

Subject: Analysis of the Communications section of the General Household Survey

Status: For Publication

Report to: Performance Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 21 November 2007

Report of: Head of Customer Services and E-Government

Portfolio

Holder: Quality Services to Customers

Key Decision: Yes / No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To assist members of the Performance Scrutiny Committee to understand more fully the issues raised by the communications section of last year's General Household Survey and to inform members of the work being done to address these.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.

- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
- Well Managed Council (Improvement, Community Network)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- Failure to communicate adequately to target groups in Rossendale can have an impact on service uptake, overall customer satisfaction and the Council's ability to influence people.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Every three years councils are required to carry out a survey of households in their Borough to ask a series of questions set by the audit commission. The approach to the survey is determined by the commission and councils have limited leeway in the format and any additional questions – being allowed to ask only 5 additional questions each time.
- 4.2 The Council has to receive a minimum of 1100 completed surveys in order for it to be considered valid. Rossendale received back 1411 surveys well exceeding our target and the response makes the survey statistically valid +/- 3%.
- 4.3 The survey results allow us as a Council to determine how we compare with other authorities in east Lancashire and nationally and to identify areas of success and areas of work for improvement.

5. SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

- 5.1 Respondents were asked to consider the communications they receive from the Council and how well they feel informed about different issues. Figure 1 shows the number of people in Rossendale who felt at least fairly well informed compared with the East Lancashire average.

Figure 1: % of respondents who feel at least fairly well informed

	Rossendale (% at Least Fairly well informed)	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	84.1	84.4	-0.28
How and where to register to vote	84.0	84.3	-0.3
How you can get involved in local decision making	29.4	33.2	-3.8
How to complain to the Council	40.9	39.7	1.2
What the Council spends its money on	39.2	39.0	0.2
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	37.8	38.5	-0.7
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	21.4	23.0	-1.6
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	17.4	19.2	-1.8
How well the Council is performing	24.6	25.3	-0.7

Comparison with Burnley, Hyndburn and Pendle indicates that our main areas of weakness are in providing information about how people can get involved in local decision making and information about what the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behavior.

Rossendale scores positively compared with the other East Lancashire councils on providing information about how to complain to the Council and about what the Council spends its money on. These are both areas where we have been proactive in communicating with local people over the last 2 years.

Figure 2a: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (Under 25)

	Age Under 25	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	63.3	69.6	-6.3
How and where to register to vote	54.5	67.2	-12.7
How you can get involved in local decision making	17.5	20.8	-3.3
How to complain to the Council	34.4	31.5	2.9
What the Council spends its money on	35.8	30.1	5.7
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	37.8	29.3	8.5
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	16.2	14.9	1.3
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	18.9	16.8	2.1
How well the Council is performing	26.9	19.2	7.7

Comparative data is only available from Burnley and Pendle. This shows that our weaknesses with the Under 25 age group relate to providing information about how and where to register to vote and how to pay bills to the Council. The later weakness may reflect the relatively small number of young people who are living independently and paying Council Tax in the borough and is significantly increased in the older age groups.

Amongst this age group the Council is comparatively strong on promoting the standards of service to expect from the Council and how the Council is performing.

Figure 2b: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (25 – 40)

	Age 26-40	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	81.4	83	-1.6
How and where to register to vote	76.9	81.2	-4.3
How you can get involved in local decision making	23.8	28.1	-4.3
How to complain to the Council	32.4	33.2	-0.8
What the Council spends its money on	33.5	31.6	1.9
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	30.9	32.4	-1.5
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	20.5	18.5	2
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	14.1	15.6	-1.5
How well the Council is performing	20.0	20.8	-0.8

Weaknesses here relate to information about how and where to register to vote and how this age group can get involved in local decision making.

The Council performs well amongst this age group in showing that it is delivering on its promises and providing information about what the Council spends its money on.

Figure 2c: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (41 – 59)

	Age 41-60	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	86.7	86.6	0.1
How and where to register to vote	89.4	91	-1.6
How you can get involved in local decision making	32.4	36.7	-4.3
How to complain to the Council	41.1	41.8	-0.7
What the Council spends its money on	40.3	41.1	-0.8
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	36.0	42.1	-6.1
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	20.8	24.5	-3.7
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	14.3	18.4	-4.1
How well the Council is performing	24.0	25.3	-1.3

Amongst this age group there is a need to improve communications in relation to the standards of service to expect from the Council and how they can get involved in local decision making.

The Council does comparatively well on ensuring that this age group knows how to pay bills to the Council.

Figure 2d: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (Over 61)

	Age Over 61	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	91.8	91.5	0.3
How and where to register to vote	96.3	94.7	1.6
How you can get involved in local decision making	36.4	40.0	-3.6
How to complain to the Council	52.2	47.8	4.4
What the Council spends its money on	46.0	48.2	-2.2
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	48.5	49.0	-0.5
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	26.2	30.0	-3.8
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	26.0	26.3	-0.3
How well the Council is performing	30.3	32.8	-2.5

Comparison with Burnley, Hyndburn and Pendle indicates that our main areas of weakness are in providing information about how people can get involved in local decision making and whether the Council is delivering on its promises.

This age group are comparatively well informed about how to complain to the Council and how and where to register to vote.

Figure 2e: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (White)

	White	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	92.2	87.9	4.3
How and where to register to vote	83.4	86.2	-2.8
How you can get involved in local decision making	22.1	31.2	-9.1
How to complain to the Council	40.3	39.8	0.5
What the Council spends its money on	39.6	40.3	-0.7
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	37.4	39.7	-2.3
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	21.1	23.0	-1.9
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	17.1	19.3	-2.2
How well the Council is performing	24.1	25	-0.9

Amongst people who identify their ethnicity as White there appears to be a need for more information about how and where to register to vote and how to get involved in local decision making.

Compared to other East Lancashire Councils this group have a higher than average awareness of how to pay bills to the Council.

Figure 2f: % who feel at least fairly well informed - by type of respondent (BME)

	BME	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
How to pay bills to the Council	84.6	86.4	-1.8
How and where to register to vote	97.9	92.7	5.2
How to can get involved in local decision making	28.1	30.1	-2
How to complain to the Council	57.7	41.7	16
What the Council spends its money on	29.0	29.6	-0.6
What standard of service you should expect from the Council	53.0	31.9	21.1
Whether the Council is delivering on its promises	34.2	28.3	5.9
What the Council is doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in your local area	37.1	26.4	10.7
How well the Council is performing	37.0	27.5	9.5

Amongst people identifying themselves as part of the Black and Ethnic Minority Community the Council needs to improve information relating to how to pay bills to the Council and how they can get involved in decision making.

Compared with other East Lancashire Council's we are good at promoting the standard of service that people should expect from the Council and information about how to complain.

Figure 3: % who agree they are well informed by type of respondent

	% who agree	East Lancs Average	Variance from E.Lancs Average
Under 25	29.7	24.8	4.9
26-40	26.9	27.7	-0.8
41-60	30.1	33.9	-3.8
Over 61	39.1	44.6	-5.5
White	31.6	35.9	-4.3
BME	35.0	34.3	0.7
Disabled	35.8	n/a	n/a

On this analysis we are performing better than other authorities in keeping the under 25s informed and marginally better at keeping our BME community informed. The biggest weakness appears to be in communicating with Over 61's

Figure 4: Main source used to find out about Council's in East Lancashire

	Rossendale	Burnley	Pendle	Hyndburn	Ribble Valley
Local media (newspapers, television, radio)	37.8	32.1	28.9	27.4	32.4
Information provided by the Council (newspaper/leaflets etc)	25.2	24.8	28.6	28.0	31.8
Council website/internet	5.4	6.8	5.9	5.6	5.1
From local Councillor	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.0
Direct contact with the Council	5.2	6.6	6.6	5.5	6.9
Word of mouth (e.g. family or friends)	11.0	12.1	11.4	13.2	9.9
Other source	12.1	13.7	14.1	14.1	8.9
None	1.0				
Don't know	1.3				
total					

6. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE

- 6.1 There are no immediate financial implications from the report. The financial cost of actions arising from the report will be contained within existing budgets.

7. COMMENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGULATORY SERVICES

7.1

8. COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

8.1

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This analysis shows that one of the most important areas of focus in the future should be on providing people with information about how they can get involved in local decision making. The greatest areas of targeting needed is amongst the White community and in the 25 to 60 age groups. Based on Figure 4, the most important source of information for local people is the local newspaper and radio, indicating a need to focus on this medium, at least in the short term.
- 9.2 In terms of specific age targeting the biggest requirement with the Under 25 age group is to provide more information about how and where to vote. This activity ties in very closely with the work that is being undertaken in connection with previous Local Democracy Weeks which we are continuing to develop. A summary of these activities is provided in Appendix 2.
- 9.3 More information about how and where to vote is also required for the 26-40 age group, which is perhaps a reflection on the growing number of people who do not regularly vote. As part of the Act of Parliament establishing the Electoral Commission local authorities are now legally bound to promote the active participation of local people in the electoral process. This is being undertaken through regular media relations in the build up to each election.
- 9.4 Amongst the 41 to 60 group there is a greater need for information about the standard of service they should expect from the Council and amongst the Over 60 group there is a greater need for information about whether the Council is delivering on its promises. This perhaps indicated a desire amongst the Over 40s for reassurance that they are getting what they should from the Council in terms of service standards being met and promises being delivered.

10. RECOMMENDATION(S)

10.1 Information about how people can get involved in local decision making

This is a key challenge for the Council in all its operations and links in with our desire to ensure that elected members are effective advocates and leaders for

their communities. One of the key publications to raise awareness is the annual 'Know your Councillor' publication which is distributed to households throughout Rossendale. In addition to this the Communications Team are proactive in producing articles for the Rossendale Alive newsletter to promote greater awareness of opportunities to get involved in decision making. Extensive use is also being made of media relations to engage with local people and involve them in various consultations e.g. around planning issues, the annual budget consultations and strategies such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and Environmental Strategy. Significant opportunities also exist for public involvement in decision making though on-line forms on our website.

10.2 Communicating with young people (raising awareness of how and where to vote)

There were clear disparities between age groups on the questions in the General Household Survey, with younger people feeling the least well informed. This will require action to be taken through our youth engagement work, particularly the annual Local Democracy Week events and closer work with the youth council – see Appendix 2.

10.3 Raising awareness of how and where to vote (amongst the 25 to 40 age group)

This age group are potentially more difficult to target than the under 25 where we have already developed a number of initiatives. One way in which we can target them is to ensure that this group is well represented visually in any leaflets and posters that we use to promote voting and participation in the electoral process. We can also ensure that they are well represented visually in the Council's publications such as the Rossendale Alive newsletter and perhaps identify various case studies of people in this age group saying why they think it is important to vote. The Communications Team will also target advertising towards a number of publications in the local area that target this age group.

10.4 Communicating information about performance and service standards (to the over 40 age group)

There is a knowledge gap between those services which have a significant impact on people and which are highly relevant to people's lives and issues around performance which are less clearly defined and with which fewer people may wish to engage. Nevertheless, there is a clear public interest for the Council to be as transparent and clear about its own performance as possible and for this to be communicated to residents in a meaningful way.

10.4.1 Further research is required to determine which areas of Council performance are of most interest to residents and a communications plan will be developed once this is complete. In the meantime performance information will feature strongly in the Council's Rossendale Alive newsletter to residents three times per year and we will continue to build on our approach to public accountability which has been praised in the CIPFA/PricewaterhouseCoopers awards.

10.4.2 Performance information will also be updated on the Council's website regularly and we will continue to publish a full review of the Council's performance in the Annual Corporate Plan which is available on the website.

11. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

11.1 East Lancashire E-Consultation Co-ordinator

12. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required Yes/ No

Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached Yes / No

Contact Officer	
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Either

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
General Household survey results for other East Lancashire Authorities relating to Communication issues	Room 211, Futures Park

Appendix 1 - An overview of communication tools and techniques

Rossendale Alive Newspaper – The Council produces 3 editions of the newspaper each year which are distributed to 29,000 homes across the borough. The first edition of Rossendale Alive was published in summer 2005 and we have recently printed the 8th edition.

A-Z Guide – The Rossendale Council A to Z of services was published in September 2007 and distributed to 29,000 homes across the borough and is available from the One Stop Shop and libraries. The guide gives information about the Council's services and how to access them.

Press Releases and Media briefings – In the region of 180 press releases are issued each year to both local and national media covering a wide range of Council issues and services.

Rossendale Council Website – The website contain a news section which gives details of all the latest news stories and is regularly updated. A wide range of services are now provided through the website and information about hundreds of services is available.

Corporate Information Leaflets - The Council has produced a set of 14 Corporate Service Folders. The folders contain a selection of leaflets on each of the Council's services and include information on telephone contacts and email addresses for council services.

Community Events - The Council regularly attends community events including the Rossendale Alive Weekend, Rossendale Carnival and Haslingden Street Fair to promote the Council.

Corporate media enquiries service – The Communications Team coordinates a full media enquiry service for all local, national media enquires and produces press statements on behalf of all council services.

Advertising – Targeted advertising is produced for use in local publications.

General Service Leaflets – a wide range of information leaflets for individual services are available covering specific issues like housing grants, the complaints process and planning.

Branded Goods - the Council aims to raise awareness corporately and for individual services though a range of branded goods.

Consultations and Surveys – in addition to a regular programme of consultation surveys undertaken in conjunction with the East Lancashire E-partnership a wide range of consultation takes place with specific groups and in relation to specific issues.

Public Relation Campaigns – specific public relations campaigns are organised in relation to specific issues such as refuse collection, regeneration, benefit take up and changes to telephone numbers.

Appendix 2 – Local Democracy work with Young people

Over the past 3 years the Council has actively promoted Local Democracy Week, holding events aimed at both primary school children and 14 to 18 age groups.

The work with primary aged children was devised to show the children what activities the Council undertakes in the borough and to give an insight into the role of the Mayor.

It was important to make the events fun and enjoyable for the children. In 2006 we ran our first Mini Mayor competition. 10 year old Katie Smith of Sharneyford Primary School, won the title in a competition to write an essay on the subject: "If I was Mayor for a Day". The competition was open to all the primary schools in the borough and received over 200 entries.

During the year Katie undertook a number of engagements including switching on Christmas Lights, visiting schools at Christmas with the Mayor, opening of the new Council Chamber and opening the Rossendale Weekend.

The Mini Mayor competition ran again this year attracting 290 entries from 10 primary schools – 90 more entries than the previous year. The winner was Katie Wright Dunn from Broadway County Primary School.

In order to engage with more schools the Council has introduced "A Day out at the Council". The event, held at Hardmans Mill, is designed to show children age 10 to 12 the wide range of activities the Council undertakes and to encourage them to look at what services they think are important. The first event was held in October 2007 and more than 45 children from Balladen County attended. The children listened to a presentation on the work of the Council, met Mr Clean and met the Mayor. There have been 10 further requests from schools to take part in this session in the future.

Work with secondary school aged children has helped to promote involvement in local democracy and allowed the Council to hear the views of young people. A Youth Council established in October 2007 is made up of two representatives from four of the borough's secondary schools and is designed to improve our consultation with young people. One of the main aims of the committee will be to act like a scrutiny committee, checking that the Council has done what it said it would do.

Sixth form students from Haslingden High School have also taken part in two Question Time Events, both of which have been extremely successful and have highlighted a number of issues including recycling, public transport and lowering the voting age. The events have highlighted the issues which are important to young people in the valley.

Work is currently underway on developing a youth section on the Council's website to give more information on local democracy and citizenship.

An 18th Birthday card has also been produced to encourage young people to make the most of their newly acquired right to vote.