



Your Views on Lifelong Learning

WELCOME to the fifth edition of the Angus Citizens' Panel News giving you feedback and information from the last survey.

Hundreds of you responded to the last survey, providing us with some extremely valuable information on a huge number of issues.

The most encouraging thing is that your responses confirm other information about the desire of the people of Angus to learn and continue learning. It is good to know that there is overwhelming support for work-based learning and that many of you take part in a wide range of learning opportunities from personal development to formal education.

That said, we recognise that there are issues that concern you, particularly the behaviour of pupils, the quality of school meals, the state of playing fields and the results achieved in our schools. A large majority think that school leavers are not prepared for work and half think that universities also fail to prepare graduates for the world of work. In contrast, about three-quarters of you recognise the strength of Angus College in preparing people for work.

Angus College is also pleased to note the positive feedback about its promotional material, with around 90% both receiving and reading the brochure and 14% visiting the web-site. It is good to note that nearly everyone found the brochure easy to read. The college has, however, noted your concerns about the time, cost and location, of the courses that it runs.

The broad area of informal learning, including volunteering, also produced some very positive information. Many of you are involved in some form of volunteering, demonstrating your commitment to your local communities.

As you may recall the survey also contained a large number of questions on issues other than Lifelong Learning. The information you provided here, has as always, proved extremely helpful as you can discover elsewhere in this newsletter. As in the past, a number of issues have been picked up and taken forward on the next survey, which is on the Angus Economy.

Thank you once again for your commitment to the Citizens' Panel.

Top of the Pops!

Your answers show that most of you are very pleased with the services you use. Of the forty-two services we asked you about over 80% of you were very happy or happy with twenty-four of them. What's more, over 50% of you were happy or very happy with all but three of these service. These three were road maintenance, pavement maintenance and attracting new jobs and businesses to the area.

Angus Council has increased investment on road and pavement maintenance significantly in recent years and is confident that you will begin to notice the improvement soon. The council has also worked hard to attract new jobs and businesses to Angus. With initiatives ranging from tourism to the supply of business land, from training to business support, from export missions to the promotion of local towns, we are confident that prospects for the Angus economy are rosy.

This does not mean that we are complacent, on the contrary we have taken your comments on board and based the current survey on the Angus economy.

All roads lead to... Unhappiness if your responses are anything to go by.

This is something that Angus Council is acutely aware of and which has been raised on previous surveys.

Unfortunately the state of the roads and pavements is at least in part the result of decades of central government underfunding.

It is a sad fact that local investment can only change the situation over a long period of time. Rest assured that this is precisely our intention.

It is also worth bearing in mind that Angus Council took the decision to direct resources to projects that could bring significant improvement to

the road network in Angus, improving safety and reducing journey times.

Projects such as the upgrading of the A92 between Dundee and Arbroath that will bring benefits to Arbroath, Carnoustie, Monifieth and the rest of southern Angus, the creation of the Montrose relief road and a new Montrose bridge, and improvements to junctions on the A90 at Forfar.

Not good enough...

Perhaps the most disappointing result was that almost a third believe that the council does not listen to your views.

Over previous surveys we have discovered your preference for a local newsletter that could be used for consultation and your support for the local press and consultations on the web. We have done work on all of these things! The Have Your Say (www.angus.gov.uk/hys) consultation internet pages began life in August 2003, press-releases for all consultations are issued and a newsletter is due to be launched in 2005! All this and the new e-survey facility used for the first time on the enclosed survey!

We noted from your comments that one of the big issues is the time it takes for the council to report the results of consultation and to take action based upon them. The challenge is to achieve a balance that makes sure that councillors get the information they need to reach decisions and the public get a report in the shortest possible time. Reporting results before a committee has considered the issue can appear both indecisive and undemocratic, reporting after a committee can appear secretive and bureaucratic.

Customer Care

Angus Council is committed to customer care and is aware that it has a long way to go to meet your expectations. Your comments raised a number of issues, of letters unanswered, of unhelpful staff, of being unhappy with the action taken, of missed meetings and more. As the panel is anonymous we, of course, have not passed on names in connection with these comments unless you specifically asked us to do so. When you did, we passed on your comments and made sure that the services concerned dealt with the issues.

Without being complacent it does appear that we are making headway. In general about three-quarters of you rate the quality of service, helpfulness of staff, friendliness of staff, the response and the speed of service as good or very good.

That said, you are less satisfied with the speed of service when writing to the council. This appears to be because you contact us in this way to raise issues that have not been sorted out face-to-face or over the phone. Nonetheless, this is an issue that we have taken on board and will be working hard to sort out.

There is a demand for extended opening hours, with a fifth suggesting that the most convenient time to contact ACCESSLine is weekdays 5pm to 8pm and 15% stating that this would also be the most convenient time to visit the council. Obviously we will have to consider a number of factors in relation to extended opening, not least the cost and facilities, but this an issue that we have noted.

Dirty old town?

Once again your comments on the mess made of our streets, parks and countryside by a minority of people came across loud and clear. Angus Council is only too aware of the impact of dog-fouling, litter and vandalism on our environment and has pursued a number of initiatives to tackle this and other forms of anti-social behaviour.

The recent introduction of community wardens to tackle these and other issues and allow the police to concentrate their resources on other areas only serves to demonstrate the council's resolve in this area. You may remember that the last survey revealed significant support for these wardens - support that we listened to.

There was a high level of satisfaction with recycling and refuse collection, as well as comments supporting the introduction of kerbside recycling. Again we have listened and following a successful pilot in Arbroath, kerbside recycling will be rolled out across Angus over the next few years.

The planners get embarrassed?

Well, not really. While over 70% of you were happy or very happy with both planning control and building control we were struck by the number of unprompted comments on a variety of issues.

The planning system is of necessity complex, which can make it confusing, and on occasion, slow. By its nature it also requires us to reach decisions that balance development and conservation, and the interests of the community and the individual. This means that the council cannot please all of the people all of the time.

It is also the case that some decisions are out of the control of Angus Council. The council must follow national rules and is bound by national decisions. Against this background Angus Council will continue to do whatever it can to reach the best decisions in a reasonable time.

At your convenience?

Whilst 74% of you were happy or very happy with toilets and this rose to 84% for people who used them, we did receive a number of specific comments that we have noted. There was particular concern regarding the state of unattended toilets and a suggestion that more were required and that seasonal hours were unhelpful. As always we will consider these issues and the costs and benefits of any changes before taking any action.

Comments registered but no going back!

It was no surprise, given comments carried in the press, that your comments covered the closure of the registrars in Carnoustie and Brechin. It is, however, interesting to note that 86% of you were happy or very happy with the registration service and this increased to 96% for those who had actually used it! We are confident that these results reflect the steps we have taken to ensure that a high quality service continues to be provided following a decision that delivered substantial savings for the people of Angus.

Free to park whenever I shop...

Nearly 95% of you supported the existing policy on free car-parks, though you were split 50-50 on an increase in the maximum stay in short-stay car parks from 2 to 3 hours.