

Agenda Item	
Report No	

2009 Performance Survey Results

Report by the Chief Executive

Summary

The Annual Performance Survey carried out in June/July of this year was sent to a random sample of 11,000 households. With 1,807 responses (17% response rate), the results can be seen as representative of the views of Highland households.

High levels of satisfaction continue to be found in contacting the Council and with services provided. 93% of respondents find it easy to contact the Council. 71% of requests are felt to be dealt with on the first point of contact and only 7% feel dissatisfied with information provided. Satisfaction levels remain high for nearly all types of contact but there remains room for improvement in the privacy for personal visits and in waiting times for written responses. 83% of respondents are satisfied with Council services, the highest score recorded since the survey started in 2003. Improved or sustained performance is found in 22 service areas compared to last year with notable improvements in a range of environmental and community works services.

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

Highland communities are still regarded as safe and good places to live in with high levels of people feeling connected to their communities and with high levels of volunteering.

Any notable differences in the views based on age, gender, disability or geography are highlighted in the report.

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. The Single Outcome Agreement also includes indicators which are drawn from surveys of public perception.
- 1.2 The Council commissions an independent survey of public opinion each year covering satisfaction with Council services and aspects of quality of life in Highland communities. The survey is in its 7th year. The results give a sense of public opinion and shows changes in public perception over time. Along with other performance information, the survey findings 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 Gaelic language, community safety, volunteering and Community Councils.

This year additional questions were included about the Council's website and further information was sought on reasons for any dissatisfaction reported. The survey report is appended.

- 1.3 The survey provides feedback, which can be generalised to the Highland population as a whole on how the Council is perceived overall and for Corporate Management Areas. 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.
- 1.4 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, tenant participation 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's views;
 - Feedback from regulatory activity, inspections and audits;
 - Contact customers have with elected members, including through Ward Forums.

2. Methodology, scope and new analysis

- 2.1 In seeking the views of our customers we want to achieve representative results. The survey is sent to a random sample of 11,000 households drawn from the electoral roll. For the 2009 survey a response rate of 17% was achieved. This is in keeping with previous years. Although this response rate is relatively low, the large sample size means that the 1,807 responses received can be treated with statistical confidence that they represent the views of Highland households¹.
- 2.2 The methodology used does limit the representation in terms of :
1. Very local results – although information is available on some responses at a Ward level, the sample size is not large enough for results to be seen as representative of Ward views, but some 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 young people's views in particular are likely to be under-represented, however where younger people (18-24 years) have responded and their views differ from the population as a whole, their views are noted separately. The Council pursues the views of young people in different ways. Survey results are weighted to deal with this under-representation.

¹ The responses provide a 95% Confidence Level with a narrow margin of error (1.3-2.2% Confidence Interval).

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.
- 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 and home owners are over-represented. The sample size is too small to draw any meaningful analysis by ethnicity. 16% 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 any under-representation in responses from particular sections of the community, 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. Where results have significance by age, gender or disability these are highlighted in the report. Notable differences are:
 - young people (16-24 years) are less likely to contact the Council than older people and far less likely to contact their Community Council;
 - older people prefer to contact the Council by personal visit and are least likely to make contact by e-mail;
 - people with disabilities are more likely than average to contact the Housing Service;
 - people aged over 65 years, women and people with disabilities were more likely to view their contact with the Council as good;
 - young people (16-24 years) are more likely to prefer to receive information from the Council by interactive/digital TV;
 - benefits information and advice in Service Points was particularly sought after by people with a disability;
 - people with disabilities ranked Service Points, pavement maintenance, street cleaning and occupational therapy higher in importance compared to the whole sample. They are less likely than average to be involved with their community, half as likely to volunteer and less likely to regard their community as safe for themselves and for others;
 - females and people with disabilities are more likely to be satisfied with services generally;
 - older people are more likely to feel that their community provides a sense of belonging to some or a great extent;
 - older people appear to feel safer in terms of personal safety; yet specific community safety concerns appear to grow with age.
- 2.6 With the sample size too small to capture views of people from ethnic minorities, feedback is sought in other ways and mainly through representative groups or community associations.
- 2.7 While the sample size is insufficient for responses at Ward level to be seen as representative of all people living in the Ward, responses at Ward level can be considered further at Ward Business Meetings and Ward Forums. Ward responses have been aggregated to the three corporate areas and the responses can be regarded with sufficient confidence to be representative of views at that geography. Notable differences across the three Corporate Areas are noted below:

- Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross

Respondents are more likely to contact the Council by telephone than make a personal visit. Respondents were less likely to be satisfied overall with Council services. Although high at 79%, this is lower than the 83% for the Highlands as a whole. Road repairs, pot holes and winter maintenance are seen as more important service areas than for Inverness. Speeding cars is the top community safety concern in the area, with concern growing by age. Concern about drug misuse or drug dealing was also highest in this area.

- Ross, Skye and Lochaber

Road repairs, pot holes and winter maintenance are seen as more important service areas than for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey. The lowest scores for most community safety concerns were found in this area. Respondents in this area are more likely to have contact with their Community Council (13% compared to 10% for Highland). People living in this area are more likely to volunteer than other parts of Highland (34% compared to 29%).

- Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey

People were less likely to view their contact by personal visit to an office or service point as good in terms of waiting time, privacy and the ability to reach the right person. Street cleaning, public parks and open spaces are seen as more important among all services compared to other Corporate Areas. Respondents are likely to feel less of a sense of belonging to their community. They are least likely to regard their community as very safe.

3. Key findings

3.1 Contact With the Council

65% of respondents had contacted the Council in the previous year. Most contact with the Council is to make an enquiry, obtain a service or make a payment. Most contact continues to be by telephone, but a sizeable proportion of contact is still face to face by visiting an office and especially by visiting a Service Point. A growing number of people report making contact by e-mail. 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; regularly publicising the fact that the public can communicate with Council staff orally in Gaelic and that Council services are increasingly being made available through the medium of Gaelic

3.2 71% of requests made to the Council were dealt with on the first point of contact. This shows a steady increase from 62% in 2003 and a slight decrease from 72% in 2008. 67% of respondents felt that the service given at point of contact was good. This compares with a figure of 90% 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 sitting at 83%.

3.3 Satisfaction levels remain fairly high for all aspects of contact with the Council; although privacy for personal visits and waiting time for a written response are still areas where over 20% of those contacting the Council this way note a poor experience. Satisfaction with contacting the Council has improved since 2003 across almost 12 aspects of contact (e.g. helpfulness of staff, facilities for people with a disability and opening hours); however satisfaction levels for waiting time at offices,

the ability to reach the right person and the speed with which telephones are answered have dropped marginally from last year. This year we asked new questions about the Council's website. The vast majority found content and ease of use good. For those customers who make contact via the customer service network, customer satisfaction is recorded at 96% via face to face and telephony surveys.

- 3.4 The Council is actively working to review and improve its customer service network and is, via the corporate improvement programme, reviewing how it delivers services across the Council in order to make services more accessible to customers. As part of this review, Resources Committee on 30th September 2009 agreed to extend the opening hours at the service centre to allow better telephone access for customers. Future reviews will focus on reviewing the operational structure of the customer services network, improving access to services via the Council website and also reviewing how the council engages with the customer at the first point of contact.
- 3.5 93% of respondents feel it is easy to contact the Council, an increase from 90% in 2008 and 86% in 2003. Satisfaction levels with information provided has increased slightly with 65% respondents feeling very or fairly satisfied compared to 64% (2008) and 53% (2003). The lowest level of dissatisfaction with information provided ever recorded in the survey is found this year, with 7% of respondents feeling fairly or very dissatisfied (compared to 17% in 2004, the highest level recorded).
- 3.6 In terms of how else people would like to receive information from the Council, around a third of respondents are interested in interactive/digital TV (particularly young people) and 19% are interested in texting. Both of these technologies and are being explored via the Council's ICT Strategy and Customer services Strategy.
- 3.7 The Council continues to make improvements to the way that it deals with people who contact the Council. The Customer Engagement and Assessment Project (part of the Corporate Improvement Programme) is already addressing how the Council can become more efficient while improving service delivery and making services more accessible. This will include increasing the range of services dealt with at first point of contact in the Service Centre, Service Points and through the website, as well as developing other new ways for people to contact the Council.
- 3.8 Overall satisfaction with services
83% of respondents were satisfied with Council services, the highest score recorded since the survey began in 2003 (the lowest score recorded was 75% in 2004).
- 3.9 Respondents were asked to record their satisfaction with a range of services, 41 in total. In 36 services or functions more people are satisfied than dissatisfied. There is little change in the top 10 services in terms of satisfaction. Satisfaction with refuse/bin collection remains the highest of all services and satisfaction with recycling facilities continues to increase. Other notable increases in satisfaction are found for street cleaning and pavement maintenance and residential homes of elderly / disabled people.
- 3.10 Increased or sustained satisfaction is found in 22 services compared to last year, with notable increases (over 5% improvement) found in a range of TEC Services: street lighting, recycling, street cleaning, dealing with flooding, pavement maintenance and roads repairs and potholes; although roads repairs and pot holes

continue to show the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

- 3.11 Decreased satisfaction from last year (5% reduction or greater) is found in five service areas, although far more people are satisfied than dissatisfied. The service areas are registrars, primary and secondary education, community learning/adult education and cycle paths.
- 3.12 On Council housing repairs it is worth noting that 59% of tenants responding to the survey were very or fairly satisfied with the service received, a decrease from 70% last year. The sample size is too small to generalise these results to all Council tenants.
- 3.13 The importance of services
Little change is noted in the public's priorities over time. The top five most important services continue to be: roads repairs and potholes; winter road maintenance; refuse/bin collection; recycling facilities; primary and secondary education.
- 3.14 Perceptions of the Council
In terms of the qualities of the Council which are most important to respondents the top five are:
1. maintaining good quality local services;
 2. listening to local people;
 3. providing value for money;
 4. being aware of people's needs; and
 5. involving people in how it spends money.
- This is broadly consistent with previous years, although telling people what the Council is doing and being efficient have previously featured in the top five.
- 3.15 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 maintains good quality local services and is aware of people's needs. A neutral response is recorded for whether the Council listens to local people (this is an improvement from the results in 2007). More people disagreed than agreed that the Council provides value for money or involves people in how it spends money.
- 3.16 In addition and on balance the Council is seen also to be efficient, environmentally friendly, helpful, friendly and a fair employer. It is not seen as representing people's views, treating residents fairly or telling people what it is doing.
- 3.17 Areas for improving perception clearly relate to communication and engagement, particularly in terms of how resources are or should be used and the value they provide (see section 4.3).
- 3.18 Respondents were asked whether the Council exceeded or fell short of their expectations. The highest level recorded, 69% felt that the Council met or exceeded their expectations (compared to 67% in 2008 and 63% in 2003).
- 3.19 Complaints
The survey feedback shows that over time satisfaction with complaints handling is rising gradually (25% very and fairly satisfied in 2003 compared to 30% in 2009 and 32% in 2008). Levels of dissatisfaction have reduced (64% very or fairly dissatisfied in 2003 compared to 24% in 2009 and 25% in 2008). Most respondents are neither

satisfied nor dissatisfied. Further questions were asked in 2009 to understand reasons for dissatisfaction. Over 500 respondents provided information identifying 28 different areas for dissatisfaction. Roads, potholes, pavements, planning and cycling paths are mentioned most frequently in terms of service areas, but complaints handling was the third most frequently mentioned theme. In particular dissatisfaction has arisen from a perceived lack of action or slow response times. It should be noted that complaints were mentioned 76 times as an area of dissatisfaction and this can offer insights into handling complaints better, but the number is too small for it to be seen to be representative of the views of the population as a whole.

3.20 The Council has reviewed its Complaints Procedure and continues to monitor performance in order to improve customer satisfaction. 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.

3.21 Views on receiving performance information

The preferred method of receiving performance information is for it to be contained with the council tax leaflet (69%). This is done annually. Information from the website and in Service Points and other offices were also popular choices. 22% listed the newspaper supplement as a preference, this is lower than the preference for a separate newsletter to each household, but costs for the latter are prohibitive. A newspaper supplement is usually distributed in November each year and positive feedback is received from this method. Interestingly, only 3% listed ward forums as a preferred method of receiving performance information, the same level as last year and a decrease from 11% in 2007.

3.22 The Council will continue to develop its communications through the newspaper supplement and Council Tax leaflet. It is intended to improve the website, as part of the Corporate Improvement Programme, to make this a more valuable source of information and to provide on-line access to services.

3.23 Community life

Overall, 68% of respondents felt that their community provides a sense of belonging to some or to a great extent and 44% feel involved in the life of their community. This is a decrease from last year but similar to earlier years. Lower results were shown for some Inverness Wards and within the Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey corporate area. 82% overall feel that their community is accepting of people from outside the area, with a slightly lower level reported for the Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey Corporate area.

3.24 94% of respondents regard their community as a safe place to live and 92% regard the area within 15 minutes of their home to be very or fairly safe. This is in keeping with previous years. Respondents felt that communities were generally safe places for everyone to live in; although less so for teenagers, older people and ethnic minorities. Young people answering the survey were least likely to regard their communities safe for ethnic minorities. Older people appear to feel safer in terms of personal safety; yet specific community safety concerns appear to grow with age. Disabled people appear to feel less safe with above average concern about most types of anti social behaviour. Respondents in the Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey corporate area were least likely to regard their community as safe against a range of measures.

- 3.25 The top five community safety issues which respondents feel worried about to some or great extent remain: speeding cars; dog fouling; vandalism; anti social behaviour; and rowdy behaviour.
- 3.26 92% of respondents regard their neighbourhood or community as a very or fairly good place to live, a slight decrease from 95% in 2008. Ratings for schools and health care are highest, with a notable increase in the health care rating since 2004. Transport is now rated positively, but shops, leisure facilities, housing availability and other services are viewed negatively.
- 3.27 Community Councils
In keeping with last year the survey results show low levels of contact with and awareness of Community Councils, with only 10% of respondents contacting their Community Council in the last year, with this decreasing to 4% for the 16-24 age group. This indicates a need to work with Community Councils to raise their profile and awareness of their role particularly with younger people and to raise awareness of the breadth of issues Community Councils may be involved in. Opportunities exist to do this with the introduction of a new model Scheme for Community Councils with phased consultation underway.
- 3.28 The Council is currently consulting Community Councils on a new Scheme and this will include developments in the future to support Community Councils and Councillors and to encourage participation in democracy at this local level.
- 3.29 Volunteering
The survey indicates that the high levels of volunteering in the Highlands recorded last year are sustained with:
- 29% indicating they volunteer in some capacity;
 - 56% of those volunteering are involved in more than one voluntary activity;
 - 57% of those volunteering do so once a week or more.
- 3.30 These levels of volunteering are high and only 16% of respondents said that they did not volunteer because they did not want to. The most common barriers preventing people from volunteering were lack of time, ill health and not being sure how to volunteer. Motivation to encourage more volunteering differs by age, with older people noting altruistic motives and younger people seeking fun.
- 3.31 In cross referencing answers on volunteering with other questions answered on community life, it is clear that people who feel very or fairly involved in their community and have a great sense of belonging to their community are much more likely to volunteer. Volunteering is clearly an important part of a community's assets (social capital) and can bring personal wellbeing. 90% of respondents said that the Council should support voluntary organisations and their work to some or a great extent (a slight reduction from 93% last year). This is aligned well to the Council's Programme commitment to working with the third sector and supports the development of a compact with the sector.
- 3.32 Attitude to Gaelic language
This year 38% of respondents felt well disposed to a great or some extent to Gaelic language. This is a slight decrease from last year at 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 and

provides a good platform for implementing the Council's Gaelic Language Plan. Older people and respondents living in Ross, Skye and Lochaber were more disposed than others (42% and 46% respectively).

4.0 Next steps

4.1 There is rich information contained within the responses to the survey and this can be considered with other performance information to identify areas for improvement. These will be considered by strategic committees in quarterly performance reviews and set out in Service Plans. Some actions can be taken forward quickly to inform policy, including: the Customer Services Strategy; the ICT Strategy; the Corporate Improvement Programme; the compact with the third sector; the new model Scheme for Community Councils; the Gaelic Language Plan; and in understanding the needs of people with disabilities better, including volunteering opportunities.

4.2 The Local Government Improvement Service is developing a Customer Service Question Bank which is being trialled in six Councils at this time. The Question Bank is expected to be made available to all Councils by the end of 2009. This could inform the approach to next year's survey.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The survey was commissioned following competitive tendering and cost £22,500. Any cost implications of actions arising from the survey results which cannot be accommodated in current budgets could be considered by the appropriate Committee.

5.2 One of the key findings from the survey is the public appetite for more information and involvement in how the Council directs its resources and the value for money achieved. Given the challenging financial position facing the public sector the Council will use Ward Forums to discuss budget issues. In addition it is proposed that other ways of gauging representative views of the population, particularly in gauging public mood on spending options will be appraised. This includes setting up citizens' panels in the Highlands. A further report will be brought to the Council's Resources Committee in December 2009 on this matter.

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
- survey results will be used to inform work currently in progress on: the Customer Services Strategy; the ICT Strategy; the Corporate Improvement Programme; the compact with the third sector; the new model Scheme for Community Councils; the Gaelic Language Plan; and in understanding the needs of people with disabilities better, including volunteering opportunities.

6.3 Members are asked to note that to meet public expectations, ways of engaging with the public on how the Council spends its money will be explored, including the creation of citizens' panels to gauge representative views, and reported to Resources Committee in December 2009.

Signature:

Designation: Chief Executive

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Date: 2.10.09

Appendix 1: The Highland Council 2009 Performance Survey, Final Report