

## FIRST LOOK – FINDINGS FROM PET OWNER FOCUS GROUPS

During November 2014 we carried out two focus groups with 14 pet owners in total. All those we spoke to had visited their vet at least twice in the last year, and all owned at least one domestic pet (mostly dogs).

Here is a quick look at the headline results.

- Most were positive about their experiences of vets and were loyal to their own particular vet – this is not a service they would shop around for and pet owners would have to be very unhappy to change vets.
- Convenience and word-of-mouth recommendations were the key factors in determining pet owners' choice of veterinary practice. The attribute they appreciated most about their vet was a caring attitude towards their pet, followed by the vet's knowledge and professionalism, friendly staff and convenient appointments.
- Pet owners tended to place a great deal of trust in vets – they saw vets as being caring people, and part of a reputable profession that was valued more highly than bankers and politicians, and often better than dentists, lawyers or accountants. Vets were on a par, or even above, doctors in terms of the trust placed in them.
- Concern about the costs of veterinary care was the main area of complaint. Vet services were thought to be expensive, with little transparency about costs. Some questioned whether vets might suggest treatments that were not strictly necessary. Yet vets have a captive market – even those who were concerned about costs were unlikely to consider shopping around for cheaper services (although some would shop around for cheaper pet health products).
- Pet owners would welcome greater transparency about the costs of veterinary services, including displaying prices in the waiting room and standardised pricing schemes. Some would like the option of payment plans, enabling them to spread the cost of large, unexpected bills.