

Report on User survey for Assistant Director and Cabinet Member

Background

Under the terms of the Inter-Authority Agreement, and as matter of good practice, the Archives Service aims to undertake a survey of user views at least once a year. During the year, a record is kept of any compliments and (very infrequent) complaints. However, this does not necessarily tell senior officers and members what users' views are about the details of the service.

Therefore, during the month of February 2023 all researchers who came to the service were issued with a copy of a short questionnaire about their experience. A version of this was sent to those who purchased digital copies via email but only one was returned and this has not been included in the figures as not being statistically valid. The website was in the process of being migrated from the old Northants County Council site to the new West Northants one, so it was not considered to be a good time to try to survey web users. February is a good month, however, as it is usually among the busiest in terms of physical users of the service.

A total of 75 questionnaires were returned, making one return worth less than 2%. It was felt that this gave a sufficient sample and was better than the previous year.

User satisfaction

Of the questions about user satisfaction, no-one said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Also, no-one refrained from giving an opinion. Everyone using the service was satisfied. We can be pleased to state the service has 100% user satisfaction. This has been broken down a bit further, but it is important not to lose track of the fact that to have all of your users saying they are satisfied, despite the fact that the service was at this time operating at half staffing, is an achievement. There were certainly a number of very busy days in February when researchers did not get as much time spent with them as they might have done if had not been so busy. On the other hand, users were getting the benefit of very experienced and senior staff on duty, covering for vacancies in the front-line team.

Question	Very satisfied number	Very satisfied %	Satisfied number	Satisfied %	Total
Are you satisfied with the overall service that you received today?	70	93	5	7	100%
Are you satisfied with the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff?	69	92	6	8	100%

Are you satisfied that the staff understood your needs?	71	95	4	5	100%
Are you satisfied that you were treated fairly and sensitively by our staff?	72	96	3	4	100%

Feedback on the service

All users were asked to specify what changes they would like to see; this was from a list of options based on the feedback offered last year, but with space for people to add additional comments or other thoughts. The aim was to try to make it easier to group the feedback and get a clear impression of the issues that were worrying researchers. The results were not a surprise, but it is nice to note that 35% of users did not see any need for any change or make a comment. That the overwhelming desire is for improvement to the online catalogue was expected, as this is something that the service provider, working with the service has failed to resolve to date. Some resolutions are proposed in the final section.

What changes would you like us to consider about the way we deliver our service?	Numbers	Percentages
Nothing comes to mind	25	29%
Improvement to online catalogue	25	29%
More catalogues online	15	17%
More document images online to assist researchers outside the County	17	19%
Clearer service standards so I know what I can expect	0	0%
No Comment	5	6%

In addition, many researchers chose to leave comments, and 19% of these were to make written comments about the staff. These included, 'Excellent facility and friendly helpful staff', 'Thanks to all the staff for answering enquiries and great help! Everyone was very friendly', and 'Very helpful and willing to go above and beyond'. 17% made comments about the online catalogue, mainly about its speed but some asking for more detail. The latter is simply not possible because of resources, the former can be addressed if the authority is willing to spend some money and set up a new contract to enable an upgrade to be done.

Five people did comment on the opening hours, saying that these were too limited to meet their needs. The points were reasonable. However, with current levels of resourcing there is simply no way that the desire for longer opening hours could be addressed. Nor does a 6% interest in change (with only one person mentioning lunchtime opening, for example) suggest this is a top priority for users.

Four people expressed their concern about the cold in the public rooms in the strongest terms. One researcher even knitted staff fingerless gloves, she was so distressed at how cold everyone looked! Luckily this immediate situation seems to have been addressed, though the longer-term situation with the gas boiler has not yet been resolved. There were a few other random requests, such as for a coffee machine or tea maker, neither of which are economically viable given the numbers visiting.

Conclusions

AS before, the speed of the online catalogue is a source of most frustration to researchers. In the period between the two surveys, work has been done with the software supplier to try to address the issues. Although overall the service feels that the speed had improved, it has become clear that the only way to address the issue is for an upgrade to the whole software. Given the poor level of service provision the service has experienced from the supplier Adlib, an investigation has been done into alternative archive software packages. However, Adlib (now run by Axiell) has made a reduced quote for the upgrade as an incentive to remain with them. A short note has been prepared for Procurement and this will be followed through the appropriate channels. The old software system will no longer be supported from the end of the year, so a decision is required swiftly in any case.

Otherwise, it is simply pleasing to note the positive nature of the survey results.

S Bridges

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