

Annual Customer Survey 2012-13

Aims of the survey

Our annual customer survey aims to remind customers about the range of activity we were involved with in 2012-13, provides feedback on our services and offers an indication of which of our priorities for 2013-14 are of most relevance.

We use the results, together with other feedback from events, projects, website, social media and our members to help evaluate our annual impact, provide evidence when seeking future funding and to help improve our future activity. We report the key findings as part of the business review in our annual accounts.

About the survey

A link to our 4th annual survey was emailed to over 1,500 of our customers on the 1st August 2013 and the survey was open until the end of September 2013. We received 104 responses (125 last year).

About our customers

The roles of those who responded included:

- 23% are leaders
- 45% are officers and managers supporting leaders
- 32% are experts with particular technical knowledge

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. These ratios are similar to previous years.

The sectors our customers work in included:

- Public sector (48%)
- Private sector (29%)
- Voluntary sector (23%)

This indicates that we are well connected to the public sector through our additional learning networks and it shows improved contact with the voluntary sector through our increased efforts to engage with the sector. Through our business clubs networks we have also maintained our response rate of almost a third from the private sector.

The majority of respondents worked in the West Midlands, but many also worked in other areas of the UK or overseas. Of those who also worked in one or more West Midlands sub-regions and Local Enterprise Partnership areas, there was a reasonable spread based on population size. Respondents worked in one or more of the following areas:

- Birmingham and Solihull (40%)
- Black Country (32%)
- Coventry and Warwickshire (34%)

- Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin (30%)
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (27%)
- Worcestershire (25%)
- Rest of the UK (15%)
- Outside of the UK (5%)

The type of relationship our customers have with us can be through one or more types of interaction. The respondents in the survey this year included:

- Monthly newsletter subscribers (46%)
- SWM member or Green Leaders (34%)
- Members of various good practice networks we run (33%)
- Funders and partners: organisations we work jointly with such as signposting others to their support or working with on research and events (19%)
- SWM employee, board member or associate (8%)

Word of mouth continues to be the most popular way in which people hear about us, reflecting nearly half of all responses (48%). Our events (31%), our newsletter (28%) and our website (27%) are also the main ways in which we make connections with our customers. Only 2% of respondents indicated that they heard about us from an exhibition stand.

Our impact in 2012-13: policy advice, cross-sector working and communications

This year we have published or been involved with a number of policy publications and presentations and we have run and supported a number of cross-sector events to develop solutions.

Our priorities for 2012-13

Our work from April 2012-13 was summarised for respondents in order for them to rate the likely relevance of the themes of these publications, presentations and events for the West Midlands.

The majority of respondents believed that our priorities for this year had high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (74%, which has increased by about 10% from last year).

Respondents rated the following as the most relevant to the West Midlands in terms of high or medium relevance:

- Local authority low carbon support - finance, procurement and planning (82%)
- Coordination and support for the Local Authority Sustainability Officers Network and sharing good practice (81%)
- Good practice in green transport and smarter working practice (80%)
- Sustainability reviews, benchmarking and monitoring for our business and public sector members (76%)
- Climate adaptation partnership and business and health sector support (76%)
- Publication of the UK's first low carbon investment prospectus for West Midlands Local Enterprise Partnerships (75%)
- Annual Conference and update on progress on the sustainability priorities towards Vision 2020 (74%)
- Promotion of bioenergy and decentralised energy (74%)
- Support and promotion of Sustainable Housing Action Partnership and Birmingham Energy Savers work on retrofit (73%)

- National review and promotion of Climate Tools (70%)
- Coordination of green business clubs – business to business mentoring and sharing good practice (67%)
- Production and promotion of water quality and environmental infrastructure guidance (66%)
- Voluntary sector support - green job opportunities and community renewables (63%)

Our website

Respondents were asked to rate how well the website delivers against its aims. The overall trend against comparable questions from last year showed an overall 5% increase in satisfaction to 86%. However, this year we also asked more detailed questions to help inform the future re-design. Therefore the website was also rated for:

- Explaining who SWM is (86%)
- Explaining how to engage with and support SWM (75%)
- Exploring the range of projects SWM is involved with (76%)
- Regular update of news and comments (86%)
- Regular update of West Midlands events (81%)
- Promoting West Midlands award winners and good practice case studies (67%)
- Reviewing and cataloguing a range of relevant research and presentations (56%)
- Signposting to help available from other organisations (56%)
- Supporting graduates with a sustainability careers service (46%)

Representative quotes and comments:

“Less content e.g. reports”

“Needs updating”

“I have looked many times and not seen much on how to engage.”

This feedback has been useful in helping to inform the update of our five year old website. As a result we will make it clearer on how to engage with us and the projects we are working on, stop reviewing and cataloguing others research and only keep on what we view as key documents. We will also review how we can improve how we identify and promote case studies and what level of signposting we should provide in the future. The low score for the graduate service is not surprising as this is a specialist service with 39% of respondents not scoring this due to lack of relevance to them. However, we will also review this service.

Our monthly newsletter

The majority of those questioned believe that the newsletter continues to deliver all aims at a good or excellent level.

- SWM projects (86% good to excellent)
- Resources available on our website (82% good to excellent)
- Events (84% good to excellent)
- West Midlands news stories (80% good to excellent)

Our performance 2012-13 against our vision, mission and values statements

Over half of those who filled out the survey believe that we are making excellent or good progress against our 2020 vision (53% good to excellent) and 2015 goal (51%).

Around 77% of respondents believe we are delivering our mission well or very well, although this is a slight decrease on last year; over the last three years the average is 80%.

Our values continue to resonate with our customers as they believe we are practicing our values at a high level (overall average of our three values this year is 72% good to excellent).

We asked all respondents if they had any comment on how we could improve. A very small percentage of individuals left responses (8%).

Representative comments and quotes:

“SWM to get endorsement of chairs of LEPs and LNPs as being a key West Midlands centre of excellence on sustainability and low carbon economy”

“We collectively need to seize back the political agenda which is hard during recession – need to win the argument that sustainable growth and jobs is based on a healthy natural environment”

Trend focus: our performance against our vision, mission and values statements 2009-2013

The following table reflects our customer’s opinions of our progress towards our mission, vision and organisational values since we began the survey four years ago.

The main trends have been:

- Rapid improvements in performance following feedback in the first year
- In subsequent years the perception of our performance has remained consistently high for our customers, despite rapid internal changes moving from a grant funded to a diverse project funded organisation
- How well we are delivering our mission remains high, however the overall outcomes of how well we are achieving our vision and the milestones we have set remains much lower. This is a fair reflection of the reality of the current economic, social and environmental climate and the changes in local and regional governance.

Mission, Vision and Values Statements.	2009-10 % well or very well	2010-11/ % well or very well	2011-12/ % well or very well	2012-13/ % well or very well
Our mission – as sustainability advisers to the leaders of the West Midlands	61%	82%	81%	77%
Our Vision: By 2020 businesses and communities are thriving in a West Midlands that is environmentally sustainable and socially just	45%	55%	56%	53%
Our Vision milestone: By 2012 our leaders are clear on what a sustainable West Midlands looks like, have set clear milestones and their organisations are making strong progress	42%	50%	N/A	N/A
Our Vision milestone: By 2015 our leaders are working together to	N/A	N/A	48%	51%

Mission, Vision and Values Statements.	2009-10 % well or very well	2010-11/ % well or very well	2011-12/ % well or very well	2012-13/ % well or very well
make significant progress on the roadmap towards the 2020 vision.				
Our value of being business led and business like – we seek and expect others to maintain personal and professional standards	59%	77%	78%	73%
Our value of being creative and positive – we are always looking for better ways of working with others	70%	79%	80%	74%
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	62%	76%	83%	70%

Our planned work programme for 2013-14: policy advice, cross-sector working and communications

Our planned work from April 2013-14 was summarised for respondents in order for them to rate the likely relevance of the themes of these publications, presentations and events for the West Midlands.

Our planned priorities for 2013-14

Respondents rated the following as the most relevant to the West Midlands in terms of high or medium importance:

- Local Authority low carbon leadership (90%)
- Sustainable Development Officers Network (90%)
- Annual Conference including an update on activity on the sustainability priorities towards our Vision 2020 (89%)
- Levering in EU and other funding for business and communities (86%)
- Low carbon transport (86%)
- Decentralised energy infrastructure and energy efficiency for local authority buildings (85%)
- Developing our services such as sustainability reviews, benchmarking, research, training and graduate careers service (82%)
- Local Enterprise Partnerships and the low carbon economy (80%)
- Climate Adaptation Partnership (80%)
- Local Nature Partnerships and Environmental infrastructure (77%)
- Green Communities Network (74%)
- Energy Managers Network (73%)
- Green Business Clubs Network (68%)

The majority of responses indicated that our priorities for the coming year are of high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (all priorities fall between 68% - 91% relevant). Of our priorities, individuals ranked our Green Business Clubs Network as least relevant (20% rated this as a low priority). This is likely to have been

determined as the majority of respondents came from the public sector and as such this network is not relevant.

Our planned communications priorities for 2013-14

Overall, respondents believed all of our methods for sharing success are important and should be given sufficient priority. The ratings in terms of high to medium priority:

- –Monthly newsletters, members quarterly update and West Midlands leaders six month update (94%)
- Website and social media - signposting to resources (93%)
- Grow active SWM members and opportunities to contribute (87%)
- Regional awards and good practice case study service (85%)

Conclusions

Our customers

- We are engaging with the right level of individuals who are attempting to push change through their organisations.
- We have been able to maintain our cross-sector customer base, the geographical spread of our customers and grow the ways customers can engage with us.
- Our reputation through the recommendation of our customers and supported by our social media channels remains our strongest method of outreach.
- More work with the private sector and sub-regions outside Birmingham would be welcomed.

The impact of our 2012-13 activities

- There has been a 10% increase in our respondents believing that our priorities for this year had high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (74%). This, together with our high ratings from our project and events levels assessments (over 85% good to excellent in meeting aims), means our activities for 2012-13 have increased in relevance and impact.
- The majority of our activities is supported by a growing range of public sector funders and in-kind support from our members. As a result, although we maintain a range of cross-sector activity, we need to ensure this is maintained, especially our work with the voluntary sector.
- Our five year old website continues to meet its main aims, although more could be done in promoting case studies and relevant resources. We will be using website feedback to redevelop it to include more information on how to engage, along with a greater streamlining of content. This will be launched in December 2013.
- Our overall communications, such as our website and newsletter, continue to be an effective and efficient way of sharing success across the West Midlands in line with our mission. As such, we have exceeded our annual business aim of an 80% good to excellent satisfaction rating.
- Overall, perception that organisations are working well or very well together to make progress on the West Midlands sustainability priorities has decreased in 2012-13. This may be attributed to austerity cuts facing local authorities and conflicting priorities within the public sector.

Our performance for 2012-13 against our vision, mission and values statements

- We continue to successfully deliver our mission, with 77% of those surveyed indicating we are doing well or very well (an average of 80% over the last 3 years).

- We are making progress on our vision and 2015 milestone for our leaders to be clear on what a sustainable West Midlands looks like and to work together on the 2020 roadmap priorities.
- Our values continue to resonate with our customers as they believe we are practicing our values at a high level (overall average of our three values this year is 72% good to excellent).

Our planned priorities for 2013-14

- Our priorities for the coming year received a positive response, as the majority of our customers see these as high or medium priorities for the West Midlands.
- Our planned communications activities were rated very highly (94%-85%) with the newsletter, website and social media coming top.

We will use this information together with other feedback to improve our services to our customers and the delivery of our mission and vision. This will be reflected in our future work and priorities as an organisation.

Thank you to all our customers who participated in the 2012-13 customer survey.

Report by: Anisha Chandar and Simon Slater, Sustainability West Midlands (December 2013).

ANNEX 1: PERCEPTION ON PROGRESS OF ORGANISATIONS WORKING TOGETHER ON WEST MIDLANDS SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES

We also use our annual customer survey as a way of testing our customer’s perceptions of how well organisations in the West Midlands are working together on the 2020 roadmap sustainability priorities that will help deliver our vision.

The question we have been asking over the last three years is:

“Each year we monitor progress on key sustainability priorities which will create jobs, reduce carbon and improve quality of life to deliver our 2020 vision. From your knowledge and experience, how well do you think that organisations in the West Midlands work together on the following priorities?”

The results and good practice against these priorities have been reported each year at our annual conference as part of the yearly progress update against the 2020 vision. In addition, we commission a range of qualitative and quantitative research to help build up a more complete picture.

The main trends around perception have been:

- Topics such as buildings and transport where respondents may be more aware of activity and joint working often score higher than more specialised areas such as industrial waste and decentralised energy.
- There has been a recent decline in the perception of joint working on buildings and waste, probably with the demise of the West Midlands Retrofit and the commercial waste infrastructure groups.
- Although we have only asked the question once, it is worrying that the perception of civic and corporate leadership is so low.

Sustainability Priority	2010-11 % very well or well	2011-2 % very well or well	2012-3 % very well or well
Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	55%	75%	57%
Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	49%	56%	56%
Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs	47%	51%	44%
Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	49%	57%	44%
Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	57%	55%	36%
Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defences and green spaces	44%	52%	52%
Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	31%	38%	36%
Leadership and perception change – civic and corporate leaders showing that work and lifestyle changes are desirable and realistic	Not asked	Not asked	36%

Representative comments from 2012-13 include:

“Sorry – too broad to answer. Some geographical areas have good collaboration, others are poor”

“Momentum has been slowed by government spending cuts in many of these areas”

“Local authorities shouldn’t have a choice, they should lead on these issues and if people at the top don’t listen, they should be removed”

Austerity and financial pressures are common elements within the comments received and may explain a halt or decrease in progress towards the West Midlands sustainability priorities.