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Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa and Environment Committee
from Nigel Corry, Account Manager, Consents Management
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Consents Customer Satisfaction Survey

1. Purpose

To present to the Committee the results of the Consents Customer Satisfaction Survey which was recently completed for the Consents Management and Planning and Resources Departments of the Wellington Regional Council.

2. Background

Since 1997, the Consents Management Department in Wellington, and the Planning and Resource Department in Wairarapa, have jointly undertaken three customer satisfaction surveys. The first of these surveys was completed in November 1997, with the second in May 2000.

The most recent of these surveys has just been completed in July of this year. As well as providing a detailed analysis of where we currently stand in terms of our customer satisfaction levels, the most recent survey also provides an excellent overview of the changing trends in our customer satisfaction over the last five years.

A summary document of the most recent survey will be provided to all Councillors at the Environment Committee meeting, and a representative from ACNielsen will give a short presentation on the outcomes of the survey to the meeting.

3. Method

All three customer satisfaction surveys have been contracted outside of the council to ACNielsen. The continued use of ACNielsen resulted from an open tender process where ACNielsen again provided the outstanding tender in terms of both quality and price. This decision also gave us the advantage of being able to work with the same methodology as used in previous studies ensuring robust comparison could be made between the surveys.

The principle purpose of the survey is to measure customer satisfaction with the services provided by the consents customers in both the Wellington and Wairarapa offices, and secondly, to provide an analysis of changing trends in customer satisfaction. To achieve this, four different customer groups were surveyed:

- Recent applicants;
- Existing consent holders;
- Submitters; and
- Complainants

4. **Survey Objectives**

The main objectives of the study were identified as being to:

- Compare the overall levels of satisfaction with the 1997 and 2000 survey results;
- Identify the relative importance of the different aspects of service in relation to overall satisfaction;
- Measure specific satisfaction levels with recent applicants, existing applicants, complaints and submitters.

Based on the results of measuring these objectives, it is then possible for the strengths and weaknesses of consent sections in Wellington and the Wairarapa to be assessed, and priority areas for improvement to be highlighted. This in turn will then lead to specific projects being implemented within our day to day work to improve satisfaction in those areas that have been identified as requiring improvement.

5. **Summary of Results**

The overall level of satisfaction with the performance of the department, while decreasing slightly to 78%, is still high. This is based on the responses of those who rated our service as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good'. In particular, we have maintained our satisfaction at the 'excellent' and 'very good' levels of service at 44% indicating maintenance of a very high top end level of satisfaction.

The main reason for the decrease in overall satisfaction from 80% in 2000 to 78% is due to a decline in satisfaction amongst the Recent Applicants group, which dropped from 89% in 2000 to 78% this year. This decrease has largely arisen from lower satisfaction rates in the 'excellent' and 'very good' categories.

This result is tempered with the increase in satisfaction amongst our Submitter group, who at 79% have continued to become more satisfied with each survey, and only a small decrease in satisfaction amongst Existing Consent Holders who at 78% are only a few points below the last surveys result of 82%. Interestingly, there has been a marked decrease in levels of satisfaction amongst Existing Consent Holders with our approach to enforcement. In many ways this may be construed to be a positive result in light of our more rigorous approach to enforcing compliance over the last two years!

As with the 2000 survey, complaints remain our least satisfied group, with a 64% overall satisfaction rating. Given the reasons as to why this customer group engages in contact with us, it is perhaps not surprising that this remains the least satisfied group. However, we are pleased that overall satisfaction amongst this group has remained the same since the last survey.

For the first time since we began the surveys, the Wairarapa Office (83%) achieved a slightly higher overall satisfaction rating compared to the Wellington office (78%). As with past surveys, this difference may be attributable to the different customer bases of the two offices. However, both offices experienced slight decreases in overall satisfaction when compared to the 2000 survey.

Overall, the current survey needs to be viewed in the context of the extremely high level of satisfaction found in the 2000 results, which prompted ACNielsen to state *“The increases in customer satisfaction observed across all groups of customers can be considered to be an excellent result. Increases of this magnitude are no often seen in customer satisfaction research...”* Given this, and while disappointed with the slight decrease in overall satisfaction, it does not necessarily come as a surprise.

Areas for improvement to ensure that satisfaction levels rebound in the next survey include the following:

- Increased and more effective communication with all groups, but especially recent applicants.
- Improve the usefulness of our compliance monitoring reports
- Ensure that customers are kept up to date with processes and outcomes in relation to both the applications and complaint processes

A strategic effort will be put in place over the next two years within the departments to introduce measures to ensure that these and other issue are addressed.

6. Communications

It is proposed to issue a short press release to publicise the results of the survey. Information on the survey will also be contained in our annual Consents Management newsletter which gets sent out to all of our consent holders.

7. Conclusions

While there has been a slight decrease in overall level of satisfaction, we are proud to have maintained such a high level of satisfaction amongst our customers which is easily comparable with other local authorities and other areas of the service sectors.

Obviously the decrease in satisfaction, particularly amongst recent applicants, is of some concern, and we will investigate and implement strategies to address this. The extensive information found in the report will allow us to look strategically at what groups and areas we need to focus our efforts.

8. Recommendation

That the Committee receives this report and its contents are noted.

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