



| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Subject: | Belfast Residents' Survey |
| Date: | 25th March 2022 |
| Reporting Officer: | John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy |
| Contact Officers: | Patricia Flynn, Strategic Policy & Planning Officer |

| | |
|--|---|
| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After Council Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometime in the future | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 1.0 | Purpose of Report |
| 1.1 | To update the Committee on the key findings from the Belfast Resident'' Survey and to outline how the data will be used and reported. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | The Committee is asked to note the report. |
| 3.0 | Key Issues |
| 3.1 | Background Every two years, the Council commissions consultants to carry out an independent survey of residents. The survey provides statistically reliable, perception data based on a representative sample of Belfast residents (aged 16 and over) and is used to inform strategic planning and performance management at the city (Belfast Agenda) and organisational level. Normally |

conducted face-to-face, this year's survey was carried out by telephone due to Covid restrictions. Following a quotation exercise, we appointed Social Market Research (SMR) to carry out the survey on our behalf. They interviewed 1504 people between 15th November and 12th December, with quotas applied to ensure those completing the survey were representative of the population of Belfast (by age, gender, social class and geographical area).

Trend Data

3.2 On the whole, the results for 2021 are positive (see Appendices 1 and 2). In 2019, satisfaction with council and life in Belfast dipped, a trend replicated across the rest of the UK. This year, our results have improved on 2019 and are now generally on a par, and in some places better than the 2017 results. For most of the council indicators we have reversed the downward trend in satisfaction and approval ratings, whereas this has continued in English council areas (as per the LGA benchmark).

3.3 The Committee is asked to note that overall satisfaction with Belfast and local area remains lower than in 2017 (85% now compared to 91% in 2017), though still higher when compared to other local authorities. Some data has fallen, such as views on whether all people can lead healthy lives or live life to the full, whether they feel listened to and whether they feel safe in the city centre at night. This data will be used to inform improvement activities of council and the Belfast Agenda.

Key Results

3.4 Overall satisfaction with Belfast and local area:

- **85%** of those surveyed were satisfied with **Belfast** as a place to live
- **85%** of those surveyed were satisfied with their **local area** as a place to live

3.5 When asked about **Living in Belfast**, more than three quarters of those surveyed agreed that:

- Belfast was a good place to visit - **90%**
- People are friendly, caring and compassionate - **88%**
- Belfast had good infrastructure (**83%**) and was easy to get about (**85%**)
- The city centre was vibrant and attractive, with lots going on - **80%**
- Belfast is a welcoming safe, fair and inclusive city for all - **79%**
- Older people are treated with respect and dignity - **76%**
- People can live life to the full - **75%**

3.6 However, respondents were less likely to agree that Belfast:

- Is an environmentally friendly city - **73%**
- Where everyone benefits from a thriving and prosperous city - **65%**
- Everyone fulfils their potential - **52%**
- Everyone experiences good health and wellbeing - **51%**
- Just over half of those surveyed (**56%**) said they felt safe in the city centre after dark

3.7 **Priorities for Belfast**

When asked to select their most important priority for Belfast overall, *health and wellbeing* emerged as the highest priority followed by a stronger economy and employment and skills:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Health and wellbeing | 26% |
| A stronger economy | 13% |
| Employment and skills (jobs) | 13% |
| Reducing poverty | 12% |
| Improving local communities and neighbourhoods | 11% |

3.8 **My Local Area**

When asked about their **Local Area**, at least three quarters of those surveyed agreed their area:

- Was safe **96%** (during the day) and **86%** (after dark)
- They could access all the services they needed - **85%**
- Was seen as welcoming to others - **82%**
- Had a strong sense of community - **82%** and was a place where people worked together to improve things - **80%**
- Was clean and attractive - **80% and**
- Had good quality parks and green space - **78%**
- Had parks and green space that were safe - **76%**
- **They could** access job and training opportunities - **76%**

3.9 However, respondents were less likely to agree that their local area was a place where:

- People from different racial and ethnic backgrounds got on well together - **72%**
- People from different religions and political backgrounds got on well together - **67%**

3.10 When asked unprompted, to specify what **one** thing would most improve the quality of life in their local area, the most frequently mentioned individual issues were:

| | |
|---|-----|
| All good, don't know or can't think of anything | 25% |
| Community safety | 17% |
| Cleanliness | 8% |
| Jobs / wages | 5% |
| Children & Young people | 4% |
| Housing | 4% |

3.11 Respondent came up with an extensive list of issues, which we have grouped under 5 broad headings. Appendix 1 provides more detail on the type and relative importance of each of the issues raised under these themes.

Belfast City Council

3.12 When asked about Belfast City Council, around three quarters (**76%**) were **satisfied with the council overall** up from 65% in 2019. And at least three quarters agreed that we:

- Make Belfast a better place to live - **80%**
- Keeps resident very well or fairly well informed - **78%**
- Responds to the needs of local residents – **77%**

3.13 And around two thirds or more agreed that we:

- Provide good customer service- **73%** (up from 62% in 2019)
- Show good leadership for the City - **72%** (up from 62% in 2019)

3.14 Although the primary aim of the survey is to provide statistical information (quantitative data), respondents who stated that they were dissatisfied with council were asked why they had said this. 93 comments were provided, many of whom cited Covid-19 and in some way:

- 24 comments about covid and its impact on access to council services, the impact on cleanliness and pest control or concerns about the lack of enforcement;
- 12 residents felt the council could listen more to local residents; some felt they did not have a voice or weren't respected and that council be more responsiveness to local residents' needs;

- 12 residents felt that the council was not doing enough in their local area, with some suggesting that their area has been neglected;
- 8 references to crime and anti-social behaviour;
- 8 comments relating to lack of communication or information;
- 7 felt council was not doing enough to support poorer and vulnerable residents;
- A smaller number cited cleanliness issues (5); felt more could be done to promote recycling and the green environment (4) or that we took too long to act (2); and
- 5 residents felt that we ‘could just do more’ and 3 said they can’t see or don’t know what we do. 3 comments did not relate directly to council e.g., housing and healthcare.

3.15 **Benchmarking our results**

In previous years, we have benchmarked our results against other UK cities, but due to covid or budgetary constraints benchmark data is either no longer available or has been delayed. Bristol and Cardiff have recently completed resident surveys, which we will benchmark against once this data becomes available. Available comparisons against Glasgow City Council and local council averages as measured by the Local Government Association are provided below. When comparing Belfast with these benchmarks, our results are significantly higher:

| | Glasgow | LGA Average | Belfast |
|---|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| | | 2021 | 2021 |
| Overall satisfaction with local area | | 78% | ↗ 85% |
| Overall satisfaction council | 48% | 56% | ↗ 76% |
| Value for money | 33% | 43% | ↗ 64% |
| Keeps informed | 39% | 57% | ↗ 78% |
| Responsiveness (Listens and acts) | | 52% | ↗ 77% |
| Trust | 42% | 57% | ↗ 63% |
| Feels safe in local area - during the day | | 92% | ↗ 96% |
| Feels safe in local area - after dark | | 71% | ↗ 86% |
| Satisfaction with response to pandemic | 50% | | ↗ 78% |

3.16 **Resident Survey – Analysing the Results:**

On the whole, these results are positive and encouragingly for Belfast, and in particular the council:

- Significant increases in satisfaction with Belfast City Council. Many of the 2017 survey results were high, whereas the 2019 results were exceptionally low, a trend also replicated

across the UK. However, our results for 2021 are generally on a par, and in some places better than the 2017 results. See appendix 2 for these trend statistics set out in graphical format.

- Perceptions of council in terms of reputation and trust has improved (up by 16% and 10%) with the majority of respondents (78%) indicating that we responded well or very well to the covid-19 pandemic.
- The percentage of people who felt that people in Belfast were friendly, caring and compassionate increased significantly, up from 80% to 88%. As did those who felt that Belfast was a good place to visit, up from 82% to 90%.
- Significant increase in percentage of people who felt Belfast was safe, fair and inclusive, and that local areas were welcoming to others. However, perceptions in relation to people from different religious and racial backgrounds 'getting on' with each other were still the lowest rated local area indicators, with only two thirds agreeing that people from different religious and political backgrounds got on well, down slightly from 2019.

3.17 However, although these results are positive and compare quite favourably to other council areas, it is noted that levels of dissatisfaction have increased compared to previous years. This is in contrast to 2019, where despite local government approval ratings falling, both in Belfast and across the UK, our levels of dissatisfaction did not increase significantly. Instead, more respondents voiced a neutral opinion than in previous years. Whilst these results show that we have been able to move people back into the satisfied band, the increase in dissatisfaction suggests that there is a small but increasing proportion of residents who have shown dissatisfaction.

3.18 Other findings to note include:

- The percentage of people who agreed that people in Belfast 'lead healthy lives' and can 'fulfil their potential' fell (down by 7% and 9% respectively). The proportion of those disagreeing also rose. Only around half of residents agreed with these statements whilst almost a third (32%) disagreed that everyone experiences good health and wellbeing (up from a fifth in 2019), and almost a quarter (24%) disagreed that everyone fulfils their potential (also up from around a fifth in 2019).
- This was reflected in people's opinion regarding the city's priorities with a quarter of respondents (26%) selecting 'health and wellbeing' as their number one priority, making it the highest-ranking priority for Belfast.
- Significant increase in the number of people feeling less safe at night, especially in the city center (up to 25% from 9%). Perception of safety during the day remained high and fairly constant.

- The number of people who have sought advice for debt or financial problems remained constant (approx. 1 in 10 respondents), and although the percentage of respondents who report using a food bank is relatively low, that percentage has doubled - up from 4% in 2019 to 8% in 2021.

Impact of Covid-19

3.19 Whilst it is unclear as to the full impact of covid-19, these results point to a correlation between perceptions, behaviours and covid. For example:

- Increase in perceptions of people being caring and compassion;
- Increase in those disagreeing that everyone experiences good health and wellbeing;
- Reduction in volunteering and participation in local groups and community activities (although 4% did indicate that they do more volunteering now);
- Whilst 23% said they would be more likely to use public transport during the next 6 months, 28% said they would be less likely;
- Increase in use of foodbanks;
- Perceptions of wellbeing generally remained constant, although there were slight falls in reported satisfaction with mental / emotional wellbeing; financial situation and living accommodation; and
- People have equally reported being 'more' and 'less' active as a result of covid; Further analysis might shed more light on physical activity levels by age and reported physical activity in due course, which might correlate with research undertaken by Age UK that indicated older people have become less active during covid. Currently, the results do seem to indicate a general increase in walking for leisure.

Next Steps

3.20 The results from the resident survey play a key part in helping to track progress against key outcomes within the "Belfast Agenda". These results will also be used to inform the ongoing review and action planning process of the Belfast Agenda, corporate plan and other council strategies, particularly where figures indicate room for improvement. Information relating to the city centre, safety and physical and active travel for example will be shared with relevant operational sections and strategic programmes.

3.21 Further detailed analysis of the survey data is currently underway. This includes an analysis by area (North, South East and West) and by other demographic characteristics including age and social class. An initial analysis by gender indicates that, with the exception of safety at night particularly in the city centre, there is no or limited statistical difference in perceptions based on gender. Area based results will be brought to the Area Working Groups in due course. Relevant

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <p>3.22</p> <p>3.23</p> <p>3.24</p> | <p>results will also be shared with, for example, the Healthy Aging Strategic Partnership and Belfast Community Safety Partnership. Benchmark data will be added as it becomes available. Relevant survey data (in the form of performance indicators) will be included within the Council Improvement Plan, year-end performance assessment report for the Local Government Auditor and our corporate plan.</p> <p>Currently this survey is repeated every 2 years, but with the introduction of the Your Say Belfast platform, we may trial the survey through this platform later this year. The reliability of this method will be determined by response rates and, whilst it may not be as statistically representative nor provide accurate trend data for certain analysis (such as by age or area), it could provide interim citywide data to inform progress and annual performance data.</p> <p><u>Resources Implications</u></p> <p>There are no resource implications contained in this report.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality implications contained in this report. However, the information obtained will help inform our good relations work and audit of inequalities.</p> |
| <p>4.0</p> | <p>Documents Attached</p> |
| | <p>Appendix 1 – Residents’ Survey Results (with trend and benchmark data)</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Residents’ Survey Trends: Key Statistics</p> |