

The Highland Council

30 October 2014

Agenda Item	17
Report No	HC/31/14

Results from the Citizens' Panel 2014 Performance and Attitudes Survey

Report by the Chief Executive

Summary

The survey results from the Citizens' Panel show generally positive trends and improving satisfaction with most services surveyed over a five year period and positive perceptions of community life in the Highlands. A number of actions have been identified which should help sustain or improve public perception of the Council in the future.

1. Background

- 1.1 The results from our Citizens' Panel survey into views on our performance and on public attitudes are provided for members' consideration. The survey represents a set of questions which have now been sustained over a 10 year period. The results from the 2014 show generally positive trends. Planned activity across Services will help to maintain positive satisfaction levels.
- 1.2 In keeping with previous survey analysis, we have considered if there are any differences in view among different groups in our community, namely by age, gender and disability. We also introduced new questions on views on waste treatment and disposal, civic & democratic engagement, and attitudes to welfare.
- 1.3 This year we received 1148 responses from our Citizen's Panel of just over 2,750 adults, including 332 electronically, providing a 41.9% response rate. This number of responses along with the sampling method used provides good validity in the results; a 95% confidence level is achieved with a confidence interval of +or- 2.9%. In other words where this level of responses was received, we can be 95% confident that the response we would get if we surveyed all adults in Highland would be within + or – 2.9% of the results from the survey¹.
- 1.4 The annual survey of the Citizens' Panel contributes towards our Programme commitment that 'we will continue to measure our progress openly, report on it publicly and listens to communities, to ensure we are delivering services that provide best value for Council Taxpayers'.

2. Key findings

- 2.1 The full survey report, provided by the UHI Centre for Remote and Rural Studies, can be accessed on the performance pages of the website http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/407/how_we_are_performing_public_performance_reports. As this is a long report, running to 138 pages, a summary of overall results is provided as appendix 1 with highlights and areas

¹ While this is a very small margin of error, not all respondents answered every question, especially when the questions were about using specific services, so results need to be treated accordingly.

for improvement provided below.

2.2 Overall the survey provides a positive picture and the Council continues to deliver quality services which are valued by the public. This is within the context of the current period of fiscal austerity where over the past 3 years the Council has reduced its revenue budget by £42.9m and in the last year by £12.7m. It has done so while maintaining positive public perceptions on the quality of services delivered.

2.3 Key results and positive trends in performance and attitudes include:

Contact with the Council

- 91% say they find it easy to contact us.
- 69% felt their request was dealt with by the first person they contacted (in 2013/14 87% of calls to the Service Centre were resolved at First Point of Contact).
- Top 3 methods of contact are: by telephone (46%), personal visit to Service Point or Council Office (37%) and on-line (22%) (this is in line with visit numbers to Service Points declining by 11.4% since 2012/13 while calls to the Service Centre increased by 4.7% and emails by 10.9%)
- Top 3 preferred options to make contact are: a personal visit (to Service Point or office) (33%), on-line (29%) and telephone (Service Centre or council office) (20%). Older residents and council tenants are more likely to prefer personal contact with an officer.
- Top 3 reasons for contact are: to make a payment (45%), make and enquiry (29%) and report a problem (18%).

Satisfaction with Council Services

- Of the 46 service areas surveyed, there were more positive views than negative views for 45 of them. Highest positive scores are found for libraries (84%), walking routes (84%), payment of Council Tax (81%) and parks and open spaces (80%).
- The top four most important services for the public are also the top four used by most people; road repairs and potholes, winter road maintenance, refuse/bin collection and recycling facilities. High satisfaction continues to be found with refuse and recycling services.

Council Qualities

Our values are: listening; being open; valuing; improving; supporting; partnering and delivering. Many of the qualities positively scored by respondents are reflective of our values. Including:

- There are 4 qualities where over half the panel agree with the statements that the Council 'maintains good quality local services' (67% agree, national benchmark 45%²), 'is approachable' (64%), 'is helpful' (57%) and 'is environmentally friendly' (56% agree). On balance, the Council is viewed positively in demonstrating all of these. We are also viewed positively with increased scores on being approachable, listening to local people and being efficient.
- 78% of the panel believe the Council meets or exceeds their general expectations.

² National benchmark source is 2013 Scottish Household Survey, published 13th August 2014 at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/08/7973/downloads>

Community Life

- 93.1% say they rate the neighbourhood or community they live in as very or fairly good;
- 96.7% rate their locality as either very or fairly safe;
- 78% feel we have strengthened the profile of the Gaelic language to a great or some extent (76% in 2012/13).
- 82% of those contacting the Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB) were very or fairly satisfied with the service and 82% said they would recommend the service to others.
- Rating of a range of services in communities revealed the top 3 positive scores as local schools (71%), local health services (66%) and leisure facilities/events (48%)
- Democratic engagement - 77% of the panel declared themselves to be interested on the democratic process and 87% said they have voted in an election in the past 2 years.
- Community safety - 96.7% of respondents consider the area within 15 minutes' walk of their home to be 'very' or 'fairly' safe.
- Equalities - 76.8% agree that Highland should do everything it can to get rid of all types of prejudice.
- Volunteering – results show that volunteering levels remain high with 39% saying they volunteer in some capacity (36% in 2010) and 55% of them say they do this at least every. Highland is significantly above the national benchmark figure of 28%.

2.4 Areas for improvement

Roads

Of the 46 service areas surveyed only roads repairs and potholes have more dissatisfaction than satisfaction (-56%). This is also the most important service for the public and also the one used by most people.

The Council has already agreed additional funding for this service. In April 2014 £1.25M was allocated to be used as a Roads Innovation Fund in 2014/15. An Action Plan was agreed at committee which targeted:

- permanent patching techniques;
- GPS and data logging;
- drainage; and
- structural maintenance recycling techniques

Mid-way through the financial year, half the money has been spent with some very promising results, especially regarding the fixing of potholes and structural road maintenance. A detailed report on all of this will be presented to the February 2015 Community Services committee, but early indications are that the recycling techniques in particular are proving to be 20%-30% more efficient than more traditional methods.

Customer Contact

There has been a reduction in satisfaction with some aspects of customer contact and improvements are needed regarding contact made with the Council including the speed the telephone is answered, the length of time taken to respond to written contact (letter, email or fax) and the website.

- Improvements are being made at the Service Centre to ensure that

calls are answered promptly. A number of vacancies have now been filled to ensure the Centre is operating at capacity. The new website now also provides on-line access to an increased number of services providing customers with an alternative point of contact;

- Complaints handling is also the subject of an improvement plan to ensure that customers receive a timeous reply to complaints and reports are now taken regularly to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee to monitor performance.
- A new website was launched at the start of June and it is intended to undertake a 6 month review which will be reported to Resources Committee and will monitor customer reaction to the new site. The website will continue to develop with more services and features scheduled to be available on-line over the next 24 months with a target of all services and 40% of transactions being on-line by April 2017. The new 'My Account' feature will also be launched before the end of 2014 to improve service for customers.
- The Customer Service Review is also underway and will be consulting on revised proposals for Service Points during November-January. The Customer Services Board has already recognised that some customers prefer face to face contact and the Board has agreed a number of principles which includes *'the need to offer a face to face point of contact for those who do not want to or can't use technology or for more complex enquiries'*.

2.5 Overall satisfaction with Council services

87% of the panel say they were satisfied overall with Council services in 2013/14, the second highest figure ever recorded.

3. **Follow up actions**

3.1 The results will be fed back to:

1. Staff through the newsletter, management briefings and service briefings;
2. Citizens' Panel members to thank them for taking part in the survey, advising them of the key results and our follow up action;
3. The general public when we feedback our performance results through our performance and press webpages.
4. Partners, especially on volunteering issues.

3.2 In summary action that is already planned or delivered that should help sustain or improve public perception of us includes improvements to customer contact and engagement, improvements to particular services and for community safety. These are set out below :

1. The redevelopment of our website which launched at the end of May 2014 and we will continue to extend on-line self-service and payments options and undertaken a survey of customers to assess their reaction to the new website;
2. The speed of call handling at the Service Centre has been addressed and a number of vacancies have now been filled to support the required service improvement;
3. The Customer Service Review Board is on-target to conclude the Service Point Review in spring 2015 and has agreed that the Council will need to continue to provide face to face contact for customers who prefer this;
4. The Customer Contact Transformation project continues to redesign service delivery to simplify service delivery, reduce staff effort and to

ensure that more simple customer enquiries can be dealt with at 'first point of contact' including on-line services via the website;

5. Complaints handling is being improved through an improvement plan and performance continues to improve to meet the corporate target;
6. We are exploring options for further cost effective methods of publishing our performance reports which meet the statutory requirements of public performance reporting (PPR);
7. The Council has created a £1.25m Roads Innovation Fund in 2014/15. This is a one-off fund to help address roads maintenance concerns and is being used for innovative road surfacing techniques to address pot holes, drainage and surface draining problems.

4. Continuously improving the survey process

4.1 Each year we ask panel members how they find being a member. This year 71% said they felt their views have been listened to (78% in 2012/13), 86% said they found it useful to be a panel member and 87% said they found it worthwhile. 34% said they found it time consuming (29% in 2012/13).

4.2 We refresh a third of the Citizens' Panel membership each year and ensure the overall panel membership is representative of the adult population profile (based on Census 2011). For this year's survey we also increased the size of the panel by 400 to just over 2,750 members.

4.3 Further analysis and reporting

We will analysis and feedback in more detail on a number of sections of the survey to strategic committees and working group meetings including to:

CPE Committee:

- Civic and Democratic Engagement
- Community Safety
- Equalities

Community Services Committee:

- Views on future waste treatment and disposal

Resources Committee

- Satisfaction with advice services (reported 27.8.14)
- Satisfaction with contacting the Council (customer services)

Welfare Reform Working Group

- Attitudes to Welfare

4.4 Service summaries

In addition short profiles for each of 46 service areas surveyed will be provided in a Service briefing pack. These can be used for briefing members further, for use in service self-assessment and for considering any further survey work required.

5. Implications

5.1 Resource implications

There are no new resource implications arising from this report. The recommendations for further action will be contained within current budgets. The survey costs around £15,000 in research fees, printing and postage.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report, but using the information for understanding how our performance is perceived and being open about that, helps us to comply with our legal duties on public performance reporting.

5.3 Risk implications

There is a risk that our performance is judged solely on public perception. Credible performance reporting should also take into account performance information from other sources as well and ideally combining results from a range of sources. This includes our statutory and local performance indicators, describing our performance against our Programme commitments, professional opinion gathered through self-evaluation and external scrutiny bodies as well as feedback to members from constituents.

5.4 Equalities implications

The report questions on public attitudes to diversity and equality appear to show improving tolerance and acceptance of diversity in our community. Information on the breakdown of the panel by age, gender, ethnicity and other factors is available. However the sample size is too small to provide statistical confidence it is representative of all views, however this can provide a useful indication of area where further investigation is needed.

5.5 Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications

Several questions in the survey will help us to understand how we are perceived on a range of environmental services. We will use this information to help us set a base-line and targets for improvement for the new Carbon Clever Highland initiative.

5.6 Rural Implications

The survey collects data at Ward level but the sample sizes of returns are too small to have statistical confidence they are representative of the Ward as a whole. Additional work has been commissioned to analyse the results of the survey from a rural perspective and the findings will be used to inform service and policy direction.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Members are asked to consider the key findings of the feedback from the Citizens' Panel from this year's survey, noting overall a set of positive results and the actions being taken to address areas for improvement.

6.2 Members are asked to approve the follow up action to communicate the results widely and to approve the specific actions set out in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 as well as the action proposed in section 4 of the report to continuously improve the survey process.

Date: 23.09.14

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Summary of main findings – Annual Performance and Attitudes Survey 2014

A. Contact with the Council

- 91% say they find it easy to contact us.
- 69% felt their request was dealt with by the first person they contacted.
- Top 3 methods of contact are: by telephone (46%), personal visit (37%) and on-line (22%).
- Top 3 reasons for contact are: to make a payment (45%), make an enquiry (29%) and report a problem (18%).
- Top 3 methods of making contact are: telephone 46% (45% in 2012/13), personal visits 37% (34% in 2012/13) and on-line 30% (30% in 2012/13).
- Top 3 preferred options to make contact are: visit Service Point (33%), on-line (29%) and telephone (Service Centre) (20%).
- Overall satisfaction with all types of contact was 63% compared to 70% in 2013/14.
- 57% were satisfied with speed the telephone was answered compared to 66% in 2012/13.
- 32% were satisfied with length of time taken to respond to written contact (letter, email or fax) compared to 47% in 2012/13.
- 39% are satisfied with our web home page content compared to 46% in 2012/13.
- 27% are satisfied with links on our web home page compared to 35% in 2012/13.

B. Satisfaction with Council services

- 87% of the panel say they were satisfied overall with Council services in 2013/14, the second highest figure ever recorded.
- Of the 46 service areas surveyed, there were more positive views than negative views for 45 of them. Only roads repairs and potholes have more dissatisfaction than satisfaction. This is the second consecutive year where only one service is viewed negatively on balance.
- The top four most important services for the public are also the top four used by most people; road repairs and potholes, winter road maintenance, refuse/bin collection and recycling facilities. High satisfaction continues to be found with refuse and recycling services.
- There are 4 qualities where over half the panel agree with the statements that the Council 'maintains good quality local services' (67% agree), 'is approachable' (64%), 'is helpful' (57%) and 'is environmentally friendly' (56% agree). On balance, the Council is viewed positively in demonstrating all of these. We are also viewed positively with increased scores on being approachable, listening to local people and being efficient.
- On balance fewer people disagree than agree that we involve people in how we spend money (38% disagree compared to 20% who agree) or that we represent their views (26% compared to 25%).
- In terms of the top 4 most important qualities the panel views these to be maintains good quality services, listens to local people, provides value for money and is aware of people's needs.
- 78% of the panel believe the Council meets or exceeds their general expectations.
- 98% of those surveyed think the Council should construct and operate sufficient waste treatment plants in Highland to deal with all our waste; 62%

think as a first or second option the treatment should provide affordable heat and power.

C. Satisfaction with Advice Services

- 10% of the panel had contacted advice services of these 95.5% contacted the Citizens' Advice Bureau, 14.5% the Council's Income Maximisation Service and 9% the Council's Money Advice Service (includes contacting more than one service).
 - Contact was highest amongst those unemployed (44%), disabled (23%), unemployed (22%) and council tenants (21%)
 - 82% of those contacting the Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CAB) were very or fairly satisfied with the service and 82% said they would recommend the service to others. Note that a relatively small number of the panel (104) responded to this question.

D. Community Life

- 74.1% of respondents believe the area where they live provides them with a sense of belonging to a community;
 - 93.1% say they rate the neighbourhood or community they live in as very or fairly good;
 - 96.7% rate their locality as either very or fairly safe;
 - 39% saying they currently volunteer in some capacity with over half of them (55%) saying they do this at least every week and 27% say they are involved in three activities or more;
 - 78% feel we have strengthened the profile of the Gaelic language to a great or some extent (76% in 2012/13).
 - Rating of a range of services in communities revealed net satisfaction ratings (% dissatisfied deducted from % satisfied) were as follows:
 - Top 3 positive scores were local schools (71%), local health services (66%) and leisure facilities/events (48%);
 - Lowest 3 scores were availability of housing (-17%), services to help people into employment (-16%) and access to energy saving advice (7%).
 - 87.9% of the panel had not contacted their community council in the past year.
 - 77% of respondents declared themselves to be interested on the democratic process and 87% said they have voted in an election in the past 2 years.
 - 73% of respondents selected 'the media' as having the most perceived impact on people's everyday lives.
 - 69.3% would like to be involved in local decision making while 17.8% believed they had some influence in local decisions.
 - 66.8% of respondents viewed the level of benefits for unemployed as 'too high and discourage them from finding jobs'. While 60.9% of respondents had never claimed unemployment benefit.
 - Community safety top 3 areas of concern are road safety (36%), alcohol abuse (30%) and anti-social behaviour (22%).
 - The top 3 actions people take because of possible worries about crime are 'make sure their home is adequately secured (73%)m make sure their vehicle is adequately secured (71%) and carry a mobile phone (52%).
 - 96.7% of respondents consider the area within 15 minutes' walk of their home to be 'very' or 'fairly' safe.

- Equalities - 76.8% agree that Highland should do everything it can to get rid of all types of prejudice.

E. Volunteering

- Volunteering levels remain high with 39% saying they volunteer in some capacity (36% in 2010).
- 24% are involved in three or more voluntary activities.
- 55% of respondents also say they volunteer this at least once a week.

Differences in views between groups and geographies within the Citizen's panel

We received 1148 responses from our Panel of 2700 adults, including 332 electronically, providing a 41.9% response rate. This number of responses along with the sampling method used provides good validity in the results; a 95% confidence level is achieved with a confidence interval of +or- 2.9%. In other words where this level of responses was received, we can be 95% confident that the response we would get if we surveyed all adults in Highland would be within + or – 2.9% of the results from the survey.

This also means that for sub-levels of information we cannot have the same confidence the results are representative of the Highland population. However at Ward level and between groups with the Citizen's Panel there are useful indications of differing views to consider. In addition generally people with disabilities tend to have less positive feedback, although generally still positive overall rather than negative. Older people, people with school age children and people living here for less than five years tend to view us more positively. While those aged 16-24 were more satisfied overall with Council Services (93%) there a number of areas where satisfaction was lower including public transport, believing the Council treats all resident's fairly and some areas of community safety.