

Executive – 12 July 2007

SOUNDING BOARD SURVEY 9 – RESULTS

Report of the Head of Improvement

Statutory Powers: Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000

Financial Implications: In addition to staff time, the cost of conducting this survey was in the region of £5,000, which includes internal printing of the survey and external administration of the survey and analysis plus the printing of and issuing to all members a cover letter and a Sounding Board newsletter.

Purpose

1. This report provides members with an overview of the results of Sounding Board survey 9.

Links with Council Priorities and Commitments

2. Consulting the South Hams Citizens' Panel, Sounding Board, supports the Council's priority to *improve the well-being of the people of the South Hams* and achievement of the six corporate priorities. It also supports the Council's commitment to *communication, consultation and openness* and *community involvement and community vibrancy*.

Recommendation

That Executive CONSIDERS AND COMMENTS on the results of Sounding Board Survey 9 and in particular the improvement in the percentage of respondents who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area.

Background

3. The South Hams Citizens' Panel, Sounding Board, was established in 2002 as a means of consulting a representative sample of South Hams residents about a variety of issues affecting them and their local area.
4. There are currently 947 panel members who have agreed to take part in regular Sounding Board surveys. The panel is largely representative of the wider South Hams population in terms of age, ethnicity and gender and is refreshed every three years.
5. We are currently committed to issuing two surveys a year to Sounding Board members. We also provide regular feedback to panel members on the outcomes of previous consultation exercises and inform panel members of additional consultation that is taking place that they might be interesting in taking part in, for example local focus group meetings.

The Survey

6. Sounding Board survey 9 was approved by the Strategic Management Team and comprises questions relating to Quality of Life in the District. The survey largely comprised questions recommended by the Audit Commission, including questions which inform Quality of Life Indicators no longer collected by the statutory General Satisfaction Survey.
7. The survey was issued to all Sounding Board members in November 2006. A reminder letter was also issued to help boost replies. In total 628 replies were received, giving a response rate of 66%.
8. The results from the survey will be used by Community Development to inform the "State of the District" report contained within the Sustainable Community Strategy, and by the Improvement Unit, to build a profile of the District. This information will be available to council service areas and will be used as context information for future Council Performance Plans. The results will also be useful in relation to work surrounding the recent Local Government White Paper, within which local leadership, neighbourhoods and empowering communities are key themes.

Survey results

9. The full survey data and results have not been included with this report due to their length (82 pgs), but are available in the Members Room and on the Internet.
10. The survey results largely paint a positive picture regarding quality of life in the South Hams. Some of the key findings are reproduced below:
 - In respect of changes to quality of life, access to the environment was the aspect for which the greatest number of respondents indicated that there had been improvements over the last three years, followed by activities for teenagers and community services.
 - The top three aspects that affect people's quality of life for which respondents believed there had been most deterioration in the last three years, were the level of traffic congestion, wage levels and the cost of living and the level of anti-social behaviour.
 - The quality of life area deemed to be most in need of improvement was affordable housing; this reflects the Council's Corporate Priority to secure a supply of housing for local people at affordable levels.
 - There was little perception of discrimination in the South Hams, particularly with regard to ethnic or religious communities, gender or sexual orientation. Age was the category that received the highest number of people who thought there was discrimination (13%).
 - The journeys that people use their vehicles for most are recreation, main shopping trips and work. The journeys that people are more likely to walk for are trips to the park, local shop and post office.

- Most respondents thought that SHDC keeps them informed to some degree, with a fifth saying that they did so ‘a great deal’ (21%) and over half saying ‘to some extent’ (60%). Furthermore, over a half of respondents indicated that SHDC involves residents and takes their views into account when making decisions (56%).
- 72% of respondents agreed with the statement “By working together, people in my neighbourhood can influence decisions that affect the neighbourhood”. In 2004, the percentage of respondents who agreed that people could influence decisions affecting their local area was 30% - giving an overall rise of 42% of respondents indicating that they agree they have an influence in their local area.

Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
The Council is not engaging with a diverse range of residents and ensuring that all residents, including young people and people with disabilities, have an equal opportunity to take part in council consultations.	Head of Improvement to review the council’s existing approach to consultation and consider new means of surveying opinion e.g. random sample surveys, telephone/email surveys, targeted consultation.
Continuing to consult the Citizens’ Panel, Sounding Board, is not seen as an effective use of Council resources (reference the costs outlined on page 1).	Head of Improvement to review use of Sounding Board to ensure that it remains an effective use of Council resources and that this consultation meets Corporate requirements.

Conclusion

11. The survey results provide a useful snapshot of residents’ views of living in the South Hams area. The results have been considered by the council’s Strategic Management Team and feedback will be provided to Sounding Board residents through a Sounding Board newsletter. Feedback will also be provided on the council’s web-based consultation tool Consultation Finder. Comments from Executive Members will be included within feedback, at Members’ request.

Roger Nicholson
Head of Improvement

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Background Documents: