

FUTURE OPTIONS: TECHNICAL NOTE

Title	What does HDC want to achieve with this project?
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<p>Content</p> <p>This technical note looks at the external factors such as government policy and countywide changes that could affect the way HDC operates. It also examines the internal factors such as existing performance and councillor priorities. Together these factors should define our perspective on what is required to be achieved by the future options project. This is not meant to be a fully comprehensive look at all external and internal factors, but more to give a flavour of the scale of change around within local government at present.</p> <p>External National Drivers</p> <p>1. White Paper : Open Public Service 11th July 2011</p> <p>Reducing the cost of the public sector is a major objective of the current government. The financial settlements set out in the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review set out this challenge. The decisions HDC take around alternative methods of service delivery will inevitably be strongly influenced by cost.</p> <p>However, over and above the financial imperatives, central government also has the view that civil society organisations can make a major contribution to shaping and delivering more efficient public services that better meet the needs of the people who use them.</p> <p>This view is articulated in the Cabinet Office Green Paper of 7th December 2010 entitled '<i>Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery</i>'. Key messages in the Green Paper are that the government wishes to support:</p>	

- Creation and expansion of mutuals, cooperatives, charities and social enterprises, and the facilitation of these organisations in having a much greater involvement in the running of public services
- Increased citizen and community involvement in all stages of commissioning
- Creation of new opportunities for civil societies to deliver public services; the ‘rights to provide and challenge’ contained within the Localism Bill reflect this aspiration
- Improved accessibility: the removal or reduction of practical, legislative and cultural barriers to market entry in existing markets; this is also aimed at assisting small and medium sized commercial enterprises (‘SME’) to enter the market for public service provision
- Increased understanding of the social, environmental and economic aspects of commissioning decisions

Following on from the Green Paper, a White Paper was published on 11th July 2011 by the Cabinet Office entitled ‘*Open Public Services*’. An extract from this shows how government thinking has developed:

Extract from White Paper – ‘Open Public Services’

In applying our principles to different public services, we recognise that there can be no one-size-fits-all policy prescription. Different public services have different characteristics, and our proposals are tailored accordingly. In essence, we see three different categories of public service:

Individual services – These are personal services – for example in education, skills training, adult social care, childcare, housing support and individual healthcare – that are used by people on an individual basis.

Neighbourhood services – These are services provided very locally and on a collective, rather than an individual, basis – such as maintenance of the local public realm, leisure and recreation facilities, and community safety.

Commissioned services – These are local and national services that cannot be devolved to individuals or communities, such as tax collection, prisons, emergency healthcare or welfare to work.

Within the White Paper is the requirement to introduce what is termed an ‘open commissioning policy’ with the implication that certain services should be subject to some sort of procurement process and that the public sector body consider at least three providers from all sectors for the work. The paper states that: ‘The Government will consult with local authorities and the wider public sector about how to go further in opening up locally commissioned services in:

- customer contact
- planning
- property and facilities management
- back-office transactional services
- family support
- support for looked after children
- trading standards and environmental services
- housing management

2. The Localism Bill

This was introduced to Parliament on 13 December 2010 and is currently having a third reading in the House of Lords. This focus for the Bill is to shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. The Localism Bill includes a number of important packages:

- decentralisation and strengthening local democracy
- Non-Domestic Rates
- community empowerment
- a radical re-boot of the planning system including neighbourhood planning
- changes to social housing policies
- devolving Powers to the Mayor and London Boroughs.

The Coalition Government believes in a radical shift of power from the centre to citizens and communities, giving control and freedom back to people to manage their own lives as they see fit. To achieve and maintain the radical shift in power, the Government has published *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide*. It sets out six actions central government will need to take to do things differently - in behaviour, expectation, and culture, which must go alongside the changes in law proposed in the Bill.

They are to:

- Lift the burden of bureaucracy - by removing the cost and control of unnecessary red tape and regulation, whose effect is to restrict local action;
- Empower communities to do things their way - by creating rights for people to get involved with, and direct the development of, their communities;
- Increase local control of public finance - so that more of the decisions over how public money is spent and raised can be taken within communities;
- Diversify the supply of public services - by ending public sector monopolies, ensuring a level-playing field for all suppliers, giving people more choice and a better standard of service;
- Open up government to public scrutiny - by releasing government information into the public domain, so that people can know how their money is spent, how it is used and to what effect; and
- Strengthen accountability to local people - by giving every citizen the power to change the services provided to them through participation, choice or the ballot box.

3. De-centralisation

The government has issued a number of consultation papers as part of a wider policy of decentralisation, to give councils increased financial autonomy and a greater stake in the economic future of their local area. This supports the Government's wider agenda to enable stronger, balanced economic growth cross the country and complements the Government's proposals for other incentives, such as the New Homes Bonus. Due to the magnitude of the changes being considered, the Government have already published two significant consultation papers to local authorities. The two key papers that are currently 'live' are;

Local Government Resource Review: Proposals for Business Rate Retention

The Government released a major consultation paper 'Local Government Resource Review: Proposals for Business Rate Retention' on 18 July 2011. The consultation period runs until 24 October.

The consultation document is a major piece of work, the outcome of which will determine the way in which a significant proportion of local government funding is allocated from 1st April 2013. In short, the consultation paper proposes that the current system of formula grant is replaced by a system that is directly funded through business rates and a system in which local authorities get to keep a proportion of subsequent increases in their business rate take. The consultation paper outlines a broad framework in which the new system may operate however it did not however go into specific detail. The detail is contained in a series of eight separate technical papers that were issued on 19 August 2011. The eight technical papers covered the following subjects;

- Establishing the baseline
- Measuring business rates
- Non-billing authorities
- Business rates administration
- Tariff, top up and levy options
- Volatility
- Revaluation and transition
- Renewable energy

Localising Support for Council Tax in England

The Government is consulting on a proposal to localise Council Tax benefit. In effect the Government will provide a fixed amount of money from which councils will have to try and meet the costs of council tax benefit. The Government as part of its consultation paper “Localising Support for Council Tax in England” states that it “*will reduce expenditure on the current council tax benefits bill by 10%*”. If a council cannot achieve that council tax benefit budget saving then the cost burden will fall on their local tax payers. Councils will be encouraged to do this through establishing a local scheme of council tax benefits – rather than the national scheme that currently operates. The consultation paper doesn’t propose any specifics scheme details and sets an ambitious target implementation date of April 2013. This consultation is as important for local authorities as the proposals for business rate retention. This is because the new scheme could see a major shift in budget risk away from central government to local government – even small changes in caseload numbers could see local authorities struggling to contain the benefit expenditure within budget.

4. External Local Drivers Leicestershire Together Background

- The notion of Councils working in partnership with other organisations to deliver services is part and parcel of modern local government. In April 2010 there were over 100 partnerships operating in Leicestershire, with a many having budgetary responsibilities.
- Since coming to power in May 2010 the Coalition Government has brought in sweeping changes to public services in an attempt to reduce the national deficit. Additional funding streams, such as the Local Area Agreement which have largely driven partnership work have been abolished and mainstream budgets of various public services reduced by an average of 20%. However public services also have more freedom, new powers to raise income locally and less regulation from government.
- Rather than reducing the need for partnership working Leicestershire believes this new landscape opens up opportunities for a new ‘harder’ form of partnership working where more spending decisions are made jointly and issues of sovereignty more relaxed. The

move towards 'harder' partnerships in Leicestershire follows the insight that public services often need assistance from other organisations to meet their aims, and that tough financial times mean it is more important than ever to demonstrate to the public that we are avoiding duplication and working well together; focussing ruthlessly on saving money and tackling thorny problems at the root.

- The current debate around partnership working centres on;
 - Leicestershire's refreshed priorities
 - Strategic and locality commissioning
 - Community Budgets
 - Big Society

Leicestershire's refreshed priorities.

- Under the Local Government Act 2000 all Local Authorities must develop a Sustainable Community Strategy to guide Local Area Agreement and public service spending towards shared priorities. Leicestershire Together (made up of public services in Leicestershire including District Councils) is currently reviewing and reducing these priorities. The refreshed Leicestershire Community Strategy is organised into 6 themes;
 - Supporting Individuals and families
 - Enhancing children's lives
 - Improving our communities
 - Protecting our environment
 - Developing our economy
 - Delivering effective services

Strategic and Locality Commissioning

- There has been broad agreement at the county level, led by Leicestershire County Council to develop a 'strategic commissioning' approach to the delivery of priorities set out in the Community Strategy. This is where public services pool money to buy services that meet their collective aims. This allows economies of scale, reduced duplication and a more joined up approach to service delivery. There has been support from key partners including Leicestershire County Council, the NHS, Police, Fire, Probation and district councils to develop a 'commissioning approach' in time for the 2012/13 financial year.
- To ensure local issues are included in the commissioning debate, Localities i.e. districts led by District Councils are expected to highlight key local concerns/priorities through drafting a locality commissioning plan by December 2011. This will inform the strategic commissioning process and may result in significant county budgets being devolved to a locality to tackle a specific issue.
- This approach has the potential to improve outcomes whilst coping with reduced budgets. However, the emerging governance

structures must be effective and receive buy-in from partners. Leicestershire Together has no power to enforce these changes but to fully engage will require relaxing sovereignty boundaries related to services we deliver if it can be shown that we could improve outcomes by pooling/ aligning resources with partners. This would be a big culture change if services, such as waste and recycling could be demonstrated to be better commissioned at the county level. But this is two way and has equal consequences for the county if localities turn out to be better placed to design or coordinate services important to that locality, such as Libraries.

Community Budgets

- Leicestershire is one of the 16 areas to hold a Community Budget for Families with Complex Needs. These families have multiple issues that restrict their opportunities and capacity to improve their quality of life, such as poor education, long term unemployment, anti-social behaviour, poor health etc... Community Budget proposals are based on learning that demonstrates clearly that better outcomes could be achieved for these families at less cost, if more effective and earlier interventions could be planned by agencies working together. The ambition is to have an integrated service model in place for a pilot in 2012/13 and county rollout by 2013/14 to support the Prime Minister's ambition to "try and turn around every troubled family in the country". National estimates put the number of Families with Complex Needs in Leicestershire as between 740 and 880.

Big Society

- The Big Society is the Government's flagship policy and is about helping people come together to improve their own lives. It's about putting more power in people's hands – a massive transfer of power from government to local communities. Harborough District Council supports the voluntary sector in a number of ways;
 - Funding volunteer and group support through Voluntary Action
 - Funding free, impartial and confidential advice through Citizens Advice
 - Commissioning the sector to help deliver local priorities e.g. Leisure Team funds training for Sports Coaches in return for them offering free sessions for the community to support health and well-being, the Council supports Rural Youth Voice Project that is helping young people across in the district to get involved and the Community Safety Team funds Women's Aid to help domestic violence victims.
- Leicestershire County Council has made £500,000 available to support the big society and defines this agenda as;
 - Empowering communities: giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area.
 - Opening up public services: enabling charities, social enterprises, private companies and employee-owned co-operatives to compete to offer people high quality services.
 - Promoting social action: encouraging and enabling people from all walks of life to play a more active part in society and promoting more volunteering and philanthropy

5. Internal Drivers HDC Performance and Current Position

Appendix 1 sets out the available existing assessment for the way the council is managed and operates, and citizen’s views. Many of these assessments are a few years old but do provide good context. HDC has achieved adequate assessment with a number of areas identified for improvement. The Council’s Business Plan 2011/2012 sets out the priorities for the year ahead and the Annual Report 2010/2011 sets out the achievements of the previous year.

6. Output from All Councillor Assumptions Workshop

Technical Note 1 outlines in detail the outputs from the workshop with HDC councillors. From this work it is clear that change is a requirement for HDC. The council can not afford to remain as it currently is configured. Although saving money is important it is not the only objective. Focusing service design around the community and providing community leadership, shaping places, protecting the vulnerable and enabling individuals, communities and businesses to achieve their potential are all important factors.

Sharing across county boundaries into neighbouring counties was considered to be a viable option, although it has been suggested that this should be re-considered by a number of external Chief Executives, as the repercussions within the Leicestershire community could have significant impact.

When considering who to collaborate with, councillors considered this to be an open book, and any council should be considered irrespective of geography, size demographics, politics and culture. From further analysis of best practise and consultation with staff and external Chief Executives, this maybe an area to be reconsidered. Technical Note 4 explores this further.

<p>Sources of Information</p>	<p>Existing Council’s business plan and annual report. Output from the All councillor Workshop 2 August 2011 Summary of existing assessments of HDC performance (see appendix 1)</p> <p>Open Public Service White paper http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/open-public-services-white-paper</p> <p>The consultation paper on Local Government Resource Review: Proposals for Business Rate Retention http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/resourcereviewbusinessrates The eight technical papers are available at the following link http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localgovernmentfinance/lgresourcereview/ The full consultation paper Localising Support for Council Tax is available at the following link :-</p>
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	<p>http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localisingcounciltaxconsult</p> <p>Localism Bill content and progress : http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/localism.html</p>
Consultees	None : Desktop study
Officer Conclusion	<p>The council does not sit in isolation in terms of defining its future and any options or solutions need to take into account external drivers, not just internal drivers.</p> <p>The Comprehensive Spending Review has presented challenging financial scenarios for all councils. In line with many other authorities across the country, we must explore how changed methods of delivery could help to mitigate these difficult circumstances regarding public sector budgets. The Localism agenda presents opportunities for councils to look at delivering their business in new ways.</p> <p>The Localism Bill will provide the legislative foundation for putting power back into the hands of communities. But it will also require fundamental changes in the way government works at every level.</p> <p>The magnitude of the changes regarding finance is such that there could be a very significant impact on the Council's budget and medium term financial strategy. Localising Support for Council Tax is as important for local authorities as the proposals for business rate retention. This is because the new scheme could see a major shift in budget risk away from central government to local government – even small changes in caseload numbers could see local authorities struggling to contain the benefit expenditure within budget</p> <p>Government policy is currently fluid and evolving. Whatever is delivered through the Future Options project has to be flexible and have the opportunity to evolve and change</p> <p>The Council should review all of the Council's services to consider alternative methods of service delivery. It is doubtful whether this can be done through the existing budget and service planning process, and will require a more transformational process.</p> <p>Central government thinking does not seem to suggest or support the idea of a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery. Therefore a service by service approach is appropriate.</p>

It could be considered necessary to refresh and establish firmly the council's vision for the future, what values and principles these are based on, and the priorities to deliver. This could be captured through the work arising from the Future Options, and built into the budget and service planning process.

It is considered necessary to reflect service transformation as a key principle with the budget and service planning process, and not solely primarily around prioritisation and savings.

What can be concluded is that HDC has no failing services, and performance overall is adequate. This can lead to a complacent approach to improvement, without a key driver for change of special measure or impending interventions.

HDC must be in a position to respond to and inform the priorities and debate at a county level, to ensure the issues and community of Harborough are represented by the work that strategic authorities will do within our communities. The formal consultation on Leicestershire Strategy refreshed priorities will run between October and mid December. As a partner in Leicestershire Together, HDC should respond to the consultation and give consideration to its role in delivering Leicestershire's priorities as part of the business planning process. HDC should also feed in to the refresh of the priorities on an annual basis to ensure that they are continually relevant to the environment we are planning and delivering services in. As the lead organisation for Locality Working within the Leicestershire Together framework we need to ensure we address the implication of establishing and administering any locality structures.

Although HDC budgets have not been identified for initial integration into the community budgets programme, several budgets have been identified as supporting this work depending on the appetite of the Council to engage. These are;

- Homelessness Support
- Housing Support
- Sport's funding
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Community Safety Funding

Big Society fund within Leicestershire Together gives options for this council to support this agenda, which should be picked up in the business planning process.

The way forward

The project brief agreed at HDC Full Council on 25 July 2011 set out the objectives for the work as follows:

- Sustainable budgets going forward, including significant savings
- A customer focused organisation
- High quality services, efficiently delivered
- Mutual interest and understanding with partners to support long term high quality service delivery
- Solutions that work locally and fit appropriately into a national and countywide framework

These objectives if delivered to the full, should address the external and internal pressures facing HDC for the future. We may need to consider adding flexibility in the way we deliver service to ensure we embody the spirit of the Coalition Government belief in a radical shift of power from the centre to citizens and communities, giving control and freedom back to people to manage their own lives as they see fit

Appendix 1 : HDC – PERFORMANCE AND CURRENT POSITION

1. INTRODUCTION

This report looks at HDC's performance, as viewed by external auditors and the community. References are from historical data, such as CPA (2004), CAA (2009) and the last Annual Audit Letter (2009/10).

It has been more difficult to get information on how satisfied our customers are with the authority as a whole, or individual services. The Places Survey 2008 was the last comprehensive survey of residents. 2600 questionnaires were sent to randomly selected addresses in the district. 1111 were returned. (Note the Places Survey had been due again in Autumn 2010 but was discontinued following the General Election).

The report therefore refers to:

- What our customers see as important services (budget priorities consultation 2010)
- What they think about access to services (customer access survey 2011 and Govmetric Feedback)
- Is the authority providing value for money (places survey 2008)
- What is most important in making somewhere a good place to live, and what most needs improving (places survey 2008)

2. EXTERNAL AUDITS

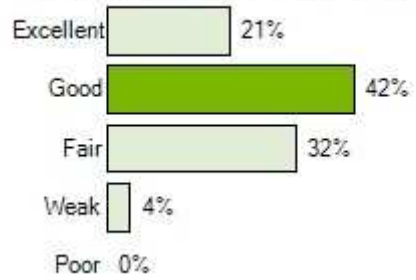
CPA for district councils was undertaken between June 2003 and September 2004 when each council was given a corporate assessment rating of either excellent, good, fair, weak or poor.

Inspectors looked at how the Council is run, what the Council together with its partners is trying to achieve and the capacity of the Council to deliver services including housing, waste collection, leisure facilities and dealing with housing benefits.

Overall performance for this Council

This is an authority that demonstrated **Good** overall performance in 2004.

Performance against other councils



The CAA Organisational Assessment for 2009 found that overall, Harborough District Council performs adequately

Managing performance	2 out of 4
Use of resources	2 out of 4
Managing finances	2 out of 4
Governing the business	2 out of 4
Managing resources	2 out of 4

Description of scores:

1. An organisation that does not meet minimum requirements, Performs Poorly
2. An organisation that meets only minimum requirements, Performs Adequately
3. An organisation that exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Well
4. An organisation that significantly exceeds minimum requirements, Performs Excellently

The Annual Audit Letter 2009/10 findings conclude that in all significant respects, the Council made proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, except for managing its risks and maintaining a sound system of internal control.

Audit Commission’s approach to local value for money work from 2010/11 – it aims to introduce a new, more targeted and better value approach to their local VFM audit work. The reduced number of reporting criteria will focus on:

- Securing financial resilience; and
- Prioritising resources within tighter budgets

2.1 MANAGING FINANCE

Annual Audit Letter 2009/10 - Value For Money Conclusion

The Council has continued to operate under financial pressures and, as in 2008/09, its focus has been on achieving a balanced budget whilst maintaining services. The 2010/11 budget was set in the context of the three year medium term financial strategy (MTFS) which has been updated to reflect the current economic climate. Outstanding debt continues to be above target. A strengthening of outstanding debt procedures and a reduced level of debt could help ease financial pressures.

The Council continues to have sound understanding of costs overall. But staff cuts such as the reduction in the size of the management team have impacted upon capacity which will need to be managed. The 2009/10 efficiency target was achieved. Profiled budgets have been introduced and the council has improved the content of its budget monitoring reports. Internal financial monitoring has been timely.

2.2 MANAGING BUSINESS

Annual Audit Letter 2009/10 - Value For Money Conclusion

Commissioned services continue to provide efficiencies. Greater care is needed to ensure that any delays in procurement and letting of contracts are better risk managed and more openly and formally reported in the future. Data quality is sound with additional training this year for managers and could be further enhanced by making quality assurance, and data sharing with partners, more consistent.

The principles of good governance are in place in the Council but need to be developed further with partners. Internally these have been enhanced by introducing a CIPFA compliant audit committee. Management of the Council's own risks is generally sound and reinforced with a new risk management strategy but partnership risks are not so actively managed. The Council's arrangements did not ensure an effective performance bond was in place for the first three months of the environmental services contract which commenced in April 2009. The Council has reviewed the circumstances leading to this itself and is intending to learn lessons from this. The Council has sound counter fraud and corruption arrangements, but these do not extend to partnerships in the same degree.

CAA – HDC Organisational Assessment 2009

Harborough District Council scores 2 out of 4 for managing performance. It knows that crime, affordable housing, and energy efficiency are important to local people and it is improving these things.

Crime is low and reducing due to good work with the police and local people. People are being helped to lead healthier lives. Close work with the NHS locally means that GPs refer people to leisure centres for exercise. The Council has responded quickly to the recession, providing additional help for people worried about debt.

The Council generally works well with other public services locally and across the county. They have agreed plans based on what local people say is important and they are generally clear about who is responsible for doing what. The Council has meetings with local people and improves things that they are concerned about. Overall satisfaction with the Council is about average. The Council helps some vulnerable people but it isn't sure that it is reaching all of the most needy. Disabled people wait too long for their homes to be adapted. The Council has started to look at improvements jointly with other councils but it is too early to see any results yet. It needs to find out who is in most need and make sure that help reaches them quickly.

While sufficient homes for people on low incomes to rent or buy are being provided, not enough homes are being built to meet overall demand. The Council is good at helping people at risk of becoming homeless. A lot of household waste is recycled and this is increasing.

2.3 MANAGING RESOURCES

CAA – HDC Organisational Assessment 2009

The Council scores 2 out of 4 for use of resources.

It plans its spending well and has had to manage with £1.2 million less, which led to staff and service reductions. This has meant focusing on keeping services going and not completing as many improvements as it had planned. Councillors and staff work well together to make sure spending stays on track.

The Council looks at budgets and progress together so that it understands how changes in one affect the other. It makes sure that councillors and staff behave properly: in claiming expenses, for example.

The Council has reduced sickness absence, but it needs better plans to make sure it has the right staff with the right skills in the long term. It is working on these.

As the Council is still unlikely to have enough staff and money in the future for all its plans, it needs to move more quickly to find other ways of working including shared services with other organisations.

Annual Audit Letter 2009/10 - Value For Money Conclusion

The Council has committed to reducing its impact on the environment and it has set a baseline for carbon use and targets for reduction. It is actively involving councillors and staff in its reduction programmes. It works with partner agencies to reduce land contamination and requires

contractors to use greener vehicles. The Council has not yet shown the impact of these measures. The Council has implemented its pay and grading review and is taking steps to balance the age profile of its workforce.

3. WHAT DO OUR COMMUNITY THINK ABOUT THE AUTHORITY, OUR SERVICES AND ACCESS TO THESE?

3.1 WHAT ARE THEIR PRIORITIES?

Executive Summary of Budget Priorities 2010 report carried out with Harborough Citizens Panel.

Harborough District Council (HDC) commissioned Social Research Associates (SRA) to undertake a consultation on budget priorities for discretionary services. The consultation consisted of four main arms:

1. A full length questionnaire to the Viewpoint Citizen Panel and available to the public online;
2. a short questionnaire distributed with the *Talkback* newsletter and also available online;
3. a series of activities with local young people, including assembly presentations, a class discussion and an adapted version of the main questionnaire;
4. a discussion group with local people with learning disabilities and carers. 812 people completed the short survey and 366 completed the full survey. 47 students completed a student questionnaire and approximately 50 additional people participated in discussion groups. Overall, more than 1000 people participated in the consultation.

Results

Short Survey

The short survey asked respondents to rate service areas 1 to 4, with 1 being 'Not Important' and 4 being 'Very Important'. The highest rated service areas were as follows:

Service Area Mean

Recycling Services 3.38

Community Safety 3.32

Community Services Environment 3.25

The lowest rated service areas were:

Service Area Mean

Corporate Services 2.26

Health Advice 2.25

Communications 2.19

These ratings were reflected in the final section of survey, which asked respondents to choose the most important service areas overall. The top 2 most important service areas were Community Safety (20%) and Recycling Services (18%). 4

Full Survey

The full survey revealed many of the same ratings as the shorter version.

However, within the service areas individual services were shown to be particularly well supported. The highest average ratings for individual services were:

Rank Individual Services Mean

1 Fly Tipping – Reporting And Clearing Fly-Tipping. 3.44

2 Re-Use / Recycle 3.35

3 Anti-Social Behaviour 3.31

The lowest rated services were:

Rank Individual Services Mean

73 Internal Staff Newsletters/Communications 1.83

74 Ticket Sales (For The Theatre) 1.74

75 Supporting Local Artists 1.71

Young People

A series of events were held with young people planned in conjunction with Robert Smyth School and the Harborough Youth Council. These aimed to capture the opinion of local students and provide young people with a chance to learn about what the Council does. Student presented to a special assembly and some undertook class discussions. An adapted questionnaire was produced and completed by 47 students. The top rated services were:

Rank Individual Services Mean

1 Safeguarding Children 3.30

2 Money To Support Minibuses And Transport 3.26

3 Public Toilets 3.26

Disabilities group

Representatives of HDC and SRA attended an accessibility forum with people with learning disabilities, their carers and other stakeholders. Additionally 130 of the respondents to the two questionnaires considered that they had a disability.

The key issues raised in the discussion group were:

- Public toilets- these were particularly important for carers taking groups into town. 60% of respondents to the short survey with a disability felt that public toilets were very important (compared to 32% of respondents with no disability).
- Participants were keen to maintain the upkeep and facilities in local parks.
- Concessionary travel, particularly community transport, was important to the group

3.2 WHAT IS THEIR VIEW ABOUT ACCESS TO SERVICES?

3.2.1 CUSTOMER ACCESS SURVEY – FEBRUARY 2011

This survey was concerned with methods of access to Harborough District Council customer services, approval ratings for the service received and preferences for accessing information.

The survey was distributed to members of the Viewpoint Citizens' Panel and an electronic version was hosted on the front page of the Harborough District Council website.

The survey was completed by 359 people, 118 of whom completed the survey online.

Customer service

63% of respondents had been in contact with the Council within the past year. The largest percentage of respondents (44%) had been in telephone contact within the last six months.

The most popular topics for the last enquiry made by respondents were planning applications, waste and recycling.

73% of respondents received all the information they required from a member of staff, although only 63% of enquiries were fully resolved in the initial contact.

88% of those who had been in contact with the Council in the last six months rated the service as satisfactory or better. This is a higher satisfaction rating than the 84% stated in the Govmetrics Local Indicators.

Council offices

68% of respondents had visited Market Harborough offices. However, respondents from the rural areas of the district were disproportionately likely to have never visited the Council offices.

50% of all respondents visited Council offices less than once a year. Those in the rural areas were less likely than those in the towns to visit regularly.

60% of respondents drove to the Council offices and 35% walked as they lived close to the offices.

33% of respondents preferred to visit the Council offices to any other method of contact, but 50% preferred to use the telephone.

54% of respondents would support relocation to another, more efficient, building within Market Harborough.

However it should be noted that a number of respondents did not answer the question as they wanted to respond to specific proposals. Equally, 55% of those who currently walk to the offices were against a move. The majority of respondents with a disability were also in opposition.

The key issues for those opposed to the move were ease and cost of accessing the building, especially for those who walk or rely on public transport and more generally, the risk of increasing car trips.

The possibility of improved parking was welcomed, but respondents wanted to ensure that the other services such as the library and museum in the current building would be protected.

Council information

Respondents indicated that they received information about the Council from varied sources, but the highest rated medium was the local press (61%).

Less than half of respondents stated that they were aware the website could be used to set up direct debits, make payments or make freedom of information requests. 67% of respondents were aware that the website could be used to view planning applications, which was the highest level of awareness for any of the services listed.

72% of respondents had access to the internet at home. 20% stated they had no access.

Conclusion

Respondents had a varied experience of contacting the Council, but most prefer the telephone and face-to-face methods. There was a high satisfaction rating and over two-thirds considered the service to be good or excellent.

The use of Council offices was much more frequent by respondents in Market Harborough and Lutterworth. Respondents from the LE7, 8 and 9 postcode districts would generally visit less often and drive to the offices.

Support for any relocation was above 50%, but there was some opposition from users who rely on easy access to the offices. A key issue for any new site would be ensuring that these groups retained their ease of access.

Many respondents were not aware of many of the functions of the Council website despite most having access to the internet.

Waste and recycling was the top reason for enquiries, followed by planning applications and environmental services.

3.2.2 GOVMETRIC FEEDBACK

Customers are encouraged to use GovMetric to provide feedback on the service they receive from the Council. A summary of the responses received from 01/04/10 to 31/03/11 can be seen in the table below. *It should be noted, however, that the % of customers using Govmetric (from the call centre) is low.*

	Good	Average	Poor
Face to Face	808 (71%)	90 (8%)	236 (21%)
Telephone	553 (93%)	32 (5%)	10 (2%)
Web	110 (34%)	40 (12%)	177 (54%)
Email	624 (84%)	40 (5%)	80 (11%)
TOTAL SATISFACTION	2095 (75%)	202 (7%)	503 (18%)

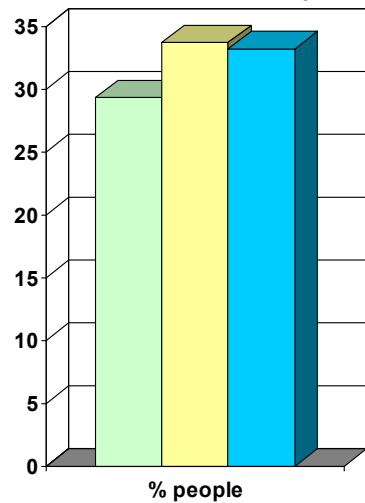
GovMetric also provides us with information about the access channels by which our customers choose to contact us. See table below:

	Number of contacts recorded on GovMetric	Proportion of Total Contacts	What do the queries relate to? (Top 3 Services)
Face to Face	18,708	16.3%	Council Tax (43%), Benefits (19%), Other Services (18%)
Telephone	36,491	31.8%	Council Tax (28%), Other Services (22%), Waste & Recycling (14%),
Web	59,036	51.4%	Other Services* (79%), Council Information (9%), Benefits (5%)
Email	522	0.5%	Waste & Recycling (30%), Other Services (22%), Council Tax (14%)
TOTAL CONTACTS	114,757	100%	

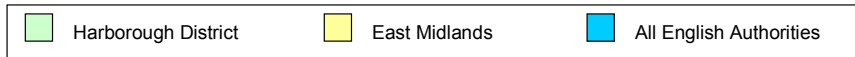
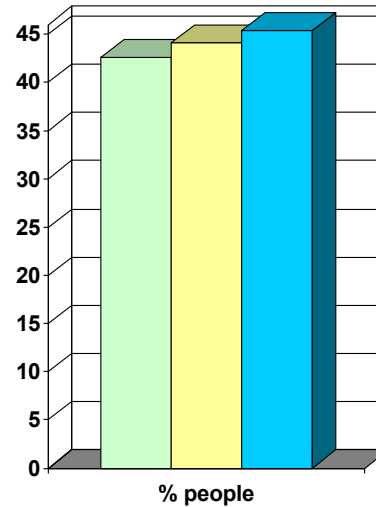
3.3 IS THE LOCAL AUTHORITY PROVIDING VALUE FOR MONEY?

The last Places Survey in 2008 demonstrated the following results for our customers' view of the local authority providing value for money.

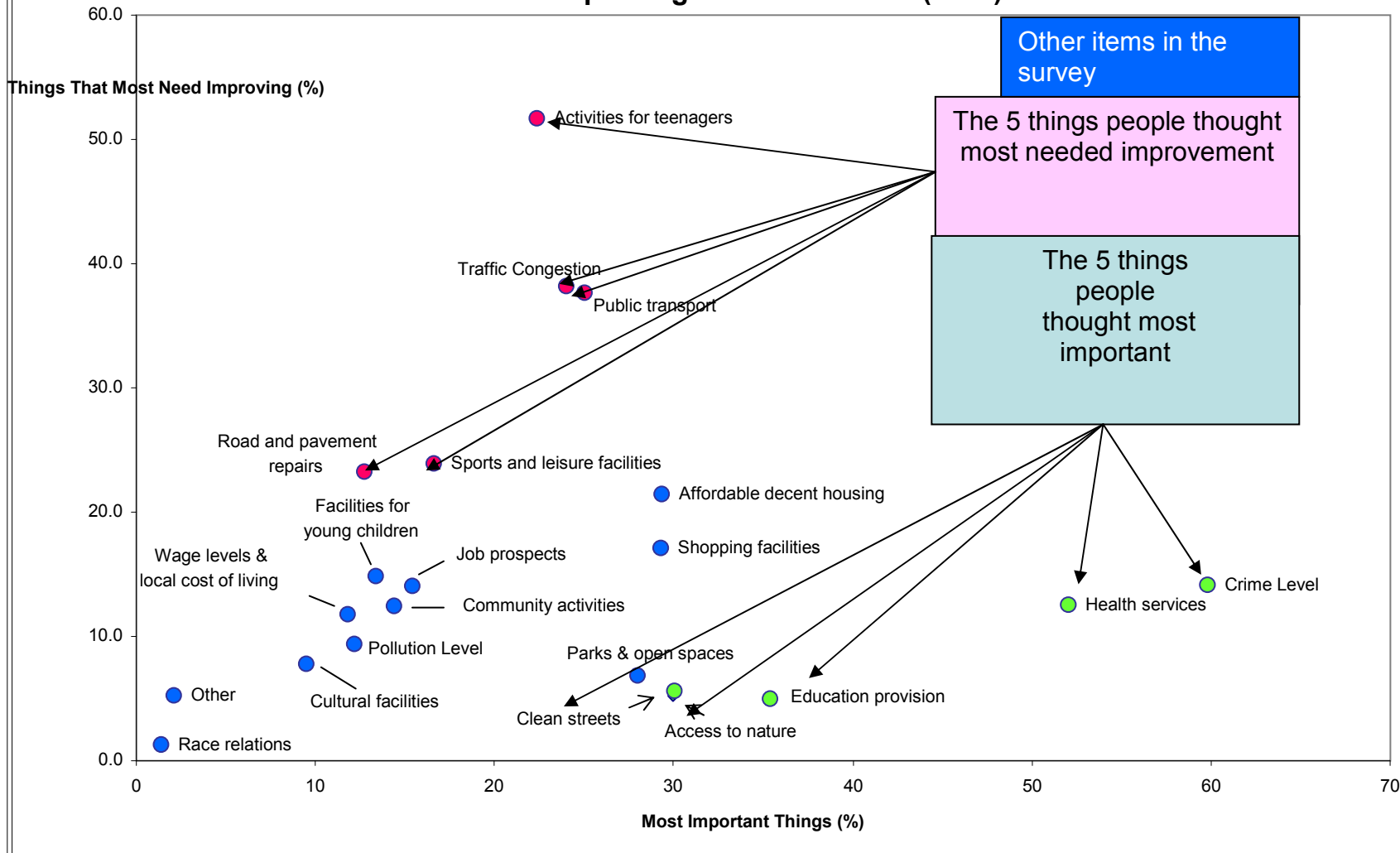
% of people who strongly agree or tend to agree that their local council provides value for money



% of people very or fairly satisfied with the way their local council runs things



What is most important in making somewhere a good place to live, & what most needs improving in the local area (HDC)



Appendix 2

Harborough District Council's vision is:

To put our residents first - maintaining Harborough's position as one of the best loved UK districts to live, work and visit.

To make the best and most effective use of our resources, ensuring efficient services and providing good value.

Our Values

- Putting residents and frontline services first
- Listening, informing and consulting local people and promoting greater community involvement within our urban and rural communities
- Being open and accountable in the way we make decisions
- Embracing innovation and partnership as a way of bringing about efficiency, cost effectiveness and improvement in our services
- Working in partnership with the voluntary, community and business sector
- Endeavouring to achieve lowest council tax rises, to cover inflation and the targeted investment required for our priorities
- Ensuring services are accessible to all
- Promoting equality of opportunity, with particular attention to the needs of those less accessible or vulnerable residents, located within our diverse community
- Valuing, supporting and developing our employees