REPORT TO: **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 10 SEPTEMBER 2001**

REPORT ON: **ANNUAL CONSUMER SURVEY 2001**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE PLANNING**

REPORT NO: **592-2001**

1. PURPOSE

This report summarises the main findings from the 2001 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) note the points which emerged from qualitative research carried out after last year's survey

(iv) note the benchmarking comparisons from other surveys

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

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 towards 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 – and is based on a sample of 400 citizens, who were interviewed in their homes during June. A full copy of the research report has been sent to each Group Secretary and is available in the Members' Lounge.

6.3 This report also summarises the results of qualitative research carried out following last year's survey, and provides comparisons with other surveys

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	2001
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy of Staff	79%	87%	79%	75%	81%
How Quickly Phone Was Answered	84%	79%	90%	96%	84%
How Well Staff Understood What Was Wanted	79%	77%	76%	92%	71%
Overall Helpfulness of Staff	77%	74%	79%	75%	81%
Ease of Getting Someone Who Could Help	74%	70%	79%	86%	64%
Outcome of Contact	61%	68%	65%	51%	59%
Average	76%	76%	78%	79%	73%

Table 2

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

Table 3

Satisfaction With Facility Visits	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Overall Friendliness/Courtesy of Staff	83%	95%	95%	96%	87%
East Of Getting To Facility	90%	95%	100%	97%	98%
Suitability of Facility	N/A	N/A	98%	84%	81%
Overall Helpfulness Of Staff	81%	95%	95%	96%	87%
Overall Standard of Service	72%	93%	97%	98%	93%
Average	82%	95%	97%	97%	89%

7.1.2 The profile of satisfaction remains positive across all the indicators, although some results are down on the high scores obtained last year. The most significant level of dissatisfaction relates to 'outcome of contact' with telephone contacts and office visits, and there is also a drop in the percentage of people satisfied with 'ease of getting someone who could help' and 'how well staff understood what was wanted' on the telephone. The full survey report does point out that a significantly lower percentage of those interviewed in 2001 said they had contacted the Council in the previous year.

This would reduce the size of the sample for these particular questions which may have affected the results. However, these issues in particular will 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 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 showed this falling from 38% to 31%, and there has been a further fall to 27% in 2001. There were significant increases in contacts for the following reasons:

- to use a Council facility (up from to 43% to 58%)
- to seek information (up from to 44% to 51%)
- to request a service (up from to 29% to 37%)

7.1.4 80% of respondents in 2001 felt that they receive enough information about the Council and the services it provides. This is up from 2000's figure of 68% and more in line with 1999's result of 81%

7.2 **Improvement in the City**

Table 4 shows a relatively equal split in 2001 between the people who perceive the City to have improved, deteriorated or stayed the same. In each year previously, significantly more people have felt the City to have improved than deteriorated, but this year there has been an increase in 'stayed the same' or 'can't say'.

Table 4

Changes to Dundee	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Improved	41%	44%	42%	46%	28%
Stayed the Same	21%	27%	20%	19%	28%
Deteriorated	31%	25%	31%	31%	33%
Can't Say	7%	5%	6%	4%	11%

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

- better/more policing, CCTV etc (9%)
- more jobs (8%)
- tackle drugs problems (8%)
- improvements to housing schemes (6%)
- tackle vandalism/graffiti (5%)

7.3 **Fear of Crime**

The percentage of people more worried about becoming a victim of crime was 32%, while 34% said they were less worried and 22% said they were not worried. In previous years, the percentage saying 'more worried' has generally been between 50% and 60%.

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	2001
Good Range of Services	48%	77%	79%	61%	68%
Friendly Employees	75%	73%	79%	64%	64%
Good Quality Services	46%	67%	65%	54%	63%
Efficient Services	39%	66%	69%	54%	86%
Communicates Well	34%	61%	67%	43%	31%
Promotes Services Well	40%	59%	65%	45%	68%
Receives Fair Press Coverage	52%	59%	69%	31%	37%
Value For Money	39%	53%	57%	34%	64%
Listens to Complaints	45%	53%	69%	46%	23%
Has Sufficient Resources	38%	52%	68%	51%	48%
Average	46%	63%	69%	48%	50%

7.4.2 The average score for the public image of the Council across all indicators in 2001 (50%) was very similar to that in 2000 (48%). However, there were significant variations for specific public image scores. For example, there were notable increases with respect to the following indicators:

- Providing good quality services (rising from 54% to 63%)
- Providing an efficient service (rising from 54% to 86%)
- Promoting its services well (rising from 45% to 68%)
- Providing services which are good value for money (rising from 34% to 64%)

During the same time, however, there were significant falls in:

- Communicating well with the public (falling from 43% to 31%)
- Listening to complaints (falling from 46% to 23%)

7.5 **Qualitative Research**

7.5.1 Following last year's survey, qualitative research was carried out to explore some of the public image findings in more detail. The research identified a lack of public awareness of the wide range of services provided by the Council and of how local government is financed. Among the positive findings was a strong element of trust towards the Council, which was seen as more likely to be honest than other organisations which put their own interests first. On the other hand, there was a view that customer service standards within the Council could be variable, and a perception that the Council is gradually cutting back on services, which may tie in with the question on resources in the consumer survey.

7.5.2 Key issues identified in this research included:

- making sure that the city's environment is cared for
- being open about what the Council can do and sticking to timetables
- listening to the public and keeping them informed
- dealing effectively with complaints and enquiries in a customer-focussed way

7.5.3 The qualitative research also provided valuable information on public perceptions of new methods of service delivery such as call centres and the internet, which will be drawn upon in developing the Council's approach to these issues.

8. BENCHMARKING

8.1 There is now a facility on COSLA's website which allows Councils to compare results from residents' surveys. Only three Councils have entered data so far and the questions have not been fully standardised, but the comparisons below can be made using a detailed interpretation of our survey results and the results of those Councils which have entered data on similar questions. It is hoped that more Councils will add survey results to the system in future which will allow more extensive comparison:

(a) I was satisfied with the contact I had with the Council

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Dundee	33%	44%	7%	12%	4%
Council 1	31%	35%	8%	15%	11%
Council 2	61%	5%	3%	24%	7%
Council 3	25%	21%	12%	35%	7%

(b) The staff I spoke to were helpful

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Dundee	48%	37%	1%	7%	7%
Council 3	8%	21%	31%	32%	8%

(c) I am satisfied with the information I get on local Council services

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Dundee	N/A	80%	N/A	20%	N/A
Council 2	8%	41%	3%	42%	6%

(d) The Council gives residents good value for money

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Dundee	N/A	64%	22%	14%	N/A
Council 1	4%	35%	15%	28%	18%
Council 3	4%	18%	46%	29%	3%

8.2 Further contextual information is available from the results of the Peoples Panel, an initiative by the Cabinet Office to measure consumer satisfaction with key public services. In the latest wave of research, just over half of Panel members (51%) said they were satisfied with their local Council, down from 53% in 1998. A quarter (23%) were dissatisfied, up from 18% in 1998. The Dundee survey explores satisfaction in greater detail and does not have a directly comparable question on overall satisfaction, although the overall 'public image' score in para 7.4.1 above is broadly in line with national levels of satisfaction. Data on overall satisfaction with the Council will become available in due course from the ongoing Scottish Household Survey, which will provide a useful comparison with other Scottish authorities.

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 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.

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 will inform development of the Council's Information and Communication Technology strategy.

Director of Corporate Planning …………………………….. Date ………………………..