Annual Customer Survey Report 2014-15

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Report information

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About Sustainability West Midlands
We are the sustainability adviser for the leaders of the West Midlands. We are also the regional sustainability champion body for the West Midlands, designated by government. We are a not-for-profit company that works with our members in the business, public and voluntary sectors. Our Board is well led and has cross-sector representation; they are supported by our team of staff and associates.

Our vision is that by 2020 businesses and communities are thriving in a West Midlands that is environmentally sustainable and socially just.

Our role is to act as a catalyst for change through our advice to leaders, to develop practical solutions with our members and share success through our communications.

www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk
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sustainability west midlands

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1 Introduction

This report details the key findings from our annual customer survey for 2014-15. Since 2009 we have reported on the survey findings and trends, including the respondents' perception on progress of organisations working together on West Midlands' sustainable priorities.

Our annual customer survey aims to remind customers about the range of activity we were involved with in each year, provides feedback on our services and offers an indication of which of our priorities for the forthcoming year 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.

Thanks to all those who responded and the SWM team that has compiled the results.

2 Summary of Results

In 2015 it has been disappointing, but not unsurprising to see a drop in the perception of joint working across all the regional sustainability priorities, but also across many other indicators.

One of the reasons for this appears to be the impact of cuts and capacity to work jointly really beginning to be felt over the last 12 months. However the main impact was the bonfire of the 'green policies' announced by the new Government in the summer around areas such as energy generation, sustainable buildings, and the retrofit of homes. This coincided with the launch of our survey and has appeared to set the tone and mood of the majority of our respondents which does not match the positive feedback at project or event level.

However our work with LEPs, funding, transport, energy, buildings, communities, local authorities, business, and communications continues to have high relevance from the survey feedback. Although we still have not cracked how to communicate how to engage with SWM clearly enough through our website.

Therefore as a result of this survey we will report the perception of progress on the sustainability priorities through our annual conference and monitoring report, and continue to improve how the SWM offer is communicated via the website. Next year we will also encourage more respondents who score key questions lower to provide more specific feedback we can act on.

3 Methodology

A link to our sixth annual survey was promoted through direct emails to over 2,000 of our customers, through our monthly newsletter, our news webpage and our twitter account. The survey was opened on 27 July 2015 and was closed on 30 September 2015.

4 Results

4.1 Responses

We received 125 responses as opposed to 45 last year. This reflected a return to the number of responses previously received and reconfirming the drop last year was 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.

4.2 Our Customers

The roles of those who responded included:

- 38% down to 28% are leaders
- 33% up to 39% are officers and managers supporting leaders
- 29% up to 41% are experts with particular technical knowledge

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

The sectors our customers work in included:

- 49% are Public sector
- 22% up to 33% are Private sector
- 29% down to 26% are Voluntary sector

This indicates that we remain well connected to the public sector through our networks and, although there has been a slight (3%) drop in response from the voluntary sector, we are pleased to see a rise of 11% response from the private sector. This, we feel is the result of our efforts to further engage this sector, particularly through our business clubs networks.

The majority of respondents worked in the West Midlands, with a slight increase on last year of those working in other areas of the UK or overseas. Of those who worked in the West Midlands sub-regions, there was a reasonable spread based on population size. Respondents worked in <u>one or more</u> of the following areas:

- Birmingham and Solihull (56%)
- Black Country (43%)

- Coventry and Warwickshire (63%)
- Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin (33%)
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (51%)
- Worcestershire (27%)
- Rest of the UK (23%)
- Outside of the UK (10%)

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:

- SWM corporate members (14%)
- Members of various good practice networks we run (39%)
- Funders and partners: organisations we work jointly with such as signposting others to their support or working with on research and events (24%)
- Monthly newsletter subscribers (41%)
- SWM employee, board member or associate (6%)

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.

4.3 Sustainability Priorities for the West Midlands

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 five years is:

"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 2015-16 results, with the previous annual survey results, are below.

Sustainability Priority	% well or very well				
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16
Jobs - Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	49%	57%	44%	40%	31%
Procurement - Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs	47%	51%	44%	51%	30%
Waste - Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	57%	55%	36%	59%	39%
Buildings - Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	55%	75%	57%	66%	40%
Transport - Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	49%	56%	56%	63%	51%
Energy - Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	31%	38%	36%	55%	38%
Environment - Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defences and green spaces	44%	52%	52%	53%	49%
Leadership and perception change – civic and corporate leaders showing that work and lifestyle changes are desirable and realistic	Not asked	Not asked	36%	44%	38%

Representative quotes and comments from the 2015-16 survey include:

"Although there are good initiatives in many areas, the overall picture is disappointing"

"There is evidence across the West Midlands of good partnership working and cross boundary projects, specifically in the aforementioned areas, but at times there is a lack of drive from senior leaders to push on environmental areas. Therefore, my answers are mixed because I think at officer level, there is a keen sense to push working together, but the nature of some of the topics (sometimes) requires more senior input to aid delivery."

"I am not sure that a single regional approach to all issues is healthy, particularly in areas like innovation and buildings. The art is collaborating in the right areas and recognising sub-regional strengths: I think we can be very poor at this (i.e., regional institutions tend to be biased towards Birmingham and lose sight of strengths elsewhere)"

In 2015 it has been disappointing, but not unsurprising to see a drop in the perception of joint working across all the priorities. One of the reasons for this appears to be the impact of cuts and capacity to work jointly really beginning to be felt over the last 12 months. However the main impact was the bonfire of the 'green policies' announced by the new Government in the summer around areas such as energy generation, sustainable buildings, and the retrofit of homes. This coincided with the launch of our survey and has appeared to set the tone and mood of the majority of our respondents.

Between 2010-15 the main trends around perception on working together on these priorities have been:

- **Jobs** - 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.

- **Procurement** - 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.

- **Waste** - 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.

- **Buildings** - There has been a dip in the perception of joint working on buildings probably with the demise of the West Midlands Retrofit group, Birmingham Energy Savers and the Government Green Deal and other schemes.

- **Transport** - 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.

- **Energy** - 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.

- **Environment** - Environmental infrastructure has remained mostly steady.

- **Leadership** – Although only the third year of asking this question, it is disappointing to see a dip related to perception of civic and corporate leadership. Clearly, there is still some way to go.

4.4 Impact of our Services

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 2014-15 and current planned activities

Our work from April 2014-15 and current planned activities for the current year were grouped by operational category and summarised for respondents in order for them to rate the likely relevance of our topics for the West Midlands.

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

- Strategy
  - Strategy - Update of our local futures tool to support our strategy reviews and benchmarking of combined authority, local councils and business sustainability performance (64%)
  - Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) - Developing national LEP guidance, cross-LEP projects, and support on EU low carbon funding (76%)
- Delivery
  - Funding - Promoting over £100m in accessible green funding to local councils, businesses, and communities (76%
  - Inward Investment - Promoting low carbon cross-sector inward investment and business trade missions (64%)
  - Transport - Promoting good practice in green transport, cycling, walking, flexible working practices, and regional transport and HS2 priorities (79%)
  - Buildings - Sustainable buildings events programme locally and nationally with partners (76%)
  - Communities - Launch of green communities network and support on funding local energy schemes (76%)
  - Local authorities - low carbon support on finance, procurement, behaviour change, and good practice networks securing £3m energy savings (78%)
  - Business - Promotion of green business clubs network, site visits, new legislation updates, support for skills events, bids for cross-LEP business support (68%)

  - Health - Support to health sector on sustainability via NHS and public health networks (64%)

  - National Climate Adaptation - ‘Climate Just’ for communities, Climate Change Committee local events, Climate UK conference, and UK wide business resilience campaign (72%)

  - Local Climate Adaptation - Local advisory partnership, business and farm resilience training and Severn Trent consultation events (70%)

- Innovation

  - Roadmap 2020 - Annual cross-sector conference including an update on activity on the sustainability priorities towards our Vision 2020 (68% down 24%)

  - Energy - Developing national district energy procurement guidance, renewable energy guide and securing funding for cross-sector local energy studies (71%)

  - Future Leaders - Good practice promotion of Young Director on our Board (49%)

Representative quotes and comments include:

> *“Further marketing of the work that SWM does to achieve a greater exposure in the local and national press”*
>
> *“This is hampered by a conflict of interests between profit and local community benefits e. g. Severn Trent could grow biomass on spare marginal land as a local community activity with local voluntary management for the local community benefit.”*
>
> *“Parallel support, giving education and information to end-users (improving knowledge base and availability) with support to local businesses (networking, information exchange, technology updates). If end users are aware of what can be done this improves local business and improves the decision making process”*

The majority of responses indicated that our priorities for the coming year are of high or medium relevance for the West Midlands (The overall average was 67% down from 75% last year). It was interesting to note that our planned annual conference was rated less relevant this year, yet the feedback on the day indicated the opposite. This may again be due to the timing of the survey coinciding with the summer changes in Government policy focused on the Northern Powerhouse, but ignoring the West Midlands. While our conference in October 2015 capitalised on the recent announcements about the West Midlands Combined Authority.

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 excellent or good were:

- Explaining who SWM is (78% down 2%)
- Explaining how to engage with and support SWM (67% down 1%)
- Explaining how SWM can support your organisation (47%)
- Exploring the range of projects SWM is involved with (65% down 6%)
- Regular update of news and comments (66% down 10%)
- Regular update of West Midlands' events (73% down 5%)
- Promoting West Midlands award winners and good practice case studies (56% down 15%)
- Signposting to funding and help available from other organisations (49% down 12%)

Representative quote and comment include:

> *"hard to understand what SWM offer is"*
>
> *"There is more to sustainability than carbon"*
>
> *More need of pump priming funding e.g. the Green Investment Bank so more flexible rules could enable start up activities to prove viability"*

This represents an overall satisfaction percentage of 63% and a decrease of 9% from last year. The results show that we still need to work on making it easier to engage with SWM and the support on offer. However it is disappointing where we have made extra effort this year in our comment, case studies and promoting funding activities, these have yet to translate through to improved customer survey results.

4.5 Performance for 2014-15 against our vision, mission and values statements

Overall there has been a decrease from the customer survey percentage in how well we are progressing towards our vision, mission and values.

The average against our mission over last 5 years is 77% but this has varied from a range 63-82%.

There was a decrease from last year of those who believed that we are making excellent or good progress against our overall 2020 vision (44% good to excellent). There was also a decrease in how well we were progressing towards the 2015 milestone (36% good to excellent).

Around 63% of respondents believe we are delivering our mission well or very well, and this is a 19% decrease on last year; bringing the last five years average to 77%.

Our values continue to resonate with our customers as they believe we are trying to practice our values at a high level (overall average of our three values this year is 63% good to excellent, but down 8% from the year before).

Our performance against our vision, mission and values statements 2009-2015

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.

Mission, Vision and Values Statements	% well or very well					
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2014-15	2015-16
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%	44%
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%	36%
Our Mission: to provide sustainability advice to the leaders of the West Midlands	61%	82%	81%	77%	82%	63%
Our Values: business led and business like – we seek and expect others to maintain personal and professional standards	59%	77%	78%	73%	71%	61%
Our Values: creative and positive – we are always looking for better ways of working with others	70%	79%	80%	74%	71%	63%
Our Values: 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%	66%

The main trends have been:

- Rapid improvements in performance after acting on customer feedback after the first year of our customer survey in 2009.

- The timing of our survey with the 2015 summer of 'bonfire of the green policies' by the new Government has had a marked impact on all our annual customer survey results for that year. These do not match the much more positive feedback at project and event level.

- 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. In 2015 we are now the only regional independent sustainability body left in England.

- 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.

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