

CABINET
16 January 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Community Survey results (March – June 2023)

REPORT OF: Service Director, Place

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council, Elizabeth Dennis

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST and A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise Cabinet of the key findings from the Community Survey results (March – June 2023).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet comment on and note the key findings and observations from round one of the Community Survey and comment on the approach to future surveys (as detailed in section 8.5).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the results of the Community Survey (our first digital residents' survey) and how they compare to the Local Government Association (LGA) June 23 Resident Satisfaction phone survey results.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Community Survey results report was taken to the internal, informal Political Liaison Board of the Executive and the Leadership team on 5 December 2023. The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council have also been consulted on the report findings.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 District Wide Surveys have been carried out every other year since 2008 and are a key tool to gauge residents' views and perceptions towards the council at a particular point in time.
- 7.2 A key focus of our 2022-27 Community Consultation Strategy is ensuring it delivers on our core priority of 'People first', by getting closer to our community and giving them opportunities to have their say on issues that are important to them. Incorporated within this, is a greater focus on digital forms of consultation, to reach a wider sample of our community and make it easier for people to share their views, at a time that suits them.
- 7.3 Taking the above into account, the decision was taken in September 2022 to move our district wide survey from a phone survey every two years, to a digital survey every six months, enabling us to hear 'of the moment' snapshot views from our residents on a more frequent basis.
- 7.4 Changing methodology from a phone survey to digital, means that previous results cannot be benchmarked and therefore the results from this first round will become our baseline for future comparisons.
- 7.5 Unlike interviewer-administered surveys (where the interviewer has time to build rapport, which research proves leads to more positive responses) moving to a digital (or self-administered mode for collecting feedback) gives no opportunity for explanation prior to residents giving their answer. Research has shown that this leads to significantly lower scores from residents. Source: Gallup; Oxford Academic; Nielsen.
- 7.6 It is important to note that the digital Community Survey is not designed to be an official consultation, but instead it captures a snapshot of resident feeling at a given point in time. The first of these surveys was carried out between March and June this year. It has fewer questions compared to a traditional phone survey (to ensure ease/speed for the user) and is weighted by fewer variables to previous phone-based surveys: area, age, gender, and ethnicity.
- 7.7 Respondent data was matched to the 2021 Census ethnicity, age and gender distribution of North Herts and rake-weighting applied to ensure no demographic group was over or underrepresented in the results.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Key findings

8.1 Highlights.

- 8.1.1 The digital survey saw a 183% increase in responses from 16-34-year-olds (113 people vs 40 people) and an increase of 88% of responses from 35-54 -year-olds (272 vs 145) compared to the 2022 phone survey.

- 8.1.2 Our residents continue to be satisfied with North Herts as place to live (74%). This is 1% higher than the Local Government Association (LGA) June 23 Resident Satisfaction Phone Survey average of 73%, and Hitchin residents' satisfaction levels were over 80%.
- 8.1.3 Two thirds, or 67% of residents would recommend North Herts as a place to live.
- 8.1.4 40% of those surveyed trust North Herts Council. This is 5% higher than trust levels in the UK Government (ONS 2022 'Trust in government' report).

8.2 Satisfaction with the way we run things and our services.

- 8.2.1 43% of those residents surveyed are satisfied with the way North Herts Council runs things. This is 17% lower than the LGA June 23 Resident Satisfaction Phone Survey results (60%). In addition, only a quarter of those surveyed feel we offer value for money (vs 42% in the LGA Survey).
- 8.2.2 A review of the open-ended responses for those residents who are dissatisfied with how we run things, and also have a low value for money perception, highlights that the biggest improvement that they would like to see is the maintenance of our roads, particularly potholes. Parking fees are the next biggest area of feedback, as some residents feel they are too high, and some feel they should be free at weekend/lunchtimes to attract footfall to town centres.
- 8.2.3 Resident satisfaction with waste collection (62%) and street cleaning (48%) services are considerably lower than the corresponding LGA survey results (79% and 64% respectively) and feature heavily in the 'how could the council improve the overall running of North Herts' responses. Comments include 'services need significant improvement', 'more bins/bigger bins' and 'increase street cleaning/sweeping'.
- 8.2.4 64% of those surveyed are satisfied with how we run North Herts parks and green spaces. This is significantly less than the LGA Survey results (80%), however it is positive to see that there are minimal 'park and green space' mentions in the open-ended 'improvement' feedback. What is mentioned is cutting grass more frequently at junctions.
- 8.2.5 Just under half of those residents surveyed are satisfied with our leisure facilities. Comments in the open-ended feedback include 'invest more money into leisure facilities', 'more leisure opportunities' and 'ensure they are tendered to a contractor that provides good service, clean facilities and a high level of maintenance'.
- 8.2.6 It is clear from the answers to the open-ended questions that residents are unclear which services/responsibilities sit with North Herts Council and which sit with Hertfordshire County Council, so an 'informing' communications piece is needed to clarify the situation moving forwards.

8.3 Informing and communicating with our residents.

- 8.3.1 Only 36% of residents surveyed (vs 55% in the LGA Survey) feel that we keep them informed about the services and benefits we provide. Current work on the draft 2024 - 2028 Marketing and Communications strategy has highlighted a need to communicate our services more.
- 8.3.2 33% of residents surveyed are aware of what their local councillor does in their local area.

- 8.3.3 84% felt we should listen/consult more and only 15% of respondents agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This is interesting, as the number of surveys/consultations shared over 2022/2023 has increased vs 2020/2021 and they have also been promoted across all our communication channels (in-person as well as digital) to ensure they reach residents through their channel of preference.

8.4 Areas of focus

- 8.4.1 The top three areas of improvement highlighted by responding residents are:

- **Improve our roads** (31%) – potholes (overwhelmingly) and pavement repairs/weeding & grass cutting.
- **Housing** (12%) – stop building new houses without the infrastructure to go with them; build more affordable housing and protect the greenbelt/rural areas.
- **Street cleaning** (11%) – increase the frequency; provide more bins; regular drain clearance and don't forget the villages/rural areas.

It is clear that the condition of our roads is of particular concern to residents and the open-ended feedback from residents on our roads will be shared with Hertfordshire County Council.

- 8.4.2 Royston residents' satisfaction levels with North Herts as a place to live (60%) and their propensity to recommend North Herts a place to live (57%) are considerably lower than both the district averages (74% & 67% respectively) and other areas. The open-ended question responses from those Royston residents who are dissatisfied, highlight the following key areas they'd like us to focus on:

- Increased frequency of street cleaning and maintenance.
- Fixing the roads, particularly potholes.
- Improving and increasing facilities, particularly with the new developments planned and with teenagers/young adults in mind.
- Reducing car park charges.

It is recommended that plans are put in place to involve, consult and engage with Royston residents with greater regularity in the future.

8.5 Future thoughts on resident surveys

- 8.5.1 As this is the first time North Herts Council have used a digital survey to gain feedback from our residents, there are areas of learning for us to take forwards.
- 8.5.2 A graphical explanation of which services/responsibilities sit with North Herts Council, and which sit with Hertfordshire County Council should be included in future rounds.
- 8.5.3 The 'services' question should only be answered by those who have stated they use them.
- 8.5.4 It is recommended that future results are not brought to Cabinet but published on our website and through other communications channels.
- 8.5.5 The discussion at Political Liaison Board considered the approach to how North Herts Council approach resident surveys in the future. This included reclarifying our objectives

and whether, as the surveys are not official consultations, they could be managed in-house by the Communications team.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. If any actions are identified as a result of the findings of the Community Survey results (March to June 2023), the legal implications of those will be considered at the time.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The cost of the Community Survey has been funded from the current District Wide Survey budget.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 Conducting the Community Survey is an important tool for gaining a snapshot of resident feeling at a given point in time. If the areas of focus identified in the survey are not seen to be acted upon, there is a risk that public satisfaction with the Council will reduce, leading to a negative impact on the Council's reputation.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. The returned sample of those surveyed was matched to the 2021 Census ethnicity, age and gender distribution of North Herts and rake-weighting applied to ensure no demographic group was over or underrepresented in the results. This ensured that the results are broadly representative of the population of North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the findings of the Community Survey results (March to June 2023).

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no known Human Resource impacts or requirements that apply to the findings of the Community Survey results (March to June 2023).

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Zencity Community Survey results report.

- 16.2 Appendix B – LGA results comparison.

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