

<b>Item No</b>	<b>Referred from:</b>	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>6A</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>3 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
	<b>Title of item:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY SURVEY ROUND TWO RESULTS (MARCH – MAY 2024)</b>
<b>To be considered alongside agenda item:</b>		<b>AGENDA ITEM 7</b>

The report considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 3 September 2024 can be viewed here [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 3rd September, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#).

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet consider the recommendations and comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:** To ensure that Overview and Scrutiny and 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.

Audio recording –

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled ‘Community Survey Round Two Results (March-May 2024)’ and advised that:

- The first digital residents survey was conducted last year by Zensity.
- Digital surveys were able to be conducted more regularly than phone surveys, to provide ‘of the moment’ opinions from residents.
- As this was the second survey conducted in this way, the current satisfaction levels of residents can be directly compared with the results from last year.
- The sample size aimed to be representative of the North Herts population as possible by using 2021 Census population data to guide who their digital adverts targeted.
- It was noted that satisfaction scores were often lower on digital surveys than those conducted by phone, where interviewers can explain questions in more detail and build a relationship with the interviewee.
- Surveys were just one method of how the Council received feedback from residents, with Councillor surgeries and forums offering in-person opportunities to provide feedback.
- There had been a 3% increase in satisfaction with waste and recycling services, the Council providing value for money, and how the Council involved, consulted, engaged and listened to residents.
- Residents had continued to be satisfied with North Herts as a place to live (74%), and around two thirds had said they would recommend it as a place to live.
- There had been a 3% increase in trust in North Herts Council, with a 22% increase in Royston and a 12% in Southern Rural areas compared to 2023.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Louise Peace

In response to questions, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

- The digital survey was one way of receiving feedback from residents and there were other non-digital methods, such as Councillor surgeries, Community Forums, Ward Walks, customer complaints and contact via the website.
- The Council had two further rounds of surveys to be conducted by Zencity, and it was felt that a new approach should be taken in future, which would allow for more targeted and specific questions.
- There had been a 'who does what' poster produced to try and provide detail on which services were provided by District and County Councils, which had been promoted online and in print.
- He was confident that the Communications team were able to put out the information, but it was difficult when you try to engage but this is not listened to.
- There had been an increase in direct communication with the public through increased surgeries and forums.
- Whilst there were some issues the Council could not improve, such as roads, there would be a focus on the issues which could be addressed, such as housing, car parking, provision of activities for young people and teenagers and listening to residents.
- Further questions directed at young people and teenagers could be added to the next survey to scope out what provisions or support they would require from the Council.
- Letchworth was an outlier where several levels of government or charitable organisations existed which was contributing the specific concerns raised in the town.
- The Council wanted to make sure that Councillors were visible to residents, which was being done through increasing the number of surgeries and forums which residents could attend and speak to Councillors.
- The demise of local press had also been a factor in declining communication with residents. However, the Council was exploring different ways of engaging with residents, such as using YouTube videos, as had been recently demonstrated with a recruitment video which increased traffic to the recruitment page.
- The number of responses from an area was based on the most recent census population data.
- Ward walks were an opportunity for Councillors to discuss Ward issues which affected their residents with the Managing Director. They are not publicised in advance but often involve talking to residents too.
- Surgeries were already provided for direct contact by residents and Ward Walks were to look at specific issues within a ward, not to attract public to raise specific issues, therefore it would not be suitable to advertise these.

In response to questions, the Communications Manager advised that:

- It was unclear why the Royston scores had a red exclamation mark note next to them and this would be clarified after the meeting.

- One of the limitations of Zencity was that the survey was owned and managed by them. Previous internally conducted surveys were provided in different ways and could be promoted using various methods to reach more people, including those without digital means.
- The contract with Zencity was until March 2025, with two further surveys planned between September and November 2024 and January and March 2025.
- The 'who does what' services artwork, which highlighted the services provided by District and County Councils, had been shared across digital channels, was published in the most recent Outlook magazine and had been used by Councillors in conversations with residents.
- Communicating to residents that the Council had listened to feedback from community surveys and were taking action required a whole Council approach and more work was required to find out why messaging was not getting through and what else needed to be done.
- A free text question asking 'How can the Council improve the running of North Herts' had been included in this survey, as with previous surveys.
- Any future surveying alternatives would need to provide value for money, reach a wider number of residents, allow for flexibility and be able to reach people through without digital means.
- As outlined in the Community Survey 5-point action plan included in the appendix to the report, some actions were already being taken to address issues raised, however there would need to be more focus on developing the understanding of what Councillors do.
- There was the ability to drill down into demographics of the Zencity results, however just the headlines were presented within the report.
- She had received results from a similar size council who had conducted surveys through Zencity, but these had not yet been made public and therefore could not be shared. However, North Herts was roughly 10% above the other council.
- A specific session with Letchworth residents could be set up to help understand specific concerns from residents of the town.
- The Budget Hub had been established to raise awareness of the financial situation that local authorities are in and to allow residents to provide feedback and thoughts on proposals.
- The hub process was new to the Council. The Climate Hive had been active for around 18 months and had around 400 subscribers, the Budget Hub had around 200 in a shorter period, which was a good start.
- Herts County Council conducted an annual survey with residents.
- The results of the survey could be shared publicly on the Council website.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that the Police were conducting a trial in schools in Hitchin in autumn to get young people to engage with the priority setting for the area, where previously no input from this group had been provided.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- Some of the questions included were not very actionable and it would be difficult to know how to address these with such broad terms. Consideration should be given to whether questions were posed in the most useful way and whether the response received could be turned into actionable policies.

- It was important that previous results continue to be used to benchmark for future surveys when the contract with Zencity came to an end. If there were significant differences, it would make it difficult to monitor trends over time and compare against previous performance.
- The 5 point plan should be a live and agile document which should be revised and refreshed. Actions should not only be ticked off but should be reviewed to consider the effectivity of the action at improving results.
- Ward walks could be used more effectively to become a genuine outreach option.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Committee commented on and noted the key findings and observations from round two of the Community Survey and commented on the approach to future surveys (as detailed in section 8.7.2).

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet consider the recommendations and comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:** To ensure that Overview and Scrutiny and 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.