

# STATEWIDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES REPORT

JUNE 2012

**Coordinated by the  
Department of Planning and Community Development  
on behalf of Victorian councils**



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# Background & Objectives

- Welcome to the state-wide report of results and recommendations for the 2012 community satisfaction survey.
- Each year the Department of Community Planning and Development (DCPD) coordinates and auspices this community satisfaction survey throughout Victorian Local Government areas. This coordinated approach allows for far more cost effective surveying than would be possible if Councils commissioned surveys individually.
- Participation in the community satisfaction survey is optional and participating Councils have a range of choices as to the content of the questionnaire and the sample size to be surveyed, depending on their individual strategic, financial and other considerations.
- The main objectives of the survey are to assess the performance of Victorian Councils across a range of measures and to seek insight into ways to provide improved or more effective service delivery. The survey also provides Councils with a means to fulfil some of their statutory reporting requirements as well as acting as a feedback mechanism to DCPD.

# Background & Objectives (Cont'd)

- **Please note that comparisons should not be made with community satisfaction survey results from 2011 and prior. As a result of feedback from extensive consultations with Councils, in 2012 there have been necessary and significant changes to the methodology and content of the survey which make comparisons invalid, including:**
  - The survey is now conducted as a representative random probability survey of residents aged 18 years or over in local Councils, whereas previously it was conducted as a 'head of household' survey.
  - As part of the change to a representative resident survey, results are now weighted post survey to the known population distribution of Victorian Councils according to the most recently available Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates, whereas the results were previously not weighted.
  - The service responsibility area performance measures have changed significantly and the rating scale used to assess performance has also changed.
- As such, the results of the 2012 community satisfaction survey should be considered as a benchmark. Tracking comparisons will be possible in future years.
- Detailed explanations of the 'Survey Methodology & Sampling' and 'Analysis & Reporting' approaches are provided in the following sections.

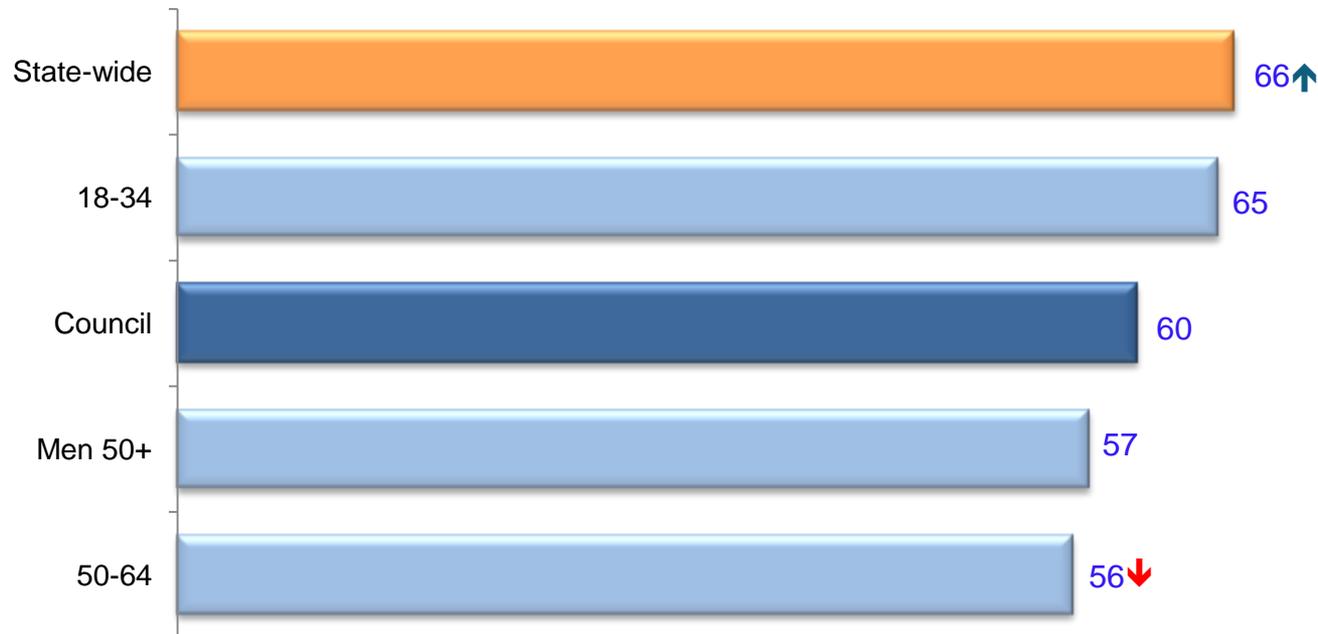
# Survey Methodology & Sampling

- This survey was conducted by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) as a representative random probability survey of residents aged 18+ years in the Overall.
- Survey sample matched to Victorian Councils was purchased from an accredited supplier of publicly available phone records, including up to 10% mobile phone numbers to cater to the diversity of residents in the Council, particularly younger people.
- A total of n=29,384 completed interviews were achieved based on a survey of an estimated average length of between 4 and 15 minutes dependent on individual Council question selection. Survey fieldwork was conducted in the period of 18<sup>th</sup> May – 30 June 2012.
- Minimum quotas of gender within age groups were applied during the fieldwork phase. Post survey weighting was then conducted to ensure accurate representation of the age and gender profile of the Overall area.
- Any variation of +/-1% between individual results and NET scores in this report or the detailed survey tabulations is due to rounding.
- “NET” scores refer to two or more response categories being combined into one category for simplicity of reporting.

# Survey Methodology & Sampling (Cont'd)

- Within tables and index score charts throughout this report, statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level are represented by upward directing blue and downward directing red arrows. Significance when noted indicates a significantly higher or lower result for the analysis group in comparison to the 'Total' result for the Council for that survey question. Therefore in the following example:
  - The State-wide result is significantly higher than the overall result for the Council.
  - The result amongst 50-64 year olds in the Council is significantly lower than for the overall result for the Council.

## ***Overall Performance – Index Score (example extract only)***



# Margins of Error

- The sample size for the 2012 community satisfaction survey for Overall was 29,384. Unless otherwise noted, this is the total sample base for all reported charts and tables.
- The maximum margin of error on a sample of approximately 29,000 interviews is +/-0.6% at the 95% confidence level for results around 50%. Margins of error will be larger for any sub-samples.
- As an example, a result of 50% can be read confidently as falling midway in the range 49.4% - 50.6%.
- Maximum margins of error are listed in the table below, based on a population of 4,300,000 people aged 18 years or over State-wide according to ABS estimates.

**Table 2: Survey sub-samples and margins or error**

Demographic	Actual survey sample size	Weighted base	Maximum margin of error at 95% confidence interval
Overall	29384	28400	+/-0.6%
Inner Melbourne Metro	6002	6001	+/-1.3%
Outer Melbourne Metro	4901	4400	+/-1.4%
Regional Centres	4403	4400	+/-1.5%
Large Rural Shires	6913	6400	+/-1.2%
Small Rural Shires	7165	7200	+/-1.2%
Men	12924	14005	+/-0.9%
Women	16460	14395	+/-0.8%
18-34 years	3933	7809	+/-1.6%
35-49 years	6270	7570	+/-1.2%
50-64 years	9707	6575	+/-1.0%
65+ years	9474	6445	+/-1.0%
Men 18-49 years	4547	7725	+/-1.5%
Men 50+ years	8377	6279	+/-1.1%
Women 18-49 years	5656	7654	+/-1.3%
Women 50+ years	10804	6741	+/-0.9%

# Analysis & Reporting

## Council Groups

- Overall results for this 2012 community satisfaction survey include an overall state-wide result which is an average of all participating Councils, as well as results by the 5 self-classification groups that each Council was part of and measured against:
  - Inner metropolitan councils
  - Outer metropolitan councils
  - Rural cities and regional centres
  - Large rural shires
  - Small rural shires
- All participating Councils are listed in the State-wide report published on the DPCD website. In 2012, 71 of the 79 Councils throughout Victoria participated in this survey.

# Analysis & Reporting (Cont'd)

## Index Scores

- Many questions ask respondents to rate Council performance on a five-point scale, for example, from "Very good" to "Very poor", with "Can't say" also a possible response category. To facilitate ease of reporting and comparison of results over time (after this initial 2012 benchmark) and against the State-wide result and the Council group, an 'Index Score' has been calculated for such measures.
- The 'Index Score' is calculated and represented as a score out of 100 (on a 0 to 100 scale), with "Can't say" responses excluded from the analysis. The '% RESULT' for each scale category is multiplied by the 'INDEX FACTOR'. This produces an 'INDEX VALUE' for each category, which are then summed to produce the 'INDEX SCORE', equating to '60' in the following example.

SCALE CATEGORIES	% RESULT	INDEX FACTOR	INDEX VALUE
Very good	9%	100	9
Good	40%	75	30
Average	37%	50	19
Poor	9%	25	2
Very poor	4%	0	0
Can't say	1%	--	<b>INDEX SCORE 60</b>

- Similarly, an Index Score has been calculated for the Core question 'Performance direction in the last 12 months', based on the following scale for each performance measure category, with 'Can't say' responses excluded from the calculation:
  - 'Improved' = 100
  - 'Stayed about the same' = 50
  - 'Deteriorated' = 0

# Analysis & Reporting (Cont'd)

## Reporting

- Every Council that participated in the 2012 Victorian Local Government community satisfaction survey receives a customized report. In addition, DPCD is supplied with a State-wide summary report of the aggregate results of 'Core' and 'Optional' questions asked across all Council areas surveyed.
- Tailored questions commissioned by individual Councils are reported only to the commissioning Council and not otherwise shared with DPCD or others unless by express written approval of the commissioning Council.
- The State-wide Research Results Summary Report is available on the Department's website at [www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au](http://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au).

## Contacts

- For further queries about the conduct and reporting of this community satisfaction survey, please contact JWS Research as follows:
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# Analysis & Reporting (Cont'd)

## Core, Optional and Tailored Questions

- Over and above necessary geographic and demographic questions required to ensure sample representativeness, a base set of questions for the 2012 community satisfaction survey were designated as 'Core' and therefore compulsory inclusions for all participating Councils. These Core questions comprised:
  - Overall performance last 12 months (Overall performance)
  - Lobbying on behalf of community (Advocacy)
  - Community consultation and engagement (Consultation)
  - Contact in last 12 months (Contact)
  - Rating of contact (Contact rating)
  - Overall council direction last 12 months (Council direction)
- Reporting of results for these Core questions can always be compared against other Councils in the Council group and against all participating Councils State-wide. Alternatively, some questions in the 2012 community satisfaction survey were optional. If comparisons for Overall for some questions cannot be made against all other Councils in the Regional centres group and/or all Councils on a State-wide basis, this is noted for those results by noting the number of Councils the comparison is made against.
- Councils also had the ability to ask tailored questions specific only to their Council. Results for these tailored questions are only reported to the commissioning Council.

# Glossary of Terms

- **Core questions:** Compulsory inclusion questions for all Councils participating in the CSS.
- **CSS:** 2012 Victorian Local Government community satisfaction survey.
- **Council group:** One of five self-classified groups, comprising: inner metropolitan councils, outer metropolitan councils, rural cities and regional centres, large rural shires and small rural shires.
- **Council group average:** The average result for all participating Councils in the Council group.
- **Highest / Lowest:** The result described is the highest or lowest result across a particular demographic sub-group e.g. Men, for the specific question being reported. Reference to the result for a demographic sub-group being the highest or lowest does not imply that it is significantly higher or lower, unless this is specifically mentioned.
- **Index Score:** A score calculated and represented as a score out of 100 (on a 0 to 100 scale). This score is sometimes reported as a figure in brackets next to the category being described, e.g. men 50+ (60).
- **Net Differential:** The difference between net importance and performance ratings.
- **Optional questions:** Questions which Councils had an option to include or not.
- **Percentages:** Also referred to as 'detailed results', meaning the proportion of responses, expressed as a percentage.
- **Sample:** The number of completed interviews, e.g. for a Council or within a demographic sub-group.
- **Significantly higher / lower:** The result described is significantly higher or lower than the comparison result based on a statistical significance test at the 95% confidence limit. If the result referenced is statistically higher or lower then this will be specifically mentioned, however not all significantly higher or lower results are referenced in summary reporting, especially in this State-wide report where differences of just one percentage point or more are often significant due to the large sample sizes involved.
- **State-wide average:** The average result for all participating Councils in the State.
- **Tailored questions:** Individual questions tailored by and only reported to the commissioning Council.
- **Weighting:** Weighting factors are applied to the sample for each Council based on available age and gender proportions from ABS census information to ensure reported results are proportionate to the actual population of the Council, rather than the achieved survey sample.

# Observations & Recommendations

- Victorian Councils tend to score lower than their Overall Performance rating on Community Consultation and Engagement, Advocacy and Council Direction, so these are obvious areas for improvement for most Councils over the next 12 months.
- Personal or household experience of Council Consultation and Advocacy typically extends the gap between rated importance and performance. On both counts, Advocacy especially, personal or household experience actually does very little to improve rated performance.
- To improve performance on Consultation and Advocacy, the recommended approach is not simply to engage more residents in these services, but to improve service content and for Council's to better communicate their efforts to the broader community, targeting information to those demographic groups which rate these services lowest – this is typically 50-64 year olds, for whom the preferred communication method is hard copy not electronic mail outs and newsletters.
- Councils obviously need to make their own assessment on what constitutes acceptable levels of performance on core and individual service responsibilities and similarly for the level of improvement required. Our recommended approach by way of a guiding principle for action is:
  - Where Councils are rating at or above the State-wide or Council group average, target improvement at underperforming demographic groups.
  - Where Councils are rating below the State-wide or Council group average, review delivery of the service – including with reference to other Councils if performance is particularly poor or unacceptable. In some instances further consultation or research may be required.

# Observations & Recommendations

- We recommend a more detailed analysis of Council service delivery areas, particularly those with the highest net negative differentials between importance and performance, with a focus on identifying the demographic groups driving higher and lower results.
- Councils should focus on services (and demographics) where rated importance is higher than performance by 10 points or more. Such services and demographics will typically be negative drivers on Overall Performance.
- For arts centres and libraries and for community and cultural activities, the importance-performance net differentials are typically lower amongst personal and household user groups than for the overall result. To rectify this disparity and to reduce the apparent over-servicing to the broader community, we recommend more of a focus on improving performance delivery to these personal and household user groups.
- For those Councils who included the coded open ended questions, analysis of the verbatim responses provides depth and insight into Council's performance and service delivery, both from a positive as well as a negative perspective. The category descriptions for the coded open ended responses are generic summaries only. We recommend further analysis of the detailed cross tabulations and the actual verbatim responses, with a view to understanding the responses in more detail and by their demographic profile, especially for any over or under performing target groups identified for individual Councils.

# Observations & Recommendations

- Despite 92% of Victorian Council residents stating there is room for improvement for their Council, the right / wrong direction results indicate that the improvements required should be moderate rather than substantial in nature and that most Councils have their 'macro' settings set appropriately.
- Additionally, the rate rises versus service cuts results indicate that ratepayers expect most Councils to live within their current means.
- For Councils with the available data, it will be important to understand the demographic profile of contact and service ratings by various methods, such as by telephone, in-person, via the Council website, etc. Understandably, contact in writing is rated lower for customer service than other forms of contact, so extra attention needs to be made in this area. Social media does not yet have wide currency or preference.
- An approach we have recommended to all Councils is to further mine the survey data and any verbatim (open-ended responses) to better understand the profile of any over and under-performing demographic groups. This can be achieved via additional consultation and data interrogation, or self-mining the SPSS data provided or via the dashboard portal available to Councils.

# KEY RESULTS SUMMARY

# Summary of Findings

- In 2012 in response to the core performance measure question of, “*On balance, for the last twelve months, how do you feel about the performance of your Council, not just on one or two issues, but overall across all responsibility areas?*”, Victorian Councils State-wide recorded an Overall Performance Index Score of 60.
- On the other core performance measures the State-wide Index Scores were as follows:
  - 71 for Customer Service
  - 57 for Community Consultation and Engagement
  - 55 for Advocacy
  - 52 for Overall Council Direction
- All core performance measures can be compared by Council group and for key gender and age demographics for all Councils State-wide.

# Summary of Findings

- On Overall Performance, among the different Council groups, the Inner Melbourne Metropolitan group achieved the highest rating of 66, which is significantly above the State-wide average Index Score of 60. The Large Rural Shires group rated the lowest, at 56, which is significantly below the State-wide average.
- Small Rural Shires (59) rated below average, whilst Regional Centres (60) were on par with the State-wide result and the Outer Melbourne Metropolitan group at 61 was above the State-wide average.
- Analysis by key gender and age groups shows that on Overall Performance, 18-34 year olds (rating 65), women aged 18-49 (62), women generally (61) and 65+ year olds all rated above average.
- By contrast, 50-64 year olds (57) rated lowest, below 35-49 year olds and men aged 50+ (both rated 58) and men generally (59). Men aged 18-49 and women aged 50+ rated equal to the Statewide average of 60.
- Although 18-34 year olds were the most likely to rate their Council's Overall Performance as 'good' or 'very good', at 61% combined, 65+ year olds were the most likely to rate their Council's Overall Performance as 'very good', at 13%.

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# Summary of Findings

- On the other core performance measures, the Inner and Outer Melbourne Metropolitan groups generally record the highest results, while the Large Rural Shires and Small Rural Shires groups record the lowest results and the Regional Centres group is consistently equal to the average. More specifically:
  - Across all Victorian Councils, 61% of residents have had contact with their Council in the last 12 months. Index Scores for Customer Service across the Council groups did not vary greatly from the State-wide average, with the Inner Metropolitan group the highest at 73, ahead of the Outer Metropolitan and Regional Centres groups at 72, with the Large Rural Shires (68) and Small Rural Shires (70) groups rated lowest.
  - On Community Consultation and Engagement, a service area consistently underperforming relative to perceived importance, the Inner and Outer Metropolitan groups, both at 58, rated their Council's Consultation efforts above the State-wide Index Score of 57. Conversely, Large Rural Shires (54) and Regional Centres (56) rated below average, whilst Small Rural Shires were on par.
  - On Advocacy, the Inner Metropolitan group at 57 and the Small Rural Shires and Outer Metropolitan group, both at 56, rated their Council's efforts above the State-wide Index Score of 55. Regional Centres also rated 55 and Large Rural Shires at 53 performed below the State-wide average for their advocacy efforts.
  - Council Direction over the last 12 months was a particular issue of concern for many Victorian Councils. The Large and Small Rural Shires groups at 48 and 50 respectively rated the lowest and Regional Centres were on par with the State-wide average of 52, while the Outer and Inner Metropolitan groups (55 and 54 respectively) rated above average.

# Summary of Key Community Satisfaction Results

Core Performance Measure	Index Score
<b>OVERALL PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>COMMUNITY CONSULTATION</b>  (Community consultation and engagement)	<b>57</b>
<b>ADVOCACY</b>  (Lobbying on behalf of the community)	<b>55</b>
<b>CUSTOMER SERVICE</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>OVERALL COUNCIL DIRECTION</b>	<b>52</b>

# Summary of Key Community Satisfaction Results

