

Member Consultation Customer Survey 2014 - Christmas Closure

Epping Forest District Council

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk



Introduction

The Council wanted to seek the views from Members on future arrangements of opening Council buildings during the Christmas and New Year period between 24 December to 2 January.

Historically, the Council buildings have been closed in this period, although emergency services are available and officers are on standby.

A survey of staff opinion was carried out in Autumn 2013. The Cabinet and JCC reports of January 2014 and April 2014, and the Cabinet decision March 2014, wished officers to seek the views of Members on this matter.

Methodology

An online/interactive questionnaire was sent to the 58 District Councillors via the Member's Bulletin.

The consultation was carried out between the 28 June and the 17 August 2014.

The questionnaire contained questions about access to Council services, eg, which services were needed at the time and which services, should be contactable between 24 December to 2 January. The questions asked if there were any complaints received or inconvenience caused relating to the Christmas/New Year closure period.

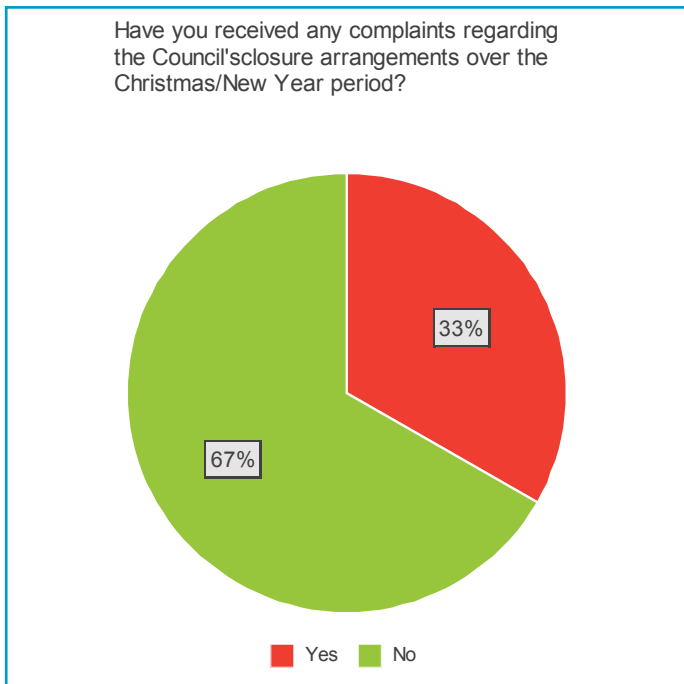
There were also questions on preferences for receiving information/communication from the Council at this time of year and the views of Members on the Civic Offices being open.

Copies of the questionnaires were also available at the Council's information desks and main Reception, Civic Offices and Human Resources.

Summary

The questions were:

- Have Members received any complaints regarding the Council's closure arrangements over the Christmas/New Year period?
 - 1 complaint received.
- Are Members aware of which services are available over the Christmas period?
 - 100% (3) said 'Yes', they were aware.
- Have Members ever been inconvenienced by not being able to access a Council service between 24 December to 2 January?
 - 1 said 'Yes'.
- Which services did Members need at the time?
 - Environmental Services (Waste and Recycling).
- Which Council services did Members think should be contactable over the Christmas period and why?
 - Housing (Repairs) (3), Housing Options, (3), Environmental services (including waste and recycling), (3), were chosen by all respondents.
- When asked to tell us why?
 - Members were sympathetic to office closure for this period and also wanted to know what the public thought about it and that it would depend on the service as to whether or not it should be accessible.
- How would Members like to be informed of any issues over this period?
 - The Council's website (3), Social media, (2), The Forester, (1), and Bulletin, (1), were the means by which Members wished to be informed.
- What are Member views of the closure over the Christmas period?
 - One Member thought a call-out system rather than have offices manned during the day, another thought it would depend on the service.



Summary

There were 3 respondents to this survey. One respondent received a complaint regarding the Council's closure arrangements over the Christmas/New year period two did not, (Q1).

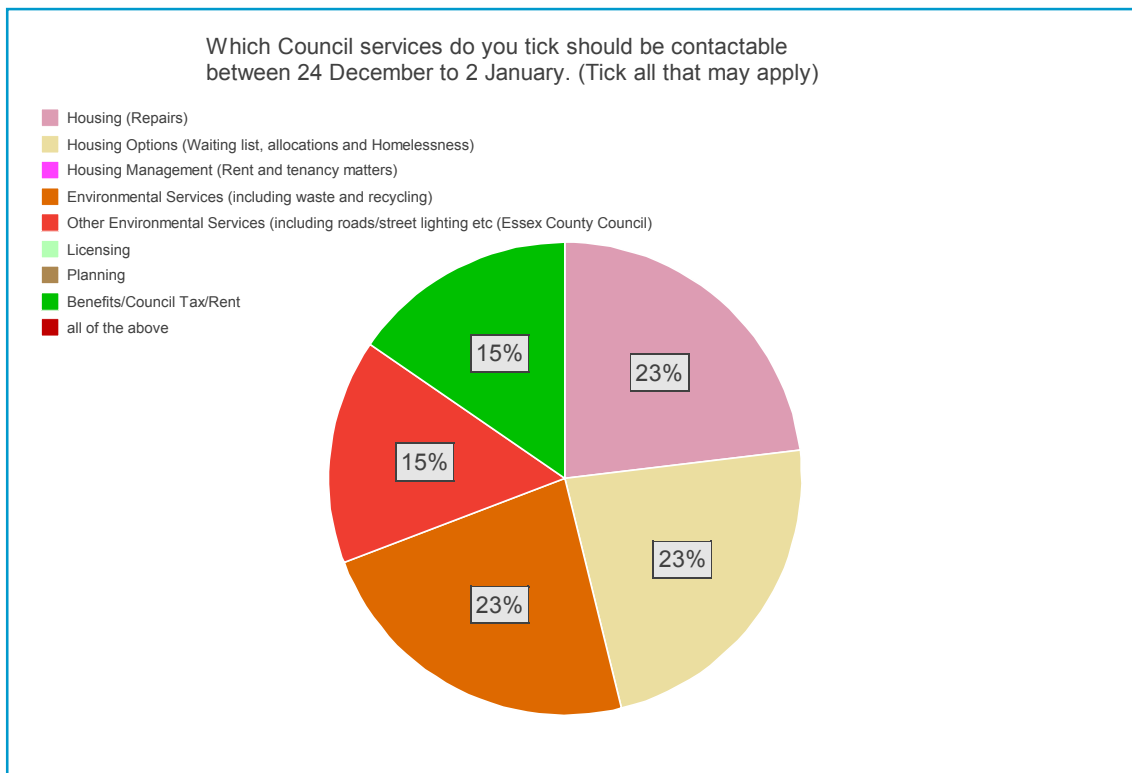
The complaint was: *'During periods of bad weather - inability to get answers on refuse collections etc.'* (Q2).

All respondents said they were aware of the availability of services over the Christmas period, (Q3).

One respondent was inconvenienced by not being able to access a Council service at this time, (Q4).

The inconvenience was: *'Minor issues such as picking up refuse sacks'*. (Q5).

The service needed at the time was Environmental Services including waste and recycling. (Q6)



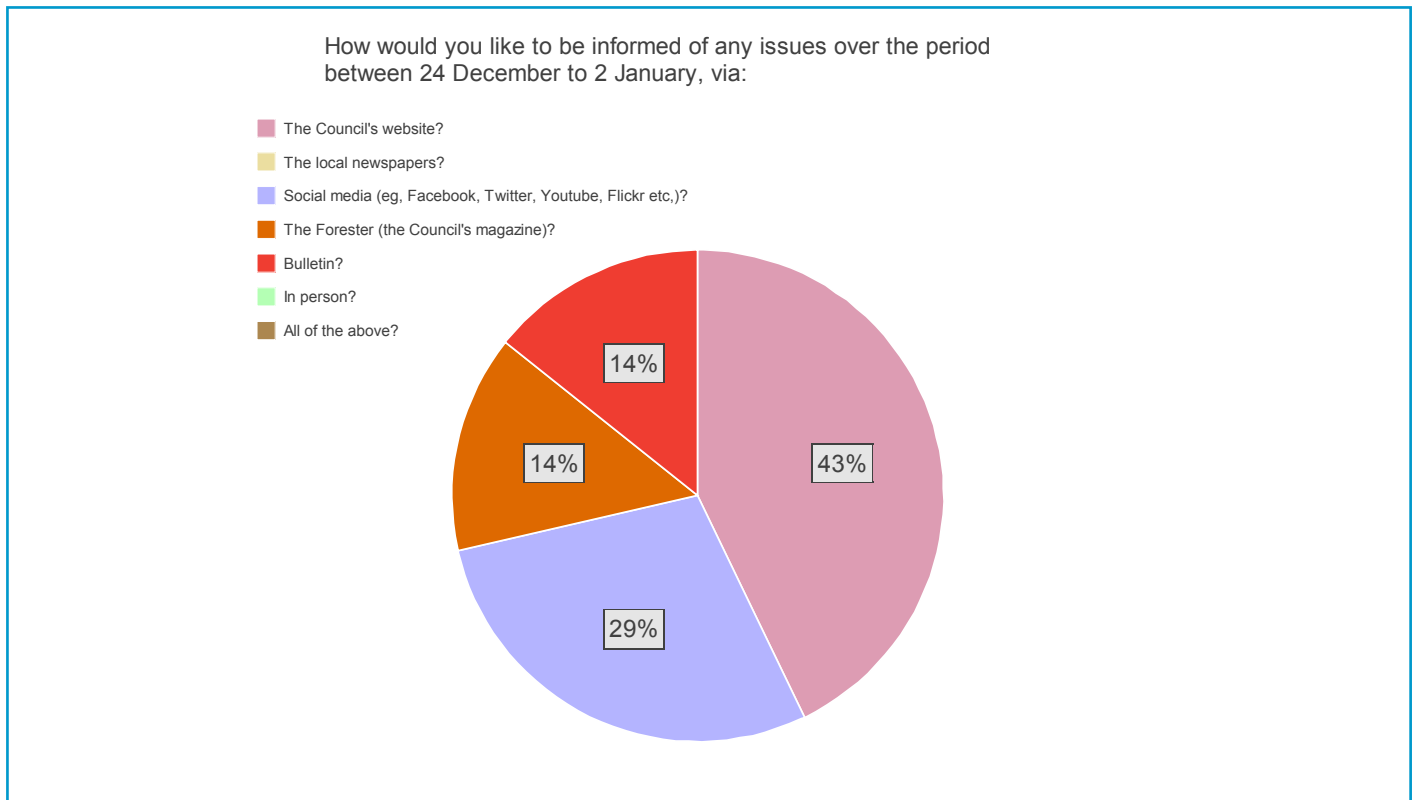
(Q7). The services which respondents felt should be contactable during this period were:

- Housing (Repairs) (3), Housing Options, (3), Environmental services (including waste and recycling), (3), Benefits/Council Tax/Rent, (2), Other Environmental Services (including roads/street lighting etc (Essex County Council), (2).

(Q7a). Other responses were: *'Housing options Homelessness - waiting list and allocations less time critical'*.

(Q8). When asked to say why, comments were as follows:

- *'These in my view are the issues that could arise over the Christmas period, including homelessness issues'.*
- *'These are generally time-critical issues e.g. non-payment of benefits and homelessness have an immediate effect and require quick response'.*
- *'Housing repairs - urgent repairs only e.g. major water leak Housing Options - homelessness issues only Environmental services - environmental crises such as flooding'.*



(Q9). When asked, 'How would you like to be informed of any issues over the period between 24 December to 2 January', most respondents thought the Council's website was the way issues should be communicated to them during this period. Social media, The Forester and Bulletin were also chosen. The responses were as follows:

- The Council's website (3), Social media, (2), The Forester, (1), and Bulletin, (1), were the means by which Members wished to be informed.

(Q10). When asked for views of the closure over the Christmas period, one response was to, 'Keep the current closure arrangements the same'. (Q10a). Other responses were:

- *'I would like to see what public support there is for opening over this period'.*
- *'Depends on service - reduced cover over Christmas and New Year is accessible'.*
- *'Some services could remain available by a call-out system rather than have the offices manned during the day. Consideration should be given to whether staff have to take leave for part of this time as happens in most private companies'.*