

Crime Tops Neighbourhood Concerns in National Poll

Public wants more say in tackling the problem

Over a quarter of the public – especially younger people – think that the number one priority for councils should be helping to combat neighbourhood crime, which comes top in a list of neighbourhood concerns. Nearly three quarters (73%) would like to use council websites to post their own videos or photos of graffiti and other anti-social behaviour to enable councils to identify problem areas.

Nearly eight out of ten people (78%) want more of a say in how council tax is spent, with 66% saying that it would be a good idea for communities to have more of an input into some local government decisions. But despite the proposed Community Empowerment Bill*, which was announced last month, nearly three quarters of the public (72%) believe that a fully consultative local government will never happen.

These are the results of a survey** published today by WebsEdge, producers of the Local Government Channel.

Currently, few people choose to communicate with their council electronically. Only 17% of the public use email or the council website to communicate with them. The majority of communications (56%) take place by phone or by post (30%).

Even fewer (only 6%) primarily use the council website to obtain information about council activities, preferring to rely on local newspapers (44%) and leaflets (32%).

Less than half (48%) thought that councils were good at communicating their activities, while over a fifth (22%) of respondents thought councils were bad at communication. 64% would prefer councils to provide visual communication, such as video clips or photos, combined with text.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 received Royal Assent last October, so citizens were asked about health as a council priority. Health was rated second after crime. Housing was a particular issue for 16-24 year olds.

Only a fifth (20%) of respondents thought that their council was doing a bad job, however, with nearly half (46%) thinking they did a good job and just under a third (31%) thinking they did neither a bad nor a good job.

“Overall, councils are holding their own in terms of public opinion, but they are missing an opportunity to engage with the public through electronic channels,” said Stephen Horn, CEO of WebsEdge. “There is clearly a willingness amongst the public to use websites to communicate in very practical ways that could benefit councils, such as uploading photos or videos of appropriate problem areas for council staff to examine. In terms of consultation, councils would benefit in many ways if they made their websites more visually compelling. In the run-up to the Council Worker of the Year Awards⁺ next week, people throughout the UK have voted electronically on the basis of video case studies to acknowledge the great job that ordinary council workers are doing. If every council website in Britain had that sort of involvement from its residents, then you’d see a massive drop in public scepticism about consultation.”

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Notes to editors:

**The research was conducted by GfK NOP via a nationally representative UK telephone omnibus survey. Fieldwork 16-18 May. Weighting was applied to the data to bring it in line with national profiles. A summary report and full data tables can be seen on www.localgovernmentchannel.com from 23 June.

* Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill
http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/Parliament/DG_076367

⁺The Council Worker of the Year Awards are designed to acknowledge ordinary council workers and are supported by the Local Government Association. On-line voting by the public on the Local Government Channel closes at 12 noon on Thursday 3 July.
www.localgovernmentchannel.com/awards/