

Roads Services

Customer Survey Report 2009 / 2010

“West Lothian Council continue to provide an excellent standard of roads and footpaths” (West Lothian Resident).

Throughout 2009/2010 Roads Services conducted an ongoing Customer Survey through the Council's award winning website. The survey is seen as a key tool for the service in measuring the satisfaction levels of their customers and identifying areas for concern in West Lothian and help set our main priorities for the coming year.

Background

The survey was made available to all customer and residents of West Lothian through the West Lothian Council website (www.westlothian.gov.uk) from April 2009 through to March 2010. This was a change from the previous years when we distributed one survey during just one period of the year. The decision was taken to trial an online survey as we know from monitoring the way our customers contact us that many of them now choose electronic means as their preferred method of contact. In addition the West Lothian Citizens Panel was being re-vamped and therefore unavailable to us and we were keen not to miss out on customer feedback. It was also seen as a far more effective and efficient way to carry out our survey. If this method is deemed a success then it will be used by other services within Operational Services for their customer surveys.

As a result of this the total number of returns we received was 155 throughout the year.

As always, the survey was reviewed and re-vamped, from the previous years, so we could measure satisfaction levels relating to the key priorities which we set following the previous years survey, including the Winter Maintenance Service. We also increased the questions regarding the quality of customer service and our complaints procedure.

Full results can be requested from the Service Development Team

Findings

In total we asked 39 questions relating to Street Lighting, Winter Maintenance, Roads Maintenance, Flood Prevention and Customer Care. Customers were given 5 possible grading responses for each question – Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Poor and Very Poor. These ratings were consistent with the ratings recommended by APSE and should hopefully allow us to easily benchmark our results with other local authorities.

The overall level of satisfaction in Roads Services for 2009/10 was 82.17%

Areas of High Satisfaction

The results of the survey were very positive, with many questions scoring well above 80% satisfaction results. The main areas of satisfaction, those which customers rated either excellent or good more than anything else were:

- Coverage of Street Lighting: Main Roads **(96.77%)**
- Overall Service provided by the Street Lighting team **(95.45)**
- Present maintenance condition of Main Roads, Housing Estates and Residential Areas **(84.13%)**
- Our response to emergency situations which affect the public roads **(90.07%)**
- Speed and manner in which we respond to Flooding Emergencies **(85.42%)**

Main Areas of Concern

The main areas of concern, those which customers rated as the most unsatisfactory, more than anything else, were:

- Dealing with Frost/Ice conditions: Housing Estates / Footpaths / Rural Roads (**42.52%**)
- Dealing with Snow Conditions: Housing Estates / Footpaths / Rural Roads (**44.61%**)
- Provision of Grit Bins (**35.95%**)
- Present maintenance condition of Rural Roads (**29.29%**)

Quality of Customer Service and Customer Care

As part of this years survey we increased the number of questions we asked customers about the level of customer service the received when the contact the service. The results were very encouraging will many questions returning a large % of satisfactory responses, as follows:

- Friendliness & Co-operation of staff (**93.42%**)
- Staff knowledge and skills at dealing with enquiries (**83.33%**)
- The fairness and sensitivity with which customers feel treated (**86.96%**)
- How accurate and comprehensive the information received about the service was (**91.43%**)
- The outcome of Complaints (**84.62%**)

As a result of the success of this section we intend to now survey those customers, who contact us through the Call Centre or CIS offices, on the quality of the customer service they received.

Addressing Dips in Performance and Areas for Concern

As noted above the Customer Survey identified key areas of concern in our service delivery, areas where customers have felt there has been a dip in our performance. In order to address these dips in Service performance we created put in place a number of initiatives. We will evaluate the success of these initiatives through our next Customer Survey, due out early 2011.

Winter Maintenance Service

The main area for concern highlighted by our customers were relating to the Winter Maintenance Service – dealing with frost/ice and snow conditions within Housing Estates, on footpaths and rural roads and subsequently the provision of grit bins in residential areas. The winter of 2009 / 2010 was the worst, in term of sustained severe winter weather, we have experienced for 30 years and one which as a Council we are not equipped to cope with.

During this period we received a huge number of enquires, requests for service and complaints all in relation to the Winter Maintenance Service we provided. As well as the weather, there were a number of other factors which impacted directly upon our ability to provide the service our customers were looking for. National salt shortages and government restrictions on salt usages as well as the Christmas and New Year holiday period all posed further challenges for our service.

As a result of the 09/10 winter we are currently carrying out a full review of our Winter Maintenance Policy and Service try and ensure that we are better placed to face this kind of situation in future years and we learn the lessons from the year past.

Part of this extensive review includes carrying out consultation exercises with our full range of customers – residents, community groups, emergency services, local businesses and elected members. We feel that it is important for us to fully understand the impact the weather had on all these groups and to allow the different stakeholders the opportunity to tell us what kind of service they would like and where our priorities should be.

The review will also include looking at staffing levels and the use of private contractors to assist during periods of severe weather, something which we did to great affect during 09/10.

Initial reports and finding have already been submitted to the Council Executive and Elected Members and we will continue to keep customers informed regarding the improvements we plan to make.

Condition of Rural Roads

Our recent road condition survey, as part of our SPI return, showed that our A,B and C class roads remain in a good state of repair and customers back this up by what they are telling us. However, it is has been highlighted both through the road condition survey and the survey results from our customers that our Rural roads are an issue. The reason for this is that there has been a concentration on our budget directed into A,B, C classifications and Urban unclassified roads to ensure they remain in a steady state and there is now a need to provide a higher emphasis in future years on our rural network, which generally made up of a lesser construction and subject to climate change and in particular freeze/thaw condition and the affect of water damage in recent years. Surface dressing programmes will be considered to seal and provide a new running surface to these roads where appropriate. Nearly £1 million has been set aside, through the Asset Management Programme, for 2010/2011 to be invested in the maintenance of rural roads

A full list of our planned Service Improvements can be found in the Operational Service Management Plan 10/11 which is available on the Council website or by contacting us.

If you would like any further information on any of our services or have any enquires then please do not hesitate to contact us through our Call Centre on 01506 775000 or e-mail us at customer.service@westlothian.gov.uk.