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**Meeting:** Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> December 2009  
**Subject:** Resident and Employee Market Research Project  
**Report of:** Director of Business Transformation  
**Summary:** The report presents an overview of the results from recent surveys conducted with both customers and staff of Central Bedfordshire Council.

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**Contact Officer:** Georgina Stanton, Assistant Director - Communications  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All – customers from all areas of Central Bedfordshire have participated in this research.  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

In order to achieve our corporate vision and priorities it will be key for us to understand the perceptions and priorities of our customers, for example on quality of life. It will be equally vital that staff are effectively managed. This research therefore underpins the Council's ability to deliver its priorities at the most fundamental level.

### **Financial:**

N/A

### **Legal:**

N/A

### **Risk Management:**

N/A

### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

The research will inform our People and Communication strategies which will be subject of consultation.

### **Equalities/Human Rights:**

The research covers issues relating to equality and diversity which will inform our corporate approach to these issues.

### **Community Safety:**

N/A

**Sustainability:**

N/A

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive and reflect the findings from recent market research exercises and;**

- (a) consider the implications of the customer research for future communication and customer service strategies.**
- (b) consider the implications of the employee research for future human resource strategies.**

**Report Summary**

1. As a new authority, Central Bedfordshire Council does not have a legacy of public or employee opinion data to draw upon. We therefore conducted two quantitative research exercises in September 2009 to strengthen our understanding of customer and staff perceptions on key issues, including national performance indicators
2. These research exercises provide a baseline of performance data for corporate use and to inform future assessments, such as the review of our Local Area Agreement
- 3 Ipsos MORI were commissioned to conduct this research on behalf of the council following a competitive tendering exercise and ran the surveys through written questionnaires.
- 4 We exceeded our target sample size of 1,100 responses from local residents. 1,335 customers participated in this exercise. Over 50% of staff also took part.
- 5 The research findings have been shared with the Executive and Corporate Management Team and a briefing has been distributed to all Members.
- 6 The headlines from the research give an indication of the issues and opportunities the council faces. Discussions on the implications of the research are also being held in all teams and service areas so that the staff at all levels have a clear understanding of customer priorities and opinions. Through this engagement, colleagues will also be best prepared to respond to our customers' needs.

**Residents Survey**

- 7 Residents think the overall quality of Council services is good, however this does not yet translate into the Council having a good reputation among residents.
- 8 Satisfaction with the Council has remained stable since 2008 but is relatively low (35% satisfied) when considered against comparable authorities.
- 9 However, many residents are still very much undecided about the Council. This is a reflection of the fact that Central Bedfordshire is a new authority, and demonstrates the opportunity Members and Officers have to establish the authority with residents.

- 10 Key drivers of satisfaction are residents perceptions of:
- whether or not an authority is well run; and
  - the extent to which they offer value for money and efficiency.
- 11 Currently, just 19% of Central Bedfordshire residents feel we provide value for money. A focus on efficiency will therefore be critical to enhancing customer satisfaction.
- 12 Attitudes to Council staff are strongly associated with the overall perceptions of a Council. Residents' views of council employees are generally lukewarm. 27% think staff understand what customers want, 20% think they do their job with the customer in mind and 16% think staff act on customer feedback. Frontline staff and Councillors have an important role to play in improving perceptions.
- 13 There is high recognition of the Council logo (70%) and views of the Council's magazine are positive with 73% having seen the latest copy and 70% having read all, most or some of the latest edition of News Central. This magazine is also the preferred information source for over a third of residents. However, only 48% feel informed about the Council and 52% do not. The Council needs to ensure that the brand recognition is associated with positive and useful communication, which in turn translates into increased satisfaction with the Council.
- 14 Another key driver of customer satisfaction is the extent to which residents recognise the role of the authority in making their local area a better place to live in, also known as "leadership of place".
- 15 Our survey asked residents about their priorities for their communities. Community safety, transport, housing and environmental issues are seen as priorities.
- 16 We also used the survey to track performance on a number of national indicators:
- 52% feel informed about large-scale emergency **(NI 37)** (up from 12% in 2008).
  - 30% feel they can influence local decisions **(NI 4)** (up from 24% in 2008).
  - 9% take part in civic roles **(NI 3)** (down from 13% from 2008).
  - 21% volunteering at least once a month **(NI 6)** (down from 24% in 2008).
  - 75% are satisfied with their local area **(NI 5)** (down from 80% in 2008).
  - 28% feel the Police and other local public services are successfully dealing with issues in the local area **(NI 21)** (up from 23% in 2008).

## Employee Survey

- 17 Employees are well motivated, satisfied with their job, go the extra mile and feel challenged by their work. However recognition (non-financial) for good work could be improved and innovation and creativity could be harnessed more.
- 18 Team objectives are well understood but Council objectives are less well understood. Staff need a clearer line of sight about how their roles relate to the Councils' objectives.
- 19 Line management and local team working is very good in most areas however perceptions of cross-council team working are less favourable. This needs to improve to create a "one council" focus.
- 20 Most feel the Council is committed to learning and development and does not discriminate, however there is room for the authority to show more interest in how employees feel.

- 21 Perceptions of communication across the Council are above external benchmarks but we need to outperform these as a new Council in order to take staff through the continued transition and transformation journeys. Although staff feel communication is credible they do not feel the Council is as open and as honest as it should be. Employees also want to be more involved in what is happening within the Council.
- 22 Support for change is positive but staff feel remote from it and unable to influence, as a result they are not confident the Council will be successful in achieving its' objectives.
- 23 The relationship between employees (including middle managers) and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) is perceived less favourably. Senior management visibility and accessibility needs to increase to give employees (and particularly middle managers) confidence in them.
- 24 Employees aspire to an organisational culture that is community focused, innovative and proactive. Currently they feel the council is too preoccupied with bureaucracy.

### **Next Steps**

- 25 The research findings offer us much more than a baseline of performance information, important as this is.
- 26 The findings will be helpful in shaping a number of emerging policies and strategies of the Council and Central Bedfordshire Together, our Local Strategic Partnership.
- 27 Residents' priorities and perceptions of place will be crucial to the development of our Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 28 Similarly, the communication and community engagement strategies of the Council will be driven by solid evidence from residents' views on the extent to which they feel informed and involved with the work of Central Bedfordshire Council
- 29 As the Council embarks on the process of setting the budget for 20010/11, key messages regarding value for money and efficiency are also relevant.