

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

5th September 2012

Agenda Item	
Report No	

2012 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 52% response rate achieved. With 1,215 useable responses the results can be generalised to the adult population of the Highlands. Overall the results are positive. Key results include:

- 83% of respondents are satisfied with Council services. Most service areas (42 out of 45) have positive net satisfaction scores and in 29 of them ratings are higher than in 2010. Although satisfaction scores in 26 services have decreased from 2011, scores in that year were unusually high.
- 90% of respondents find it easy to contact the Council. On-line contact has grown with 22% saying they contact in this way compared to 8% in 2008. Nearly half of those aged 25-44 years are interested in receiving information about Council services by text messaging.
- 70% of requests are felt to be dealt with on the first point of contact and 63% feel very or fairly satisfied with information provided.

On balance the Council is viewed positively in 10 out of 13 qualities, with maintaining good quality local services seen as the priority and with the best performance. Generally Highland communities are regarded as safe and generally good places to live in, with more people volunteering and with further support from the public to tackle prejudice.

The Council's new commitments on road repairs and potholes fit well with the high importance placed on these services by the public and they should begin to address their dissatisfaction with road conditions.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Council's Programme 'Working together for the Highlands' gives a commitment that:

'The Council will continue to measure its progress openly, report on it publicly and listen to its communities, to ensure we are delivering services that provide best value for Council Taxpayers.'

One way of listening to communities is through the annual survey of Council performance and attitudes, completed by the Citizens' Panel. The survey is also important evidence of customer views for internal and external scrutiny by Audit Scotland and other scrutiny bodies.

1.2 The results not only give a sense of public opinion in 2012, but also indicate where public mood is changing over time as data now exists from several years of surveys. 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, equalities, and Gaelic language;
 - Experience of voting in the 2012 Council elections and of volunteering; and
 - Views of being a Panel member.
- 1.3 This is the third 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 at [How your Council Performs](#). 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 Council's 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 is in place.

2. Methodology, response rate and equalities

- 2.1 It is not practical or necessary to survey everyone in the population to gauge public opinion. The Citizens' Panel was constructed in 2010 from a random sample of the Electoral Roll with enough people (2300) with different characteristics involved to allow the survey results to be representative of the adult population. In 2012 one third of the Panel (780) was refreshed and all members of Highland Youth Voice were asked to participate to boost responses from young people. The Panel currently has 2350 members. With 1215 responses, a 52% response rate was achieved and the results can be generalised to the population as whole with high levels of confidence.
- 2.2 This year the number of responses was slightly higher than last year (62 more). Of those responding we asked how they found being a panel member. This showed:
- 86% found it worthwhile;
 - 83% found it useful;
 - 73% felt their views have been listened to;
 - 30% found it time consuming.
- Each year to avoid voter fatigue one third of the Panel is refreshed. The Panel will also be surveyed as part of the Budget Consultation 2012.
- 2.3 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. Notable differences, which will be considered more fully at the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee in September 2012, are that:
- Older people have the highest levels of satisfaction with services and when contacting the Council.
 - While satisfaction when contacting the Council and in using services is generally high, people with disabilities tend to have lower levels of satisfaction for general services but higher levels of satisfaction for care services.
 - While more people are contacting the Council using the internet and younger people are interested in using text messaging for service information, older people continue to prefer face to face contact in service points and offices.

- Different groups tend to place greater importance on some services than others. For older people street cleaning, pavement maintenance and libraries are most important; parks and swimming pools are more important to younger people; public conveniences are most important to disabled people; men view road repairs and pot holes as more important than women; and women place more importance on home care services.
- These indicate where targeted consultation with particular groups could be more effective if services may be changing.

3. Key findings

3.1 Contact With the Council

51% of respondents had contacted the Council in the previous year. Key feedback is that:

- Most contact was to make a payment (46% chose this option). This may be explained by more people seeking to set up Direct Debit payments with 46% saying they pay this way or finding out where payments could be made following the changes to paying at service points.
- Compared to last year fewer people contacted the Council to make an enquiry, but this accounted for more than a third of all contacts made (38%).
- Most contact continues to be by telephone, with 48% saying they used this method, but this is the lowest figure since the survey began and down from 59% in 2008.
- A sizeable but declining proportion of contact is still face to face by visiting a service point or an office (38% had contacted in this way compared to 48% in 2010).
- Growing numbers of people report making contact on-line (an increase from 8% to 22% of respondents since 2008). Awareness of the web casting of Council meetings is modest at 33% although awareness of social networking opportunities through Facebook and Twitter has increased from 22% in 2011 to 31% in 2012.

3.2 Key indicators of perception on contact show:

- 90% of respondents feel it is easy to contact the Council (it has varied between 90% and 93% over the past four years).
- 70% of requests made to the Council were dealt with on the first point of contact. This is similar to the level in 2008-2010 and slightly lower than 74% reported in 2011.
- 63% were very or fairly satisfied with information provided, slightly lower than the 69% in 2011, but closer to the satisfaction of 2008 (at 64%).
- Interest in receiving information by text message has increased steadily since 2008 with 35% now interested in this channel, rising to 45% of those aged 25-44 years. It is worth noting that the development of telephony is one of the actions in the Customer Services Strategy.

3.3 High levels of satisfaction with contact have been maintained for the helpfulness of staff (74% viewing this as good); staff understanding what is wanted (73% good); overall satisfaction with service given (63% good); and the ability to reach the right person (62% good). Satisfaction has improved with the facilities for people with a disability (68% rate this as good compared to 61% in 2008) and in the Council's use

of social networking (49% view this as good compared to 41% in 2011)¹. Modest improvements are found in views of the Council's website, with more respondents finding this good than poor.

- 3.4 Satisfaction levels are lower (with less than 50% viewing the service as good) for privacy when making a personal visit to an office (at 39% in 2012 and fluctuating between 34% and 40% over the past five years) and the length of time for a written response (although this has increased to 41% viewing this as good compared to 35% in 2011). Notable decline in satisfaction (of 5% and over) is found in opening hours for personal visits (49% view this as good compared to 57% in 2011 and 62% in 2008) and opening hours for telephony contact (49% view this as good compared to 60% in 2011). It is worth noting that future office rationalisations in Inverness, Dingwall, Kingussie and Fort William will seek to deliver improved facilities for private conversations in public caller buildings. Opening hours in service points have reduced in response to agreed budget savings, but for telephone access opening hours have been extended in the Service Centre in to include Saturday mornings, opening from 8am to 6pm (instead of 9am to 5pm) and for increased cover during the festive period.
- 3.5 Overall satisfaction with services
83% of respondents were satisfied with Council services, this is the same score found in the 2009 and 2010 surveys and slightly lower than 85% recorded in 2011.
- 3.6 Respondents were asked to record their satisfaction with a range of services, 45 in total. In 42 services or functions more people are satisfied than dissatisfied. There is some change in the top 10 services in terms of satisfaction, all with net scores of 68% and over². Recycling facilities and burials and cremation services have moved up while the countryside ranger service and museums have moved down (although both still have high net satisfaction scores at 67% and 64% respectively). Eight services are now in the 70-100% net satisfaction band: payment of council tax, libraries, walking routes e.g. Great Glen Way, service points, public parks and other open spaces, registrars service, recycling facilities and refuse/bin collection.
- 3.7 Compared to 2011, 11 services show higher net satisfaction scores. In six of these the increase is greater than 5%. They are recycling facilities (up from 66% to 72%); community learning/adult education (up from 41% to 47%); street cleaning (up from 37% to 43%), economic development and business support (up from 27% to 35%) pavement maintenance (up from 8% to 16%); and winter road maintenance which no longer has a negative score (at 0%) when previously more people were dissatisfied than satisfied.
- 3.8 These increases are notable because last year's scores showed the greatest increase in satisfaction across services since the survey began. With 2011 being a record year, comparisons with 2010 are useful and since then 29 services have higher net satisfaction ratings in 2012. Improved satisfaction with recycling facilities coincides with the introduction of alternate weekly collections. Further promotion of the Council's Business Gateway service may have contributed to increased satisfaction with economic development and business support.

¹ The number of responses to the question on webcasting and social networking are too small to be generalised to the adult population as a whole; however they can be compared to previous years' responses.

² Net satisfaction scores are calculated by adding all those saying they are very or fairly satisfied and subtracting those saying they are very or fairly dissatisfied.

- 3.9 It was going to be challenging to increase satisfaction even further from 2011 and in 26 of the 45 services listed net satisfaction has decreased from 2011. This decrease is 5% or greater for 15 of them as listed below although several still have high scores and in all but one service net satisfaction is higher than it was in 2008.
- Libraries have net satisfaction of 81%, down from 89% in 2011 but up from 72% in 2008
 - Service points have net satisfaction of 74%, down from 83% in 2011 but up from 70% in 2008
 - Public parks and open spaces have net satisfaction of 73%, down from 82% in 2011 but up from 45% in 2008
 - Registrars service has net satisfaction of 73%, down from 80% in 2011 but up from 59% in 2008
 - Street lighting has net satisfaction of 64%, down from 69% in 2011 but up from 53% in 2008
 - Museums have net satisfaction of 64%, down from 79% in 2011 but up from 36% in 2008
 - Secondary education has net satisfaction of 57%, down from 63% in 2011 but up from 44% in 2008
 - Cycling paths have net satisfaction at 50%, down from 65% in 2011 but up from 28% in 2008
 - School meals have net satisfaction of 45%, down from 60% in 2011 but up from 31% in 2008
 - School transport has net satisfaction of 33%, down from 45% and at the same level as in 2008
 - Services to protect children from harm have net satisfaction of 28%, down from 37% in 2011 but up from 15% in 2008
 - Breakfast and after school clubs have net satisfaction of 24%, down from 46% in 2011 but up from 11% in 2008
 - Residential homes for disabled/elderly people have net satisfaction of 21%, down from 32% in 2011 but up from 4% in 2008
 - Public conveniences have a net satisfaction score of 19%, down from 38% in 2011 but up from 4% in 2008
 - Dealing with flooding has net satisfaction of 18%, down from 28% in 2011 but up from 11% in 2008.
- 3.10 When scores for these 15 service areas are compared to their scores in 2010, nine have increased, two have stayed the same and five have decreased. The decrease is significant only for school transport which has declined from its highest score of 51% in 2010; although 18% of the panel say they have used this service. This indicates that the scores last year were unusually high, possibly affected by the budget consultation in the previous year which asked about reductions in services and potential closures and perhaps leading to higher values being placed on some services.
- 3.11 In only three of the 45 services are more people dissatisfied than satisfied. This has been consistently fed back for at least five surveys, and in 2012 they are:
- Planning applications and building warrants (where 35% say they are very or fairly satisfied compared to 37% very or fairly dissatisfied, giving a net score of -2%). 33% of the panel say they have used this service.
 - Services to reduce youth offending (where 23% are very or fairly satisfied and 36% are very or fairly dissatisfied giving a net score of -13%). 13% of the

panel say they have used this service.

- Road repairs and potholes, which received its worst score this year at -59% net satisfaction with 90% of the panel saying they have used the service. 16% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied but 75% were very or fairly dissatisfied.

Two new Council commitments to improve road maintenance should improve scores in future years. They are:

1. To improve the roads maintenance allocation system and spend preventively on our roads according to need; and
2. To investigate a co-ordinated thorough Highland-wide programme of inspecting water courses and cleaning gullies and ditches to avoid further water damage and support future repairs and to make this programme available to the public.

3.12 The importance of services

The top five most important services continue to be (in rank order): roads repairs and potholes; winter road maintenance; refuse/bin collection; recycling facilities; and primary education. More than half the panel members placed road repairs and winter road maintenance in their top five most important services.

3.13 Complaints

Slightly more people say they made a complaint in 2011/12, 16.5% compared to 14.5% in 2010/11 but still lower than 18.5% in 2010 when the question was first asked. Of those making a complaint, more were indifferent to how their complaint was handled, with 25% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. More positively, fewer people were dissatisfied with how their complaint was handled (down from 51% to 43%) and slightly more were satisfied (up from 30% to 31%). However even with these improvements, on balance more people were dissatisfied than satisfied with how their complaint was handled by 12%; although this is an improvement from 2010 when 21% more people were dissatisfied than satisfied. The top 3 reasons for dissatisfaction were the outcome of the complaint, the quality of the response, and the time taken to respond. The new complaints policy was agreed at the Finance, Housing and Resources Committee meeting in August 2012.

3.14 Qualities of the Council

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

3.15 Respondents were asked to say how they viewed the Council against these qualities and net scores were calculated. Overall the Council is viewed positively with more people agreeing than disagreeing that the Council demonstrates 10 of the 13 qualities as follows:

- maintains good quality local services (51% more agree than disagree);
- is approachable (by 49%)
- is environmentally friendly (by 45%)
- is helpful (by 45%)
- is a fair employer (by 27%)
- tells people what it is doing (by 9%)

- listens to local people (by 9%)
- is aware of people's needs (by 6%)
- treats all residents fairly (by 5%)
- provides value for money (by 3%)

3.16 Where net scores were 9% or lower, most responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed that the Council met the quality. By communicating better on what the Council is doing and plans to do, these scores should improve. Compared to 2010 improvements are seen in 10 out of 12 qualities also measured, one has stayed at the same level and another has declined by only 1%. Scores from 2011 were high and eight have declined since then; however the scores may have been higher last year following the wide budget consultation in 2010 and the feedback on how that made a difference to the decisions made by the Council.

3.17 Not enough people are convinced that the Council is efficient (net score of -1%), represents their views (-6%) or involves people in how it spends its money (-18%); yet being efficient and involving people in how it spends money are rated in the top five most important qualities for the Council to demonstrate. This highlights the importance of consulting widely again on the budget and feeding back the consultation results and impact.

3.18 A new question was included in 2012, asking if people felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area. 21% agreed with the statement, 32% neither agreed nor disagreed and 47% disagreed.

3.19 Community life

The majority of respondents (68%) feel that the area where they live provides them with at least some sense of belonging to a community. 47% 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. Overall people living in rural wards feel more involved in their communities. The majority of respondents (86%) believe their communities are accepting of people coming from outside the Highlands to live in the area.

3.20 Attitude to Gaelic language

New questions were asked about the Gaelic language in 2012. When asked whether the Council has strengthened the profile of the Gaelic language, 75% of respondents said it had. Questions were asked about satisfaction with Gaelic pre-school services, Gaelic primary education, Gaelic secondary education and Gaelic community learning/adult education and all were rated positively with net scores in the range of 14% to 24%.

3.21 Other community services

The survey asks about views on a range of other community services including local health services, shops and local transport. Only two are viewed negatively, services to help people into employment and the availability of housing; no doubt reflecting current levels of unemployment and difficulties in accessing housing in the owner occupied and rented sectors.

3.22 Community Councils

5 out of 6 people said they had not made contact with their Community Council in the past year, although contact was higher in rural wards. Those making contact had done so mainly to improve amenities in their area. Those not making contact gave the main reason as having no need to contact, with 10% unsure of how to contact their Community Council. Awareness of the Community Council elections in 2011 was highest among older people and in rural wards.

3.23 Community safety

A revised set of seven questions were asked about community safety. The headlines are that road safety, alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour are the top three concerns from respondents but that 96.1% feel that the area within 15 minutes' walk of their home is either very or fairly safe. The responses will be reported in more detail to the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee in September.

3.24 Equalities

To follow up the questions first asked in 2011, questions on prejudice were asked. These show improvements in support for tackling prejudice and this will be reported more fully at the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee in September 2012.

3.25 Volunteering

The survey indicates increasing high levels of volunteering in the Highlands with:

- 38% indicating they volunteer in some capacity (up from 27% in 2007);
- 64% of those volunteering are involved in more than one voluntary activity (up from 58% in 2008);
- 58% of those volunteering do so at least once a week;
- 74% of volunteers are volunteering at least several times a month.

3.26 Voter experience

To learn from the Council elections in May 2012, questions were asked about awareness of the elections and satisfaction with arrangements provided by the Council. 89% said they were aware of the election with good levels of satisfaction recorded for information received from the Council and with arrangements made at polling stations. A report on improving voter participation in elections will be considered at the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities Committee in September 2012.

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.
- Improve our understanding of different experience and views of different groups within the community.
- Support policy development for commitments in the Council's programme, particularly for setting new base-lines for perception on community safety, developing the Council's approach further on community development and volunteering and considering how to improve community engagement.

These will be progressed through strategic and other Committees of the Council.

5. Implications

5.1 Resource Implications

The survey was analysed independently and within the contract allocation of £15,000 for research support in 2012.

5.2 Legal and Risk Implications

Acting on the survey results contributes to the legal duties on the Council to demonstrate Best Value (listening to customers and reporting performance publicly) and engaging with equality groups (a duty in the Equalities legislation). There are no risk implications identified as a result of the 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 where views varied by gender, age and disability and it is supplemented by other qualitative approaches to understanding people's experiences of using services. Questions are also included in the survey on attitudes to equalities.

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).

6. Recommendation:

6.1 Members are asked to note the generally positive survey results and that the Panel will be surveyed as part of the Council's Budget Consultation this year.

6.2 Members are asked generally to agree that the survey results are used to identify areas for improvement and more specifically that improvement action arising includes: implementing the new complaints policy and continuing the office rationalisation programme; ensuring customer services are more accessible to people with disabilities and that the public is aware of the extended opening hours at the service centre for telephone enquiries; and generally improving communication with the public on what the Council is doing and plans to do including the opportunity for their views on the budget to be heard.

Designation: Chief Executive

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