

# **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**8 JULY 2009**

### **REPORT OF MANAGEMENT TEAM**

**Report prepared by Georgia Hawkes**

#### **1. PLACE SURVEY**

##### 1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1. To consider the provisional results for the Place Survey.

##### 1.2. Recommendation of the Policy and Performance Manager

1.2.1. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- i. Note the initial results of the Place Survey, including National Indicator (NI) results (shown at Appendix A and B);
- ii. Note Maidstone's performance compared to other Kent district councils (Appendices A and B) and look at the highest performers to identify any best practice;
- iii. Note that work on NI 4 continues through the Communities in Control working group.

##### 1.3. Reasons for recommendation

1.3.1. The Local Government White Paper Strong and Prosperous Communities emphasises a new focus on 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. The results, particularly the NIs, will be used as part of Comprehensive Area Assessment to judge how well public services are being delivered.

- 1.3.3. The Place Survey covers a number of topics which relate to the Council's priorities. By analysing the results the Council can take account of the views of local people and can identify areas for improvement.
- 1.3.4. Although the survey was completed some time ago and the Council received provisional data the Audit Commission has been carrying out an audit of the Place Survey data received nationally. This has delayed the publication of Place Survey results, as local authorities have not been able to publish their own results.
- 1.3.5. On 16 June 2009 the Government announced that Place Survey results would be confirmed and published on 23 June 2009. The Council believes the data for Maidstone must now be published so that the information can be used to inform work with partners on improving outcomes for local people. The company that undertook the work on the Council's behalf has also been asked for some additional analysis which should be available later in the year. The figures in this report are based on the provisional results and a wide range of information that has been collected from authorities in Kent.
- 1.4. Place Survey Overview
- 1.4.1. The Place Survey involved the use of a postal questionnaire to capture residents' views, experiences and perceptions. It replaced the Best Value User Satisfaction Survey which was the previous national mechanism for consulting residents. The set of questions and the postal methodology are mandatory, but the Council elected to add two extra questions to the survey:
1. a) Have you contacted Maidstone Council with a complaint in the last 12 months? and b) How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your complaint(s) was (were) handled?
  2. Thinking about what most affects and concerns you, what do you think are the most important issues facing Maidstone today?
- 1.4.2. Maidstone, in partnership with Swale, Tunbridge Wells, Ashford and Sevenoaks councils, engaged a particular social research company (SMSR) to carry out the research. 5,000 surveys were initially sent out to Maidstone residents in October 2008 and up to two reminders sent to those who did not respond. Over 2,300 responses were received from residents.
- 1.4.3. The high number of responses means that we can be confident that the results are representative of the views of local people.

## 1.5. National Indicators

- 1.5.1. The Place Survey is the data source for 18 National Indicators (NIs). However, the Department of Communities and Local Government has informed councils that quartile information (so council's can compare their results) will not be available for the new set of indicators, because every area is different. Instead, the Place Survey should be used to find out more about the local area and the information used to improve outcomes for local people. The lack of quartile information means an assessment of performance is more difficult. In order to allow some comparisons to be made, the twelve Kent districts have undertaken a benchmarking exercise. The weighted anonymised results from all the Kent districts are shown at Appendix A. The Audit Commission has applied weights to all councils' NI data to make sure it is representative of the population of each area. It is the weighted results that will be used for the Council's NI results.
- 1.5.2. When compared to the 12 Kent districts Maidstone has performed well, being in the top three (representing top quartile performance in Kent) for ten out of 18 NIs. It is particularly encouraging that 85% of people are satisfied with their local area and that one in four people participate in regular volunteering. It is also pleasing to note that, where comparisons are possible from the BVPI survey carried out in 2006/07, people generally appear to be more satisfied with where they live and are less concerned about crime and anti-social behaviour. In spite of this good performance the Council is not complacent and will keep striving to improve outcomes for local people.
- 1.5.3. Only three NIs were below the average result for Kent. Of these, only one was in the bottom quartile. The three NIs below the Kent average were:
- NI 4 – Percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality (9<sup>th</sup> in Kent);
  - NI 37 - Awareness of civil protection arrangements in the local area (8<sup>th</sup> in Kent); and
  - NI 139 – The extent to which older people receive the support they need to live independently at home (10<sup>th</sup> in Kent).
- 1.5.4. Multi partner action plans have been created for NI 37 and NI 139 and are shown at Appendices D and E respectively. An action plan has not been created for NI 4 – Percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality as it is felt this would be duplicating the work of the Communities in Control working group that was formed in order to improve Community

Engagement across the Council and respond to the Communities in Control White Paper. A report from the Communities in Control Group will be presented to Cabinet on 12 August 2009.

- 1.5.5. Further analysis of the results for these three NIs has been undertaken looking at the differences in how people answer these questions depending on their age, gender, ethnicity and whether or not they are disabled. The only significant difference found was for NI 139 on support for the elderly with respondents under 60 much less likely to say that older people in the local area were able to get the services and support they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to. This suggests that those over 60, who may be receiving the support and therefore users of the service, were more informed and positive about the support on offer. It should be noted that Maidstone Borough Council is not ultimately responsible for providing most of the support older people need to live independently at home and, as reflected in the action plan for NI 139, work is required with partners to improve performance in this area. Additionally, as the difference in responses between older and younger people seems to be due to public perception, the action plan includes a number of actions to help promote the services available to older people.

1.6. Other Questions

- 1.6.1. The Place Survey also included a number of other questions that do not form part of the national indicator set. The full results of the non-NI questions are shown at Appendix B and some of the specific questions are explored in further detail below.

Priorities of local people

- 1.6.2. **Question 1:** When asked what would make somewhere a good place to live, respondents' top choices were:
1. The level of crime;
  2. Health services;
  3. Clean streets;
  4. Public transport; and
  5. Affordable decent housing.
- 1.6.3. **Question 2:** When given the same options and asked which most needed improving the most commonly selected options were:
1. Road and pavement repairs;
  2. The level of traffic congestion;

3. Activities for teenagers;
4. Public transport; and
5. The level of crime.

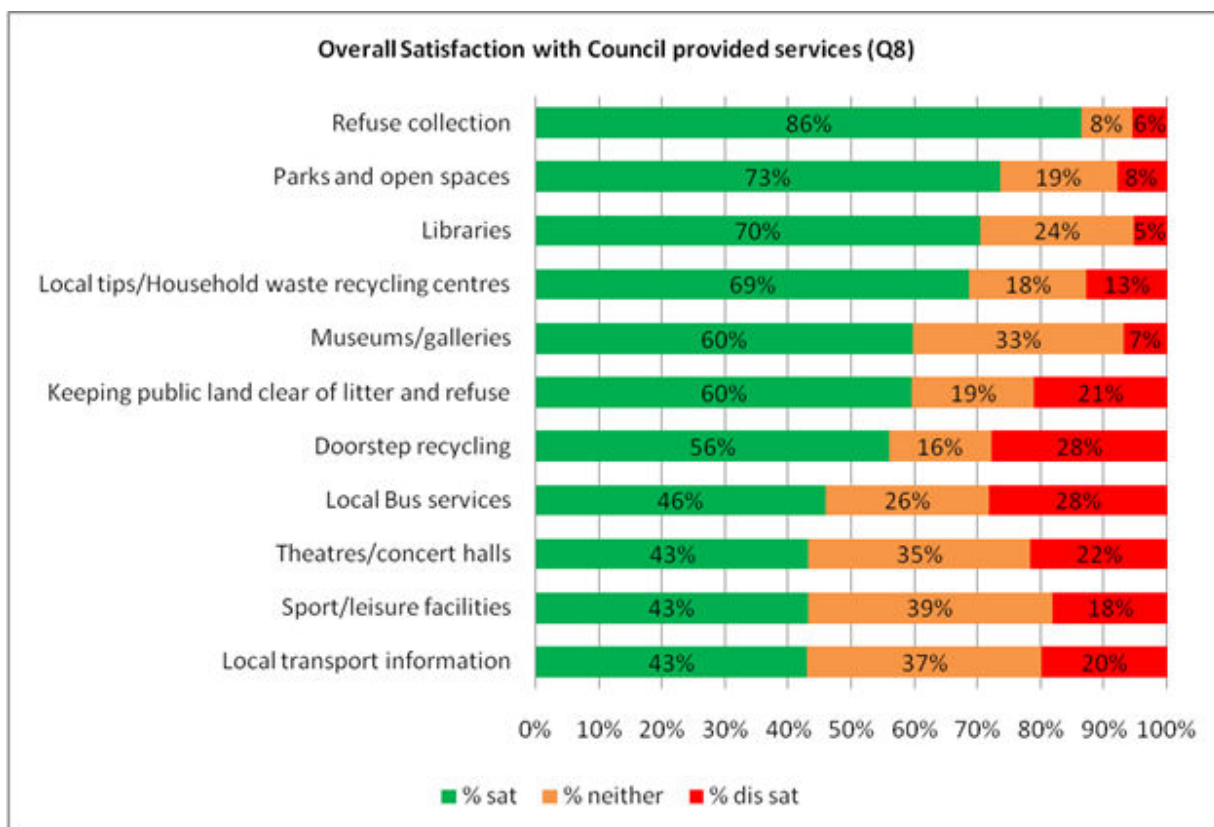
1.6.4. The Council decided to add a question to the Place Survey asking people what they thought the most important issues were facing Maidstone today. The responses still have to be fully analysed, but initial findings show the following tend to be most commonly identified by respondents:

1. Congestion , highways and road safety;
2. Parking and public transport;
3. Anti-social behaviour and crime;
4. Litter and clean streets;
5. Housing and planning;
6. Health services;
7. Waste and recycling; and
8. The Town centre.

#### Satisfaction with services

1.6.5. **Question 7:** When asked how satisfied they were with different public services (not including the Council) respondents who had used the service were most likely to say they were satisfied with their family doctor (excluding those who had not used the service, 84% are satisfied) and least likely to say they were satisfied with Kent Police (excluding those who had not used the service, 58% are satisfied).

1.6.6. **Question 8:** Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with specific council provided services. Results are shown in the graph below.



- 1.6.7. Comparison with data that is available from the BVPI survey undertaken two years ago indicates that nationally satisfaction levels with services are generally lower than in 2006/07.
- 1.6.8. The Council asked all Kent district councils for their results to allow a benchmarking exercise to be carried out. Only seven of the other 11 districts responded. Results of the eight districts, including Maidstone, are shown at Appendix C. Maidstone came top for satisfaction with the museum and galleries which is a notable achievement. However, performance was weaker in terms of satisfaction with doorstep recycling (seventh out of eight) albeit a new scheme was being established at the time of the survey.
- 1.6.9. It is important that we look closely at services where levels of satisfaction were lower to try to discover why this is and help us improve these services. To this end, further analysis has been undertaken on those service areas Maidstone Borough Council is responsible for where around one in five people said they were dissatisfied:
- Q8.1 – Keeping public land clear of litter and refuse
  - Q8.2 – Doorstep recycling
  - Q8.7 – Sport and leisure facilities

- Q8.10 – Theatres and concert halls

1.6.10. It was found that people who used these services on a regular basis (at least once a month) were far more likely to be satisfied with the services. Those who had used the service over 6 months ago or had never used it were much more likely to be dissatisfied. This is positive as it suggests that people who use the services are happy with them. Those who hardly ever or never use them may not have an accurate picture of the services. Again, this suggests that there may be less of an issue with quality of the services and more of an issue with people's perceptions of them.

1.6.11. Action plans have been devised for the four services where dissatisfaction levels were higher. These are shown at Appendices F to I. Key considerations and actions include the following:

- Keeping land clear of litter and refuse – People do not discriminate between land the Council is responsible for and land other organisations are responsible for. As KCC and MHT, for example, are also responsible for keeping the land they are responsible for clear of refuse, it is important to engage with these partners to ensure high standards are maintained no matter who is responsible for clearing the land. It is also important to monitor customer satisfaction by area, to work out where dissatisfaction is higher and work to improve these.
- Doorstep recycling – analysis by ward suggests that people living in wards in which the full doorstep recycling programme had not yet been introduced were less satisfied with doorstep recycling, as would be expected. Therefore, now the enhanced doorstep recycling service is in place across the borough satisfaction should improve. Publicity, particularly to encourage people to throw away less, reuse materials and recycle more is also an important consideration, and is part of the current Best Value Review of waste and recycling.
- Sport and leisure facilities – the renovation of the Leisure Centre should help improve satisfaction. A programme of communication activities to promote the services offered by the Leisure centre is planned once the improvements are complete. This may also attract more regular users, who tend to have higher levels of satisfaction.
- Theatres and concert halls – the lower levels of satisfaction may be down to public perception. The action plan includes a number of actions to improve promotion of the Hazlitt.

- 1.6.12. Analysis looking at how people answered these questions depending on their age, gender, ethnicity and whether or not they had a disability found the following significant differences:
- Those from BME groups had higher levels of satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse (78% satisfied compared with 60% overall)
  - Those over 60 were far more likely to be satisfied (69% satisfied) with doorstep recycling than those under 60 (46% satisfied). Overall satisfaction with doorstep recycling was 56%)
  - People from BME groups were more likely to be satisfied (52% satisfied as opposed to 43% overall) with sport and leisure facilities
  - Women and those from BME groups (50% and 52% satisfied respectively, compared with 43% overall) were most likely to say they were satisfied with theatres and concert halls
- 1.6.13. It is positive that BME residents seem to have a positive view of our services. Generally research across the sector has found that BME residents are less satisfied than white groups. However, it should be noted that the BME sample size is very small; just under 50 respondents. It is, therefore, difficult to say whether these results are representative of the wider population.

#### Value for money

- 1.6.14. **Question 10:** Respondents were asked whether they thought Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council provided value for money. Overall 34% said Maidstone Council provided value for money and 31% said Kent County Council provided value for money. When our results are compared to some of the other Kent districts we are fifth highest out of eight. The Kent district results range from 28% to 39%.
- 1.6.15. This result is in contrast to the top rating for value for money in the recent Use of Resources assessment by the Audit Commission. However, it should also be noted that more than four out of ten people who answered question 10 answered 'Neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know'. When asked whether they felt well informed about what their Council Tax was spent on (Q12.2), approximately three in ten people said they were not very well informed or were not well informed at all. This suggests people do not know whether or not the Council provides value for money and that more could be done to improve information about Council spending.



- 1.6.16. Analysis by diversity information shows that BME respondents are most likely say the Council provides value for money. Again, this analysis is based on a very small sample.
- 1.6.17. There is no direct comparison data from the previous BVPI survey as this is the first time this particular question has been asked.
- 1.6.18. Further analysis will be carried out by SMSR to discover whether there is any relationship between the way people answer this question and the others on the survey. This information will help the Council plan actions to improve performance on this measure.

#### Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things

- 1.6.19. **Question 11:** Overall 46% of those who responded said they were satisfied with the way Maidstone Council runs things. This is higher than the 44% who were satisfied with the way Kent County Council runs things. When compared to other Kent districts this places Maidstone sixth out of eight. The Kent district results range from 38% to 57%.
- 1.6.20. As with Q10, four in ten people again answered 'Neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know'. This suggests people do not feel particularly strongly either way about the way the Council delivers services, or may not be aware of what services the Council delivers.
- 1.6.21. Maidstone is not the only council where satisfaction has dropped. Nationally, the picture is one of decreasing satisfaction with councils: Ipsos MORI has reported that satisfaction with councils has dropped from an average of 53% to an average of 45%. Ipsos MORI has suggested that the drop in satisfaction could be due to a perceived lack of communication from councils and recommend that councils do more work to improve branding and visibility of council services.
- 1.6.22. Further analysis will be carried out by SMSR to discover whether there are any key drivers of people's satisfaction with the way the Council runs things e.g. are people much more likely to be satisfied if they feel well informed? This information will help the Council plan actions to improve performance on this measure.

#### Feeling informed

- 1.6.23. **Question 12:** People feel most well informed about how and where to register to vote (93% said they were 'Very well informed' or 'Fairly well informed') and least well informed about how to get involved in local decision-making (31% said they were 'Very well

informed' or 'Fairly well informed'). 40% said they were well informed about local public services.

Complaints

1.6.24. **Question 27a and 27b:** 22% of respondents (483) said they had made a complaint to the Council within the last 12 months. Of those who had made a complaint, 44% reported they were satisfied with the way the complaint was handled. This is a significant improvement in the satisfaction levels in 2006/07, when 32% of people said they were satisfied with the way the way their complaint was handled.

1.7. Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.7.1 Cabinet could decide not to respond to the results of the Place or agree the action plans shown at Appendices D to I. However, it is an independent assessment of resident views and expected that that authorities will use the results of the Place Survey to improve services. The Council has an excellent record of using consultation to drive service improvements.

1.7.2 In addition the national survey will be repeated again in 2010 and it will be able to provide an assessment of whether the council is having an impact on the outcomes in the local community.

1.8 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.8.1 The Place Survey covers a number of topics that relate to the council's objectives.

1.9 Risk Management

1.9.1 If the results of the Place Survey are not considered it is possible that services to customers will not improve or could decline. This could have an adverse on a range of Council services.

1.10 Other Implications

1. Financial	X
1. Staffing	X
2. Legal	
3. Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
4. Environmental/Sustainable Development	X

- 5. Community Safety
- 6. Human Rights Act
- 7. Procurement
- 8. Asset Management

X

1.11 Financial and staffing

1.11.1 Further analysis of the Place Survey results will have implications in terms of staff time (if undertaken internally) or financial implications (for work undertaken by SMSR).

1.12 Environmental/sustainable development and community safety

1.12.1 There are specific questions in the Place Survey that relate to both of these areas.

<b><u>NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED</u></b>			
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan?			
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Is this an Urgent Key Decision?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<u>Reason for Urgency</u>			