

Summary and Implications of this Analysis

This report looks primarily at the results of the 2006 Local Government Residents Survey as they relate to Leicestershire, but also draws on a range of other survey work carried out by MORI and pre-existing County Council service satisfaction data including MORI highways satisfaction surveys, the national Active People Survey and various surveys of service users including libraries and country parks.

National Context

The report highlights the **decline in satisfaction with Councils nationally**, although the decline now seems to be slowing. Satisfaction with local authorities has been in decline since the last adjustment to the way local government is funded in 2003-4 (the year in which a rise of 12.9% to the average council tax bill was recorded). Average satisfaction with Councils is now at 54%. County Council satisfaction has fallen by 4% since 2003 (though some of this can be explained by Councils moving away from face to face survey methodologies). The average County satisfaction score is now 50%.

Leicestershire Context

Leicestershire County Council satisfaction (BV3) is down 6%, slightly more than the trend and places the County 4 percentage points below average (though there is a 2% margin of error on the data). However our *Frontiers of Performance* analysis, which seeks to take account of the socio-economic circumstances in which local authorities operate, shows **Leicestershire to be performing at or around where we would expect it to be** (taking account of the confidence intervals attached to the data), with the authority recording 46% for BV3 and our own predicted level of satisfaction for the authority standing at 49%.

However Leicestershire satisfaction results place the County someway behind the top performing areas for resident satisfaction. The report attempts to uncover the factors behind this.

County Council Image

The County Council scores comparatively well on key image perceptions relating to value for money (just 2% below the highest County score) and above average on efficiency and trustworthiness. **The public do appear to recognise more than they do in other parts of the country that the authority is efficient and trustworthy and that it provides good value for money.**

Most other perceptions of the Council including that it is making areas better, safer, greener, promoting the interests of residents, acting on their concerns and treating all people fairly are positive and match the average for other counties.

However the report shows that what the best counties (here defined as those which emerge from our *Frontiers of Performance* analysis most favourably) seem to be able to do is **really make residents notice that they are contributing to making areas cleaner, greener and safer.**

These are exactly the factors, along with good performance on visible services, to emerge from our national analysis which shows the key drivers behind overall satisfaction with local authorities.

Drivers of Satisfaction

Analysis of the correlations between the answers Leicestershire residents gave to the survey show that the positive perceptions of efficiency, trustworthiness and people getting on well have been a positive influence on overall satisfaction. The only aspects having a negative influence are **perceptions of teenagers hanging around on the streets and rubbish and litter lying around.**

Our national research shows that **waste collection and environmental services are key contributing factors to how the public view councils generally** – this will also have an impact on perceptions of the County Council because of confusion amongst the public between County and Districts responsibilities in two tier areas.

Analysis of the written comments to the survey show confusion amongst the public about which Council provides which services. Indeed the biggest area of negative comment in the County survey relates to changes to a two weekly bin collection service. This change seems to have had a negative impact on both County Council satisfaction and individual District Council satisfaction.

Service Satisfaction

One of the patterns we have seen in the national BVPI results is the continued existence and even **widening of the gap between overall image and service satisfaction.** While overall image is static or in decline, service scores – and especially for cleaning and greening services – have been rising. This is certainly what we have seen played out in Leicestershire County Council's results. The overall satisfaction score falls some way short of the average satisfaction score for all services covered in the survey.

The report also highlights the **many positive service user satisfaction scores** in Leicestershire including Libraries (95%), Parks and Open Spaces (95%), Household Waste Sites (95%), Sports and Leisure (72%), and Bus Service (65%). Ipsos MORI surveys also show an **improving trend of satisfaction with Leicestershire highways services.**

Whilst these need to be considered carefully, because of modal differences, they do suggest that service users are satisfied with the core services provided by the County Council. It must be remembered that resident satisfaction in an exercise such as the

BVPI survey is diluted by the indifference or lower levels of reported satisfaction of non-users in the reporting of Best Value performance indicators based on all respondents. This approach is applied everywhere and so is not just a problem in Leicestershire.

However whilst the service satisfaction data points to a number of areas of positive satisfaction there is also scope to improve service satisfaction scores further. This points to the importance of the Council **continuing to seek improved satisfaction scores in targeted areas** for example from its significant investments in library refurbishment, recycling and household waste sites and museums in order to increase satisfaction with the Council overall.

Analysis of resident satisfaction data for aspects of customer service also shows the Council to be slightly behind the average for other Counties. The County Council has already identified customer service improvements as one of its priorities and is implementing a new customer service centre as part of its improvements. The results confirm the Council's approach to improving satisfaction in this area.

Confusion over Services in Two Tier Areas

Staying with services, evidence from a national survey recently carried out for the Local Government Association (illustrated in the table below) helps to highlight the **lack of clarity about service responsibilities in the minds of residents living in two-tier areas.**

| Service | County responsibility | District responsibility | Both responsible |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Primary Schools | 63 | 16 | 10 |
| Libraries | 59 | 29 | 7 |
| Street cleaning | 19 | 63 | 9 |
| Refuse collection | 14 | 76 | 6 |

Here is where it becomes vital to look at the performance of districts on key services. While there is 'two-way traffic', **some of these services are significant 'dissatisfiers'**. In other words, high levels of dissatisfaction with them will have a significant impact on overall perceptions. Bringing this down to a local level, there are indeed broad variations in how these services are delivered in Leicestershire, and indeed some poor performances.

As you will see further on in this report, our national data also shows the impact that a resident's views of the government of the day can have on perceptions of local councils. All of this needs to be considered in arriving at an objective view of how well an authority such as Leicestershire is doing.

Grasping the Place Shaping Agenda

The 2006 Resident Survey straddles some issues focusing purely on County Council service satisfaction but many that relate to the Council's community leadership role in areas of partner or partnership activity including anti-social behaviour, sports/leisure,

cultural services, parks/open spaces, housing, planning and overall satisfaction with the area as a place to live. It is in this area that some of the improvements need to be focussed.

Through the strengthening of Local Strategic Partnerships (with each upper and single tier authority taking responsibility for the Local Area Agreement), the move towards a lighter touch performance management framework under CAA, local government generally will continually be pushed to adopt a more area- and user-focussed role.

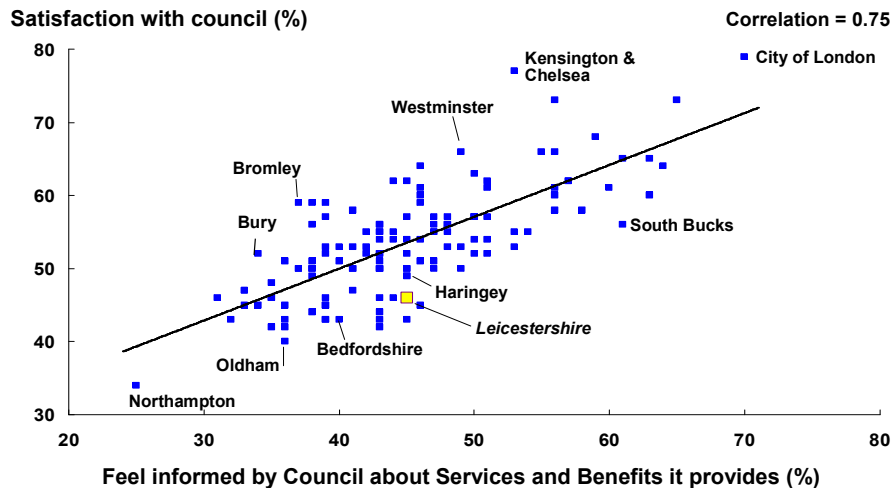
Within this broad thrust there are great opportunities for the ambitious to **grasp the place shaping agenda and really seek to change residents' quality of life**. With this will come a positive change in perceptions. This report points to some obvious areas such as taking a strong lead on tackling crime through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, and creating more cohesive communities, but there are also potentially risky but high reward actions such as changing resident behaviour in areas such as health, recycling, transport usage (through social marketing mechanisms such as road charging schemes and parking regulations).

The Communications Challenge

Brought together, this mixture of factors represents a distinct communications challenge for the authority as leader of the County LSP – one which needs to focus on raising awareness about what the County Council and its partners do and then improving perceptions of the authority's and partners services. The next stage being for Leicestershire Together to communicate its relevance in terms of the difference it makes to the lives of local residents.

The communications message is not a new one, and it is important to state that it very much plays a part in a wider sweep of activities which revolve around delivering quality services. However, it is worth noting that of all the bivariate analyses (i.e. one variable against another) we have run on this year's national BVPI data, we again find the strongest relationship between residents feeling informed and overall satisfaction.

Satisfaction and Feeling Informed: Evidence from the Ipsos MORI BVPI Surveys



Base: BVPI 2006 (130 Single, Upper Tier and District Ipsos MORI client authorities)

Source: Ipsos MORI

There is a need for greater sophistication using other techniques apart from the Council's newspaper. Some of the best communicators in Local Government take great pains to bring real life situations and narratives to their communications, constantly focussing on success stories around interventions in local areas and with individual citizens, being clear about the difference made in each case. What three messages would senior managers and service directors like to communicate to Leicestershire residents?

Conclusion on Main Recommended Areas for Action

There is no one single driver of public satisfaction. The Council, together with its partners, needs to tackle a number of different issues to ensure improvements in the overall satisfaction of residents including:-

1. Improving the communication of partnership activities and achievements to improve quality of life and of performance on these;
2. Improving the perceptions of services amongst non-users through better communications;
3. Ensuring improvements in the most visible public services – such as cleaner/greener issues, nuisance, town centre improvements, teenagers on the streets and anti-social behaviour, waste collection and recycling by a strong partnership approach and using the opportunities of the LAA;
4. Ensuring increasing resident satisfaction comes through from targeted improvement in the County Council's own services including libraries, museums, household waste sites, bus information and customer services;
5. Maintaining the Council's good public perceptions for efficiency, trustworthiness and value for money.