

## **ESSEX-WIDE BEST VALUE GENERAL CONSULTATION SURVEY**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report brings to Members' attention the findings of the Essex-wide Best Value General Consultation Survey, in which 11 Councils, including Rochford District Council and Essex County Council, participated.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 As part of the Best Value process, the Government requires all local authorities to formally consult with their local population about services as part of their duty to deliver what people want. In order to ensure compatibility of data between all Authorities, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) published clear guidance about what questions should be asked as part of this general survey of local residents and also the frequency of such surveys, which should be undertaken at a minimum of 3 year intervals commencing in 2000.
- 2.2 In June 2000, the Council decided that rather than carry out such a survey in isolation, there would be benefits from joining a consortium of Essex Authorities, both in terms of resource expenditure and the opportunities for benchmarking (Min. 213/2000). A list of the participating Authorities is given as Appendix 1. In August 2000, the Essex Consortium commissioned ORC International to undertake the work.
- 2.3 The questionnaire produced by ORC International followed the format prescribed by DETR guidelines. In addition, 3 extra questions were asked common to each of the Essex Authorities. The common questions focused on how well informed residents felt they were about the Council services, whether the Council gave good value for money and whether the resident would be interested in taking part in future surveys. In the context of the District Council, 2 further specific questions were asked. The first asked residents whether they would access Council services through the Internet, whilst the other gave an opportunity to provide further details about a recent good or bad experience of Council services. It was felt that responses to both would help the Council in issues around service delivery and access to services.

- 2.4 The survey was carried out by means of a postal survey over a 6 week period. The initial mailing went to 2,600 residents in mid October 2000. These were randomly selected from the electoral register.
- 2.5 In all, a total of 1,265 completed questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 48.9%. This is below the target of 50% response established by DETR, but is regarded as acceptable due to the efforts made to increase response rates by the use of reminders. A total sample of this size is subject to +/- 3% sampling error at a 95% confidence level. This means that ORC International are 95% confident that in overall terms actual figures lie within 3% of reported figures based on the full sample of 1,265 respondents.

### **3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

#### Demographic Profile

- 3.1 All respondents to the Rochford survey were asked to state their gender. 57% stated that they were female and 43% that they were male. 68% of respondents were aged 45 or over, with 29% of this total being aged 65 or over. The proportion of respondents from the 18-24 age group was lower and constituted only 32% of the total group. 64% of respondents were working, either full time, part time or were self-employed. One in 5 respondents described themselves as wholly retired from work. Respondents were asked to state if they had any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. Of the 23% of respondents who stated that they did suffer some form of long standing illness or disability, 44% of this group found that their condition limited their activities. The data indicates that nearly all (98%) respondents considered themselves to be White British.

#### Overall Satisfaction

##### The Authority as a whole

	% Very satisfied	% Fairly satisfied	% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	% Fairly dissatisfied	% Very dissatisfied
Taking everything into account how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Authority runs things	13	62	19	4	2

- 3.2 Three quarters (75%) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way Rochford District Council runs things. One in 5 (19%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, whilst only 6% expressed dissatisfaction.
- 3.3 Rochford topped the Consortium profile in terms of overall satisfaction levels achieved, followed by Chelmsford and Maldon. The benchmark figure across the Consortium was 67% (Appendix 2)
- 3.4 MORI have just published some work that they have been doing nationally and from that District Councils achieve a higher satisfaction rating than County Councils or Unitary Authorities. However, the MORI figure for District Councils is 52% fairly satisfied and 6% very satisfied, making a total of 58%. In this context, the Essex-wide benchmark figure is therefore extremely good and that for Rochford is excellent. However, it is important not to be complacent and to build on this figure.

#### Complaint Handling

##### Overall satisfaction with complaint handling

	% Very satisfied	% Fairly satisfied	% Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	% Fairly dissatisfied	% Very dissatisfied
How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way your complaint(s) was (were) handled	13	24	20	20	22

- 3.5 All respondents were asked if they had contacted the Authority with a complaint in the last 12 months. The 15% who had made a complaint were then asked to state their level of satisfaction with the way in which the complaint was handled. Forty-two percent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which their complaint was handled and 37% were satisfied with the handling of the complaint.
- 3.6 Rochford's performance in this area was amongst the lowest of the Consortium, which was topped by Epping Forest with a figure of 45%. The Essex Consortium benchmark figure was 40% (Appendix 3).
- 3.7 From the MORI information, the level of satisfaction on the way complaints are handled is highest amongst Unitary and Metropolitan

---

Authorities, at 43%. In their survey, the satisfaction levels amongst Districts was 32%. This may have something to do with the relatively low level of complaints received by Districts, which tend to be smaller Councils, compared to Unitaries or Metropolitan Authorities.

- 3.8 Compared to the MORI information, Rochford's satisfaction level in the handling of complaints is above average, but in the context of the Essex Consortium Authorities, could certainly be improved. Nonetheless, the Council has recently agreed to change its complaints procedure to reflect best practice and it will be interesting to see as this is brought in whether it will have an impact on future figures.

Overall Satisfaction with Environmental Services

- 3.9 More than two thirds (68%) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the Council Environmental Services. A quarter (26%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 6% were dissatisfied with the service provided.
- 3.10 In the context of the Essex Consortium, Rochford came top, equal along with Uttlesford. The Essex Consortium benchmark figure was 61% (Appendix 4). Again, it is pleasing to see such a high satisfaction level expressed against such activities as refuse collection and street cleansing, environmental health functions and licensing. Nonetheless, it is important to ensure that the Council continues to build on this.

Overall Satisfaction with Planning Services

- 3.11 Almost half (47%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the Council Planning service. More than a third (37%) of respondents did express satisfaction, whilst 15% were dissatisfied with service provision. However, only 60 people indicated that they had used the Planning Division in the past year.
- 3.12 Rochford's satisfaction level was above the Essex Consortium benchmark level of 36% and was 4<sup>th</sup> equal overall (Appendix 5). Given the relatively low level of response, which is probably similar for the other participating Authorities, it is hard to place too much importance on the figures given. However, taken in the context of the other figures available on Planning and the performance of the Division, it is indicative of a service moving steadily forward and continuing to improve following the Planning Process Review of 3 years ago.

Overall Satisfaction with Cultural and Recreational Services

- 3.13 Nearly half (48%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the Council service provided. However, 45% stated that they were satisfied and only 6% expressed dissatisfaction with Council Cultural and Recreational Services. Only 42 of the residents marked that they had contacted the Division in the last 12 months.
- 3.14 In comparative terms, Rochford's satisfaction level fell just below the Essex Consortium benchmark of 47% (Appendix 6). That said, it should be remembered that a number of the facilities utilised by residents lie outside the District and that a large number of the Rochford respondents (almost half) expressed neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction with the service.

Overall Satisfaction with Housing Services

- 3.15 Most respondents (64%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the Council Housing service. Almost a third (31%) expressed satisfaction and only 4% were dissatisfied with the service provided. However, only 35 people had used Housing services over the past year.
- 3.16 The Essex Consortium benchmark figure in terms of satisfaction levels equates to 32% (Appendix 7). However, these figures should be seen in the context of the small numbers who have used the Housing service and the other survey work being carried out to establish user satisfaction of the Housing services provided by the Council.

The Duty to Keep Land Clear of Litter and Refuse

- 3.17 Seventy seven percent of respondents expressed satisfaction that the Council had fulfilled its duty to keep land clear of litter and refuse. However, one in ten stated their dissatisfaction, and 12% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the Council's performance.
- 3.18 Along with Maldon, the Council achieved the highest satisfaction levels of all the Essex Consortium Authorities (Appendix 8). With the new contract commencing in April, it is important that such standards are not just maintained but if possible improved upon still further.

Satisfaction with the Waste Collection Service

- 3.19 Satisfaction with the waste collection service overall was high (91%). Seven percent of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 3% expressed dissatisfaction. Elements such as the receptacle proved (92%) and the reliability of the service (96%) were also highly rated.

- 
- 3.20 Again, the Council achieved the highest satisfaction levels of all the Essex Consortium Authorities, along with Uttlesford (Appendix 9). As with 3.18 above, the new contract commencing in April provides the challenge to maintain the existing very high level of satisfaction with the service and if possible, improve upon it.

Provision of Recycling Facilities

- 3.21 Seventy one percent of respondents were satisfied with the provision of recycling facilities overall. However, 14% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction and 16% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- 3.22 At 71%, the satisfaction level of 72% almost Rochford equates to the Essex Consortium' benchmark figure (Appendix 10). Clearly, the Council's decisions in this area of activity in the next few weeks could have an impact on this figure over the next few years.

Sports/leisure Facilities

- 3.23 Fifty Seven percent of respondents were satisfied with the Council's sports and leisure facilities. A third (34%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and one in ten (8%) expressed dissatisfaction. Over a third (36%) had never used the facilities and a further 18% had done, but over a year ago.
- 3.24 In terms of satisfaction levels, the District Council's figure equated to third equal behind Castle Point (Appendix 11). With the new Leisure Services contract due for letting from April 2002, the opportunity exists to improve the Council's figures and also address some of the issues around usage.

Theatres/Concert Hall

- 3.25 Almost half (45%) of respondents stated that they were satisfied with the Council's theatres and concert halls. Forty six percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 9% expressed dissatisfaction. Thirty nine percent had never used these facilities and a further 21% had done so, but over one year ago.
- 3.26 In comparison terms, the District Council fell below the Essex Consortium benchmark level in this area (Appendix 12), although this is probably a reflection of the absence of facilities in the District compared to elsewhere.

Overall Satisfaction with Parks, Open Spaces, Play Areas and other Community Recreation Facilities and Activities

- 3.27 Most respondents (70%) were satisfied with Council parks and open spaces, a quarter (25%) of respondents were neither satisfied nor

---

dissatisfied and only 5% expressed dissatisfaction. The frequency of usage was higher for these facilities with 46% of the respondents visiting once a month or more regularly.

- 3.28 Again, Rochford's percentage level was above the Essex Consortium benchmark and was third equal along with Maldon (Appendix 13). Again, with the new Grounds Maintenance contract commencing in April 2001, the challenge is to build upon the high satisfaction levels already achieved.

The Essex Consortium "Common" Questions

- 3.29 Sixty percent of respondents felt either fairly informed or very informed about the Council's services. Around 2 out of 5 (19%) did not and 20% were not sure. In this area, Rochford fell just below the Essex Consortium benchmark level of 61% (Appendix 14). Clearly the information obtained suggests that this is an area that the Council needs to address and this will certainly be looked at as part of the Best Value Review processes currently underway or planned in key service areas.
- 3.30 Two fifths considered that the Council offered value for money, 23% felt that it did not and a further 38% were unsure. Rochford was second only to Chelmsford across the Essex Consortium Authorities in this regard (Appendix 15). Clearly, although such a response is welcome given the overall satisfaction levels, this is another area that needs to be examined to see what more can be done, and this need to be linked into the work under paragraph 3.29 above.
- 3.31 In total 51% of respondents (612 people) were willing for the Council to contact them about taking part in further surveys about its services and this will provide a useful base for further consultation work.

"Specific" Questions: The Internet/Specific Experience of Services

- 3.32 Just under a third (31%) of the residents would consider using the Internet to access Council services. Fifty nine percent indicated that they would not and 10% were unsure. This represents a growing means of access to information which the Council needs to be aware of and take into account, as it develops its future policies and programmes. Again, it also needs to be examined in the context of paragraph 3.29 above.
- 3.33 As to experience with particular services – both good and bad – the examples provided by the survey are now being looked at and fed back into individual service areas to ensure that lessons are learned and examples of best practice are built upon.

**4. GENERAL COMMENTS**

- 4.1 It is pleasing to note that overall the findings of the survey indicate high levels of satisfaction with the services the Council provides. Whilst there is clearly no room for complacency, it has certainly been a useful exercise to see how we are viewed in comparison with other Essex Authorities. The aims for the Council will now be to maintain and improve upon the high levels of satisfaction in a number of the key service areas, and examine how, in those areas where satisfaction levels are below the Essex Consortium average, these can be improved. With these surveys now required on a minimum cycle of 3 years there will obviously be value in examining changes over time and measuring our progress.

**5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 A number of the areas touched upon within the survey cover issues which fall within the Crime and Disorder agenda.

**6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 A number of the areas touched upon within the survey cover issues which fall within the Environmental agenda.

**7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 This survey has been funded from the Best Value Consultation budget.

**8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Such surveys are required under the Best Value process.

**9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The survey was a District-wide survey

**10 RECOMMENDATION**

- 10.1 It is proposed that the Sub Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That subject to Member consideration and comment, the contents of this report be noted, with the findings being fed through to the appropriate Best Value service reviews and other relevant Council initiatives. (CEX)



Paul Warren

Chief Executive

---

**Background Papers:**

ORC International , Best Value Performance Indicators - Corporate Health Survey, Rochford District Council, Draft Summary Report of Findings

For further information please contact Paul Warren on:-

Tel:- 01702 318199

E-Mail:- paul.warren@rochford.gov.uk