

Report 15.443
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File

Committee Finance, Risk and Assurance Committee
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2015 Awareness Survey results

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the results of the 2014 Awareness Survey carried out by Versus Research.

2. Background

Between 2 June and 4 July this year (2015) Versus Research was commissioned to conduct a review of residents' awareness of Wellington Regional Council and the impression they have of the regional council overall. The survey was a repeat study of research done in June 2014, April 2013 and 2012.

To address increasing concern regarding the representative sample achieved solely via computer-assisted telephone interviewing, this year an additional online sample was conducted. The final sample size was 800, made up of 200 online and 600 telephone interviews (Margin of error +/- 3.46%). The project utilised a stratified sample based on the districts that make up the Wellington region.

To ensure the sample proportions were achieved in the telephone interviews, quotas were applied. Similarly, the invitation to participate in the online survey was sent out to a representative sample, but a response was only collected from residents who did not have a listed landline, resulting in a greater response from Wellington City and Hutt City.

The surveys asked residents about their awareness and understanding of GWRC's role; the contact they have had with GWRC, services they have received; as well as the awareness and readership of council communications. Residents' use of online platforms was measured, as was civil defence emergency preparedness, use of public transport and contact with the Metlink Call Centre.

3. Results

The use of a mixed method for data collection did impact on results. The online survey managed to access the younger, urban, renter (non-ratepayer) audience, providing insights into a technology savvy young person's life and their relationship with the regional council, while the telephone survey provided a balanced view of the rural, semi-rural, older ratepayer audience.

Increasingly, information regarding GWRC is being sourced online. However, to reach diverse audiences GWRC needs to retain the multi-channel approach.

3.1 Awareness and understanding of the Regional Council's role

Overall awareness levels were on a par with 2014, with an increase in unprompted (unaided) awareness of GWRC's role in flood control and the Wairarapa water use project. Inaccurate association of regional council activities with those of local councils continued, with roading, water supply and sewerage the main services misattributed to GWRC.

The management of regional parks (89% - up 1% compared to 2014), public transport (84% - up 2%), water quality (80%, - down 7%), flood control (75%, - down 1%) and civil defence (72%, - same as 2014) received the highest mentions. Overall, total awareness (prompted and unprompted) of GWRC's activities has increased with a significantly smaller proportion of residents unaware of GWRC's role in relation to any of the activities (down 14% to 4%).

Although the proportion of residents who perceived the services as 'good' value for money for rates spend remained on a par with previous results (27%), increasingly residents felt that GWRC should demonstrate where rates were being spent.

A significantly smaller proportion of residents felt that the decisions made by the council were in the best interest of the region (down 7% to 21%), and the proportion of residents who were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in council decision-making declined considerably (down 5% to 14%).

When asked whether respondents understand the regional council's decision-making process, responses remain mixed. A total of 11% agreed they understood (compared to 12% in 2014), 40% were neutral (compared with 43% in 2014) but 44% disagreed they understood the process (compared with 43% in 2014).

Overall satisfaction with how the regional council services the region declined to 59% satisfied or very satisfied (down from 61%).

3.2 Contact and service from the Regional Council

Contact with the regional council remained at low levels with 77% of residents having had no direct contact with GWRC in the past 12 months (compared to 78% in 2014). The improvement in staff ratings

were not sustained with the proportion of residents who had contacted the council in the last 12 months and who rated the service received from staff as 'good', declining to 44% (compared to 59% in 2014).

In general, dissatisfaction related to a lack of response from the council, lack of transparency in response and a lack of insight into the concerns raised.

3.3 Communications

For the first time this year, sourcing information from the internet (up 5% to 35%) surpassed sourcing information from newspapers (down 13% to 33%). Online communication was further supported by an increase in the use of the council's website (up 5% to 14% unprompted).

The proportion of residents who sourced information about council from their rates bill remained constant at 11%, although 57% were aware of this communications channel, and 7% obtained their information from radio (up 3%).

Awareness of Our Region remained constant at 24%, with an increase in the number of people who either read the publication from start to finish or read some of the articles (up 3% to 20%). A further 32% skim read the publication, however 32% claim not to have seen Our Region or to read community newspapers (up 7%). This has been influenced by the online survey.

3.4 Online Services

A greater proportion of residents do not read any newspapers (up 6% to 20%) and a greater proportion indicated they read Stuff on a regular basis (up 5% to 8%).

The number of people accessing the GWRC website rose to 52% (up from 47% in 2014), 67% of which, accessed the site within the last 12 months. Better navigation, simplified links and improved functionality were the most common suggested improvements for the site although familiarity with the site improved ratings with residents.

Residents who have access to the website were asked whether they were members of Facebook or Twitter. Membership to Facebook remained constant (58%) and the use of Twitter increased 3% to 9%. However, 41% of residents who have internet access do not belong to either social media forum.

Residents who were active social media users were asked to indicate their intention to follow or sign up for council-hosted events. 68% would use Facebook or Twitter to keep informed on civil defence through WREMO (up 1%), 58% would follow public transport disruptions and service changes through Metlink (up from 53%) and 48% would find out more about regional parks (down 2% to 48%).

Measured for the first time, 46% indicated they would follow environmental or water issues like toxic algae. A similar proportion (45%) would follow regional projects or events. A considerably greater proportion of social media users would share information about regional issues (up 8% to 36%), while 26% would follow information regarding cycling.

3.5 Public Transport

This year 80% of residents said they have used the public transport network in the last 12 months (up 6%). Frequency of use remained similar to 2014 levels. The most frequent users (five or more days a week) are aged between 18 and 34 years.

16% of residents have contacted the Metlink call centre in the past 12 months, on a par with last year's results. Of those residents who did contact Metlink, 44% thought the service was excellent or very good (compared to 61% in 2014) and 45% rated the service as good (up from 24%).

3.6 Community Participation

Residents were again asked to indicate whether they have sufficient emergency food and water available to last three days. 23% indicated that they did not, a significant increase on 2014 when 12% said they were not prepared. This year the level of Wellington City residents who are prepared dropped from 90% to 69%, making them the least prepared in the region. Residents aged between 18 and 34 years, groups flatting together, young couples with no children, residents living in urban areas, and flat or apartment dwellers were more likely to not have sufficient food and water to last three days.

4. Conclusion

Versus has suggested several points that Wellington Regional Council should consider in future communications planning.

These include:

- Continued use of mixed methodology combining telephone and online data collection to represent feedback from the region as a whole
- Enhance perceptions of value of regional council by further promotion of regional parks, public transport, water quality, flood control and civil defence
- Use multi-channel communications including newspapers, radio, online to reach diverse audiences
- Website improvements to enable better access through smart phones
- Take advantage of interest of younger audiences in council communication regarding public transport and information regarding regional issues.

5. Communication

No communication is required.

6. The decision-making process and significance

No decision is being sought in this report is solely for receiving and noting.

7 Engagement

Engagement on this matter is unnecessary.

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*

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