sustainability west midlands

Annual Customer Survey 2013-14

Aims of the survey

Our annual customer survey aims to remind customers about the range of activity we were involved with in 2013-14, provides feedback on our services and offers an indication of which of our priorities for 2014-15 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. Previous copies of our annual accounts and customer surveys can be found on our website.

Key findings

Our customers

- We continue to engage with the right level of individuals who are increasing in seniority and who are pushing 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 and events remains our strongest method of outreach.
- More work with the private sector and sub-regions outside Birmingham would continue to be welcomed.

The impact of our 2013-14 activities

- We have maintained a high rating with our respondents believing that our priorities for this year had high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (75%). This, together with our high ratings from our project and events assessments (over 85% good to excellent in meeting aims), means our activities for 2013-14 have maintained a high degree of relevance and impact.
- Despite a continued growth in the users of our new website, there has been a slight decrease in overall satisfaction with our communications. Key improvements that would help would be being clearer on how to engage with SWM and signposting to others funding.
- Overall, perception that organisations are working well or very well together to make progress on the West Midlands 2020 roadmap sustainability priorities has increased in 2013-14 (see Annex 1).

Our performance for 2013-14 against our vision, mission and values statements

- We continue to successfully deliver our mission, with 82% of those surveyed indicating we are doing well or very well (an average of 80% over the last 3 years).
- We are continuing to make 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 practising our values at a high level (overall average of our three values this year is 71% good to excellent).

Our planned priorities for 2014-15

- 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 to promote good practice through our website, newsletter, social media and active membership were rated the highest (97%) followed by our annual conference.
- Our new role as a 'network of networks' was endorsed by strong feedback on the role of our existing and new networks.

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 2013-14 customer survey.

Christina Marshall and Simon Slater on behalf of Sustainability West Midlands (November 2014).

Detailed survey findings

The rest of this report covers the detailed survey findings and trends and the annex includes the perception on progress of organisations working together on west midlands sustainability priorities in 2014.

About the survey

A link to our fifth annual survey was emailed to over 1,500 of our customers on the 15 September 2014 and the survey was open until the end of October 2014. We received 45 responses as opposed to 104 last year. This is possibly due to the use of a generic email address to send out the survey, which is more prone to being blocked or being received in junk/spam folders.

However the quality of the responses has increased in terms of seniority and additional comments and contines to provide us with additional important feedback. Thank you to all the respondents for their valuable time and views.

About our customers

The roles of those who responded included:

- 38% are leaders
- 33% are officers and managers supporting leaders
- 29% are experts with particular technical knowledge

This represents an increase in the seniority of the respondents this year but still maintained an broadly even spread of roles.

The sectors our customers work in included:

- 49% are Public sector
- 22% are Private sector
- 29% are Voluntary sector

This indicates that we are well connected to the public sector through our networks and it shows another year's increase in contact with the voluntary sector through our efforts to engage with this sector. Whilst the percentage of private sector respondents had decreased slightly, we continue our efforts to further engage this sector, particularly through our business clubs networks.

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

- Birmingham and Solihull (55%)
- Black Country (50%)
- Coventry and Warwickshire (48%)
- Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin (36%)
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (36%)
- Worcestershire (38%)
- Rest of the UK (13%)
- Outside of the UK (6%)

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 (35%)
- Members of various good practice networks we run (31%)
- Funders and partners: organisations we work jointly with such as signposting others to their support or working with on research and events (28%)
- SWM corporate members (4%)
- SWM employee, board member or associate (2%)

Once again, word of mouth continues to be the most popular way in which people hear about us (36%), with our newsletter increasing its popularity (26%). Our website (21%) and our events (17%) are also ways in which we make connections with our customers.

Our impact in 2013-14: policy advice, cross-sector working and communications

This year we have helped organisations prepare for the future, sectors share and apply good practice, and cross-sectors develop new solutions.

Our work for 2013-14

Our work from April 2013-14 was grouped by operational category and summarised for respondents in order for them to rate the likely relevance of our topics for the West Midlands.

The majority of respondents believed that our priorities for this year had high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (75%, which is similar to last year).

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

- Strategy
    - Sustainability reviews, benchmarking and monitoring for our business and public sector members (83%)
- Delivery

    - Local authority low carbon support – finance, procurement, planning and good practice networks (93%)
    - Climate adaptation partnership and business sector support (93%)
    - Good practice in green transport and flexible working and travel practice (85%)
    - Co-ordination of green business clubs – business to business mentoring and sharing good practice (83%)
    - Voluntary sector support – funding event and developing network (80%)
    - Promotion of Sustainable Housing Action Partnership and member work on housing retrofit (71%)
- Innovation
    - Developing cross-LEP projects and support on EU low carbon funding (93%)
    - Promotion of bioenergy and decentralised energy (90%)
    - Promoting low carbon inward investment and business trade missions (85%)
    - Annual Conference and update on progress on the sustainability priortities towards Vision 2020 (88%)
    - Production and promotioin of environmental infrastructure guidance (79%)
    - Piloting and recruitment of a Young Director on our Board (49%)

Representative quotes and comments include:

"Small local initiatives have very limited value. Government initiatives around the globe are the only way there will be really meaningful reductions in carbon emissions, etc."

"Unfortunately this year SWM has not had as many relevant events for me to attend so I am not as clued up as I have been previously."

Our communications

Respondents were asked to rate how well our website and newsletter delivers against the following aims. Results of respondents who rated the more detailed questions as exellent or good were:

- Explaining who SWM is (80%)
- Explaining how to engage with and support SWM (68%)
- Exploring the range of projects SWM is involved with (71%)
- Regular update of news and comments (76%)
- Regular update of West Midlands events (78%)
- Promoting West Midlands award winners and good practice case studies (71%)
- Signposting to funding and help available from other organisations (61%)

This represents an overall satisfaction percentage of 72% and a decrease from last year. This is surprising given the launch of and positive feedback on our new website. However, the detailed results above show where we can make improvements.

Representative quote and comment include:

"There's so much on there it's sometimes hard to find what I'm looking for – but usually worth the hunt!"

Our planned work programme for 2013-14: strategy, delivery and innovation

Our planned work from April 2013-14 was again grouped by operational category and summarised for respondents in order for them to rate the likely relevance for the West Midlands.

Our planned priorities for 2013-14

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

- Strategy
  - Local Enterprise Partnerships and the low carbon economy (89%)
  - Sustainability reviews and benchmarking for our local enterprise partnership, business and local authority members (84%)
- Delivery
  - Continue to promote good practice through our website, newsletter, social media and active membership (97%)
  - Levering in EU and other funding for business and communities (89%)
  - Climate Adaptation Partnership and support for businesses (89%)
  - Sustainable Development Officers Network (89%)
  - Developing good practice networks on sustainability, public health and NHS estates (84%)
  - Energy Manager Network (82%)
  - Green Communities Network (82%)
  - Local Nature Partnerships and Environmental infrastructure (82%)
  - Sustainable Behaviour Good Practice Event (80%)
  - Birmingham Science City Low Carbon Innovation Network (71%)
  - Green Business Clubs Network (70%)
- Innovation
  - Annual Conference including an update on activity on the sustainability priorities towards our Vision 2020 (92%)
  - Decentralised energy infrastructure support for local areas (89%)
  - Developing 'future proofing' tools for businesses and local authorities (74%)
  - Develop a young green professional network (73%)
  - Low carbon practice in Highways maintenance (57%)

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 57% - 92% relevant).

Respondents were asked to provide any other overall comments. Representative quotes and comments include:

"Why not pursue the least visually impact energy saver, namely water power. Although our country is riddled with rivers, we do not use hydro-electric power which is such an obvious and far better than ugly and imposing wind turbines."

"Allow non LA members to attend WMSDON meetings. Put food on the agenda."

"I think in the past year or so the level of relevant conferences that have been relevant to me as a Transport Planner has dropped."

Our performance for 2013-14 against our vision, mission and values statements

There was an increase from last year of those who believed that we are making excellent or good progress against our overall 2020 vision (61% good to excellent). However there was a slight decrease in how well we were progressing towards the 2015 milestone (45%).

Around 82% of respondents believe we are delivering our mission well or very well, and this is a slight increase 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 practising our values at a high level (overall average of our three values this year is 71% good to excellent).

Our performance against our vision, mission and values statements 2009-2014

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

The main trends have been:

- Rapid improvements in performance after acting on customer feedback after the first year of our customer survey.
- How well we are delivering our mission – as sustainability advisors to the leaders of the West Midlands, remains high. This is despite rapid internal organisational changes moving from a grant funded to a diverse project funded organisation.
- 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.	**% well or very well**				
	2009-10	**2010-11**	**2011-12**	**2012-13**	**2013-14**
Our mission – as sustainability advisers to the leaders of the West Midlands	61%	82%	81%	77%	82%
Our Vision: By 2020 businesses and communities are thriving in a West Midlands that is environmentally sustainable and socially just	45%	55%	56%	53%	61%
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	N/A
Our Vision milestone: By 2015 our leaders are working together to make significant progress on the roadmap towards the 2020 vision.	N/A	N/A	48%	51%	45%
Our value of being business led and business like – we seek and expect others to maintain personal and professional standards	59%	77%	78%	73%	71%

Mission, Vision and Values Statements.	% well or very well				
	2009-10	**2010-11**	**2011-12**	**2012-13**	**2013-14**
Our value of being creative and positive – we are always looking for better ways of working with others	70%	79%	80%	74%	71%
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%	71%

ANNEX 1: Perception on progress of organisations working together on West Midlands sustainability priorities in 2014

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 four 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 2013-14 results, with the previous annual survey results, are below.

Sustainability Priority	**% well or very well**			
	2010-11	**2011-2**	**2012-3**	**2013-14**
Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	55%	75%	57%	66%
Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	49%	56%	56%	63%
Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs	47%	51%	44%	51%
Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	49%	57%	44%	40%
Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	57%	55%	36%	59%
Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defences and green spaces	44%	52%	52%	53%
Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	31%	38%	36%	55%
Leadership and perception change – civic and corporate leaders showing that work and lifestyle changes are desirable and realistic	Not asked	Not asked	36%	44%

Representative quotes and comments from the 2013-14 survey include:

> *"There's a lot of talk, plans etc . . . My judgement is on action. Not a lot of that."*
>
> *"These just tinker at the edges. Thinking the unthinkable is essential. For example, the increasing number of cruise ship and planes cause more pollution than all the energy efficiencies being identified above put together."*

"Transport needs political buy in to be able to be sustainable. At the moment it is disjointed and needs a regional voice to get proper funding to encourage modal shift. Also a holistic approach to larger scale transport investment is required as opposed to short term unsustainable quick wins that can shut out longer term goals."

Between 2010-14 the main trends around perception on working together on these priorities have been:

- There has been a dip in the perception of joint working on buildings probably with the demise of the West Midlands Retrofit group and then the launch of Birmingham Energy Savers and other schemes.
- The perception on transport has steadily improved with a range of high profile announcements and activities such as New Street Station, cycling improvements, and more flexible working practices.
- Despite successful initiatives on local training and employment clauses, expertise in the region producing the Government Social Value Act and other successful initiatives, the perception is that this is not yet widespread practice.
- There has been a general decline in the perception of organisations working together to help promote the low carbon jobs and business agenda. The slight increase in 2011-12 was probably due to our work on producing the joint West Midlands LEPs low carbon investment prospectus, however the funding and profile for this work has been limited since.
- Infrastructure for commercial waste has remained mostly steady. It is also a more specialist topic area and therefore often many respondents do not feel they can comment on this.
- Environmental infrastructure has remained mostly steady.
- It is encouraging to see the increase in perception on how organisations are working together on decentralised energy. This has been helped with our work with members to promote funding, guidance and schemes. The recent success of the extension of schemes in Birmingham, Coventry, and feasibility schemes in Stoke and Solihull has also assisted.
- This is the second year we have asked the question about the perception of civic and corporate leadership. It is encouraging that this has improved, but there is still a long way to go.

END