

Q and A's – The New Zealand Local Government Survey

Q. What will councils be doing to lift their performance?

- A. LGNZ is developing a programme of work that will focus on improving performance across six priority areas:
1. governance, leadership and strategy;
 2. financial decision-making and transparency;
 3. asset management and infrastructure;
 4. engaging with business;
 5. communicating and engaging with public; and
 6. building a stronger relationship with central government.

Each of these areas will include a series of tangible actions to lift performance and will include metrics and benchmarks that enable councils to demonstrate and deliver high performance to their communities. LGNZ anticipate that this will be a significant long-term three to five year programme.

Q. How will you persuade people that council services are value for money?

- A. Local government needs to demonstrate value to the communities it serves. This involves both doing things better and better engagement with the public and businesses. LGNZ is working with councils on a comprehensive performance programme that includes better engagement.

Q. Are all councils across New Zealand involved?

- A. LGNZ has briefed all 78 councils on the proposed programme of action and the findings of the inaugural New Zealand Local Government Survey. While the programme is voluntary, we have had a strong expression of interest from a number of councils.

Q. What is the New Zealand Local Government Survey?

- A. The New Zealand Local Government Survey was established by LGNZ in 2014 as one gauge for measuring the ongoing health and performance of the local government sector.

The Survey contains several important measures of awareness of local government and its services, satisfaction with services, performance of local government and areas where local business and public think local government performance can improve.

The sum total of all these performance areas culminates in a Reputation Index that will be tracked on an annual basis, and the information it gathers will help to guide the collective actions of LGNZ and councils to focus on efforts to lift the sector's reputation.

Q. What are the key findings from the Survey?

- A. The Survey found that while the majority of those surveyed consider local government to be important to New Zealand, the sector is perceived as less important in peoples' daily lives.

Most people are aware of the public-facing services that councils provide (ie solid waste, water), but there is mixed awareness of the other roles that local government fulfil (ie roading, environmental management, economic development and attracting major events).

Public and businesses want local government to focus on improvements in:

- demonstrating value for rate dollars spent;
- demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness;
- making good spending decisions;
- managing finances well; and
- the role of elected members to lead strategies to drive prosperity and well-being in their communities.

There are also particular drivers that are unique to businesses:

- effective partnerships with business, including opportunities to influence the local economic development strategy;
- improvements to the building and resource consent processes;
- adopting a flexible, common sense approach to implementing regulation; and
- marketing local investment opportunities.

In addition to these findings, Colmar Brunton developed an overall Reputation Index that summarises how the local government sector rates across the three main drivers of reputation – performance, local leadership and communication and interaction. The local government sector currently scores on average 29 out of 100, incorporating the views of both the public and business community.

Q. What similar work has been done in the past?

- A. In 2006, LGNZ commissioned Colmar Brunton to carry out a nationwide telephone survey of 1000 randomly-selected ratepayers. The aim of this research was to understand public perceptions of rates and the value delivered by local government. This fed into a platform for communications about the 2007 local government elections, with the development of a local government brand that was used on all material discussing the generic role of local government. This brand was used jointly by LGNZ and the Department of Internal Affairs to increase awareness of, and participation in, local government. This research was not subsequently repeated.

Q. How does the LGNZ Survey differ from individual council satisfaction surveys?

- A. Firstly, the key difference is that the New Zealand Local Government Survey is a measure for the local government sector as a whole, whereas council surveys are limited to views about individual councils.

Secondly, council surveys are predominantly focused on satisfaction with individual councils' delivery of the services and facilities they are responsible for, whereas the New Zealand Local Government Survey provides a more holistic view of perceptions of local government and encompasses more than just satisfaction with services and facilities.

'Satisfaction' by itself is largely based on the level of interaction respondents have had with certain services. Measuring a range of measures leading to 'reputation' encompasses not only service provision (under which 'satisfaction' is a sub-category), but also communication and engagement, and leadership.

Thirdly, the New Zealand Local Government Survey is representative of New Zealand's population and conducted with a cross-section of different stakeholders; the general public, businesses, council staff and elected members. Council surveys on the other hand are targeted towards residents, though this term varies across councils with 'customers,' 'community,' 'residents' and 'ratepayers' also used.

These key points of difference between individual council satisfaction surveys (council surveys) and the New Zealand Local Government Survey are summarised in the table below:

	Council satisfaction surveys (generalised)	New Zealand Local Government Survey
Objective	To measure satisfaction with the services and activities that the council is responsible for, and compare these with previous years results	To measure the ongoing health and performance of the local government sector, and to help guide the collective actions for LGNZ and councils to lift the sector's reputation
Typical question form	"How satisfied are you with...?"	"How much do you agree/disagree with these statements?" "How much of a lead should local government take on...?"
Sample size	200 - 800	2,400 public; 594 businesses
Frequency	Biennial, annual, ad hoc	Annual

Q. Is a similar survey methodology used in other sectors?

- A. Reputation is measured across a number of industries in New Zealand including airlines, telecommunications, power, food and insurance. However, this is the first time reputation of the local government sector as a whole has been measured in New Zealand.

Most overseas local government surveys, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, measure customer and ratepayer "satisfaction" with council services. Our methodology goes further than "satisfaction" to understand what people and business think and feel about local government generally, not just the services we offer. This comprehensive approach will greatly assist councils and LGNZ to understand where local government is doing well and where it needs to improve.