

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 31 MAY 2016

REPORT BY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

RESIDENTS SURVEY 2015

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To share the results of the Resident's Survey which was undertaken in 2015.

RECOMMENDATION FOR CORPORATE BUSINESS SCRUTINY that:

(A)	The overall purpose, utility and results of the Resident's Survey be considered;
(B)	The Executive be advised of any recommendations.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Every other year East Herts Council commissions a survey of resident's views. The commissioning process is done jointly with other districts and the county council in order to reduce overall contract costs. The survey has been undertaken by Opinion Research Services (ORS) since 2009 and prior to that IPOS MORI.
- 1.2 The latest survey was carried out in the autumn of 2015. 4000 surveys were sent to East Herts households and 1,166 responses were received. The full report from ORS can be found at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The survey asks questions across a range of different subject areas (such as perceptions of transport and community safety) and provides a picture of overall satisfaction with East Herts. Some of the questions relate directly to East Herts Council services.

2.2 The survey results are usually shared with Members and senior managers ‘for information’ – they are considered during the service planning process but are not used as a basis for making decisions. The results therefore need to be considered as contextual information around East Herts as a whole, giving a feel for resident’s views over a broad range of issues. The cost of undertaking the latest survey to East Herts Council was £15,875.

2.3 Generally the 2015 survey suggests that people are satisfied with East Herts as a place to live and that, comparatively speaking, people are satisfied with East Herts Council. The report also makes comparisons to previous surveys and highlights any trends in public views. Some relevant trends include:

- Resident satisfaction with “complaints” is decreasing in every aspect of the complaints procedure (apart from ease at initially raising the complaint).
- Satisfaction with types of materials recycled has increased
- There has been a decrease in satisfaction with local household recycling facilities and also with local bus services

2.4 Regarding local recycling facilities and bus services neither of these relate directly to East Herts Council services however it is interesting to note the wider impact that County Council policies have on resident’s perceptions. The trend regarding bus services also reflects Member concerns, as evidenced by the inclusion of the objective “*working with key partners on sustainable transport solutions for East Herts*” within the corporate strategic plan.

2.5 Regarding the issue of complaints there is clearly a disparity between resident’s perceptions of a complaint and what is formally recognised by the organisation as such. The survey indicates that 1 out of every 4 people in the district have complained to the council, half of whom have done so in the past 12 months. If we apply the results to the whole population of East Herts that would suggest we should have had around 16000 complaints last year. However, in 2015/16 the council received just 76 formal complaints. To put that in context we received over 400,000 telephone calls during the same period. The likely reasons behind the disparity are as follows:

- The definition of ‘complaint’ can be subjective. In some cases the complaint is a query or concern regarding a council service which is resolved at the first point of contact. This

may mean that they are dealt with as service queries or requests.

- Resident's responding to the survey don't distinguish between making a complaint to the district council, county council (or indeed any other agency).

2.6 The annual report on Comments, Compliments and Complaints is being presented to Corporate Business Scrutiny in July 2016 where Members will have the opportunity to consider this issue in more detail.

2.7 Given that the information from the survey provides only contextual information about resident's perceptions of issues within the district and is not used to inform any decisions, it is reasonable to challenge whether the £15,875 spent every other year represents value for money. There is a need to continue consulting and having a dialogue with residents on key issues (such as the District Plan, setting of Business Rates and changes to services which will have a local impact such as waste and recycling services) which needs to continue. There is also a need however to do this in real time, focusing on immediate issues (through social media and other types of digital interactions) and the traditional survey approach doesn't always provide the most useful type of feedback from residents. For example we are in the process of developing more sophisticated ways of capturing customer feedback (e.g. through govmetric) and this kind of data has more utility for service planning. Committee Members are therefore asked to consider whether the resident's survey is likely to provide value for money in future.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

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