



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Corporate Consultation Exercises Public, Employees and Members 2010
Date:	24 September 2010
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Purpose of the report

To provide Members with high level feedback on the consultation exercises carried out with residents, employees and Members earlier this year. This builds on the information that Members have already heard at the North South East West briefings earlier this month and in August and the strategic planning workshop on the 8th September.

Background

Members are aware that the Council has recently undertaken a series of consultation exercises to gather the views of residents, staff and Members in order to help inform the development of the new Corporate Plan and also to gather information for corporate and service level performance indicators. The information gathered from these exercises complements existing evidence and together will be used to direct the future priorities of the Council. The public consultation exercise also helps the Council fulfil its duty to consult which is part of Best Value legislation.

Methodology

The Council has consulted with residents, employees and Members in the past and the methodology adopted for each of the 2010 surveys was similar to those used previously. The methods used included:

- **Residents:** a door-to-door survey covering a representative sample of 1,619 households across the nine district electoral areas of the city. *Ipsos Mori* were commissioned to carry out this survey. Quotas were set in terms of electoral area, age and sex to ensure proportionality. This was supplemented by a series of in-depth interviews with S75 to gain the views of specific categories e.g. ethnic minorities/people with disabilities.
- **Members:** a telephone interview with elected Members. Members were also given the opportunity to self complete the survey if they preferred. Nearly 50% of Members responded. The Members survey was carried out by *PolicyArc Limited*
- **Staff:** a self-completion survey for all Belfast City Council employees which was provided online and in paper format. *Social Market Research (SMR)* were appointed to carry out the employee consultation.

Summary of Results

The results from the consultations exercises have been very encouraging. Not only have we observed an increase in satisfaction with many aspects of the Council and the city but we also have reassurance that the public and Members share many of

the same views about the priorities the Council needs to take forward. Some of the key results from the surveys are highlighted below for Members and further information and analysis will be provided to Members by way of performance reports through the briefings which will take place in developing the new corporate plan.

Residents' survey - Key results

Priorities for the city

The key priorities emerging from our consultation with the public were that the council should be:

- Creating a safer city **(50%)**
- Making the city cleaner and greener **(31%)**
- Supporting children and young people **(31%)**
- Investing in improving local areas **(30%)**
- Helping to support and improve the city's economy **(24%)**
- Providing value for money services **(23%)**

The things identified as most likely to improve quality of life were:

- Lower levels of anti-social behaviour **(46%)**
- Lower levels of crime **(39%)**
- More activities for children and young people **(37%)**
- Better employment opportunities **(33%)**
- Cleaner streets **(28%)**

Although there was a strong correlation between the priorities identified by the public in 2007 and 2010 (i.e. creating a safer city, making the city cleaner and greener and more activities for children and young people) it is interesting to note that this year the priorities have shifted slightly to issues such as the economy and investment and providing value for money services which reflects the challenging economic climate and people's interest in, and focus on, these areas.

POSITIVES

- **78%** were satisfied with the services provided by the Council compared to 74% in 07. Satisfaction with all council services also rose from 2007 to 2010
- **53%** felt Council services had got better over the past 3 years, 39% thought they had stayed the same while only 4% felt they had got worse
- **80%** felt that the Council was important to the everyday lives of the people of Belfast while only 8% felt it was unimportant
- **64%** thought the Council was efficient in the delivery of its services
- **51%** thought the Council has a positive image amongst residents (45% in 2007) while **57%** felt that Council staff present a positive image of the city (compared to 48% in 2007)
- **73%** thought the Council makes Belfast a better place to live
- **75%** used Council parks and leisure facilities with over 60% of these using them at least once a week
- **86%** agreed that the Council is working to make the city cleaner and more attractive (up from 47% in 2007) and $\frac{3}{4}$ of those surveyed felt the Council was working to make the city safer (74%) and was helping to promote good relations in the city (75%)
- **54%** agreed that the Council keeps residents informed about what it is doing, up from 41% in 2007
- There was high praise for 'City Matters' – **83%** had read the latest edition and **87%** stated it had helped increase their understanding of the Council
- **96%** of those surveyed enjoy living in Belfast. This has remained the same since 2007. **84%** were also very satisfied with their local area
- **56%** think that Belfast has got better over the past 3 years, 28% thought it had stayed the same while 14% thought it had got worse
- **69%** felt that the Council treats all people fairly and without discrimination – up from 49% in 2007

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

On the whole the results from the public survey are very encouraging, especially when set against the backdrop of a very challenging economic climate and many areas have shown improvement since 2007. The results have however indicated a number of potential areas for improvement, particularly in the areas of influencing, communication and consultation, including -

- Only **9%** of residents believe they can influence Council decisions that affect their local area while **59%** feel they can rarely or never influence decisions
- **44%** disagreed that they knew how their rates were spent while 36% agreed that they did know while 8% stated that they did not know
- **42%** stated that they felt that they don't know enough about the Council and would like to know more while only **23%** stated that they are not interested in the Council as long as they do their job. This is a reversal of the results for these questions from 2007 when 23% stated they would like to know more about the Council and 48% stated that they weren't interested as long as the Council did their job.
- **85%** of residents stated that it was important that the Council consults with them on its services and activities however only **36%** agreed that the Council consults with and listens to the views of residents while **29%** disagreed and **25%** neither agreed/nor disagreed
- Safety again was a key area of concern which is highlighted by the fact that it was the biggest priority area. **21%** stated that they felt safe in the city centre at night time which has dropped from 29% in 2007

MEMBERS SURVEY – KEY RESULTS

Members showed high levels of satisfaction with their role and felt that they had a good relationship with other Members and officers.

POSITIVES

- **92%** are proud to tell people that they are a Member of Belfast City Council – up slightly from 88% in 2007
- **76%** experience a high level of satisfaction being a Member for Belfast City Council – up from 71% in 2007
- **75%** agree that the Council is efficient in the delivery of its services compared to 64% in 2007 – only 13% disagreed with this compared to 24% who disagreed in 2007
- **100%** always/mostly take pride in carrying out their role well – compared to 93% in 2007
- **88%** agree that they receive the training and development they need to carry out their duties effectively – up from 66% in 2007
- **76%** believe that the training and development they receive helps them to fulfil their role better
- **87%** felt they had the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their role effectively
- **83%** felt that quality advice is available to enable effective decision making in the Council – up from 66% in 2007
- **100%** stated that they have a good working relationship with officers while 96% stated that they receive good support from officers for their work
- **71%** agreed that the Council has a clear sense of purpose for the future of Belfast – up from 54% in 2007 – while only 8% disagreed with this (down significantly from 29% in 2007)
- **50%** agreed that the Council has a positive image amongst residents – up from 43% in 2007
- **62%** agree that the structure of the Council is effective – significantly up from 37% in 2007 and **71% agree that the Council is well run** (compared to 59% in 2007)
- **62%** agree that the Council provides value for money services compared to

49% in 2007

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Only **46%** agreed that Members work well together to achieve the Council's goals – down from 61% in 2007 while 46% stated that Members 'sometimes' work well together (compared to 27% in 2007)
- Only **4%** of those surveyed felt they were able to 'greatly' influence the Council's priorities (compared to 17% in 2007), although 75% felt they were able to influence them 'to some extent' compared to 56% in 2007
- Although **46%** of those surveyed were satisfied with communication between all Members, 33% stated that they were dissatisfied with this. However 75% were satisfied with the relationship they had with other Members in the Council
- Just over half of those who responded (**51%**) stated that the induction practices that re in place for new Members were effective, 8% disagreed with this statement and 21% of those who responded did not know
- **17%** of those surveyed neither agreed/nor disagreed that the Council is working to create a better city for older people, that is working to create a better city for younger people or that the Council is helping to improve the local economy
- **25%** are dissatisfied at the balance between their home life and political life and 17% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with this
- **46%** of Members were neither satisfied/nor dissatisfied with communication between Members and officers compared to 42% who were satisfied and 13% who were dissatisfied

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

The results from the Staff survey also show some positive trends. It is worth noting that in the staff survey a high percentage of answers for a lot of the questions fell into the neither/nor categories of answer. So while some of the answers did not have high positive response this did not automatically mean that the responses overall were negative.

POSITIVES

- **67%** are satisfied with their current job working for the Council – up from 64% in 2007
- **96%** of employees stated that they take pride in doing their job well
- In general the results for communication showed very positive upward trends - **57%** were satisfied overall with communication in the Council – up from **50%** in 2007.
- **70%** agreed that the information they receive is clear and easy to understand and nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ were satisfied with the information from Intercom/Interlink. However there were lower levels of satisfaction with the Team Brief (54%) and Staff News

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Although there were some extremely encouraging results in the employee survey a number of areas for improvement were also identified. As with previous surveys these are focused on the areas of change, working across departments and training and development and some results highlighted the uncertainty over the RPA which was still undecided when the fieldwork for the survey was carried out.

- **26%** believe that different parts of the council work together to achieve common goals (which is down from 37% in 2007) while 40% thought they rarely/never worked together
- overall **24%** of employees are satisfied with how change is managed in the council (compared to 28% in 2007), **36%** are neither satisfied/nor dissatisfied and **38%** are dissatisfied (32% in 2007)
- **23%** felt they had an opportunity to contribute to improvements in the Council

- **49%** stated that they felt the Council values its staff, **36%** disagreed while **15%** did not know

Next Steps

Using the findings from the surveys

The results from all three surveys will be a key to helping to inform the development of the Council's new Corporate Plan for 2011-2015, and the development of plans and strategies across the organisation including those relating to Member and Workforce development. Performance indicator results from the surveys will also be fed into the new performance management system and together with trend analysis of results will be used to identify areas for improvement.

Reporting and Communication of Results

As previously, the results from all surveys will be widely communicated to Members, officers and the general public and officers from the Policy & Planning Team are working closely with Corporate Communications on the dissemination of this information.

Members are asked to note that there will be an opportunity to further discuss these findings in the further Party Group briefings and workshop sessions that are being planned around the development of the Corporate Plan.

Decision Required

Members are asked to

- To note the results of the Members, public and employee consultation exercises;
- To agree the process for communicating results to Members, the public and employees.