

EREWASH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CONSULTATION ON
EXTERNAL COMMUNICATONS**

FEEDBACK REPORT

April 2002



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EREWASH BOROUGH COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON EXTERNAL COMMUNICATONS

FEEDBACK REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This volume contains the findings of a focus group moderated by Excellence in Business Limited (EiB) on behalf of Erewash Borough Council into the authority's external communications.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

On 12 March 2002 EiB received a tentative enquiry from Erewash Borough Council about running a focus group on its behalf.

On 15 March 2002 a meeting took place in Ilkeston, where it was explained that the objectives of the focus group were to help Erewash Borough Council:

- develop a communications strategy;
- undertake a best value review into social inclusion; and
- identify a range of issues that would shape the next questionnaire for the authority's citizens' panel.

In particular, the authority wanted to know, for example:

- how people obtained information about the Borough Council;
- how they wanted the Borough Council to communicate with them;
- what information they wanted to receive;
- whether they knew how to complain;
- whether they wanted to pay council tax, etc by the Internet;
- whether they wanted offices to be open at weekends; and
- how customers were treated.

The authority had already invited a focus group of about 30 persons, extracted from its citizens' panel of 1000, to attend an event planned for Saturday, 23 March 2002 between 9.30 am and 12.30 pm at the Novotel in Long Eaton.

EiB put forward its proposals for moderating the group and these were formally accepted on 18 March 2002.

METHODOLOGY

EiB recommended the use of a questionnaire to capture quantitative information from group members and to act as a catalyst for their qualitative views. The authority agreed to this approach, and a total of 20 questions were devised (see Appendix).

There is obviously a balance to be struck in devising questionnaires of this nature: too many questions pose a risk that consultees will suffer from fatigue and fail to complete the questionnaire in the time available; and too few may fail to provide adequate information on which to base future strategy.

It should be noted that, as the authority had previously invited a random selection of persons from its citizens' panel to attend the focus group, EiB was unable to verify whether the batch that formed the focus group was representative of the population from which it was drawn.

A total of 28 focus group members attended at Long Eaton on 23 March 2002 and, after a brief introduction, they were split into two teams, each moderated by EiB. Both teams considered the same questionnaire. The purpose of splitting the group was to generate a greater sense of intimacy in each team and thereby generate the maximum response to the questions under consideration. The responses of both teams have been combined to form this feedback report.

Two of the key strengths of qualitative research (eg using a focus group) are that it allows issues to be explored in detail and enables researchers to test the strength of people's opinion. However, it needs to be remembered that qualitative research is designed to be *illustrative* rather than *statistically representative* and, therefore, does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which something is happening across the whole population.

Capturing the perceptions of citizens is not only a key driver behind the Local Government Acts 1999 and 2000, in terms of achieving best value and developing community strategies, but it is also a key criterion of the EFQM Excellence Model¹, a powerful management tool that can be used for identifying world-class organisations.

If the authority finds that the outturn results for its predictor performance indicators are inconsistent with the perceptions of its customers or the community at large, it may feel that it needs to re-appraise the approach it has to the management of public perceptions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EiB would like to record its appreciation for the considerable assistance it received from Councillor Frank Phillips, Lead Member for Community, Sue Bolter, Head of Community Development, and Chris Common, Corporate Best Value Review Officer, in helping to run this project and ensure that all aspects were successful.

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES AND FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS

Detailed below is an analysis of the responses to the questionnaire issued. In order to aid understanding, the response to each question is:

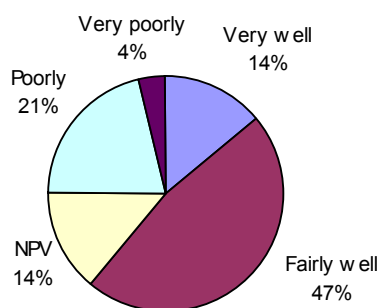
- shown in a tabular and/or graphical format; and
- commented on in terms of issues that the authority may wish to consider.

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The reported comments made by focus group members are not intended to be exhaustive but to give the flavour of those expressions that were made during the day.

Question 1: How well do you think Erewash Borough Council keeps residents informed about the services it provides?

Answer	Frequency
Very well informed	4
Fairly well informed	13
No Particular View	4
Poorly informed	6
Very poorly informed	1
Total	28



Comments to Consider

There was a clear majority of focus group members (61%) who felt that Erewash Borough Council kept residents **well informed**. The net level of those who thought residents were well informed was +10 (ie [4 + 13] – [6 + 1]).

A common means by which members were informed about the authority was the local press. However, those in rural areas, and those beyond the distribution areas of free newspapers, felt less well informed. *Viewpoint* was another key means by which the Council communicated, and members rated this quite favourably. Perceptions were less favourable about the authority’s use of local TV and radio to communicate what it was doing.

Typical comments made by focus group members were as follows:

I take the Long Eaton Advertiser and that’s the only reason I know. Female

There’s a lot in the Recorder (a free paper) too. Male

I find that I’m poorly informed as I live in a remote part of the Borough. I don’t live in a conurbation. It’s difficult to get information, except that I’ve got a lot of friends, I hear by word of mouth rather than it emanating from the Borough Council. We don’t normally get a free paper. Male

I get a free paper, it comes out on Thursday but we actually get it delivered most weeks on Sundays. What I find is, the Council puts advertisements in for events that are happening that weekend. By the time I get it on Sunday they’re gone and over with. Now I appreciate that’s probably the fault of the delivery of the free paper, but the Council should give more advance notice of the events that are going to take place. Female

<i>I'm too busy working and being with my family to sit and read newspapers.</i>	Male
<i>I've indicated "Poorly informed" because I don't get the Ilkeston Advertiser and, for some reason, we don't get the free papers delivered. So in terms of direct communication there's not a lot.</i>	Male
<i>I can tell by what people ask me that they're ignorant of what goes on. And we don't even know which constituency we're in where we live. So we don't know which councillor to approach. Now that's a bad start.</i>	Male
<i>I read the Derby Evening Telegraph and listen to the local radio sometimes, but I don't really pick up much about Erewash from either of those.</i>	Male
<i>I use the Library and Council offices and get a lot of information there. And I get information from Viewpoint when it comes around. I think the Council do a very good job for my age group. I wonder whether some of the people that are elderly are able to read Viewpoint; it's very small print. If you want people to be well-informed I think you've got to give them the facilities.</i>	Male
<i>I read the Viewpoint and I think it's very good.</i>	Female
<i>Yes, I agree. It's quite a good paper and it informs people on just about every subject.</i>	Female
<i>I do think it's a mistake to be delivered with the free papers, because a lot of people just pick them up and put them in the blue bag.</i>	Female
<i>I echo the larger print, not for the elderly but most will read headlines and if it goes on to smaller print will reject it. If you're reading a children's book you get through the pages so much quicker and I think that a lot of people would read more if it is was bigger print. Not because of eyesight but because of ease and speed of reading it.</i>	Female
<i>I get a lot of information from the notice boards at the Leisure Centre, but you have to make time to stand and read (them).</i>	Female
<i>The Viewpoint's handy because you've got your local councillors with their telephone numbers. So you can contact them on any issue. I keep them for the simple reason that it's a good reference.</i>	Male

<i>Perhaps on the back of supermarket receipts “Your local councillor is ...” It just might reach an extra layer of people. Because it’s not you and I really that we’re aiming at. And I agree, Viewpoint: it’s excellent, you’ve got all your councillors, you’ve got your photographs, you could even recognise them</i>	Female
<i>I think your local councillor should have a higher profile.</i>	Male
<i>One of the confusions I think is the lack of a link between Erewash Borough and the County. I’ve got heartily sick of hearing Erewash Borough people say “Nothing to do with me. It’s the County” and the County saying “Nothing to do with us. It’s Erewash Borough”. And it’s not clear. It’s an area where clarification is required.</i>	Male
<i>I don’t read the free press or visit the local Library. We have a computer at home and e-mails get through to me and I would read that. I lead a busy life so I don’t have a lot of free time to read publications. This (ie Internet/e-mail) is where I would get my information from.</i>	Male
<i>I don’t have a mobile phone or computer and suffer badly from rheumatoid arthritis, which keeps me indoors for months. Therefore, I don’t visit the Library or see notice boards and I am a bit remiss with local newspapers. I watch quite a bit of TV and national news is different. That is why I am “Poorly informed”.</i>	Female
<i>I’ve never seen anything (about Erewash Borough Council) on local TV or radio.</i>	Male
<i>Would it be possible to have a regular newsletter sent out much more frequently than the Viewpoint?</i>	Female

Some focus group members also made written comments on their questionnaires alongside this question. The following comments were all made by those who felt “Poorly informed”:

- *Rural area probably accounts for lack of communication.*
- *Because the information is not available or I am not in a place to see the information.*
- *I do not read the free press. Therefore, miss any information published. Not a regular library user. Have a computer (e-mail) and mobile phone.*

Question 2: As a measure of how well Erewash Borough Council communicates what it does, which of the following services do you feel are dealt with by the Borough Council and which are dealt with by the County Council?

	Erewash BC	Derbyshire CC	Undecided
Council Housing Services	23	3	2
Museums	12	13	3
Education	-	26	2
Refuse Collection	27	-	1
Trading Standards	9	17	2
Social Services	8	19	1
Environmental Health	20	7	1
Leisure Centres	22	5	1
Subsidised Fares/Bus Passes	12	15	1
Car Parks	26	1	1
Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages	8	19	1
Allotments	25	2	1
Municipal Cemeteries	17	9	2
Libraries	11	16	1

Comments to Consider

There was great clarity over which authorities were responsible for **Education** and **Refuse Collection**, and reasonable clarity over **Housing**, **Car Parks** and **Allotments**. The degree of certainty over who was responsible for most other services was mixed

Focus group members expressed considerable frustration over the difficulties they had experienced when being referred from the Borough Council to the County Council, and vice versa.

Typical comments made by focus group members were as follows:

It's very difficult. Female

I've just a taken a guess at these. Male

There is an assumption behind this that if we know, it's because Erewash Borough Council have told us. I think I know it despite Erewash Borough Council. Male

If you have a problem with any of these services then you find out through Yellow Pages or the word of mouth of a relative. Male

<i>It's not easy actually, what department you need, unless you know the exact title.</i>	Female
<i>I always tend to, if I've got a problem, go to Erewash Borough Council first and if it's not them they'll say "You need to go to Derbyshire County Council". So my first port of call is always Ilkeston Town Hall.</i>	Male
<i>I've been passed from one to one. I started at Matlock, Long Eaton, then I got passed to somebody else, then I got passed to somebody else. She said "Oh dear". It's still not been tackled.</i>	Female
<i>I actually had a problem. I got referred to the County, they said "No, ring Erewash". Then Erewash told me to go back to the County again. And at that point I gave up. Communication is often a big problem with the Council.</i>	Female
<i>It's getting hold of the right man at the right time. Getting hold of the right person to deal with it is a hard job. I find that very hard, and you can ring back and ring back and you give up in despair sometimes.</i>	Male
<i>There ought to be somebody there to say "Right, leave that with me. I'll find out for you and then ring you back." Not "Oh, you ring here, or try ringing there".</i>	Male
<i>I had (an issue) with railway fences and the Council said they didn't know whose land it was, and they passed me to another one. I think it took six or seven months to sort out just whose land it was.</i>	Female
<i>To be fair to Erewash, somebody came and dug a hole in the road and left it. None of the utilities would accept that it was anything to do with them. Erewash Borough Council didn't know anything about it, but it was Erewash Borough Council who actually found out who it was and made them fill it in again.</i>	Male

Question 3: What are the most common methods by which you learn about what Erewash Borough Council is doing?

	1 st most common	2 nd most common	3 rd most common	TOTAL
Television	-	1	-	1
Newspaper	10	3	2	15
Radio	1	2	-	3
The Council's <i>Viewpoint</i> magazine	5	3	3	11
Local councillor	2	1	1	4
Leaflets produced by Council departments	-	3	1	4
Council correspondence to my home/business	-	4	2	6
Displays and exhibitions	-	1	1	2
Notice boards	1	1	3	5
Internet	-	-	-	-
Visits to Council offices	1	1	4	6
Word of mouth from friends, neighbours, etc	4	3	6	13
Other (please specify)	-	-	1	1

Comments to Consider

Four persons were undecided about this question, and one person expressed no “2nd most common”.

The most common method by which people discovered what Erewash Borough Council was doing was through the local **newspapers**. The overall figures reinforced this view and showed that other common methods by which people learn about the authority are **word of mouth** and the **Council's *Viewpoint* magazine**. It appeared that little is learned about the authority from the **Internet**, and local **television** and **radio**.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

I don't take a local paper but I get most of my information through being a member of two parish councils, so it all filters through with meeting people there and the information that comes through officially. That's how I get to know. Male

I put "Notice boards" because we don't get a free paper. Female

I didn't know it (ie the corporate website) was on there. Male

Don't know him (ie local councillor), don't even know who it is. Male

It's different in a rural area. They deal with problems or tell you about things (ie local councillors). Female

I don't read the local newspapers. I'm out all day, so I don't know what's happening locally. So, it's either TV, radio or what people tell me. Female

The only worry about "Word of mouth" is that it's as accurate as any grapevine. Male

Some members also made written comments on their questionnaires alongside this question. The following comments were made by those who indicated "Other (please specify)", one of whom was generally undecided:

- *Libraries.*
- *I ask the Rent man.*

Question 4: What are your preferred methods for you to contact Erewash Borough Council?

	1 st preference	2 nd preference	3 rd preference	TOTAL
Telephone	17	5	3	25
Letter	1	8	4	13
E-mail	2	3	5	10
Personal visit to Council offices	5	6	5	16
Local councillor	-	3	5	8
Text message	-	-	2	2
Other (please specify)	-	-	-	-

Comments to Consider

Three persons were undecided about this question, and one person expressed no third preference.

The most preferred method by which people wanted to contact Erewash Borough Council was the **telephone**, followed by a **personal visit to Council offices**. The overall figures reinforced these preferences. The third overall preference was **letter**, followed by **e-mail**. There was little interest in **text messaging**, an initiative recently introduced by Rushmoor Borough Council.

Interestingly, although most focus group members preferred to contact the Borough Council by **telephone**, most preferred the authority to contact *them* by **letter** (see Question 5).

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

I prefer to contact them in the evening by e-mail. I find with working full time I don't have time to ring the Council during Council opening hours. Female

My preferred method would be a personal visit because I think you get a better response than by phone. You get a complaint or query or whatever it is answered in a better way. You can always stand there and dig your heels in at the Council until they sort you out, whereas if you're on the phone or whatever you get nothing. Male

That's my second preference. They've got to be in the office there and then, and you're going to be very lucky. Male

(Re: letter) I work at nights so I don't want to make phone calls during the day; I want to get my sleep. Male

We've got to think about people who are unable to (personally visit the Council offices), we've got to think of the communication system that they're going to be able to use. Male

I feel than things put on paper take weeks. I'd rather have a personal visit or telephone conversation than paperwork. It goes from department to department, and weeks go by and you never hear a thing. Male

I like face to face contact as I think you get a better response. Female

Question 5: What are your preferred methods for you to be contacted by Erewash Borough Council?

	1 st preference	2 nd preference	3 rd preference	TOTAL
Telephone	3	10	5	18
Letter	20	5	1	26
E-mail	2	3	2	7
Personal visit by officer	1	3	5	9
Local councillor	-	1	6	7
Text message	1	1	3	4
Other (please specify)	-	-	-	-

Comments to Consider

One person was undecided about this question, four expressed no second preference and five expressed no third preference.

The most preferred method by which people wanted Erewash Borough Council to contact them was by **letter**. The overall figures reinforced this preference, which was followed by use of the **telephone**.

There was a strong indication that focus group members preferred documentary communications from the authority.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

They can deny (things) if you say “Telephone”, but if you’ve got a (written) record (it’s better) Female

I’ve said “Text message” because I’ve always got my mobile phone with me, but I’m not always at home. Male

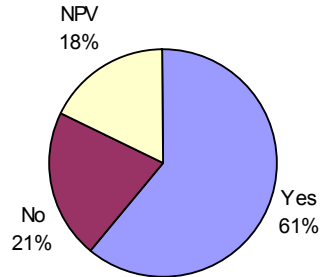
I like something in writing from the Council. For a telephone call or personal visit I’m not available. Female

My working with councillors (tells me to) “Get it in writing”. That’s my opinion on that. Male

I’m just having a recording machine fixed to our phone so they can’t say “I didn’t say that”. I’m serious. Male

Question 6: Do you feel there are any particular communication needs that Erewash Borough Council should be making provision for, but does not already (eg blind, deaf, ethnic minorities)?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	17
No	6
No Particular View	5
Total	28



Comments to Consider

Most focus group members felt there were particular communication needs that Erewash Borough Council should be making provision for.

Members expressed particular concern for the elderly and those who were blind or deaf. Although there is a loop in the Council Chamber it was not clear to what extent loops were being used in Council offices and reception areas generally. Also, it was noted that the onus was on persons with special communication needs to notify each department individually of their difficulties rather than to notify just one contact point for the whole authority.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

An elderly person I know, if she gets forms, she's quite intelligent, but because as people get older they don't have the confidence, she panics about filling them in. Female

They don't like to negotiate anything; they want somebody younger to do it. Male

My mother is 90 but she's got my sister living local and she can help her out with such things, but if she was on her own it is a problem. Male

Thinking of my father and step mother, both 86, they have real difficulty with modern telephones because of all this business of "If you want this, No. 1. If you want this, No. 2, and all that". They can't get their heads around that system. It's totally alien to them. Male

I think most of us help someone to do forms: father or relation or someone very aged. Male

I felt sorry when I was paying my council tax one day, and an elderly lady there was obviously deaf. They had taken her to a cubicle to explain everything to her, but everybody in the queue could hear everything because they were trying to shout to this poor old lady, who was very deaf. I felt so embarrassed and sorry for that lady. Everybody in the queue was hearing. I thought that was very wrong.

Male

If you're registered blind or registered deaf surely your Council should know this, and not send out (inappropriate) communications.

Male

I work with special needs children who are dyspractic and dyslexic and they're sent forms and very often the language isn't clear enough for them. A whole part of the community is left out because they have really great difficulty in reading forms. I know a mother of a dyspractic child who is also dyspractic herself. She said that her and her son are sent forms and neither of them are able to read them. She said sometimes she has then got to, very embarrassed, go to a neighbour or somebody, and she wishes Council forms were sent out in simplified language.

Female

There seems to be an increasing number with Alzheimer's, how do they cope?

Female

I've put disabled, people in wheelchairs, etc. If they're not getting out of their homes, you've got to make absolutely sure that you know who the disabled people in the community are and how you're going to communicate with them.

Female

My wife's 98-year old grandfather had a lot of communication from the Council but he often misinterpreted the contents of letters altogether.

Male

Deafness is the worst of the lot. A blind person, people look at them and see they're blind. A deaf person, people look at them as if they're stupid.

Female

I think it's young people we're probably not getting through to.

Female

Question 7: Which of these services do you feel residents should be given more information about?

	1 st preference	2 nd preference	3 rd preference	TOTAL
Council Housing Services	1	2	3	6
Museums	-	3	3	6
Refuse Collection	2	3	5	10
Environmental Health	16	2	1	19
Leisure Centres	2	8	4	14
Car Parks	1	3	4	8
Allotments	1	1	-	2
Municipal Cemeteries	-	-	2	2

Comments to Consider

Five persons were undecided about this question and one expressed no second and third preferences.

The most preferred service that focus group members felt residents should be given more information about was **Environmental Health**. The overall figures reinforced this preference, which was followed by **Leisure Centres** and **Refuse Collection**.

Members had diverse views about the general communication of services that the authority provided.

Typical comments made by members included:

There doesn't seem to be much information about areas where you can go if you've got a problem, or who to contact. I've been trying to get a leaflet for a gluten-free diet. I've been to a chemist, they've got no information, I've been to the surgery, they've got no leaflets or information, I was told to go to a supermarket, and they hadn't got any information.

Female

Keeping food healthy, restaurants, etc.

Female

It's what Erewash provides, there's a grey area there about information.

Male

I'm interested in special events, exhibitions, changing the displays, what plans they've got coming (ie Museum).

Female

I find that most of my problems on the parish council are generated by Refuse Collection, the emptying of bins. It's the nuts and bolt things rather than the less common things. It's the point of delivery; it's keeping the streets clean and getting your bins emptied on time without leaving any undue amount of litter about.

Male

Recycling is a problem down at West Park. You go on a Sunday and there's literally cartons of empty plastic bottles.

Female

The Leisure Centres put on some good shows but we don't hear about them until after it's happened.

Male

Some people say there was a fantastic jazz show, but I didn't even know it was on.

Male

I've actually hired the Albion Leisure Centre in Ilkeston on three occasions for family occasions and people have been surprised. First of all that it exists and, secondly, the quality of service it provides. We've always found that the Albion Leisure Centre do a really good job at a good price. But people don't know about it. I think Erewash aren't doing themselves a service there. The staff at that place are really very good and we've had excellent service from the, but not a lot of people know about it. And they should.

Male

On previous times car-park charges have gone up I've felt I haven't been informed. I've gone to a machine in a desperate hurry to do a quick bit of shopping but I haven't got the right money. But they have put an advert in the paper this time and informed us.

Female

I've had experience recently of someone trying to get a Council place (ie house or flat) and it's been very difficult.

Female

We get leaflets through the door (about Refuse Collection), we get them stuck to the bin, we've got a calendar for the whole year, which is incredibly good. I don't think we need any more than that. They're brilliant. They really are good.

Female

Where do we obtain the mulch they make from (organic waste)? Can we get hold of it?

Male

What I'd like is more information of how they control the finances. It's not transparent enough what they do with the money.

Male

I put "Allotments" because I noticed that all of the allotments that used to be there have gone, and they are all housing estates. Have we still got allotments in the Borough?

Female

Do we have a natural burial ground in the area?

Female

Question 8: How successful or unsuccessful would you say Erewash Borough Council is in dealing with the following objectives?

Corporate Objectives	Very Successful	Fairly Successful	Neither/Nor	Fairly Unsuccessful	Very Unsuccessful	Net Rating
Developing the local economy	1	9	5	11	2	-3
Safeguarding the environment	2	13	5	6	2	+7
Promoting equality, social inclusion and accessibility	-	9	17	2	-	+7
Developing the cultural fabric and improving the quality of life	1	10	9	8	-	+3
Improving community safety and security	1	7	7	9	4	-5
Improving and promoting the health of local people	2	11	12	2	1	+10
Creating and maintaining good quality affordable homes	2	8	12	5	1	+4

Comments to Consider

There was a net successful rating for most of the Council’s corporate objectives. With a rating of +10, the authority’s initiatives aimed at **Improving and promoting the health of local people** appeared to be particularly successful. By contrast the authority’s efforts at **Developing the local economy** and **Improving community safety and security** were perceived as being unsuccessful overall, with net ratings of -3 and -5. It should be noted, however, that the majority of focus group members had a neither/nor view in respect of **Promoting equality, social inclusion and accessibility** and over a third took a similar view in respect of **Improving and promoting the health of local people** and **Creating and maintaining good quality affordable homes**.

Focus group members had more to say about Erewash Borough Council’s approach to their corporate objectives than any other subject. The authority may wish to give consideration to communicating more actively the actions it is taking to address these objectives, particularly those relating to economic development and community safety.

Typical comments made by members included:

Developing the local economy

If you look at the bottom of Bath Street (Ilkeston), from the traffic lights down, there's only one shop that's open. And there's not many more above the traffic lights up to the market place that sell anything that I would consider decent. That's just the shops.

Male

The difficulty is they don't have any sort of Special Area Status, which enables them to get grants to attract people in. And against this background I think they've been fairly successful in maintaining employment with some of the new business parks, so I think they're doing quite well in that area given that they've got no sort of incentives to offer

Male

They've wanted to build on Green Belt in Breaston. There's already a derelict site in Long Eaton, and yet they're wanting to take Green Belt, they're wanting to build again an industrial park on the other side of Breaston.

Female

We're probably all agreed that it needs to be redeveloped and bring more economy and more jobs, but why can't we actually redevelop the places that are falling down about their ears before they start taking all the fields that I used to play in as a child?

Male

Somebody was saying that the environment and the economic development weren't hand in hand. It was one department fighting against the other and not caring about the other.

Male

It's a difficult area for retailing because people shop where they want to go and they go to big centres, they don't go to local shops any more. Jobs are going abroad: Dyson, Pifco and all these people are moving abroad and there'll be no manufacturing left here virtually.

Male

I still don't think Erewash are vigorous enough in what could be.

Male

Their argument is they're taking it away from Breaston and giving it to Kirk Hallam. Fair enough, Kirk Hallam should have it and keep it, but so should Breaston.

Female

I think we've got a very good economy here at the moment. Shops are improving, I know someone's going to drag up the Lower Bath Street fiasco again, but you look around the shops in Ilkeston and the market, and I think we've got a thriving community. And that has been brought about by the Council.

Male

<i>I don't think we could say the same for Long Eaton.</i>	Female
<i>I think the effort the Borough Council has put in has been rewarded.</i>	Female
<i>I think Long Eaton itself, when they pedestrianised the area, was a total failure. It's filthy. We have a market there that's dying on its feet. I had to do a survey of the farmers' market there and I thought it was a waste of my 10 minutes going down there. Having been in business in Long Eaton for the years I have been, and seeing the deterioration of the quality of the shops, I consider Long Eaton as having been completely lost since the Urban District Council faded away and we all went to Erewash. We all actually went to Ilkeston.</i>	Male
<i>Long Eaton is suffering quite seriously from lack of attention by the Council, not only from its economy but the environment too.</i>	Male
<i>I can't understand it. How a town that was so go-ahead (Long Eaton) can finish up the way it is, is unbelievable to me.</i>	Female

Safeguarding the environment

<i>There's a lot of rules and regulations coming in from Europe, so it's probably because they're forced to.</i>	Male
<i>Generally, I would say Erewash Borough Council are trying to do all they can.</i>	Male
<i>I think, with it being a mixed Borough, inasmuch as there's two larger places and a lot of villages, you get a conflict of interests between the two areas. You get the people who want to put businesses in Breaston, but this is bitterly resented by the people who live in the rural areas.</i>	Male
<i>They do try to support local groups who are carrying out local initiatives in a small way, in a microcosmic way, in maintaining or developing the environment, and Erewash seem particularly good at that, which is supporting self-help. I've had some experience of that so I know Erewash can be very helpful in that area.</i>	Male
<i>I think the brown bin scheme has been incredibly successful. And it must be safeguarding the environment. And the papers, of course, as well. Perhaps the thing they could do is impose a bonfire ban.</i>	Female

I live in an area (where) you can't move for dog fouling and you can't move for litter. I challenged a guy (about dog fouling), who laughed and walked away. I talked to the local councillor, who talked to the local Environmental Health Department, who wrote to me with a 13-question questionnaire. I rang them and said I wasn't happy and they said "Well, what do you expect us to do? Would you, next time you see this man, follow him, demand to know his name ..." And it's a farce. It's a disgrace. And the Council are doing nothing.

Male

Since I retired I do quite a lot of walking now and I'm absolutely amazed at the state of pavements in the district. For anyone walking you really do have to watch where you're going. There's broken slabs, there's distorted pavements all over the place. Not only that, the general appearance of the town itself (Long Eaton) is very, very poor. I'm not talking about the parks, the Parks Department does an excellent job.

Male

Canal Street is almost unbelievable, the amount of muck, dog dirt, litter, leaves, the grates are absolutely choked, and I don't think they've been dealt with for years.

Female

Promoting equality, social inclusion and accessibility

I think they're fairly successful because they do an awful lot putting in ramps for wheelchairs and lifts.

Female

Different creeds and colours and races all seem to be accepted and listened to fairly equally. From that point of view the Council has done a reasonable type of job there.

Male

At the places I go there seems to be a good mix: social standing, ethnic minorities and things like that. I go to a lot of classes and things that the Council run as well as the leisure facilities, and people from all different sorts of (backgrounds) are there.

Female

Developing the cultural fabric and improving the quality of life

I'm not aware they did it.

Male

I put "Fairly successful" because we've got a very good Leisure Centre at Long Eaton and they have groups and things playing on Saturdays. And I didn't know about the Albion Centre so it sounds as though they're doing that as well, which is good.

Female

I suspect the Leisure Centres save money in the national health area because if you keep the people fit they're not going to have cost (elsewhere).

Female

Perhaps we could persuade some of our young people to visit, who wouldn't normally, to keep them off the streets and getting up to the wrong thing. To encourage them through advertising. Male

Again it's the price you have to pay. If you've got a lot of children, I've got three, but if they all want to go at the same time you've got yearly membership plus the admission charge every time, it does get quite expensive. Female

I go to a lot of the concerts at the Leisure Centre and I think some of them are absolutely wonderful. Female

Improving community safety and security

I think this is the biggest thing at the moment; it's the thing that concerns most people, especially in the villages. Long Eaton and Ilkeston do get it and they need it because they're very dangerous towns now at night. I think they could do more and should do more. Male

In Ilkeston we've got CCTV coverage, but there seems to have been an increase in vandalism, for instance, in some of the villages outside of Ilkeston. There's a question of whether CCTV cameras are pushing some of the villains away from where they're being watched. So, overall, I don't think Erewash are doing enough. Male

I put "Unsuccessful" because although the CCTV cameras are there, they're not always manned. Male

I use a car park in Derby where you punch a number into a machine, which then "arms" your car. They've never had a car stolen from that car park. And the cost is not (excessive). That to me is brilliant. Male

I couldn't find out anything about having security in my house. I had to look in the press, Yellow Pages, and I didn't see anything where Erewash was going to be able to help. There may be somewhere but I couldn't find it. I would have liked some advice. Female

An awful lot of CCTV cameras have gone up in town. That must help something, somewhere. Female

Improving and promoting the health of local people

This is definitely a discretionary function. I think they should spend their money on mandatory functions. Male

The Leisure Centre at West Park has (a day for) the over-50s and it's full. It was so full that they started a second day and that got so full they've started a third day.

Female

They did a fridge safety thing a few years ago, that was very good, advising everybody to keep their fridge below a certain temperature, and I received a free thermometer to put in my fridge. They did a big promotion. That was very good.

Female

They're enforcing the Food Safety Act, but I think they're also providing facilities to help people comply. Safe food handling, for instance, they've actually promoted courses for people who work in, say, butchers' shops and things like that. So, as well as saying "Look, you must have this" they've provided the facility to enable people to get it and get certification. The two should go together and this is what they've done.

Male

We've got a new Minor Injuries Unit at Ilkeston Hospital, which is another thing that should be publicised by Erewash Borough Council in their Viewpoint magazine: "That is available, please use it, don't go and try and get to the large hospitals".

Male

Creating and maintaining good quality affordable homes

New ones find it very hard to start off initially.

Female

A little while back in the Insight magazine they were joining up, I believe, with a housing association and putting up quite a few houses in Long Eaton.

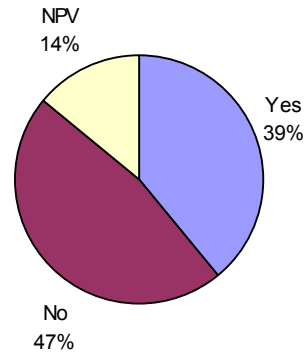
Female

They've put a lot of effort into this function.

Male

Question 9: Do you feel there are more important objectives that Erewash Borough Council should be pursuing?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	11
No	13
No Particular View	4
Total	28



Comments to Consider

Just over a third of focus group members felt there were other important objectives that Erewash Borough Council should be pursuing.

Many of the views expressed earlier by members described issues they felt the authority should also be tackling.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

The Council ought to be looking at how it spends its money and how it communicates with residents better. The only way I seem to know is when I get the rates bill, once a year. Male

There's a lot of litter spots that are never cleaned up, I pass them time and time again in a week and they're never cleaned up. Male

I know I keep getting the answer that it's nothing to do with them, but I'd like them to push for better policing. Male

Question 10: On which of these areas would you like more information about Erewash Borough Council?

Information	Frequency
The services it provides	19
Local events and activities	15
The reasons why it makes the decisions it does	23
How the Council spends its money	20
Council standards of service	14
How well the Council is performing	15
Improvements planned for services	17
How to complain	12
Who to contact to find out about services	17
Other (please specify)	-

Comments to Consider

Focus group members were able to choose any number of the above issues that were important to them.

The most common areas about which more information was requested include:

- **the reasons why the Council makes the decisions it does;**
- **how the Council spends its money; and**
- **the services it provides.**

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

I'd like to see how it performs compared to other councils. Male

Every household should have a list or handout saying exactly what services you're entitled to. Female

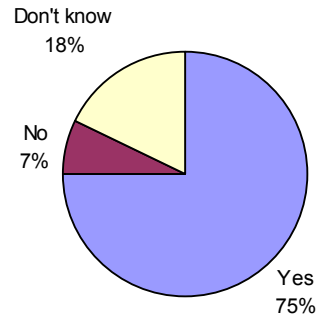
We've just recently had our rates bill and they could send us a list of all the services they actually provide with that. Male

I would like to be informed about local events and activities at the Leisure Centre. Female

I should like information on who to complain to, with a name on the end of it. Male

Question 11: Are you a recipient of the Council’s magazine *Viewpoint*?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	21
No	2
Don’t know	5
Total	28



Comments to Consider

There was a clear majority of focus group members who received the Council’s *Viewpoint* magazine.

Diverse comments about *Viewpoint* magazine were made in response to earlier questions, and these tended to be generally favourable in nature.

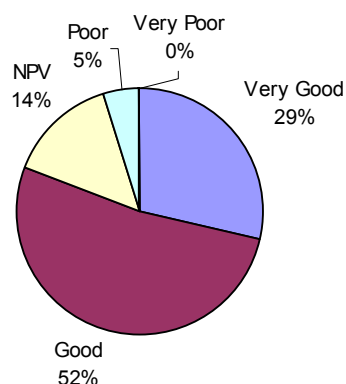
In relation to this question, one member said:

I find that in that (magazine) format it’s better than a newspaper because I put that on the shelf and say “I might want that”. If it’s a newspaper you tend to throw it.

Male

Question 12: If you are a recipient of *Viewpoint*, how do you rate its effectiveness in terms of communicating all that Erewash Borough Council does?

Answer	Frequency
Very Good	6
Good	11
No Particular View	3
Poor	1
Very Poor	-
Total	21



Comments to Consider

There was a clear majority of focus group members (81%) who felt that *Viewpoint* was an effective means of communicating all that Erewash Borough Council does.

Viewpoint magazine was regarded very highly by members, who appreciated its style, format and content, but seriously questioned the wisdom of distributing it along with free newspapers.

Typical comments made by focus group members were as follows:

Given all the information that's there, it's useful to a cross-section of the public. Male

This (ie Viewpoint) covers everyone. Female

My husband won't read it because he says it's propaganda. Female

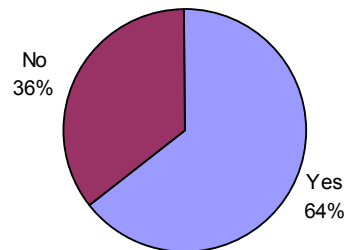
There's a distribution problem. It's very hit and miss as to whether we get free newspapers or not, it seems to depend on whose distributing them and what they feel like on the day. And that (ie Viewpoint) comes out alongside one of the free newspapers, so we might get it and we might not. Male

Viewpoint embodies all the Council does. A lot of stuff in there is well worth reading and if you read it, and take your time in reading it, you get a good idea of what the Council does. Male

All the information is in about the councillors, etc, events are in it, usually the finance, what's happening in the community, I think it's very good. Female

Question 13: Have you had occasion to contact Erewash Borough Council over any matter in the past 12 months?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	18
No	10
Total	28



Comments to Consider

There was a clear majority of focus group members (64%) who had contacted Erewash Borough Council during the previous 12 months.

Question 14: If you have contacted Erewash Borough Council in the past 12 months, how would you rate the service you received?

Service Quality Criterion	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither/Nor	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Net Rating
Reliability	6	5	4	3	-	+8
Responsiveness	7	5	3	3	-	+9
Competence	6	5	2	5	-	+6
Access	7	7	2	1	1	+12
Courtesy	8	9	-	1	-	+16
Communication	7	3	4	4	-	+6
Credibility	7	5	5	1	-	+11
Security	4	7	6	1	-	+10
Understanding the customer	6	7	2	3	-	+10
Tangibles	5	7	6	-	-	+12

Comments to Consider

Facilitators defined what was meant by each of the 10 service quality criteria indicated above before the questionnaires were completed.

Eighteen of the 28 focus group members (64%) had contacted Erewash Borough Council during the previous 12 months. Overall, members were satisfied with the service they had received, and were particularly satisfied with the **courtesy** shown by staff. Net satisfaction ratings varied from +6 to +16. Only one person expressed an indication of being “Very dissatisfied”. It should be noted that a third of members had no particular view regarding **security** and **tangibles**.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

We had our (bulky) refuse collected on two or three occasions when they said they’d come, and they came. Female

They were prompt in their service. Female

I’ve only dealt with them once and they dealt with it very well. I found the department I contacted (Environmental Health) were very prompt and they gave me the information I wanted, and they came back to me later on to see if (I was happy). I couldn’t fault them, they were very good. Male

<i>I rang up and they said “What do you want? Yes, we’ll do that”. And they came, so I thought that was very responsive.</i>	Female
<i>I’ve always found if you ask for somebody by name, you get a message to them and often they’ll ring back.</i>	Female
<i>The officers of Erewash Borough Council that I’ve confronted have been very responsive. They are doing a very good job. It seems very professional.</i>	Male
<i>They came quickly (Environmental Health), dealt with it efficiently, gave me advice and a contact number if I needed them again.</i>	Female
<i>I’ve had three occasions to contact them. One was a street lamp. I gave them a week, I didn’t say that over the phone, but they had (sorted it) in two days, no problem. Another one, a Council lorry had took the corner off a kerb, reversing around, and ripped the tarmac up. They were there in hours repairing it. Excellent service. And another one was an extension on the front of the house and the Building Inspector and Planning Officer were absolutely superb. No problem whatsoever. Brilliant service.</i>	Male
<i>I was dissatisfied. They put one of those school flashing lights outside of my house, but there’s a hole. So I phoned up the Council in Long Eaton, “No you don’t want this” and they gave me another number in Matlock, so I phoned them and they said “No you don’t want this”, so they put me through to somebody else, then I went through to somebody else and explained the situation to them. A week later I’ve still got my hole. So I managed to get back to the same lady I spoke to “Oh, haven’t they done it yet?” she said “I’ll look into it”. And she must still be looking!</i>	Female
<i>The error was rectified, and next morning the amended bill came saying I don’t owe any money.</i>	Male
<i>On one occasion I forgot to leave my wheelie bin out, and they came and found it and emptied it.</i>	Male
<i>My husband’s had several allotments for years and every time they sent a bill out they put the decimal point in the wrong place and it reads 44p and it’s supposed to be £44. And he has rung up constantly about this. And they just do not seem to understand that they are doing it wrong. And it’s gone on for years and years and years.</i>	Female

The permanent paid staff are courteous and prompt and do their best. I wouldn't say the same over whoever is my local councillor now. The predecessor was OK, I could contact him, I knew who he was but the person we've got now I haven't a clue. A different response, I think, in terms of elected members.

Male

I assure you that's not the case in the rural areas. Generally people do contact their local councillor and get good service. I know your councillors and they're two decent people.

Male

Whenever I've had dealings they've been prompt and communicated very well with me.

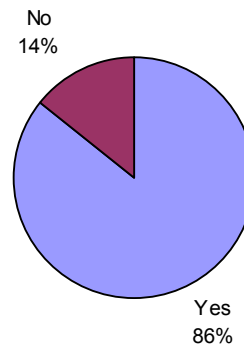
Female

If someone comes and chops my tree down, surely someone should communicate with me?

Female

Question 15: If you needed to make a complaint, comment or compliment about Erewash Borough Council, would you know how to do it?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	24
No	4
Total	28

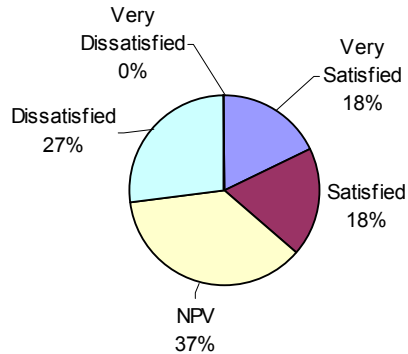


Comments to Consider

A clear majority of focus group members (86%) felt confident about making a complaint, comment or compliment about Erewash Borough Council if they needed to.

Question 16: If you have had occasion to use Erewash Borough Council’s complaints procedure, how would you rate your satisfaction with the procedure?

Answer	Frequency
Very Satisfied	2
Satisfied	2
No Particular View	4
Dissatisfied	3
Very Dissatisfied	-
Total	11



Comments to Consider

Eleven focus group members said they had had occasion to complain about Erewash Borough Council’s services at any time in the past, and seven felt able to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the procedure. There was a net satisfaction rating of +1.

Typical comments made by focus group members were as follows:

I’m very satisfied. I complained that my bin hadn’t been emptied. I rang the Council when I came home at lunchtime and I came back at 3.10 pm and they’d emptied it. So, very satisfied. Female

Sometimes I’ve complained to chaps on the collection round because some are apt to throw paper on the lawn. They won’t do it after that; it’s just the odd occasion. Female

It started off with a telephone call then that led to a series of correspondence and in the end we just gave up. It was the Finance Department; it was to do with collection of rent in a Council house, affecting my father not me, and they were just not responding to what was being said, and he got fed up with it. I was writing on his behalf. In the end he said he didn’t want to pursue it any further. Basically, they didn’t want to know. Male

I think the general complaint is that you can get bounced about a bit and the person you want is never in the office. That’s the biggest complaint. And you try and ring and find him. It’s a hard job. Male

The small problem I had was dealt with within 12 hours. I was very satisfied with the outcome. Male

Question 17: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Perception of Council	Strongly Agree	Tend to Agree	Neither/nor	Tend to Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Net Rating
The quality of Council services is good overall	8	13	2	5	-	+16
The Council is too remote and impersonal	1	8	5	10	4	-5
The Council gives residents good value for money	2	9	9	7	1	+3
The Council treats all parts of Erewash equally	-	3	12	7	6	-10

Comments to Consider

Focus group members had mixed views about this issue. A substantial proportion (75%) felt that **the quality of Council services is good overall**. A sizeable minority (46%) disagreed with the notion that **the Council treats all parts of Erewash equally** and nearly as many (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Members tended to be more evenly split over the other two issues, although both balances were in favour of the authority. However, nearly a third of members felt unable to express a positive or negative view about whether **the Council gives residents good value for money**.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

The quality of Council services is good overall

Environmental Health is particularly good.

Female

I complained about the growth of bushes over pavements, when the bushes on people's gardens are taking up half the pavement. And there's two of you can't walk together as you're having to dodge around bushes and things. Nothing has ever been done about it, and still hasn't been done about it. Tripping over pavements, nothing's ever done about it. I've tripped over in Long Eaton now eight times.

Female

The Council is too remote and impersonal

We don't know enough about how they work.

Female

If you have to deal with the Council in any department it's a brick wall. And you've got to keep hitting at it until it breaks. That's the only way you'll get at them. Otherwise, if you give up you'll get nothing. Male

I find the opposite and I've never had a problem with the Borough Council. Female

The elected members seem pretty remote and difficult to contact, and difficult to know who they are. But limited experience of contacting Council departments has been good. Male

The problem with councillors, especially the ones that have been on for some time, is that they tend to become like a club. They talk to one another a lot, but they don't tend to talk to other people. I can say that from experience; the longer you're on the more remote you get. Male

If I'd got a complaint I wouldn't know who to contact. Female

The Council gives residents good value for money

How do we know? Male

I've actually done some comparisons and the people in this area get a much better deal than in my home county. Female

I think they give good value; I've got no complaints. Male

The District Auditor gave them a very bad report this time. Male

I wouldn't know. Female

I'd like to see some comparisons so I can see whether I agree or disagree. Male

Overall we're getting good value for money. Male

If you take it over the whole of Erewash, I think we come out pretty well. Male

The Council treats all parts of Erewash equally

Ilkeston gets more money than Long Eaton. Male

The spending on the three areas is disproportionate. Those in rural areas get very little for their money. Male

Two focus group members also made written comments on their questionnaires alongside this question. These were:

- *Not enough information (to judge) regarding the last two questions.*
- *Disagree with some uses of money.*

Question 18: To what extent would you be likely to make use of the following facilities if they were provided by Erewash Borough Council?

Development Options	Very Likely	Likely	No Particular View	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Net Rating
Council payments over the Internet	2	3	3	5	15	-15
A one-stop-shop facility	10	11	4	1	2	+18
Council offices open on Saturdays	7	5	9	2	5	+5
Council offices open on Sundays	1	-	5	7	15	-21
Council offices open late on at least on weekday	4	8	7	4	5	+3
A text-messaging service	2	2	5	4	15	-15
Other (please specify)	1	-	-	-	-	+1

Comments to Consider

Focus group members expressed a strong likelihood (+18) of using a **one-stop shop facility**. However, they expressed an even greater unlikelihood (-21) of using **Council offices open on Sundays**, and were generally unlikely to make **Council payments over the Internet** or use a **text-messaging service** (both -15).

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

I use the Internet quite a lot, but not for payments Male

It's double-pay on Sundays, so it would cost us more money. Female

They should be able to cope in six days (without opening on Sundays). Male

I don't believe in opening on Sundays. Female

This is where the age group comes into it. I'm sure my sons and daughters look on Sunday as just another day. Male

Open late would be useful for me, working all the time. Female

Just being open one night a week, you would get a very crowded night that night. I wouldn't go to get something sorted out that night. Male

It's like banking. It has its use. You've got chance to get down during the week (like late-night shopping). Female

Question 19: Which of these statements best describes your attitude towards Erewash Borough Council?

Attitude	Frequency
I'm not interested in what the Council does, or whether they do their job	-
I'm not interested in what the Council does, as long as they do their job	-
I like to know what the Council is doing, but I'm happy to let them get on with their job	9
I would like to have more of a say in what the Council does, and the services it provides	17
I already work for, or am involved with what the Council does and the services it provides	1
Other	-
No Particular View	1

Comments to Consider

Basically, focus group members fell into two camps: the majority (61%) who said **I would like to have more of a say in what the Council does, and the services it provides** and a sizeable minority (32%) who said **I like to know what the Council is doing, but I'm happy to let them get on with their job**.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

<i>Let people who can do the job, do it, as long as they tell us what they're doing.</i>	Male
<i>... Before they do it.</i>	Female
<i>The Council being more open. Councillors get very introspective.</i>	Male
<i>We're going the right way forward</i>	Female
<i>If we keep asking them what they're doing and wanting to know, then it's just going to hinder.</i>	Female
<i>Everyone should be interested and have a say in things.</i>	Female
<i>I think the Council should be able to hear our view of what we need and what we feel they don't supply that they ought to. We might not be correct but they ought to hear our views.</i>	Male

I consider what we're doing today is being involved with the Council, and being on the citizens' panel. It's what we're here for.

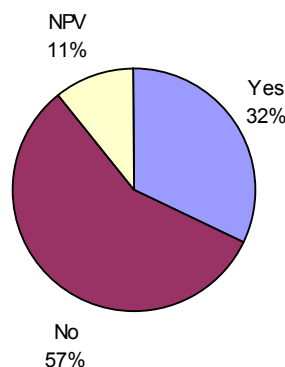
Male

One focus group member also made a comment on the questionnaire alongside this question:

- *(I would like to have more of a say in what the Council does, and the services it provides) via the Internet.*

Question 20: Are there any other comments you would like to make to help Erewash Borough Council communicate better with its residents and businesses?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	9
No	16
No Particular View	3
Total	28



Comments to Consider

Although the majority of focus group members (57%) had no additional comments to make, almost a third had further suggestions to help Erewash Borough Council communicate better with residents.

Members were particularly favourable in their views about the initiatives the authority had taken to seek the perceptions of residents, such as the citizens’ panel and the use of this focus group.

Typical comments made by members were as follows:

I think they’ve got quite a number of methods of communication that they don’t use at the minute. You see lots of billboards and bus-stop advertising and things like that, put things there. You know: what the Council’s doing, what’s coming to the Borough and what events are taking place. There’s lots of things they could use, but they don’t. Male

We had a number of complaints about Christmas time because Derby City Council put billboards up in Erewash, particularly in Ilkeston, that said “Be loyal and shop in Derby”. And the local Chamber of Trade were very unhappy about that, quite rightly. I think the ones people took most notice of were when that trader put some stickers over them that said “Be loyal and shop in Ilkeston”. And Derby City Council quickly removed those. But I think that’s indicative of how effective that might be. Male

They need to look at the role of the elected representatives in this. Male

For those of us that do read newspapers, perhaps the councillors could put a weekly or monthly editorial in. Male

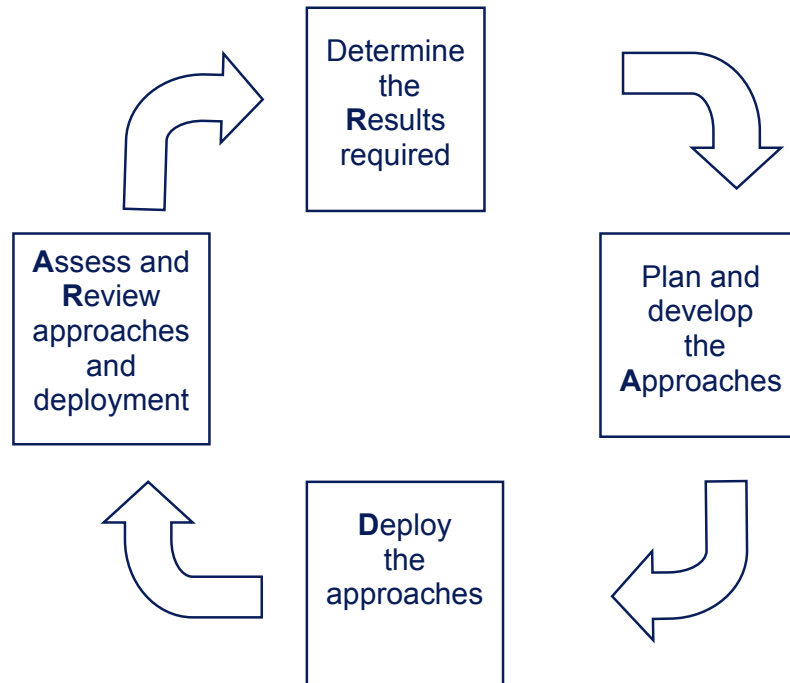
<i>With your poll tax or whatever, you could have in it who your councillor is.</i>	Female
<i>Give them a pat on the back for setting up a citizens' panel.</i>	Male
<i>The reason that we're here is proof that we're interested and we want to put our views over. They've moved in the right direction that they want to listen to us and I think the whole programme set-up is very good.</i>	Male
<i>From the point of view of being involved today I think that should continue.</i>	Male
<i>While ever we pay the rates we should be involved.</i>	Male
<i>I know I've complained a lot this morning, but can I thank the people from Erewash for doing this (ie arranging a focus group). I think this is a tremendous thing to do. I'm forever an optimist, so I'll look for better times. But it's a start and I'd like to say thank you.</i>	Male

Several focus group members also made comments on their questionnaires alongside this question. These included:

- *A regular newsletter – more often than Viewpoint – say once a month.*
- *Easy to read information – short publications – clear English.*
- *Elected councillors to be more open and pro-active with residents – between elections.*
- *More speed in dealing with things and getting it out of the way instead of shelving.*
- *We have identified for the Council today various problems that have arisen (with examples) and I feel that the Council will have to try better with their communications and must improve if they want their standards to improve.*

CONCLUSION

Whatever arrangements the authority finally decides upon for its external communications strategy and social inclusion, it is strongly recommended that it introduces some means of regularly and systematically reviewing the effectiveness of its new approaches. This would be in keeping with other aspects of the EFQM Excellence Model², at the heart of which lies the logic known as RADAR, which states that an organisation needs to:



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2 April 2002

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