REPORT TO: **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 18 OCTOBER 2004**

REPORT ON: **ANNUAL CONSUMER SURVEY 2004**

REPORT BY: **ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (COMMUNITY PLANNING)**

REPORT NO: **666-2004**

1. PURPOSE

This report summarises the main findings from the 2004 Annual Consumer Survey and explains their use.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Committee:

(i) note the results contained in this report and agree that the issues raised should continue to be addressed as part of the Council's commitment to continuous improvement.

(ii) authorise officers to publish the report on the Council's website and distribute copies to partner organisations and representative bodies as part of the Council's commitment to Public Performance Reporting.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

None

5. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

None

6. BACKGROUND

6.1 The Council carries out an Annual Consumer Survey as part of evaluating progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the Council Plan. The main purpose of the survey is to track over time a core set of questions related to customer care issues and the public's overall perception of the Council as an organisation. In addition, the survey tracks the public's perception of whether the city is improving and whether fear of crime is reducing.

6.2 The survey is conducted by an independent market research company – Ashbrook Research and Consultancy – and is based on a sample of 400 citizens, who were interviewed in their homes during June.

6.3 Key results from the survey are summarised below. A full copy of the research report will be sent to each Group Secretary and made available in the members' lounge.

7. **KEY RESULTS**

7.1 **Customer Care**

7.1.1 A key objective of the survey is to gauge the levels of customer care perceived by people who contact a Council service, either by phone or by visit to an office. Tables 1 and 2 below show the results on a range of satisfaction indicators:

Table 1

Satisfaction with Telephone Contacts	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy of Staff	79%	87%	79%	75%	81%	96%	78%	84%
How Quickly Phone Was Answered	84%	79%	90%	96%	84%	100%	84%	85%
How Well Staff Understood What Was Wanted	79%	77%	76%	92%	71%	84%	80%	79%
Overall Helpfulness of Staff	77%	74%	79%	75%	81%	96%	78%	84%
Ease of Getting Someone Who Could Help	74%	70%	79%	86%	64%	97%	74%	76%
Outcome of Contact	61%	68%	65%	51%	59%	53%	64%	71%
Average	76%	76%	78%	79%	73%	88%	76%	80%

Table 2

Satisfaction with Office Visits	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Ease Of Getting To Office	94%	87%	91%	95%	100%	91%	94%	96%
Suitability of Office	N/A	N/A	89%	89%	87%	89%	82%	75%
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy Of Staff	81%	86%	87%	93%	81%	100%	79%	85%
Overall Helpfulness Of Staff	82%	81%	87%	93%	81%	100%	79%	85%
How Well Staff Understood What Was Wanted	86%	79%	81%	96%	83%	100%	83%	82%
Outcome of Contact	60%	60%	59%	78%	58%	80%	66%	62%
Average	81%	79%	81%	91%	82%	93%	81%	81%

7.1.2 The profile of satisfaction remains positive across all the indicators, with most satisfaction ratings broadly similar to those in 2003. As in previous years, the most significant level of dissatisfaction relates to ‘outcome of contact’ with telephone contacts and office visits. As highlighted last year, this is typical of consumer surveys of this kind. A benchmarking database of responses from over 1.7 million survey respondents published in 2003 showed that, while 86% were positive when asked about the helpfulness of staff, only 60% were happy with how quickly their complaints were dealt with. Satisfaction with outcomes will however continue to be monitored closely to identify any significant trends which require attention or have implications for training or the way services are delivered.

7.1.3 2004’s survey shows that 64% of respondents felt that they receive enough information about the Council and the services it provides - a slight increase on the figures of 60% in 2003 and 59% in 2002.

7.2 **Improvement in the City Centre and Respondents' Neighbourhoods**

Last year's survey, for the first time, split up the question about improvement in the city to focus separately on the city centre and respondents' own neighbourhoods. Tables 3 and 4 below show the percentage of respondents' who perceived the city centre and their own neighbourhood to have improved, deteriorated or stayed the same in recent years:

Table 3

Changes to City Centre	**2003**	**2004**
Improved	65%	52%
Stayed the same	18%	21%
Deteriorated	13%	21%
Can't Say	4%	6%

Although the % of respondents saying the city centre has improved in recent years is down on the 2003 figures, the result remains positive. Younger age groups were more likely to believe that the city centre has improved (e.g. 65% of those up to 25 thought the city centre had improved, compared to 5% who thought it had deteriorated).

Table 4

Changes to Neighbourhood	**2003**	**2004**
Improved	28%	26%
Stayed the same	49%	41%
Deteriorated	19%	27%
Can't Say	4%	6%

2004's results are broadly similar to 2003, with a slight shift from 'stayed the same' to 'deteriorated'. There was no clear pattern of responses by the different age groups.

7.3 **Fear of Crime**

The percentage of people more worried about becoming a victim of crime was 57%, up from 48% in 2003 and 41% in 2002 while only 9% described themselves as less worried. However, 30% said they were 'not worried' - up from 8% in the last 2 years. 48% of people said they felt safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, while 25% said they felt unsafe and 27% wouldn't walk alone.

7.4 **Public Image Profile**

7.4.1 The questionnaire includes a list of ten factors which seek to assess the respondent's overall impression of the Council. The full list of factors is shown in Table 5 below, along with the percentage of interviewees who responded positively each year. For 2004, a new factor was introduced - ' Tackles Important Issues for the Future of the City'

- which was seen as a better measure of the Council's image than 'Receives Fair Press Coverage' which it replaced.

Table 5

Public Image Profile	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Good Range of Services	48%	77%	79%	61%	68%	82%	64%	63%
Friendly Employees	75%	73%	79%	64%	64%	85%	67%	68%
Good Quality Services	46%	67%	65%	54%	63%	76%	55%	60%
Efficient Services	39%	66%	69%	54%	86%	70%	54%	58%
Communicates Well	34%	61%	67%	43%	31%	28%	49%	47%
Promotes Services Well	40%	59%	65%	45%	68%	64%	44%	47%
Receives Fair Press Coverage	52%	59%	69%	31%	37%	42%	45%	N/A
Value For Money	39%	53%	57%	34%	64%	67%	45%	49%
Listens to Complaints	45%	53%	69%	46%	23%	29%	53%	53%
Has Sufficient Resources	38%	52%	68%	51%	48%	23%	53%	55%
Tackles Important Issues for the Future of the City	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	41%
Average	46%	63%	69%	48%	50%	57%	53%	54%

7.4.2 The average score for the public image of the Council across all indicators in 2004 was broadly similar to that in 2003, with little significant variation in the individual scores. The survey also asked respondents to state which three of these factors are of most importance to them, and it is interesting to note that the top 5 priorities correspond to 4 of the top 5 statements for which the Council receives a positive response. 'Listening to Complaints' was second top priority but sixth in the list of positive results.

8. BENCHMARKING

8.1 Previous reports on the survey have mentioned a facility on COSLA’s website which allows Councils to compare results from residents’ surveys. Few Councils have used this facility and there is no fresh data available for comparison. However, COSLA intend to re-launch the benchmarking facility, and it is hoped that more Councils will add their results in future. Comparisons with other areas will be included in the report on future surveys if available.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The Annual Consumer Survey continues to provide valuable information on residents’ perception of the Council and the city. As in previous years, the issues raised by the survey results will continue to be addressed as part of the Council’s commitment to continuous improvement through consultation with service users. The survey provides important information on trends for self-assessment under the EFQM Organisational Excellence Model, which is a key part of the Council’s performance management arrangements for Best Value. The results are distributed amongst officers and used in training courses in relevant areas.

9.2 As well as the key results highlighted in this report, the survey also provides valuable information on usage and demand for services and on issues such as citizens’ views on, and access to, new technology, which informs the implementation of the Council’s Information and Communication Technology strategy. For example, 84% of those interviewed said it would be useful if they could call a telephone number to request Council services later in the evening than normal office hours, while 36% of those interviewed said they would consider using the website to request Council services.

40% of respondents said they had access to the internet on a personal computer at home, while 74% had access to a mobile phone.

10 CONSULATIONS

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executives and Head of Public Relations have been consulted on this report.

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Annual Consumer Survey 2004
Report prepared for Dundee City Council by Ashbrook Research and Consultancy Ltd - September 2004

Assistant Chief Executive (Community Planning) 12 October, 2004