CITIZENS' PANEL FEBRUARY 2003 - FEEDBACK OF RESULTS

Many thanks to all of you who responded to our last Citizens' Panel survey. We received 1497 completed surveys which represents an excellent response rate of 73%.

You will recall that our last survey was based around the themes of Worcestershire Partnerships Community Strategy. The Worcestershire Partnership is the body that brings together local government, public services such as health, learning providers, police and probation, voluntary and community organisations, and local businesses within Worcestershire. "Partnership Towards Excellence – A Community Strategy for Worcestershire 2003 – 2013" sets out the aspirations for our County over the next 10 years. The aim is to enhance the quality of life of local communities by taking action to improve the economy, the environment and those social factors that make the County a good place to live. The survey questions were designed to establish a "baseline" of what you think it is like to live in Worcestershire NOW and what are your priorities for improvement. Set out below are some of the "highlights" of what you told us. You can view the full analysis of results on our website – www.worcestershire.gov.uk/citizenspanel

Quality of Life

Starting with the good news! – 91% of you love/like living in your neighborhood and the majority (72%) said you are unlikely to move. Overall 62% said you feel "proud " to live in Worcestershire. There are varying degrees of optimism about the future – most of you (57%) think that your neighbourhood will stay the same over the next 3 years, 21% think it will get worse and only 6% think it will get better.

We asked you to rate your local area against a range of factors. You said that access to nature and the countryside (77%), quality of GP services (62%) and quality of parks/open spaces (52%) were good in Worcestershire. Issues that you are concerned about reflect national trends - better road maintenance (54%), more activities and facilities for teenagers (53%) and young people (51%), more cultural activities/facilities (45%) and more affordable housing (42%).

Communities that are healthy and support vulnerable people

Generally you find it easy, or not difficut to access information on health services (55%), health issues/problem (59%) and healthy lifestyles (51%). GPs are still the major source of health information for you (74%) with family and fiends (6%) a distant second.

Your top 3 priorities for Worcestershire's health services are:

1. Increasing the number of hospital beds,
2. Reducing waiting lists with GP/Consultants,
3. Increasing the number of doctors and nurses.

The top 3 choices on the information wanted about healthier lifestyles were exercise, dealing with stress, and healthy eating.

Learning and skills for everyone, at every age

Most of you are unlikely to undertake any employment-related training or study over the next couple of years. As could be expected of those that are considering this the highest proportions are in the 18 – 34 and 35 – 49 age bracket. The factor most likely to make a difference to undertaking training or further study was when this was supported by an employer (47%). Many of you were interested in training and study for non – employment reasons (40%) and personal satisfaction was the biggest single factor in encouraging people to take up training or further study (481 people). Computer Literacy courses were the most popular choice identified by all respondents (590)

Economic Success that is shared by all
Most of you feel very secure, secure or fairly secure in your current employment (81%). Most of you (39%) felt the economy had stayed about the same over the last three years. 28% thought that the economy had got much or a little better, whilst 24% thought it had got a little worse and 8% thought much worse.

Your responses showed that the biggest barriers to taking up work or training were age, childcare, length of time out of the job market, and disability.

A Better Environment – for today and for our children
We asked you how effective the control of various environmental problems were in your area. Whilst most of you felt the controls were good or adequate the areas that caused you greatest concern were dog fouling (52%), litter (47%), traffic congestion (43%) and fly tipping (34%).

Overall you felt that the condition of the landscape, buildings and rivers, lakes or ponds and wildlife habitats in the local area are good to adequate. You showed most concern about public rights of way (footpaths etc) – whilst 75% of you felt that the condition of these were good or adequate, 16% thought they were poor.

Connecting Worcestershire
Just 34% of you feel involved in your local community – by contrast 65% of you do not feel very or at all involved in your local community. Nevertheless 48% of respondents felt that their neighbourhood was a place where people look out for each other and the majority of people felt that their area was a place where people from different backgrounds live together harmoniously (52%).

Despite the view that you were not very involved in your local community there was a strong support for the statement that by working together people in our area can influence decisions that effect the area - 62% agreed with this statement. Many of you had actually taken action to resolve a problem by signing a petition (59%), contacting the relevant organisation (47%), or contacting a local Councillor (28%).

Most of you think that they are well/fairly well-informed about local council services (45%) and local GP practices (48%). However you also said you are given limited information/not told anything about other health services (39%) and about the West Mercia Police (55%). You have a variety of views about how well public services involve you in making decisions about their priorities and future action. Local Councils and GPs scored best with 54% of you rating this as very good to adequate, whilst 39% rated the West Mercia Police and other Health Services (34%) as poor or very poor at this.

You told us that you want a public transport service that is more frequent, punctual, cheaper and with wider coverage. Improving road safety awareness and more cycle lanes would encourage you to cycle more.

This survey has provided the Worcestershire Partnership with really valuable information about how you find life in the County. The Partnership – through it's Thematic Groups – is already working hard on the issues that you have identified. For example we have made commitments in the Community Strategy to: improve access to health professionals; improve the availability of computer training through initiatives such as the Comput@bus*; improve access to public rights of way; increase the number of new homes built on previously developed land; increase the number of people represented by a District-based forum designed to gather your opinions and views and to promote community transport schemes.*

As well as tackling the immediate problems we are also looking to the future. For example we are developing a ten-year strategy for Worcestershire's economy – the aim is to diversify the economy by moving away from declining industries and strengthen our position for the future.

We said at the outset that this survey was about providing baselines against which to measure future progress. We will repeat this survey every 3 years in order to track any changes in your responses that occur over time. This will help us to judge how effective we have been at putting the Community Strategy into action – because it has had an impact on you as local residents, and has made Worcestershire an even better place to live.

To find out more about the Community Strategy visit
www.worcestershire.gov.uk/communitystrategy *or phone Margaret Reilly on 01905 766150*