

STAFF REPORT

TO: Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Susan Edwards, Strategic Development Manager
Dennis Bush-King, Environment & Planning Manager

DATE: 7 October 2008

FILE NO: A503-4

SUBJECT: Results of the Communitrak Residents Survey, and permits and consents survey

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise the Council of the results of the July 2008 Communitrak residents survey.

BACKGROUND

Every three years the Council commissions a survey of residents' views on a range of services delivered by the Council (note that the Council has decided to undertake the survey every year from now on). The survey is undertaken by an independent agency, the National Research Bureau (NRB).

A total of around 400 residents are surveyed, giving a margin of error of 4.9%. The survey was undertaken of residents over 18 years of age. Interviews were conducted of residents spread across the five wards and across various age brackets, to ensure a representative sample. The survey was conducted by telephone.

In addition to the residents survey, the Environment and Planning Department also commissioned NRB to undertake a telephone survey of 200 people/organisations who had applied for some form of regulatory consent or permit in the last year (e.g., resource, building, food, dog, liquor) to determine their level of satisfaction with the Council's service.

The information contained in the surveys will be useful for Councillors when considering the levels of service (ie what the Council will provide) for the public through the Long Term Council Community Plan.

DISCUSSION

Residents' Survey

A copy of the report on the residents' survey will be made available in the Councillors Lounge. Should Councillors wish to receive their own copy of the survey, please contact Sandra Hartley. The executive summary of the survey will be put on the Council's website so that it can be accessed by the public. Drycrust is preparing an article for Newsline – The Mag and press releases.

Key findings of the residents' survey:

- 70% of residents are either “fairly” or “very satisfied” with how rates are spent on the services and facilities provided by the Council. 3% “don't know” and 27% are “not very satisfied”. This indicates 70% of residents do consider that they get good value for money.
- The biggest single cause of dissatisfaction was that rates are too high.
- The only area of satisfaction lower than our peer councils and/or the national average is for resource consents and compliance. However, the level of satisfaction of the residents' survey was lower than that of those people or organisations who had applied for consents over the last year in the survey commissioned by the Environment and Planning Department.
- The Council services where more than 20% of residents were not very satisfied with the level of service were in the areas of resource consents and compliance; roads; environmental policy and planning; and footpaths. This pattern mirrors that of other Councils.
- The Council services with the highest levels of satisfied or very satisfied customers were recreation programmes and events; public libraries; sewerage system; community grants and assistance; environmental information and monitoring; and parking.
- Of the services surveyed the ones most frequently used by residents in the last year were other recreational facilities and public libraries (although it is important to note that the utility services like roads, sewerage systems, water supply systems, were not covered in this question).
- The key actions or decisions approved of by the residents surveyed include:
 - Beautification/Richmond upgrade
 - Community involvement, events and assistance
 - Improved roading, traffic flows, road safety
 - Good service/Mayor does a good job
 - Improved footpaths/walkways
- The key actions or decision disapproved of include:
 - Funding the Headingly Centre (7%)
 - Lack of communication, consultation, don't listen (6%)

- Consents and permit process is slow, expensive and rules are overbearing (6%)
 - Poor performance and service (6%)
 - Overspending/money wasted
 - Environmental issues
- The vast majority of residents would contact the Council offices or staff if they have a matter to raise with the Council, with contact generally being made by telephone or in person. 83% of those who contacted the council in the last year were satisfied with the service they received.
- Over half the residents surveyed receive most of their information about the Council through Newsline – The Mag, with 38% of residents getting most of their information from the newspapers. 93% of residents that had seen, read or heard information about the Council or the community from Newsline – The Mag, 80% from advertisements in newspapers and 67% from information sent out with the rates demand.
- The majority of residents felt they received enough information from the Council.
- Good numbers of people had read the recreational publications, with high levels of satisfaction.
- 84% of residents have access to the internet (up 13% from 2005).
- 36% of residents think Tasman District is a better place to live than it was three years ago, with only 5% saying they thought it was worse.
- Only 3% of residents think Tasman District is not generally a safe place to live.
- 75% of residents expressed satisfaction with the way the natural environment is being preserved and sustained for future generations.

Overall, the results from the residents' survey are similar to those from the 2005 survey, with many of the differences being within the margin of error of the survey.

Environment and Planning Survey

The survey of permit and consent holders sought feedback on customer satisfaction with the timeliness and cost of consents, helpfulness of staff, information availability, ease of completing forms and understanding obligations as a consent holder. In the interests of containing costs we did not receive a written report but just the raw data, copies of which can be made available on request. The last survey data was obtained in 2002. The survey did not cover people who may have made submissions and it is interesting to note that some of the dissatisfaction expressed was in the general residents survey.

Key results include

- Overall satisfaction with the level of service provided was 78% across all categories (compared with 32% in the general survey). This is down from 91% in 2002 and using the information from the general residents' survey can be attributed to perceptions of delays, cost, and too much red tape.
- The break down by consent was 69.4% for building, 70.7% for resource consents, 82.8% for health and liquor consents, 88.2% for dog registration
- 90.5% of respondents considered staff to be courteous and helpful with ward variations ranging from 80.6% in Motueka to 100% in Lakes - Murchison.
- As may be expected only 54.5% considered charges paid were reasonable and in line with expectations
- 29.5% considered the time taken was unreasonable in the circumstances
- 79% of respondents considered they clearly understood their obligations once issued consent but only 63.5% were happy with the information made available to applicants (17.5% said they did not know and 10% said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of information available).

The information from the survey will be used to review and improve our departmental practices.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Tasman District Council notes:

1. The contents of the report;
2. The results of the Communitrak Residents' Survey; and
3. The results of the permit and consent holders survey.

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