

REPORT OF THE LEADER

UPDATE ON THE INITIAL FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 NOTTINGHAMSHIRE ANNUAL RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY

Purpose of the Report

1. To report on the initial findings from the 2012 Nottinghamshire annual residents' satisfaction survey, which shows the Council's satisfaction rating has increased by 16 percentage points since 2011 to 63%, and to look at the key drivers of satisfaction.

Background

2. Understanding residents' views is a key element of assessing the effectiveness of an authority, alongside cost and performance information. Furthermore, understanding resident satisfaction and being able to make informed comparisons can strengthen local accountability and be a key part of the Council's approach to managing its own performance. The Strategic Plan contains priorities around 'To provide good quality affordable services' and 'To be financially robust and sustainable' and key measures include the delivery of efficient services, keeping residents informed about the services and benefits the Council provides, treating residents with respect and consideration and residents being satisfied with their local area as a place to live.
3. The County Council's Strategic Plan includes eight measures of resident satisfaction/perception which contribute to the achievement of our priorities. In previous years, these have been measured in a number of different ways:
 - In 2003/4 and 2006/7 the Council was under the Best Value regime and all local authorities were required to conduct a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) survey. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) were extremely prescriptive about how the survey should be conducted and how the findings should be analysed and reported.
 - In 2008 the BVPI survey was replaced by the Place Survey, again to a prescribed methodology and weighting scheme. Originally the Place Survey was due to be carried out every two years, however Government announced its abolition in 2010.
 - In 2009/10 and 2011 the County Council continued to carry out its own consultation exercises to gather residents views on the services delivered and this has been done by consulting members of our citizens' panel. However, the panel may lack statistical validity if it is used annually to measure overall satisfaction and, as such, it is not considered an appropriate mechanism to measure overall satisfaction ratings for the Council on an annual basis.

4. At its meeting on 20 June 2012, Policy Committee provisionally agreed to conduct an annual satisfaction tracker survey for the County Council, not only to measure headline satisfaction but to include other key performance indicators such as public perceptions of value for money, communication, quality of life, and health and wellbeing. This was fully approved by Policy Committee on 12 September 2012, when a report on the outcome of the procurement process was presented. The survey took place between 1 – 26 October 2012.
5. The key feature of the survey methodology used, was that all interviews were carried out on a face-to-face basis, which is considered superior to postal when conducted effectively. Face-to-face interviews were the chosen methodology as this allows people to fully express their real views in a personable way. Face-to-face interviews also have an unrivalled reputation for producing robust population based samples which stand up to scrutiny.
6. The brief was to undertake at least 150 face-to-face interviews in each of the seven districts, making a total county sample size of 1,050. However, slightly more interviews were conducted and a sample size of 1,063 was achieved. A sample of 1,063 respondents has given results that are accurate to approximately +/- 3% at the 95% confidence interval. This means with a result of 50%, we can be 95% sure that if all residents were interviewed then the result would be between 47% and 53%. The survey design used location based quota sampling techniques to achieve a sample that was representative of the Nottinghamshire population (nearly 785,800 according to the Census 2011 data).
7. This research cost £14,223 in total. The Council's contribution was £4,223, with the remainder of the costs being funded by partners, therefore, demonstrating good value for money due to effective procurement and partner contribution.
8. The eight key measures in the Council's Strategic Plan that are measured via the annual residents' survey are:
 - % people satisfied with the way the Council runs things
 - % people agreeing that the Council provides 'value for money'
 - % people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area
 - % people satisfied with their area as a place to live
 - % people feeling informed about the services and benefits the Council provides
 - % people feeling safe outside in their local area after dark
 - % people feeling safe when outside in their local area during the day
 - % people undertaking voluntary/community work in the last 12 months
9. The County Council set indicative targets against these measures for 2012/13 based on historical data that was available at the time i.e. the 2008 Place Survey and subsequent citizens' panel surveys.
10. The 2012 annual residents' satisfaction survey should be considered to be the baseline for current performance from which the Council is to set targets for future years. This will take a number of factors into account including trend data (but applying caution), comparative information from other local authorities and knowledge about the services we provide, any impact from budget changes and planned future activity.

Summary of key findings from the 2012 annual residents' satisfaction survey

11. The summary findings below are based on comparison of 2011 results with those of 2012. It must be noted that the two surveys differ in that one (2011) was postal and the second (2012) being face-to-face. However, even taking this into consideration, the results appear to be very positive. Further details are contained in *Appendix A*.
12. *Appendix B* details contextual and comparative data from previous surveys.

Council satisfaction

- The Council's satisfaction rating has increased by 16 percentage points since 2011 to 63% satisfied. This is above the Ipsos MORI average (taken from the 2011 national survey) (55%). A major influence on satisfaction with the County Council is feeling it provides value for money. Almost half (47%) of respondents *agree* that the County Council provides them with value for money, compared to only a quarter (25%) that *disagree*. A significant increase of 22 percentage points since 2011. The Ipsos MORI average across the country is 41% agree and 26% disagree.

Local decision making

- A total of 36% *agree* they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This score has remained unchanged since 2009.

Perceptions of the local area

- Over four in five (84%) of Nottinghamshire respondents are *satisfied* with their local area as a place to live. This is an increase of just one percentage point since 2011. Only 6% are *dissatisfied*.

Information provision

- Whether people in Nottinghamshire feel informed or not appears to influence their attitudes to various aspects of the local area and local public services, such as their perceptions of crime and safety and of value for money from the council. In Nottinghamshire, 62% of respondents *feel informed* about the services and benefits provided by the Council; an increase of three percentage points since 2011.

Community safety

- Perceptions of crime and safety are often central to whether residents see an area as a good place to live or not. In Nottinghamshire, although most (95%) of respondents *feel safe during the day*, just under three-quarters (74%) *feel safe outside at night*, an increase of 8 percentage points and 3 percentage points respectively. A total of 90% of respondents *feel safe at home alone at night*.

Helping out and getting involved

- The proportion of respondents who volunteer regularly in Nottinghamshire is one in seven (14%). This is in line with the Place Survey data of 2008.

Analysis of findings

13. There are a number of key areas of work that need to be progressed using the data from the 2012 annual residents satisfaction survey, which include the mapping of activity that may have contributed to high/low levels of satisfaction across the Council, looking at links to cost and quality of service and other available data and future comparisons with other local authorities through the LGA's LG Inform.

14. The key areas of work, referenced in paragraph 13 above, will be undertaken by the Policy, Performance and Research Team with the administration of the survey process remaining with the Communications and Marketing Team.
15. Tracking changes in satisfaction alongside questions on other related issues about residents' local areas can provide valuable information on what is driving resident perceptions and therefore what the Council can do to serve their local communities better. Many additional factors will influence resident views of councils at a local level, including local demographics. It is important therefore that these results are seen as part of a wider approach to understanding and responding to local communities at a local level.
16. Research by the Local Government Association shows perceived value for money has the strongest correlation with overall satisfaction. Councils whose residents feel they get good value for money are the most popular, and those who score badly on value for money are the least popular. The strongest driver of 'perceived value for money' and the primary driver of resident satisfaction with councils, is effective information about council services. Councils whose residents feel well informed about services are the most popular and vice versa. Other key drivers of satisfaction are perceptions of the overall quality of services, and treating all types of people fairly, and taking residents' views into account - research suggests that these measures link into perceptions of trust and fairness and also highly correlate with the overall satisfaction rating for a council.
17. People are influenced by many factors when forming their view of the Council, including coverage of local government in the media. There have been improvements in the Council's media relations activity over the last 3 years alongside significant improvements in the way that media coverage is monitored and recorded. Coverage has increased four-fold, the number of enquiries has increased by 25% and press releases issued by 43%. There has also been a 17% increase in positive/neutral coverage.
18. Keeping residents informed about any changes in services is important and council publications play a key role in this. Previous MORI research has shown that the most frequently cited (and also most preferred) channels of council information tend to be council newspapers/newsletters. Recall rates of council magazines/newspapers vary between 40 per cent and 95 per cent. This may reflect various factors such as time of the year, frequency of distribution, salience of issues reported or effectiveness of distribution. The results from the 2012 annual resident satisfaction survey show that 55 per cent of Nottinghamshire residents remember receiving a copy of County News in the last 12 months. This is a drop of 25 percentage points compared to 2011 and further work needs to be done in this area.
19. Consistent use of our corporate identity (brand) is important for recognition of the Council. It enables people to recognise council services, access them and shows public accountability. It also plays an important part in contributing to overall satisfaction with the council. The Council's revised brand and how it should be used and governed was approved on 26 January 2012. For the first time the Council has gained consistency and control over its visual identity. Having an improved visual identity enables people to recognise Council services better. This is reflected in the fact that at the Diamond Jubilee event in June, 84% of people surveyed knew that Nottinghamshire County Council was the organiser of the event, and 76% of people surveyed at the Robin Hood Festival in August knew that the County Council was the organiser.

20. There are many potential drivers for improvement in satisfaction levels and the following are examples of such activity:-

- *Community safety:* Overall crime reductions in recorded crime across Nottinghamshire have been above the national average (all crime down 18%), contributing to people feeling safer and less likely to be a victim. Targeting of 15 'Partnership Plus Areas' in Nottinghamshire has led to significant reductions in the areas with the highest levels of crime and anxiety about crime. Successful approaches to car cruising, especially at Junction 27 and Netherfield, the work of the Family Intervention Project, Victim Support Anti Social Behaviour advocates and the Vulnerable Persons' Panels in each district, have improved the response to those areas and those individuals suffering from Anti Social Behaviour. Targeted work with young people by the Targeted Support Youth Justice Services teams and also, through projects such as "I Pledge" and "I Belong, You Belong", have led to positive engagement with young people and families in Partnership Plus Areas.
- *Five or more GCSEs Grade A*-C including English and maths:* This is the first time since the 'gold standard' measure was introduced in 2006 that Nottinghamshire has been above national outcomes. Early provisional results for 2012 show that Nottinghamshire has closed the gap on national outcomes on the Government's main measure of the percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C including English and mathematics. Just over 60% of Nottinghamshire pupils gained this measure (an increase of 2.7 percentage points from 2011) compared to 58.6% nationally (which saw a decrease of 0.4% from 2011). The Education Improvement Service (EIS) are actively engaged in schools working to secure improvement in educational achievement. One of the key initiatives is to partner strong schools with weaker ones to help them improve and boost education standards. For schools that are in an Ofsted category (special measures or notice to improve) this includes brokering support and partnership arrangements with Local Leaders of Education schools, advisor support, the development of action plans and frameworks for improvement and reviewing progress prior to visits from the inspectorate.
- *Highways and transport:* A good improvement has been achieved in customer satisfaction with Nottinghamshire's overall Highways and Transport service to a ranking of 2nd at 56.6%, just half a percentage point behind the top score of 57%, and customer satisfaction with the Nottinghamshire's road safety service also now ranked 2nd at 55%, again just half a percentage point behind the top score of 55.5%. This is supported by the continued commitment of highway teams across the service from routine inspection, improvements and repairs to winter gritting and response to flooding. Current improvements to the highway service are being implemented with improved customer contact support and early notification of planned works which may have contributed to this increasing level of customer satisfaction. Further improvements including project delivery arrangements and a new highways contract will be put in place early next year to ensure continual improvement and customer satisfaction.
- *Personal budgets:* Our performance to date is very positive, with more people than ever managing their own care – as the percentage of adult social care service users and carers in Nottinghamshire now receiving a personal budget stands at 79%. This is better performance than targeted for and places Nottinghamshire amongst the top performers nationally. Building on this success, countywide information events took place in November 2012, involving employees, service users and personal assistants to help celebrate progress to date and tackle the challenges ahead.

21. It is crucial that individual councils have the best possible tools to manage their performance and drive their own improvement. Therefore, it is proposed to use the Local Government LG Inform database as a mechanism for benchmarking our resident satisfaction data with other councils. This is a free online service which allows anyone in the public sector to access, compare and analyse data, and present their findings. 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 from the 2012 annual residents' satisfaction survey into LG Inform, to enable direct comparison with other authorities. LG Inform encourages local authorities to use public opinion research to help councils aim to be the best, not just comforted by the national benchmark.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the increased levels of satisfaction evidenced by the 2012 Nottinghamshire annual residents' satisfaction survey be noted.
- 2) That the Council uses this survey data as the baseline and looks to set meaningful targets for future years based on this.
- 3) That further detailed analysis, including mapping of activity that may have contributed to high/low levels of satisfaction across the Council, looking at links to cost and quality of service and other available data, be undertaken.
- 4) The Council continues with annual satisfaction surveys in future years.

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Constitutional Comments [NAB 30/11/12]

Council has authority to consider and approve the recommendations set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments [MB 30/11/12]

The cost of the survey is met from the budget for Marketing and Engagement.

Background Papers

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All