

STANDARDS COMMITTEE5 January 2005
(6.00pm – 7.00pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Barrett-Payton, Boyce, Hymans, Stebbings (Chair).
External Members: Dr Clark, Ms Hobbs (Vice Chair)

FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**05/s/01 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting on 30 June were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

05/s/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

05/s/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

05/s/04 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

05/s/05 LOCAL INVESTIGATION OF STANDARDS BOARD COMPLAINT

The Committee received an information update from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services regarding a change in the way complaints to the Standards Board can be investigated. It was noted that Regulations came into force on 4 November which permitted Ethical Standards Officers (ESOs), who work for the Standards Board, to refer complaints to the Council's Monitoring Officer [MO] (for this Council it is the Director of Central Services) for investigation and subsequent consideration by the Standards Committee. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that although the MO could carry out the investigation, as the MO has a role in acting as advisor to the Standards Committee, it was most likely that any investigation would be delegated to another person.

05/s/06 PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Members of the Committee made the following comments that would be passed on to the Corporate Management Team and Group Leaders:

1. The Committee was pleased to see that generally, public perceptions had improved across many areas.

2. The Committee suggested that further work be carried out to try and understand why public perceptions had fallen in a few areas.

Officer comment: Further work to analyse the citizens survey findings in detail has already been programmed over the next few months - this will include the perceptions questions.

3. The Committee noted that people thought the Council was less accessible to the public. It was suggested that more should be done to publicise the different ways that people can contact us.

Officer comment: The relaunch of the website and innovations such as online payments may help adjust this perception. Longer term improvements to customer access will be considered as part of the Strategy & Partnerships service plan in 2005/06.

4. The Committee noted that fewer people thought the Council provides value for money. The Committee also noted that 21% of respondents wanted more information on how Council services were performing, 20% on budgets and how money is allocated and 16% on the services provided by the Council. It was suggested that the Council does more to publicise what we do, how well we do it and how much it costs.

Officer comment: The Best Value Performance Plan summary will be delivered door to door in March 2005 and will provide one means of reiterating these messages. The Corporate Marketing Officer will also be looking at opportunities for positively reinforcing these messages as part of her work programme for 2005/06.

The short report is attached for information as an appendix (see table on page 2 for public perceptions).

05/s/07 **PROCESS FOR APPOINTING A NEW EXTERNAL MEMBER TO THE COMMITTEE**

The Committee agreed some changes to the role and person specification of the External Member as set out in the agenda. A new version would be re-circulated to members by Committee Services for final approval. The Committee agreed a Selection Panel of four, (Dr Clark, Councillor Barrett-Payton, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour).

The meeting ended at 7.00pm

Chair

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT OF: Head of Strategy and Partnerships
TO: Standards Committee on 5th January 2005
WARDS: All

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to give members of the Standards Committee information about public perceptions of the City Council in terms of honesty, integrity, openness and related issues.

1.2 BMG Research has just completed the City Council's 5th Citizens' Survey. 1,100 citizens were randomly selected and interviewed face-to-face at their home. They were asked for their views about Council services and issues facing the city. A 'booster' sample of 100 black and minority ethnic citizens was separately selected and asked the same questions so that their views could be compared to those of the wider community.

1.3 Statistically, a sample of 1,100 surveyed in this way means that we can be 95% confident that the response from the whole sample is accurate to within + or - 3%, were the question to be asked of the whole population of Cambridge. The responses from the BME 'booster' sample are not statistically accurate. However, where there are big differences in views from the main sample, this may give an indication for further exploration.

1.4 Previous surveys were undertaken in 1997, 1999 2000 and 2002. Many questions have been repeated in all 5 surveys, providing valuable trend data. The full interpretive report from BMG Research will be available on the Council's new website in January. This report concentrates on the public's perceptions of the City Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That members of Standards Committee consider residents' perceptions of the Council and let officers at the meeting know whether they would like any comments to be passed to Corporate Management Team or Group Leaders.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Respondents to the 2002 and 2004 Citizens' Surveys were shown a series of

statements. For each statement they were asked to say to what extent they agreed or disagreed that it applied to the City Council. The results are shown in the table at 3.2.

3.2 **Public perceptions of Cambridge City Council** – Autumn 2004 compared to Autumn 2002. The figures shown are the percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement minus the percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement.

Statement	% Net agree (agree-disagree)		
	Citizens Survey – Main Sample		
	2002	2004	Better / Worse
Takes residents' views into account when making decisions	+5	+39	+34
Has the public's confidence	+14	+45	+31
Consults its residents before making decisions	+12	+40	+28
Appears to have a clear sense of purpose and direction	+11	+37	+26
A flexible organisation	+9	+34	+25
Responds to the needs of local residents	+17	+41	+24
Treats everyone fairly	+20	+44	+24
Tells residents about what its doing	+24	+44	+20
Is well managed	+28	+42	+14
Communicates well with the public	+29	+42	+13
Works in partnership with other organisations	+29	+40	+11
Looks after the interests of the area	+36	+44	+8
Always trying to improve the services it provides	+35	+42	+7
Works to improve the quality of life for residents	+38	+38	0
An honest organisation	+35	+34	-1
Easy to contact if you need them	+66	+61	-5
Cares for the environment	+57	+45	-12
Accessible to the public	+59	+39	-20
Provides value for money	+25	-21	-46

Source: *Citizens Surveys Main Sample Autumn 2002 and 2004*

3.3 Public perceptions for all the statements give important feedback to the Council. However, the statements that have been shaded are perhaps more relevant in terms of

measuring public perception of the Council's honesty, integrity and openness.

- 3.4 The table in 3.2 suggests that public perceptions of the City Council have improved considerably over the last 2 years in many areas. In particular, residents are much more likely to agree that the Council consults residents and takes their views into account before making decisions. Residents are also much more likely to agree that the Council has the public's confidence.
- 3.5 On the down-side, residents are much less likely to agree that the Council provides value for money. The issue of value for money is reflected elsewhere in the survey when residents were asked about the level of Council Tax in relation to service provision. There is some anecdotal evidence that this perception is a general feeling across the country about public sector organisations in general.
- 3.6 The table below shows that 2 years ago residents were more likely to agree that Council Tax should go up to maintain service levels

*Agreement with specified statements regarding the service provision/Council Tax balance
(All respondents)*

Statement	2002			2004		
	% agree	Net agree	Rank (by net agree)	% agree	Net agree	Rank (by net agree)
It is important for the Council not to increase Council Tax by more than inflation, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some services	21	-32	3	48	+34	1
It is important for the Council to maintain current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax by more than inflation	55	+30	1	33	-12	2
It is important for the Council to improve current levels of service, even if this means increasing Council Tax by more than inflation	47	+13	2	24	-29	3

3.7 There has also been a drop in the percentage of residents agreeing that the Council is accessible to the public and easy to contact. This suggests that whilst we are pretty good at consulting residents and seeking their views on issues, we need to be more 'customer focused' in the way we enable residents to access our services.

3.8 The table at 3.11 shows the responses to the same 'perceptions' statements from black and minority ethnic (BME) residents in the 'booster' sample. As mentioned before, great care has to be taken in making any comparisons to the responses from the main sample.

3.9 The responses from the BME sample are generally more positive than the main sample and much more positive than responses from the 2002 BME 'booster' sample. The Council has put a lot of resources into engaging with residents from BME communities over the last 2 years and this response would suggest that people have noticed a difference in many areas.

3.10 Again, the biggest disappointment is the fall in the number of BME residents

who agree that the Council is accessible to the public.

3.11 BME residents' perceptions of Cambridge City Council – Autumn 2004 compared to Autumn 2002. The figures shown are the percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement minus the percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement.

Statement	% Net agree (agree-disagree)		
	Citizens Survey - BME Boost		
	2002	2004	Better / Worse
Takes residents' views into account when making decisions	+5	+50	+45
Treats everyone fairly	+13	+51	+38
Works to improve the quality of life for residents	+19	+55	+36
Has the public's confidence	+9	+43	+34
A flexible organisation	+10	+43	+33
Appears to have a clear sense of purpose and direction	+19	+51	+32
Provides value for money	+15	+42	+27
An honest organisation	+18	+45	+27
Works in partnership with other organisations	+24	+50	+26
Is well managed	+28	+52	+24
Looks after the interests of the area	+41	+63	+22
Consults its residents before making decisions	+21	+41	+20
Cares for the environment	+59	+76	+17
Responds to the needs of local residents	+19	+36	+17
Communicates well with the public	+33	+47	+14
Tells residents about what its doing	+29	+35	+6
Always trying to improve the services it provides	+43	+43	0
Easy to contact if you need them	+63	+63	0
Accessible to the public	+60	+36	-24

3.12 There were some findings from other questions in the Citizens' Survey that bear some relation to the perception questions responses.

- 69% of people who had contacted the Council in the last 12 months did so by telephone. This is a fall of 8% since 2002.
- 5% contacted the Council by e-mail or internet. This is a rise of 3% since 2002.
- 34% of all contact was with Arbury Housing office, 25% with Cherry Hinton Housing office, 21% with Mandela House and 19% with the Guildhall.
- 83% of all those respondents who had contacted the Council said that staff were helpful, a rise of 5% since 2002.
- 38% of respondents said they didn't get enough information from the Council.
- Respondents wanted more information on how Council services are performing (21%), budgets and how money is allocated (20%) and what services the Council provides (16%).
- 68% of all respondents say that they are very satisfied or satisfied with the way the City Council is running things overall, a rise of 1% since 2002.
- For individual services, satisfaction is highest for refuse collection at 88% (2002 = 91%), recycling at 84% (2002 = 78%) and street cleaning at 68% (2002 = 64%).

4. **CONSULTATIONS**

Explained in Section 1 of this report.

5. **IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Financial Implications**

The cost of the Citizens' Survey and BME Booster Survey was £33,000. This was met from the existing corporate consultation budget.

(b) **Staffing Implications**

None

(c) **Equal Opportunities Implications**

The survey was carried out by random sample selection to ensure that a cross section of the Cambridge community was included. In addition a further 100 black and minority ethnic residents were surveyed.

(d) **Environmental Implications**

Questions relating to environmental issues and environmental services were asked in the survey to gauge public opinion.

(e) **Community Safety**

Questions relating to community safety were asked in the survey to gauge public

opinion.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: The following are the background papers that were used in the preparation of this report:

Citizens' Survey 2002 report by MRUK Ltd.
Citizens' Survey 2004 report by BMG Research
Cambridge City Council's Medium Term Objectives

To inspect these documents contact Trevor Woollams on extension 7061

The author and contact officer for queries on the report is Trevor Woollams on extension 7061

Report file:

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