

REPORT OF THE LEADER**PROPOSAL FOR A NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ANNUAL SATISFACTION
SURVEY****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval to undertake an annual satisfaction survey to gather information on public perceptions of value for money, communication, quality of life, and health and wellbeing from the Council's public services.

Information and Advice

2. Customer satisfaction is a key element of assessing the performance of public bodies. Research by Ipsos MORI shows that the top performing councils undertake annual citizens' surveys of one form or another as a way of measuring and understanding perceptions, behaviours and priorities amongst residents. The Strategic Plan makes a number of references to raising satisfaction levels including:

- Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things
- Providing value for money
- People feeling informed
- People feel they can influence decision making

However, there are currently no formal processes in place to measure performance in this respect.

3. Since 2000 there have been four statutory national benchmarking regimes involving local authorities which have provided information on the performance of local services from the citizen perspective. These surveys allowed the comparison of satisfaction ratings between authorities and identified both poor performers as well as exemplars of best practice.
4. The only other form of reputation measure undertaken by the County Council has been carried out as part of a programme of consultations undertaken through the Nottinghamshire citizens' panel in conjunction with stakeholder partners in the following areas:-

2008 : *'Improving customer access to services'*.

2009/10 : *'Reputation and Communication in Nottinghamshire'*.

2011 : *'Satisfaction with the local area and local services in Nottinghamshire'*.

5. The citizens' panel was established in 2007 and is made up of around 6,000 residents from across Nottinghamshire, recruited from a sample of residents aged 18+. The sample is made up of a random selection of postal address files in Nottinghamshire. The majority of panellists are in the 55+ age category.
6. The use of the citizens' panel has proved beneficial for gauging views on specific service performance, preferences or policy change. There has been no cost to the Council when the panel has been managed in-house as the intellectual rights belong to the County Council; costs have only been incurred when surveys have been managed on our behalf. Although beneficial, the panel may lack statistical validity if it is used annually to measure overall satisfaction, as such, it is not considered an appropriate mechanism to measure overall satisfaction ratings for the Council on an annual basis.
7. Following the cessation of the four statutory surveys (three Best Value surveys and the Place Survey) the majority of other County Councils have introduced some form of proxy measure, although the methodology used varies from council to council. Leicester, Staffordshire, Cambridge, Essex, Norfolk, Derbyshire and Buckinghamshire all conduct a residents' satisfaction survey. For the last three years, Nottingham City Council has conducted an annual face-to-face residents' satisfaction survey in partnership with NHS Nottingham City and have shared the costs.
8. An annual Council satisfaction survey will also act as a strategic evaluation tool to enable the Council to effectively measure a number of key Council strategies, and inform improvements to information provision and customer service.

Options

9. It would be preferable to confidently quantify customer satisfaction and the reputation standing of the County Council on an annual basis, both in terms of performance levels as well as direction of travel. Research undertaken has defined the *minimum* sample size for our County at 700 citizens (100 in each of the districts). However, any subgroup analysis at district level based on this number would not be reliable – it would be indicative rather than statistically robust. It is, therefore, recommended that our sample size would be at least 1,050 across the county (150 in each of the districts).
10. The Local Government Association (LGA) has recently launched LG Inform, a new (free) prototype service to allow senior local authority staff and councillors access to key data about their council and its area, and to enable comparison with other councils. Clearly, to have effective benchmarking, the data needs to be consistent, robust and meet certain quality standards. To this end LGA commissioned Ipsos MORI to develop a standard set of benchmarking questions and accompanying benchmarking criteria for councils to use. The

County Council has already adopted these benchmarking questions as part of its performance monitoring, and therefore, will be able to input local results into LG Inform, to enable direct comparison with other authorities.

11. Value for money is the single measure, above all others, that most correlates with the overall satisfaction rating for a council. On average, a council's value for money rating accounts for eighty-one percent of its overall satisfaction rating. This clearly demonstrates the importance of this measure and its specific impact on council reputation and the need for it to be included in any survey undertaken.
12. Another group of key drivers of reputation are residents' perceptions about how they are treated by councils, and public services. Research suggests that these measures link into perceptions of trust and fairness and also highly correlate with the overall satisfaction rating for a council, and need to be incorporated into future surveys.
13. Resident perceptions of how well informed they are also closely connects to perceptions of councils performance. In the Place Survey, residents were asked about how well they felt informed about local public services as opposed to just their local council. It is proposed that perceptions will also be measured in future surveys.
14. If a decision is taken to go ahead with an annual residents' survey, a procurement process would need to be undertaken to identify a preferred supplier. This will be done in collaboration with Corporate Procurement in order to secure best value for money. The final survey price will be subject to the outcome of the procurement exercise.
15. There is the possibility of undertaking an annual citizens' survey in partnership with our public sector partners and a number of district/borough council's as well as Nottingham City and NHS Nottinghamshire have expressed an interested in this approach in principle:-

Partner	Interest
Ashfield	Yes
Bassetlaw	Yes
Broxtowe	Yes
Gedling	<i>tbc</i>
Mansfield	Yes
Newark & Sherwood	Yes
Rushcliffe	No
NHS Nottinghamshire	Yes
Police Authority	Yes
East Midland Ambulance Service	Yes
Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service	No
Nottingham City	Yes

16. The Council's contribution would depend on the number of partners taking part and would be met from the Communications and Marketing budget. The costs relating to partner organisations will be recharged to them.

17. It is proposed that tender documentation will invite potential providers to submit proposals for both a postal questionnaire as well as face-to-face interviews and to provide the preferred process and rationale for the most effective approach in the known context of Nottinghamshire. The procurement process would take a minimum of two months with a provisional survey date being September/October 2012.
18. To ensure the results of an annual residents' survey are integrated into corporate performance management processes, survey data will be reported and managed alongside other service delivery and financial performance information using TotalNotts; the council's performance management software system. This data will form an important element of our 'balanced scorecard' approach to performance management currently being developed.

Other Options Considered

19. A number of other options have been considered including :-
 - i. an annual residents' survey via County News; however, unless a significant incentive were offered, it is unlikely that the required response rate to make the survey statistically reliable would be achieved;
 - ii. an annual residents' survey using the County Council's Customer Service Centre (CSC); however, the information captured would only include the views of residents who have proactively contacted the County Council and as such would not be statistically valid;
 - iii. an annual residents' survey using the Nottinghamshire citizens' panel; however this is known to lack statistical validity given the nature of the survey.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. Understanding resident or customer views is a key element of assessing the effectiveness of the authority, alongside cost and performance information. Furthermore, understanding resident satisfaction and being able to make informed comparisons can strengthen local accountability and is a key part of the Council's approach to managing its own performance.
21. Satisfaction ratings are a key performance area for the County Council with the Strategic Plan containing a number of references to raising satisfaction levels. The recommendations set out in the report provide for a mechanism to measure performance in this area and to inform achievement of the Strategic Plan commitments.
22. In addition to reporting against the Council's key performance indicators, data provided by the Council's annual satisfaction survey will be used to inform improvements to information provision, customer service and benchmark against other authorities.

Statutory and Policy Implications

23. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) It is recommended that Policy Committee approves:-
- i. the undertaking of an annual satisfaction survey;
 - ii. the selection of a supplier via an approved procurement method;
 - iii. the entry into a contract with the selected supplier subject to approval of the contract price by the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chair of Finance and Property and the Corporate Director Policy, Planning and Corporate Services.

Councillor Kay Cutts
Leader of the Council

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Constitutional Comments [HD 29/05/12]

1. The proposals within the report and the associated decisions fall within the terms of reference for Policy Committee.

Financial Comments [MB 30/5/12]

2. The cost can be met from the 2012/13 budget for Communications and Marketing.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All