

Agenda Item	
Report No	

2011 Performance Survey Results
Report by the Chief Executive

Summary

The Annual Performance Survey carried out in May and June this year was sent to the Citizens' Panel with a 54% response rate achieved. With 1,153 useable responses the results can be generalised to the adult population of the Highlands. Overall the results are very positive and show improvements in levels of satisfaction with contact and with services compared to last year when high satisfaction was recorded. Key results include:

- 85% of respondents are satisfied with Council services, the highest score in 9 years. Most service areas (38 out of 41) have positive net satisfaction scores and significant increases (5%+) from 2010 are found in 31 service areas, with many scoring the highest since the survey began.
- 93% of respondents find it easy to contact the Council. On-line contact has grown with 19% saying they contact in this way compared to 6% in 2007.
- 74% of requests are felt to be dealt with on the first point of contact and 69% feel very or fairly satisfied with information provided.

On balance the Council is viewed positively in 12 out of 13 qualities, including for the first time the qualities of listening to local people, providing value for money, treating all residents fairly, being efficient and involving people in how it spends its money. Generally Highland communities are regarded as safe and good places to live in and high levels of people volunteering are sustained.

Some analysis of results by age, disability, gender and socio-economic status is available from the survey and in 2011 particular issues have emerged from people with disabilities. To supplement this information five focus groups have been used as well this year to gather further information to identify where inequalities need to be addressed.

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 internal and external scrutiny. Audit Scotland uses the survey findings in its assessment of the Council's performance and the results will be of interest to the Scottish Housing Regulator in 2011.

1.2 The results not only give a sense of public opinion, but as this is the 9th 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.

Last year the survey included budget consultation questions. Instead this year the survey included three new areas:

- Voter experience at the 2011 Scottish Parliamentary Election and UK Referendum, to aid future election planning;
- Attitudes to equalities and diversity, to be considered by the Member Equalities Working Group (MEWG) this month; and
- Attitudes to climate change, to be considered at the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) this month.

These three sections are not included in this report, although all of the reports will be available on the website. There were also additional questions asked of the Councils' housing service for tenants. The analysis of these questions is included in this report.

1.3 This is the second year the survey was sent to the Citizens' Panel. The results were analysed independently by the UHI Centre for Remote and Rural Studies. The survey report is available on the website. [Citizens' Panel Results on Council Performance, full report 2011](#). Hard Copies will be made available to the public from libraries and service points on request. Several hard copies are placed in the Members' Lounge.

1.4 To get a balanced and robust view of performance it is important to consider this survey information alongside service specific customer feedback and ward forums as well as other performance information such as the reports to this meeting of the Council on Statutory Performance Indicators and progress against the Strengthening the Highlands Programme. Feedback from regulatory activity, inspections and audits is also important. Performance information from this range of sources provides useful evidence for self evaluation in the Council. A programme for self evaluation across all Council functions for the next three years is now developed.

2. Methodology, response rate and equalities

2.1 It is not practical or necessary to survey everyone in the population to gauge public mood. The Citizens' Panel was constructed from a random sample of the population with enough people with different characteristics involved to allow the survey results to be representative of the adult population. With over 1100 responses the results can be generalised to the population as whole with high levels of confidence.

2.2 This year the number of responses was lower than last year (around 400 fewer). The survey included 15 more questions this year with the three new sections, but these replaced budget questions which would have taken more time to complete last year. Of those responding we asked how they found being a panel member. This showed:

- 90% found it worthwhile;
- 90% found it useful;
- 79% felt their views have been listened to;
- 35% found it time consuming.

To avoid voter fatigue future surveys will be shorter, although there may be more

than one conducted in a year. It is worth noting that experience elsewhere suggests that panels once established do tend to shrink over time. For the 2012 survey one third of the panel will be refreshed.

2.3 The survey results were weighted for age and gender because of relatively low numbers of young people responding (especially from those aged under 24 years) and a slightly lower proportion of men responding. It has been particularly difficult to engage young people in this survey process, even after attempting to boost panel numbers through contact with colleges and by offering the facility to complete the survey on-line. Other approaches will be investigated for the future including focus groups, more formal consultation with Highland Youth Voice and using other potential contact channels.

2.4 In learning from the experience of the budget consultation in 2010, this year performance survey questions were used in focus groups for people under represented on the Citizens' Panel and people less likely to take part in written surveys. Five focus groups were run for:

- People with a learning disability
- Blind / visually impaired people
- Deaf / hearing impaired people
- People who have experienced mental ill health
- Chinese people

The key themes emerging from these focus groups will be considered at the MEWG this month for improvement actions to be identified.

2.5 Of those responding to the written survey, where notable differences are found in responses according to age, gender, disability, housing situation and employment status, these are included in the full report. They include the following differences:

- Older people and Council tenants were slightly more likely to have found being a panel member worthwhile, useful, feeling listened to and were less likely to have found it time consuming.
- People unable to work or unemployed, with school age children, with disabilities or Council tenants had more contact with the Council over the past year compared to the survey population as a whole.
- People with disabilities are more likely to contact the Council to make an enquiry, 55% of disabled people compared to 46% for the whole panel, and along with tenants and those unable to work they are more likely to contact the Council to request a service.
- As their most recent contact a higher proportion of men (16%) than women (11%) contacted the Council to make a complaint, with men four times more likely than women to be dissatisfied with how their complaint was handled. Men are less likely to feel that the Council represents their views than women (a 7% difference).
- Home owners and people aged under 65 years are twice as likely to contact the Council using the internet compared to Council tenants and those aged over 65 years; while people aged over 65 years, Council tenants and people with disabilities are more likely to make contact by visiting an office or Service Point. Tenants are 4 times as likely as home owners to place Service Points in their top 5 most important services.
- While satisfaction with the contact made with the Council is generally high, people with disabilities tend to have lower satisfaction across a number of features - the helpfulness of staff (66% good compared to 77% good among those not disabled), understanding what is wanted (65% good compared to

80%), overall satisfaction (52% good compared to 70%), ease of getting someone to help them by phone (31% good compared to 62%), privacy in offices (39% find it poor compared to 25% poor among not disabled). Disabled people are 6 times more likely to be dissatisfied with how their complaint is handled compared to non disabled people. They are less likely to view the Council as being aware of people's needs and listening to local people than non disabled people. People with disabilities tend to have lower levels of satisfaction than non disabled people for swimming pools, sports facilities, public conveniences, pavement and winter road maintenance, planning for future land use and business support advice. However 65% of people with disabilities found facilities specifically for them in Council buildings to be good. They are more likely to be satisfied with home care services and the community occupational therapy service than non disabled people.

- People with disabilities are twice as likely to see public conveniences in their top 5 most important services compared to people without disabilities.
- Older people are more likely to place libraries, street cleaning, pavement maintenance, public conveniences in their top 5 most important services; while younger people are more likely to place public parks and open spaces and swimming pools in their top 5 most important services.
- Older people, people with school age children, non disabled people and people in rural communities are more likely to volunteer than others.
- Communities are perceived to be less safe for adults at risk of harm and for people from ethnic minorities.

These will be considered by the MEWG as well.

3. Key findings

3.1 Contact With the Council

51% of respondents had contacted the Council in the previous year. Most contact with the Council is still to make an enquiry, 49% of all respondents. Compared to last year fewer people contacted the Council to make a payment, no doubt reflecting the new arrangements for paying in other businesses, to request a service and to speak to a Councillor. The second main reason for contact was to request a service. 12% said they contacted to make a complaint. 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. A growing number of people report making contact by e-mail (an increase from 4% to 19% of respondents used this method since 2007). Awareness of the web casting of Council meetings and social networking opportunities for accessing Council information is modest at 32% and 22% respectively; although perhaps understandable as these are new channels of information. Very little contact is made with the Council in Gaelic (less than 1% of all contact).

3.2 Key indicators of perception on contact show:

- 93% of respondents feel it is easy to contact the Council.
- 74% of requests made to the Council were dealt with on the first point of contact. This has increased from 66% in 2007.
- 69% were very or fairly satisfied with information provided, the highest figure since the survey began and up from 61% in 2007; with only 6% dissatisfied. The net satisfaction score on information provided has increased steadily from 50% in 2006 to 63% in 2011.
- 67% of respondents felt that the service given at point of contact was good.

- Interest in receiving information by text message or interactive / digital TV has increased with around a third of all respondents interested in these channels, with the figure rising to over 40% among those aged 25-44 years.
- 3.3 Satisfaction levels remain fairly high for most aspects of contact with the Council, other than privacy in offices and the length of time taken for a written response. Improvements from last year are found in: overall satisfaction with the service given (67% rate it good); how well staff understand what is wanted (76% good); privacy in offices (40% good); the ease of reaching someone by telephone who could help (60% good); and in opening hours for telephony (60% good). More respondents found the web casting of Council meetings good than poor (44% compared to 12%) and more found Council social networking (Facebook and Twitter) good than poor (41% compared to 21%). More respondents found the Council website home page to be good than poor (44% compared to 7%) and more found the general content of the website to be good than poor (45% compared to 4%).
- 3.4 Decline is found in: the ability to reach the right person in offices (55% good compared to 65% in 2007), in opening hours at offices (57% good compared to 63% in 2007) and in length of time taken for a written response (35% good compared to 41% in 2007). The Chief Executive will identify where improvement can be made in these areas.
- 3.5 Overall satisfaction with services
85% of respondents were satisfied with Council services, the highest score since the survey began and up from 83% in 2010.
- 3.6 Respondents were asked to record their satisfaction with a range of services, 41 in total. In 38 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, all with net scores of over 70%. Museums, sports facilities and the countryside ranger service have moved up while primary education, street lighting and burials and cremations have moved down; although all showing strong improvement since 2007. Six services are now in the 80-100% net satisfaction band: libraries, Service points, walking routes, payment of Council Tax, public parks and open spaces and registrars.
- 3.7 Increased satisfaction is found in 38 services compared to last year, the greatest increase in satisfaction across services since the survey began. Significant increases (over 5% improvement) are found in 31 services with the greatest increase (over 20%) found in residential homes, environmental health service, museums, other sports facilities and public conveniences.
- 3.8 The scale of the increase in satisfaction is remarkable and may be explained by:
- Service improvements
 - Services being valued more following the budget consultation in 2011;
 - The slight change in question design, where respondents were asked first to indicate if they 'have not used service' before selecting their level of satisfaction. This could affect the net scores if people previously rated services even if they had not used them. However this change could equally have affected the scores negatively and the new question design, linking responses to actual service use, should provide more accurate satisfaction results.

3.9 Satisfaction declined in only two areas and they both have positive scores: primary education (64% net satisfaction compared to 74% last year) and school transport (45% compared to 51% last year). Net satisfaction with refuse/bin collection is more or less sustained at the high level of 73% (compared to 74% last year). Only in 3 service areas are there more people dissatisfied than satisfied (compared to 9 services in 2009): winter road maintenance, services for youth offending and road repairs and pot holes. In each of these there has been improvement from last year, notably in winter road maintenance (-9% compared to -23% last year) and in services to reduce youth offending (-9% compared to -27% last year).

3.10 The importance of services

The top five most important services continue to be: roads repairs and potholes (returning to first position); winter road maintenance; refuse/bin collection; recycling facilities; and primary education. The first 3 are found in the top 5 by at least half of all respondents. Primary and secondary schools are seen in the top 5 of importance for over 50% of families with children. Libraries, primary education, home care and residential homes all show the greatest increase in terms of perceived importance.

3.11 Complaints

Fewer people appear to have made a complaint (14.5% down from 18.5%) and levels of satisfaction in how complaints were handled improved from last year (up to 36% from 30%). Even with these improvements, on balance more people were dissatisfied than satisfied with how their complaint was handled. The top 3 reasons for dissatisfaction were the quality of the response, the outcome and the timescale.

3.12 Qualities of the Council

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

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

3.13 Respondents were asked to say how they viewed the Council against these qualities and net scores were calculated. Significant improvement is seen in this area, with more people now agreeing than disagreeing that the Council:

- is approachable (by 56%)
- maintains good quality local services (by 52%)
- is helpful (by 46%)
- is environmentally friendly (by 39%)
- is a fair employer (by 26%)
- is aware of people's needs (by 17%)
- tells local people what it is doing (by 15%)
- listens to local people (by 11%)
- provides value for money (by 8%)
- treats all residents fairly (by 7%)
- is efficient (by 4%)
- involves people in how it spends its money (by 0.3%)

Improvements in perception were found from last year in 11 of 12 qualities above. It also improved for the quality that the Council 'represents your views', although 2% more people disagree than agree with this statement. Overall positive scores were found in 12 out of 13 qualities, compared to 7 out of 13 in 2010.

3.14 Views on receiving performance information

The preferred method of receiving performance information is for it to be contained with the council tax leaflet (58%). This is done annually. Information from the website is gaining in popularity and is the second most preferred method, and more favoured by the 25-44 year age group. 25% listed the newspaper supplement as one preference, up from 20% in 2007. Although not the most popular method, the newspaper supplement is more affordable than a separate newsletter to each household which is more popular. 7% listed ward forums as a preferred method of receiving performance information.

3.15 Views of Council house tenants

Additional questions of tenants were asked in the 2011 survey. They were asked whether they agreed or not with 9 qualities of the Council as a landlord. In the following 8 qualities, more tenants agreed than disagreed that the Council:

- is able to help if you have a problem
- is an efficient landlord
- maintains its homes in good condition
- cares about its tenants
- listens to its tenants
- gives good value for money for the rent you pay
- is good at helping tenants with rent arrears sort out their problems
- will help you sort out neighbour problems.

In only one area, that the Council has enough money to do a good job, was a negative score found, indicating that fewer agreed than disagreed with this statement.

3.16 Tenants were asked whether housing services were improving, staying the same or getting worse. A clear majority (61%) selected staying the same. 1 in 5 sees them improving and 1 in 5 sees them getting worse.

3.17 Community life

Over 3 in 4 respondents feel that the area where they live provides them with at least some sense of belonging to a community. Older people are more likely to feel this while people unable to work are less likely to believe this. 63% believe they are involved in the life of their communities, with higher proportions of people with school age children and newer residents feeling this way and lower levels of people unable to work feeling this way. Overall people living in rural wards feel more involved in their communities. The majority of respondents (85%) believe their communities are accepting of people coming from outside the Highlands to live in the area.

3.18 The majority of respondents feel the communities in which they live are safe places for themselves, their families and for other groups. Respondents felt that adults at risk of harm and people from ethnic minorities are on balance less likely to feel safe. Higher levels of feeling safe are found in rural areas. 93% regard the area within 15 minutes of their home to be very or fairly safe, compared to 97% in 2010 but more in keeping with the responses from earlier surveys (92% in 2009). Retired and employed people were more likely to feel their area was very safe; but disabled and unemployed people were less likely to feel this way.

- 3.19 The top 5 community safety concerns are speeding cars, dog fouling / littering, alcohol misuse, vandalism and anti social behaviour by young people. Over half of all respondents were worried about these activities.
- 3.20 93% of respondents regard their neighbourhood or community as a very or fairly good place to live, lower than last year (97%) but higher than the 92% recorded for 2009. Older people (65 years+), retired people, home owners and people in employment and people living in rural areas were more likely to rate their area as very good.
- 3.21 Attitude to Gaelic language
This year 36% of respondents felt well disposed to a great or some extent to Gaelic language. This is lower than last year (41%) and the lowest figure since 2008 (41%). 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. Older people and people living in rural communities tend to be more positively disposed towards Gaelic.
- 3.24 Volunteering
The survey indicates sustained high levels of volunteering in the Highlands with:
- 36% indicating they volunteer in some capacity;
 - 57% of those volunteering are involved in more than one voluntary activity (up from 49% in 2010, suggesting those already volunteering are taking on an increased number of activities);
 - 56% of those volunteering do so at least once a week (up from 54% in 2010);
 - 3 out of 4 volunteers are volunteering at least several times a month.
- 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, dealing with the few areas of decline as set out in paragraph 3.4 or where satisfaction levels are lower e.g. complaints handling.
 - Improve our understanding of different experience and views of different groups within the community. Notable differences in views from disabled people are found in 2011 and these will be considered more fully in the MEWG along with the feedback from the five focus groups.
5. **Implications**
- 5.1 Resource Implications
The survey was analysed independently and within the contract allocation of £15,000 for research support in 2011.
- 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 information on views across different groups in the community and is supplemented by the commissioning of five focus groups on these topics. The results will be considered

by the MEWG to identify where and how inequalities can be addressed.

5.4 Climate Change Implications

By surveying the Citizens' Panel and offering electronic surveying (700 prefer this method) the amount of paper used for questionnaires and postage has reduced significantly (1600 forms printed and posted compared to 14,000 prior to 2010). This will contribute to the Council's target of reducing paper consumption with associated reduced carbon emissions. The responses to the questions on attitudes to climate change will be considered by the Climate Change Working Group later this month.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 Members are asked to note:

1. The survey results.
2. That improvement action from the survey and from the five focus groups will be taken forward in Services and through relevant Member Working Groups, with those actions monitored through the Chief Executive's Quarterly Performance Reviews.
3. That to at least sustain response rates from the Citizens' Panel future surveys will be shorter, although there may be more than one conducted in a year and for the 2012 survey one third of the panel will be refreshed.

6.2 Members are asked to agree that other approaches for engaging young people should be explored for the future including focus groups, more formal consultation with Highland Youth Voice and through other potential contact channels.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

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