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Committee Audit and Risk Committee
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Report on Awareness Survey 2013

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the results of the 2013 Awareness Survey carried out by Versus Research,

2. The decision-making process and significance

No decision is being sought in this report as it is for information purposes.

3. Background

In June this year (2013) 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 April 2012.

Interviews were carried out via telephone, with a final sample size of 603 (Margin of error +/- 3.99%). The project utilised a stratified sample based on the districts that make up the Wellington region.

To ensure the sample proportions were achieved, quotas were applied. Age and gender weightings were applied to the final data set to ensure specific demographic groups are not under or over represented.

The survey asked residents about their awareness, understanding and perceived value-add of the regional council's role; the contact they have had with the regional council; the service they have received from the regional council; as well as the awareness and readership of the regional council publication 'Our Region' and use of media.

Residents' attitudes towards the regional council using social media and usage/behaviour around online platforms were measured; as was civil defence emergency preparedness; and awareness of the regional council's water shortage campaign earlier in the year. For the first time the survey questioned residents on their subsequent actions to minimise water wastage.

4. Results

4.1 Awareness and understanding of the Regional Council's role

There is greater awareness of the regional council's role at an unprompted (unaided) level, with an increase noted across 15 of the 23 regional council activities at a spontaneous level.

Water quality and supply, public transport, managing regional parks and flood control are the strongest associations with the regional council. Water supply increased to 53% (up from 40% in 2012), water quality increased to 50% (up from 36%) and flood control increased to 22% (up from 16%); public transport only increased by 1% to 34% and managing regional parks decreased to 26% (down from 31% in 2012).

Managing regional parks was the only category that showed a reduction in unprompted awareness.

Other categories that showed marked increases were soil conservation at 15% (up from 3%); native plants and animals at 14% (up from 6%); regional road safety campaign at 11% (up from 4%); civil defence at 9% (up from 2%) and regional economic development at 9% (up from 2%).

Combining prompted and unprompted awareness paints a different picture with 15 of the 23 regional council activities showing a marked decrease in awareness.

Regional economic development decreased to 39% (down from 56% in 2012); walking and cycling info online decreased to 38% (down from 55%); resource consents decreased to 52% (down from 68%); regional strategy development decreased to 38% (down from 53%); managing regional parks decreased to 74% (down from 87%); policy development decreased to 50% (down from 63%).

The highest levels of awareness were recorded for water quality at 87% (up from 85%); water supply at 84% (down from 85%); and public transport at 74% (however this was down from 79% in 2012).

When asked whether respondents understand the regional council's decision-making process, responses were mixed. A total of 13% agreed they understood (up from 9% in 2012), 38% were neutral (down from 47% in 2012) but 45% disagreed they understood the process (up from 40% in 2012).

Responses to having a greater say in decision-making and confidence in the regional council's decision-making remain on a par with last year. Around a fifth of residents (18%) are satisfied with opportunities to participate in the regional council's decision-making while 45% are neutral. This was a new question in the survey and has no comparator information.

Positive perceptions regarding the value add of the regional council's rates spend have decreased significantly, with around one quarter (26%) rating the regional council rates as 'good value'. This was a decrease from 39% in 2012 although those who were neutral increased from 46% to 54%.

Overall satisfaction with the regional council remains on a par with last year with a total of 62% of residents either satisfied (54%) or very satisfied (8%) with the services they get from the regional council (compared with 60% in

2012). However there was a greater number of residents who feel unable to rate the regional council overall with 'don't know' up from 1% to 3%.

4.2 Contact and service from the Regional Council

Contact with the regional council increased in 2013, with around a third of residents (34%) having contacted the regional council in the last 12 months, up from 28% in 2012. However, when asked to rate the overall performance of the regional council staff, there was a decrease in 'good' services rating, down from 50% in 2012 to 40% this year. There was also a significant increase in the number of "don't know" responses, up from 3% to 14% in 2013.

Lack of response and follow up is the main driver of dissatisfaction with the regional council staff.

4.3 Communications

Newspapers are the main source of information about the regional council for about half (52%) of the region's residents, up from 42% in 2012. Other sources that showed an increase were rates bills which increased to 17% (up from 11% in 2012); TV which increased to 10% (up from 4%) and radio which increased to 8% (up from 4%).

However flyers in letterbox decreased to 20% (down from 30% in 2012); the GWRC website which decreased to 7% (down from 15%), and the number of respondents who said they 'don't know' increased from 2% in 2012 to 10% this year.

At a prompted (aided) level, the number of residents unaware of any regional council publication increases significantly with 13% of residents unaware in 2013, compared with 5% in 2012.

Significant declines include fewer residents aware of information in rates bills (58%, down from 66%), Metlink public transport website (39%, down from 56%), and Our Region (27%, down from 36%).

Our Region changed from a quarterly publication distributed in local newspapers in 2012 to a monthly publication distributed through the Dominion Post and Wairarapa News in 2013. Almost half (44%) of residents are reading the publication but more than a third say they have never seen Our Region, mainly because they do not read the Dominion Post or Wairarapa News (38%). This is a particular issue in Upper Hutt (where 61% say they have never seen it) and South Wairarapa (where 52% say they have never seen it).

Awareness of Our Region being produced by the regional council has also declined, with only a third (32%) aware that the regional council is behind the publication. Of the eight council areas covered by the regional council, only Masterton recorded more than 40% awareness (48%).

Analysis of traditional media use shows a decrease in newspaper readership and radio listenership; with an increasing proportion of residents who do not read newspapers at all (15% in 2013, up from 10% in 2012) and the number of residents who are not regular radio listeners (17%, up from 10% in 2012).

Access to the internet in general remains high at 89% (down from 93% in 2012) but the number of people accessing the GWRC website reduced to 43% (down from 50% in 2012). However residents' access seems more targeted

with a greater proportion of residents looking for regulations, by-laws and requirements at 25% (up from 8% in 2012); information on facilities at 20% (up from 4%); and activity programmes at 12% (up from 4%). Those accessing general/unspecified information dropped to 6% (down from 16% in 2012).

When rating the regional council's website, residents who rated the site as 'poor' increased to 5% (up from 1% in 2012), while those who gave it a 'neutral' rating decreased to 52% (down from 64%). A total of 31% rated the website as 'good' (up from 26% in 2012), 12% did not give an opinion (up from 9% in 2012).

Residents who use the website were asked to suggest changes that could improve the site. Improvements included a better search facility (11%) and overall declutter/ridding the site of unnecessary links (9%).

Social media use for Facebook remains on a par with last year (46% compared to 51% in 2012) but Twitter has increased (6% compared with 2%). An interest in using social media for feedback on the regional council policies, sharing information about regional issues and keeping in touch with councillors was noted. However only 44% of respondents said they would use Facebook or Twitter for information on public transport disruptions and service changes compared to 59% in 2012.

4.4 Community Participation

This year residents were asked to indicate whether they have sufficient emergency food and water available to last three days. The majority of residents (81%) said that they did, with Upper Hutt residents being most prepared at 90%. Least prepared are Kapiti residents at 76%, Hutt City at 77% and South Wairarapa and Wellington City at 78% each.

Residents were also asked about their awareness of the regional council water shortage campaign which occurred earlier in 2013. High awareness was recorded with 86% aware of at least one aspect of the campaign; with adverts (58%), news items (42%), and radio (26%) most frequently mentioned.

A total of 76% of residents undertook some action to save water in the last six months, with limiting outside water use (38%), showering instead of taking baths (25%), using grey water (15%) and general water saving awareness (15%) receiving highest mention.

5. Conclusion

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

These include:

- Continued communication of regional responsibilities, especially around water supply, water quality and public transport
- Investigate the use of multiple contact points in the resident-council relationship
- Review the layout and design of Council's website to ease navigation; improve search tool
- Explore exclusion of youth market from traditional media

- Build on lessons learnt from water shortage campaign as example of best practice communications

The Communications team will also work with the ELT to:

- Review the content of Our Region and use of the Dompost and Wairarapa News as the communication vehicle
- Actively integrate use of radio, print communications and social media
- Review promotion of regional parks
- Work with Metlink to stimulate interest in the Metlink public transport website

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

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

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