

29 October 2014

Finance & Resources Committee

Resident Survey Report

Report of: *Steve Summers, Head of Customer Services*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with the results of a Residents Survey undertaken by Westco on behalf of the Council between the 9th and the 25th July 2014 and options for future engagement with residents.
- 1.2 The Council had not undertaken a comprehensive resident's survey since the 2008/09 Place Survey. In order to measure and understand residents' satisfaction and views about the Council, its services and the local area Westco were commissioned to undertake a residents' survey. Set out below are the main headlines from the results with the comparable Place Survey results in brackets.
- 1.3 Brentwood residents' satisfaction with their local area as a place to live is equal to the national average, with four in five, 82%, (90%) residents being satisfied. All other key reputation measures though, are considerably below national averages, for example, just over two in five, 44%, (57%) Brentwood residents are satisfied with the way their council runs things; compared to the national average of 70% and 28% (42%) Brentwood residents agree that the council provides value for money; compared to the national average of 51%.
- 1.4 Around two in five, 44%, (39%) residents feel they are informed about the services and benefits that the Council offers. However, this figure is substantially lower than the national average of 65%. If the Council is to improve its reputation scores, it will be necessary to increase the extent to which residents feel informed.
- 1.5 Feeling informed about the Council has a significant impact on how residents feel about the Council. Among those who feel informed, satisfaction with the Council increases to 63%. Furthermore residents,

who do not think that the Council takes account of their views, are more likely to feel dissatisfied with the Council. This suggests that the Council needs to look into ways of improving its communication with residents, and the way it engages with them.

- 1.6 The majority of residents believe how the Council involves them in local decision making, the value for money they receive from the council and the quality of services overall, is at the same standard as 12 months ago. Although a notable minority of residents believe that standards have declined.
- 1.7 Residents who have contacted the Council recently are significantly more likely to have levels of dissatisfaction with the Council across all reputation measures. This is an important area for the Council to address. Currently around half of those who have contacted the council have been dissatisfied with the handling and outcome of their enquiry.
- 1.8 The proportion of residents who feel that the Council is viewed positively by the media is well below the national average, (10% as opposed to 32%). Brentwood residents are more likely to feel that the media has a neutral view of the council than the national average (51% as opposed to 40%). If the council can increase the number of residents who feel that the media has a positive view of the council, this is likely to have a significant effect on key reputation measures.
- 1.9 An option for future resident's consultation and engagement is set out in Section 4 of this report for Members consideration.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Members note the results of the 2014 Residents Survey.**
- 2.2 The results are used to inform development of the Council's service and delivery plans.**
- 2.3 The Council develops a Residents e-Panel for future satisfaction surveys and a number of other engagement and consultation projects and also considers other engagement methods as appropriate to enable satisfaction responses to be received on an ongoing basis.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The results of the survey are based on 200 telephone interviews with Brentwood residents aged 16+. Interviews were completed between the 9th and the 25th July 2014. Infocorp conducted the fieldwork and the data is weighted to the known profile of Brentwood. The cost of the survey was £4,750. Where applicable results are compared to LGA national polls carried out 18th – 20th April 2014, via telephone with 1005 British Adults.
- 3.2 A presentation with details of the responses to questions from the survey is attached as Appendix A.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

- 4.1 Receiving information from residents regarding the Council's services is one of many ways which enables a local authority to identify and review its approach to service delivery.
- 4.2 The findings of the Residents Survey provide the Council the opportunity to review a number of key areas. This review work includes mapping of activity that may have contributed to high/low levels of satisfaction across the Council and looking at links to cost and quality of service.
- 4.3 In addition the survey findings indicate that the Council could consider its approach to Communications and Engagement, Media, Customer Service and Segmentation of residents.
- 4.4 Since the survey was undertaken in July 2014 the Council has introduced the Customer Contact Centre, the Borough Bulletin, weekly meetings with the media and has increased its number of press releases, and use of twitter and Facebook.
- 4.5 One option to be able to continue to receive feedback and levels of satisfaction from residents on the council's services is to undertake an Annual Residents Satisfaction Survey. However there is the annual cost of the survey and also there would be restricted ability of obtaining residents views on a variety of issues throughout the year.
- 4.6 Another option to achieve regular feedback and views on Council services and projects in a more cost effective way is the introduction of a Residents Panel. Other authorities have introduced Residents (Citizens) Panels which enables residents to give views on consultations, providing opinions and getting involved in community engagement. Panel Members can be

contacted (by email because of its speed, low cost and convenience for the panel) for views and opinions on a variety of topics.

- 4.7 The introduction of an online panel of resident's would be a cost effective and speedy approach to obtaining views and opinions and would supplement other traditional and existing consultation and engagement methods.
- 4.8 Brentwood residents over 16 could be invited to join the panel through a recruitment process and the panel would be managed by the Council's Communications Team.
- 4.9 Residents under 16 will be able to provide views on the Borough and Council services through the already existing Youth Strategy Group, Brentwood Youth Council and individual School Councils.
- 4.10 In addition consideration could be given to obtaining resident's views and satisfaction on the Council's services through the Council's website and other publications as appropriate. Any such options will be managed within existing budgets and resources.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To enable further improvements to Council's services and develop further cost effective resident consultation and survey methods.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 No consultation required.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Feedback on the Council's services and initiatives will help meet the Modern Council key priority.

8. Implications

Financial Implications

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- 8.1 The costs of the Residents Survey (£4,750) has been met from an existing Communications Budget. Any future agreement to establish an electronic based Residents Panel will require officer input only.

Legal Implications

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8.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

8.3 None.

9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

9.1 Residents Survey Report – August 2014

10. Appendices to this report

10.1 Appendix A - Presentation with details of the responses to questions from the survey is attached as Appendix A.

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