

Appendix 12

2015-16 Online Engagement Survey Overview

Survey Topics and Response Rates

From 11 November 2015 to 11 November 2016, 30 public surveys were carried out using an online survey programme as a response-gathering tool. Topics were varied and included community safety, school rezoning, harbour usage, parking in Elgin, transport in Elgin, use of online services, and the Moray 'Fit Life?' scheme leisure card. The average response rate is 138 replies per survey.

This response rate is corroborated by results gathered by community planning partner Police Scotland, which received 166 responses from Moray to its 'April-September 2016 community engagement survey'. (It is worth noting that the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) six-question survey and the 2017 Budget Consultation survey, at 147 and 193 responses respectively, also have response rates in line with these figures.)

While customer satisfaction with council services in general was covered in the Citizens' Panel survey that took place over the summer, individual services also send out customer feedback surveys to their users: 17 of the 30 surveys that were conducted fall into this category.

Top Ten Topics

The top ten surveys by response number that were conducted in the past year are:

Survey Title	Number of Responses	Reasons for Response Rate
Elgin Parking Strategy Survey	1,136	Charges/public interest, committee debate
Elgin Transport Strategy Survey	808	Western Link Road & wide consultation, committee debate
Establishing a New Primary School for South-East Elgin	382	East End Primary School developments and consultation
Moray Fit Life Membership Scheme Survey 2016	312	Widespread campaign including social media, posters
Moray Connected: online services	228	Widespread campaign including council website
The Moray Council 2017 Budget Consultation Survey	193	Widespread campaign including social media
Consultation on Sustainable Harbour Usage	148	Targeted survey to users and harbour committees
Moray Community Planning Partnership 2016 Survey	147	Widespread campaign including social media
Property Needs Survey 2016	135	Conducted in conjunction with HIE: targeted at business owners/property users
Community Safety 2015 - 2016	92	Targeted survey to service users
<i>Average no. of responses to top ten</i>	<i>358</i>	

Online versus Hard-Copy Response Rates

The 'Elgin Transport Strategy Survey' received 808 responses. The overwhelming majority, i.e. 96% of replies, were received online. Only 4% of responses were received as hard copies. Additionally, all of the 1,136 responses to the 'Elgin Parking Strategy Survey' and all 312 of the responses to the 'Moray Fit Life Membership Scheme Survey 2016' were received online. These results indicate a healthy level of interest in and ability to participate in digital engagement from the public.

There were 147 responses to the CPP six-question survey. 68 were received back as paper copies, which gives a rate of return of 46% for hard copies. Although this is close to a 50/50 split in terms of the hard-copy versus online response rates, this figure must be viewed with care. Of the 2,978 hard-copy surveys that were distributed in total, the 68 received back as paper copies yield a return rate of only 2% for the hard-copy format – not as close a divide as it initially appears.

Results for the budget survey support this. Although over one-third of responses were received back on paper, when compared against the number of paper copies that were distributed, the actual return rate for the hard-copy format is just 4%.

In contrast, the majority of interaction on the budget consultation was received online and via social networking: 61% of the budget survey responses were returned online. 447 individual respondents contributed 1,435 comments on budget topics via social networking sites. The total number of all respondents to the budget was 640 people: participation from hard-copy formats yields a 12% response rate, while digital engagement (online responses and social media) from the same grouping comes in at 88%. Email was used as an additional means of digital engagement: 25 emails were received from members of the public in relation to the budget consultation, containing 109 separate suggestions. It is clear that digital engagement has a high rate of uptake and that our future engagement efforts should include this format.

Survey response rates increase if there has been recent interest in a topic or if the survey has been sent to a targeted group. There was widespread coverage of the Western Link Road in the local press, resulting in a high response rate of over 800 replies to the 'Elgin Transport Strategy Survey'; the 'Property Needs Survey 2016' was sent out in a purely online format to a targeted group of the council's industrial tenants, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)'s clients, Business Gateway customers, and through the Moray Chamber of Commerce.

The response rate for those surveys aimed at general public is low; using social media however, we used Facebook to pose questions and situations on topics known to be of interest to the public in order to generate discussion and feedback: the technique worked well. The lessons learned from this exercise indicate that surveys conducted on topics that were recently publicised or of interest receive higher return rates than those available to the general public, except in the case of Facebook, in which targeted topics are selected specifically to generate increased engagement.

Education

Overall, responses to the education-related survey topics were lower than expected. Only 16 replies were received to the 'Forres ASG Primary School Rezoning' survey; 34 responses were received to the 'Statutory consultation for rezoning Moray secondary school' survey;

just 11 came back for the 'Statutory consultation [sic] for a revised Admissions to Schools Policy' and 33 were returned to the 'Moray Early Years Draft Strategy 2023, Consultation Survey.'

The greatest response was 382 replies to the survey on 'Establishing a New Primary School for South-East Elgin.' Although significantly higher than the other education-related responses, the result is in line with expectations as the consultation on the East End Primary School development was an emotive topic for parents in the affected catchment area.

In contrast to the prevalence of online responses for the other surveys, it is interesting to note that in this case 56% of the survey responses were received in hard copy form, while the slightly lower figure of 44% were received online. It must be noted, however, that 50% of the responses to this survey were completed by children and a further 48% were completed by parents/family members, suggesting that hard copies of the surveys were made readily available at the school to encourage the children, those most immediately affected by it, to complete it.

Commonality of Responses

The results of this consultation are in line with the comments received from the live focus group session that was held as part of the overall budget consultation (in which three out of the seven groups involved in the discussion suggested that the school estate should be rationalised and non-viable schools closed) and with the results from the online budget consultation on this topic. The results from the Citizens' Panel survey respondents also agreed with this, having included several suggestions for 'reducing the numbers of under-occupied schools.'

In addition to the commonality of response rates noted earlier, Police Scotland used their survey to identify the top five local priorities within Scotland, and anti-social behaviour/disorder was ranked first, which agrees with the results of our Budget 2017: Community Safety Mini-Survey, which was open to the general public and which also ranked anti-social behaviour as the top priority in Moray. Of note, however, are the results to the Citizens' Panel survey, which ranked anti-social behaviour fifth in its list of priorities – transport came in first place, unsurprising considering the high rate of response to the Elgin transport and parking surveys that were conducted over the summer: transport, especially public transport and that covering in rural areas, appears to be a key topic for Moray's population.

Feedback from the budget consultation focus group session agrees with the feedback from the CPP six question survey, which was received through both online and hard-copy formats. At the focus group session, 63 members of the public were broken into seven focus groups: all seven identified their top three priorities as education, health and social care, with transport and direct services tied for third.

This result is in line with that of the CPP six question survey in which health, education, and council services were also identified as the top three priorities. As with the education example given above, in which the feedback from the focus group and from responses to an online survey identified the need to address the issue of the school estate, it is reassuring to note that the results from live discussion sessions, hard-copy and online engagement are in agreement.

Summary

Across the board, the results of public feedback appear to be in agreement no matter which means – hard copy survey, online engagement, or live focus group session – is used to capture it. The low level of response rates to hard-copy surveys and the higher response rate to digital versions indicate that, despite the availability of these forms in public-facing areas – Access Points, community centres, libraries, schools, community councils, and community planning partner locations in the case of the CPP survey – digital engagement has become the preferred engagement option for the majority of respondents. The labour and resources required to distribute, collect and collate hard copies of surveys are disproportional to the response rate returned.

While it is not suggested to discontinue the use of hard-copy surveys, as many residents do not own, have access to or wish to utilise digital resources, the focus of our engagement must shift to follow the patterns of access preferred by our respondents which means placing a greater emphasis on online activities.

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