

CABINET
10 September 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Community Survey Round Two results (March – May 2024)

REPORT OF: Service Director, Place

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council, Daniel Allen

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST and A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise Cabinet of the key findings from the Community Survey Round Two results (March – May 2024).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet comment on and note the key findings and observations from round two of the Community Survey and comment on the approach to future surveys (as detailed in section 8.7.2).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that Cabinet are aware of the round two results of our digital Community Survey and how they compare to both our round one (2023) results and the Local Government Association (LGA) February 2024 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 Round Two results report was taken to the internal, informal Political Liaison Board of the Executive and the Leadership team on 6 August 2024. 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 Resident surveys are a key tool to gauge residents' 'of the moment' views and perceptions of the council.
- 7.2 In 2023 North Herts Council ran our first-ever digital residents survey which became the baseline for future survey results comparisons. Our second Community Survey round, which ran from March to May 2024 means we are now in the position to make a direct comparison with those satisfaction results.
- 7.3 The survey, which is run by Zencity, uses the powerful tools that Google and Facebook have built to digitally target a representative sample of the North Herts community, (based on 2021 Census data) through targeted digital ads. It's important to note that the sample size, which aims to be representative of North Herts population, is small (599 residents) and that the digital Community Survey is not designed to be an official consultation, but instead capture a snapshot of resident feeling, at a given point in time.
- 7.4 As with previous surveys, we continue, where we can, to compare our digital survey resident satisfaction levels with the satisfaction levels in the most recent Local Government Association (LGA) phone survey, which was run in February 2024. Interestingly, this LGA survey round saw some of the lowest/joint lowest scores since LGA polling began, particularly in areas such as satisfaction with the way local councils run things and the extent to which local councils act on the concerns of local residents.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Key findings

8.1 Headlines

- 8.1.1 When comparing residents 2024 satisfaction levels with our 2023 results: 8 scores have improved; 8 scores have remained the same; and only 1 has declined 'to what extent are you aware of what your local councillor does in your local area'.
- 8.1.2 In comparison with the latest LGA phone survey results: North Herts Council are still tracking significantly lower than the LGA phone survey scores, aside from 'satisfaction with North Herts as a place to live'. However, research (source: Gallup; Oxford Academic; Nielsen) shows that phone survey results tend to be more positive than digital survey results, as there is an opportunity for the researcher to give greater explanation and build a relationship during the call.
- 8.1.3 It is important to note when considering these results to review them in context alongside resident feedback we have received through other channels during the same time-period e.g. Councillor surgeries and the [23/24 Comments, Compliments & Complaints \(3 C's\) results reported to Overview & Scrutiny in June 2024](#) - which showed that the number of complaints received by both the Council and our contractors decreased from 417 in 22/23 to 384 in 23/24 (an 8% decrease).

8.2 Highlights

- 8.2.1 Our residents continue to be satisfied with North Herts as place to live (74%). This is on a par with the latest LGA phone survey findings (also 74%), with both Letchworth and Royston residents' satisfaction levels slightly higher than the last survey, at 76% and 75% respectively.
- 8.2.2 Two thirds, or 66% of residents, would recommend North Herts as a place to live. Royston resident satisfaction levels have improved by 10% since round one of our Community Survey.
- 8.2.3 46% of those surveyed trust North Herts Council. This has improved by 3% since last year, with Royston and Southern Rural resident trust levels improving by 12% since our last survey. This is also significantly higher than the latest Office for National Statistics 'Trust in government' report (2023) findings of 34% trust in local government and 27% trust in the UK national government.
- 8.2.4 We have seen a significant improvement in satisfaction levels from the Royston residents who responded in round two across all question areas vs our last survey. This is a positive development, as Royston resident satisfaction levels were a key concern from the 2023 survey results, however it is important to note that this was from a small base of 45 residents.

8.3 Satisfaction with our overall running of North Herts Council

- 8.3.1 Satisfaction with the way we run things remains at 43% (2024 vs 2023). This is 10% lower than the LGA phone survey results (53%). However, it is interesting to note the percentage difference has decreased, as it was 17% lower than the LGA on the previous survey.
- 8.3.2 Our value for money score has improved by 3% since we last surveyed (to 28%) which is significantly lower than the LGA phone survey score of 40% which itself has dropped by 2% since 2023.
- 8.3.3 30% of our residents believe we are working to make North Herts greener and cleaner. This is in line with our 2023 results but includes an 11% improvement in Royston residents' views (from 27% to 38%) and an 18% decline in Baldock residents' views (from 44% to 26%).

8.4 Satisfaction with our services **

*** Please note when reviewing these figures that the Round Two survey included a 'do not use' option to ensure that the satisfaction responses were gathered from residents who use the service in question. This option was not included in Round One.*

- 8.4.1 **Overall resident satisfaction with waste and recycling collection** (65%) has increased by 3% since our last Community Survey. Although encouraging, this score is considerably lower than the corresponding LGA phone survey results (79%). Since we last surveyed, Royston resident satisfaction levels have improved by 13% (from 56% to 69%) and Southern Rural resident satisfaction levels have improved by 10% (from 60% to 70%).

8.4.2 **Overall resident satisfaction with street cleaning services** (51%) has increased by 3% since our last Community Survey. Satisfaction is only 5% lower than the LGA phone survey results (56%).

8.4.3 **Resident satisfaction with our parks and greenspaces remains at 64%**. This is only 9% lower than the LGA phone survey results.

8.4.4 **47% of those residents surveyed are satisfied with our leisure facilities** which is on a par with 2023. Although the satisfaction levels have remained the same, there has been a clear improvement in Royston resident satisfaction levels (14%), alongside a clear decline in Letchworth residents' satisfaction levels which have dropped by 15%. Everyone Active took over as our Leisure operator on the 1 April and there were some initial teething issues with the new booking system, which may have led to this reduction in Letchworth residents' satisfaction levels.

8.4.5 **Resident satisfaction with our car parks remains low at 36%** and the cost of current charges (which are felt to be expensive) feature heavily in the open-ended feedback.

8.5 Informing, engaging and communicating with our residents.

8.5.1 Only 30% of residents feel aware of what their local councillor does in their local area, which is 3% lower than when we surveyed in 2023 (largely influenced by a 12% drop in score from Letchworth residents) and 13% less than the LGA phone survey results score. This score is interesting as councillors were out campaigning for our Local Elections when our Community Survey was running, which we would have expected would result in an improvement in awareness levels.

8.5.2 35% of residents surveyed feel that we keep them informed about the services and benefits we provide. Royston residents' views have improved by 21% (from 23% to 44%), however scores from our remaining four areas have declined. Since our new Marketing and Communications strategy was approved in January, we have focused efforts on communicating our services more (including which services North Herts provide versus which services Herts County Council provide), but it is clear more needs to be done.

8.5.3 80% felt we should listen/consult more and only 18% of the residents who responded agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area. Both scores have improved by 4% and 3% respectively since our 2023 Community Survey results and participation rates in our consultations are high compared to other local authorities. However, we could explore ways to encourage more people to take part in consultations, such as promoting them at Councillor surgeries.

8.5.4 A quarter of residents surveyed feel we make an effort to find out what people want and/or involve, consult, and engage with the local community. Agreement scores have improved in these areas since 2023, particularly by Royston residents, but are still relatively low.

8.6 Areas of focus

8.6.1 Continuing themes:

- **Improve our roads** – including fixing potholes, general road safety, easing traffic congestion, and clearing litter from our roads, pavements and drains.

- **Housing** – build more affordable housing; protect green and brown spaces; homeless provision and involve affected communities more in decision-making.
- **Carparks** – charges are too expensive. Lower carpark charges to encourage people to visit local shops.

8.6.2 Emerging themes:

- **Young people/teenagers** – need to create more for them to do as there is a perception that there isn't much for them to do currently. A greater provision of low-cost/free activities and entertainment were mentioned, in view of the current cost of living crisis.
- **Planning** – mentioned specifically this time rather than just general housing including enabling communities to be part of the planning process and giving them greater time to have their say at Planning Control Committee meetings.
- **Listening to residents** – although our scores have improved in this area since our last Community Survey, those residents who have low satisfaction levels with the way North Herts Council runs things did mention listening to and involving residents more.

8.7 Proposed next steps

8.7.1 Actioning residents' feedback

It is proposed that we continue with the Community Survey 5-point 'you said, we've listened' action plan (created and agreed with previous Leader and Deputy earlier this year and included in the appendices) to visibly show to residents that we have listened/are acting on the feedback they give us. The North Herts Council services versus Hertfordshire County Council services graphic is a great example of how feedback has been used to produce something which constructively helps residents in the future.

8.7.2 Future survey approach

8.7.2.1 We have two more rounds of our digital Community Survey before our contract with Zencity ends on the 31 March 2025. Round Three will run September to November 2024 and Round Four will run January to March 2025.

8.7.2.2 The Political Liaison Board felt that a new approach should be considered when surveying North Herts residents in the future. One that is targeted and asks residents their thoughts on specific issues (budgets and spending for example) to gain detailed feedback which can be actioned rather than the current 'broadbrush' survey approach offered by Zencity. This will be investigated 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 Round Two results (March to May 2024), the legal implications of those will be considered at the time.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The cost of the Community Survey is met through existing communications/consultations budgets.

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 none of these demographic groups was over or underrepresented in the results. This ensured that the results are broadly representative of the population of North Hertfordshire, however it should be noted that there is potential for an element of self-selection bias as respondents have chosen to participate in the digital survey rather than being randomly selected.

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 Round Two results (March to May 2024).

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no known Human Resource impacts or requirements that apply to the findings of the Community Survey Round Two results (March to May 2024).

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Zencity Community Survey Round Two (March to May 2024) results report.
- 16.2 Appendix B – Community Survey – Round Two Vs Round One results comparison.

16.3 Appendix C – Community Survey – Round Two digital survey results Vs LGA 2024 phone survey results.

16.4 Appendix D - Community Survey 5-point 'you said, we've listened' action plan.

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