

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

20 MAY 2010

REPORT OF HEAD OF CHANGE & SCRUTINY

Report prepared by Clare Wood

1. PLACE SURVEY - UPDATE

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To note the work that has been undertaken on the Place Survey to date and the outline plans for the next survey in autumn 2010.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- i. Note the analysis that has been undertaken, and the comparative performance of Maidstone Borough Council (Appendix A);
- ii. Note the actions that have been taken to tackle the issues raised in the Place Survey;
- iii. Agree the approach to the Place Survey in 2010; and
- iv. Agree to use the Council's community leadership role to influence and work with other organisations through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to improve the outcomes measured by the Place Survey.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Local Government White Paper Strong and Prosperous Communities emphasises improving outcomes for local people and places. Central to this is the importance of capturing local people's views, experiences and perceptions of the area they live in.

1.3.2 The Place Survey is a Government survey, carried out by every local authority in England. The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) expect that the results will be used by all local public service providers, to understand the area they serve.

1.3.3 The Place Survey covers a number of topics including the views of residents on the borough as a place to live as well as the performance of key service providers, including the council and the police. By analysing the results we can ensure that our focus and priorities take account of the views of residents and identify areas for improvement.

1.4 Amendments to Results & Comparative Data

1.4.1 Provisional place survey results were reported to Cabinet in June 2009 and the Council has been looking at the areas where satisfaction was lower. Since then the final set of weighted results has been released by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The weighting of the results to ensure that they are reflective of the borough population has impacted on our scores.

1.4.2 The top five things that are most important in making an area a good place to live have changed slightly due to weighting.

Previous un-weighted Results	Final weighted Results
Level of Crime	Level of Crime
Health Services	Health Services
Clean Streets	Clean Streets
Public Transport	Affordable Decent Housing
Affordable Decent Housing	Education Provision

1.4.3 As can be seen from the table, many of the top five factors are provided by partner organisations and therefore there is a role for the Council to play in influencing the local arrangements.

1.4.4 In terms of the specific areas that are covered by the Council, the perception and actual cleanliness of the roads varies significantly across the borough and a review of the street cleaning arrangements was concluded in March 2010. The Council has continued to invest in affordable housing and improving existing housing over recent years and has also reviewed the housing provision in the borough.

1.4.5 Weighting has also produced some variations in the initial out-turns reported in June. Changes are highlighted at Appendix A which also contains quartile details and Maidstone's position within Kent and our Nearest Neighbours group.

1.5 Analysis

National Analysis

1.5.1 National trends show that satisfaction with local government is going *down* – and by a significant amount. Ipsos Mori data suggests that the

key overall measure of satisfaction with the way the council runs things is down from 53% to around 45%. Now, fewer than half of residents are satisfied with the performance of their authority, the lowest national score recorded in a decade or more. Satisfaction with the way Maidstone Borough Council runs things was slightly below the national average at 44.0%.

1.5.2 An analysis of the results nationally was undertaken. It was noted that five measures were strong and significant predictors of overall satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and providing value for money.

- Satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities;
- Satisfaction with doorstep recycling;
- Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse;
- NI 3 - Percentage of people who have been involved in decisions that affect the local area in the past 12 months; and
- NI 4 - Percentage of people who agree that they can influence decisions in their local area.

1.5.3 The results for Maidstone on four of these measures were below average, perhaps explaining why results for satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and agreement that the Council provides value for money were also below the national average.

Local Analysis

1.5.4 Overall the analysis of the wards showed that some wards are generally more satisfied than others but there was no pattern to this e.g. urban/rural split. Female respondents are more likely to be satisfied than males and those in the age group 45-54 are generally less likely to be satisfied than the other age groups.

1.5.5 Further analysis was also undertaken internally to assess what are the key drivers of satisfaction and value for money within Maidstone. The findings of this research were that there is a strong relationship linking satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and satisfaction with the following services:

- Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse;
- Refuse collection;
- Doorstep recycling;
- Local tips /Household waste centres; and
- Parks and open spaces.

1.5.6 There were no relationships found between overall satisfaction and libraries, museums/galleries and theatres/concert halls.

1.5.7 The service areas where links were strongest between service satisfaction and satisfaction with value for money were:

- Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse;
- Refuse collection;
- Doorstep recycling; and
- Sport and leisure facilities.

1.5.8 These are similar to the national drivers of satisfaction and show that people place more importance on a good refuse and recycling service and a good street cleansing service that provide value for money than other services the Council provides. The Council's work to improve street cleansing, doorstep recycling and Maidstone Leisure Centre should improve residents' perceptions that the Council provides value for money and increase satisfaction with the way the Council runs things.

1.5.9 Internal research also looked at the influence that other public service providers have on the Council's results. Kent County Council was the biggest influencer on views of overall satisfaction with Maidstone Borough Council, perhaps illustrating that people do not differentiate between the two tiers of local government. Being such a large influence, it is likely that a change in either council's results will impact on the other (both positive and negative).

1.6 Benchmarking with other authorities

Top quartile nationally (excellent performance)

1.6.1 There were three areas where the council performed very strongly in the Place Survey:

- NI 42 – Percentage of people who think that drug use or drug dealing is a problem in their local area – 73rd out of 352 authorities;
- Satisfaction with museums and galleries – 22nd out of 352 authorities; and
- Satisfaction with refuse collection - 57th out of 352 authorities.

Upper median quartile nationally (above average/good performance)

1.6.2 The results for the following indicators/service areas were above the national average:

- NI 1 - Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their area;
- NI 5 - Overall satisfaction with local area;
- NI 6 - Participation in regular volunteering;
- NI 17 - Perceptions of anti-social behaviour;
- NI 23 - Perceptions that people in the area treat one another with respect and consideration;

- NI 27 - Understanding of local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime issues by the local council and police;
- NI 37 - Awareness of civil protection arrangements;
- NI 41 - Perceptions of drunk or rowdy behaviour as a problem;
- NI 119 - Self reported measure of people's overall health and wellbeing;
- NI 138 - Satisfaction of people over 65 with both home and neighbourhood;
- NI 140 - Fair treatment by local services;
- Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse;
- Satisfaction with libraries;
- Satisfaction with theatres and concert halls;
- Satisfaction with parks and open spaces; and
- Percentage of respondents who would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect the local area.

Lower median quartile nationally (below average performance)

1.6.3 The results for the following indicators/service areas were below the national average:

- NI 2 - Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood;
- NI 3 - Civic participation in the local area;
- NI 21 - Dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime issues by the council and police;
- NI 22 - Perceptions of parents taking responsibility for the behaviour of their children in the area;
- NI 139 - The extent to which older people receive the support they need to live independently at home;
- Satisfaction with local transport information;
- Satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities;
- Satisfaction with the extent to which the council provides value for money; and
- Satisfaction with the way the council runs things.

Bottom quartile nationally (poor performance)

1.6.4 The results for the following indicator/services area were in the bottom 25% nationally:

- NI 4 - Percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality;
- Satisfaction with doorstep recycling;
- Satisfaction with local tips / household waste recycling centres; and
- Satisfaction with local bus services.

1.7 Actions to improve performance

1.7.1 Where performance was below the national average, or where more than one in five people were dissatisfied and the service/area is the direct responsibility of the Council, multi-department action plans have been created to improve performance. An update of actions that have been undertaken is set out below.

Providing value for money

1.7.2 There is a concern that although the Council scores highly on value for money in inspections this does not match public perception. An action plan has been created and contains actions around explaining the levels of savings that the council has to make and the services that are provided, including work at road shows and further analysis into areas which had the worst satisfaction levels, including assessing the scope for the use of data on local households (Mosaic) to identify what messages residents will respond well to and how these should be delivered.

1.7.3 The recycling roll out, street cleansing improvements, Maidstone Leisure Centre improvements and work on Communities in Control should have a positive impact on this measure in the 2010 Place Survey.

1.7.4 For the past three years the Council has consulted on the budget and will continue to do so, with the aim of demonstrating to residents how their council tax is spent. The Strategic Plan also includes details of where local authority funding comes from and how it is spent.

NI 2- Percentage of people who feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood

NI 3 – Civic Participation in local area

NI 4- Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

1.7.5 The Communities in Control project was launched in 2009, in response to the Communities in Control White Paper, which places a duty on the authority to involve communities. This is being monitored on a quarterly basis by the project board. The results of the NI 2, NI 3 and Ni 4 should improve as a result of the work of the Communities in Control Project, and will be used to monitor the impact of the project.

1.7.6 Talks in partnership with KCC and parishes have been held around setting up neighbourhood forums, which will give people more of a voice in decisions that affect their local area. The areas of Maidstone the forums will cover have been agreed, as have aims, terms of reference, voting guidance, how these will be supported and guidance

on decision making. The first forums will take place in May and June 2010.

- 1.7.7 Neighbourhood action plans are also being progressed in priority areas. The Planning for Real exercise in Park Wood has led to the production of an action plan to address the issues identified by over 500 local people. In April 2010 Council officers and local volunteers spent a week talking to people at Park Wood Parade. Over 100 more people commented on which projects should be delivered first.
- 1.7.8 The budget consultation undertaken in 2009/10 involved more people than in previous years. The views of people were noted and informed the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 1.7.9 Other examples where people have been consulted and involved in decision making include:
- High Street design project;
 - Mote park improvements; and
 - Play areas.

NI 37 - Awareness of Civil Protection arrangements

- 1.7.10 An emergency planning leaflet for residents is currently being compiled and takes into account best practice from other authorities. The leaflet will form the basis of an article for the Downs Mail highlighting the importance of knowing what to do in an emergency.
- 1.7.11 The responsible officer has also been looking at early warning systems for parishes and is currently waiting for KCC to commit before proceeding in order that a streamlined network is built.

Support for older people to live independently (NI 139)

- 1.7.12 An action plan has been created by Council officers to improve the performance of this indicator. However, this is an area where the responsibility spans several organisations.
- 1.7.13 To date, an updated disability map has been published and the scope of the Handy Man service has been widened to include gardening and decorating services. In addition, work is ongoing with relevant agencies around the promotion of services.

Satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities

- 1.7.14 The Leisure Centre improvement works that have recently been carried out should improve the Council's satisfaction scores. The improvements that are being carried out correspond with resident opinions of the centre. Feedback was given that the gym equipment was tired and out of date, this has been upgraded and the gym re-opened on the 16th January.

1.7.15 The Leisure Centre had a shop in the Mall until January and there is a full publicity programme in place for once the works have been completed. There has also been local news coverage of the improvement works. Numbers using the Leisure Centre and user satisfaction with the Leisure Centre will continue to be monitored to assess the impact of the improvements.

Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter

1.7.16 The difficulty with this measure is that residents do not distinguish between land owned by the Council and other land i.e. that owned by Golding Homes (previously Maidstone Housing Trust). To combat this, a focus group has been held with partners including Golding Homes, Network Rail and Town Centre Management and more regular meetings will take place with Golding Homes to look at improving cleanliness.

1.7.17 Some of the street cleansing signage was broken, new signage has now been ordered and being used accordingly.

1.7.18 The review of Street Cleansing has been completed and the team have changed their working patterns to area based cleaning which will promote accountability.

1.7.19 The customer satisfaction surveys are being undertaken with the street scene team and results are now being reported quarterly. Current performance is showing an improvement in satisfaction since the Place Survey, up from 60% to 64% satisfaction with the service. The environmental services survey will continue to be used and the wording of the question will be reviewed.

Satisfaction with doorstep recycling

1.7.20 The third phase of the mixed recycling collections was completed in May 2009. It included expanding the service to the majority of multi occupancy properties within the borough. The recycling rate has now increased to over 33% as at quarter 3, but it is expected that the end of year 2009/10 target of 34% will just be missed.

1.7.21 Now that the whole of the borough receives the enhanced recycling service, satisfaction with the service should be higher. Indeed, at quarter 3 2009/10 89% of those surveyed over the year said they were satisfied with the service. However, it should not be assumed this figure will be replicated in the 2010 Place Survey.

1.7.22 The Education Officer is targeting the promotional work in areas of high contamination, low participation and low satisfaction including school workshops and community groups.

1.7.23 The KCC public engagement team carried out work in two low performing areas and although participation did not show an increase,

resident's feedback showed that they were able to recycle more following the visit. In 2010/11, use of the Green Pages in the Borough Update will be included in the communications plan.

Satisfaction with the theatres and concert halls

1.7.24 This measure reflects satisfaction with the Hazlitt Arts Centre, but also covers concert halls. As Maidstone has no fit for purpose concert hall satisfaction is likely to be lower on this measure. In addition, many people do not think of the Hazlitt Arts Centre as a Council service. To combat this, a banner with the council logo has been purchased and is being used at events.

1.7.25 The questionnaire used by the Hazlitt Arts Centre has been revised and will continue to be reviewed annually. The Hazlitt staff have also been innovative in trying to gain feedback from people who use the Arts Centre and now use electronic hand held devices to collect people's views. The action plan also contains activities including expanding the ranges of disciplines available through the Youth Theatre and undertaking showcases in wards where satisfaction is low.

Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things

1.7.26 All the actions listed above should contribute to an increase in residents' satisfaction with the way the Council runs things in the 2010 Place Survey. The recycling roll-out, improvements to street cleansing, the Maidstone Leisure centre improvements and the work on Communities in Control are likely to have the biggest impact.

NI 21 - Percentage of people who agree that the police and other local public services are successfully dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime in their local area

NI 22 - Percentage of people who agree that in their local area parents take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children

1.7.27 Public perception of anti-social behaviour and parent taking responsibility for their children are measures that would be influenced by a number of agencies, in particular the Council and Kent Police. The Crime and safety Unit ensures a joint agency approach to tackling anti-social behaviour and is specifically looking at parental responsibility through the work on the parental support package. The initial results of the Place Survey have been discussed with the Safer Maidstone Partnership and the Policy and Performance Manager will attend a future meeting to make a further presentation and facilitate discussion around the results.

1.8 Place survey 2010

1.8.1 The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) has released a consultation on the 2010 Place Survey, to which the Council

has responded. CLG is not proposing any major changes to the questions in the Place Survey or to the methodology of carrying out the survey, which will continue to be postal, with an initial mail out and up to two reminders for non-respondents.

- 1.8.2 The exact timetable for undertaking the 2010 survey has not yet been released by CLG but is likely to be similar to 2008, which is shown below:

Activity	Due date
Sampling window open	Mid July
Sampling window closes	End of July
Initial mail out	End of September
Reminders mail out	Mid October
Deadline surveys	Mid December
Deadline data submission	End of January

- 1.8.3 In 2008 the Council joined a number of other Kent districts in jointly procuring the services of a research company to carry out the survey on the Council's behalf. It is recommended that a similar approach is adopted for the 2010 Place Survey to ensure that the costs of carrying out the survey are as low as possible. The Policy and Performance Manager is currently in discussions with all Kent authorities, including Kent County Council, about the possibility of joint procurement, amongst other options.

- 1.8.4 Councils are required to achieve at least 1,100 responses. However, in order for the data to be used more usefully, especially when looking at a ward level, a larger number of responses is better. It also means more people get to have their say. In 2008 the Council sent out surveys to 5,000 households and received about 2,400 responses, response rate of around 45%.

- 1.8.5 Therefore, it is recommended that a sample size of 5,000 is also used for the 2010 survey, even though there will be a cost implication (in 2008 it cost approximately £5,000 more to send the survey to 5,000 households rather than 2,000). The Policy and Performance Manager is working with authorities across Kent to maximise the response rate for the 2010 Place Survey.

- 1.8.6 *Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government* committed Government to reducing burdens and increasing flexibility for local areas, including reducing the National Indicator Set (NIS). The Budget 2010 included the removal of 18 indicators from the NIS, including five that are collected from the Place Survey. These are:

- NI 2 – Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood;
- NI 3 – Civic participation in the local area;
- NI 23 – Perceptions that people in the area treat one another with respect and consideration;
- NI 37 – Awareness of civil protection arrangements in the local area; and
- NI 140 – Fair treatment by local services.

1.8.7 The questions that relate to these indicators will still be asked in the survey, but will not be reported nationally as NIs.

1.9 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.9.1 Cabinet could choose not to note the outcomes of the Place Survey, but it is expected that these results are used to inform improvement in services and public perception of the Council could decline if public opinion is not taken into account.

1.9.2 Cabinet could decide not to agree the approach to the Place Survey for 2010, but it is believed that the approach procuring with other Kent authorities would ensure value for money, and the approach of sending out surveys to 5,000 household will ensure a good number of responses and mean that more people are able to give their views.

1.10 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.10.1 The Place Survey includes questions which relate to each of the Council's five priority themes. Carrying out the Place Survey and using the results to inform delivery of services contributed to key objective 14 - *Engage communities so people have the opportunity to participate and have a real say in what happens in their local area.*

1.11 Risk Management

1.11.1 Failure to consider and use the results of the Place Survey could lead to the Council delivering surveys that do not meet the needs of local people or are not of a sufficient quality. This risk can be mitigated by ensuring the results of the Place Survey to help determine the present and future priorities of the Council.

1.12 Other Implications

1.12.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing

X

3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	X
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

Financial

1.12.2 There is a cost to carrying out the Place Survey. In 2008 this was approximately £13,000. There would also be a cost implication to sending out 5,000 surveys rather than 2,000. In 2008 it cost approximately £5,000 more to send out 5,000 rather than 2,000.

1.12.3 The results of the Place Survey on which services drive overall satisfaction and which services the public believe are most important and which need improving should be taken into account when allocating resources.

Environmental/Sustainable Development & Community Safety

1.12.4 The Place Survey contains questions relating to these areas and contributes to National Indicator out-turns.

1.13 Relevant Documents

1.13.1 Appendices

Appendix A - Performance Comparison and Benchmarked Positions

1.13.2 Background Documents

SMSR Final Report December 2009
 People, perceptions and place – Ipsos Mori, August 2009

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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