



Scrutiny Board

Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group

MAY 2010
SCRUTINY BOARD
Supporting Officer: Amanda Scarce



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



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FOREWORD

It is pleasing to know that over 80% of respondents in the Place Survey thought that the district of Bromsgrove was a great place to live and 79% of 65s and over were satisfied with their home and neighbourhood.

It was also reassuring that the survey has recognised the positive role that the District Council plays in ensuring that Bromsgrove residents enjoy a quality of life that is amongst the highest in the County.

Although these facts are cause for celebration and no small degree of pride, the perception is that only 34% of respondents were satisfied with the way in which the Council ran things.

Therefore the Task Group had a clear aim to 'drill' down into these results and explore these perceptions with an ultimate goal to specifically look at improving residents' satisfaction with services provided by the Council and to recommend actions that are acceptable to Cabinet and that will assist in moving the Council towards an "excellent" status.

The results were supported by the report 'Mind the Gap: Frontiers of Performance in local Government (V)', an analysis based on the findings of the Place Survey. This report produced a "predicted" level of satisfaction with key outcomes given the circumstances of a local area. By comparing these predicted levels to actual perceptions, a "gap" score is calculated which shows whether perceptions are more or less positive than would be expected given local circumstances. In the Council's case the "gap" for the way in which it operated was -15%.

Providing efficient effective services to residents across the district is a primary Council priority and is continually evolving. Meeting customer expectation can only be achieved through continual improvement and self assessment if Bromsgrove District Council is to improve residents' perception and satisfaction levels. This is particularly important in the light of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment performance regime, which provides a new framework where, local public services are collectively held to account for delivering improved outcomes for local people.

One of the improvements in the Council's administration is the willingness to look inward to ensure how its services can be improved and using the recommendations within this report will no doubt improve public perception further.

Councillor Steve Colella
Chairman of the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conclusions drawn from this extensive piece of research shows that improving residents' satisfaction is within the authority's gift but requires a strategic customer focused approach from all aspects of the Council's services and from both Members and officers. It is important for the Council to remember how far it has come in a short period of time. We are still suffering a "reputation hangover" from our past "poor" rating and from a range of difficult decisions we have had to take to help turn around the Council.

Having made most of the difficult decisions, the Council needs to continue its positive journey and start delivering more visible outcomes for our residents, combined with improved customer service and community engagement/communications. Diagrams 1 and 2 overleaf provide good examples of the interdependencies for delivering an improved reputation and increased satisfaction.

The report recommends a number of simple changes to how the Council promotes itself, but these must be supported by strategic service delivery that is more customer led, customer focused and delivers visible outcomes.

It also became clear that residents appreciate the direct interaction with Council staff, Portfolio Holders and Councillors. Being approachable and open gives added value to customer service and reflects the view that news travels fast, be it good or bad. Building a brand takes many years but it can instantly be destroyed.

Building pride in services begins with building pride with staff. Training, communication and enhancing identity are the main corner stones of the major high street retailers, something that is recommended for the Council to build on within this report.

From the investigations undertaken, it was clearly highlighted that the Council has not taken the opportunity to 'publicise' the work it already does in a more dynamic way. A prime example is recent tree works in the new cemetery and recognition of the excellent Sanders Park. Both examples of the highest professional management but to the passing resident they would be little or no recognition of the Council's role in them.

Street cleaning, sports events, grounds maintenance and litter collection are celebrated Council services all with high public interactions and along with its role within schools, Parish Councils and County Council partnerships demonstrate the involvement in the everyday life of the district's residents.

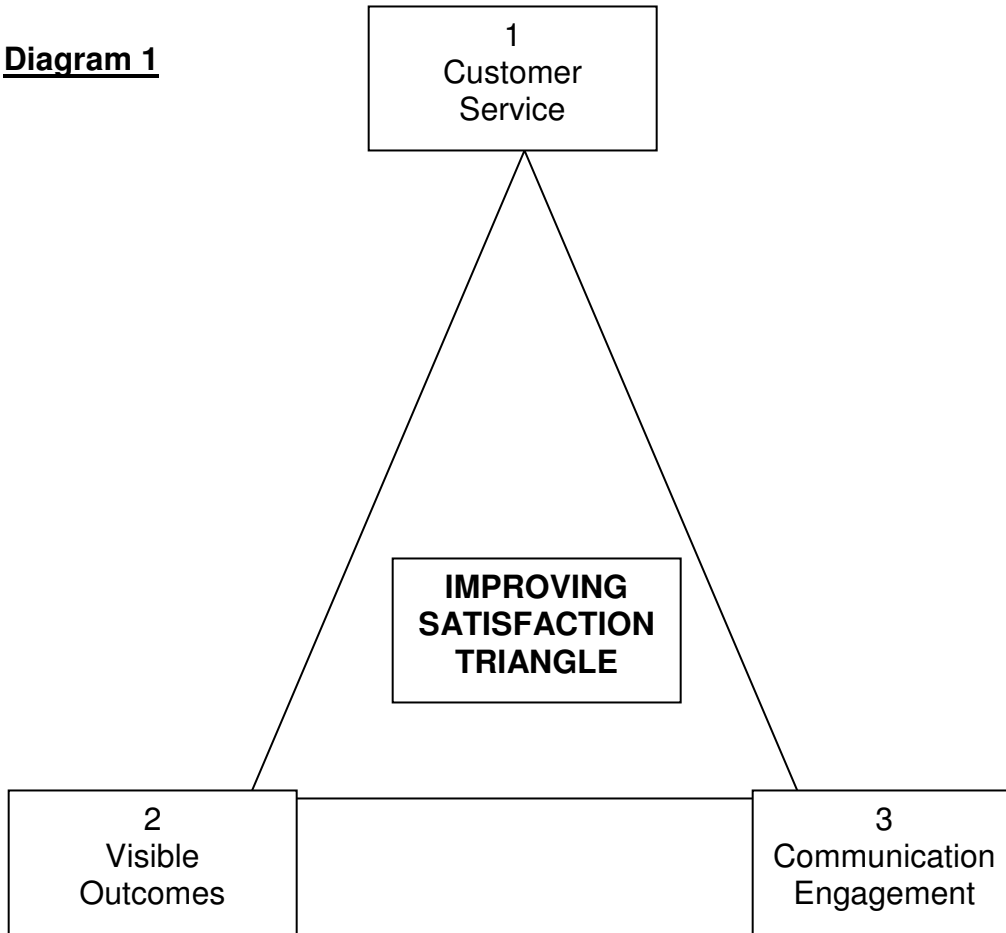
The Place Survey is a national indicator and as such is an important "yard stick". This should be underpinned with 'local' surveys of service delivery, for both internal and external customers. Knowing your customers and their needs is self perpetuating and leads to self improvement.

It is also clear that nothing in the recommendations adds significant costs to the Council's expenditure and much of the likely costs are embedded in current budgets. Working smarter is a primary requirement at a time of budget constraint whilst still recognising the importance of delivering excellent services.

Improving residents' satisfaction is not one person's responsibility but depends on every staff member of the Council recognising their role in service delivery, whether they are front line or back office support and how the Council communicates with its stakeholders.

Finally it is hoped that the recommendations made in this report are clear and achievable and will be universally embraced. It is clear that the first steps have been taken by the scrutiny of the Place Survey results and a willingness to look inward by Bromsgrove District Council.

Diagram 1



1

Customer Service

e.g.

Customer First Parts 4, 5, 6 Training
Customer Service Excellence Accreditation
Project Management

2

Visible Outcomes

e.g.

Railway Station development
Town Centre re-development
Car Parking
Wide range of retail outlets

3

Communication/ Engagement

e.g.

Published programme of engagement
Re-launch of brand
Older People's Service Directory
Children & Young People magazine
More out of town communications
Value for Money Campaign
Community groups engagement

Diagram 2

The Task Group was provided with background information on key marketing principles and how applying those principles could help the Council satisfy residents. The area that the Task Group felt was of most interest to them was the 4P's which, was part of the scope of the complete marketing mix.

The “Marketing Mix”

Product Managing products. Developing new products. Identifying products to customers (i.e. branding). Presenting products to customers (i.e. physical appearance).	Place Organising of products and their added value. Customer care/service. Organising actual delivery of product.
Price Determining product price levels. Incentives to buy products. Contractual arrangements.	Promotion Advertising and promoting products. PR and communications. Relationship marketing.

The interesting thing to note is that promotion is only one of the four Ps of the marketing mix. In order to market something well (and therefore improve our reputation and perception) we also need to ensure we price at the right level for our customers, produce a product that they want (based on customer engagement/market research) and place the product correctly. In local government speak, place is akin to customer access, ensuring we provide access channels or services in such a way that is best for our customer.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

PLACE SURVEY ANALYSIS

The bi-annual Place Survey was used as the primary evidence to establish the Council's current standing in terms of meeting residents' expectations and how this is reflected in terms of satisfaction with Bromsgrove District Council's services.

Recommendation 1

That Cabinet note that achieving a high level of satisfaction is a combination of visible outcomes, good customer service, regular and clear communication and public engagement and requires all aspects of the Council to be fully committed and working to the same outcomes.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications arising from this.

Recommendation 2

That MORI be invited to present the findings of the Place Survey to Corporate Management Team, Officers and all Members to demonstrate what are the current perceptions of the Council's services, where they stand in relation to councils with similar demographic and geographic characteristics and where the Council should actually be.

Financial Implications

£1,250 (+ VAT)

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

THEORY AND BEST PRACTICE ON SATISFACTION

The Task Group recognised the improvements that the Council had achieved in a relatively short space of time to turn around its overall performance. This achievement has been positively reflected in subsequent Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) reports, official recognition that the Council has come out of engagement and moved to "fair" council status.

A status of “excellence” requires a co-ordinated approach to the next level of service delivery. In many ways the Council is getting there already, however, from the research on the theory of marketing and building brands it was apparent to the Members of the Task Group that positive and regular communication played a vital role in both maintaining and improving residents’ satisfaction and raising the perception of the services delivered.

Recommendation 3

That a small corporate working group (officers) be set up to support the delivery of corporate communications in a standard style, (including strict brand management and style guidelines), for the Council’s priority campaigns and develop closer working with the lead teams so that the Communications Team are more involved from the beginning of campaigns.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to support this working group.

Recommendation 4

That internal communication is kept high on the agenda, particular in the light of the shared services and strict budget control. This should also include the regular communication of the Council’s achievements to staff.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation 4(a)

That in order to improve residents’ satisfaction with the Council’s services regular newsletters be provided to Parish Councils and businesses and Portfolio Holders along with Officers playing a greater visible role in their area of customer interface.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to support this.

Recommendation 4(b)

That a web design style is created that is user friendly and embraces the principles of writing in “plain English”.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

LOCAL PRACTICE AND LOCAL ISSUES

The Task Group looked at Streetscene and Community Services (the biggest department within the Council) and Customer Service, to identify measures that could be taken in order to enhance customer satisfaction.

It was again clear that the Council “under sells” its achievements and there are many quick and easy wins that can be done at little or no cost. Being proud of the every day services provided and letting the customer know who is behind them is the basis of good customer service, regularly demonstrated in the retail trade. From this point forward being satisfied with this and overall Council services becomes subliminal. Equally a bad experience in one service affects the overall perception of the Council, its staff and Members, even if they are totally unrelated.

Recommendation 5

That a review of the use of the Council’s crest and Building Pride logo be carried out in order to increase their usage and promote the message behind them throughout all Council departments and services.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

That the Communications Team work more closely with Cabinet, through the Communications Plan in order to identify any difficult decisions at an early stage in order to involve residents as soon as possible.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 7

That the Council Aim for Excellence with Customer Service, to include Customer

First parts 4, 5 and 6 and by providing the relevant training to all staff.

Financial Implications

The estimated cost of the award is £5,000.

Resource Implications

The new single management team will take account of this with the appointment of the new Head of Customer Service.

Recommendation 7 (a)

That the Director of Policy, Performance and Partnership and the new Head of Customer Service work together to co-ordinate detailed customer feedback on services from both external and internal customers, which will enable the Council to understand how they are doing, what they must do better, why particular services are not used or why customers may have stopped using the service.

Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

The new single management team will take account of this with the appointment of the new Head of Customer Service.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP

Membership of the Task Group was confirmed at the Scrutiny Board meeting held on 24th November 2009 and was made up of the following Councillors:

S. R. Colella (Chairman)
Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths
D. Hancox
Ms. H. J. Jones
C. R. Scurrall
C. J. Tidmarsh

The Task Group wishes to acknowledge the assistance received from the Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships and his team, who have helped the Task Group from the start of the investigations and all the way through to the end of the investigation when this report was finalised.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK GROUP

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 27th October 2009, it was decided a Task Group would be established to scrutinise issues relating to improving residents' satisfaction with the Council. Councillor S. R. Colella was also appointed as Chairman of the Task Group at this meeting.

The Task Group's terms of reference were approved by the Board at its meeting held on 24th November 2009. The full terms of reference are attached at **Appendix 1**. The Task Group was given 4 months (from the date of its first meeting) to complete its work.

Following publication of the results of the Place Survey 2008/09 conducted on behalf of the Audit Commission and a key tool for measuring satisfaction and perception, it was apparent that although residents were satisfied with the local area, this was not the case when asked if they were satisfied with the Council.

The aim of the task group was therefore to improve residents' satisfaction with the Council.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Task Group was to identify ways in which the Council could achieve higher levels of satisfaction amongst local residents. Residents' should be the main Council priority and Members felt there was a need to investigate the underlying reasons why some residents appeared to be "dissatisfied" and recommend ways in which the Council can improve both residents' perception of council services and their satisfaction levels. This was felt particularly important in the light of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) performance indications, which give greater focus and importance to these outputs.

Witnesses

The Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group worked closely with the Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships and the following officers provided the Task Group with information on specific areas; the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services, Communications and Customer First Manager, Marketing Officer, Senior Corporate Policy & Performance Officer.

Information was also provided by –

Ms. Fiona Narburgh, Head of Strategy and Communications (Wychavon District Council)

Mr. Peter John, Publisher (Stourbridge Division of Newsquest)

Mr. Bob Poston, Chairman (Rubery PACT)

Research

Task Group Members were provided with the following documentation –

Ipsos MORI Place Survey 2008/2009 carried out on behalf of the Audit Commission and a key tool for measuring satisfaction and perception.

Wychavon District Council Communications Strategy 2009/10 and Campaign Strategies 2009/10. As a neighbouring authority and with a similar demographic and geographical make-up, these documents were used as part of a benchmarking and comparison exercise.

Selby District Council Communications Strategy 2009/11. As a District Council with an excellent rating the Council have used Selby in the past for benchmarking our services and on this occasion were used as part of a comparison exercise.

Bromsgrove District Council Communications Strategy Review 2009/10. The Task Group compared the Council's Communications Strategy with that of excellent rated councils.

Areas Covered

There were a total of five Task Group meetings. During the first meeting a schedule of work was devised and the scoping checklist was considered and the following areas of investigation were agreed:

- Place Survey Analysis (to include a literature search and comparative analysis with Wychavon District Council and Selby District Council and segment analysis by age and economic group)
- Theory and Best Practice on Satisfaction (including a review and comparison of communication strategies, theory on marketing and an overview of the Mosaic tool)
- Local Practice and Local Issues (Customer Service including improvements that could enhance customer satisfaction and Leisure and Cultural Services including enhancement of customer satisfaction)

CHAPTER 1 - PLACE SURVEY ANALYSIS

The Council's 2008/09 Place Survey results, published in June 2009, are highly mixed. For certain issues, such as reducing aspects of crime and anti-social behaviour, and general satisfaction with the area, the District has shown substantial improvements and it outperforms Worcestershire overall in several areas, such as health and community cohesion. However, there has been a general decline in satisfaction with the Council and with the services it offers, often putting current satisfaction ratings lower than the average for all Districts surveyed by Ipsos MORI.

Bromsgrove is a good place to live. It is relatively wealthy, mostly rural, has good transport links, good quality schools and a Council that is officially recognised as improving. The 2008/09 Place Survey results show that whilst 81.2% of residents are satisfied with their local area; over the last 3 years satisfaction with the Council has fallen from 51% (2006/07) to 34% (2008/09).

The 34% level of satisfaction is 12 percentage points lower than the district council average of 46%. This very low level of satisfaction is supported by a range of other disappointing measures, for example the percentage of residents who think the Council delivers value for money is 23%, compared to a district average of 36%, 31% feeling informed about council services, compared to a district average of 38%.

The Council should be concerned about these figures. Whilst the Council has done well to improve its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) rating from "poor" to "fair", CPA has now been replaced by Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). MORI believe that CAA represents "a fundamental shift in emphasis" away from output measure, to measure of outcome and perceptions, about how people feel about the place in which they live. Eighteen of the new National Indicators (NIs) are now perception or satisfaction indicators, measured through the Place Survey. If the Council aspires to excellence, then it must understand how to influence these measures.

In January 2010 Ipsos MORI published a further report, "Mind the Gap". The aim of this report was to look at the Place Survey results and apply some contextual information to give an estimate of how well a local authority should have done within the Place Survey; a ranking was then produced based on what percentages should have been achieved. Based on this information MORI say that the Council should have scored the following:

Satisfaction with the local area					
Actual score	81%	MORI	86%	Gap	-5%
Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things					
Actual score	34%	MORI	49%	Gap	-15%
Agreement that the Council offers value for money					
Actual score	24%	MORI	36%	Gap	-12%

It is clear from these figures that residents do not relate their satisfaction with the area to anything which the Council does.

MORI does identify things we can do:

- **Local services really matter to a sense of place** (by local services, MORI invariably mean services provided by district councils).
- **Understand and target local priorities** (the Audit Commission scored the Council 3 out of 4 for prioritisation in the last Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which suggests the Council is doing well on this, but the MORI report also suggests that the Council look to use increasing numbers of measures which matter to its customers, rather than central government measures).
- **Communicate what councils are doing** and proactively seek views (MORI note that no councils rated well on communications are rated poorly overall. MORI also note that it must be “better communications that reach a much wider group”, which may be a particular problem in Bromsgrove District, given the local paper coverage across the District is fragmented. MORI also suggest that partnerships need to examine their respective communications and engagement programmes).
- **Parenting and respect** MORI note that focusing on young people and family/parental support seems to “yield particular dividends in resident satisfaction”. The Council was considering a young people’s equivalent to Together Bromsgrove, but the economic climate and expected reductions in revenue meant this budget bid was not successful.
- **Targeting individual neighbourhoods** (finally, the report identified that the Place Survey data was not sufficient for ward level analysis, but analysis at a sub-district level was possible and that this should be mapped. There are tools available for this analysis in the market). The mapping tool offered by MORI costs £3,000 and enables councils to overlay data on different areas and identify whether, for example, an area of low satisfaction has particularly low satisfaction with ASB, but higher levels of satisfaction with being informed, which would suggest a focus on the former.

The Council needs to understand what drives perception and satisfaction and focus on these. In the tightening financial climate this makes even more sense, as the ability to deliver new services will be reduced or severely hindered. MORI identify that many of the variations between levels of satisfaction with an area and with a council are beyond the Council’s control, for example, deprivation, ethnicity, how young the population is etc. Bromsgrove District has a noticeable

statistical anomaly in that its older people seem relatively less satisfied than neighbouring districts in Worcestershire.

There are drivers of perception over which the Council has direct control or some influence. These include: area satisfaction, crime and liveability (ASB, open spaces, waste collection, car parks), how the Council delivers services (customer service and equalities) and information to residents. MORI recommend a focus on “highly visible issues” and on information, rather than community engagement.

Despite the Council’s clear improvement in recent years, it has had a difficult recent past, both in terms of performance and Member/Member relations. The Council has also had a recent history of taking difficult political decisions, for example, increasing car parking charges, charging for green waste and closing the museum. It is inevitable that these “highly visible issues” will feed through into the satisfaction with the Council. These decisions have been important to re-align the budget to the Council priorities, but the Council has yet to deliver highly visible outcomes on our new priorities e.g. the town centre, train station or climate change etc.

Improved communications will help, but improving the Council’s satisfaction rating is more fundamental than improved communications. The Council needs a better story to communicate.

The Task Group therefore recommend the following:

Recommendation 1

That Cabinet note that achieving a high level of satisfaction is a combination of visible outcomes, good customer service, regular, clear communication and public engagement and requires all aspects of the Council to be fully committed and working to the same outcomes.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications arising from this.

Recommendation 2

That MORI be invited to present the findings of the Place Survey to Corporate Management Team, Officers and all Members to demonstrate what are the current perceptions of the Council’s services, where they stand in relation to councils with similar demographic and geographic characteristics and where the Council should actually be.

Financial Implications

£1,250 (+ VAT)

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

CHAPTER 2 - THEORY AND BEST PRACTICE ON SATISFACTION

Task Group Members requested a review and comparison of BDC's communications strategy with that of "excellent" councils, together with information on key marketing principles and how applying those principles could help BDC's objective of improving residents' satisfaction. Members also felt it would be useful to have an overview of the Mosaic Tool.

Communications Strategy Review

Selby District Council (SDC) and Wychavon District Council (WDC) were ranked 'excellent' under CPA and since the new CAA scores were announced, Selby has still maintained its position in the top ranking. As a neighbouring authority and with a similar demographic and geographical make-up WDC provided a good benchmarking opportunity. As Ipsos MORI suggested a link between how informed residents were and a Council's subsequent CPA/CAA ranking, a comparison of the communications strategy with those of WDC and SDC was felt to be useful.

Whilst BDC's strategy mirrors a lot that WDC and SDC do, it appears that the basics are right using less resource. BDC's strategy was robust, covered a wide range of areas and subjects and boasted detailed operational action plans. WDC and SDC's strategic communications plans were shorter and less detailed, and did not contain action plans. The difference seemed to be that at those councils all communications are managed centrally, in a single strategic context. Operational tactics and actions come in a level down from that strategic context but are then passed back through the centralised communications for delivery to the customer. The management of communications at BDC was not the same, with several interlinked but autonomous departmental communications strategies in place. This fragmented approach still had a single impact and that was on the reputation and image of the Council. If the message is not delivered correctly it seemed to be 'implausible' or even 'dishonest' putting the Council into further disrepute.

From both of these strategies there are some useful actions which can be implemented, for example:

- Targeted newsletters
- Reaching out to 'out of town' centres
- Design and create information stands and expand on road shows and community events.
- Promote and establish a standardised centralised communications strategy through a small CMT working group

Most importantly the creation of a consistent and timely communications strategy that all departments fed into and adhered to would be imperative to enhance the Council's reputation and so residents' satisfaction. This would become even

more prevalent as the Council moves forward with the Shared Services Agenda with Redditch Borough Council.

Marketing Communications

From the information provided to the Task Group it was noticeable that the matter of improving satisfaction levels was a key marketing issue and National Indicators (NI) were obviously a key measure of the Council's success. The Council scored well and above national benchmarks on NIs, which means that addressing dissatisfaction with the Council's performance was not necessarily connected to improving actual performance but was more of a perception issue.

In terms of the Council's corporate profile, BDC worked to ensure the local press profile indicator (LPI - CCPP12) was as positive as possible. The Council was overwhelmingly successful in this regard. Between April and December of 2009 less than 8% of actual press articles related to BDC were negative in nature, disregarding the almost universally negative letters pages (which were measured against a different NI). The majority of the 8% negative stories were politically motivated rather than actual service issues.

A measured strategic approach to wider consultation and public engagement would ensure more effective resource management and begin to breakdown difficult to reach audiences and dilute the suspicion that exists in certain quarters. This is achievable by utilising the wide variety of media channels, events and customer interfaces in conjunction with a more visible staff, CMT and Portfolio relationship with residents. A particularly strong message that came from witnesses was how important it was to see senior officers, staff and Portfolio Holders on the 'shop floor', 'front of house' or 'walking the floor'.

Co-ordinating marketing and communications around key decisions within Council plans at the earliest opportunity would alleviate and tackle the view that the Council tells the public what has happened rather than asking what should happen. Throughout the Task Group's work a clear message emerged. By simply informing residents or stakeholder what was going to happen results in wide spread misunderstanding and criticism. By explaining the issue in more detail and involving the residents or stakeholders at an early stage, gives them a greater understanding and acceptance of the decision making process. There are many benefits to be had from the Council bringing people in and working through disagreements and misconceptions early on, allowing them to understand how people feel and acting appropriately.

Overview of the Mosaic Tool

The Task Group were provided with information on Mosaic Public Sector which is a classification system that provides a comprehensive, up-to-date and needs based view of society down to a household level, enabling policy decisions, communications and resources to be targeted and applied where most relevant or effective. Data comes from a wide range of public and private sources and is

updated annually, giving greater insight into the nature and needs of residents. It is also a widely used classification across the public sector, which allowed for residents to be viewed in the same way by different bodies, which will assist joined-up and partnership working.

In the Council Plan 2010-13 a high priority budget bid was successful, which will enable the Corporate Communications Team to purchase Mosaic for 1 year. In Mosaic, the Council will have access to a valuable tool for understanding the demographic of its district(s) which will have a positive effect on service delivery and public perception and satisfaction. It will assist in providing value for money through cost savings or channel shifts, as service development, communications and policy will be able to utilise up-to-date and segmented information, which will be crucial in implementing potential budget changes.

The Task Group therefore recommend the following:

Recommendation 3

That a small corporate working group (officers) to be set up to support the delivery of corporate communications in a standard style, (including strict brand management and style guidelines), for the Council's priority campaigns and develop closer working with the lead teams so that the Communications Team are more involved from the beginning of campaigns.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to support this group.

Recommendation 4

That internal communication is kept high on the agenda, particular in the light of the shares services and strict budget control. This should also include the regular communication of the Council's achievements to staff.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

No significant resource implications are envisaged.

Recommendation 4(a)

That in order to improve residents' satisfaction with the Council's services regular newsletters be provided to Parish Councils and businesses and

Portfolio Holders along with Officers playing a greater visible role in their area of customer interface.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required to support this.

Recommendation 4(b)

That a web design style is created that is user friendly and embraces the principals of writing in “plain English”.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

CHAPTER 3 - LOCAL PRACTICE AND LOCAL ISSUES

The Task Group looked at Streetscene and Community Services (the biggest department within the Council) and Customer Service to identify measures that could be taken in order to enhance customer satisfaction.

The Task Group was informed that the Council had previously been focused on moving from a “poor” to “fair” rating. This has meant that it had concentrated on corporate governance, systems, procedures and budget management, none of which were of particular interest to residents. It was expected that the Council would have these in place as a matter of course. In essence, 10 years of bad news had been compressed into 3 years. The Council was now progressing well and receiving positive feedback, had reached a period where it had the opportunity to build on that reputation and image because much of the bad news has now been dealt with. Although it is important for the Council to remember how far it had come in a short period of time, it must demonstrate continued forward motion and learn from the past. The Council was now “ahead of the game” in terms of its financial management with cost savings and efficiencies through the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier system (WETT) and Shared Services. A firm platform has been created from which to deliver a programme of visible changes that are likely to improve satisfaction, in the long term.

Taking the authority towards a status of excellence and improved customer satisfaction will require support and direction from a recognised customer service standard. This will include working towards the Customer Service Excellence award, which will drive a culture of excellence within the organisation and provide ongoing training, which will involve Customer First parts 4, 5 and 6.

From the information provided to the Task Group and from listening to various witnesses, it was apparent that the Council needs to interact more with residents. This could involve the production of an Engagement Planner which will include priorities, deliverables and budgetary requirements, and allow the authority to identify potential problems and engage with residents at an earlier stage in the decision making process. The Council could also be much clearer with residents as to how they can get involved. The Council will shortly be producing an Older People’s Services directory and should look at producing a similar directory or magazine for Children and Young People or make greater use of local media (radio and newspaper ‘wrap rounds’ etc) to cover current issues and provide relevant information for residents. It was also noted that face to face contact with residents’ was one of the most effective ways of changing perception, for example stalls in the high street and using the Bromsgrove District Housing Trust bus to take information out into the rural areas more frequently would be an excellent way of reaching the “wider audience”.

The current Communication Plan that is considered by the Corporate Management Team should be reviewed to take account of campaigns in the future which will then give a greater opportunity to plan in advance.

Members of the Task Group were advised that they should be cautious of surveys which asked questions about services provided as often people responded negatively even if they did not use the service. A good example of this related to the use of the Dolphin Centre, the Sport England Active Places survey showed a 55% satisfaction rate with people who used the services, which is higher than the Place Survey, as it was specific to people who used the facility and again when a survey was completed by the Dolphin Centre itself this increased to over 80%.

The Task Group recognised this as an excellent way of measuring customer (resident or user) satisfaction and recommends that a similar approach be adopted throughout the authority to measure the service delivery between both internal and external customers. Once measured this allows further enhancements to training or system appraisal.

It was felt that it would be appropriate for a piece of work to be carried out, across the authority, on understanding why people do not use some services in order to maximise attendance or use of services and improve satisfaction further. Members were also advised that residents in other areas of the district would, particularly in respect of leisure facilities, not always use facilities provided by BDC and therefore they may be commenting negatively on a survey for BDC about a service which BDC had not provided. It is therefore important that the authority recognises the need for localised survey and intelligence information.

The Task Group therefore recommend the following:

Recommendation 5

That a review of the use of the Council's crest and Building Pride logo be carried out in order to increase their usage and promote the message behind them throughout all Council departments and services.

Financial Implications

No significant financial implications are envisaged.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

That the Communications Team work more closely with Cabinet, through the Communications Plan in order to identify any difficult decisions at an early stage in order to involve residents as soon as possible.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

Officer time will be required in order to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 7

That the Council aim for Excellence with Customer Service, to include Customer First parts 4, 5 and 6 and by providing the relevant training to all staff.

Financial Implications

The estimated cost of the award is £5,000.

Resource Implications

The new single management team will take account of this with the appointment of the new Head of Customer Service.

Recommendation 7 (a)

That the Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships and the new Head of Customer Service work together to co-ordinate detailed customer feedback on services from both external and internal customers, which will enable the Council to understand how they are doing, what they must do better, why particular services are not used or why customers may have stopped using the service.

Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications arising from this.

Resource Implications

The new single management team will take account of this with the appointment of the new Head of Customer Service.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group was:

- To carry out a scrutiny exercise to explore options to improve residents' perception of and satisfaction with the Council and the services it provides;
 - This was successfully achieved with a recommendation to enhance the reputation of the Council through wider public engagement and consultation with a particular emphasis on a corporate buy-in and re-building the 'pride' logo throughout the authority's services.
- To understand why there is a 15% gap in the satisfaction rate with the Council even when inflated for local circumstances;
 - It has been recognised that the Council has 'suffered' in the perception stakes because of the difficult decisions taken over the last 5 or 6 years.
- To consider whether the Council was concerned about the low level of satisfaction?
 - The recent changes to how the Council is measured against its peers mean that there is an absolute need for the authority to strive towards excellent status. Recent experience of a failing Council is still very clear and is still a regular reminder from its critics.
- If they are, produce a programme that delivers an improved satisfaction level in a way that the Council know will have an impact.
 - This will be through delegated duties to the CMT who will cascade the recommendations down through all levels of the Council and equally through all Portfolio Holders and Cabinet. An update will be reported back to the Task Group and Overview and Scrutiny Boards as part of the annual update.

Bibliography

1. Place Survey 2008/2009

The Council has recently received the results of the national Place Survey, conducted on behalf of the Audit Commission and a key tool for measuring satisfaction and perception.

2. Ipsos MORI Local People, Perceptions and Place (June 2009)

This is a national report on the initial Place Survey results.

3. The State of Worcestershire

This is a more specific report by MORI on the results for the six districts and County Council in Worcestershire.

4. Mind the Gap: Frontiers of Performance in Local Government V

Analyses based on the findings of the 2008/09 Place Surveys. This report applied contextual information to give an estimate of where a local authority should be within the Place Survey; a ranking was then produced based on what percentages should have been achieved.

5. Wychavon District Council Communications Strategy 2009/10

6. Wychavon District Council Campaign Strategies 2009/10

As a neighbouring authority and with a similar demographic and geographical make-up, this was used as part of a benchmarking exercise.

7. Selby District Council Communications Strategy 2009/11

As a District Council with an excellent rating we have used Selby in the past for benchmarking our services.

8. Bromsgrove District Council Communications Strategy Review 2009/10

IMPROVING RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION TASK GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE TASK GROUP

The attached scrutiny exercise scoping checklist, which will act as the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group's terms of reference, was approved by the Scrutiny Board, as follows:

- An understanding of the statistics behind the current levels of satisfaction
- An understanding of good practice in delivery and high levels of satisfaction
- Understand the causes of dissatisfaction for particular customer segments
- Identify solutions based on further research



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EXERCISE SCOPING CHECKLIST

This form is to assist Members to scope the overview and scrutiny exercise in a focused way and to identify the key issues it wishes to investigate.

- Topic: **Improving Residents' Satisfaction**

- Specific subject areas to be investigated:

- An understanding of the statistics behind the current levels of satisfaction
- An understanding of good practice in delivery and high levels of satisfaction
- Understand the causes of dissatisfaction for particular customer segments
- Identify solutions based on further research

- Possible key outcomes:

(i.e. please state what Members hope to achieve through this investigation):

- A set of recommendations based on the segments looked at that would identify priorities
- A possible corporate marketing plan
- A possible approach to be used continually
- To improve resident satisfaction over the medium term

- Should the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) be invited to give evidence? **YES**

- Which officers should be invited to give evidence?

(Please state name of officer and/or job title)

This would be dependent upon initial literature search and outcomes of investigation.

- Should any external witnesses be invited to give evidence?

YES/NO*

If so, who and from which organisations?

To be identified as the investigation progresses.

- What key documents/data/reports will be required?

Place Survey, Customer Panel, Focus Groups, National Comparative Statistics and Reports, Complaints system data, Ward data

- Is it anticipated that any site visits will be required? **YES/NO ***
If so, where should members visit?

It may emerge through the literature search that a visit is relevant.

- Should a period of public consultation form part of the exercise? **YES**
If so, on what should the public be consulted?

This will be done through the use of a focus group or similar resource.

(Please Note: A separate press release requesting general comments/suggestions from the public will be issued in the normal way at the beginning of the investigation.)

- Have other authorities carried out similar overview and scrutiny exercises? **NO**
If so, which authorities?

- Will the investigation cross the District boundary?
YES/NO*
If so, should any other authorities be invited to participate?
YES/NO*
If yes, please state which authorities:

There may be some overlap with services provide at county level.

- Would it be appropriate to co-opt anyone on to the Task Group/Board whilst the Overview and Scrutiny exercise is being carried out? **NO**
If so, who and from which organisations?

- What do you anticipate the timetable will be for the Overview and Scrutiny exercise?

It is anticipated that the investigation will take 4 months.



**This report can be provided
in large print, braille, CD, audio tape
and computer disc.**



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