

Report To: Policy and Resources Committee

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**Report By: Corporate Director
Improvement and Performance**

Report No: POL/38/09/PW/LF

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Subject: Results from Third Citizens' Panel Survey

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with details of the headline results from the third Citizens' Panel Survey.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 The third Citizens' Panel survey was conducted in Spring 2009 with a final report received in late June 2009. It was not possible to report these findings to members before the summer recess.

2.2 The Survey covered a range of topics. Questions about the impact of the credit crunch were included in the Survey to inform the work of the Economic Downturn Working Group. In addition, questions were incorporated into the Survey at the request of services.

2.3 The questionnaire was organised around the following issues:

- Street cleaning
- Grounds maintenance
- Managing your money
- Financial information and advice
- Council Tax and Benefits
- The Council's Website
- The Council's Magazine InView
- Youth work

2.4 A total of 617 Panel members completed and returned a questionnaire. This is a response rate of 62% which is very good for this method of consultation. The first survey carried out in December 2007 and the second in June 2008 also received a response rate of 62%. This indicates that interest and willingness to participate in the Panel is still high amongst current members. To ensure that participation remains high membership of the Panel will be refreshed in September 2009.

2.5 Overall, the results from the survey are very encouraging, Appendix 1 provides a full summary. It should also be highlighted that the results compare well with surveys carried out by other local authorities on similar issues.

2.6 This report only provides details of the headline results from the survey. It highlights some of the positive results that have emerged and also areas where further action will be required. It will be the responsibility of each Directorate to take appropriate action to address key issues that impact on their services which have come out of the survey.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- a. Note the content of this report.
- b. Agree that services take appropriate action to address issues raised in the survey.

Paul Wallace
Corporate Director
Improvement and Performance

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The third Citizens' Panel survey was carried out in Spring 2009. The survey covered a range of topics. Questions about the impact of the credit crunch were included in the survey to inform the work of the Economic Downturn Working Group. In addition, questions were incorporated into the survey at the request of services. These included street cleaning, grounds maintenance, Council Tax and Benefits and youth work.

4.2 As with the previous two Citizens' Panel surveys that have been undertaken, a number of positive results were obtained that portray the Council in a positive light and demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with service delivery.

- 69% of all respondents said they were either fairly or very satisfied with the standard of street cleaning in the main town and villages in Inverclyde and 66% were satisfied with the standard of street cleaning where they live.
- 63% were satisfied with the provision and servicing of litter bins.
- 77% said they were satisfied with the appearance and maintenance of parks in Inverclyde and 70% were satisfied with the appearance and maintenance of open spaces.
- 77% of respondents who have contacted the Council Tax and Benefits Office were satisfied with the length of time they had to wait and 72% were satisfied with the response they received to their enquiry and the overall quality of service they received.
- 76% of respondents who have used the Council's website said it was either quite easy or very easy to find what they were looking for.
- 82% of respondents said that they receive the Council magazine InView and 72% think that InView is either good or excellent.

6.0 KEY ISSUES

6.1 Street Cleaning

A set of questions about street cleaning were asked in the survey in order to assess the opinion of Inverclyde residents as to how well we are delivering services, assess how important street cleaning services are to residents and to highlight areas where we need to improve.

- Satisfaction with the standard of street cleaning in the main town and village centres in Inverclyde is fairly high, with 69% of respondents expressing their satisfaction. Similarly, satisfaction with the provision and servicing of litter bins in the main town and villages in Inverclyde is also high quite high with 63% of respondents satisfied.
- Respondents were also asked to consider the standard of street cleaning in the area in which they live. Satisfaction with street cleaning was highest in Kilmacolm (78%) and lowest in Inverkip (54%). Dissatisfaction was significantly higher in Wemyss Bay (32%), followed by Greenock (27%).
- When asked about the provision and servicing of litter bins in the area in which they live, satisfaction was also highest in Kilmacolm (62%), followed by Gourrock (56%). Respondents who stay in Wemyss Bay (58%) and Port Glasgow (42%) were most dissatisfied.
- Dissatisfaction with the provision and servicing of dog bins was significantly higher. Respondents who stay in Port Glasgow were most dissatisfied (54%) followed by Wemyss Bay (48%) and Greenock (47%).

Service Commentary

The areas where concern has been expressed about street cleaning standards will be monitored and, where appropriate, resources will be allocated to deal with any issues as they arise. Dog bin numbers rise year on year and requests for dog bins are usually met within a reasonable time frame.

6.2 Grounds Maintenance

A set of questions about street cleaning were asked in the survey in order to assess the opinion of Inverclyde residents as to how well we are delivering services, assess how important grounds maintenance services are to residents and to highlight areas where we need to improve.

- Satisfaction with the appearance and maintenance of parks in Inverclyde was very high with 77% of respondents stating they were either very or fairly satisfied. 70% of respondents also expressed their satisfaction the appearance and maintenance of open spaces in Inverclyde. While only 39% said they were satisfied with the provision and maintenance of sports pitches in Inverclyde.
- The provision of children's play areas was deemed to be an important service by 83% of respondents who completed the questionnaire. 76% stated that floral displays in prominent locations were important and 67% said that the provision of sports pitches was important.

Service Commentary

Play area investment of £250K is underway, including the formulation of a Play Area Strategy. A £23M package of sports investment, including installation of 3G field turf pitches and improvements to Ravenscraig Stadium, are now underway.

6.3 Managing your money

A series of questions were included about the current credit crunch to find out how it is affecting Inverclyde residents. The purpose of asking these questions was to inform the work of the Economic Downturn Working Group.

- The majority of respondents have either been affected by the credit crunch or expect to be affected in the future. 25% have been significantly affected, 19% have been affected a little and 41% expect to be affected before long. Losing their job is the main factor that people are concerned about (38%), rising food costs was a worry for 22% and 21% were worried about petrol costs.
- Just under half of all respondents (46%) said that they would get through the recession, 35% believed it would be tough but they would survive and 19% said they would be affected in a more significant way.
- When respondents were asked how well they think they manage their money, 25% said they are getting into difficulties. 28% said they have difficulty managing their fuel bills.
- The top five issues that respondents said have caused them financial difficulties included unemployment / redundancy (18%), income not enough to cover all expenses (15%), ill health / disabilities (11%), retirement (8%) and problems managing money (6%).

Service Commentary

The Council is taking the lead in a Scotland wide initiative that will help to ensure that people are aware of the advice, banking and affordable credit services that are available to them and which will help them to get through the credit crunch. The aims of the Financial Champions Scheme for Scotland is to:

- Increase access to banking and affordable credit
- Increase access to face to face advice
- Increase uptake of financial products such as home insurance, Child Trust Funds etc.

A working group has been established to consider the impact of the economic downturn on the Council and services. The results from the Citizens' Panel will be taken forward by the working group.

6.4 Financial information and advice

- The majority of respondents (58%) said they have not sought any advice about money matters in the past couple of years. Of the 42% who had sought financial, the majority contacted either a bank, financial advisor or a building society.
- Advice on welfare benefits, more information about financial matters and advice about money matters were the main issues that respondents said they would be interested in.
- Loans at a low interest rate (21%), advice on financial management (18%), convenient savings facilities (17%), financial services for low income levels (13%) and volunteering opportunities (13%) are the most popular services that people would like provided at a local level.
- 30% of respondents said they were not confident they were receiving all the different tax and welfare benefits that they might be entitled to.
- 53% of respondents said they were not aware of the local Credit Unions in Inverclyde.

Service Commentary

Money Matters Inverclyde provides free, confidential and impartial financial advice and helps people to learn to manage their money better. Money Matters has experienced an increase in demand for its services, particularly from people finding it difficult to refinance existing arrangements.

Social Work is Working with the Department of Work and Pensions to develop other methods of obtaining credit for people who are paying really high interest rates.

Every new social work case has a regular financial assessment to ensure full take-up of benefits and every new social work service user is offered the opportunity of a full financial assessment.

6.5 Council Tax and Benefits

- A quarter of all respondents said they had contacted the Council Tax or Benefits Office in the last 12 months and the majority of people did so with regard to Council Tax (82%) followed by Benefits (29%). The most popular means of contacting the Council Tax or Benefits Office was by telephone (59%), followed by in person at customer service office in Wallace Place (36%).
- The majority of people who contacted Council Tax and Benefits (77%) were satisfied with the length of time they had to wait for their enquiry to be dealt with, 72% were satisfied with the response they received to their enquiry and overall quality of service they received.

Service Commentary

Revenues and Benefits relocated its front line customer service provision to Wallace Place in October 2007. This has made the service more accessible to customers particularly those with mobility issues or prams. Waiting times have been reduced which is reflected in the results shown above. Revenues and Benefits delivery of customer service will change further in the future as it will be the first area affected by the roll out of the Customer Service Review/Future Operating Model. Further research on customer requirements such as preferred opening hours will be carried out with customers and relevant stakeholders.

6.6 Website

- 42% of respondents said they had visited the Council's website, with the majority of them (74%) having used it just once or twice. The most popular reasons for visiting the website are to get information (59%), for news (29%), events information (23%) and job vacancies (22%).
- The majority of people who have used the website (76%) found it easy to find what they were looking for. However, 22% said it either took them sometime to find what they were looking for or that they found it difficult.
- Respondents told us that the most useful features on the Council's website are information on Council services (36%), news (36%), events (26%), job vacancies (23%) and education and schools (20%).
- The most popular features or facilities that respondents said they would like to see on the Council's web site are to be able to pay for certain Council services online (32%), GIS mapping (26%) and interactive services (23%).
- A high percentage (69%) of respondents said that if the Council offered online payments on the website they would use this service if it was free. Only 5% would use it if there was a small charge.

Service Commentary

Corporate Communications and Public Affairs is pleased with the results from the panel in regards to the website. Our Web Development Strategy addresses the future direction of the Council website, including making it more visible and high profile for the public and ensuring it is seen as a positive source of information and news about the Council. The issue of paying for transactions is also addressed by the Web Development Strategy and this will form part of its next stage of development.

6.7 InView

A number of questions were asked about the Council's magazine InView to find out what Panel members think of it and to help inform the future direction of the magazine. The feedback obtained was very positive.

- The majority of respondents (82%) said that they received InView. Of those, 40% read it cover to cover, 14% read selected articles while 46% do not read it at all.
- News updates are by far the most popular articles that people read (62%), followed by features (41%) and the A-Z of services (26%).
- The majority of respondents (72%) think that InView is either good or excellent and 27% think that it is fair.

Service Commentary

It is extremely encouraging to see that more than 80% of people received InView as we go to great lengths to ensure it is delivered as far and wide as possible within Inverclyde. Corporate Communications and Public Affairs have taken on board the comments from the panel and will focus future editions around the areas that people enjoy reading. We are delighted that 72% of respondents found InView either good or excellent with another 27% rating it fair.

6.8 Youth Work

A series of questions were asked about the range of youth work activities provided by the Council. The reason for asking these questions was to obtain feedback on improvements that could be made to existing youth work provision.

- There is scope to improve awareness of youth work activities that are available. 47% of respondents said they were aware of school holiday play schemes, 39% are aware of youth clubs in local community centres, 28% of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, 21% know of drop in centres and only 6% said they were aware of detached youth workers.
- A very small percentage (4%) take part in any youth work initiatives as a volunteer or helper.
- The majority of respondents (61%) said that there are not enough youth work facilities.
- The majority of respondents agreed that youth work is beneficial to the local community. 60% said it gives young people something to do in the evenings, 59% agreed that it provides a safe environment for young people to socialise and 57% said that it reduces vandalism and anti-social behaviour amongst young people.

Service Commentary

- The Big Lottery Funding recently awarded to the CLD Partnership will allow their website inver-cld to be refreshed and then used more effectively to promote CLD opportunities, including youth work provision by the Council.
- One strand of Inverclyde's bid to the Future Jobs Fund will create job opportunities in youth work for local people.
- The Service is exploring the potential to gain priority access to school facilities out of school hours to offset the loss of youth wings and dedicated premises for youth work associated with school re-provisioning.
- The Service and the CLD Partnership has successfully applied to the Cashback for Communities fund to support the provision of summer programmes and diversionary weekend activities over the winter months.
- The findings of the Citizens Panel will be taken to the next meeting of the CLD Strategy Group and a partnership response discussed and agreed.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance

None

7.2 Personnel

None

7.3 Legal

None

7.4 Equality and Diversity

The Citizens' Panel is representative of the population of Inverclyde in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability.

8.0 CONSULTATION

8.1 All services were fully consulted in the development of the Citizens' Panel survey and the results will be widely disseminated to ensure that appropriate action is taken to address issues of concern.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 Citizens' Panel Spring 2009 Report.

Appendix 1: Summary of Citizens' Panel Results

Street Cleaning

Just over two thirds (69%) of all respondents said that they were either fairly or very satisfied with the standard of street cleaning in the main town and village centres in Inverclyde. A further 15% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 18% said they were dissatisfied.

Sixty three percent of respondents are either fairly or very satisfied with the provision and servicing of litter bins in the main town and village centres in Inverclyde. Fourteen percent of respondents are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and just under a quarter (23%) are dissatisfied.

Respondents were then asked to consider the standard of street cleaning and litter bins in the area in which they live. Two thirds (66%) of all respondents said that they were fairly or very satisfied with the standard of street cleaning where they live. Ten percent of all respondents said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 24% said they were dissatisfied with the standard of street cleaning where they live.

The level of satisfaction with regard to the provision and servicing of litter bins in the area in which people live is lower than for the main towns and villages of Inverclyde. Fifty percent of respondents are satisfied with the bins in their local area compared to 63% in the main towns and villages. Just over a third of all respondents said they were dissatisfied with the provision of litter bins in the area in which they live and 14% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Less than a quarter (24%) of all respondents said they were satisfied with the provision and servicing of dog bins in the area where they live. Just under a third (31%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 45% said they are dissatisfied with the provision and servicing of dog bins in the area where they live.

Most people (94%) said that they agreed that the Council should issue fixed penalties (currently £50) to people who drop litter. Four percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 2% disagreed .

Similarly, to the responses regarding fines for dropping litter, 98% of respondents agreed that the Council should issue fixed penalties (currently £40) to people who don't clean up after their dogs. Two percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% said that they disagreed.

Most people (94%) said that they agreed that fast food retailers should be responsible for keeping the area around their shops free of litter. Three percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 3% disagreed that this should be the case.

Similarly, to the above statement, 88% of respondents thought that schools should be responsible for keeping the surrounding area free of litter during term time. Seven percent disagreed with this and 5% said that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Forty percent of respondents said that they have noticed an improvement in pavements in town centres as a result of the Council using specialised equipment to remove chewing gum from pavements in town centres.

Ground Maintenance

Seventy seven percent of respondents said that they were either fairly or very satisfied with the appearance and maintenance of parks in Inverclyde. Twelve percent said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and a further 12% said they were dissatisfied.

A similar number of people (70%) said they were satisfied with the appearance and maintenance of public open spaces in Inverclyde. Fourteen percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 15% said they were dissatisfied with the appearance and maintenance of public spaces.

When asked about the provision and maintenance of sports pitches in Inverclyde, a significant number of respondents said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This probably means that they have little awareness of the condition of sports pitches. Thirty nine percent of respondents are satisfied with the provision and maintenance of sports pitches and a further 23% are dissatisfied.

Respondents were asked to consider how important they felt a variety of aspects of the grounds maintenance service were. The three issues to be considered were sports pitches, children's play areas and floral displays in prominent areas. The greatest number of people (83%) thought that the provision of children's plays areas was important. This is followed by 76% of people who stated that floral displays in prominent locations were important. Finally, 67% respondents said that the provision of sports pitches were important.

Managing your money

At the time of the research 25% of respondents indicated that they have been significantly affected by the credit crunch. A further 19% said that they have been affected a little and 41% expect to be affected before long. The remaining 16% say they haven't been affected at all

The main factor that people are concerned with most with regard to the credit crunch is losing their job, with 38% of respondents saying this. This is followed by rising food costs (22%) and petrol costs (21%).

In general, just under half (46%) indicated that they would get through the recession, a further 35% said that "it'll be tough but we should survive". The remaining 19% said they would be affected in a more significant way.

Just over two thirds (67%) of all respondents said that they are currently managing their money well. In contrast to this, 25% of all respondents said that they were getting into difficulties.

Ninety six percent of all respondents said that they had a bank account.

Almost two thirds (64%) of all respondents said that they find it either quite or very easy to manage their fuel bills at the moment. A further 28% have some difficulty and 5% state that it is very difficult.

Overall, the most popular method of paying fuel bills is by direct debit/standing order, with 69% of all respondents paying in this manner. This drops to 54% among people living in the worst 15% of datazones and rises to 77% among respondents in the rest of Inverclyde. In contrast to these figures, respondents living in the worst 15% of datazones are more likely to use a card meter (18%) or cash (15%) to pay their fuel bills.

Eighty eight percent of respondents stated that they have never spent time without access to gas or electricity. Thirteen percent of respondents living in the worst 15% of datazones state that they have at some time gone without access to gas or electricity. The comparable figure for those people living in the rest of Inverclyde is 10%.

In a similar way to the payment of fuel bills, the most common way of paying other bills is by direct debit/standing order (65%). This again declines among respondents living in the worst 15% of data zones (55%) and increases among people living in the rest of Inverclyde (71%).

Cash becomes a more important means of paying other bills among respondents living in the worst 15% of datazones (34%), whereas 18% of people living in the rest of Inverclyde state this.

The top 5 issues that people indicated have resulted in them facing financial difficulties were, unemployment, redundancy, short time working (18%), income is not enough to cover all expenses (15%), ill health/disabilities (11%), retirement (8%) and problems managing money (6%).

The debts which people consider the most important for them to deal with are council tax (38%), credit card (31%), utilities (27%) and mortgage arrears (21%).

Financial Information and Advice

Over half (58%) of all respondents said that they have not been anywhere for advice about money matters in the past couple of years. The three most popular places which people have sought advice about money matters are, bank (14%), financial advisor (12%) and building society (7%).

The main issues that respondents stated they would be interested in included advice on welfare benefits (13%), more information about financial matters (11%) and advice about money matters (7%).

The types of services that people would like to be provided at a local level include, loans at a low interest rate (21%), advice on financial management (18%) and convenient savings facilities (17%).

Ninety six percent of respondents said that they are either very or quite aware of how much money they owe to different creditors and to who they owe it to. Only 3% state that they are either not very or not at all aware.

Similarly, to the figures outlined above, most people (97%) are either quite or very aware of the consequences of not paying different debts. Once again only 3% state that they are not aware of the consequences.

Overall, 70% of respondents said that they are either quite or very confident that they are receiving all the different tax or welfare benefits they might be entitled to. A further 21% are not very confident and 9% are not at all confident.

Just under half (47%) of all respondents are aware of the local Credit Unions in Inverclyde. This rises to 62% among respondents living in the worst 15% of datazones and drops to 39% among those living in the rest of Inverclyde.

Council Tax and Benefits

A quarter (25%) of all respondents said that they have contacted the Council tax or Benefits Office in the last 12 months. The majority of people who made contact with these services did so with regard to Council tax (82%), followed by Benefits (29%).

The most common means by which respondents contacted the Council tax or Benefits Office was by telephone (59%), followed by in person at the customer service office in Wallace Place (36%).

Respondents were asked to consider how satisfied they were with regard to various aspects of contact with the Council Tax or Benefits Office. The three issues to be considered were “the amount of time they had to wait for the enquiry to be dealt with”, “the response they received to their query” and “the overall quality of the service they received”.

The greatest number of people (77%) were satisfied with the length of time they had to wait for their enquiry to be dealt with. This is followed by 72% of people who were satisfied with the response they received to their enquiry and the overall quality of service they received.

Forty five people stated that they had to re-contact the Council Tax or benefits Office following their initial contact.

Thirty six people indicated that they would consider taking part in a distinct customer focus group to improve the services of the Revenues and Benefits Team.

Website

Forty two percent of respondents said that they have visited the Inverclyde Council website. For those people that have used the website, just under three quarters (74%) said that they had visited it just once or twice. A further 15% visit it every month, 8% every week and 4% visit the website on a daily basis.

The main reason people visited the Council website was to get information (59%). This is followed by news (29%), events (23%) and job vacancies (22%). Most people (85%) said that they found what they were looking for on the website.

Just over three quarters (76%) of respondents said that it was either easy or quite easy to find what they were looking for on the Inverclyde Council Website. A further 16% said that it takes them some time to find what they are looking for and 6% said it was difficult to find what they were looking for.

In keeping with the issues which people made of the website, as outlined in the responses to question 43, the most useful features on the Council's Website is information on other Council services (36%) and news (36%). This is followed by events (26%), job vacancies (23%) and education and schools (22%).

Other features or facilities that people would like to see on the Council's Website include, Pay for certain Council services online (32%), GIS Mapping (information displayed on maps) (26%) and interactive services (23%).

Sixty nine percent of respondents said if the Council offered online payments on the Website (for things like Council tax, payment of hall hire fees etc) they would use the service if it was free. The number of people who would use the online payment facility drops significantly to only 5% if there was a small charge for using it.

InView

Eighty two percent of respondents said that they receive the Council magazine InView. This figure remains similar among respondents living in the worst 15% of Datazones and those living in the rest of Inverclyde.

Just under half (46%) of the people who state that they receive the Council magazine InView, say that they do not read it at all. A further 40% read it cover to cover and 14% read selected articles in it.

The articles that people are most likely to read within the InView magazine are the news updates (64%), features (41%) and the A-Z of Service (26%).

Seventy two percent of respondents think that InView is either good or excellent. A further 27% think that it is fair and 2% state that it is poor.

Youth Work

Just under half (47%) of all respondents said that they were aware of school holiday play schemes. A further 39% of people are aware of youth clubs in local community centres. Twenty eight percent of respondents are aware of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and 21% know of drop in centres. Only 6% of respondents said they were aware of detached youth workers.

Four percent of respondents said that they take part in any youth work initiatives as a volunteer or helper. This reaches a high of 12% among respondents aged 16-24 years of age.

The main benefits respondents believe that working with young people in these initiatives brings to the local community are, gives young people something to do in the evenings (60%), provides a safe environment for young people to socialise (59%) and reduces vandalism and anti social behaviour among young people (57%).

Only 3% of respondents said that they believed there are enough youth facilities available in Inverclyde. A further 61% said that there were not enough and 36% did not know.