

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 2nd February 2017

Lead Member/Officer: Leader/
Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation

Report Author: Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation

Title: Denbighshire County Council Residents Survey 2017

1. What is the report about?

The report outlines a revised approach to the 2017 Residents Survey.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Residents survey is an important test of public opinion for the Council. Members wanted reassurance that the next survey would be designed to get a greater response rate from citizens.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee comments on the proposed new arrangements.

4. Report details

The Council has been conducting a bi-annual residents' survey since 2011, seeking views on a variety of subjects, including how well informed people feel, the effectiveness of customer services; overall perception of the Council etc. Recently, surveys have also included questions on well-being, and how people feel.

Initially these surveys were carried out by external agencies, largely by post, attracting between 5,000 and 6,000 responses. The cost of these exercises was c£25K. More recently, in an attempt to reduce the cost to the Council, more work has been undertaken in-house, including the analysis of results, but also including a reduced spend on postal circulation (one of the main expenses). The cost of the survey has reduced accordingly, down to c£10K in 2013 and then down to c£3K for the 2015 exercise, which was conducted entirely on-line.

A consequence has been that the response rate to the survey has reduced accordingly, perhaps indicating a continuing reliance on traditional communication methods in the county. The 2015 exercise only attracted about 750 responses, making it difficult to validate the results statistically. Members felt that this was too low to be useful, and that the next survey should seek to increase the number of respondents, even if this meant greater expense.

To address this issue, the target number of respondents for the 2017 survey should be 2-3000, as this would give us sufficient volume to draw statistically valid conclusions. We have the expertise to analyse the results in house, but we'll invest in communication methods that will help us reach more people.

- This will include postal communication as well as using the Council's website.
- The Council's media and press office will develop a formal campaign to support the survey.
- If need be, we will use the services of an external provider to deliver targeted support.
- We hope to have developed a Citizens' Panel by then too, based on the people who have already engaged with us during the County Conversation, and this will also be a source of respondents.
- The intention is to spend c£12K on the exercise overall.

The timing of this survey is important, especially in an election year. The optimum time for 2017 would be to align the residents' survey with the consultation required on the contents of the Council's new corporate plan, which will be during August-September. The survey can be used to consult on the plan's priorities at the same time as covering the core range of questions used in the last survey, providing a baseline for the new Council to measure its performance.

This represents a 'middle way' for the residents' survey in terms of cost. Although it is only a snapshot of public opinion at the time it is conducted, it has a value. Increasingly we are also using other methods of understanding public views, based on continuous sampling in some cases, for example through the CRM system. The County Conversation is also set to continue, becoming a continuous engagement activity rather than a one-off exercise. These developments should help the Council better understand what its citizens think about it, and what concerns them, so that the residents' survey itself becomes one part of a broader overall pattern of community engagement.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The Council has a long term goal to engage effectively with its communities; the proposed changes to the Residents' survey will support this.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The costs are identified in report, and will be met from a reserve established for this purpose within Business Improvement and Modernisation (BIM).

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment? The completed Well-being Impact Assessment report can be downloaded from the [website](#) and should be attached as an appendix to the report.

A WIA is not required for this report.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

CET has been involved in the development of this proposal

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The Service has identified funding for the additional cost of the survey. A more statistically valid rate of response would help to inform the development of future policies and decisions.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a reputational and regulatory risk for the Council if we fail to understand the views of our residents.

11. Power to make the Decision

This report does not require a decision.

Scrutiny's role with respect of policy development and ensuring that the Council's policies meet the needs and aspirations of local inhabitants are laid out in Section 7 of the Council's Constitution.

Contact Officer:

Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation

Tel: 01824 706246