

Community Engagement Parish and Town Council Satisfaction Survey 2009

Summary

1. Scope and purpose of the work

1.1 This report provides information about work that has been done to find out town and parish council levels of satisfaction concerning their engagement with Mid Suffolk District Council.

1.2 The piece of work has been led by the Community Engagement strategic priority group. The Community Engagement group is one of the six that guide the priorities of the Council as set out in the Council's Strategic Plan 2007-2011.

1.3 One of the community engagement priorities for the district Council is to increase engagement with town and parish councils and to find out how satisfied these local councils are with the engagement process. The mandate to carry out this piece of work came from Member endorsement of the strategic priority action plans.

1.4 We want to know the answers to the questions in the survey because we are committed to a better understanding between our Council and the 122 parishes in the area. We want to encourage decision making down to local level. If our community engagement processes are poorly organised, then this agenda will have the potential to fail our communities. We have the desire to hear the voices of residents and business people in the area so that we can understand their issues and respond quickly to their changing needs. We also want the communities to understand the impact of strategies, policies and services on the well-being of their communities and their locality.

2. The questionnaire

2.1 The Community Engagement questionnaire was devised to find out:

- a) how satisfied in general are town and parish council's with the current level of engagement with the district council
- b) how satisfied are town and parish councils with more specialised / operational level engagement with us as a district council
- c) if any changes need to be made to enhance community engagement and what these may be.

2.2 It is intended to carry out this survey every year so that we can monitor levels of satisfaction with community engagement over time.

3. Number of returns

3.1 Of the 122 town and parish councils in the district that were contacted, 54 returned comments. This is a 44% return rate which compares very favourably to the 10% norm for postal questionnaire return rates. However, it is accepted that this figure may have been substantially more if district Councillors had been directly involved in promoting the questionnaire. This is a point to take forward for next year.

4. Headline messages

4.1 Overall, when asked to summarise by scoring their satisfaction of engagement between their council and the district council the average score was 7.5 (on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 10 is extremely satisfied). This figure will form the baseline number of satisfaction with community engagement on which we intend to build and progress.

4.2 Appendix A (at the back of this report) shows the range of values for each service that respondents were asked to comment about. These values of average satisfaction range between 6.5 and 9.1. All aspects of the community engagement topics covered by the questionnaire are showing a level above 5, which is representative of being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with community engagement.

4.3 When parish and town councils were asked how useful the input of the district councillor is to the area the average score is 7.8. This is mid range when the survey is taken in entirety, with 8 other items from the questionnaire scoring higher than this and 6 scoring lower.

4.4 When parish and town councils were asked how often the District Councillor attends Parish Council meetings 26% reported 'Every', 66% reported 'Most', 6% reported 'Some' and 2% reported 'Very few'.

4.4 Further questions in the survey were asked to find out the reasons for the scorings for each of the 16 sections of the questionnaire, and these too have been analysed to be fed back to the relevant officers. It is anticipated that the individual parishes will be contacted to action and resolve the outstanding issues mentioned.

6. Further work and actions

6.1 We need to find out why we did not get more responses by contacting a sample of the non-respondent parish councils. Action 1: a Policy Officer from Organisational Development will contact a random 10% sample of the non-responding parishes and a short report will be compiled including the learning points, in preparation for the next survey during 2010. Target date: end of July 2010.

6.2 All 122 parishes will be sent a summary report for information and comment. Action: an officer from Democratic and Legal will lead this work. Target date: end July 2010.

6.3 Specific issues from the survey will be raised at service level with the appropriate person. Action: a Policy Officer from Organisational Development will lead this work. Target date: by end of July 2010.

6.4 A media briefing will sent out which highlights the many positive comments from the survey responses. Action: Senior Communications Officer. Target date: Mid July 2010.

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Appendix A

Community Engagement 2009 : town and parish council satisfaction scores

