

RESIDENTS SURVEY 2013 – RESULTS

Strategy and Performance Advisory Committee – 28 January 2014

Report of Head of Transformation & Strategy

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Promise in the Corporate Plan to provide value for money.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

Contact Officer(s) Lee Banks (Ext. 7161)

Recommendation to Strategy & Performance Advisory Committee:

Members note the results of the Residents Survey 2013 and advise on any areas of concern that should be addressed arising from the report.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure that Members are provided with an opportunity to assess the feedback of residents and propose actions for improvement arising from any concerns identified from the results.

Introduction and Background

- 1 Following a tender process Lake Market Research Ltd, an independent research company, carried out a resident survey on behalf of the Council during October 2013.
- 2 The survey was carried out to provide information on satisfaction with the Council and also to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's communications and to establish where residents obtain information about the Council.
- 3 A number questions within the survey were taken from the Local Government Associations (LGA) LG Inform project, a tool which is being developed by the LGA as a benchmarking data service for local authorities, which may in time allow benchmarking with other, similar authorities.
- 4 Overall the results are positive showing significant improvements in satisfaction levels with the Council compared to the last telephone survey undertaken in 2010. This report sets out the results of the survey and identifies potential areas for improvements and further research.
- 5 Where it exists, comparative data has been included in this report.

Methodology

- 6 The data was collected by way of a telephone survey of 201 Sevenoaks District residents. Collectively they formed a broadly representative sample of the District population.
- 7 Research took place from 16 to 30 October 2013. Some telephone calls took place during evenings and at weekends to ensure we heard the views of a representative, cross-section of our District population. All the telephone numbers were randomly generated.
- 8 The research was conducted under the Code of Practice of the UK Market Research Society, which means that all of the answers residents gave remain strictly confidential and anonymous.
- 9 The results are presented in percentage form, and compared to the corresponding results from the 2010 telephone survey where available.

Council Performance

- 10 Overall satisfaction with councils is an important performance measure for many local authorities and has been collected through surveys for many years. The Council's survey showed an improvement in satisfaction with the way the Council runs things of 18% since 2010.

2013 result	2010 result
88%	70%

- 11 From the limited amount of recent benchmarking data currently available to the Council the satisfaction scores of other local authorities ranged from 58% to 84%, indicating that the Council is performing strongly in this area.
- 12 The Council's survey asked for responses to four further questions that reflect on performance. These are set out in the table below.

Question	2013 result	2010 result
Trust in the Council	80%	Not available
Helpfulness the last time you contacted the Council *	80%	66%
The Council acts on the concerns of local residents	72%	32%
Would speak positively of the Council	42%	31%

* 115 responses were received to this question. Those respondents had all contacted the Council within the last 12 months.

- 13 Across these questions it is evident that the Council has improved its performance since 2010. Benchmarking data is not currently available therefore it is difficult to assess whether the 2013 results represent strong performance within the local government sector.
- 14 The proportion of residents that would speak positively of the Council although improved is significantly lower in percentage terms than other results within this Council performance section. The results of the survey showed that 10% of respondents would speak negatively, with 47% with no strong view.
- 15 Any future research carried out by the Council may wish to consider exploring in further detail the experiences of residents that most influence their opinions on the Council. This would in turn allow for improvement plans to be considered for services as well as improvements in how the Council communicates with residents about its services.

Value for money and budget

- 16 Residents opinions on the value for money provided by councils is an important performance measure for many local authorities and has been collected through surveys for many years. The Council's survey showed an improvement in its value for money score of 8% since 2010.

2013 result	2010 result
58%	50%

- 17 From the limited amount of recent benchmarking data currently available to the Council the value for money scores of other local authorities ranged from 42% to 56%, indicating that the Council is performing strongly in this area.
- 18 The Council's survey asked for responses to five questions that reflect on the priorities for the Council's budget setting. These are set out in the table below.

Question	2013 result
Seek new opportunities to work in partnership	91%
Invest money and resources to generate income to help fund services	85%
Look for further efficiency savings	84%
Charges for services should at least cover costs	79%
Increase Council Tax to continue to deliver services	27%

- 19 In essence the majority of respondents support the Council's approach to managing its money. There is a high level of support for the Council's emerging plans, as set out in the Corporate Plan to invest money in projects that generate

income for the Council. Just over a quarter of respondents recognise that council tax raises may be necessary to continue to fund service delivery.

- 20 Despite seeing a rise in the Council's value for money score it has been expressed by Members and Strategic Management Team that they would wish to see this score improve further. To this end improvements will be sought in the way in which we communicate the work of the Council, within the financial constraints placed up on us in recent years, with residents. This will be reflected in the Communications Strategy for the coming year.

The local area

- 21 Residents were asked about how satisfied they are with their local area as a place to live. This question reflects on the whole range of services and factors that influence the quality of a local area and not just the services provided by the District Council. The Council's survey showed a reduction in satisfaction levels of 4% since 2010.

2013 result	2010 result
89%	93%

- 22 The survey asked respondents what they perceived to be the biggest problems in their local area. The table below summarises the responses received.

Perceived problem	2013 result
Rubbish or litter	30%
Vandalism and graffiti	25%
Groups hanging out	22%
People using or dealing drugs	16%
Drunk or rowdy people	13%
Noisy neighbours	11%

- 23 The responses to the survey have been shared with relevant services to enable them to assess the measures currently being taken, or those that could be taken in the future to address the concerns raised. Further research may be required to understand more about where these issues most predominantly occur.

Communications

- 24 An important message to gauge the effectiveness of the way the Council communicates is to assess how well residents feel that they are kept informed about its services. The 2013 survey showed an improvement in the proportion of residents that feel they are well informed of 7% since 2010.

2013 result	2010 result
71%	64%

- 25 To understand more about the types of Council communication that residents see and therefore what may influence their level of satisfaction with being informed about services the survey asked which sources of information residents have seen within the previous six months. The results are set out in the table below.

Source of Information	2013 result	2010 Result
In Shape magazine	73%	69%
Council website	44%	36%
Council's social media feeds	4%	Not available
Leaflets	1%	Not available

- 26 The results of the survey indicate the most effective form of communication, or that with the greatest reach, continues to be In Shape magazine. However this is a greater growth in the use of the website to find information about services. Work is underway to improve the way information is provided on the Council's new website and its growth as a communication tool provides a level of support for this project.

In Shape Magazine

- 27 In Shape magazine is produced for residents and local businesses four times a year. The magazine is designed, printed and distributed to over 50,000 homes and businesses at the net cost of 21p per copy. As the source of information about the Council that residents tell us they see most, further questions were asked to understand more about residents opinions on the magazine.
- 28 The survey asked whether residents had seen the September 2013 copy of In Shape, which was distributed four weeks prior to the survey taking place. 69% of respondents had seen the magazine, 17% responded that they hadn't and the remaining 14% were unsure.
- 29 56% of respondents to the questionnaire told us that they spent up to 10 minutes reading there copy of In Shape, 39% said that they spent more than 10 minutes reading In Shape and 5% said that they didn't read it at all.
- 30 The following table summarises respondents' views on the quality of In Shape.

In Shape ...	2013 result
... is easy to read	97%
... is colourful and well produced	96%
... keeps me informed about the Council's work and local services	91%
... informs me of Council news and activities I have not previously heard about	88%
... tells me about the Council's future plans	88%
... is good value for money *	86%

* - Respondents to the questionnaire were informed of the cost of In Shape before responding to this question

- 31 The responses on the quality of In Shape are very positive and supportive of the current design and approach taken to content.

Campaign Evaluation

- 32 During September and October the Communications team managed a media campaign on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership to promote the work they do to keep the District safe. To evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign respondents were asked if they had heard about the primary objectives of the campaign. The results are summarised as follows:
- 40% of respondents knew how to report anti-social behaviour and other crime to the District's Community Safety Unit;
 - 38% of respondents had heard about the Council's work with the community to reduce speeding vehicles (Speed Watch);
 - 34% of respondents had heard about how the Council's CCTV system is helping to keep the District's town centres safe;
 - 33% of respondents had heard about the Council's work with its partners to keep the District safe; and
 - 16% had heard about the Council funded projects to tackle drug and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse.
- 33 For a campaign that ran across a 5-6 week period to gain recognition from up to 40% of the respondents is a satisfactory outcome. Work will continue to evaluate what works well and what can be improved from previous campaigns to ensure that every effort is made to maximise reach and recognition levels in the future.

Learning from the Members Communications Strategy Working Group will help officers to achieve this aim.

Information provision and Media

- 34 The survey concluded by asking a range of questions about how residents receive their news and their preferences for local and national media. A summary of the results is provided at Appendix A for Members information.
- 35 The information from this section of the survey helps to guide the Council on where to place their news or announcements to ensure the greatest reach.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

None

Key Implications

Financial

The telephone survey of 200 respondents was at a cost of £3,371.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

None.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The survey collects anonymous information about the individuals that respond to the questionnaire. Analysis of this data enables the Council to explore whether any inequalities may exist from the responses given by different categories of individual.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Not applicable

Conclusions

- 36 Over the past three years the levels of satisfaction with the Council have increased to the point where it has one of the highest scores in the country based on our own, limited, benchmarking exercises. Our data may be more readily comparable

once other local authorities support the LGA's LG Inform programme to share their survey data.

- 37 The Council's Value for Money score is increasing (in 2010 50% of respondents said that we provided value for money, whilst 58% said this for 2013). While this compares well with others, there is still room for improvement.
- 38 More people feel well informed by the Council (71% in 2013 as opposed to 64% in 2010) and this may be one of the drivers for the improvements in satisfaction and value for money.
- 39 The Council's website is now the primary source by which residents get their information from about the Council. The influence of the local media, while still important, shows a decline as a useful information source about the Council.
- 40 Satisfaction levels with the Council magazine, In Shape are high and those who read it are generally more satisfied with the Council than those who do not.
- 41 The vast majority of residents have broadband at home. Furthermore 72% have an internet enabled phone. Social media use has continued to grow amongst Sevenoaks District residents.

Appendices: Appendix A – Survey Results – Media

Background Papers: None

**Dr Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive**