

Welcome!

Hello and a very warm welcome to 2009. This is the first edition of the Citizens' Panel News for the year so a huge welcome to you and I hope you find being a member of Wigan Borough's largest single consultation group, throughout 2009, worthwhile.

Meanwhile, another huge thank you to all 814 of you who returned their questionnaires for the last survey, especially with it being

so close to the Christmas holidays.

It was great to see that so many of you stayed committed to the panel and found the time to give your opinions at such a hectic time of the year, we are, as always, very grateful for this.

As always, your opinions play a huge role in helping to ensure Wigan Council is listening to what residents across the borough think about its services.

In this edition of the Citizens' Panel Newsletter you can expect to find more information relating to the council budget, parks and open spaces, the greenheart project, the safer Wigan website and the NHS.

For these sections I will provide some feedback on what you said to us in the November survey, and what we are doing with this feedback and other useful information.

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Changes to the citizens panel

You may remember that last year we asked some questions about the ways that you like to contact the council and what methods you would like to use to have your say. We have used these findings to design some new options for you to give your views.

We will still have the main postal surveys as many of you (over 80%) have told us that you like the format and enjoy being a panel member. But we recognise that some of you find it easier and more convenient to use different technology. For example over a third of

you told us that you would be interested in completing online questionnaires. In the enclosed questionnaire we would like you to complete your details so that we can update your details as a panel member. We will also be asking if you would like to 'sign up' to be on our other panels – you may already know about or be a member of the Readers and Discussion panels. We are also offering the opportunity to join a text and telephone panel. These are new and the idea is that we will contact you maybe a handful of times throughout the year

for your short and snappy feedback. It may be on issues such as if you have seen a recent advert for free swimming? or how are services in your local area? We know that for some issues we need regular feedback from residents in between the surveys. It's up to you if you would like to be involved in these panels and there may be small prizes and incentives for taking part. Also this year there will be changes to the main postal surveys. You have told us that you like the format and topics asked and we want to

use the panels in the best way to improve life in the local area.

We will be having 3 main postal surveys this year and as before these will include topics relating to other public services such as the Police, Health and the Fire service so that the different services can work together and look at the results to jointly improve life for local people.

We hope you like the new format and want to sign up to the additional ways you can have your say.

Council Budget

In the November survey we asked you a section of questions relating to Wigan Councils budget. Within this section you were asked what you would do if you were council leader for the day. The top three areas you gave priority to were:

- living in a place where you feel safe (48%)
- creating a strong and modern economy (48%) and
- creating a good start in life for every child and young person (36%).

Following on from this, you were asked whether services in specific areas should be improved, maintained or reduced.

Improvements to services areas—even if this were to result in a rise in council tax charges, the two main areas you would like to see improvements in are:

- living in a place where you feel safe (58%) and
- care and protection when life is difficult (55%)

Maintaining services —the two main areas where service levels should be maintained are:

- a good start in life for every child and young person (67%) and
- aiming for high achievement with the education, training and skills people need to meet their potential and gain jobs (57%)

Reduction in service—the most common area where budget cuts could potentially be made relates to creating a place where people respect and value different backgrounds and get on well together (29%).

The Council uses the results each year to feed into departmental service plans making sure that the views you provide here are considered when setting out priorities for the year ahead.

The results are also used when considering budget setting and the Council Tax levels for the year ahead.

Parks and Open Spaces

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust manage parks, country parks and other open spaces on behalf of Wigan Council.

Questions relating to the panels views on these green spaces were asked in 2004 and 2007 and your opinions have helped in the development of a long term strategy for the provision of parks and green spaces.

In this most recent survey the same questions have been asked in order to monitor progress and identify any changes in public opinion.

Slightly more of you stated that you have visited a park or country park in Wigan Borough in the past 12 months (78%)

compared to 76% in 2007, which still shows that a huge majority of you are using the parks across the Borough.

43% of you who have visited a park or country park chose to visit Haigh Hall, compared to 63% in 2007.

With 30%, Pennington Flash Country Park is the second most popular, followed by Mesnes Park with 28%.

The two main reasons you gave for visiting the park or country park were:

- to walk/exercise/relax (58%) and
- to take children/grandchildren to the play area (34%)

Although almost a third (32%) of you stated that you visit a park or country park in the borough simply to “enjoy the surroundings.”

The results collected from the citizens panel has been used to develop the 2008 Parks and Greenspaces strategy.



The Greenheart Project

The Greenheart is a partnership programme which is aiming to make the countryside more accessible to people living in Wigan.

From your responses we can see that 72% of you feel the countryside within the borough (such as Wigan Flashes, Amberswood, Haigh Hall and Pennington Flash) are accessible to you.

49% of you stated that you visit the countryside within the borough at least once a month.

Haigh Hall appears to be the most popular Greenheart site with 59% of people stating they have visited the country park in the last year, this is closely followed by canals with 52%.

When asked how the Wigan borough countryside could be improved, access to the countryside by improving footpaths, cycleways, bridleways etc (38%) and investment in habitats to attract wildlife (35%) are deemed to be the two most important.

When asked about countryside activities, 41% of you said you would be interested in taking part in healthy walks.

For future information, you said that the best way to tell you about Greenheart is through Borough Life (35%) and local newspapers (29%).

The results provided by the citizens panel will provide a more comprehensive baseline study and review a number of points asked earlier in the year to see how the Council have progressed.

Safer Wigan Website

The Safer Wigan website is the Community Safety Partnerships website. Launched in November 2007, it has up to date crime statistics for each ward, crime prevention advice, and the latest news from the Partnership.

It also has information about the many areas of work undertaken by the Partnership, such as domestic violence, drugs and alcohol services, and anti social behaviour.

More information on this can be found by visiting the Safer Wigan website at www.saferwigan.org.uk

Prior to completing the questionnaire only 10% of you had heard about the Safer Wigan website, this tended to be through a family friend (37%) or after reading a newspaper article (26%).

When asked about what information should be included on the Safer Wigan website, the following were rated as the most important:

- contact details for you neighbourhood police team (57%)
- how to prevent burglary (52%)
- how to report anti social behaviour (43%)
- crime statistics for your ward /neighbourhood (43%) and
- how to report crime (33%).



Special points of interest..

78% of you have visited a park or country park within the borough in the past 12 months.

82% of you had never heard of the Greenheart project before completing the questionnaire.

59% of you stated that cleanliness is the most important factor when choosing which hospital to use for treatment or to have an operation.

NHS

The Government developed a policy to offer people using the NHS more choice about where they can go to receive their hospital treatment.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out what is important to you when making choices about who you wish to provide your treatment.

When choosing a hospital you stated that the top three most important things are:

- cleanliness (59%)
- length of time needed to wait for an operation or treatment (43%) and
- the reputation of the hospital (39%).

When asked who would you prefer to receive treatment from, 37% of you said an NHS hospital, 15% stated a private healthcare provider and 31% of you said either.

You were then asked to give reasons why you would prefer to receive treatment from the provider you chose. The top answer for each response was:

- **NHS hospital**—NHS are good / NHS are the best / brilliant / excellent (35%)
- **Private healthcare**—better service / more efficient (53%)
- **Either**— want treatment / appointment as soon as possible (24%).

Dear all,

Many thanks for taking the time again to read this newsletter and to complete the November Citizens' Panel survey. Your opinions as always are crucial for us to feed back to Council Services and all of your input is really useful. I look forward to continuing to keep you up to date with all the Citizens Panel results in 2009.

Many thanks,

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