



**THURROCK COUNCIL
COMMUNITY STRATEGY SURVEY**

**SUMMARY EVALUATION
JANUARY 2003**

PREPARED FOR: THURROCK COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Council has commissioned Market Research UK (mruk social research) to undertake a programme of recruitment, refreshment and consultation with its Citizen's panel.

Part of the initial requirement was to refresh approximately one third of the Citizen's Panel after establishing the extent of drop out from those originally recruited some 18 months ago.

The Council also wanted to conduct its first Community Strategy consultation towards the end of 2002 and, in view of this it was agreed that the most cost effective approach would be to combine the recruitment process with the first survey.

By adopting this technique the Council and mruk ensured the previous imbalances in Local Assembly Area representation on the panel could start to be redressed. It also provided for a more robust response to the first survey than would otherwise have been achieved by relying on existing Citizens Panel members.

The following report provides a summary evaluation of the key survey findings.

1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Objectives

The key objectives of the panel recruitment were to refresh panel membership and move it towards being more representative of the four Local Assembly Areas.

The primary objective of the quantitative survey was to provide Thurrock Council with key information to assist in the development of its Community Strategy with particular emphasis on quality of life indicators and priorities for the Borough.

2.2 Methodology

The panel recruitment was undertaken using a random route quota control method. In order to redress imbalances in the existing panel the recruitment focussed on the South and North East Assembly Areas.

In the North East Assembly Area panel recruitment was undertaken from 25 sampling points and in the South Area from 5 sampling points. The aim was to achieve 10 interviews from each, thus recruiting 300 new panel members.

The survey itself was conducted using the same questionnaire through two methods.

With existing panel members a telephone survey was conducted. 455 interviews were achieved within the survey period of 3 weeks from 7 November 2002. This represents approximately 50% response and does highlight the need to further refresh the panel to ensure it contains a continuously “active” and available membership.

In anticipation of this response rate a further 600 interviews were conducted on a face-to-face in-home basis. Survey Interviews were conducted with all those successfully recruited as new panel members plus an additional 300 survey only interviews.

The aggregate response was 1055 achieved interviews thus providing for very robust analysis.

Data analysis (in SPSS format) has been provided to the Council cross-tabulated by survey type and Local Assembly Area (allowing for the built in bias towards those in the North East). In this respect the survey findings cannot purport to be geographically representative and appropriate caution should be exercised in any such interpretation.

3 LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

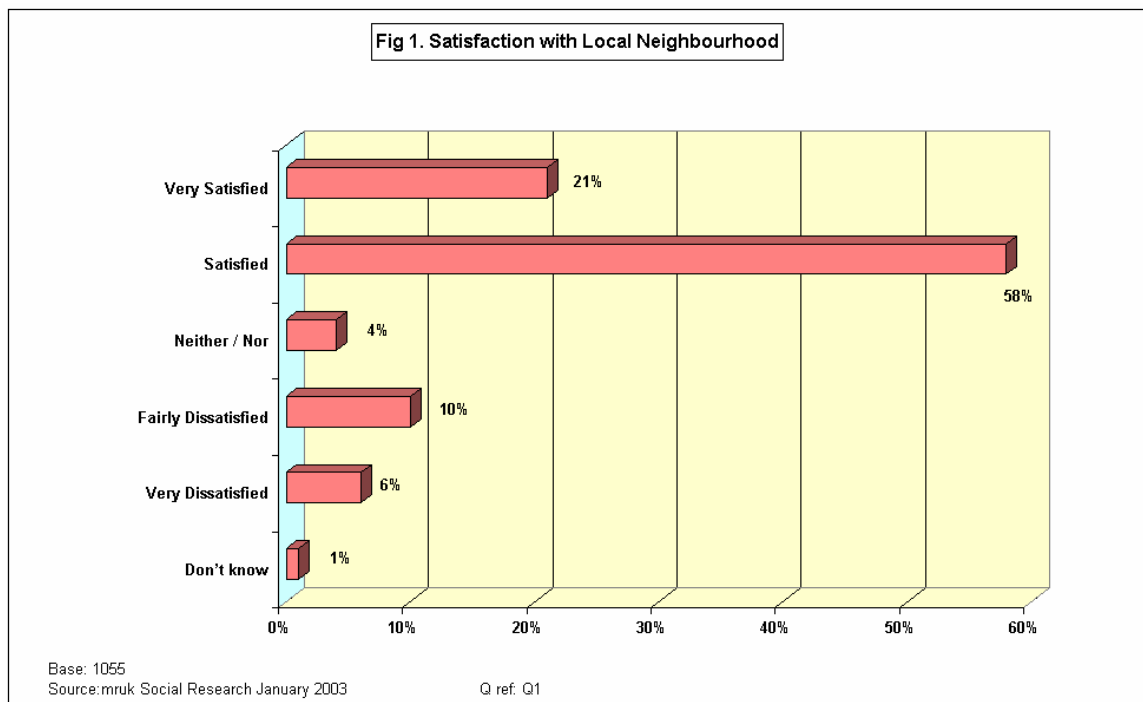
3.1 Satisfaction With Local Neighbourhood

Overall, some 79% of respondents say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

As one of the key quality of life indicators developed by the Audit Commission this represents a fairly high satisfaction level although only 21% specifically say they are “very satisfied”.

Figure 1 below illustrates that 16% express dissatisfaction while nearly 5% do not express a view either way.

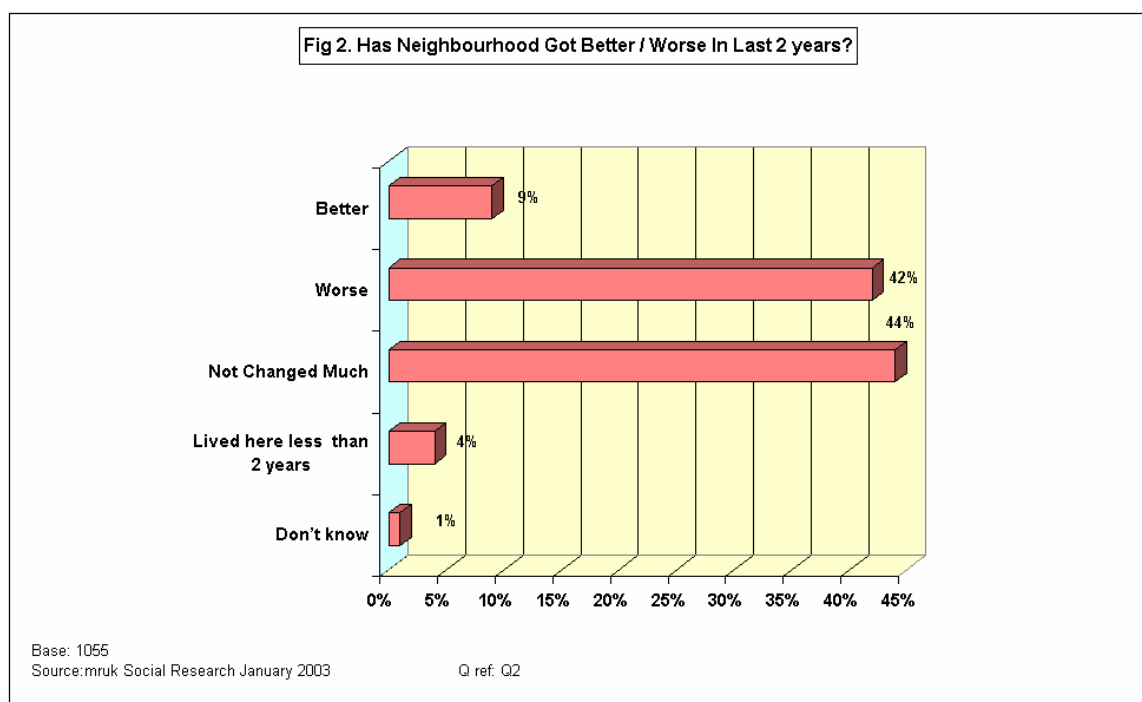
It is notable that in proportionate terms satisfaction appears highest amongst the Central Assembly Area respondents.



3.2 Neighbourhood Improving / Deteriorating

Despite the relatively high satisfaction level a significant 42% of respondents consider that their neighbourhood has deteriorated over the last 2 years. While 44% say it has not changed much and 5% were unable to answer only 9% believe their neighbourhood has improved

Proportionately, 49% of respondents in the South Assembly Area believe their neighbourhood has got worse which appears to be the highest level of the four



3.3 Noise In Local Area

Figure 3 below illustrates the extent to which respondents believe the specified types of noise pose a problem of some sort in their local area.

Fig 3. How would you rate the following types of noise in your local area?

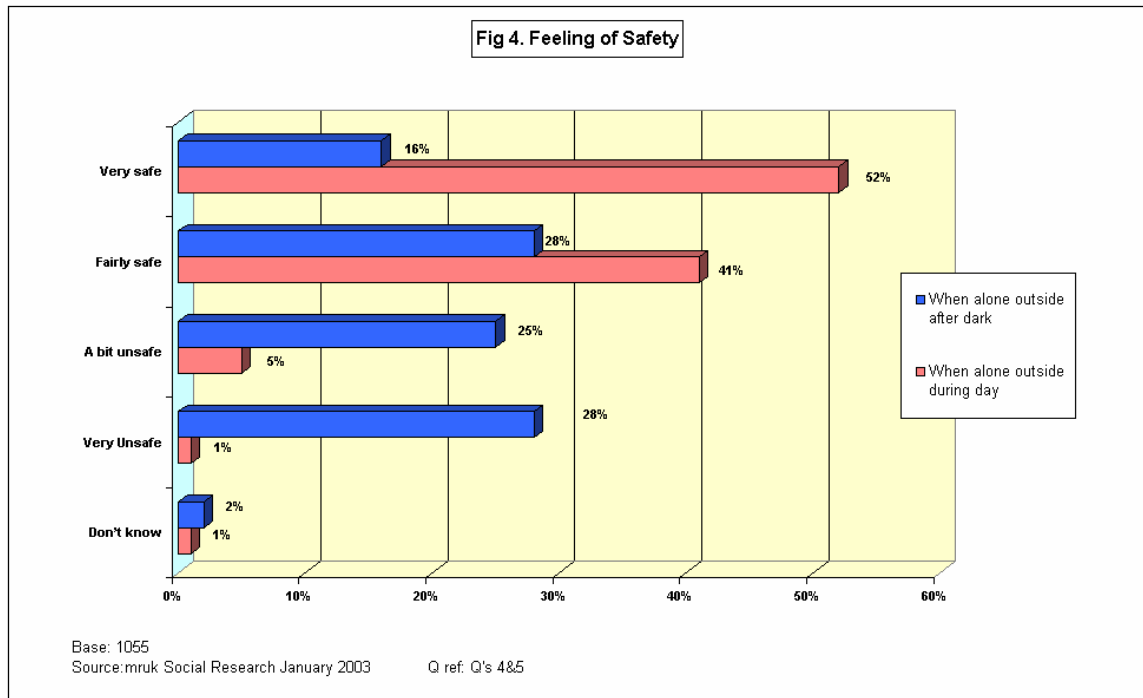
	Serious Problem	Problem - but not serious	Not a problem	Don't know / N/a
Road Traffic	12%	21%	65%	1%
Aircraft	1%	8%	88%	2%
Trains	2%	4%	92%	1%
Industrial / commercial premises	2%	6%	89%	2%
Road works	3%	9%	86%	2%
Construction / demolition	2%	5%	91%	3%
Pubs, clubs or other place of entertainment	4%	9%	85%	3%
Neighbours	6%	10%	83%	2%
Gangs of youths congregating	18%	24%	57%	1%

In most cases the vast majority of respondents do not consider noise to be a problem from these sources. However, notable exceptions are 42% who say noise is a problem from “gangs of youths” and 33% who say that road traffic poses some sort of noise problem.

3.4 Community Safety

The vast majority (93%) of respondents feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe if alone outside during the day. However, this drops significantly to less than half (44%) if alone outside after dark. Only 6% specifically say they feel 'unsafe' during the day compared to 53% who feel unsafe after dark.

The council may be interested to note that in other recent surveys we have conducted in the South East comparable figures have been between 80% - 90% feeling of safety during the day and 45% - 55% after dark.



3.5 Access to Local Facilities / Services

Respondents were invited to state how easy it is for them to get to a range of specified services and facilities by using their usual form of transport.

Full analysis is detailed in the data which accompanies this report. However, a significant majority of those to whom it applied (usually 80% or more) find it easy to access: -

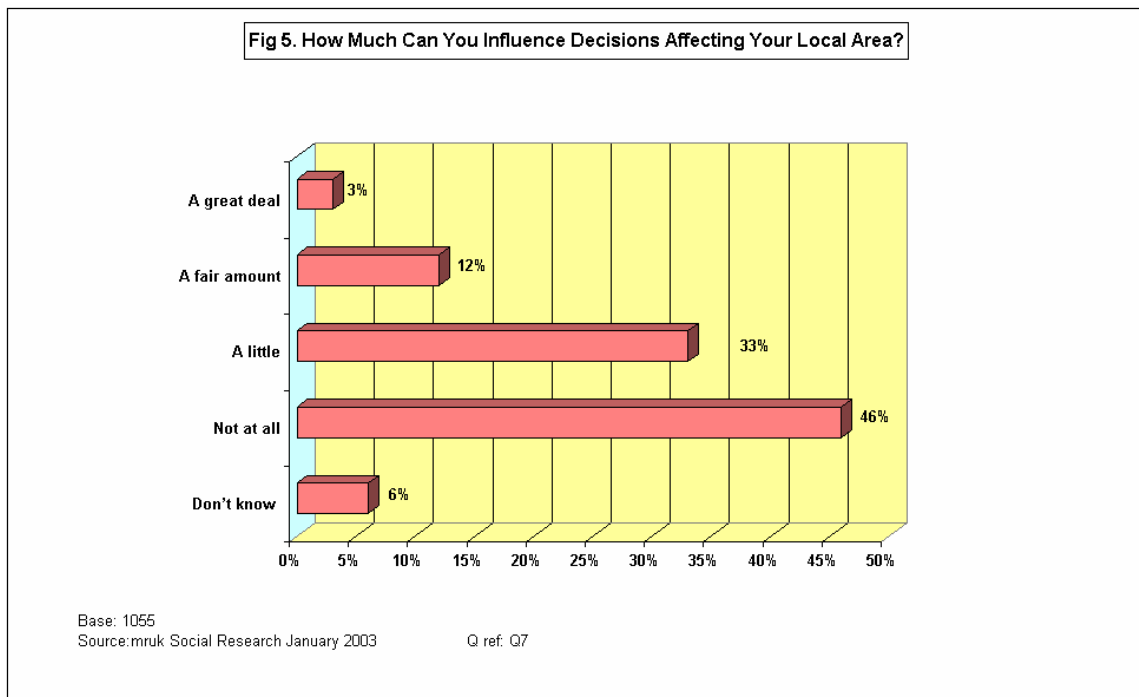
- Local Shops
- Shopping Centre / Supermarket
- Post Office
- G.P.
- Chemist
- Publicly accessible green space

Services or facilities which a higher proportion experience difficulty in getting to include: -

- Local hospital (36% find it difficult)
- Public transport facility (18%)
- Recycling facility (17%)
- Bank / cash point (18%)
- Council / Neighbourhood office (12%)

3.6 Influencing Decisions

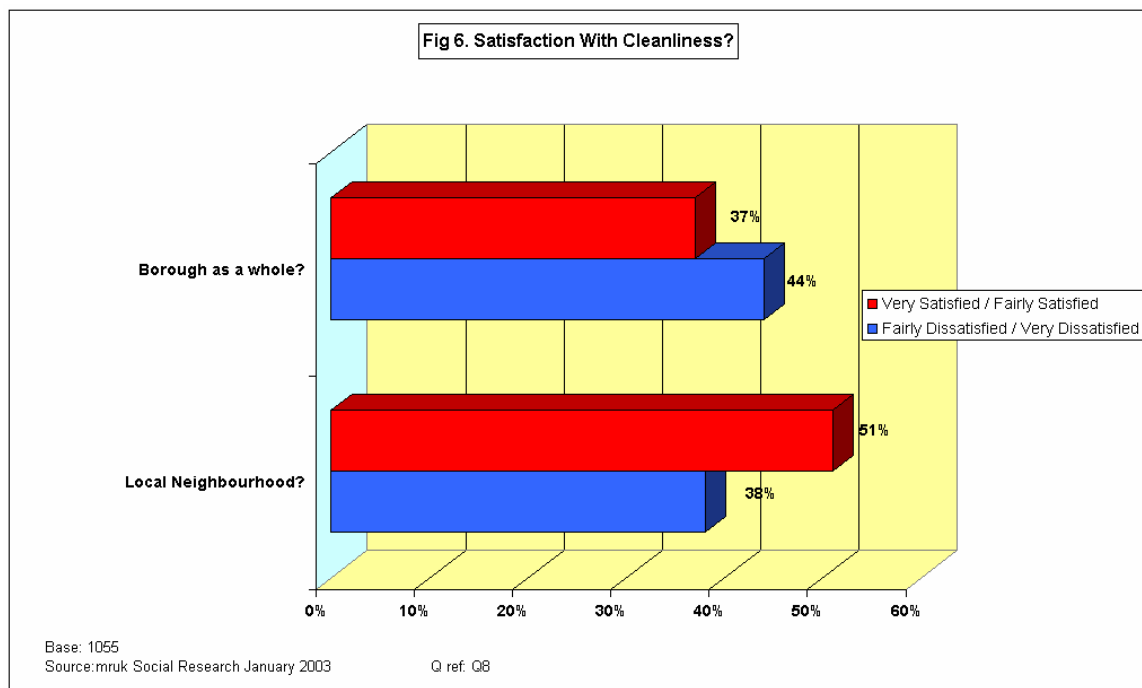
Figure 5 below illustrates that only 15% of respondents believe they can significantly influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood although an additional third (33%) think they can exert a "little" influence. However, nearly half (46%) say they cannot exert any influence at all.



3.7 Cleanliness of Local Neighbourhood

Just over half (51%) say they are satisfied with the cleanliness of their local neighbourhood. 38% specifically say they are dissatisfied. However, this compares with just over one third (37%) who express satisfaction with the general cleanliness of the Borough as a whole and 44% who say they are dissatisfied.

In proportionate terms the highest level of local dissatisfaction appears to emerge from those resident in the West Assembly Area (47%) whereas highest satisfaction is in the Central Assembly Area (60%).



3.8 Community Harmony

Overall, 61% agree or strongly agree that their area “is a place where people from different backgrounds and communities can live together harmoniously”.

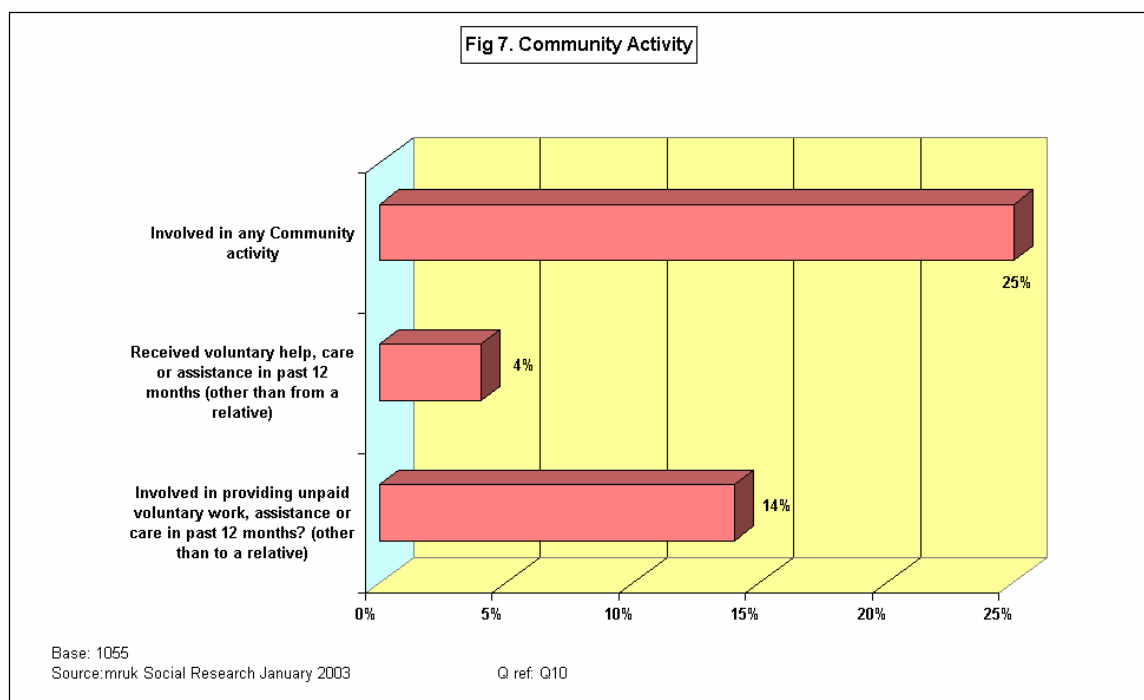
Only 14% disagree with this statement although just over one quarter (26%) do not / are unable to express a view either way

3.9 Community Activity

Figure 7 below illustrates the extent to which respondents are involved in their local communities in any of the ways highlighted.

14% have been involved in providing some form of unpaid (except for expenses) work, assistance or care for someone who is not a relative over the last 12 months. By contrast only 4% have actually received such help or care.

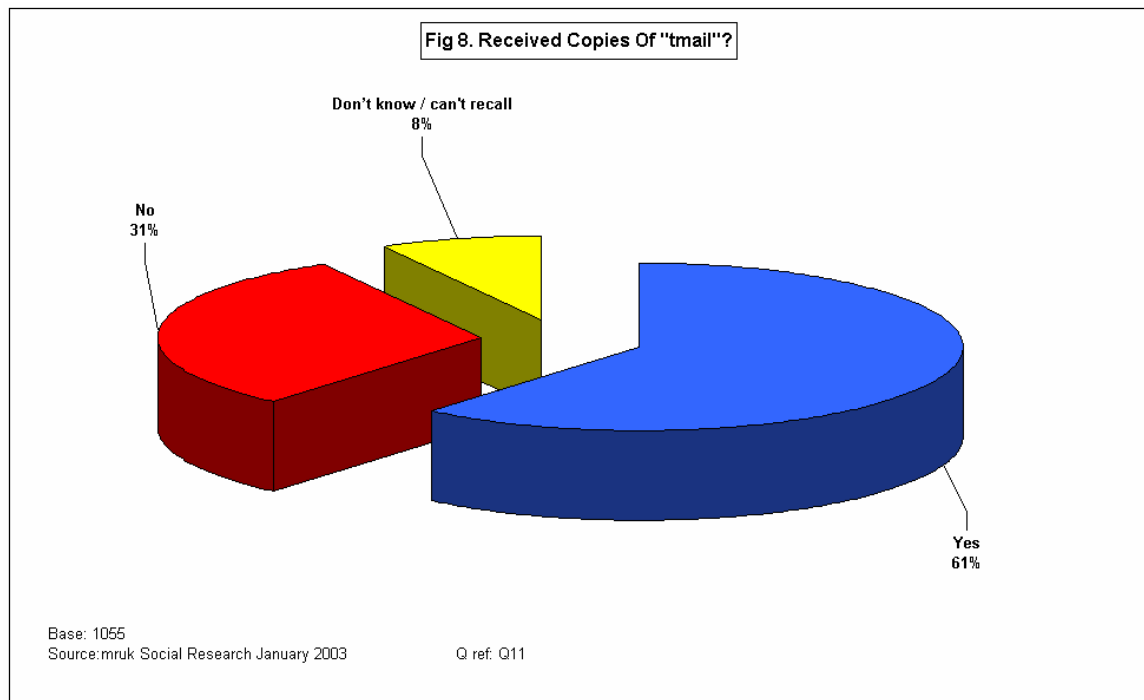
In total, 25% say they have been involved in some other form of local community activity such as Church groups, Play Groups, Residents Associations or similar.



4. THURROCK COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

4.1 “T-Mail” – Thurrock Council’s Newspaper

Thurrock Council produce “t-mail” a newspaper which is delivered quarterly to every resident in the Borough. However, as figure 8 illustrates less than two thirds (61%) of respondents recall having received copies of the newspaper.

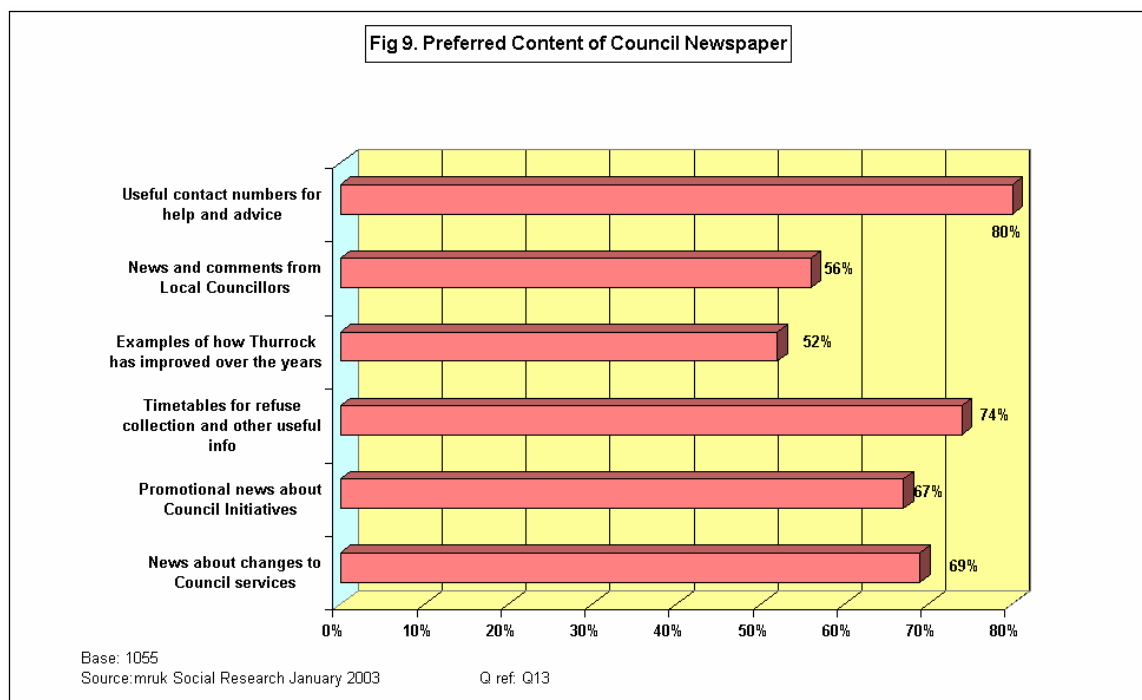


Of those who recall having received copies of the newspaper, the vast majority (92%) say they read it.

4.2 Content of Newspaper

Respondents were given the opportunity to specify what (from a pre-determined list) what they would most want to read about in a Council Newspaper .

Figure 9 illustrates that all items are generally considered useful but, in particular, useful contact numbers for help / advice, timetables and other such information is the preferred content.



It is notable that variations in findings are evident between existing panel members and those undertaking the survey as part of the wider consultative or recruitment process.

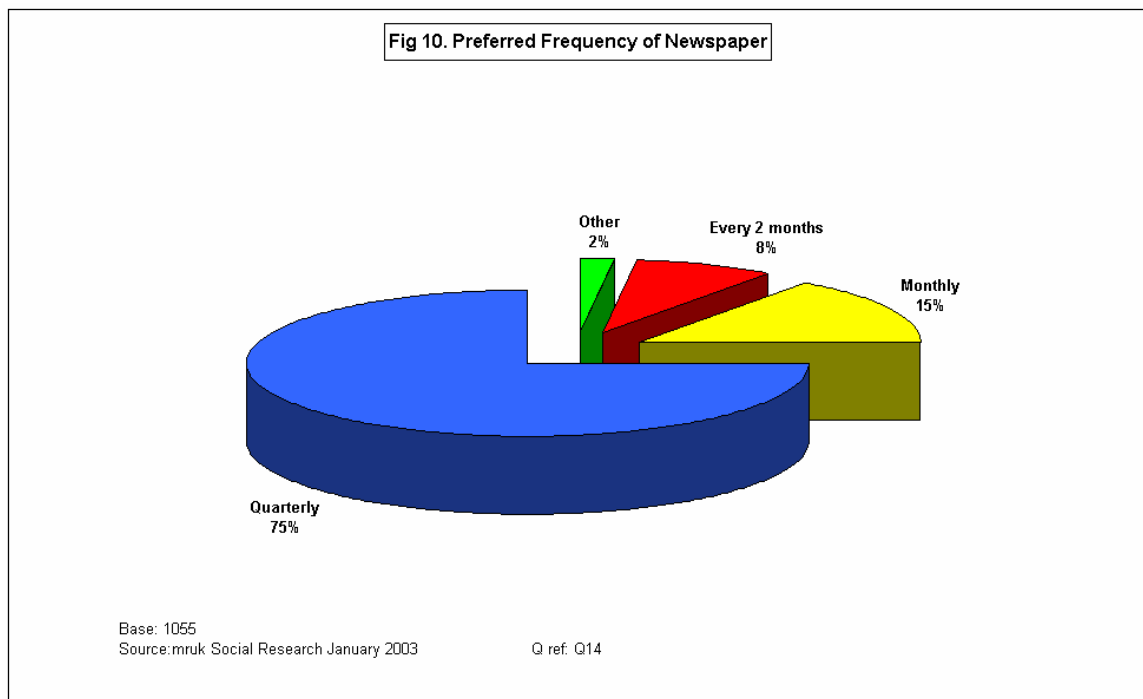
Arguably, existing panel members have built up a more positive view through their involvement and this manifests itself through a greater level of “Civic Pride”. It is the case (for example) that some 84% of existing panel members responding would most want to read news about Council initiatives compared to only 55% of other survey respondents.

Similarly 62% of panel members want to learn about improvements to Thurrock compared to only 44% of other respondents.

It therefore appears that even the modest commitment required of panel members has helped them develop more positive attitudes towards the type of information they would like.

4.3 Frequency of Newspaper

The majority (75%) express a preference to receive “t-mail” – the Councils newspaper quarterly with 23% saying monthly or every 2 months.



5. THINKING ABOUT THURROCK

5.1 Key Priorities

Respondents were asked to identify (unprompted) their three main priorities for Thurrock.

Whilst a wide range of issues were identified, the highest proportions were associated with: -

- Policing / tackling crime
- Need for cleaner streets / environment
- More provision for young people / children (with education and schools a potential linked issue)
- Transport – more buses

Such issues remain broadly contained within the Councils existing strategic priorities and are also reflected in items identified as the “one change” respondents would make to Thurrock if they were able to make just one .

The profile is again similar in response to a question posed as “what (if any) is the one thing about Thurrock that most gets you down?”

Proportionately – the highest single responses included: -

- “Dirty” / “Vandalism” and associated items
- Hooligans / gangs of youths
- Lack of police / facilities
- Lack of buses
- Traffic / parking

By contrast, when asked what 'one thing' about Thurrock they hope will never change proportionately highest single responses included: -

- Preserving 'green' places
- Community spirit / friendly people
- Opportunities for peace and quiet

5.2 Achievements

When asked what the “best achievement has been for Thurrock in the past 20 years” over half (52%) were unable to identify one.

Of those who did, the most frequently identified included: -

- The Lakeside Shopping (and other) Centres
- All round improvements
- Council house improvements
- Building of new A13 road / other road improvements

Aspirations for the next 20 years include: -

- More provision for young people
- Improve ‘cleanliness’ of the Borough
- Preserve ‘green’ areas
- Improve hospital provision / health care
- Increase policing
- Improve local bus services

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey findings are a first step towards informing the Community Strategy for Thurrock.

Key issues to emerge from this initial programme of quantitative research are: -

- A perception held by a significant proportion of survey respondents that their local neighbourhoods have deteriorated in the last 2 years.

While it is possible to identify potential correlating reasons for this from other parts of the survey it is recommended Thurrock Council and its partners investigate causes further. The aim should be to ensure the Community Strategy makes clear provision to address perceived concerns and restore confidence in local areas.

- Key concerns that are expressed through the survey may (arguably) be linked. Concerns relating to gangs of youths congregating and feeling unsafe when alone outside after dark are often in our experience intrinsically linked to perceptions of the local area .

The relationship between such issues should be further developed as part of any wider community safety strategy. In turn they are likely to link into the priority issues identified by respondents which include provision for young people / children.

- Whilst many find it easy to access a wide range of services and facilities the main problems in this respect seem to be associated with getting to a local hospital and availability of buses .

Public transport (buses in particular) has previously been an issue which the Council has been made aware of . The need to continue to examine accessibility of services / facilities in a fully inclusive way for all local communities will remain an important theme for the Community Strategy to address.

- Approaching one half of the survey respondents express dissatisfaction with the “cleanliness” of the Borough. Again this will contribute to the perceptions of local areas continuing to deteriorate .

The Council and its partners should examine the extent to which they believe it is necessary to provide a responsive mechanism on this particular issue . Cleanliness can become an important contributory factor in maintaining (and developing) “civic pride”. However, it inevitably has a wide range of resource implications and clearly must then be balanced against competing priorities .

- Nearly half the respondents feel they cannot influence decisions affecting their local area .

In comparative terms this is not unusual. However, the Council and its partners need to agree and communicate to Citizens how much they believe local communities can and should exert influence. In turn, any consultative strategy should set out the primary opportunities and mechanisms available to local communities for this purpose. The Council and its partners should also ensure Citizens will be informed of how influential their views have been.

- Thurrock Council should be informed by the views expressed in the survey relating to its newspaper. It appears that not all are receiving it regularly even though it is intended to be distributed to all households .

Quarterly distribution is preferred. However, it is notable that perceptions of newspaper content vary depending upon how informed or involved readers are with the Civic process .

- Key priorities which are identified by respondents include those associated with: -

- Crime / safety
- Cleanliness / the environment
- Provision for young people / children (including links with wider Education issues)
- Transport

The Community Strategy should therefore take account of these issues and particularly acknowledge the potential (and complex) inter-relationships. In developing initiatives around youth engagement, community safety, civic pride, transport and broader community support the strategy should ensure a place for active consultation, involvement and feedback to local communities themselves.

APPENDIX I - QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX II – TABULAR DATA