

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 11 SEPTEMBER 2000
REPORT ON: ANNUAL CONSUMER SURVEY 2000
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE PLANNING
REPORT NO: 569-2000

1. PURPOSE

This report summarises the main findings from the 2000 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.
- (iii) remit the Director of Corporate Planning to arrange in-depth qualitative research, as agreed by Committee in April 2000, to explore relevant findings in greater detail.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the proposed qualitative research will be contained within the current budget allocation for the Annual Consumer Survey, due to savings achieved by reducing the questionnaire size and sample for the main survey.

4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

None

5. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

None

6. BACKGROUND

- 6.1 The Council Plan 1999-2002 committed the Council to continue to conduct an Annual Consumer Survey as part of evaluating progress in achieving the objectives of the Plan. The main purpose of the Annual 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. In line with the decision of Committee in April 2000 (Report 61/2000) this year's survey was based on a reduced sample of 400 citizens, who were interviewed in their homes during June and July. It was agreed that the savings generated by this approach would be used to carry out more detailed qualitative research. A full copy of the research report has been sent to each Group Secretary and is 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 or facility. Tables 1, 2 and 3 below show the results on a range of satisfaction indicators:

Table 1

Satisfaction with Telephone Contacts	1997	1998	1999	2000
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy of Staff	79%	87%	79%	75%
How Quickly Phone Was Answered	84%	79%	90%	96%
How Well Staff Understood What Was Wanted	79%	77%	76%	92%
Overall Helpfulness of Staff	77%	74%	79%	75%
Ease of Getting Someone Who Could Help	74%	70%	79%	86%
Outcome of Contact	61%	68%	65%	51%
Average	76%	76%	78%	79%

Table 2

Satisfaction with Office Visits	1997	1998	1999	2000
Ease Of Getting To Office	94%	87%	91%	95%
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy Of Staff	81%	86%	87%	93%
Overall Helpfulness Of Staff	82%	81%	87%	93%
How Well Staff Understood What Was Wanted	86%	79%	81%	96%
Outcome of Contact	60%	60%	59%	78%
Average	81%	79%	81%	91%

Table 3

Satisfaction With Facility Visits	1997	1998	1999	2000
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy of Staff	83%	95%	95%	96%
East Of Getting To Facility	90%	95%	100%	97%
Overall Helpfulness Of Staff	81%	95%	95%	96%
Overall Standard of Service	72%	93%	97%	98%
Average	82%	95%	97%	97%

7.1.2 The profile of satisfaction remains positive across all the indicators, the majority of which show improvement on the previous year's results. The most significant level of dissatisfaction relates to 'outcome of contact with telephone contacts', although there has been a significant improvement in satisfaction with the outcome of contact from

office visits. 2000's figures also show significant improvements in satisfaction with 'how quickly the phone was answered', 'how well staff understood what was wanted' and accessibility issues such as 'ease of getting someone who could help' and 'ease of getting to office'.

7.1.3 1999's survey results had given some cause for concern in terms of the percentage of those who had contacted the Council to make a complaint. 2000's figures show this falling from 38% to 31%, with significant increases in contacts for other reasons e.g.

- to use a Council facility (up from 33% to 43%)
- to seek information (up from 35% to 44%)
- to request a service (up from 16% to 29%)
- to make a suggestions (up from 2% to 11%)

7.1.4 68% of respondents in 2000 felt that they receive enough information about the Council and the services it provides. This is down from 1999's figures of 81% but broadly in line with 1997 and 1998, and significantly higher than the most recent figure available for the Scottish average which was 24%.

7.2 Improvement in the City

Table 4 shows relatively consistent results over the 4 years in the number of people who perceive the City to have improved or deteriorated, although this year's figure for improvement is the highest since the survey began. In each year, significantly more people have felt the City to have improved than deteriorated.

Table 4

Changes to Dundee	1997	1998	1999	2000
Improved	41%	44%	42%	46%
Stayed the Same	21%	27%	20%	19%
Deteriorated	31%	25%	31%	31%
Can't Say	7%	5%	6%	4%

When residents were asked, on an unprompted basis, to identify ways the city could be improved, the principal suggestions were:

- improvements to housing schemes
- cleaner streets
- more jobs
- cheaper buses
- improvements to roads and pavements

7.3 Fear of Crime

The percentage of people more worried about becoming a victim of crime involving violence is 60%. This is broadly consistent with figures for previous years (1998 – 58%, 1999 – 56%). More police on the beat was by far the most common suggestion for how safety could be increased.

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:

Table 5

Public Image Profile	1997	1998	1999	2000
Good Range of Services	48%	77%	79%	61%
Friendly Employees	75%	73%	79%	64%
Good Quality Services	46%	67%	65%	54%
Efficient Services	39%	66%	69%	54%
Communicates Well	34%	61%	67%	43%
Promotes Services Well	40%	59%	65%	45%
Receives Fair Press Coverage	52%	59%	69%	31%
Value For Money	39%	53%	57%	34%
Listens to Complaints	45%	53%	69%	46%
Has Sufficient Resources	38%	52%	68%	51%
Average	46%	63%	69%	48%

- 7.4.2 Following steady improvement in 1998 and 1999's results, the figures for 2000 have fallen back, although most still represent an improvement on 1997. An analysis of press coverage at the time the survey was being conducted shows that the main issue was the difficulties being experienced locally by the Health Service. It is possible that the publicity on this issue may have affected the public's view of local services, particularly if there was any confusion regarding responsibilities. It is therefore proposed that further in-depth research be carried out in this area, focussing on:

- the public's understanding of the responsibilities of local government
- the factors which would make the public regard the Council in a more positive light

As agreed by Committee in April 2000 (Report 61/2000) the reduction in the size of the survey sample will allow further in-depth qualitative research to be conducted within the budget normally allocated to the annual survey. It is proposed that the Director of Corporate Planning be remitted to arrange this.

8. **CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The 2000 Annual Consumer Survey results show that good progress continues to be made in terms of customer care and that fairly consistent results are still being achieved in terms of improvement in the city and fear of crime. The 'public image profile' results are more in line with 1997's figures than the improved results in 1998 and 1999, and it is proposed to conduct further in-depth research in this area and to address this as part of the Council's strategy of continuous improvement.

- 8.2 This research is for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It meets with the Council's commitment to continuous improvement through consultation with service users, and provides important results information 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. The survey also provides valuable information on usage and demand for services and on issues such as citizens' access to new technology, which will inform development of the Council's Information and Communication Technology strategy.

Background Papers

Report to Policy and Resources Committee - April 2000
Annual Consumer Survey (61/2000)

Director of Corporate Planning Date