

Lancashire Audit Service client satisfaction survey 2006

The questionnaire

- 1 The survey was designed to explore our clients' views on our audit services, audit staff, the conduct of our audits, audit reporting and customer service. There were 35 detailed questions and, in addition, clients were asked to provide a single overall rating of internal audit, independent of the other scores.
- 2 Clients were asked to score our performance, stating whether an issue was of high, medium or low importance to them. They could define our performance as poor, weak, less than adequate, adequate, adequate, good or excellent.
- 3 Their scores have been aggregated into a single score for each area.
- 4 Both internal Lancashire County Council clients (34 individuals including 2 members) and external clients (18 individuals) were contacted: 52 individuals in total.

The response rate

- 5 We received 23 responses. Lancashire County Council returned 12 questionnaires and our external clients returned 8; 3 anonymous questionnaires were also returned.
- 6 Clearly a response rate of 23 returns, or 44% of those surveyed, does not provide a particularly good basis for an assessment, but a response rate of only 30% to electronic questionnaires is apparently not unusual.

Performance summary

- 7 Our clients rated the internal audit service overall as good.
- 8 Of the 35 detailed questions, our clients rated us as good in 31 areas and adequate in 4.
- 9 Of the areas in which our performance was deemed only adequate, 2 were rated of low or medium importance to our clients (work on value for money and reviewing completed capital projects), but 2 areas were of high importance and these are therefore of concern. Both relate to audit reporting:
 - There are delays in issuing our reports; and
 - Recommendations are not always constructive, practical and cost effective.
- 10 Both of these issues were also raised by our clients in our last survey and are therefore of particular concern; we will need to work to remedy this in the second half of 2006/07.

On closer inspection

- 11 More detailed scrutiny of the returns shows that of the 21 individuals who answered the question relating to delays in audit reporting, two scored our performance as poor or less than adequate, 12 individuals assessed our performance as adequate, and 5 assessed our performance as good. This indicates a definite need to improve the speed of our audit reporting, but not wholesale client dissatisfaction.
- 12 Of 22 respondents to the question regarding the quality of our recommendations, although 12 regarded our performance as only adequate, 10 assessed our performance as good. However comments from clients specifically referred to the need to provide pragmatic, workable recommendations and to recognise the scale of their operation in considering these.
- 13 The survey has highlighted individuals whose responses are of concern, whether because they are apparently dissatisfied (in one named case only) or because it would be helpful to them to consider how they can best take advantage of our services (in two cases). We will discuss our service with them at the earliest opportunity, and indeed have already done this with one individual.
- 14 However it is interesting that the number of lower scores in the 'audit services' area has decreased since 2005, perhaps indicating a better understanding by our clients of the nature of our role.

Comparison with results in 2005

- 15 In 2005 there were 7 areas where our clients regarded elements of our work as important, but in which our performance was only adequate. Although two of these areas are still of concern as noted above, our perceived performance in the other 5 has improved:
 - Facilitating the risk management process (although this still gained us one 'less than adequate' score in 2006);
 - Providing advice and guidance on policies and procedures;
 - Adequately considering business concerns and perspectives;
 - Fostering service department participation; and
 - Focussing our audits on significant risks (where 18 of 22 respondents rated our performance as good or excellent).
- 16 In every single area, the overall proportion of assessments of our service as good or excellent has increased since 2005. Correspondingly in every area the number of assessments of our service as below average, weak or poor (very low in absolute terms in both years) has fallen.