

## **Audit of consultation information which provides evidence of the public's opinion of local government**

### **Political Management**

#### **Attitudes to three proposed new models for local decisions making Workshop December 2000**

- Low level awareness regarding current decision-making structure of the County Council and the proposals for change.
- Respondents doubted whether any of the proposed models will deliver real challenge or address issues for local people.
- Respondents felt that the County Council were doing a good job, so why change things.
- Wanted a more visible, in-touch authority with proactive information provision.
- Confusion between County and District roles.
- County Council perceived as large and faceless but respondents fairly satisfied with services.
- Lack of knowledge of candidates and policies are the key reasons for not voting in local elections.
- Varying levels of awareness about how decisions are made – some older, more middle class residents are familiar with the traditional committee structure, while the majority of respondents have no idea how the Council currently operates.
- Key concern was that local government is dominated by party politics – “If we could switch off politics, it may work better”.

### **Political management**

#### **Postal research December 2000**

- The Leader and Cabinet model is the preferred choice across all age ranges, though support is highest amongst older people. There is a lack of interest in the process, particularly among younger people.
- The real challenge for Hampshire is not in the selection of which process to adopt; but in increasing resident participation, which reflects the call by residents for a more open and communicative council, made during the Political Management workshop held in December 2000.
- The ‘Leader with Cabinet’ is the option regarded as the one most likely to achieve improvements in these areas, although more say that they ‘don’t know’ or that one political system will ‘make no difference’ to either of the others.
- Residents do not consider that they know about how the Council makes decisions about its services and other local issues – around eight in ten say they do not know much about how the Council makes decisions about services and other local issues.

## **Qualitative Research among the 'hard to reach groups' Depth Interviews February – March 2001**

- Residents with physical disadvantages feel that Hampshire County Council could do a lot more to represent their interests and meet their needs.
- Homeless residents are generally dissatisfied with local services and facilities. This is mainly as a result of their acute support and services needs.
- Social exclusion in Gosport – residents generally identify 'the Council' as Gosport District Council and housing services in particular. There is little understanding of the role Hampshire County Council plays. Attitudes towards the Council are generally critical. But this is based largely on experience of particular services, such as housing.

## **Research with the Young and Elderly Focus groups May 2001 Older residents**

- More aware of work of the Borough / District Councils (likely to be due to more visible "doorstep" services).
- Low awareness of what Hampshire County Council does.
- More interested in knowing about services that were of relevance to them than Countywide strategic responsibility of Hampshire County Council.
- Majority said understanding of how political decisions were made was hazy.
- Residents felt that party politics has far too much influence on decision making. They saw the process as inefficient and lacking in openness and honesty. As far as they were concerned, accountability was the most important element of the decision making process.

## **Younger residents**

- Little understanding or interest in local government., however other research has shown that this is the same across the full political spectrum.
- Total lack of interest in the mechanism of local government.

## **Regional Government in England 2003 Research on behalf of 14 County Councils, depth interviews February 2003**

- Overall awareness of regional governance is low. Nationally just one in six (17%) claim to know more than a little about suggestion that there should be elected regional assemblies for each English region.
- Generally , residents who feel informed are more likely to oppose the establishment of an assembly than those who are not informed.

## **Hampshire Residents' Survey 2004 / 05**

### **Face-to-face interviews November 2004 and February 2005**

- After a small dip in the proportion of residents satisfied with the way the Councils running the area in 2002, the level of satisfaction has now almost returned to that seen in 1999 (67%). This pattern of satisfaction with Hampshire County Council is very much in line with the national pattern observed over the recent years.
- There is considerable variation between the districts in levels of satisfaction with the Council. East Hampshire and Basingstoke and Deane top the scale with almost three-quarters of their residents saying they are very or fairly satisfied with the way the County Council runs the area, while only just over half (55%) of residents in Hampshire say the same thing.
- When given a list of descriptions, both positive and negative, with which to describe the Council, residents tend to choose negative descriptions over positive ones.
- Hampshire has made large strides in communications, with the proportion of residents who feel that the Council keeps residents very or fairly well informed rising from 42 per cent in 2002 to 47 per cent in 2004.
- Over half of residents continue to assert that while they like to know what the Council is doing, they are happy to let them get on with their job. Only one per cent of residents claim that they are not at all interested in the Council's work.
- Those aged between 16 and 24 are the most likely to be uninterested in the Council's activities, with more than a quarter of this age group saying they are not interested in what the Council does as long as they do their job.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

There is a wealth of information about the public opinion of local government. The audit here includes information from consultations either commissioned by Hampshire County Council, or those which we have had some involvement with. There may be more research on a national level that is available.

The research seems to be pointing towards the fact that, whilst residents may be generally pleased with the service provision in their area, they have little or no understanding of how decisions are made. They can relate more to their district and borough council because of the local service provision but are less clear of Hampshire County Council's role.

This opinion seems to be more prevalent in younger people and the harder to reach groups.