

# **Influencing the Future of Forestry**

## **Online Questionnaire Feedback**

Prepared to accompany the Dialogue App Discussion.

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## **1 Abbreviations**

EEFD – East England Forest District

FC – Forestry Commission

FDP – Forest Design Plan

HEC – Harnessing the Energy of the Community

IPF – Independent Panel on Forestry

PFE – Public Forest Estate

## **2 Introduction: Harnessing the Energy of the Community**

### **2.1 Overview**

Harnessing the Energy of the Community (HEC) is one of four projects responding to the direction set by the Independent Panel on Forestry (IPF) on community engagement, transparency and accountability, which was adopted by the Government Woodland Policy Statement. It specifically aims to trial ways of supporting stakeholders to feed into the FEE strategic decision making process at a district level.

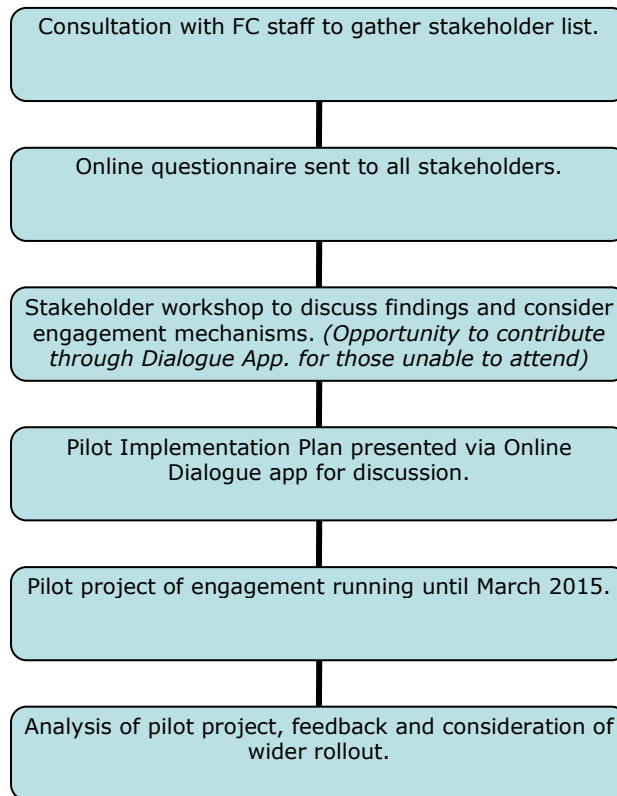
At the heart of this project is the fulfilling of the Forestry Commission's (FC) commitment to the many communities and organisations that have a stake in the Public Forest Estate (PFE). It recognises the energy of those who campaigned for the PFE and the input from stakeholders who helped shape the options and recommendations that informed the Government response to the IPF report.

### **2.2 Project Aims**

The HEC project aims are to:

- Develop a broader perspective and understanding between the FC and stakeholders to increase transparency in what we do and clarify accountability.
- Explore different means and depths of involvement alongside stakeholders to learn what practically does or doesn't work together.
- Bring stakeholders alongside the FC to share in the responsibility of strategic decisions about the East England Forest District (EEFD) at a district level.

During the course of 2014 and up until March 2015 the FC will be running a pilot project within the East England Forest District (EEFD) to test ways to achieve these project aims. This is being achieved through the following process:



## 2.3 Work to Date

Work so far has focused on drawing together feedback from stakeholders and FC staff in order to create baseline data to understand the current position in regards to stakeholder engagement. This was carried out through interviews and a questionnaire; “Influencing the Future of Forestry”. The baseline data helps clarify where there is need for change to improve performance in engagement, transparency and accountability.

## 2.4 Workshop and Workshop Online Discussion

A workshop held on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May presented the main findings from the questionnaire. Participants provided more detailed feedback on the findings and discussed suitable methods of engagement to test using initiatives that are relevant to EEFD. An online discussion is also being held on Dialogue App to allow stakeholders who were unable to attend to discuss the questionnaire findings.

The feedback gathered will be used to develop and refine the pilot project and to test the effectiveness of engagement mechanisms within the EEFD from Summer 2014 to March 2015.

Once this work has been completed, a roll out Nationally across all Districts will be considered based on the successes and refinements required. It will be the responsibility of the Forest Management Directors within each District to consider how to apply the findings from this pilot project.

### **3 Current stakeholder engagement within the East England Forest District**

The FC works with a wide variety of stakeholders in different ways. A stakeholder analysis was carried out with FC staff from each beat and operational area to begin to identify the people and organisations that have a stake in the PFE. Interviews with staff were carried out to establish what the current methods of engagement are.

The stakeholder analysis helped established gaps in stakeholder representation, which allowed us to identify where additional outreach was required.

Below are the main methods of engagement used currently on a regular basis.

#### **3.1 One to One Contact**

EEFD staff have a network of interest groups, local authority contacts, contractors, landowners and delivery partners they are in regular contact with. FC staff are often a first or regular point of contact for local communities, groups and visitors to the forest.

#### **3.2 Forest Design Plans**

Forest Design Plans (FDP) are reviewed for each forest over a period of time and new plans are made available for consultation. Some plans are available online with the FDP process explained.

#### **3.3 Volunteering**

Volunteering happens throughout the district with the EEFD recruiting volunteers for specific jobs and projects and also working with other organisations to work with external volunteer groups.

#### **3.4 Working in Partnership**

EEFD has agreements with a number of organisations and community groups which help deliver activities, manage areas of the PFE and provide a service. Examples of this are the working relationship EEFD has with different bike groups across the district who help maintain and create trails and promote good cycling practice on the PFE.

#### **3.5 Events**

The EEFD hold a variety of events and activities at its Forest Centres. The majority of activities and events are initiatives promoted and organised in partnership with the FC National Team, for example the national concerts programme and more recently the Gruffalo Birthday Party.

#### **3.6 Permissions**

Permission can be applied for by individuals or organisations to hold an event or activity on the PFE. The FC can charge for the grant of permission but the charge depends on the

size and nature of the event, the location and whether there are any existing agreements between the FC and the applicant.

The permission system results in a huge variety of recreational activities and events taking place in the PFE and involves all departments in the FC to work together to ensure activities don't clash and any restrictions, operations and health and safety are observed.

### **3.7 Communication**

The FC website is managed with a national focus. Individual forest web pages exist in a set format for ease of navigation for users and ease of management. There is no general district level online communication.

### **3.8 Consultation**

Paper questionnaires and relatively new software called "Dialogue App" and "Citizen Space" which manage online discussions and questionnaires may be used to consult on issues and new initiatives.

## **4 Influencing the Future of Forestry: Summary of Questionnaire Feedback**

The online questionnaire "Influencing the Future of Forestry" ran from the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 to the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2014. It aimed to create baseline data to improve our understanding of how transparent stakeholders felt the FC was and how well we engaged and demonstrated accountability. It also asked questions about stakeholder's main interest areas and their current and preferred levels of engagement in order to put responses on accountability and transparency into context. This helped identify areas of more specific need and where we needed to target improvement. The questionnaire was produced in consultation with Forest Research to try and make sure the questionnaire was as impartial as possible.

### **4.1 Online Questionnaire Distribution**

- The questionnaire was targeted at stakeholders in the PFE in the EEFD. District staff from each beat and operational areas identified stakeholders in their field of work as part of a stakeholder analysis.
- The stakeholder analysis helped identify gaps in stakeholder representation and allowed action to be taken to help address this.
- Stakeholders responding to the questionnaire were invited to suggest other stakeholders who should be sent the questionnaire.
- Over 200 people representing 121 community and interest groups and organisations were directly contacted and invited to complete the questionnaire.
- 153 completed questionnaires were received back.
- A hard copy of the questionnaire was made available for those who could not or did not want to use the online version.

### **4.2 Summary of Questionnaire Feedback**

A detailed analysis of questionnaire data is currently being developed by Forest Research to provide a robust assessment of the responses. However, we are keen to incorporate stakeholders views on the questionnaire findings. Below is a summary to inform responses to the online feedback exercise. For a graphical breakdown of the data please refer to Appendix 1.

#### **4.2.1 Stakeholder Interests**

Out of 153 responses 61% indicated their main interest was in Recreation, 31% in Environment and Conservation, 5% in Timber and 3% in Business.

#### ***Points to consider***

- There were fewer timber customers / business stakeholders identified than other stakeholders so we can expect a lower response from stakeholders in this area. However follow up interviews are proposed to gather more detailed feedback.



- Additional comments indicate that respondents had more than one interest and while establishing main interests has helped guide thinking around improvements it is acknowledged that people's interest in the forest is diverse and interlinked.

#### **4.2.2 Contributing Skills**

Responses to this question reveal the wide range of skills, experience and knowledge represented by the stakeholders surveyed. Key potential contributions from stakeholders relate to:

- local knowledge (59%)
- specialist knowledge (56%)
- local contacts (50%)
- communication opportunities (31%).

#### **Points to consider and recommendations**

Respondents were also invited to identify other areas of potential contribution. There were 50 relevant responses. About half of the responses related to available resources that could contribute to sustainable forest management activities, for example environmental volunteering resources and coordination and environmental management. Other responses related to offers of advice, expertise and organisational skills in support of District activities, for example, leadership of organised recreation activities and events, provision of advice (e.g. in support of community engagement activities, and managing for public access), advocacy, the delivery of forest-based education activities, and knowledge and expertise around environmental and habitat management.

#### **4.2.3 Engagement**

**"The Forestry Commission enables me / my organisation to influence and contribute to the decisions that affect us."**

41% (n=62) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, indicating that a significant proportion of stakeholders surveyed feel that they can exert influence over decision-making processes within the District.

**"I am / my organisation is able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience to Forestry Commission activities."**

A significantly higher proportion, 73% (n=111), feel able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience.

#### **Points to consider and recommendations**

There is a statistically significant difference between the proportion of stakeholders who feel able to influence decision-making and the proportion who feel able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience. This suggests that the District / FC is perhaps more successful

at facilitating engagement around delivery, as opposed to governance and decision-making at a strategic level. Efforts to close this 'gap' could constitute a potential area of focus within the Pilot project.

A number of stakeholders highlight the value of direct contact with FC staff. The Pilot project should aim to explore and understand this in more detail, and this should also be a key focus of the evaluation.

#### **4.2.4 Accountability**

##### **"There are clear standards which the Forestry Commission must meet?"**

68% of respondents (n=104) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, indicating that the majority of stakeholders surveyed feel that there are clear standards that the FC must meet.

##### **"I have enough information to judge whether the Forestry Commission are meeting these standards."**

Opinion was fairly evenly split on this question. Whilst 31% either agreed or strongly agreed, 28% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 41% gave a neutral response. This suggests that the provision of information relating to standards and performance are potential areas of improvement.

##### **"I don't know how to raise awareness of unsatisfactory performance by the Forestry Commission"**

A higher proportion (44%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed than disagreed or strongly disagreed (33%) with the statement. This highlights the potential for improvement in publicising appropriate channels for stakeholders to report good / poor performance.

#### ***Points to consider and recommendations***

The survey results show that whilst many stakeholders know that the FC is directed by clear performance standards, there are significant proportions who feel they do not have adequate information to judge the FC's performance, and are uncertain of the the procedures for notifying when performance standards are not being met.

The qualitative responses in relation to accountability improvements bear out the results of the closed questions, with respondents calling for improvements in terms of communication and information provision relating to standards and performance, more open and transparent business processes, and increased consistency across sites.

Accountability should be a central design feature of the Pilot project. A suggestion would be for each initiative to develop / publicise clear performance targets and standards as well as clearly defined procedures that for judging performance and raising concerns over poor performance. The evaluation should also incorporate accountability performance indicators.

#### **4.2.5 Transparency**

##### **"The Forestry Commission is an open and easy organisation to approach for information"**

46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, whilst 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. 37% gave a neutral response.

##### **"The Forestry Commission demonstrates clear processes and procedures in carrying out its work and in making decisions."**

Whilst only 20% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, the remaining proportion of stakeholders were split between a neutral (40%) and positive (40%) responses.

##### **"It is difficult to understand how decisions are made within the Forestry Commission regarding my area of interest"**

Opinion was fairly evenly split between those agreeing (33%) and disagreeing (32%), with 35% responding neutrally.

These findings highlights significant scope for improvements in relation to transparency in decision-making.

#### ***Points to consider and recommendations***

The survey results indicate clear opportunities for improvement in relation to transparency, particularly with regard to decision-making procedures.

The qualitative responses in relation to transparency improvements are similar to those covering accountability (see above), with responses split between requests for better communication and information provision, more clarity and transparency in relation to business process, and comments that highlight the value placed on direct access to FC staff.

In terms of the Pilot project, improvements in accountability and transparency as they relate to decision-making should constitute a key area of focus. In addition, a strong emphasis should be placed on communication and information provision so that external stakeholders can understand decision-making processes and assess how best to engage with them.

The Pilot evaluation should include specific measures relating to transparency in decision-making.

#### **4.2.6 Where stakeholders go for information**

The FC website (62%) and FC staff (70%) were clear preferred information sources. With local information boards and district office coming well behind in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

The results highlight the importance of FC staff and the website as sources of information.

#### 4.2.7 Levels of Engagement

Stakeholders were asked to indicate where they felt their current level of engagement was with the FC and what level of engagement they would like in the future.

A majority of respondents said they currently had a low level of involvement with the FC but the results indicated a general aspiration amongst stakeholders to be more engaged, both in relation to consultations on strategic issues, and involvement in developments at strategic and delivery levels.

This feedback supports and drives the aims and objectives of the Harnessing the Energy of the Community project.

### 4.3 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>⊕<b>Influencing decisions:</b> 41% (majority) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the FC enabled stakeholders to influence and contribute to the decisions that affected them.</p> <p>⊕<b>Contribute skills:</b> 73% agreed / strongly agreed they were able to contribute their skills, knowledge and experience to FC activities.</p> <p>⊕<b>Standards:</b> 68% agreed or strongly agreed there were standards that the FC needed to meet.</p> <p>⊕<b>Approachable:</b> 46% (majority) of respondents felt the FC were an open and easy organisation to approach for information but 37% were undecided on this.</p>	<p>⊖<b>Information to judge:</b> Respondents appeared unsure as to whether they have enough info to judge whether FC are meeting those standards. 40% (majority) neither agreed or disagreed when asked if they did.</p> <p>⊖<b>Clear decisions:</b> 41% (majority) neither agreed or disagreed that the FC demonstrates clear processes and procedures in carrying out its work and making decisions. 39% agreed or strongly agreed that they did.</p> <p>⊖<b>Decisions around interests:</b> 35% (majority) neither agreed or disagreed that it was difficult to understand how decisions were made around their area of interest compared to 32% who disagreed or strongly disagreed and 29% who agreed / strongly agreed.</p> <p>Low response from stakeholders in forest operations, timber and business.</p> <p>Stakeholders who have an established relationship with the FC may have a better level of engagement than those who haven't.</p> <p>Stakeholder focus appears to be on local area or specific interests rather than district or strategic decisions.</p>

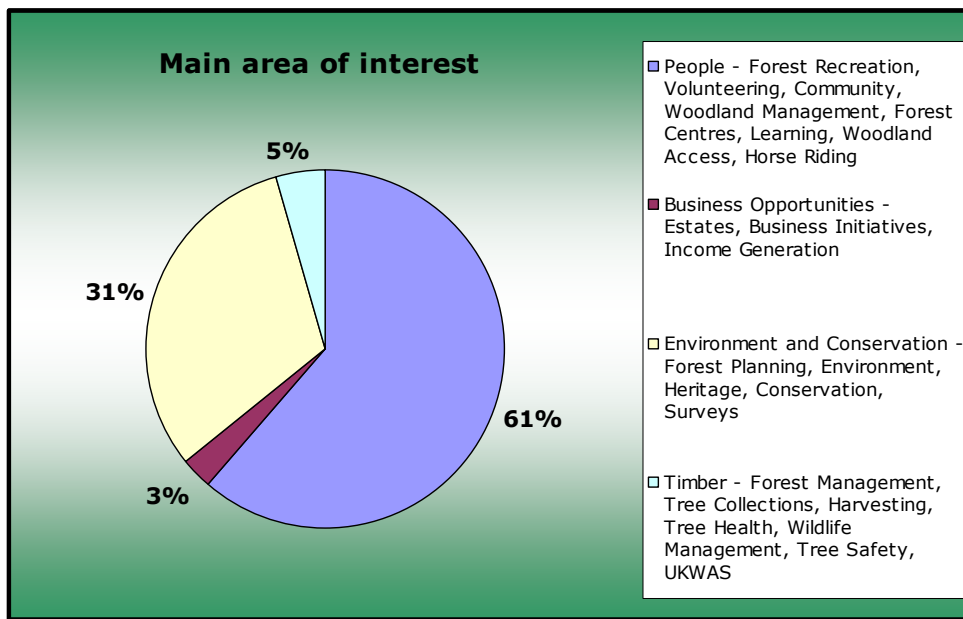
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<p>Stakeholders feel they can offer local or specific knowledge and contacts.</p> <p>Most preferred way finding information is through FC staff or the FC web page. Two readily available resources!</p>	<p>⊗<b>Unsatisfactory performance:</b> 44% agreed or strongly agreed that they didn't know how to raise awareness of unsatisfactory performance by the FC. 23% neither agreed or disagreed. 33% agreed that they did know how.</p> <p>There are limited capacity and resources with in the FC and stakeholder groups.</p>

*See Appendix 1 for responses on all questions*

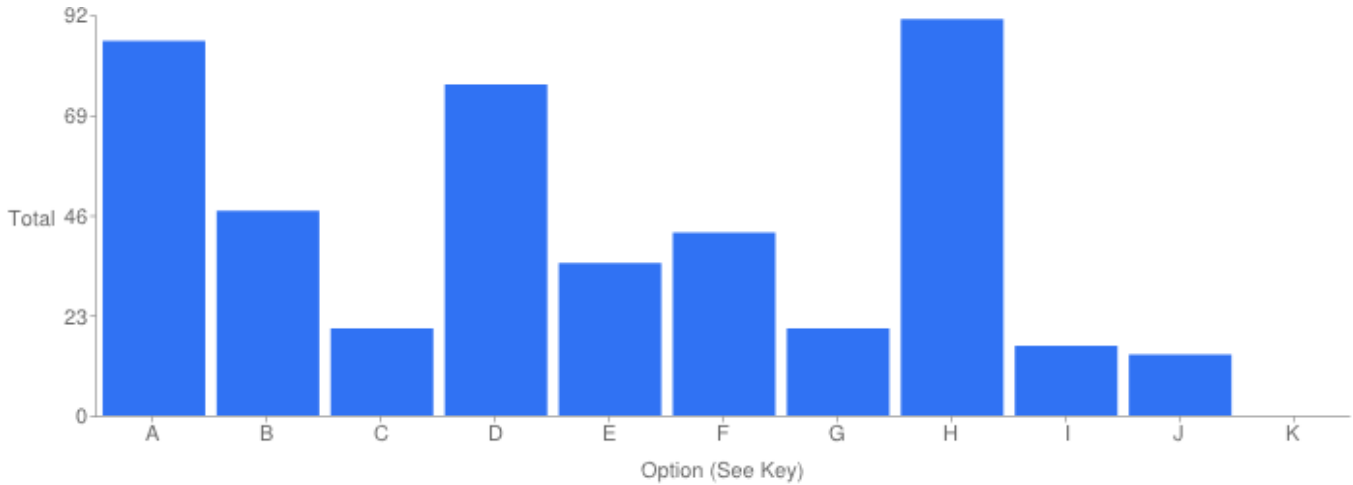
## 5 Appendix 1

### 5.1 Questionnaire Feedback

Question 1: Please indicate which main area of FC business you are interested in. Please select one of the four options below. Your choice here is important as subsequent questions may ask you to refer to your main area of interest



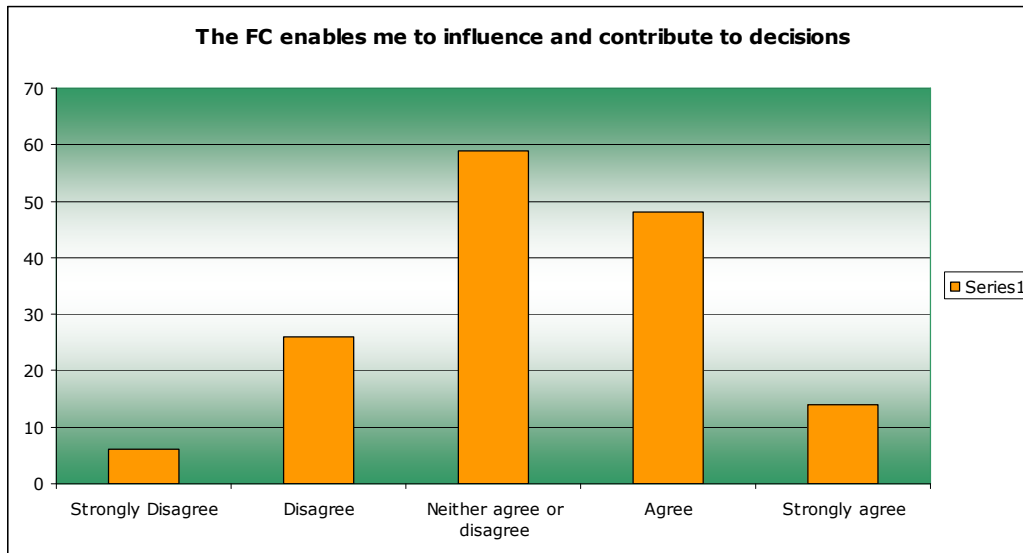
Question 2: What skills, experience and opportunities can you contribute to the management of the Public Forest Estate? Tick all that apply.



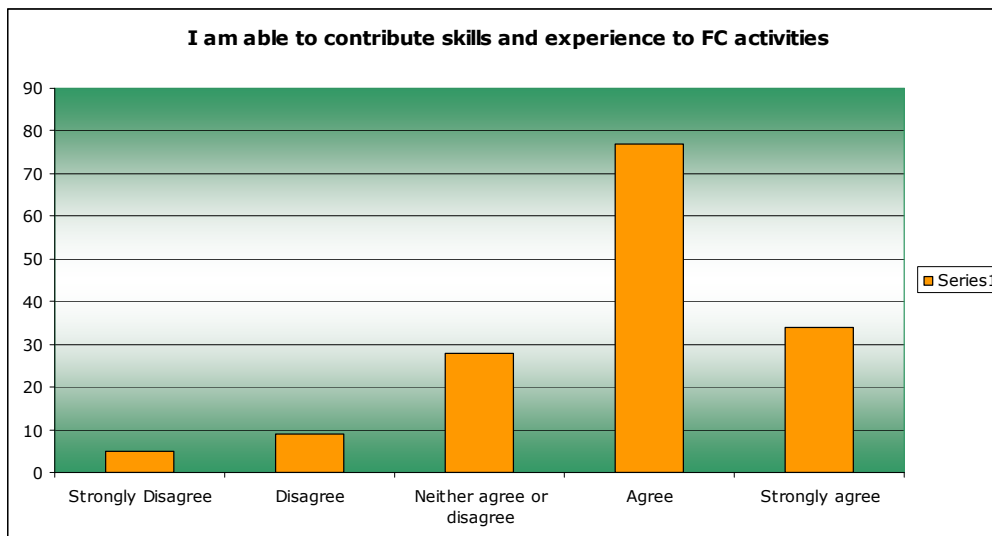
Key	Option	Total	% of all
A	Specialist Knowledge	86	56.21
B	Communication Opportunities	47	30.72
C	Fund Raising	20	13.07
D	Local Contacts	76	49.67
E	Publicity	35	22.88
F	Project Delivery	42	27.45
G	Income Generation	20	13.07
H	Local Knowledge	91	59.48
I	None Known	16	10.46
J	Other	14	9.15
K	Not Answered	0	0

Question 3: Stakeholder engagement is the process by which the FC involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes or who can influence the implementation of its decisions. Based on your experience with the FC, in regard to your interest area indicated in question 1, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

**The FC enables me / my organisation to influence and contribute to the decisions that affect us**



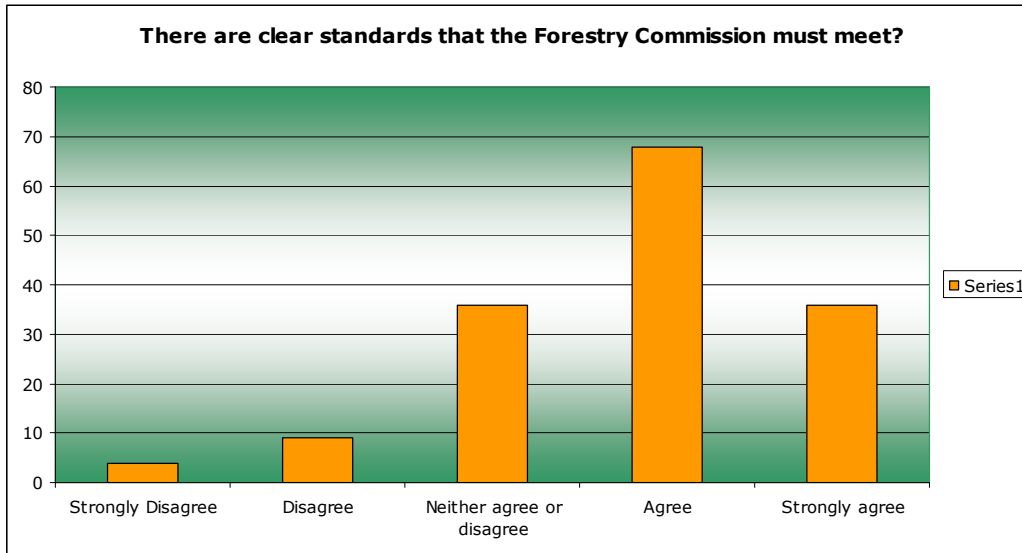
**I am / my organisation is able to contribute skills, knowledge and experience to FC activities.**



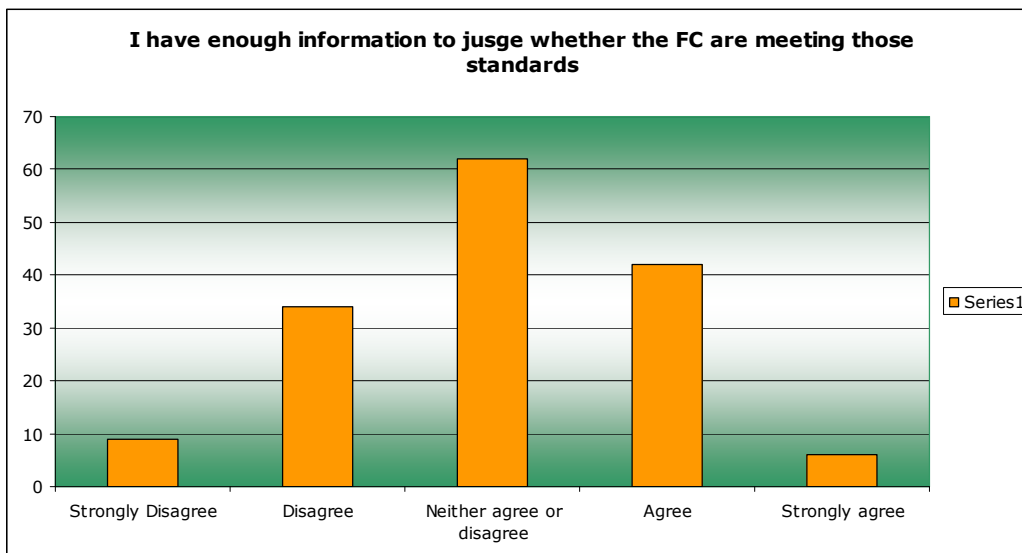


Question 4: The FC needs to be held accountable for the decisions it makes and the actions it takes according to established standards. Based on your experience with the FC, in regard to your interest areas indicated in question 1, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

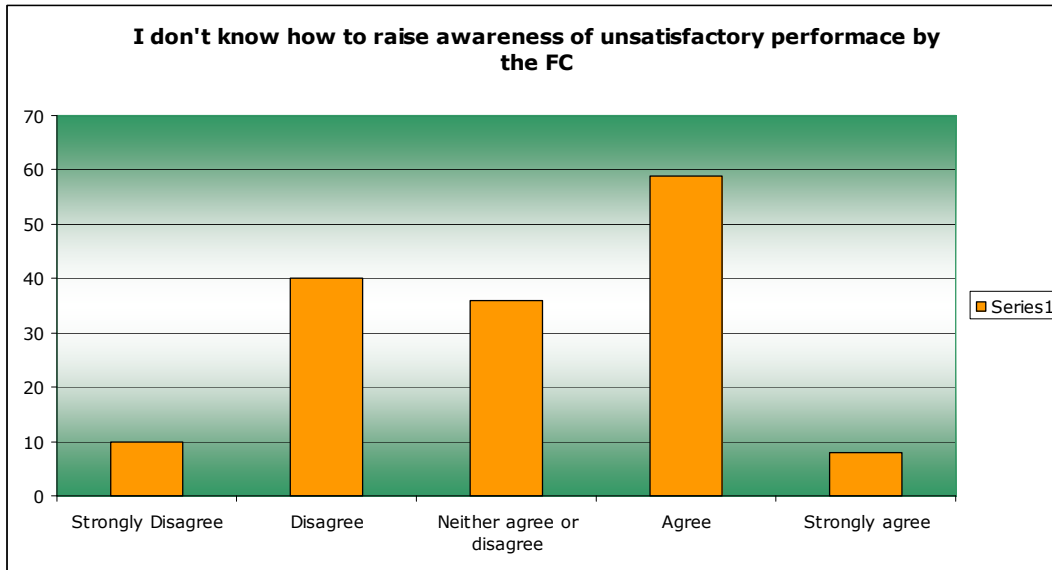
**There are clear standards which the FC must meet?**



**I have enough information to judge whether the FC are meeting these standards.**

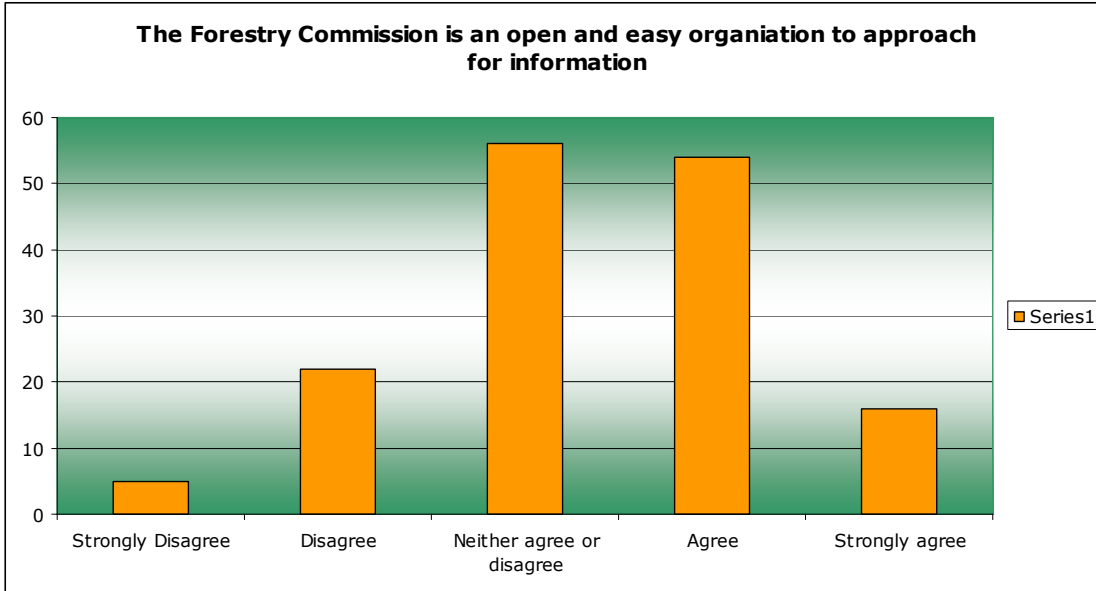


**I don't know how to raise awareness of unsatisfactory performance by the FC**

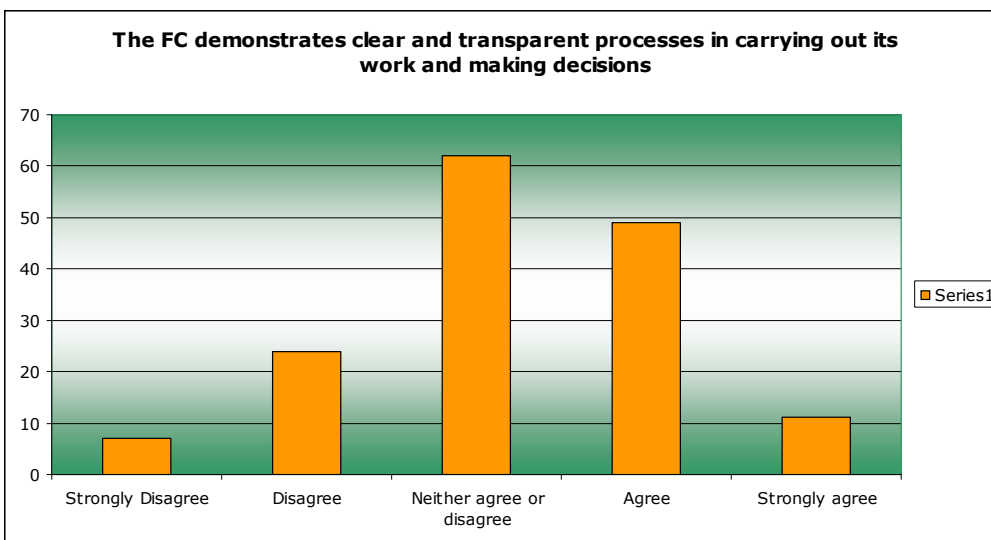


Question 5: Transparency is an essential ingredient of accountability. If an organisation is transparent, people outside the organisation can understand how decisions are made and how they can influence those decisions. Based on your experience with the FC, in regard to your interest areas indicated in question 1, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

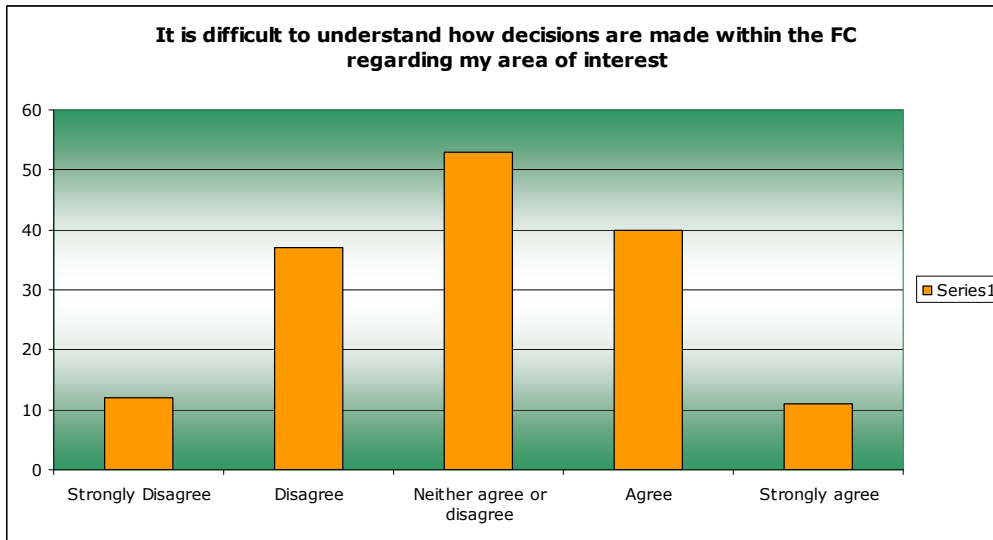
**The FC is an open and easy organisation to approach for information**



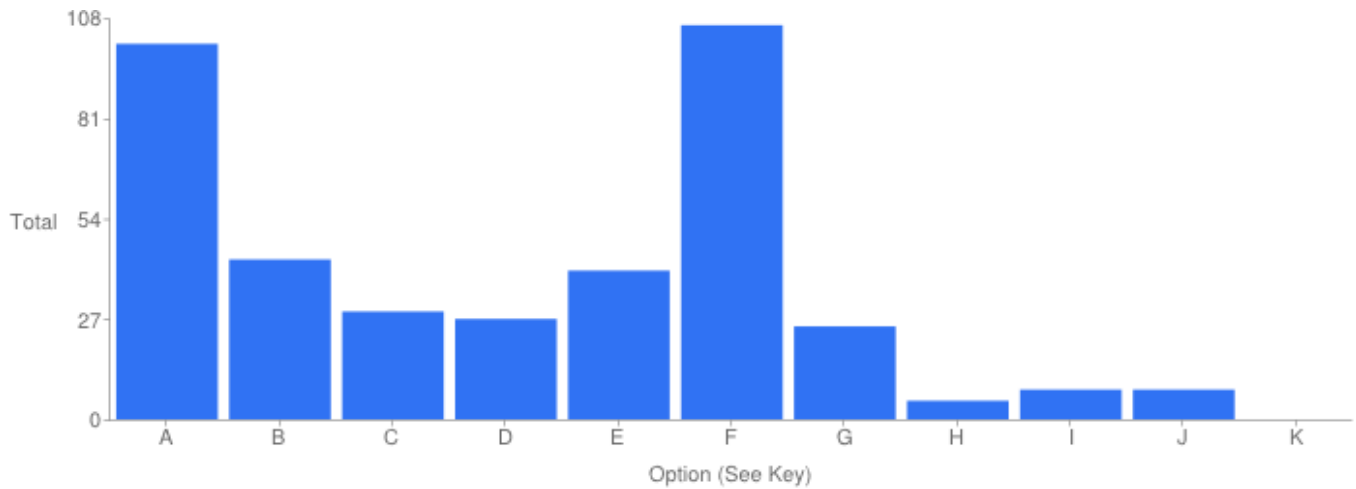
**The FC demonstrates clear processes and procedures in carrying out its work and in making decisions**



**It is difficult to understand how decisions are made within the FC regarding my area of interest**



Question 6: Based on your interest areas indicated in question 1, Please indicate from the list below where you normally go for information about the FC. Tick all that apply



Key	Option	Total	% of all
A	The FC website	101	66.01
B	Information boards at FC sites	43	28.10
C	Other organisations	29	18.95
D	Information leaflets	27	17.65
E	District office	40	26.14
F	FC staff	106	69.28
G	Regular meetings	25	16.34
H	Telephone information line	5	3.268
I	Your local authority	8	5.229
J	Other	8	5.229
K	Not Answered	0	0