



Motion 722 – Highways Satisfaction Levels

1. Background

1.1 Members considered the following motion to Full Council on 29 June 2016.

Motion 772 – Highways Satisfaction Levels

Proposed by Cllr Paul Hodgkinson

Seconded by Cllr Chris Coleman

This Council expresses concern that the key performance indicators for Highways as published in recent Council papers show disappointing satisfaction levels with the service amongst both members and parish councils.

This Council believes that more needs to be done to improve satisfaction levels and that it is in the public interest to understand the reasons for such unsatisfactory levels of satisfaction.

This Council therefore requests that the Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee conducts a detailed analysis of these satisfaction levels with the county's highways and reports back for member discussion at the full Council meeting on 7 December 2016.

1.2 The committee supported the proposal to commission an independent review of Highways Customer Satisfaction Surveys and endorsed the suggestion that the consultant be asked to: -

- a) *Review the results of previous surveys and any comments attached to the results to attempt to identify trends or areas that needed to be improved;*
- b) *Review the questions for the survey to ensure they are fit for purpose and focused on collecting the right customer satisfaction data;*
- c) *Look for ways to improve survey return rates, (currently low, with less than 20 percent of parishes responding);*
- d) *Review what changes the Highways Service and Amey have put in place to improve customer satisfaction, and to better understand what impact these are likely to have, including the recently agreed Amey Customer Service Improvement Plan;*
- e) *Review the National Highways and Transport (NHT) survey results and data, and to make a recommendation on the council's future participation in the survey.*

2. Review of previous survey results and questions

2.1 Two annual surveys are carried out – one with parish and town councils and one with county councillors. These are aimed to capturing levels of customer satisfaction and understanding any trends which might drive customer service improvements. In 2015 the result for the parish and

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town council survey was 2.41 (rating 1 to 5, 5 good) and for the member survey was 2.95. These results were a reduction compared with the previous set of results at 3.73 and 3.83 respectively.

- 2.2 A review of the surveys was carried out by Emma Burchell (Communications Manager: Creative and Consultation) in conjunction with GCC and Amey officers. The proposed revisions to surveys were also independently reviewed by the Consultation Institute.
- 2.3 In general terms the review of the previous survey found that analysing the survey to identify deliverable customer service improvements was very difficult. The questions were not specific enough and the wording in places was ambiguous or unhelpful. It was also considered that comparing the survey results with anything pre-2014/15 was not straightforward – the highways contract has changed dramatically, some of the questions were not suitable for the current contract and, as it stood, the questions did not take into consideration new communication channels and the introduction of the Customer Contact Centre. Within the existing survey, very few questions attracted a written comment, but where these existed there was a general trend around lack of communication being a source of dissatisfaction.
- 2.4 Both surveys have been revised and this has added the following benefits: -
- Questions have been made much more specific, to ensure the results enable us to better understand the reasons behind satisfaction levels, and at what point in the process can issues arise.
 - The surveys are 'routed' so that they ask more detailed questions where particular responses are selected.
 - The names of parish councils who respond to the survey will be collected – this way it should be possible to pinpoint any particular areas of dissatisfaction amongst parish councils and address these through follow up face to face discussions with those parish councils who have identified specific issues, so that we can drill down into the data and come up with specific action plans for those councils if necessary.
 - The survey will be run online but will also be supplemented by having the surveys designed up into eye catching hard copies to maximise response rates.
 - The introduction of an incentive to complete the survey to boost return rates. This will be a prize draw to win a week of lengthsman in their parish.
- 2.5 The Consultation Institute have independently reviewed the proposed new survey questions and provided feedback that they were content to endorse the questionnaire as fit for purpose. Notwithstanding this, they suggested that it would add value to conduct some research work with potential respondents to ensure that their views as to what represent appropriate measures for satisfaction are covered. As such, it is intended that the survey is tested on a selection of responders prior to the survey being distributed widely.
- 2.6 The disadvantage of overhauling the surveys is that the overall survey results will not be comparable to previous years. However there are significant benefits in changing the surveys to make them far more useful in being able to drive customer service improvements. Although the questions have been altered we will still be able to make some comparisons to last year's survey results with the following two key questions and we can potentially use this to benchmark against previous results.

Old Question

Overall, how would you rate Amey Highways Gloucestershire?
(Very Good, Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor)

New Question

Overall, how would you rate Amey Highways Gloucestershire on the service(s) it has provided in your parish/town?
(Very Good, Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor)

Old Question

If Amey Highways Gloucestershire has carried out work in your Parish/Town, how would you rate the following:

- The helpfulness and accuracy of the information provided prior to the works taking place.
- Speed with which the work was carried out on site
- Success of keeping disruption to a minimum
- Quality of the completed work

(Very Good, Good, Average, Poor, Very Poor)

New Question

This question has remained the same but in order to identify where any particular satisfaction may lie we have split this question into various work types to enable us to address the issues in a more focused way and if necessary have further conversations to identify the issues. The areas are: pothole repairs, patching, resurfacing, surface dressing, road markings, hedge/tree cutting, grass cutting, gully emptying/cleaning, drainage schemes, winter salting, lengthsman and public rights of way (PROW)

3. Return rates

- 3.1 The 2015 parish survey received a 40% response rate (107 of 266 parishes). The 2015 councillor survey received a 43% response rate (23 out of 53 councillors). It would be helpful to improve the response rate for both parish and member surveys in order to have enough data to enable trends to be identified and services improved.
- 3.2 A number of techniques are proposed to improve response rates to the parish and town council survey: -
- Promotion through the parish newsletter.
 - Promotion through the Chartered Parish group.
 - Parishes who return their survey will be entered into a draw for an extra week of lengthsman duties.
 - Both electronic and hard copy surveys available.
 - Parishes which have not responded initially will receive a telephone call from the Parish and Member CCC administrator to check that they have received the survey and request their response.
 - County councillors will be asked to encourage their parishes to respond.
 - County councillors will be emailed directly
 - Promotion through members matters
- 3.3 The parish and town council survey is a useful strand which can demonstrate a county wide view. However, there are areas of the county which are not represented by a parish or town council,

such as within some wards of Cheltenham and Gloucester. Whilst these areas are covered by county councillors who have the opportunity to represent the view of their area in the councillor survey, there are some ways in which wider customer feedback could be sought all year round which would help to drive customer service improvements. One option to be investigated is the inclusion of a 'how are we doing' feedback survey on customer responses which would collect feedback all year round and potentially be a bigger source of data.

4. Improving customer satisfaction

4.1 A number of customer service improvements have been put in place with the aim of improving communication and customer satisfaction.

4.2 Following the 2015 survey results Amey put in place a Customer Service Improvement Plan. This looked at all complaints received during 2014/15 and 2015/16, as well as the parish and town council surveys. The conclusions from this identified some key areas of improvement:

- Communication
 - o Improvement of schemes communication and public consultations
 - o Responding to customer when they expect it (direct request for communication and identifying customers who should be responded to)
- Work not done since reporting
 - o Communicating policy and SLA timescales for defects and 'minor' works – managing customer expectations.
- Staff attitude
 - o Customer service training for customer facing teams – dealing with difficult customers and situations

In addition to the findings from this review, a customer service improvement workshop was held with Area Highways Representatives, PROW officers and members of the Customer Contact Centre to understand where improvements can be made to systems and processes. This resulted in seven key improvement areas which were added to the Action Plan.

4.3 Since the start of the current highways contract additional staff have been recruited into the Customer Contact Centre. In addition a specific member of staff has been assigned to dealing with member and parish emails.

4.4 More recently a Stakeholder Manager was recruited into Amey's team to specifically focus on customer and community engagement, firstly focusing on scheme consultations, but with a longer term objective of improving customer focus throughout the business. This is already having a significant and positive impact on communications with customers.

4.5 The focus on communications and customer satisfaction is starting to show real progress. In October an update on the customer service area shows significantly higher numbers of compliments compared with complaints, and lower volumes of justified complaints. October saw the lowest amount of complaints received in a month so far this year (3 no.). The rate of complaints received is slowing, with just one complaint in October relating to schemes communication.

5. National Highways and Transport Survey

5.1 The NHT Public Satisfaction Survey collects public perspectives on, and satisfaction with, Highway and Transport Services in Local Authority areas. It is a unique, standardised, collaboration between Highway Authorities across the UK enabling comparison, knowledge sharing, and the potential to improve efficiencies by the sharing of good practice. The NHT Survey is also referenced in the DfT's Incentive Fund Self-assessment process. It gives participating Authorities:

- A better understanding of how they are performing in the eyes of their public
- A consistent datum for setting service levels and a means of measuring the impact of service improvements
- Access to the best performers and the opportunity to learn from the good practice of others
- Full transparency of data for benchmarking purposes Previous and current results

5.2 The NHT survey has a number of disadvantages:

- It is currently carried out as a postal survey, and only generates around a 25% response rate; as such is self selecting.
- The age profile of respondents shows that more than 50% are over 65, which does not accurately reflect the county's demographic
- The questions are quite generic and often results correlated better with other national issues (such as the price in petrol) rather than with actual road condition.

However, it is currently the only survey which enables highway services across local authorities to be benchmarked against each other. The SW Highways Alliance is currently looking at how we could benchmark more effectively across the region. However, this ability to benchmark against other peer authorities is an essential part of performance management and is also included as evidence of good practice in the DfT Incentive Questionnaire. As such, until such time as a more suitable survey is developed it is recommended that we continue to participate.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 *That the amendments to the parish and town council survey and member survey are supported.*
- 6.2 *That the 2016 survey is started in December 2016, lasting approximately 8 weeks.*
- 6.3 *That GCC continue to participate in the NHT survey.*

Copies of the revised surveys can be viewed on the council website at the following link:

<http://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=673&MId=8228&Ver=4>