

Annual Customer Review 2010-11

Aims of survey

The aim was to remind customers about the range of activity we were involved with in 2010-11 and an indication of which of our priorities for 2011-12 were of most relevance.

About the survey

A link to the survey was emailed to over 1000 people on 15/06/11 and the survey was open until 09/08/11. We received 125 responses (132 last year).

About our customers

Of those who responded, 21% are leaders (23% last year), 49% are officers and managers (50% last year) supporting leaders and 30% are experts (27% last year). This would be expected as there are more people in officer/managerial roles than experts or leaders and we often interact with people who support leaders as a means of influencing them.

Responses primarily came from the public sector (45%, 58% last year) followed by the private sector (35%, 33% last year) and lastly the voluntary sector (20%, 9% last year). This indicates that we are well connected to the public sector and it shows improved contact with the voluntary sector through our increased efforts to engage with the sector. Having a third of responses from the private sector is a good response rate.

There was a reasonably even spread across the West Midlands sub-regions for responses, with the highest number of responses coming from those working in Birmingham probably due to our location and work in the city. (This is the same result as last year.)

The voluntary sector customer base has increased this year to provide an improved overall balance of types and geographical spread of our customers.

How do people hear about us?

The results show that word of mouth, our events, our website and our newsletter are the main ways in which people have heard of us which is positive as it shows that our reputation precedes us and that our events and website are reaching people from our target audience. (This is the same result as last year.)

Our impact in 2010-11 - policy advice, cross-sector events, and communications

9 out of 17 (53%) of our policy advice from the past year were most frequently rated as highly relevant to the West Midlands (compared to 7 out of 11 (64%) the year before). Of these the most relevant were:

- West Midlands Sustainability Priorities to deliver the Low Carbon Vision 2020
- West Midlands Roadmap to a Low Carbon Future in 2020
- Sustainability Challenges in the West Midlands

17 out of 21 (81%) of our cross sector events from the past year were most frequently rated as highly relevant to the West Midlands (compared to 12 out of 14 (86%) the year before). Of these the most relevant were:

- Carbon Reduction: a business opportunity for the West Midlands
- Low Carbon Economy Leadership Summit – Funding carbon and cost saving measures
- The future of business support to achieve a low carbon economy in the West Midlands

In terms of sharing success, our website and newsletter were rated most frequently as excellent to good at providing information about:

- SWM projects (80% good or excellent, 73% last year)
- West Midlands events (82% good or excellent, 67% last year)
- West Midlands news (80% good or excellent, 73% last year)

Representative quotes and comments:

“All the work the business does is high quality for a high priority agenda” SWM Business Member

“Engage the third sector with business in this debate.” SWM Business member

Our performance 2010-11 against our vision, mission and values statements

We were most frequently rated as making ‘good’ progress against our vision, mission and value statements. The highest ratings were for our performance against:

- Our mission as sustainability advisers to the leaders of the West Midlands (82% good or excellent, 63% last year)
- Our value of being business led and business like - we seek and expect others to maintain personal and professional standards (77% good or excellent, 58% last year)
- Our value of being creative and positive – we are always looking for better ways of working with others (79% good or excellent, 64% last year)
- Our value of being respectful - we respect nature's limits and the needs of future generations, we respect each other and celebrate our diversity so that everyone can give their best (76% good or excellent, 59% last year)

This means an almost 20% improvement in perceived performance in total across our mission and values.

Our priorities for 2011-12 – policy advice, cross-sector events, and communications

For all of our priorities for the coming year, the majority of people said they would have high or medium relevance and 16 out of 24 (67%) of priorities were most frequently rated as highly relevant (16 out of 19 (84%) last year). Of these the most relevant were:

- Coordination of green business clubs – business-to-business mentoring and sharing good practice
- Dissemination of low carbon evidence base to local enterprise partnerships
- Support and promotion of Sustainable Housing Partnership work on retrofit
- Local Authority leadership summit – steps to low carbon prosperity in a changed economic and political world
- Renewable energy workshop for local authorities
- West Midlands priorities for a sustainable 2020; where next on our journey?
- Climate change adaptation workshop for local authorities

In terms of sharing success the most relevant priorities were:

- Newsletters – monthly, members quarterly update and West Midlands leaders six month update
- Website – signposting to resources
- Grow active members and opportunities to contribute

Representative quotes and comments:

“Engaging the private/commercial sector is paramount to achieve results – they have the money and resources unfettered by public policy. You need to persuade this sector of the benefits.” SWM Business member

“How to best engage MPs and MEPs?” SWM Public sector member

This means that our work with business, local enterprise partnerships, and local authorities around the low carbon economy as expressed in our sustainability priorities and communications is perceived as highly relevant, compared to our growing voluntary sector work.

Perception of West Midlands progress against the seven sustainability priorities

This year for the first time we asked about how people felt progress was being made by others working together on the newly published sustainability priorities.

- Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency (54.7% very well or well)
- Improved low carbon transport choices - flexible working, cycling, walking (49.1% very well or well)
- Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation & save costs (47.2% very well or well)
- Development & coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs & skills (49.1% very well or well)
- Infrastructure for diverting commercial & industrial waste from landfill (56.5% very well or well)
- Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defences & green spaces (44% very well or well)
- Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas (30.8% very well or well)

Representative quotes and comments:

“There is little cross over between public and private sector and the economic situation will drive most decisions at the present time.” Green Leader

“Things have got markedly worse under the new govt as it has scrapped regional governance structures and the important relationships that had developed between key actors in the region.” SWM Green Leader

“It's hard to see much progress amongst leaders in understanding that infinite growth is not possible that sustainability means there have to be environmental limits. The dominant business model still seems to be multinational neo-liberal capitalism, which is obsessed with profit at any cost and Birmingham's leaders think inward investment is the key to everything.” SWM Voluntary sector member

“It's hard to see how you can perform well against some of your (laudable) objectives in the current economic and political climate - this is not a reflection on your organisation but an observation on the context in which you have to operate. I also have problems with these 2020 vision type statements, they are rarely meaningful, and I cannot see that in 2020 that there will have been that much progress on sustainability or social justice given current trajectories. I am minded of the Millennium Development Goals, most will be missed by a good mile and it just shows how vacuous

these kinds of goals can be. Wishful thinking is no substitute for real structural change.” SWM Green Leader

This means that a few priority areas, such as the retrofit of housing and low carbon transport, are perceived as being progressed more rapidly than the rest.

Other

We also asked for feedback on several new services we were running for the first time this year.

The West Midlands Sustainable Development Officer Network meetings of sharing good practice was rated by 85% of people as of high or medium relevance this year and 81% as a future priority.

Our careers service for graduates didn't provide enough relevant feedback due to the sample size, so it is being evaluated through a separate survey to gain feedback from those using the website and receiving the email bulletins.

Conclusions

From the customer survey is:

- SWM is engaging with the right level of individual and has a good geographical and sector spread. The voluntary sector base has increased substantially to help SWM to become more cross-sector with strong private and public sector engagement.
- There is an ongoing tension to manage where we are more cross-sector than last year, as not all sectors are perceived as equally of importance for our work or priorities.
- The best way of communicating about us is still members and others recommendations, our events, website and newsletter – not trade stands.
- We have made significant improvements in the delivery of our mission and values (an almost 20% improvement)
- Our previous activity is seen as of high relevance with particular elements standing out such as our sustainability challenges, priorities and roadmap work, low carbon economy leadership programme.
- Our planned activity is seen of high relevance with particular elements standing out such as the evidence base for local enterprise partnerships, business support, annual conference, good practice case studies service, newsletter, and supporting our members and green leaders.
- A few WM SD priority areas, such as the retrofit of housing and low carbon transport, are perceived as being progressed more rapidly than the rest.

- The improvements we need to make are to focus our policy work more clearly around the 7 SD priority areas rather than the previous broader approach and to use more cross-sector events and working to achieve this, especially as our audience is changing.

Laura Simpson, 13th September 2011