive a written response has not improved since 2006 with only 36% of respondents rating this as good. For those customers who make contact via the customer service network, customer satisfaction is recorded at 98.9% via face to face and telephony surveys. Notable decline is found from last year in views about the content and ease of use of the Council's website, although there is only a marginal increase in those rating content as poor. Another approach to assessing website quality (e.g. functionality, accessibility and accuracy) is through the UK Sitemorse survey, where currently the Council is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> out of 429 local

authorities in the UK.

- 3.4 A new question on contact preferences was asked this year. In responding to the question 'If more services were available via telephone or on the internet would you use these options rather than make a personal visit?' For telephone 64% answered 'yes' and for internet 71% answered 'yes'. Those least likely to favour using these methods are older people (65years+), those with a disability and those living in the region for over 10 years. There is interest in receiving information or contacting the Council through interactive TV and texting and younger people in particular (22% of 25-44 year olds) are interested in using social networking for this purpose. The Corporate Improvement Programme will deliver improvements to the service provided by the Council's Service Centre (call handling) and the website. This will deliver an improved service to customers through these channels. A pilot is also underway using Twitter and Facebook to communicate council news and information.
- 3.5 Overall satisfaction with services  
83% of respondents were satisfied with Council services, the same score as last year and the highest score recorded since the survey began.
- 3.6 Respondents were asked to record their satisfaction with a range of services, 42 in total. In 37 services or functions more people are satisfied than dissatisfied and in most of these net satisfaction scores are strong. There is some change in the top 10 services in terms of satisfaction. Burials and cremations and pre-school services have moved up, while recycling facilities have moved out of the top 10 but still show steady increases in net satisfaction since at least 2006.
- 3.7 Increased satisfaction is found in 35 services compared to last year, the greatest increase in satisfaction across services since the survey began. Significant increases (over 5% improvement) are found in 30 services with the greatest increase (over 20%) found in a range of children's services (primary education, pre-school services, breakfast and after school clubs and secondary education and school transport), museums and sports facilities, the countryside ranger service, walking routes, the Registrar service and burials and cremations. The increase in satisfaction with business support is notable also, given the Council's expanded role with Business Gateway and since this service has previously scored negatively. For many of these services (31) their score is the highest since the survey began.
- 3.8 The scale of the increase in satisfaction is remarkable and may be explained by:
- Service improvements (e.g. Business Gateway, the new Archive Centre where Inverness Registrar services are based, expanding the Ranger role, the additional resources committed through the Strengthening the Highlands Programme for home care and benefits advice).
  - A change in attitudes, possibly affected by the timing of the survey and the budget consultation with some services and facilities identified as changing or reducing and consequently valued more highly.
  - A change in survey methodology, moving to the Citizens' Panel, but this does not fit with most of the other survey results where results are sustained
  - The change in question design, as described in paragraph 74 of the attached report, but this change could equally have affected the scores negatively and the new question design, linking responses to service use, should provide more accurate satisfaction results.

3.9 Satisfaction is sustained in three services: street cleaning, land use planning and services to reduce youth offending. Decreased satisfaction from last year is found in only three service areas: planning applications and building warrants, winter road maintenance and road repairs and pot holes. The latter two services are no doubt affected by the severe winter in 2009/10. Although the survey shows dissatisfaction with planning and building warrants significant improvement have been delivered in the past year. These include:

- Introduction of e-planning which allows planning applications and comments on them to be submitted online. Currently over 40% of applications are submitted, against the 10% estimated by the Scottish Government.
- The percentage of non-householder applications dealt with within two months significantly improved in 2009/10 to 59.9% compared to 44.1% in 2008/9.
- The Building Standards Team has received a very positive external inspection report and their ongoing customer surveys shows an increase level of customer satisfaction in the improved time taken to process building warrants.

### 3.10 The importance of services

The top five most important services continue to be: winter road maintenance (moving into first position); roads repairs and potholes; refuse/bin collection; recycling facilities; and primary education. Winter road maintenance and roads repairs and potholes are seen to be the most important but also have the greatest dissatisfaction. Libraries, primary education, home care and residential homes all show the greatest increase in terms of perceived importance.

3.11 Different groups in the community rate importance of services differently. Schools are rated as more important among the 25-44 years age group, libraries and pavement maintenance are more important for older people (75 years+).

### 3.12 Qualities of the Council

In terms of the qualities of the Council which are most important to respondents the top five are:

1. maintains good quality local services;
2. listens to local people;
3. provides value for money;
4. is efficient
5. is aware of people's needs.

The top three qualities have been constant for three years. Being efficient has risen in importance this year and involving people in how it spends money was more important last year (7<sup>th</sup> position this year compared to 5<sup>th</sup> last year).

3.13 Respondents were asked to say how they viewed the Council against these qualities and net scores were calculated. This showed that more people agreed than disagreed that the Council:

- is friendly (by 55%)
- maintains good quality local services (by 50%)
- is helpful (by 46%)
- is environmentally friendly
- is a fair employer
- tells local people what it is doing
- is aware of people's needs

Perception improved across all of these areas, apart from being a fair employer where it dropped marginally by 2%.

- 3.14 More people disagreed than agreed that the Council:
- treats all residents fairly (only by 1%)
  - listens to local people (by 2%)
  - provides value for money (6%)
  - is efficient (by 6% - and this was previously viewed positively)
  - represents their views
  - involves people in how it spends its money.
- 3.15 Providing value for money and being efficient are important qualities to the public, but the Council is on balance not perceived to be achieving these qualities. Older people, people resident for less than five years and those unable to work are more likely to view the Council positively against these qualities.
- 3.16 Despite these negative perceptions on value for money and efficiency, the Council has consistently succeeded in meeting and surpassing the efficiency targets set by the Scottish Government since 2005/06. Between financial years 2005/06 and 2009/10 the Council achieved efficiency savings of £34.293m against targets totally £23.729m. These figures have been reported in the Council's Annual Efficiency Statements, presented to Council annually in June. The achievement of the 2008/09 efficiency target was highlighted in the Highland Council Best Value 2 Pathfinder Audit Report, published by Audit Scotland in May 2010. In addition, the Corporate Improvement Programme is on course to deliver cashable efficiency savings in asset management, procurement, business support and travel costs.
- 3.17 Respondents were asked whether the Council exceeded or fell short of their expectations. 68% felt that the Council met or exceeded their expectations, an increase from 65% in 2006 and a slight drop from 69% in 2009. Those resident for less than five years were more likely to say that their expectations had been exceeded (22% compared to 5%).
- 3.18 Complaints  
18.5% (267 respondents) said they had made a complaint in the past year. Over half (51%) were either very or fairly dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. Men were more likely to make a complaint than women and were less likely to be satisfied with how it was handled. Compared to last year, net satisfaction with complaints handling appears to have fallen. Roads repairs and potholes, winter road maintenance and pavement maintenance were the top 3 reasons cited for dissatisfaction (accounting for 465 of all dissatisfaction comments received) and no doubt influenced by the severe winter in 2009/10.
- 3.19 The Council continues to keep its Complaints Procedure under review and continues to monitor performance in order to improve performance in responding to complaints. A new Customer Services Training Programme has been introduced for front line staff and a new training course on dealing with complaints is also now in place and is targeting those staff in services who most frequently deal with complaints. The implementation of the new CRM System in February 2011 will enable the council to improve management reporting on complaints handling.
- 3.20 Views on receiving performance information  
The preferred method of receiving performance information is for it to be contained with the council tax leaflet (59%). This is done annually. Information from the website is gaining in popularity and is now the second most preferred method. 24%

listed the newspaper supplement as one preference, slightly higher than in 2009. Although not the most popular method, the newspaper supplement is more affordable than a separate newsletter to each household and is normally distributed in November each year with positive feedback usually received. Interestingly, 8% listed ward forums as a preferred method of receiving performance information an increase from 3% last year, but lower than 11% in 2007.

### 3.21 Community life

97% regard the area within 15 minutes of their home to be very or fairly safe, compared to 92% in 2009. Those resident for less than five years were more likely to feel their area was very safe; but disabled and unemployed people were less likely to feel this way.

3.22 97% of respondents regard their neighbourhood or community as a very or fairly good place to live, an increase from 92% in 2009. Older people (65 years+), home owners and residents in the Ross, Skye and Lochaber area were more likely to rate their area as very good.

### 3.23 Attitude to Gaelic language

This year 41% of respondents felt well disposed to a great or some extent to Gaelic language. This is a return to the figure in 2008, after a small decline in 2009. Given that the Census 2001 records 6% of the Highland population speaking and writing in Gaelic, this response indicates a more positive response among non Gaelic speakers and provides a good platform for implementing the Council's Gaelic Language Plan. Older people and respondents living in Skye, Wester Ross, Lochalsh and in North, West and Central Sutherland were more positively disposed towards Gaelic (ranging between 54% and 83%).

### 3.24 Volunteering

The survey indicates higher levels of volunteering in the Highlands than recorded previously with:

- 36% indicating they volunteer in some capacity;
- 49% of those volunteering are involved in more than one voluntary activity;
- 54% of those volunteering do so at least once a week;
- 3 out of 4 volunteers are volunteering at least several times a month.

3.25 A higher proportion of older people and people living in Ross, Skye and Lochalsh volunteer. Very high levels of volunteering are found in the following wards:

- Eilean a' Cheo (52%)
- Badenoch and Strathspey (51%)
- Caol and Malaig (50%)
- Fort William and Ardnamurchan (47%)
- Landward Caithness (47%)
- Dingwall and Seaforth (46%).
- Those resident for less than five years are volunteering at 35%, only slightly lower than for those resident over 10 years (40%).

## 4.0 **Next steps**

4.1 The feedback from the Citizens' Panel can be considered with other performance information to:

- Provide evidence for future self-evaluation of Council services and to support the implementation of the Public Service Improvement Framework.
- Identify areas for improvement. Complaints handling, privacy in Council

offices and Service Points, waiting time for written responses and actions relating to efficiency and value for money are all highlighted in this analysis.

- Improve our understanding of different experience and views of different groups within the community. This will improve our service planning and perception about treating all residents fairly and it will help us to comply with the Equalities legislation.

4.2 With the Citizens' Panel now set up, further surveys prior to April next year are being considered. This could include surveys to support consultation approved on the single equalities scheme and climate change. The panel will continued to be used for the annual public performance survey. In 2011 it is proposed that specific questions on road maintenance are included.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Resource Implications**

The survey was analysed independently at a 50% lower cost than previous arrangements (£15,000 including the creation of the Citizens' Panel and the costs associated with printing and posting questionnaires).

### **5.2 Risk Implications**

There are no risk implications identified as a result of the public performance survey.

### **5.3 Equalities Implications**

As noted above, the Citizens' Panel has been constructed to be as representative of the Highland adult population as possible. The analysis provides far more information on views across different groups in the community and will assist in fairer future service planning.

### **5.4 Climate Change Implications**

By surveying the Citizens' Panel and offering electronic surveying (700 used this method) the amount of paper used for questionnaires and postage has reduced significantly (1600 forms printed and posted compared to 14,000 previously). This will contribute to the Council's target of reducing paper consumption with associated reduced carbon emissions.

## **6. Recommendation:**

6.1 Members are asked to comment on the survey results.

6.2 Members are asked to note that improvement actions will be taken forward by strategic committees, identified in service quarterly performance reviews and included in Service Plans.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

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Date: 7.10.09

Appendix 1: The Highland Council 2010 Performance Survey, Final Report