

Survey Commentary

Conclusions:

1. We have some usable data that can inform policy choices but which should not be relied upon as a single source.
2. We have significant issues engaging young people and men.
3. We lack capacity and resources to undertake more complex surveys.

It is strongly arguable that a survey of residents' views can be considered scientific if it adheres to certain methodological principles that ensure its accuracy, reliability, and validity. If such a view is taken a survey may be unscientific. However, even data gathered unscientifically may be useful.

Starting from first principles the survey should have a well-defined purpose and objectives. What is the survey trying to find out? This ensures that the questions are relevant and focused. The residents survey set out to gather data about Town Council services and to provide a baseline for future work.

To be entirely scientific a representative sample of residents should be surveyed that is representative of the larger population. This often involves using random sampling techniques to avoid selection bias and can be done either by sampling residents whose characteristics are already known, or by collecting demographic data about respondents and weighting the results after the survey has been carried out. Irrespective of methods the sample size should be large enough to allow for generalization of the results to the entire population with a known margin of error.

These are survey techniques that we as staff are aware of, but which we can't implement due to lack of capacity and lack of appropriate tools. Experience suggests a survey to these standards conducted by an outside agency would cost at least £1000, plus delivery / collection costs.

Small councils can gather and use data effectively by following a systematic approach even if it falls short of what would be described as a scientific approach. A typical step-by-step guide to help parish councils collect, analyse, and utilize data might include:

1. Surveys and Questionnaires

- **Online Surveys:** Use tools like Google Forms, Microsoft 365 Forms, SurveyMonkey, or Typeform to reach a broad audience. We used Forms for our most recent survey because it's free with our existing software.
- **Paper Surveys:** Distribute during community events, in local stores, or via mail for those less willing to use technology – we can use these, but lack the capacity to input more than 100 ten question surveys.
- **Telephone Surveys:** We could use these for a more personal touch, particularly with older residents, but lack the technical resources (e.g. a dialler) to do this efficiently.

2. Public Meetings and Workshops

- **Town Hall Meetings:** Gather qualitative data from community discussions like the Town Meeting – such as the recent Town Meeting
- **Focus Groups:** Target specific groups to get detailed feedback on particular issues.

3. Social Media and Online Platforms

- **Facebook, Twitter, etc:** SM Platforms are good to engage with the community and collect feedback through polls and discussions, but we restrict our use to Facebook.
- **Parish Council Website:** Provide forms and feedback sections for residents to share their opinions.

4. Observational Data

- **Field Observations:** Note conditions of public spaces, usage patterns, and community behaviour – for instance we used footfall counting in the High Street in 2020-2022 to assess post covid recovery.
- **Photographic Evidence:** Document issues or events in the town – an untapped resource especially when used with focus groups and / or sentiment analysis

5. Existing Records and Data

- **Census Data:** Utilize national and local statistics for demographic information.
- **Local Government Data:** Access reports, planning documents, and other official records.

By following these steps, parish councils can effectively gather anecdotal and qualitative data, analyse it to understand community needs, and use the insights to make informed decisions that improve the quality of life for their residents.

In the case of the survey conducted in Q1/2 2024 169 responses were collected; lack of technical resources and GDPR issues means we have no way of knowing if there were multiple responses.

Questions 1-3 show a significant positive response, but also an unusually low response for one field (9/10) that suggests there may be an issue with form presentation around that number. The response, however, is generally positive.

Question 4 asks respondents to rank council priorities. Those rankings reflect existing council priorities.

Question 5 identifies that respondents are most dissatisfied with communications, litterbins and bus shelters.

Question 6 suggests respondents are, by a narrow margin, satisfied with the methods by which they can provide feedback to council.

Question 7 suggests respondents preferences for communication with the Town Council are similar to the Town Council's choices.

Question 8 reflects the council's existing issues engaging younger people.

Question 9 requires more research as to why we don't get male engagement – more research into Facebook usage may be required.

Issues arising from proposal

None.

Rationale for recommendation

Not applicable.