

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 17 AUGUST 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Barned, Beerling, Mrs Hinder, Sharp,
Verrall and Vizzard

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from Councillor
Yates

13. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast

Resolved: That all items be web-cast.

14. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Yates.

15. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Mrs Hinder was substituting for Councillor Yates.

16. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Councillor English was a visiting Member with an interest in agenda item 8, 'Interview with Councillor Richard Ash, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, concerning his plans and priorities for his portfolio'.

It was noted that Councillor Chittenden was a visiting Member with an interest in agenda items:

- 8, Interview with Councillor Richard Ash, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, concerning his plans and priorities for his portfolio.
- 9, Interview with Councillor Ben Sherreard, Cabinet Member for Environment, concerning his plans and priorities for his portfolio.
- 10, First Quarter Performance Monitoring: Street Cleansing. Interview with Jonathan Scott, Environment Manager; and
- 11, First Quarter Performance Monitoring: Park and Ride. Interview with Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Development.

17. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were none

18. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

Resolved: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

19. Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 June 2010

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 15 June 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

20. Interview with Councillor Richard Ash, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, concerning his plans and priorities for his portfolio

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Richard Ash, Cabinet member for Leisure and Culture, to the meeting.

Councillor Spearink, of Staplehurst Parish Council, asked Councillor Ash about his plans to reduce the size of the museum's collection. Councillor Ash said he would provide a written reply. It was explained to the Committee that the intention was to reduce the size of the collection by loaning or selling duplicate exhibits. He confirmed the proceeds of any sale would be retained by the Council.

Allotments

Members were informed that the council paid £11,000 a year towards the cost of managing the allotments and plot rental was £25 per year. Members felt the rental fee was low and suggested it should be increased. Councillor Ash said the rental fees had to be fair and agreed that the charges could be reviewed. He said he was touring the allotments on 9 September and invited Members to accompany him.

Members heard some plots were being subdivided and questioned whether this meant more allotments were needed. Councillor Ash thought this was likely, but added there were many cases where people were unable to tend a full sized plot and subdivision meant the plot was fully used.

It was highlighted that a draft allotment strategy had been produced some time ago, but this had not been progressed and agreed to circulate this to the Committee.

Cemetery and crematorium

Councillor Ash informed the Committee that while the chapel and a building at the entrance to the cemetery needed substantial maintenance, funds were not available to carry out the work required. In the current financial climate he could not predict when that work might be possible.

Members heard that the ongoing work on headstone safety was almost complete. There had been some adverse comments as work had progressed, but most people appeared satisfied with the results. A Member stated that some gravestones appeared to be more secure than others. Councillor Ash said that all gravestones had been checked and were safe, although some did lean a little. Members asked Councillor Ash to provide the specifications for installation of gravestones.

It was highlighted by a Member that when he had contacted bereavement services, staff had been unable to tell him the capacity of the chapel or what the charges were. He also felt the 'on hold' music played was inappropriate. He believed steps had been taken to remedy these points but asked Councillor Ash to check this had been done.

Councillor Ash highlighted that the recent £1.29 million investment in the crematorium had created excellent facilities for staff and for visitors, and the site could now cremate larger people. Members asked how the current charges compared with other crematoria, and how the Council could increase the income generated by these improved facilities. Councillor Ash said he intended to ensure funeral directors were aware of the improvements. He added that David Edwards, Director of Change and Planning and the Environment and Councillor Denise Joy had recently visited Medway crematorium and had ideas on how additional income could be generated. Members asked for a copy of their report.

Parks and Open Spaces

Councillor Ash said that £50,000 had previously been secured to provide a play area near the walled garden in Mote Park, but he believed this funding had been withdrawn. He said children from Oakwood Park, St Simons Stock and The Astor of Hever schools had submitted a plan to the Red Bull company to build a BMX dirt track in Mote Park as part of a competition. This had been successful and the facility should be built later this year at no capital cost to the council, although there would be small ongoing maintenance costs.

In response to questions, Councillor Ash commented that:

- The footfall in parks and open spaces was measured electronically;
- Footfall for Mote Park in the first quarter last year had increased significantly but had dropped this year, although generally numbers were increasing each year;
- There were litter problems in Brenchley Gardens, created by people not using the bins provided;
- In September he should know if the Heritage Lottery Fund would provide funding for further improvements in Mote Park;
- In future, spending would be prioritised so that some parks such as Mote Park, Whatman Park and Clare Park could be maintained to a high standard, while others would be maintained to a good standard;
- The Council would have to consider reducing the number of smaller play areas to enable the remaining ones to be maintained to a high

standard. This would be subject to discussion and would be part of a long term strategy over a period of five years or more.

Resolved: That:

- a) Members who want to accompany Councillor Ash on his tour of allotments on 9 September were to inform Les Smith, Overview and Scrutiny Officer;
- b) Councillor Ash to provide a written reply to Councillor Spearink, of Staplehurst Parish Council, concerning his plans for disposal of duplicate museum exhibits;
- c) The current charges for allotments be reviewed to ensure they are fair and provide value for money for the Council;
- d) How to raise awareness of the improved facilities at the crematorium be considered;
- e) An update on the application to the Heritage lottery for funding for Mote Park be provided; and
- f) The following information was requested:
 - i) A copy of the draft allotment strategy be provided;
 - ii) The specification for erection of headstones in the cemetery be provided;
 - iii) Confirmation that staff have details of the facilities at the cemetery and crematorium be provided; and
 - iv) A copy of David Edwards' and Councillor Joy's report of their visit to Medway crematorium be provided.

21. Interview with Councillor Ben Sherreard, Cabinet Member for Environment, concerning his plans and priorities for his portfolio

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Sherreard, Cabinet member for Environment, to the meeting.

Councillor Sherreard informed the Committee about the priorities for his portfolio and Members questioned him as follows:

Waste services

Councillor Sherreard informed the committee about the recent changes to the freighter service, following the best value review of waste. Material that could be recycled would no longer be accepted by the freighter service. Changes to the service had been publicised on the website, by leaflets and through the Downs Mail. Officers would travel with the freighter for the first ten weeks of operation to resolve any problems arising from the changes.

A Member said some residents were fly-tipping garden waste instead of recycling it. Councillor Sherreard said ensuring residents knew about the recycling service should reduce this.

The new litter enforcement contract had been operating for four weeks, and:

- The contract was intended to be self financing;
- 460 fines had been issued, of which half had already been paid;
- Most fines were paid when a reminder was sent two weeks after issue of the fine;
- The Council would pursue non payment; and,
- Councillor Sherreard would inform the Committee of the minimum age for issuing a litter enforcement fine.

Parking

A Member asked if the recent announcement to ban clamping of cars on private land would affect the Council's enforcement of parking offences. Councillor Sherreard said he believed Council car parks were public land. He added the council does not currently use clamps, but that consideration was being given to towing away cars that had been left illegally parked for a long period and had acquired multiple parking tickets as a result.

In response to a Member concern, Councillor Sherreard agreed to examine the restrictions preventing residents with permits parking in adjacent zones.

Air Quality

Members were told the Air Quality Monitoring Action Plan (AQMAP) had been published for consultation. In response to a question, Councillor Sherreard said he would provide details of the number and location of air quality monitoring sites in the Borough, and confirmation that KCC provide the Borough with relevant information from the monitoring sites.

Resolved: That:

- a) How the changes to the freighter service were publicised, be reviewed. The review to include whether parish magazines should be used in future; and
- b) Consideration be given to whether the restrictions preventing people with residents' parking permits parking in adjacent zones should be amended; and
- c) The Committee be informed of;
 - i) the minimum age for issue of a litter enforcement ticket; and
 - ii) the number and location of air quality monitoring sites, and whether the relevant information is being provided by KCC for the Council to use

22. First Quarter Performance Monitoring: Street Cleansing. Interview with Jonathan Scott, Street Scene Manager

Jonathan Scott, Environment Manager, gave a presentation to the Committee on the new street cleansing arrangements (**Appendix A**). He explained that:

- The Borough had stopped cleansing streets according to a rigid rota in April 2010. Under the previous system, some areas were never subject to regular cleansing or inspection;
- All areas were now assessed for cleanliness on a maximum five week rotation;
- Areas would be cleansed when the cleanliness fell below national standards;
- Areas with known litter problems were assessed and cleansed more frequently.
- The new system would save £120,000 per year as fewer staff were required;
- There had been minimal set up costs as all preparatory work had been done by officers;
- Customer satisfaction cards were sent out to 100 households in each of two Wards every month. On average about 20 to 25 cards were returned;
- The customer satisfaction survey covering May to July 2010 showed 66% of residents were satisfied or very satisfied with the cleanliness compared to 62% in the same period the previous year

Members noted there were wide variations in the results of the survey on an area by area basis, and sample rates were low. Therefore a true picture of satisfaction across the Borough would only appear when the system had been running for nearly a year. The possibility of developing an electronic survey was discussed, but Members noted this might not be as random as the current system.

Members discussed littering problems near schools. They suggested Head teachers be offered a litter education presentation. Jonathan confirmed this was available however senior schools were generally less receptive to such offers.

In response to Member's questions, the Environment Manager:

- Agreed to offer to give the presentation to Parish councils;
- Agreed to copy a letter he had sent to Members on the changes to waste services, to Parish councils and Registered Social Landlords;
- Acknowledged that there was a litter problem in Hermitage lane. Nine bins had been located in the area, which was cleansed every day, but the council were not responsible for cleansing private land; and
- Confirmed Waste Management Services were happy to receive feedback on problem areas.

Resolved: That:

- a) the presentation on cleansing be offered to Parish Councils;

- b) The letter recently sent to Members concerning the changes in waste services, be sent to Parish Councils and to Registered Social Landlords in the Borough; and
- c) Senior schools in areas with a litter problem be contacted with a view to providing litter awareness education to pupils

23. First Quarter Performance Monitoring: Park and Ride. Interview with Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Development

Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Regeneration and Cultural services, informed the Committee that there had been a steady decline in park and ride usage since 2008, partly as a result of the recession and also the changes in the service and an increase in fares. In the first three months of this financial year usage was 2% lower than in the same period in 2009/10.

Mr Morgan explained the following steps had been taken to manage performance over the last year:

- In November 2009 the London Road service was amended so that it was solely served by park and ride buses and not a mixture of park and ride and normal service buses;
- An action plan to collect statistics had been devised;
- The website had been updated;
- There had been targeted promotion of the service;
- On board equipment had been improved;
- A new driver's duty rota had been introduced; and
- A marketing plan had been developed

Members heard the park and ride scheme was competing with parking provision within the town centre. Parking charges were relatively low which reduced the incentive to use park and ride. Other towns usually had a greater differential between car park fees and park and ride charges.

Mr Morgan said there were about 1600 council operated car park spaces in the town centre, plus those in Fremlins and the Mall, and over 4000 private parking spaces in the town centre. The private spaces were considerably underused, so there was a pool of available parking spaces in the town centre. This limited the options to increase usage of the park and ride scheme. He believed this could only be addressed as part of a transport strategy that also dealt with parking provision.

Mr Morgan explained that the possibility of changing to a pay to park scheme with free bus travel had been considered. However parking fees would be liable to VAT and the additional costs of installing and operating the required equipment could negate the benefits of changing the current operation.

In response to questions, Members heard that the Council was paying about £200,000 per year to bus operators for travellers who used concessionary bus passes on the park and ride buses.

A Member referred to a meeting of the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2009, where the possibility of developing a park and ride site at Bluebell Hill had been discussed. Members heard the original estimate of up to £3 million to develop the site had reduced, possibly to below £2 million. Mr Morgan indicated that the site may be available at a cost of about £38,000. Members suggested consideration be given to acquiring the site for possible future development.

Resolved: That:

- a) Information on the earlier plans for development of the Bluebell Hill site be provided to the Committee; and
- b) Consideration be given to acquiring the Bluebell Hill site for potential development of a park and ride site in the future.

24. Review of Past Reports

The Committee discussed the recommendations of the review of past reports that related to the Committee's remit. Members noted that:

- It would be premature to consider the image of Maidstone Town Centre before the High Street regeneration project was complete;
- Councillor Ash had confirmed the memorial safety programme was almost complete;
- The Committee's Future Work Programme included an item on the security of water supplies later in the year;
- Some work had been carried out to reduce noise pollution from the M20 between junctions five and six, and a mandatory variable speed limit would be introduced between junctions three and seven of the M20 on the 23 August. The Committee believed it would be premature to look at motorways again until the impact of the variable speed limit could be assessed;
- The joint Committee on air quality would meet shortly to start their review. Members asked for details of how and where air quality was monitored and details of the results;
- While the value of scrap metal was currently high, if prices dropped it was likely that abandoned vehicles would again be a problem; and
- The Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee had looked at park and ride last year. The Chair asked Members to consider whether this Committee should progress recommendations arising from that committee's work.

Members therefore agreed that during this year, updates on the following past reviews be provided:

- abandoned vehicles;
- climate change;
- fly tipping; and
- rural roads.

Resolved: That updates be provided on the past scrutiny reviews of:

- abandoned vehicles;
- climate change;
- fly tipping; and
- rural roads.

25. Transition Towns

Members heard that the Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee had declined the invitation to include Transition Towns in their work programme for this year. They discussed whether to include this in their current work programme. Members agreed this should be considered for the 2011-12 work programme, when there may be more examples of transition town programmes to inform the review.

Resolved: That Transition Towns be considered as a review topic in the 2011-12 municipal year.

26. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Members considered the Future Work programme. A Member asked that the Allotment Management Committee be invited to the scrutiny meeting when they were considering the maintenance of communal spaces.

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 Key Performance Report and noted the footfall in parks and open spaces had dropped by 32% compared to the previous year. It noted Councillor Ash's earlier explanation that there had been a large increase in footfall in the same quarter the previous year, but questioned how such a large drop in footfall would not result in missing the annual target significantly. Members requested details of where the measuring equipment was located, and that a written report be provided explaining how the annual target was calculated and why it was expected to be only slightly missed despite the large drop in the first quarter footfall.

Resolved: That

- a) The Future Work Programme be noted subject to the addition of the reviews of past scrutiny reports;
- b) The Allotment Management Committee be invited to the scrutiny meeting considering the maintenance of communal spaces; and
- c) A written report be provided;
 - i) Describing where the measuring equipment for footfall in parks and open spaces is located; and
 - ii) Explaining how the annual target was calculated and why it was expected to be only slightly missed despite the large drop in the first quarter footfall.

27. Duration of the Meeting

6:30 p.m. to 9:26 p.m.

Street Cleansing Overview



How we clean the borough

- In April 2010 we changed the way we carry out street cleaning in the borough from schedule based cleaning to Area Based Cleaning (ABC).
- This new way of working is a more flexible approach to street cleaning. It moves away from rigid schedules and focuses resources in areas that need to be cleaned.
- ABC has been implemented in other high performing councils and as a result of this Ni195 scores and public perception have improved.
- The town centre is not affected by ABC but a slight change in the early morning cleansing has improved the overall cleansing standard.



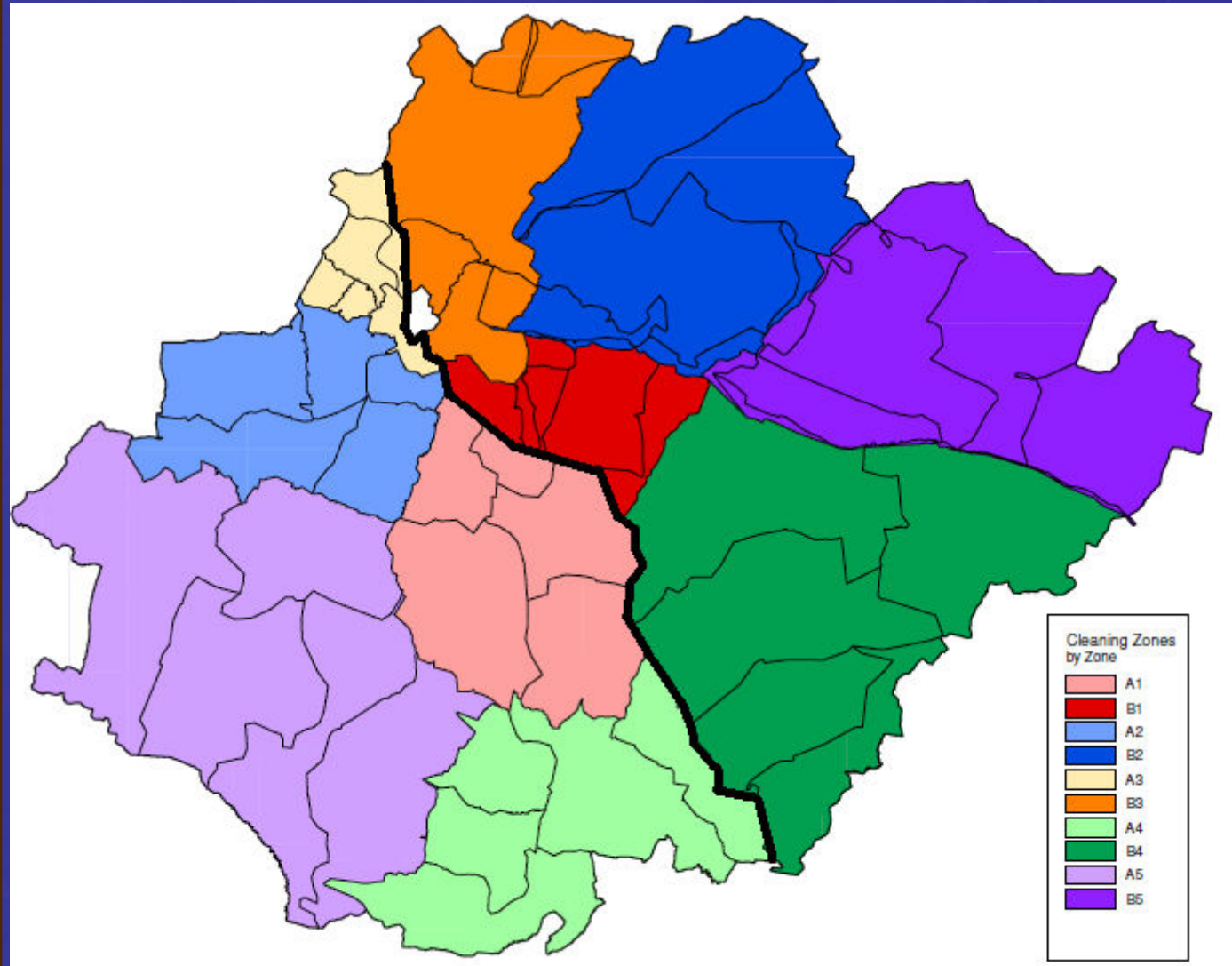
What is Area Based Cleaning?

- The Borough is separated into 2 Areas.
- The workforce is also separated into two equal teams with an Area Leaders in each team.
- The Area Leader will visit **every road** in the borough on a minimum of a 5 week cycle.
- Area Leaders have been trained by Defra to full Ni195 levels.
- Shop fronts, main routes in and out of Maidstone, recycling sites and school fronts will still be on a daily or weekly schedule.

Key points for ABC

- The highway will not be automatically cleaned but an Area Leader will visit that area and make a judgement on what cleansing action is needed (if any). This judgement will be based on Defra Ni195 methodology.
- Any road that falls below a Grade B will need to be cleaned. The road might need a litter pick, a mechanical sweep, a full cleanse or no action whatsoever.
- Area Leaders record name of road, grade awarded, date and time of the inspection and what cleansing has taken place for all roads inspected. By doing this it will provide a robust record.
- **Shop fronts, main routes in and out of Maidstone, recycling sites and school fronts will still be on a daily or weekly schedule.**

ABC Map



How we judge what Cleansing is needed.

Litter



Grade A- No Litter/Detritus Present



Grade B- Predominantly free of litter/detritus



Grade C- Widespread distribution with minor accumulations



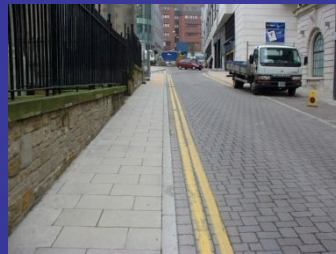
Grade D- Extensively covered with litter/detritus with significant accumulations.

Detritus



How we judge what Cleansing is needed.

Litter



Detritus



Advantages of ABC

- More efficient use of resources by cleaning areas on demand.
- This approach is designed to improve the overall perception of street cleanliness within the borough, particularly in areas where there is currently lowest perception.
- A better ability to deal with unpredictable fluctuations in demand.
- Every road in Maidstone will be visited at least once every 5 weeks.
- We now inspect every road in the borough on a 5 week rota. This was not the case with the old way of working
- A better ability to visit problem areas more often due to a more flexible work force.

Street Cleansing Elements



Customer satisfaction/Public perception

- We carry out a monthly customer satisfaction survey.
- We survey 200 household over 2 wards every month.
- Last year we received 489 replies (an average 24.45% survey cards returned).
- This year we have received 175 replies to date (an average of 21.87% survey cards returned).
- Questions on these surveys are based on the Place survey questions.

Printed on recycled paper

Please could you spare a few moments of your time to comment on our services? Tell us how you feel about the area in which you live by answering the questions below and returning the card to us.

1 How satisfied are you with the cleanliness in your neighbourhood?

Very satisfied Satisfied
 Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

2 What has happened to the cleanliness in your neighbourhood over the last 12 months?

Got better Stayed the same
 Got worse Unsure

3 Which areas in your neighbourhood tend to get most dirty?

Roads Paths Garages Car parks
 Other (Please specify)

4 Are any of these a regular problem in your neighbourhood?

Litter Dog fouling Graffiti Flyposting
 Flytipping Other (Please specify)

5 When was the last time you saw Maidstone Borough Council cleaning in your area?

In the last month In the last 3 months
 In the last 6 months More than 6 months ago

6 How satisfied are you with your weekly rubbish collection service?

Very satisfied Satisfied
 Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

7 How satisfied are you with your fortnightly recycling collection service?

Very satisfied Satisfied
 Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied

Thank you for completing the card. If you wish to report a specific problem, please call the **Cleansing Hotline** on **01622 602162**. Your postcode:

Maidstone Borough Council
Environmental Services Satisfaction Card

MAIDSTONE
Borough Council

Customer satisfaction Results

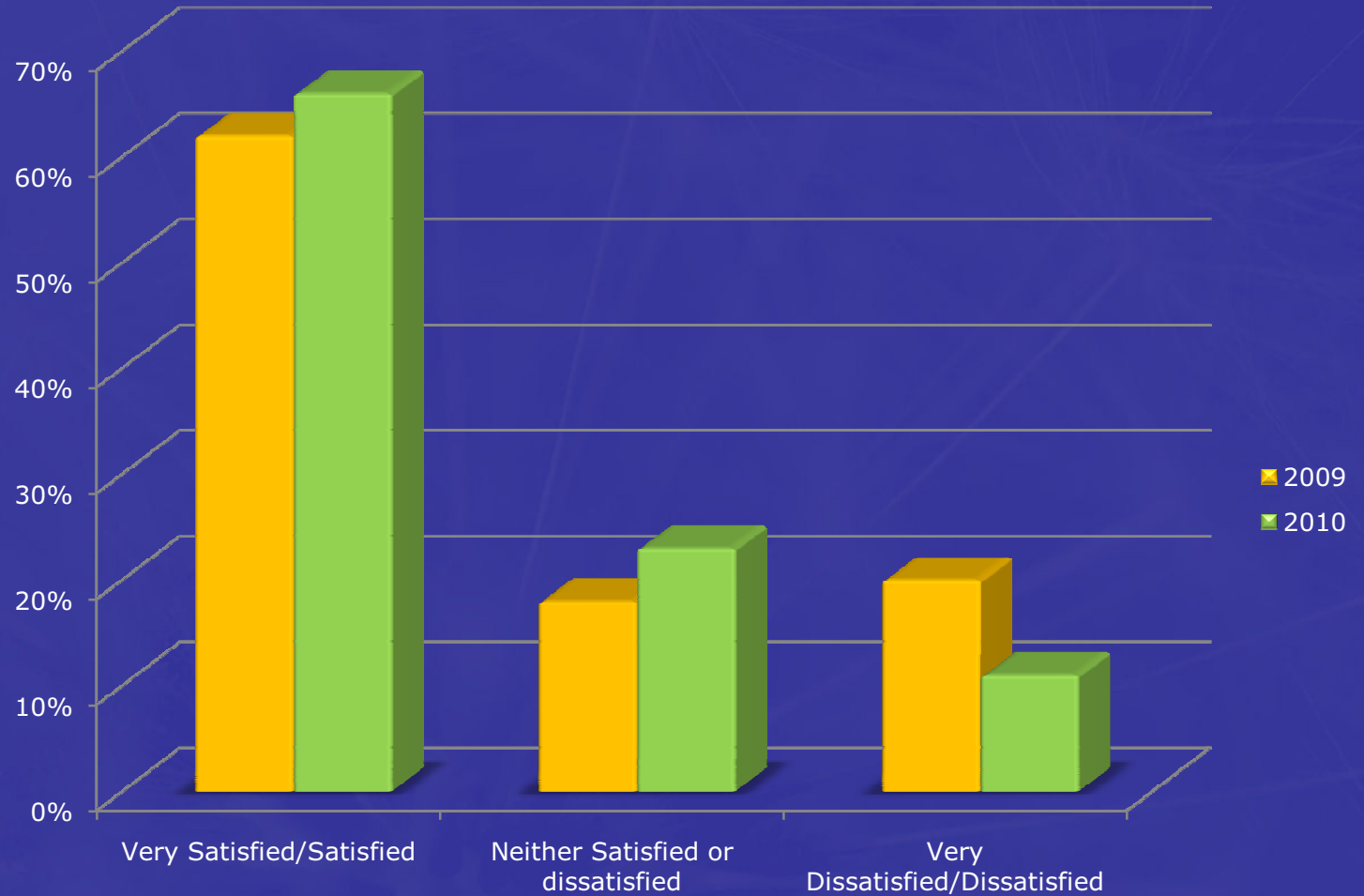
2009-10



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

(Results from June 2009 to April 2010)

Customer satisfaction/Public perception



How satisfied are you with the cleanliness in your neighbourhood?

Compliments from members of the public

Very pleased to report that your Road Sweeper arrived before 9.00.am. and he has done a really thorough job. Please thank him for me. Thank you also for arranging this so promptly. 07th July 2010.

- Thank you for your time last week regarding the alleyway alongside 32 High Street. I was very pleased to find that the alleyway had been cleaned early this morning. 2nd August 2010.

- Mrs x phoned in and wanted to say thank you for clearing this so quickly, a job well done (in her words!) regarding a Fly tip in chart Sutton.

- Thanks for your quick response and for looking into the matter. Regarding litter in Cornwallis avenue. 05th July 2010
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