



Report to: Policy and Resources Committee, 9th February 2021

Report of: Corporate Director, Finance and Resources

Subject: ANNUAL SURVEY 2020 RESULTS

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the results of the Annual Survey 2020.

2. Background

- 2.1 In recent years, the Council has conducted a 6-week annual consultation in Autumn. While there is no requirement for the Council to consult on the annual budget it is recognised as good practice to do so and promoted under openness and accountability guides and regulations published by government between 2011 and 2014. There is a specific duty to consult with local businesses on the preparation of the annual budget under Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 2.3 At its meeting of 8 September 2020, the Committee agreed the arrangements for an annual survey to be undertaken for 2020 which would incorporate the core questions from previous budget and resident perception surveys (City Plan themes, spend on services and satisfaction) to enable tracking of trends. The survey also included additional questions based on current Council activities and developments.
- 2.4 In response to the Covid-19 situation, a set of questions were developed by the County Council to help inform the recovery process across Worcestershire. These standardised questions were included in the 2020 annual surveys for all Districts in Worcestershire as the most effective means to gather this information. District Councils and the County Council developed the questions in partnership and all partners agreed the final version.
- 2.5 The Annual Survey was conducted between 28 September and 8 November 2020. The survey was available through both online and offline channels. Hard copies were made available at the Guildhall, our Customer Service Centres, our museums and on request.
- 2.6 The consultation was promoted through social media, our Resident Panel, in community centres and leisure centres, the Council's website and publications and local media. Additional advertising was purchased through Facebook and Worcester Observer.
- 2.7 The survey was also promoted directly to the Council's community contacts to encourage responses from a wider range of community groups and to help engagement with groups that are harder to reach.

- 2.8 It was also agreed by this Committee to hold a small number of discussion group sessions. The groups had initially been planned as a further stage of consultation to follow the 2019 survey. Unfortunately, this was initially delayed by the General Election and then postponed further due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- 2.9 The discussion groups were arranged during the consultation period to provide more detailed feedback on issues that are included in both the previous and current surveys, specifically around the City Plan themes, customer service experience and getting involved in decision making. The independent facilitator appointed to run the discussion groups for 2019 was re-engaged to undertake this work under the existing contract.
- 2.10 Results from the Annual Survey will be used to inform service planning and improvement activities. Results regarding Covid-19 recovery questions have been shared with Worcestershire County Council to help inform a county-wide response.

3. Information

- 3.1 The number of responses received for the Annual Survey 2020 was 526. However, the completion rate was 77% so the number of responses received for most questions is lower. The response rate is significantly lower than the responses received in 2018 and 2019. This may be attributable to the disruption caused by Covid and a high level of consultation work that has taken place over the last twelve months which has enabled residents to have their say on a variety of Council activities and proposals. Worcester residents are still keen to participate in decision-making about the City, as evinced by the high number of proposals for the High Street Fund that were submitted on the My Town website.
- 3.2 512 residents and 57 businesses undertook the survey (some respondents were both residents and business owners). Responses were received from all Wards across the City, as shown in **Appendix 1**, and are set out in detail in **Appendix 2**. The results are summarised in the following sections.

4. Satisfaction with services

- 4.1 Overall satisfaction with the Council has increased from 57.6% in 2019 to 64.35% in 2020, while the percentage dissatisfaction level has stayed the same at around 13%.
- 4.2 Although this increase is not reflected across all services, satisfaction has increased for 7 out of 15 services (not including Environmental Health as no comparable data is available).
- 4.3 Levels of satisfaction with were highest for rubbish collection and recycling services (87.83%) and garden waste collection (83.10%).
- 4.4 The transition of the Customer Service Centre from The Hive to Council premises has affected the responses to the satisfaction questions regarding Customer Services. The number of users for the service were low (83) and the survey was undertaken at a time of disruption due to Covid-19 restrictions as well as the transfer of the service from the Hive.

The low satisfaction score of 30.12% needs to be understood in that context. More detailed measures of satisfaction with front-facing Customer Services have been developed but have not yet been put in place fully due to the disrupted access caused by Covid-19 restrictions. This area will be monitored closely in 2021/22 to establish a baseline satisfaction level, subject to the facilities being fully open.

- 4.5 The most important City Plan theme for respondents remains 'A Healthy and Active City' which has been the case for each of the past three years. The percentage of respondents selecting this theme increased from 27.07% in 2019 to 35.05% this year. It can be reasonably supposed that Covid-19 is a factor in increasing focus on health issues, including the recognition of the need for opportunities to seek active exercise for mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.6 To understand preferences in more detail, respondents were asked which of the recent initiatives delivered or supported by the Council were the best received. The most 'liked' projects delivered by the Council were the Festive parking offer for Christmas (73.1%), Delivering Business Grants to help deal with the impact of Covid-19 (72.9%) and Housing First (72.9%).
- 4.7 On the other hand, the projects with the most 'Don't like' responses were Payment by card for parking in Council car parks (11.3%) and Festive parking offer for Christmas shoppers (9.5%) demonstrating mixed views about projects regarding parking.
- 4.8 The 'Find it, Do it' website and the introduction of the Paypoint system had the highest percentage of 'Don't know about' responses, indicating that further promotion activity may be required, although the latter may also indicate an increased use of direct payments through the website rather than cash or card payments at local outlets.

5. Customer contacts

- 5.1 Following changes to our customer service provision after delivery of the service was brought in-house from April 2020, and due to Covid-19 restrictions, we sought information on how local people have engaged with the new service and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on their access to our services.
- 5.2 20% of respondents stated that they were unable to access some City Council services at some point since March 2020 due to Covid-19, although the majority of the responses related to reduced access to refuse and recycling due to these services being disrupted for a short period in the early weeks of the pandemic. It should be noted that a number of services identified were actually County services.
- 5.3 Although the majority of respondents stated that they had not needed to contact the City Council since March 2020, most of those who did used a webform (30%), email (26%) or telephone (21%). The top reason given for contacting the Council was to make a request for a service.

- 5.4 In 2020, 67% of respondents who used online services got what they needed. This has decreased from 81% in 2019. The decrease may reflect increased use of the website itself, as a source of access to various forms of support. This is a useful measure as it highlights the need to ensure that information is easy to find and that online facilities are easy to access.
- 5.5 The majority of respondents had not used either of the new Customer Service Centres. Of those who did, 47% of customers using 89 High Street and 50% of those using Trinity Street were happy with the service provided. As noted above, this is an area where detailed monitoring is required in the next year to establish a more complete picture of how well the facilities are meeting customer needs.

6. Covid-19 Recovery

- 6.1 To help develop services to support the recovery from Covid-19 we asked residents how they have been affected and how Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council could help.
- 6.2 The greatest concern to respondents for:
- Themselves, was risk of infection from Covid-19 (25%)
 - their family, was risk of infection from Covid-19 (22%)
 - their local community, was the financial situation (13%)
- 6.3 The changes that resulted from COVID-19 or from restrictions imposed to control COVID-19 that respondents would most like to continue was spending less money (62%) and spending more time outdoors (45%). This would support the Council's aims around the development of the Riverside and an Active Travel Network as part of its Towns Improvement Plan proposals. Respondents were least likely to continue trying different or new things (23%).
- 6.4 The activities that respondents were most likely to continue after the COVID-19 pandemic is contained and restrictions are no longer in place were taking measures to control infection, such as wearing a face mask, thorough hand washing and social distancing (52%) and supporting local businesses (41%).
- 6.5 Respondents were least likely to continue attending large sporting or entertainment events (30%) or commute during peak rush hour (28%). These may have some implications for the Council in terms of holding such events, which is a significant ambition in the City Plan and changes in traffic management in the City.
- 6.6 Answers to some of the questions in this section will support the Council's Covid-19 recovery planning work. The most frequent responses for anything that respondents have seen in the way local organisations (public sector, voluntary sector and local businesses) have responded to the crisis that they would like to see continue once the COVID-19 pandemic is contained were:

- Community volunteering/support/spirit/ consideration. "In it together".
- Local business and organisation adaptation including more services and products available online & delivered.
- More care/checks/consideration for elderly/vulnerable/alone
- Support for homeless
- Increased hygiene measures: cleaning; improved personal hygiene; wearing masks; protective screens in shops; hand sanitiser available in public

6.7 The most common 'one main thing' that respondents stated will help Worcestershire recover from the COVID-19 pandemic were:

- People following rules; enforcement of rules; protective measures/hygiene
- Community cohesion; helping each other; investment in community
- Promote buying local/independent
- Job creation/retention/support
- Investment for in businesses (especially independent/local); reduce business rates

7. Budget development

7.1 As usual, the survey included questions about spending and fee levels in order to inform the development of the 2021/22 budget and future spending plans.

7.2 The services with the highest percentage of responses to increase spending were:

- Supporting local businesses and getting people back to work,
- Support for Housing and Homelessness and
- Making Worcester a safe city where residents and visitors feel safe.

These responses may have been influenced by perception of need for these services following the Covid-19 pandemic.

7.3 The services with the highest percentage of responses to decrease spending were licensing, car parking and parking enforcement and planning.

7.4 The services with the highest percentage of responses to increase charges were Housing licences, e.g. HMOs, planning, land charges and building control applications and enquiries and PCN Income (parking enforcement). The services with the highest percentage of responses to decrease charges were car parking, leisure admission fees and PCN Income - parking enforcement.

7.5 Fees and charges were considered by the Income Generation Committee at its meeting of 28th January. The majority of charges were held at 2020/21 levels or were increased by the level of inflation only. There were some exceptions, to bring the level of fees into line with comparable organisations and/or to reflect significant changes in the cost of providing services. In particular, there has been no proposed change in parking fees.

7.6 Commentary on how this feedback on financial issues has been fed into the 2021/22 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan are included in the Budget Report elsewhere on the agenda of the meeting.

8. Discussion Groups

- 8.1 Two discussion groups were held on the 21st and 22nd October 2020.
- 8.2 Discussion group participants were a self-selecting subgroup of the 2019 Annual Survey respondents. Attendees had previously agreed to take part in the groups planned for March 2020 which enabled discussions to cover topics from both the 2019 and 2020 surveys.
- 8.3 The two discussion groups shared the same content and structure but were delivered using different formats:
- Group One: face-to-face group. Robust social-distancing measures were in place, with all slides and discussion stimuli presented from a distance. Seven participants were booked to attend, although in the event only two attended following late withdrawals and no-shows.
 - Group Two: online group, held via Zoom. Four participants were booked to attend, plus one provisional - four attended.
- 8.4 Topics discussed were:
- Worcester City Council Services
 - Satisfaction
 - Impact of Covid-19
 - Customers Services
 - City Plan Themes
 - Budgets and changes
 - Getting involved
- 8.5 The outputs provided by the consultants that undertook the work have been used to inform the commentary in this report and will be taken into account in the development of services, particularly in terms of information provided. The key themes that emerged from the discussions were as follows.

Key themes related to satisfaction with Worcester City Council services:

- Continued desire for personal contact with services
- Increased visibility of services and visibility of information about services, including the publication of feedback from the annual surveys
- The impact of change and the Council's ability to respond
- Recognition of the diversity of needs that the Council faces and the understanding that tailored solutions are needed not a 'one size fits all' approach
- Improving convenience of access
- Recognising the tension and/or inconsistency between different priorities.

Key themes related to refreshing the Worcester City Plan:

- Recognition that the priorities are inter-related and cross-cutting, with a need for clarity regarding the 'Sustaining and Improving our Assets' theme as this is not well understood
- The revised City Plan should have a clear vision for the future of the City
- There is a need to reflect on and develop Worcester's identity

- A theme that could be included in future is that of mental health and wellbeing which does not feature explicitly in the current version
- There should be a stronger focus on 'A Safer City'
- There is a need for large-scale investment and the approach to be seeking this through Future High Streets Fund and the Towns Fund is welcomed as they bring exciting opportunities.

Ward(s): **All Wards**
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Background Papers: **None**