

## **Cabinet 19 October 2005**

### **Local tracker survey 2005 – topline results**

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Marco Longhi
<b>Service Area:</b>	Corporate Performance Management
<b>Wards:</b>	All
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	No

#### **Summary of report**

This report sets out the key resident perception highlights arising from the 2005 tracker survey and how this influences Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) outcomes. The results show significant improvement in the overall satisfaction of residents with the council. Results have increased to 56%; a 22 percentage point improvement on 2003/4. This is excellent news, demonstrating that the reputation of Walsall Council is improving, and that quality of life is improving for the people of Walsall. This represents a strong indication that our vision is meeting the needs of and making a real difference to local people.

#### **Recommendations**

Cabinet note the results arising from the 2005 tracker survey and the future relevance that such research has in the context of future CPA judgements.

#### **Resource and legal considerations**

The new CPA framework 'the harder test' places more emphasis on user opinion and diversity. This should be evidenced through high quality, rigorous and robust research with service users. Tracker survey results are invaluable in determining where satisfaction is already high and where further improvements may be needed. This information can be used in service planning, when making policy decisions on how services should be provided, and where investments and savings should be made; supporting our work on value for money. Best value user satisfaction scores are used in the CPA assessment, and good scores contribute to the award of higher CPA categories.

## **Citizen impact**

The tracker survey gathers Walsall residents' general perceptions of their satisfaction with council services. It also collects data on what is currently impacting on overall satisfaction with local quality of life. It helps the council to plan and deliver targeted action to address these issues and improve perceptions in the future.

## **Community safety**

In planning the survey, community safety concerns were considered. For example: households received letters of invitation from the Chief Executive, interviewers carried proper identification and letters of introduction; telephone help lines were provided, and awareness raising took place with relevant services working with vulnerable people in the community who may have queried legitimacy of the contact.

## **Environmental impact**

The results show perceptions of local quality of life in Walsall; including what residents most want to see improved in their local environment. This helps to identify what issues exist and enables actions to be targeted to improve the local environment.

## **Performance and risk management issues**

Satisfaction ratings tell us how well the council is performing and help us implement the improvements needed to deliver our excellence vision. It also helps us to identify actions required to reduce the risks of any adverse impact of how PIs are used within the new CPA 2005 "harder test" framework.

## **Equality implications**

The tracker survey has addressed equality implications in a number of ways:

1. Purposefully selected a representative sample of the Borough's population to take part in the feedback to ensure that results are a fair representation.
2. Specifically researching issues regarding community cohesion.
3. Gathering and interpreting information by age, gender, ethnicity, disability and geographically. This ensures that issues particular to a specific group are acted on to evidence we are meeting the needs to our diverse community.

## **Consultation**

This face to face doorstep survey was conducted on our behalf by Bostock Marketing Group (BMG). The tracker survey is a large scale consultation exercise that outputs the views of 1,111 Borough respondents. It is a notable piece of consultation that demonstrates our continued commitment to listening and acting on the opinions of local residents.

## **Vision 2008**

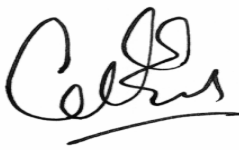
Together with other consultation undertaken by the council, these results mirror local opinion, and help assess the extent to which we are achieving our vision. The results show significant improvement in overall satisfaction with the council, demonstrating that our reputation with residents is improving, and that quality of life is improving. This helps demonstrate to our residents, staff, partners and other stakeholders that the improvements we have accomplished are getting recognised where it matters most: in the eyes of local people. Some tracker results have been used in the Beacon Index as a very user-focussed way of measuring progress in delivering the council's vision.

## **Background papers**


Reports to EMT on 03/02/05 and 16/06/05

## **Contact officer**

Vanessa Holding – Account Manager for Performance - Neighbourhoods Directorate ☎  
2474

Signed: 

**Carole Evans - Executive Director:**  
**10.10.05**

Signed: 

**Marco Longhi - Portfolio Holder**  
**10.10.05**

## **1. Purpose of the Tracker Survey**

- 1.1 Every three years from 2000/1 onwards, councils are statutorily required to undertake a general satisfaction survey. Between 2000/1 and 2003/4 overall satisfaction declined from 53% to 34%. This mirrored in Walsall a national trend in declining satisfaction with local government. 2003/4 was the peak year in local negative media coverage arising from Government intervention, coupled with a planned high council tax increase (as part of the recovery package) which is considered to have a particular notable adverse impact.
- 1.2 During October 2004, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) announced its intention to undertake a national tracker survey aiming to understand better the reasons for declining satisfaction with local government and to track headline user satisfaction BVPIs in the period before the next scheduled triennial survey.
- 1.3 ODPM sought direct local authority involvement in the design and content of tracker, including an opportunity to locally pilot the survey. Walsall became one of 32 councils to take part, and committed to a parallel local pilot of the survey. Walsall's tracker survey took place during April/May 2005, and this provides a more up to date picture. One other council has since similarly piloted the survey; the national survey took place during June/July 2005. We are still awaiting the results from the national survey to be shared with the tracker project participants. All surveys have been administered by BMG, a research association based in Birmingham.

## **2. Significant highlights**

- 2.1 The next statutory general satisfaction survey is scheduled for 2006/7. Meanwhile, some indicators are updated in the tracker survey acting as proxy 'interim' performance results.
- 2.2 Particularly good news from tracker is increased overall satisfaction with the council of 56%; representing a 22 percentage point increase on the 2003/4 result and 3 percentage points above the first benchmark in 2000/1. This equates to above average performance compared to the 2003/4 results for all England. This is undoubtedly an indicator of improved reputation in the eyes of residents. Together with results showing 72% of respondents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live are very pleasing, help demonstrate how well residents perceive the council's progress and further substantiates the appropriateness of the end of special measures.
- 2.3 Other notable satisfaction improvements on the 2003/4 results include:
  - Satisfaction with complaints handling up to 33% (+5 % points); just above average compared to all England.
  - Satisfaction with cleanliness standards improved marginally to 47% (+2 % points).
  - Satisfaction with the provision of public transport information is up +2 % points to 45%.
  - Overall satisfaction with cultural services increasing to 58% (+22 % points) and enters above average performance for all England.

- Satisfaction with household recycling 'bring sites' is back up to 2000/1 levels at 62% (+6 % points on 2003/4), and
- We have our first baseline for satisfaction with kerbside recycling facilities and street lighting at 68% and 63% satisfaction respectively.

2.4 In other respects, the survey is helpful in identifying where further action is required. For example research also explores issues of local quality of life, choice, user focus and perceptions of the local authority 'brand'. Here there is additional good news, with perceptions of good community cohesion shining through, and a strong sense of belonging to the local community, and people feeling better informed now than in the past. Also, what is noticeable is generally low levels of dissatisfaction, though there is some respondent neutrality (ie. 'Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied') and this is dampening overall results to a certain extent. The citizen panel recruitment will research this further and additional focus group work planned for October will also help identify improvement activity needed. Before the next statutory survey in the autumn of 2006/7 it will be important to convince residents that improvements are sustainable so that neutrality moves along the rating scale towards greater satisfaction. Increased communication will be essential to this success.

### **3. Relevance to CPA**

- 3.1 Past results from the statutory survey (known as user satisfaction best value performance indicators (USBVPis)) have been previously used within the CPA framework. Used directly in the service assessment framework (SAF), and generally in the overall corporate assessment; achievement judgement. The 2003/4 satisfaction results adversely impacted on our CPA scores/judgements. A key criticism within the recent CPA corporate assessment was that existing resident satisfaction data available for Walsall at the time failed to show whether or not the council's many improvements were tangibly recognised by residents and service users. This was based upon the 2003/4 results as the tracker results were not then available.
- 3.2 Hence, recent CPA activity concerning the Use of Resources (value for money) and Direction of Travel self assessments have enabled the council to present a more up to date and much improved picture of customer perceptions using a wider range of feedback. Demonstrating that our service improvements are 'making a difference' to local residents improved perceptions.
- 3.3 Tracker helps evidence our current position and the further improvements we aspire to achieve on our path to excellence prior to the next survey taking place in 2006/7. The 2006/7 results will not be refreshed again for another 3 years thereafter and so this is an important step towards evidencing achievement of outcomes for input into future CPA judgments prior to 2008.

### **4. Summary**

- 4.1 Undoubtedly involvement in the Tracker research helps councils demonstrate user focus and target action where it matters most: in improving services for residents. In addition it has provided evidence of good progress for CPA including the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessment currently being judged. It is important for us to be able to demonstrate the quality and

robustness of our own consultation methods and that we use these results to inform service improvements that meet the needs of Walsall's diverse community. We will be continuing our service improvement focus in order that improvement trends identified through tracker are maintained if not improved further before the next statutory survey takes place.

## **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 These results are being promptly communicated to services to enable them to celebrate our general success in improving our reputation with residents, and to help them focus on areas of further improvement. This information is also being used in the mainstream budget process, including the next round of budget consultation which aims to help identify priorities for 2006/7.