Annual Customer Survey Report 2016

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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.

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1 Introduction

This report details the key findings from our annual customer survey for 2016. Since 2010 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 are 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, our website, social media and our members to 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.

2 Summary of Results

The majority of responses indicated that our priorities for the coming year are of high or medium relevance for the West Midlands.

Across all aspects of our performance and values there has been an increase in the perception of respondents in how well we are progressing towards our vision, mission and values.

We have worked hard this year to improve our website so that it is easier to navigate, and provides clear information on how SWM can support organisations as well as signposting to all relevant news and funding for the region. We are happy to see that this is reflected in feedback from our customers.

In 2016 it is disappointing, but not unsurprising, to see a drop in the perception of joint working across most priorities since 2015 other than waste, jobs and leadership and perception change. In comparison to the results in 2010 the only increase in the perception of joint working in 2016 is in relation to energy and leadership and perception change

One of the reasons for this appears to be the impact of budget cuts and capacity to work jointly really beginning to take effect. Other reasons for this perception could be the result of the vote for the UK to leave the EU at the referendum in June 2016 and concern over how this will impact upon the sustainability of our region.

As a result of this survey we will continue to encourage joint working on our priorities and broker relationships between our members and as through our networks. We will continue to improve how the SWM offer is communicated via the website and will report on progress against our priorities at our annual conference in 2017.

3 Methodology

A link to our seventh 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 opened on 13 July 2016 and closed on 31 October 2016.

4 Results

4.1 Responses

We received 61 responses in 2016 in comparison to 125 responses in 2015 and 45 in 2014. The number of responses is lower in 2016 than 2015 which is disappointing given that the survey remained open for four weeks longer in 2016 than 2015. Several reminders regarding the survey were sent to our customers, along with promotion on Twitter and in our newsletter so it is possible that the reason for the lower rate of response was down to lack of interest or time available from our customers.

4.2 Our Customers

The roles of those who responded included:

Role	2016	2015	2014
Leaders	36%	28%	38%
Officers and managers supporting leaders	45%	38%	33%
Experts with particular technical knowledge	27%	41%	29%

This represents an increase in the proportion of leaders, and offices and managers supporting leaders in the respondents this year, but still maintained a broadly even spread of roles.

The sectors our customers work in included:

Sector	2016	2015	2014
Public	42%	49%	49%
Private	32%	33%	22%
Third	43%	26%	29%

This indicates that we remain well connected to the public and private sector through our networks and membership. We are pleased to see a rise of 17% in responses from the third sector which could be attributed to the growth of our 'Green Communities Network' as well as a rise in members from the third sector including a reciprocal membership arrangement with Social Enterprise West Midlands.

The majority of respondents work in the West Midlands, with a slight decrease 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 one or more of the following areas:

- Birmingham and Solihull (33%)
- Black Country (16%)
- Coventry and Warwickshire (25%)
- Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin (25%)
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (25%)
- Worcestershire (10%)
- Rest of the UK (18%)
- 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 (27%)
- Members of various good practice networks we run (25%)
- Funders and partners: organisations we work jointly with such as signposting others to their support or working with on research and events (0%)
- Monthly newsletter subscribers (55%)
- SWM employee, board member or associate (8%)

This year has seen an increase in the proportion of respondents that are members (up 13%) and newsletter subscribers (up 12%) whilst the proportion of respondents that are members of our networks has decreased (down 17%) and none of the respondents were funding organisations. In January 2016 SWM introduced fees for membership for the first time. As a result we lost around 50% of our members but those that remained were willing to contribute financially to SWM's activity and as such are more likely to be engaged and supportive of SWM. The number of subscribers to our newsletter grows by around 20% per year so this increasing number of recipients is likely to account for the increase in respondents from this audience.

The decrease in the proportion of respondents from our networks is perhaps not surprising given that we have run fewer events for our networks over the past year. SWM rely entirely on project funding for our activity and without specific funding to maintain our networks we have had to become more efficient in the way that we support our networks, and in particular, the way that we provide events. We have tried to provide events that are attractive to more than one of our networks, and worked with partner organisations such as Severn Trent and Public Health England to deliver events using their support. However, as a result of this approach our opportunities to engage with network members this year have been fewer.

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 2016 results, with the previous annual survey results, are below.

Sustainability Priority	**% well or very well**					
	2010	**2011**	**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
Jobs - Development and coordination of initiatives to stimulate low carbon jobs and skills	49%	57%	44%	40%	31%	44%
Procurement - Public sector sustainable procurement to stimulate innovation and save costs	47%	51%	44%	51%	30%	25%
Waste - Infrastructure for diverting commercial and industrial waste from landfill	57%	55%	36%	59%	39%	40%
Buildings - Retrofitting existing housing stock and buildings to improve energy efficiency	55%	75%	57%	66%	40%	36%
Transport - Improved low carbon transport choices – flexible working, cycling, walking	49%	56%	56%	63%	51%	47%
Energy - Decentralised energy networks focused on regeneration areas	31%	38%	36%	55%	38%	35%
Environment - Environmental infrastructure to enhance water supply, flood defences and green spaces	44%	52%	52%	53%	49%	38%
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%	44%

In 2016 it is disappointing, but not unsurprising, to see a drop in the perception of joint working across most priorities since 2015 other than waste, jobs and leadership and perception change. In comparison to the results in 2010 the only increase in the perception of joint working in 2016 is in relation to energy and leadership and perception change

One of the reasons for this appears to be the impact of budget cuts and capacity to work jointly really beginning to take effect. Other reasons for this perception could be the result of the EU referendum in June 2016 and the vote for the UK to leave the EU and concern over how this will impact upon the sustainability of our region.

Between 2010 and 2016 the main trends around perception on working together on these priorities have been:

- **Jobs** - There has been a slight increase in 2016 in the perception of organisations working together to help promote the low carbon jobs and business agenda. This may be a result of the focus of the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority on economic growth as detailed in their Strategic Economic Plan[1]. It could also be related to the establishment of the Midlands Engine and the specific focus on economic productivity. The slight increase in 2011-12 was probably due to our work on producing the joint West Midlands LEPs Low Carbon Investment Prospectus[2], 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 sustainable procurement 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 possibly with the demise of the West Midlands Retrofit group, Birmingham Energy Savers, the Government Green Deal and other schemes.

- **Transport** - The perception on transport had steadily improved until 2015 with a range of high profile announcements and activities such as New Street Station, cycling improvements and more flexible working practices. The decline in the last two years could be as a result of increased congestion in the region and the focus on air quality and the impact of transport on this important issue.

- **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, as well as access to funding from the Heat Networks Delivery Unit.

- **Environment** - Environmental infrastructure has remained mostly steady until 2016 when we have seen a drop in the results. This could be as a result of increased flood

[1] https://westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk/media/1209/making-our-marksep.pdf
[2] http://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk/resources/west-midlands-low-carbon-investment-prospectus/

events in recent years and the perception that not enough is being done to address and prepare for incidents and impacts of flooding.

- **Leadership** – Although this is only the fourth year we have asked this question, it is encouraging to see an increase in the perception of civic and corporate leadership. This may be as a result of the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority and the inclusion of sustainability measures in their targets for 2030, as well as their focus on environmental technologies as a priority area. It could also be related to the greater focus of individual LEPs on low carbon activities as reported on in our 'Fit for the Future' report[3] earlier in 2016.

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 2015-16 and current planned activities

Our work from April 2015-16 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
    - Devolution - Supporting the development of the West Midlands Combined Authority; providing input to the development of the Strategic Economic Plan, providing benchmark data and examples of activities that could be scaled up across the region, using our board as a 'sustainability commission' (71%)
    - Strategy - Using our local futures tool to support our strategy reviews and bench-marking of combined authority, local councils and business sustainability performance (75%)
    - Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) - Developing cross-LEP projects and support on EU low carbon funding. Reporting on national performance of LEPs in relation to climate change and the low carbon economy (82%)
- Delivery
    - Funding - Promoting over £300m in accessible green funding to the public sector, businesses and communities (76%)

[3] http://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk/resources/fit-for-the-future-local-enterprise-partnerships-climate-ready-and-low-carbon-economy-good-practice/

- Inward Investment - Promoting low carbon cross-sector inward investment and business trade missions (63%)
- Transport - Promoting good practice in green transport, cycling, walking, flexible working practices, and regional transport and HS2 priorities (65%)
- Buildings - Sustainable buildings events programme locally and nationally with partners (67%)
- Communities - Coordinating Green Communities Network and delivery of Climate Resilient Communities Conference (71%)
- Local authorities - Low carbon support on waste, green infrastructure and fuel poverty (69%)
- Business - Coordination of Green Business Clubs Network, site visits, quarterly legislation updates, support for skills events, bids for cross-LEP business support (59%)
- Health - Support to health sector on sustainability via NHS and Public Health networks, including focus on waste, sustainable food and green infrastructure. Providing support to individual trusts in relation to sustainability strategy (63%)
- National Climate Adaptation - 'Climate Just' for communities. Reporting on national performance of LEPs in relation to climate change mitigation (60%)
- Local Climate Adaptation - 'Climate Just' for communities. Reporting on national performance of LEPs in relation to climate change mitigation (63%)
- Education - Launch of Midlands Sustainability Network for Further and Higher Education Institutions. Working with local universities to promote good practice and activities (63%)

- Innovation
  - Roadmap 2020 - Annual cross-sector conference including an update on activity on the sustainability priorities towards our Vision 2020 (75%)

Representative quotes and comments include:

> *"Lots of local interest not being harnessed effectively."*
>
> *"Sustainability should be part of our digital strategies too. Digital investment needs to be part of long term and sustainable advances, not isolated, unconnected parts supporting outdated management structures."*

The majority of responses indicated that our priorities for the coming year are of high or medium relevance for the West Midlands.

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 how SWM can support your organisation (63% up 16%)
- Explaining how to engage with and support SWM (67% no change)
- Exploring the range of projects SWM is involved with (67% up 2%)
- Regular update of news and comments (80% up 14%)
- Regular update of West Midlands' events (74% up 1%)
- Promoting West Midlands award winners and good practice case studies (69% up 13%)
- Signposting to funding and help available from other organisations (65% up 16%)

We are pleased with these results as we have worked upon feedback provided by our customers in the 2015 survey which indicated that our website was not communicating effectively as to how SWM can support organisations, what our offer is, and providing information about West Midlands news, awards and funding.

We have worked hard this year to improve our website so that it is easier to navigate, and provides clear information on how SWM can support your organisation as well as signposting to all relevant news for the region. We are happy to see that this is reflected in feedback from our customers.

4.5 Performance against our Vision, Mission and Values statements

Across all aspects of our performance and values there has been an increase in the perception of respondents in how well we are progressing towards our vision, mission and values this year.

51% of respondents believe we are delivering our Vision well or very well, and this is a 7% increase on last year; bringing the last seven years' average to 52%.

74% of respondents believe we are delivering our Mission well or very well, and this is an 11% increase on last year; bringing the last seven years' average to 70%.

Our values continue to resonate with our customers as they believe we are trying to practice our values at a high level (the overall average of our three values this year is 72% good to excellent, up 9% from the year before).

Representative comments and quotes include:

> *"A driven, enthusiastic and knowledgeable team who are devoted to supporting organisations across the board."*
>
> *"Committed and hardworking staff!"*
>
> *"Both the SWM Vision and Mission are very ambitious and not entirely within your own control."*

"Long history of positive engagement."

"Persistence of evidence based vision, ability to keep growing networks and cross-sector engagement to inspire others and make connections that count"

Our performance against our Vision, Mission and Values statements 2009-2016

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

Vision, Mission and Values Statements	**% well or very well**						
	2010	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
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%	51%
Our Mission: to provide sustainability advice to the leaders of the West Midlands	61%	82%	81%	77%	82%	63%	74%
Our Values: business led and business like – we seek and expect others to maintain personal and professional standards	59%	77%	78%	73%	71%	61%	68%
Our Values: creative and positive – we are always looking for better ways of working with others	70%	79%	80%	74%	71%	63%	77%
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%	72%

The main trends have been:

- Rapid improvements in performance after acting on customer feedback after the first year of our customer survey in 2010.
- How well we are delivering our mission – as sustainability advisors to the leaders of the West Midlands, remains high and has shown a marked increase since 2015. In 2016 we are now the only regional independent sustainability body left in England outside London.
- The overall perception of how well we are achieving our vision and practicing our values has increased and now reflects levels seen in 2013-2014. This may be as a result of improvement to our website and the way that we are communicating our work and influence.

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