report

meeting	**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE AUTHORITY**		
date	**26 MARCH 2004**	agenda item number	

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FINDINGS OF THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY 2003

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Fire Authority of the outcomes from the recent public opinion survey conducted in November/December 2003.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Services provided by Best Value Authorities have a direct effect on the quality of life of local residents. It is therefore important that the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) address levels of satisfaction with these services. Thus, a number of 'quality' BVPIs have been specified by the Government to explicitly reflect user experience of services.

2.2 Central and Local Government has agreed that these user satisfaction surveys, to inform the production of the indicator information, be conducted on a triennial cycle. On that basis the user satisfaction surveys had to be undertaken during 2003/04.

2.3 As with our previous pubic satisfaction survey, the Authority employed Opinion Research Services Ltd to carry out this work.

2.4 This was for a number of reasons, mainly,

2.4.1 They are seen to be completely independent of the Authority and the Service.
2.4.2 As they are carrying out the survey for a number of other fire authorities we are able to accurately benchmark the results.

2.5 The full results from this survey are available in the **attached** report – see **Appendix A**.

3 SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 In addition to general questions around the various aspects associated with the Service and resultant influence on householders, we were able to include questions in relation to the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

3.2 Of the 4,000 questionnaires distributed, 1612 were returned to give an excellent response rate of 43%. This compares with the 2001 survey response rate of only 17%.

4 OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

4.1 Section 2 of the attached report is arguably the most interesting to Members as this deals with performance and cost.

4.2 Satisfaction of Fire Authority

On first sight it is disappointing to note a dip in the number of respondents that are "very satisfied" with the way the Authority runs things (a drop from 49% in 2001 to 29% in 2003) however, this figure is reversed in the "fairly satisfied" with an increase from 28% to 42%. There is no evidence to point to any particular area of why these figures should have changed, but one reason may be down to the publicity following the recent industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union.

4.3 Response Times

The answers formulated around response times provide the Authority with the evidence that supports its proposal within the IRMP for a ten-minute measurement standard for attendance to incidents (this is not a standard for cover provision). A local standard of measurement is required due to the removal of Best Value Performance Indicator 145, as specified in the Draft National Framework Document.

It can be seen from page 9 of the attached report that the Authority measurement standard is meeting the expectations of the public for incident attendance's in urban areas and exceeding them for incidents in rural areas.

4.4 Value for Money

Once again first impressions show a disappointing dip in the number of respondents who feel they are getting very good value for money (a drop of 23%). On closer inspection of the data it would appear that the comparison between national averages and savings greatly influence the result to this question. It is important to recognise that 95% of respondents believe that they get either very or fairly good value for money.

4.5 Service Charges

This issue continues to provide mixed opinions on introducing charges for certain services, however, there was near unanimous belief that charges should be levied in relation to persistent calls to false alarms.

4.6 Section 4 and 5 of the attached report cover the areas of "Fire Safety in the Home" and "Awareness of Fire Safety Messages". It is clear that the fire safety message is getting through, but a large proportion of people receiving the message are still not taking action. These results will prove to be valuable information for targeting Community Fire Safety in the future.

4.7 Fire Service Priorities

Given a choice of three possible priorities, it is clear that Nottinghamshire respondents do not believe that "Keeping Costs to a Minimum" should be the top priority for the Fire Service. There was not a great deal to choose between the other two categories, as the "Speed of Emergency Response" and "Prevention of Fires" were both popular. However, three quarters of respondents thought that the speed of emergency response should be the most important priority.

5 BENCHMARKING

5.1 Adequate benchmarking depends upon appropriate comparisons and the number of brigades taking part. A total of 27 brigades used this ORS survey.

5.2 Of the 15 Best Value family brigades within our group, 10 took part in the survey

5.3 Having compared our results with all 27 brigades taking part in the survey, it is clear that there is a national drop in public satisfaction ratings. However our figures show Nottinghamshire to be within the top 25% with only 4 other brigades having a better mean score.

5.4 As expected there was little variation across the country when it came to the public perception of value for money. Nottinghamshire being the same as all other brigades within the BV family group.

5.5 In the section entitled public priorities, respondents were asked to choose between three areas.

5.5.1 Respondents from Nottinghamshire put '**speed of response'** as number one. This result was also the highest percentage score within the 10 brigades of the Best Value Family Group for this question.

5.5.2 Interestingly although **'prevention'** was the second choice, the same as others brigades. Nottinghamshire was the lowest figure within the group.

5.5.3 Of the 10 family group members, Nottinghamshire respondents were the top percentage for **'cost'** being important although this figure was very low at 1.7%

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The disappointing shift from "very satisfied" to "satisfied" has been noted and the Service is designing a new communications strategy in order to address its identified future communication and consultation needs.

6.2 Details of the survey are being discussed with relevant Officers across the Service to ensure full benefits and improvements are made from this useful feedback.

6.3 The full report will be posted on the Internet and Intranet.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, there will be a need to budget for carrying out this type of survey in three years time.

8 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

9 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Best Value “Customer Satisfaction” Survey is part of the Government’s drive to improving public services. It is therefore essential that the Fire Authority address any areas it considers necessary to improve performance and the public perception of the Service.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 That Members note the contents of the report.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

None

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CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Appendix A is not yet available in electronic form. Please contact Catherine Ziane-Pryor on 0115 9154594 to obtain a hard copy.