

Agenda Item No:

Report No:

Report Title: Best Value Survey 2006/07

Report To: Cabinet

Date: 23 July 2007

Lead Councillor: Councillor De Vecchi

Ward(s) Affected: All

Report By: Chief Executive

Contact Officer(s): John Crawford

Purpose of Report:

To present the results of the three yearly survey required by the Government on public satisfaction with Council Services

To present the positive levels of satisfaction with Council Services and the messages on other matters that people consider affect the quality of local life.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the positive results from the results of public satisfaction with services
 - 2 To consider the proposals to improve aspects of local life where public satisfaction is not positive.
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1 Reasons for Recommendations

To improve the Council's services.

2 Information

2.1 This report summarises the results of the Best Value General Survey, conducted amongst 1,185 local residents, via a self-completion postal survey carried out between September 2006 and January 2007. The Survey showed the following results about the District Council's services:

- The majority of people feel the council treats all types of people fairly, is working to make the area cleaner and greener and is making the local area safer and a better place to live. Most feel the Council is trustworthy, efficient and well run.
- The vast majority of people feel very well informed about how and where to register to vote and how to pay bills to the Council. Most felt they were informed about what the Council spends its money on and the standards of service they could expect from us. Most

people felt the Council keeps residents well informed about the services it provides.

- Satisfaction with keeping land clear of litter and refuse (68%) has improved since 2003 and has moved from the 3rd to 2nd quartile nationally.
- High levels of overall satisfaction with the waste collection service have been maintained over the last 3 years (87%). Performance exceeds that of other East Sussex districts and boroughs and is now in the top quartile nationally.
- There is a similar picture for overall satisfaction with local recycling facilities (73%). Satisfaction levels have also been maintained. The Council's performance remains in the 2nd quartile nationally and exceeds that of other districts and boroughs in East Sussex. There are high levels of satisfaction with the general provision, location and cleanliness of local recycling facilities. There are also high levels of satisfaction with the kerbside recycling service.
- Satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities has improved significantly (65%). It is now in the top quartile nationally and is at the top of the performance table in East Sussex.
- 70% of residents are generally satisfied with the local area as a place to live. Anti-social behaviour in the form of abandoned or burnt out cars, noisy neighbours, drunkenness or rowdy behaviour, people using or dealing drugs, rubbish and litter is not regarded as a problem by the majority of people.
- Most people agreed that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- Overall satisfaction with the way the authority runs things (51%) has dropped in line with national trends.
- The majority of people feel the Council is to some extent too remote and impersonal and does not provide good value for money.
- Although overall satisfaction with the handling of complaints (28%) has fallen since 2003, the vast majority of people who had made a complaint had found it easy to find the right person to deal with, were happy with the length of time taken, were satisfied with the competence and helpfulness of staff and were happy with the information provided and the final outcome.
- Most people did not feel well informed about how they could get involved in decision making, how the Council is performing and whether it was delivering on its promises.
- The vast majority did not feel well-informed about what the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in the local area.

- The majority of people felt they couldn't influence decisions affecting their local area.
- Satisfaction with museums and galleries (37%) has improved since 2003.

3 Additional Information

- 3.1** The Survey is based on a questionnaire devised by the Government which we are not allowed to change or modify except to insert the name of the District Council in certain places. The Government requires all councils to carry out this survey every three years. To reduce the costs, the five districts in East Sussex procured the same research company 'BMG Research' to carry out the survey for all the districts. East Sussex County Council used MORI.
- 3.2** The target population for the survey was the adult population (18+) of the District of Lewes, and the sample was drawn from the Postcode Address File supplied by Audit Commission. The survey was done according to Audit Commission guidelines and included two reminder mailings.
- 3.3** The initial mailing of 2,500 Lewes residents took place on 25th September 2006. The second (reminder) mailing was sent on 20th October 2006, and the third (reminder) mailing on 20th November 2006. In total 1,185 usable completed questionnaires were returned: a response rate of 47%.
- 3.4** Our consultants BMG have told us they have been saying for years to the government that the questionnaire needs an overhaul. The Audit Commission has recently decided to assess all the public services in one area which may prompt a change. A few pages of the questionnaire are reproduced as Appendix A. You will see that the questionnaire asks people to give opinions on a wide range of issues in life such as local wages, the cost of living and crime. Some of those issues are influenced directly by government policy more than anything that Councils do.
- 3.5** In some places, the questionnaire does not clearly define what it means by "your council". It also groups together some services that are not provided by the District Council but which we are not allowed to delete. For example, questions 10, 11 and 12 ask people how satisfied they are with facilities such as cinemas and concert halls that are "provided or supported by the District Council". There is no clue as to what "supported" is supposed to mean. The level of satisfaction with theatres and concert halls at 26% is well down on that achieved in 2003 (34%). The District Council does not provide any concert halls or theatres.
- 3.6** The headline results of the District Council's survey are set out in Appendix B. They show a good level of satisfaction with the Council's services but a lower satisfaction with whether things have got better or worse in everything ranging from the local cost of living, though education and access to nature to health services.

When asked to think about whether things have improved or deteriorated in their local area over the last three years, respondents said that, in most cases, things have deteriorated. Most notably, respondents feel things have got worse with job prospects, the level of crime and wage levels. Improvements on the other hand appear to be with regard to sports and leisure facilities, education and access to nature. The following table shows the specific responses to the question about whether things have got better or worse.

	Better %	Stayed the same %	Worse %	Net difference %
Access to nature	19	76	5	+14
Sports and leisure facilities	10	57	5	+10
Parks & open spaces	13	77	10	+3
Education provision	15	71	14	+1
Public transport	25	51	24	+1
Facilities for young children	14	71	16	-2
Race relations	5	87	8	-3
Community activities	9	77	14	-5
Cultural facilities	4	75	21	-17
Health services	10	61	28	-18
Clean streets	8	65	27	-19
Shopping facilities	6	48	30	-24
Activities for teenagers	10	52	38	-28
Level of crime	4	32	37	-33
Level of pollution	1	33	36	-35
Road & pavement repairs	4	37	39	-35
Wage level & local cost of living	*	28	35	-35
Job prospects	3	58	40	-37
Affordable decent housing	7	37	56	-49
Level of traffic congestion	3	17	65	-62

4 Proposals

The survey is at its most reliable in people's direct opinions on services that they have used. The way the questionnaire is formulated does not help people to understand which public agency provides which service. The result for all councils in England shows that despite rising efficiency and improved annual performance assessments, councils are suffering lower overall satisfaction ratings from residents.

The mismatch between the general image of local government and the level of satisfaction with services may be because councils are criticised for events that are beyond their control. For example, successive rises in council tax to offset reductions in Government Grant have created the impression of increased spending, even though local government expenditure has reduced.

The issues arising from the results of the survey which need attention are:

- The level of satisfaction with services is generally high but a substantial proportion of people are not satisfied with the arrangements to deal with complaints (which we interpret to include any request for a service that says 'I want something done').
- The result for overall satisfaction with the Council at 51% is noticeably lower than the results for individual services. We need to test why a substantial proportion of respondents value individual services but don't think that overall the Council is providing value for money. In Appendix C I have set out some proposals to improve the way we communicate with the public about the delivery of overall value for money. The Cabinet may wish to extend those proposals.

5 Financial Appraisal

The proposals in this report can be funded from existing budgets. Subsequent proposals to improve our capacity to handle incoming service requests or complaints will be the subject of a separate report.

6 Environmental Implications

I have completed the Environmental Implications questionnaire and this Report is exempt from the requirement because it is a progress report/budget monitoring report/development control report.

7 Risk Management Implications

I have completed the Risk Management questionnaire and this report does not require a risk assessment because the changes/issues covered by this report are not significant in terms of risk.

8 Background Papers

The BMG Survey Report (which can be found on the Council's website).

9 Appendices

Appendix A	Extracts from the Government Questionnaire
Appendix B	Headline results of the District Council's survey
Appendix C	Proposals to improve communication with the public on the value for money provided by the Council

APPENDIX A

QB1 Thinking about your local area, for each of the following things below, do you think each has got better or worse over the last three years, or has it stayed the same?
Please tick ✓ one box per row

	Better	Stayed the same	Worse	Don't know
Access to nature	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Activities for teenagers	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Affordable decent housing	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Clean streets	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Community activities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Cultural facilities (e.g. cinemas, museums)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Education provision	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Facilities for young children	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Health services	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Job prospects	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Parks and open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Public transport	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Race relations	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Road and pavement repairs	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Shopping facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Sports & leisure facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The level of crime	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The level of pollution	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The level of traffic congestion	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
Wage levels & local cost of living	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

Q3. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?
Please tick ✓ one box only

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

[2]

Cultural and recreational activities and venues

Lewes District Council directly supports cultural and recreational activities and venues. The authority's licensing and planning responsibilities also make a difference to the level of private and voluntary cultural provision in your area.

Q10. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following services provided or supported by Lewes District Council. **PLEASE ANSWER THIS QUESTION WHETHER YOU HAVE USED THESE SERVICES OR NOT.**

Please tick ✓ one box per row

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Sports/leisure facilities and events	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Museums and galleries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Theatres / Concert halls	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Parks and open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Q11. Please indicate how frequently you have used the following cultural and recreational services provided or supported by Lewes District Council in the last 12 months.

Please tick ✓ one box per row

	Almost every day	At least once a week	About once a month	Within the last 6 months	Within the last year	Longer ago	Never used	It does not apply/ Don't know
Sports/leisure facilities and events	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Museums and galleries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Theatres / Concert halls	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 8
Parks and open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 8

Q12. For each of the following services provided by Lewes District Council, do you think the service has got better or worse over the last three years, or has it stayed the same?

Please tick ✓ one box per row

	Better	Stayed the same	Worse	Don't know
Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Collection of household waste	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Local recycling facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Doorstep collection of items for recycling	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Sport/leisure facilities	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Museums/galleries	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Theatres/concert Halls	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4
Parks and open spaces	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

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Proposals to improve communication with the public on the value for money provided by the Council

Communication

- We will look at all our publications to residents to see how we can strengthen information about value for money
- We will review the reliability of delivery arrangements for council publications and test the current arrangements for delivering District Link with some focus groups drawn from the Citizens' Panel
- We will review the costs of the different methods of addressed delivery available from Royal Mail
- We will improve the written information available on our website and have put resources in place to do this

Customer

- We will test with some targeted focus groups (younger people and mixes of people) what we can do to improve awareness of the breadth of services that the Council provides
- We will explain the service improvements that have been made and the efficiency savings that we have achieved

Customer contact

- We will do some research on the calls received by the help desks in Community Services and Environmental Health and the outcome of those calls
- We will carry out an analysis of the switchboard response times for the recent months and, if possible, the months of September/October 06 for comparison
- We will then look to see what we can learn about improving the experience of residents who contact the Council by telephone and look to create better ways for the public to contact and communicate with us
- We will ask the consultants who carried out the survey if they are able to provide any analysis of the link between the overall satisfaction score and any other questions in the survey (for example if people were better informed on the value for money issue would the overall satisfaction score increase?)