

Executive Summary

The new performance framework for local government, outlined in the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper is about improving quality of life in places and providing better public Services. The National Indicator Set which is a key element of the framework by which to measure progress against. The Place Survey is a collection of citizens' perspective indicators from the National Indicator Set which is collected biennially and the findings influences the rating of the Council's Comprehensive Area.

An investigation of public perception on behalf of the Local Strategy Partnership 'One Epping Forest' was undertaken by consultants BMG Research. The collection of data was organised across Essex with local samples for Epping Forest District in order to maximise efficiency and value for money.

The following report examines the results of the statutory Place Survey 2008; and the Place Survey's contribution of results for 18 National Indicators within the National Indicator Set.

The purpose of the report is to describe customer satisfaction and perception about where they live, public services and neighbourhood cohesion; highlight areas of competence and areas for concern; and compare, where possible, with Essex County Council, Local Authorities and trends over time.

The report examines overall satisfaction of residents with the local area. It examines perceptions of residents of local public services and shows priorities for improvement and areas to sustain best practice.

Method

The Place Survey is intended to replicate much of the survey methodology of the Best Value Performance Indicator surveys. It continued as a postal survey, sent out in September 2008 to a random sample of 1350 residents in the District. The results were published by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) in June 2009.

Key Findings

The majority of National Indicator scores for performance were average and the following section highlights some of the higher and lower scores in customer satisfaction and opinion:

- The top three factors making area a good place to live were, low levels of crime, health services and clean streets;
- The highest priority for improvement was road and pavement repairs; activities for teenagers and traffic congestion. Young people mentioned transport, shopping facilities and race relations as areas to improve;
- Overall satisfaction with the area as a place to live was up by 10% to 87% from 2006. The majority of residents were satisfied with their own homes (91%), (94% were home owners, 84% were social housing tenants, 85% others). Only 3% expressed dissatisfaction with their home;

Place Survey Executive Summary

- Most people felt they belonged to their neighbourhood and felt safe in their local area during the day and after dark, but there were perceptions that anti-social behaviour was a problem in their area and that teenagers hanging around the streets was of most concern;
- Overall satisfaction with the way the council runs things was down by 1% to 49% from 2006 which was not a significant drop. Residents rated public service performance high with regard to good value for money but low with regard to acting on the concerns and promoting the interests of local residents;
- Older people were more likely to be satisfied with public services and this increased with age. Satisfaction with public service performance was at its best with doorstep recycling and worst with local bus services and sport and leisure facilities. Three quarters of respondents were satisfied with Fire and Rescue services. Half of the survey's respondents were satisfied with the Police Service; and
- The majority of residents felt that generally speaking, they would like to be more involved in local decision making depending on the issues and the provision for information on how to get involved was felt to be above average. However, residents showed a lack of awareness of emergency planning.

KEY FINDINGS

Views on the local area - Residents feel that the most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live are the level of crime (55%); Health services (44%); and clean streets (38%) *page 14*. The issues which are considered to be in most need of improvement are road and pavement repairs (50%); activities for teenagers (45%); and the level of traffic congestion (32%) *page 16*.

Priorities for Improvement - Priorities for improvement (i.e. the aspects that are regarded both as important and as in need of improvement) are the level of crime (55%); and cleanliness of streets (38%) *page 19*.

Overall Satisfaction With Area - The majority of residents are satisfied overall with their local area as a place to live (87%), (NI5). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are highest among residents living in Buckhurst Hill (97%); Theydon Bois (96%); Chipping Ongar (96%); and Moreton and Fyfield (95%). Satisfaction ratings for this aspect are lowest among residents living in Chigwell (78%); and Waltham Abbey (78%) *page 21*.

Neighbourhood Belonging - More than three fifths of residents report feeling a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood (62.6%); and this tends to increase with age (76%), (over 65). The highest rated area is in Moreton and Fyfield (98%); and the lowest rating area is Lower Sheering (38%), (NI2) *page 24*.

Satisfaction with Local Public Services - The majority of residents agree that local public services are working to make the area safer (53%); and cleaner and greener (63%), (NI21) *page 28*.

Fair treatment from public services - Half agree that they treat all types of people fairly (50%). Agreement declines when asking whether they act on the concerns of local residents (36%), especially in Theydon Bois (40%), Chigwell Row (36%) and Loughton Alderton (32%); and/or promote the interests of local residents 37%, especially in Chigwell Row (46%) and Loughton Alderton (40%), (NI140) *page 33*.

Among respondents who have used public services in the past year, around three quarters are satisfied with their Fire and Rescue Service (77%); and Local GP/family doctor (76%). At least three fifths of those who have used them are satisfied with the local hospital (66%); and the local dentist (62%). While around half are satisfied with the local dentist (62%); and police force (51%) *page 27*.

Environmental Services - The majority of respondents are satisfied with environmental services; particularly doorstep recycling (81%); and refuse collection (74%). Satisfaction is lower in relation to keeping public land clear of litter and refuse (63%), particularly in Chigwell Row (25%); and Loughton (24%) *page 28*.

Local /tips household recycling centres - In terms of the most frequently used are local tips household recycling centres (53%). The most popular service amongst those who have used them, around three quarters are satisfied with recycling centres (75%) *page 29 and 30*.

Satisfaction with Leisure and Cultural Services - In terms of leisure and cultural service, the most popular and frequently used facilities are parks and open spaces (17%) and around three quarters are satisfied with them (72%). Around half are satisfied with sport and leisure facilities (51%). Respondents are more likely to be dissatisfied with local bus services (30%); local transport information (28%); and theatres and concert halls (30%) *page 30*.

Value for Money - Just under a third of respondents agree in relation to Epping Forest District Council. provides good value for money (36%), and (30%) for Essex County Council *page 31*

The way the council runs things - More than two fifths of respondents are satisfied with the way Essex County Council runs things (43%), and almost half are satisfied with the way Epping Forest District Council runs things (49%) *page 32*.

Information - Although the majority of residents feel well informed about how and where to register to vote (90%) and how their council tax is spent (67%). Many feel that they are not well informed in terms of other aspects; in particular how to get involved in local decision making 59%; and what to do in the case of a large-scale emergency (73%), (NI37) *page 33*.

Local decision making and involvement - A quarter of respondents agree that they can influence local decision making (26%). Six in ten feel that, generally speaking or depending on the issues, they would like to be more involved in this process (60%) *page 35 and 37*.

Volunteering - Although the majority of respondents have not been involved with any volunteering work in the past year (34%), around one in six volunteer at least weekly (16%), (NI3) *page 32*. Few have been involved in any decision making groups (5%) *page 36*.

Respect and Cohesion - Around a quarter of respondents agree that parents in the local area take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children (27%), however around half disagree (52%), (NI22) *page 39*.

More than three quarters of respondents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (78%). Residents in the Waltham Abbey (28%) and Loughton (29%), are more likely to disagree (NI1), (NI23) *page 40*.

Most respondents do not feel that there is a problem with people treating each other with respect and consideration in their local area (70%), and almost three quarters agree that they have been treated with respect and consideration by public services all or most of the time (74%), (NI140) *page 41*.

Anti-social Behaviour - The majority of respondents feel safe in their local area (89%), during the day and report anti-social behaviour issues to be fairly unproblematic where they live. There are fewer than one in five respondents who consider one or more anti-social behaviour issues to be a problem in their local area (17.8%), (NI17) *page 45*.