BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

3RD OCTOBER 2007

CUSTOMER PANEL SURVEY (1)

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Mike Webb
Responsible Head of Service	Hugh Bennett, Assistant Chief Executive

1. SUMMARY

1.1 To inform Members of the key findings of the first Customer Panel Survey which took place in June 2007 (full report attached as Appendix 1)

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet considers the attached report.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The CPA Framework 2006 sets out a number of Key Lines of Enquiry for Corporate Assessment. These include the need for councils to ensure their ambitions are based on local needs and for them to be clear about what their customers' priorities are. Initial guidance for the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment emphasises the need for agencies including councils to strengthen their focus on citizens and service users, to engage customers better and to obtain robust data from a reliable evidence base. To do this, the guidance states organisations must secure the participation of citizens in their activities and pay close attention to those citizens' experiences and viewpoints, as well as reporting progress back to them on a regular basis in order to strengthen engagement.

3.2 One of Bromsgrove District Council values is 'Putting the Customer First. The Council is committed to providing an excellent service for all its customers, and to consulting more effectively to ensure their needs are being met. Customer engagement is a crucial part of the Council's journey towards achieving a 'Fair' CPA recategorisation, and the Improvement Director has emphasised strongly that Members must be provided with firm evidence of customer need, rather than anecdotal evidence, in order to be effective decision-makers.

3.3 A Customer Panel Survey was commissioned in early 2007 to ascertain customers' views on the Council's priorities and current service provision. Following initial meetings with customer focus groups to develop the content of the survey, 1,600 copies of a postal questionnaire were sent out to the Customer Panel by the Council's contractors, Snap. 438 surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 27%. The confidence interval was 6%. Snap administered the process and analysed the results on behalf of the Council. The detailed results are available in the consultant's report, attached at Appendix 1.

3.4 The findings of the survey were mixed, though a number of successes were evident. 65% of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from the Council, and over half felt the Council was making the area a better place to live (55%) and were making it safer (56%). Moves to improve Customer Service have been recognised: 71% of respondents found accessing the Customer Service centre easy, and 72% said they would recommend the centre to a friend. Over half of respondents found contacting the Council easy (54%); however, only 43% found the Council to be efficient and well-run and even fewer felt it provided good value for money (38%). 61% of respondents felt the Council was remote and impersonal.

3.5 When asked about the Council's priorities, street cleansing was deemed to be the most important priority (89%), whilst improving the Council's reputation came a close second (87%). Importantly, 78% viewed community influence through consultation as a priority, echoing the message from Central Government in CPA and CAA guidance. Mechanisms such as electronic questionnaires and discussion forums were suggested as alternative methods of consultation that the Council could use.

3.6 The priorities deemed least important to the Council's customers were community events and the regeneration of Longbridge. When asked about progress towards achieving the Council's priorities, respondents were least satisfied with progress made on regenerating Bromsgrove town centre. This is important given that half of respondents said they visited Bromsgrove town centre at least once a week (50%). Satisfaction with progress made in improving the Council's reputation was also low (38%).

3.7 In terms of service provision, 69% were satisfied with the refuse collection service, 71% were satisfied with parks and open spaces and just under half were satisfied with the overall range of entertainment offered at the Artrix (47%). Of concern is the fact that 63% of respondents no longer use the Dolphin Sports and Leisure Complex. Reasons given for this included structural disrepair and lack of privacy in changing facilities, lack of cleanliness and competition from private gyms.

3.8 The Senior Corporate Policy and Performance Officer is currently re-letting the contract for the Customer Panel in order to make it more robust, and so that other methods of consultation and recruitment to the panel can be exploited. An increase in the size of the Customer Panel will be sought, together with a facility to drill down into ward-level and customer-group data (i.e. results according to age, ethnicity etc). This will improve the quality of the data that can be drawn from each consultation. Methods of boosting the sample size and response rate, together with wider marketing of the Customer Panel are also being incorporated into the new contract. This work will be completed shortly, ahead of the next Customer Panel Survey which is due to take place in November 2007.

4. <u>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</u>

4.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this survey, given that budget provision for existing corporate priorities has already been made. Subsequent consultation may impact on the next round of budget planning, depending on results. Budgetary provision for current consultation activities has already been made.

5. <u>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</u>

5.1 There are no legal implications.

6. CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

6.1 This report and associated appendix relate broadly to all corporate objectives due to the discussion of prioritisation and service delivery covered.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 There are no risks associated with the details included in this report

8 CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Customer implications include the need to strengthen the existing Customer Panel and engage participants in further consultation exercises. Officers should be aware of perception results for their service areas and use these to inform their own business planning processes. Members should be aware of the emphasis placed on customer consultation and evidence–based decision making in CPA and CAA guidance, and use the results of this consultation to inform the improvement journey of the Council.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Implications for the Council's Equalities and Diversity policies include the need for the Customer Panel to be as representative as possible of the population as is practicable, and of the necessity to ascertain the views of specific demographic groups by drilling down into consultation responses.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues: None
Personnel Issues: None
Governance/Performance Management: Performance management of key issues identified in the report; management of Council reputation and communication of results; adherence to CPA KLOEs and CAA guidance.
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act 1988: None
Policy:
Environmental: None

11. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	No
Corporate Director (Services)	No
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	No

12. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Customer Panel Survey draft report July 2007

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Customer Panel Survey draft report July 2007
- The transition from CPA to CAA consultation paper April 2007
- CPA District Council Framework from 2006: Corporate Assessment Key Lines of Enquiry

Contact officer

Name: Jenny McNicol
E Mail: j.mcnicol@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 881631