

**THURROCK COUNCIL
QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY
(COMMUNITY STRATEGY)
SUMMARY EVALUATION
JANUARY 2004**

Prepared For: Thurrock Council

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Council conducted its second major quality of life survey in December 2003. The survey itself was conducted independently by **mruk social research** and was designed to enable key results to be compared to the previous survey conducted in December 2002.

The outcome will contribute to the Council's Community Strategy and help inform its ongoing development and review.

This report provides a summary evaluation of the principal findings to emerge from the 2003 survey and makes direct comparisons with the 2002 research where possible. The report is accompanied by a detailed data file that will enable the Council to conduct further in-depth analysis as required.

2.1 Objectives

The primary objectives of the survey were 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) and allow comparisons with the previous 2002 survey in order to identify any shift in views and opinions.

2.2 Methodology

In 2002 the survey was combined with a refreshment of one third of the Citizens Panel. At that time 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.

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.

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 in 2002 was 1055 achieved interviews. However, in 2003 the survey was conducted entirely by telephone. Existing members of the Citizens Panel were again a primary source of respondent with whom a total of 415 interviews were completed. A further 685 were achieved on a randomly selected basis from within each of the 4 Local Assembly Areas to ensure a stratified sample of 275 per area. This improves area representation when compared to the previous survey and combined with the variance in methodology should be taken into account when examining findings.

Data analysis (in SPSS format) has been provided to the Council cross-tabulated by Local Assembly Area and Gender.

3. LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

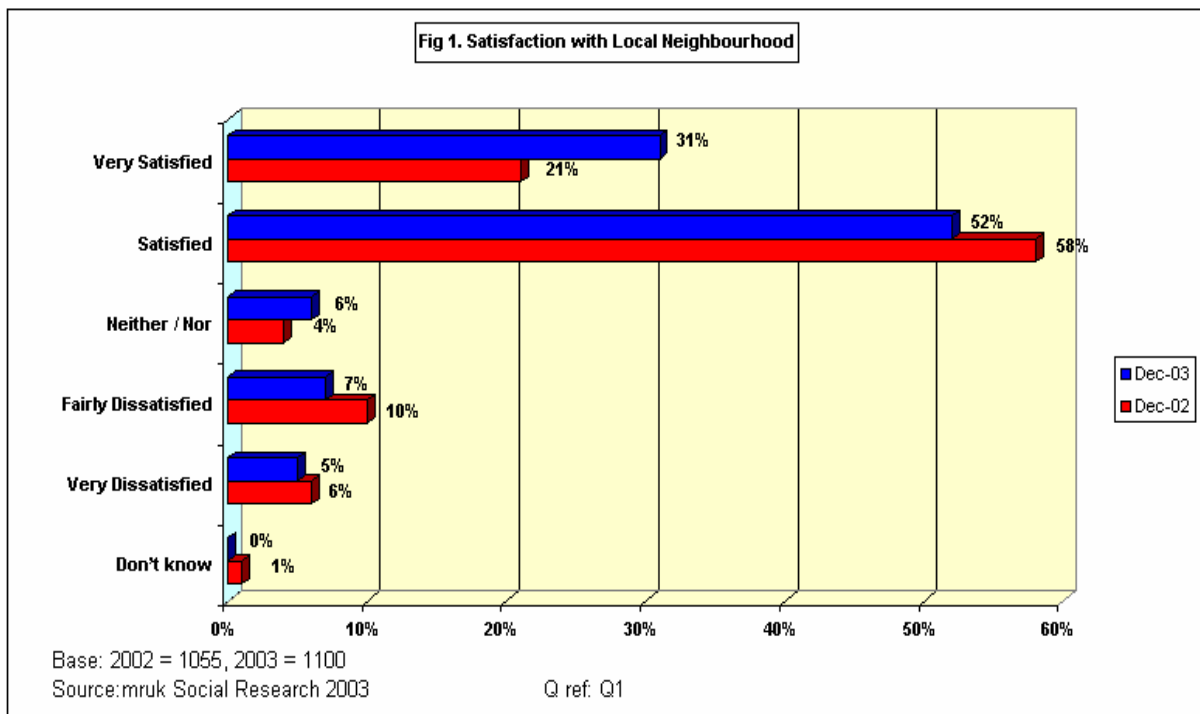
3.1 Satisfaction With Local Neighbourhood

Overall, some 83% of respondents say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. This represents a small increase from 79% in 2002.

As one of the key quality of life indicators developed by the Audit Commission this maintains a fairly high satisfaction level with 31% who now specifically say they are “very satisfied”.

Figure 1 below illustrates that 12% express dissatisfaction while 6% do not express a view either way.

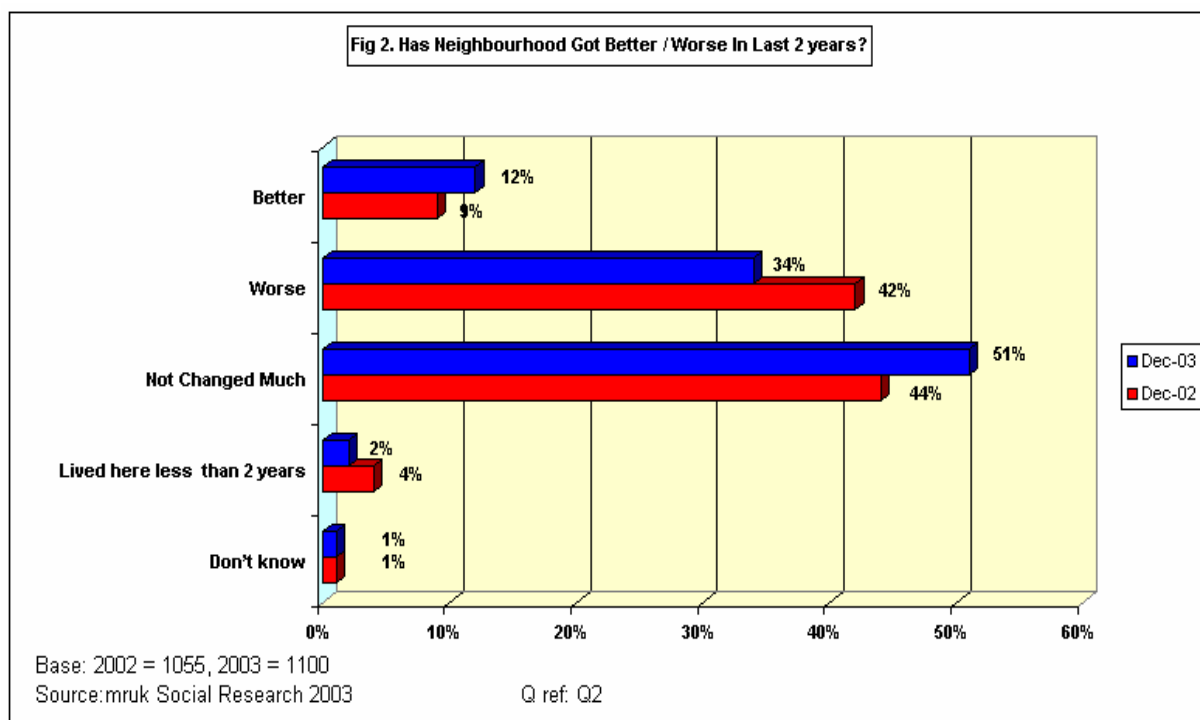
It is notable that in proportionate terms dissatisfaction appears highest amongst the South Assembly Area respondents (16%) and satisfaction is highest in the Central Area (87%).



3.2 Neighbourhood Improving / Deteriorating

Some 34% (compared to 42% in 2002) of respondents consider that their neighbourhood has deteriorated over the last 2 years. While 51% say it has not changed much and 3% were unable to answer only 12% believe their neighbourhood has improved (compared to 9% in 2002).

Proportionately, 37% of respondents in the South Assembly Area believe their neighbourhood has deteriorated worse which appears to be the highest level of the four. However, it is an improvement on the 49% recorded at the last survey for that particular assembly area.



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.

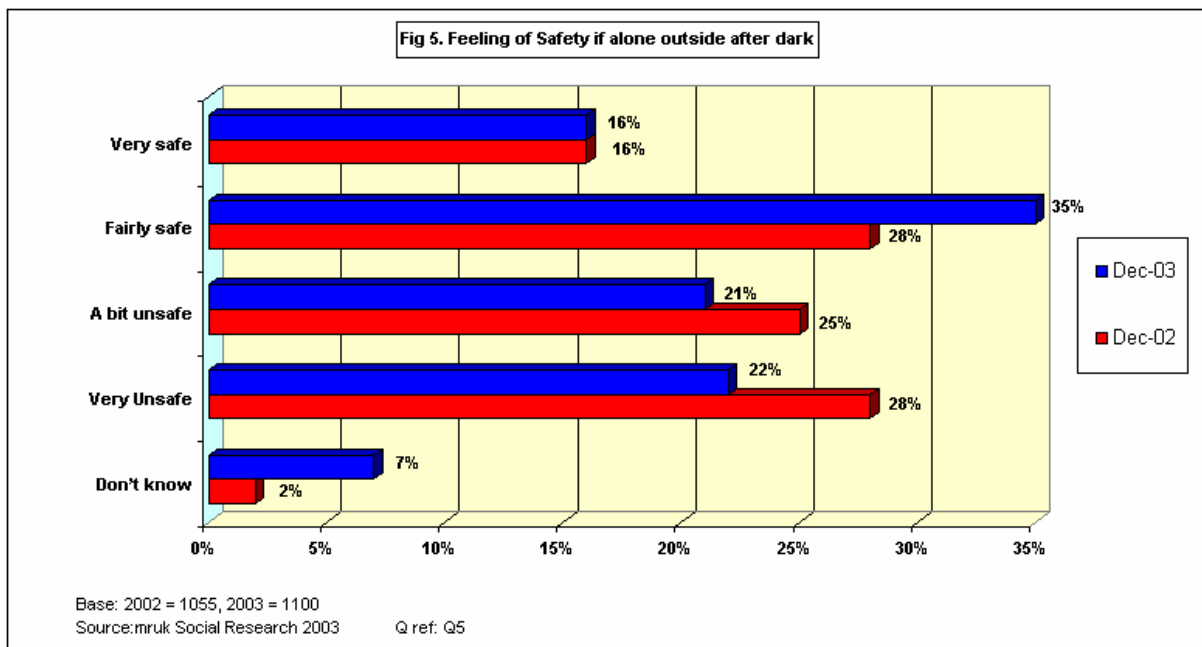
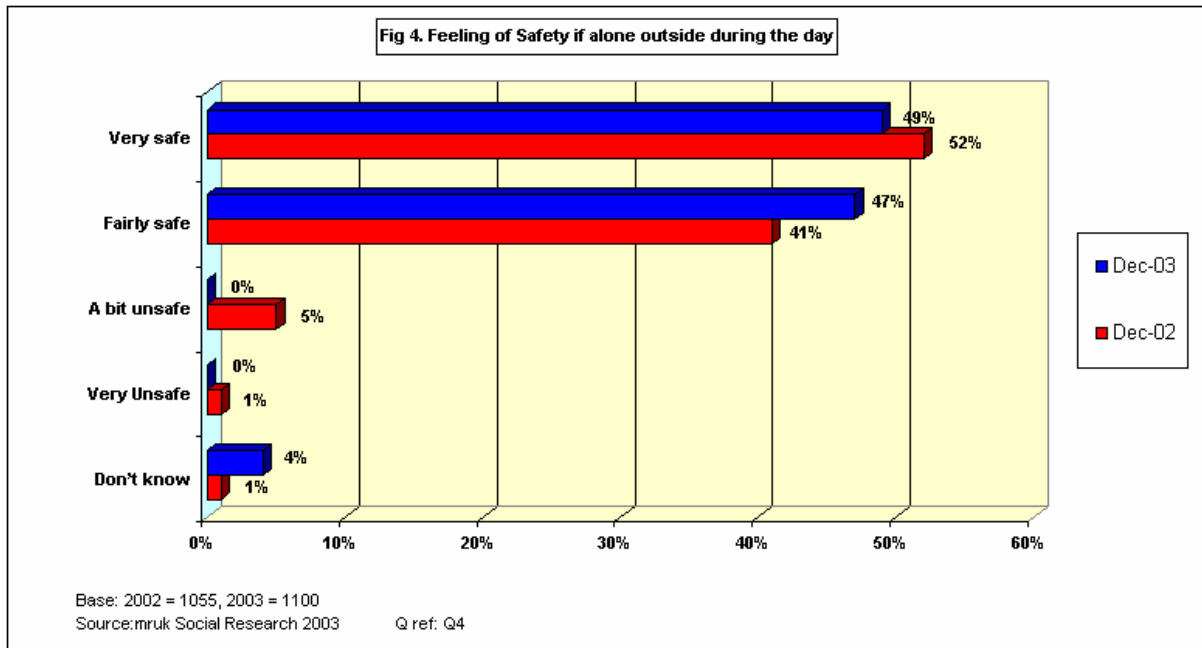
Fig 3. How would you rate the following types of noise in your local area?

	Serious Problem		Problem - but not serious		Not a problem		Don't know / Na	
	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-02	Dec-03
Road Traffic	12%	15%	21%	20%	65%	65%	1%	0%
Aircraft	1%	2%	8%	9%	88%	88%	2%	0%
Trains	2%	2%	4%	6%	92%	91%	1%	0%
Industrial / commercial premises	2%	3%	6%	8%	89%	88%	2%	0%
Road works	3%	4%	9%	10%	86%	87%	2%	0%
Construction / demolition	2%	3%	5%	5%	91%	92%	3%	0%
Pubs, clubs or other place of entertainment	4%	4%	9%	8%	85%	88%	3%	1%
Neighbours	6%	5%	10%	9%	83%	86%	2%	0%
Gangs of youths congregating	18%	22%	24%	31%	57%	47%	1%	0%

In most cases the vast majority of respondents do not consider noise to be a problem from these sources. However, notable exceptions are 53% who say noise is a problem from “gangs of youths” (22% say it is a serious problem). The proportion who hold this view has increased from 42% in 2002. In addition, 35% say that road traffic poses some sort of noise problem.

3.4 Community Safety

The vast majority (96%) of respondents feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe if alone outside during the day. However, this drops significantly to around half (51%) if alone outside after dark. It is notable when examining the gender split that a higher percentage of males (62%) feel safe after dark than females (42%). Overall 26% of females say they feel "very" unsafe at this time compared to 15% of males.



Amongst those who feel unsafe the most significant fear (expressed by 70%) is that of harassment and/or intimidation from gangs of youths. 30% fear physical attack.

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: -

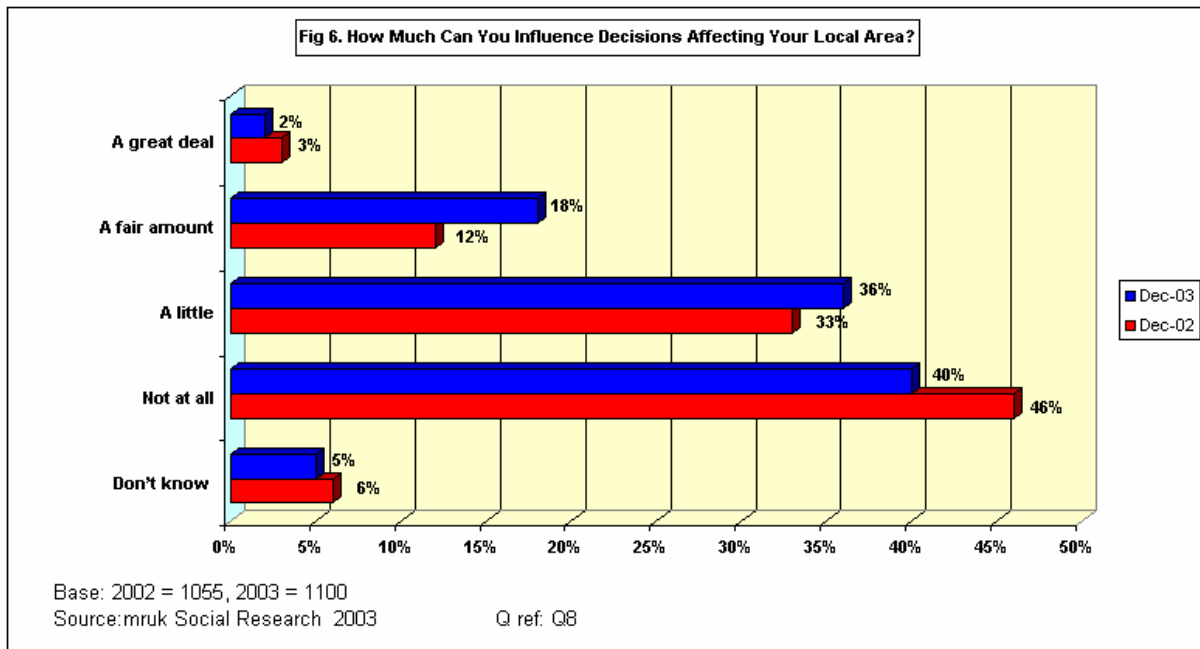
- Local Shops
- Shopping Centre / Supermarket
- Post Office
- G.P.
- Chemist
- Publicly accessible green space

Services or facilities which a higher proportion (over 20%) experience difficulty in getting to include: -

- Local hospital (57% find it difficult)
- Public transport facility (21%)
- Bank / cash point (25%)

3.6 Influencing Decisions

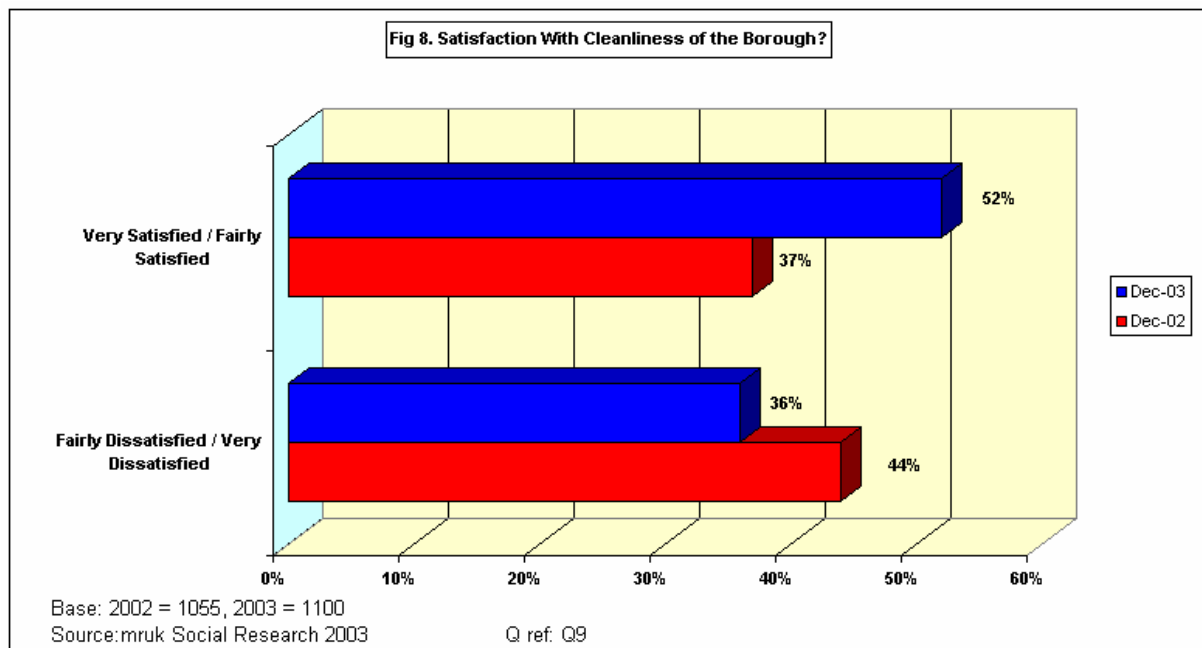
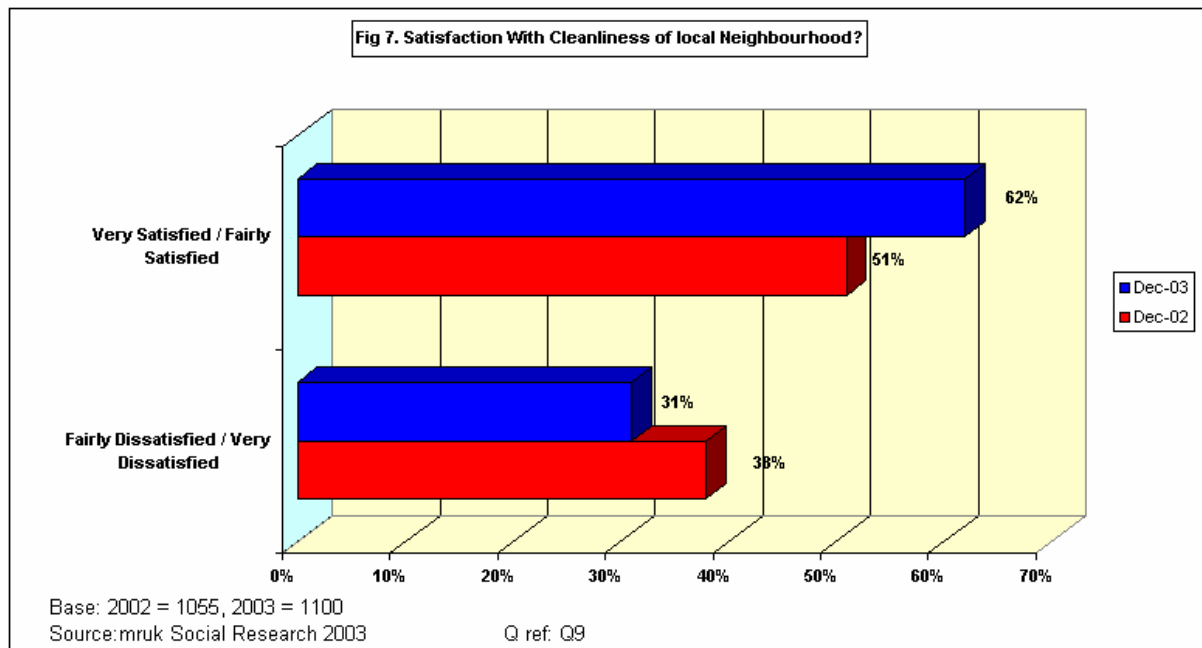
Figure 6 below illustrates that only 20% of respondents believe they can significantly influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood although an additional 36% think they can exert a "little" influence. However, some 40% say they cannot exert any influence at all. This represents some improvement on the previous survey when the equivalent figures were 15%, 33% and 46% respectively.



3.7 Cleanliness of Local Neighbourhood

62% (up from 51% in 2002) say they are satisfied with the cleanliness of their local neighbourhood. 31% specifically say they are dissatisfied. This compares with 52% who express satisfaction with the general cleanliness of the Borough as a whole and 36% who say they are dissatisfied.

In proportionate terms the highest level of local dissatisfaction remains from those resident in the West Assembly Area (36%) whereas highest satisfaction is in the North East Assembly Area (67%).



3.8 Community Harmony

Overall, 59% (61% in 2002) agree or strongly agree that their area “is a place where people from different backgrounds and communities can live together harmoniously”.

17% (14% in 2002) disagree with this statement although nearly one quarter (24%) do not know / are unable to express a view either way.

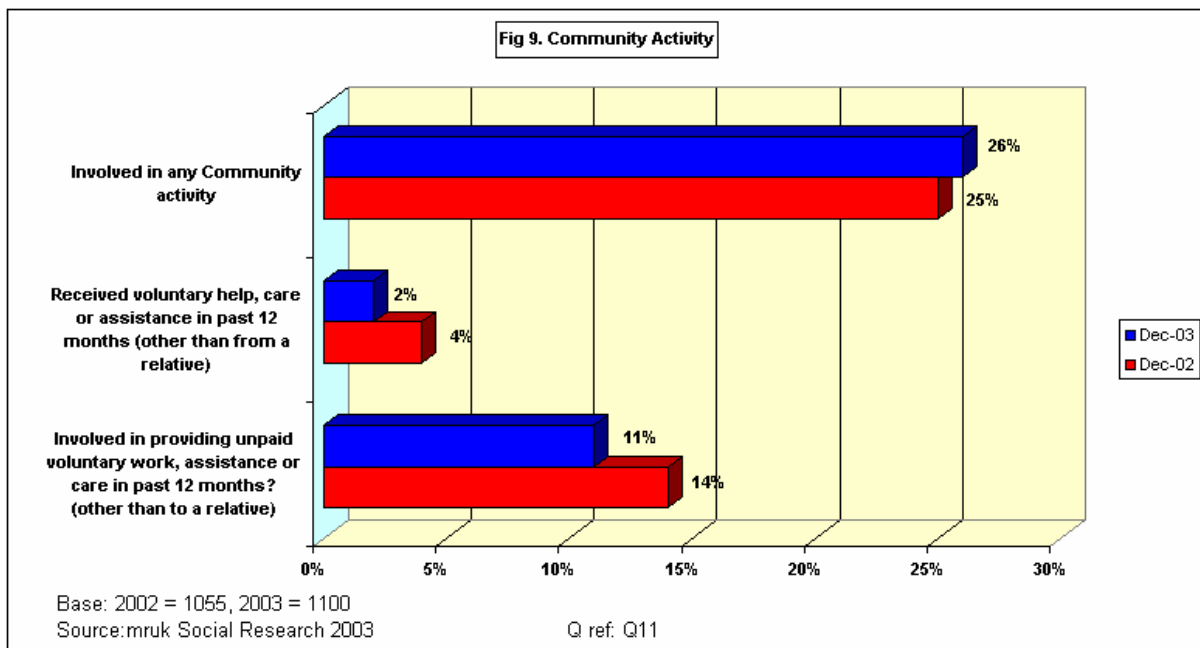
3.9 Community Activity

Figure 9 below illustrates the extent to which respondents are involved in their local communities in any of the ways highlighted.

11% 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 2% have actually received such help or care.

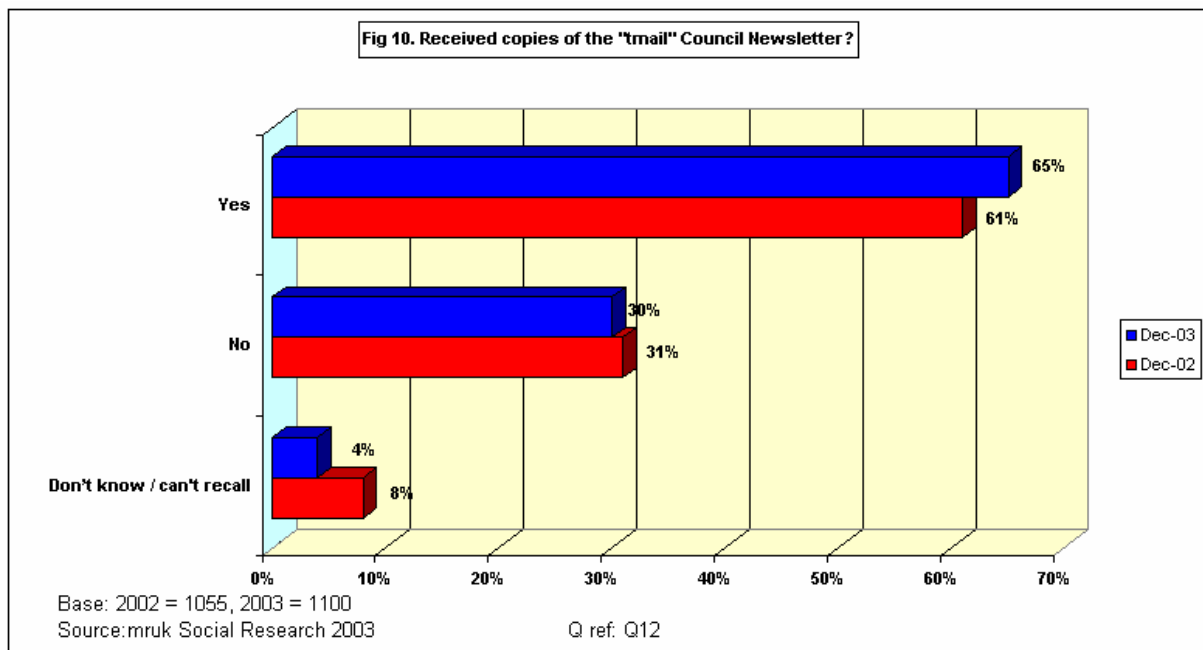
In total, 26% say they have been involved in some other form of local community activity such as Church groups, Play Groups, Residents Associations or similar.

Findings remain close to those in 2002.



4.1 "T-Mail" - Thurrock Council's Newsletter

Thurrock Council produce "t-mail" a newspaper which is delivered quarterly to every resident in the Borough. However, as figure 10 illustrates just less than two thirds (65%) of respondents recall having received copies of the newspaper. This remains fairly consistent with the findings in 2002.

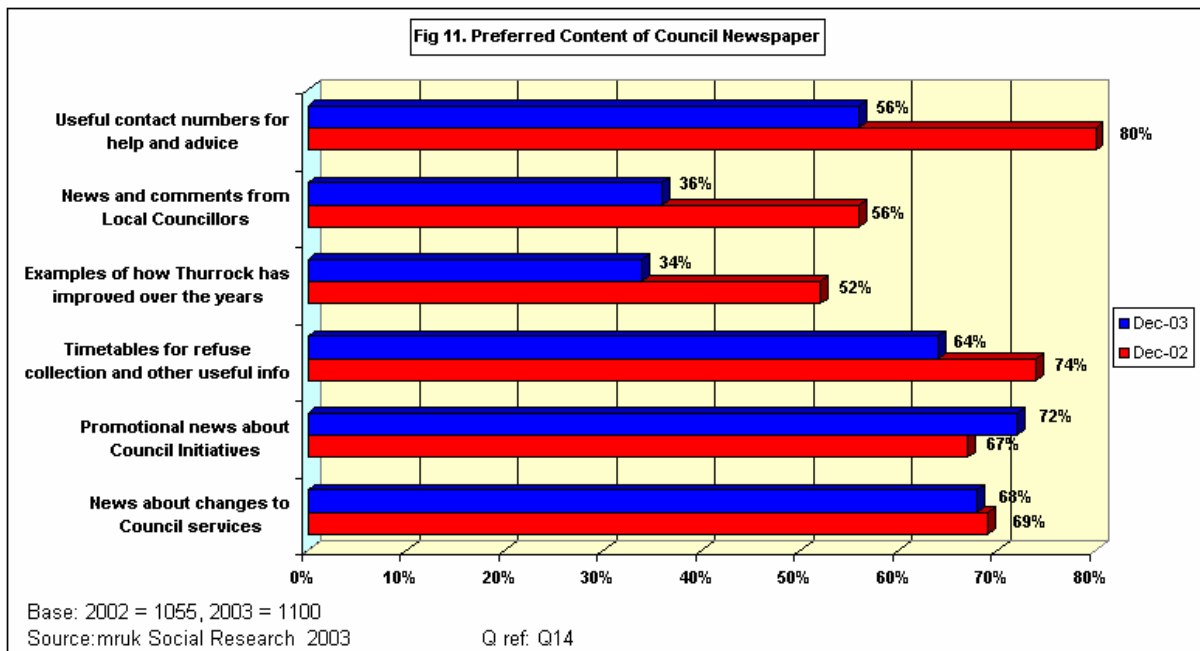


Of those who recall having received copies of the newspaper, the vast majority (89%) say they read it.

4.2 Content

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.

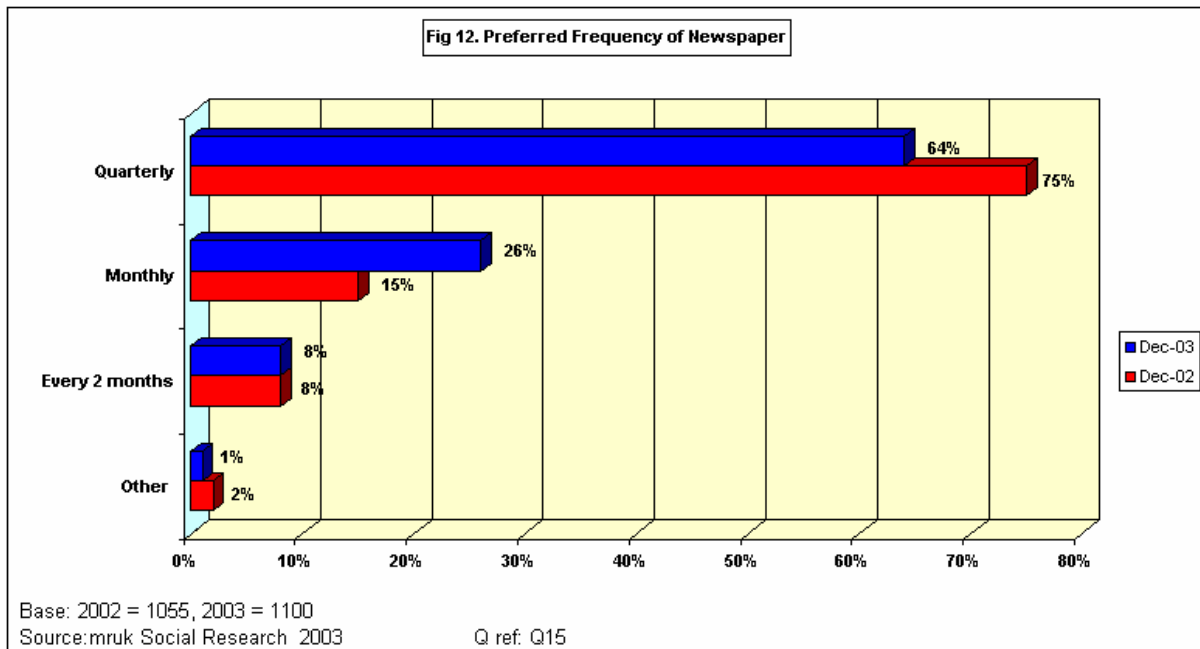
Figure 11 illustrates that all items are generally considered useful but, in particular, useful contact numbers for help / advice, timetables for refuse collection and other such information and news about the Councils Services is the preferred content. However, findings do show a variation with those identified in 2002.



4.3 Frequency of Newspaper

Nearly two thirds (64%) express a preference to receive “t-mail” – the Councils newspaper quarterly with 26% saying monthly and 8% every two months.

Findings suggest a shift in opinion towards increasing the frequency of the newspaper.

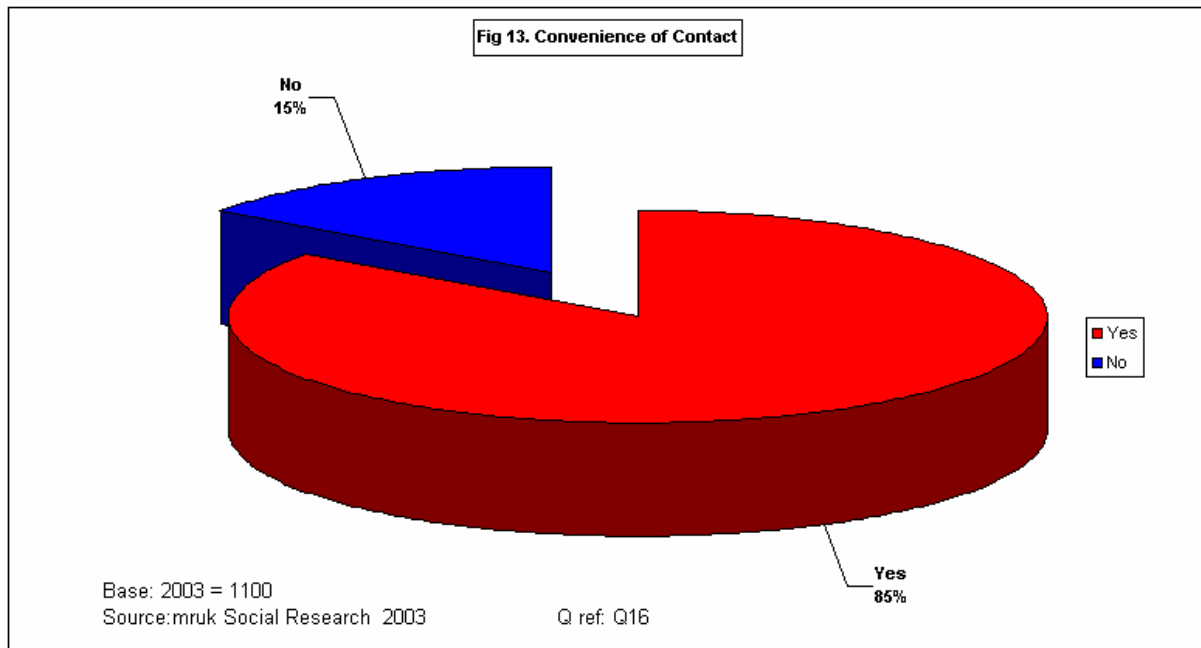


5. CONTACT WITH THE COUNCIL

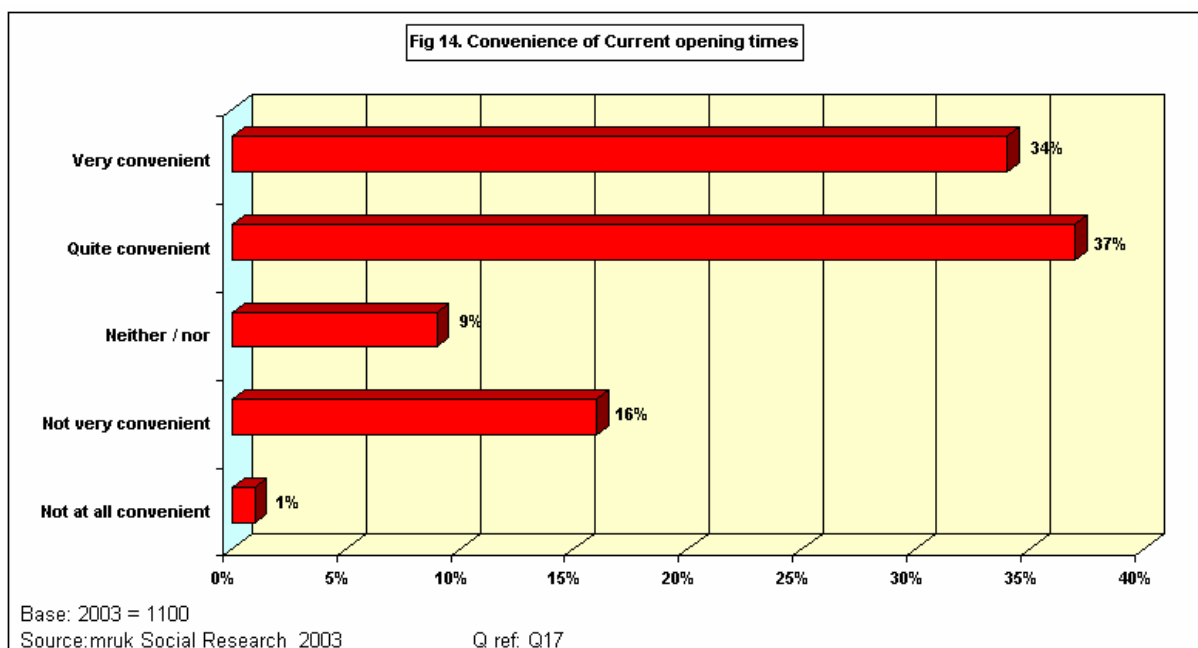
Additional questions were asked within the 2003 survey concerning contact with the Council. As the questions had not been included in the 2002 survey there are no comparisons to illustrate.

5.1 Convenience of Contact

Overall, a significant majority (85%) of respondents feel they are able to contact the Council during the hours they wish to.



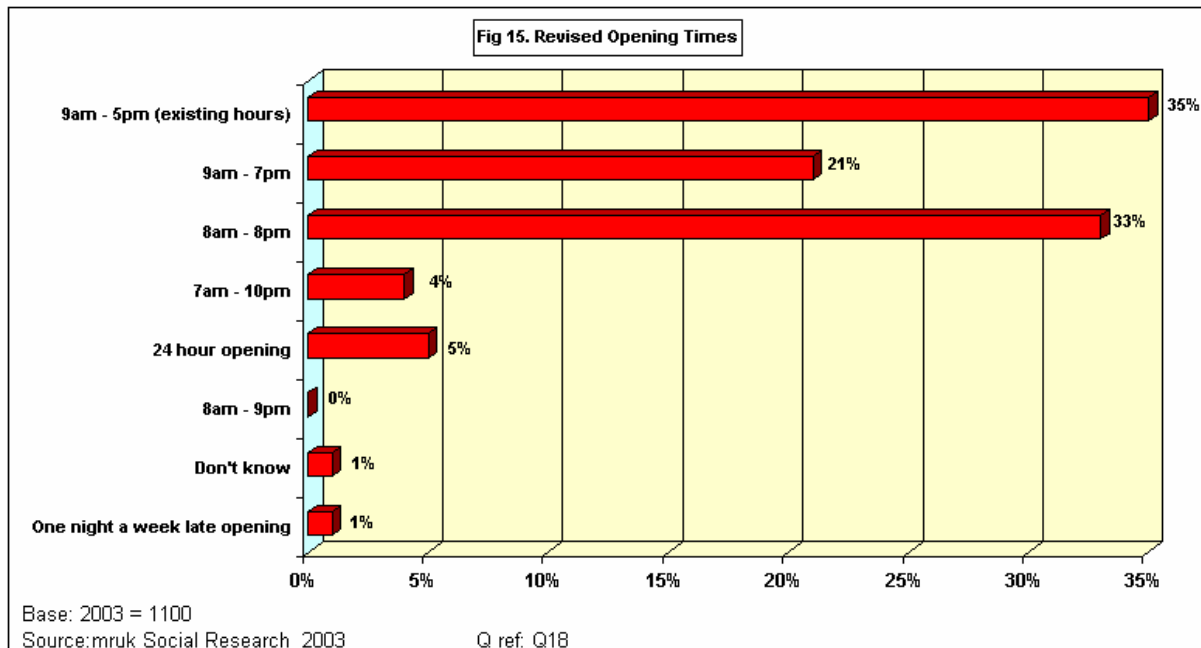
When specifically asked how convenient they think the Councils current general opening hours (9am - 5pm) are, some 71% said "very" (34%) or "quite" (37%) convenient. By contrast 18% do not think opening hours are convenient.



5.2 Revised Opening Times

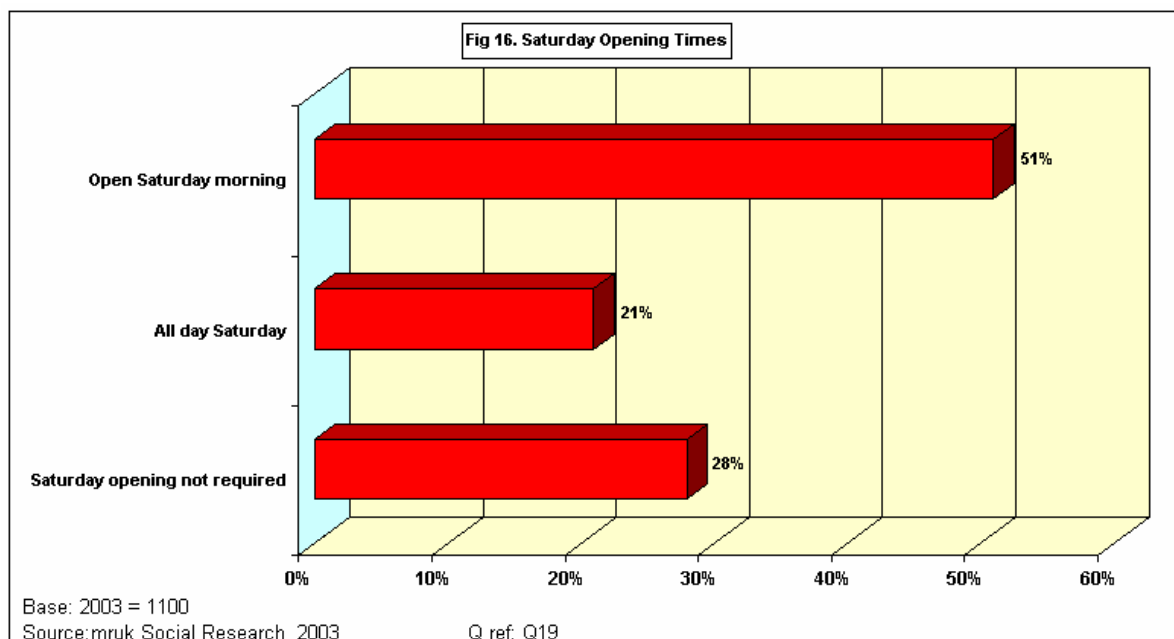
Thurrock Council is at present examining ways of becoming more accessible to the public. In view of this a series of options were presented to respondents and they were asked which would provide the most reasonable access for contact (other than for emergencies).

Figure 15 below illustrates that a minority of just over one third (35%) consider the current 9am - 5pm opening hours to provide the most reasonable access. Some 21% would prefer 9am - 7pm and, 33% 8am - 8pm. Overall, nearly two thirds express a preference for extended opening hours.



In addition, respondents were asked if the Council should be accessible for contact (other than emergencies) on Saturday's?

Figure 16 illustrates that just over half (51%) think the Council should open for business on a Saturday morning and a further 21% would like to see all day opening on a Saturday. Just over one quarter (28%) say Saturday opening is not required.



6.1 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 continue to be associated with: -

- Policing / tackling crime
- Need for cleaner streets / environment
- More provision and support 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: -

- Litter, poor cleanliness / “Vandalism” and other associated items
- Hooligans / gangs of youths
- Lack of buses / good public transport
- Traffic / parking congestion

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
- Maintaining the characteristics of the borough and not over developing.

The only notable variation against findings in the 2002 survey is the emergence of concerns / aspirations that “over development” will not occur in the borough.

6.2 Achievements

When asked what the “best achievement has been for Thurrock in the past 20 years” over half (57%) were unable to identify one.

Of those who did, the most frequently identified again (as in 2002) included: -

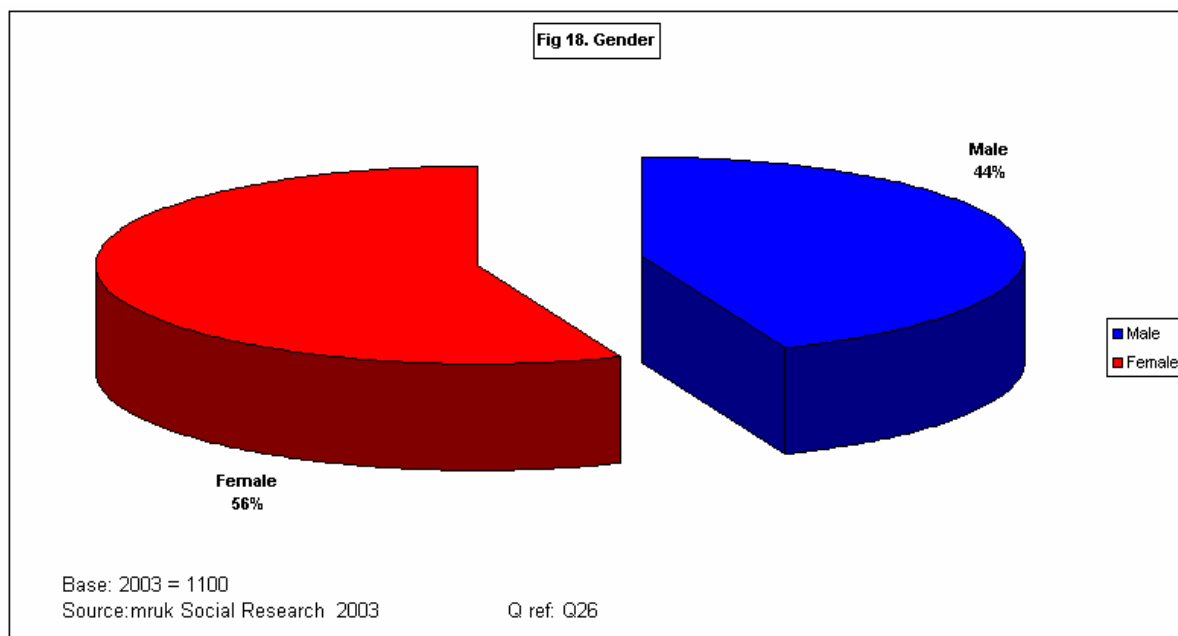
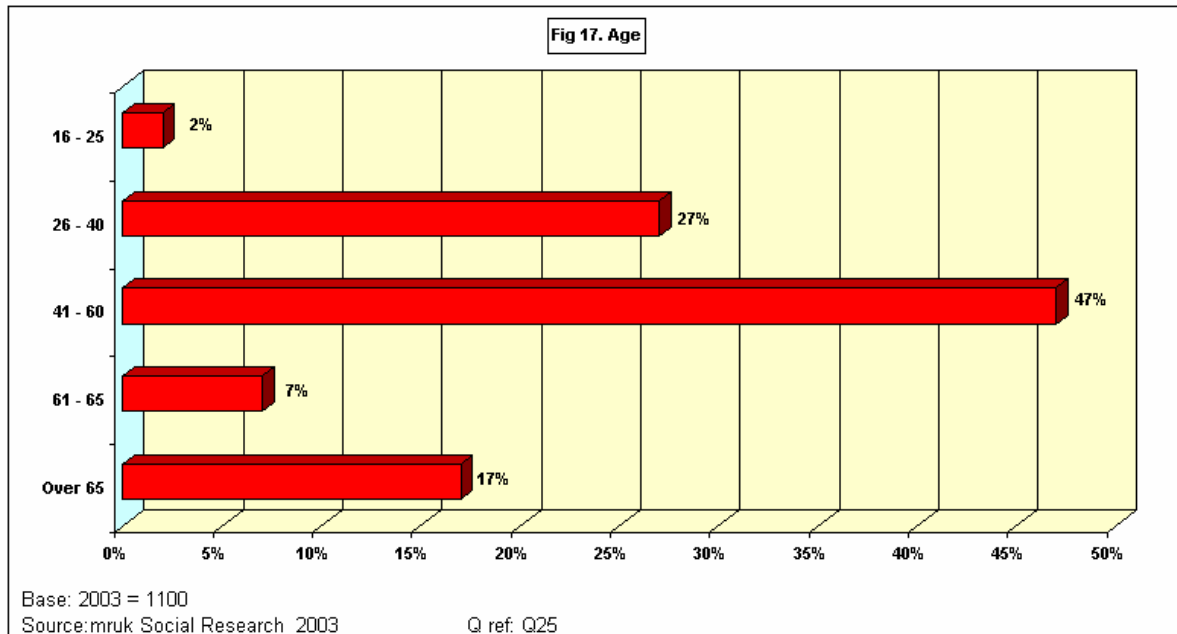
- The Lakeside Shopping (and other) Centres
- All round improvements to local services and facilities
- Better parks
- Road improvements

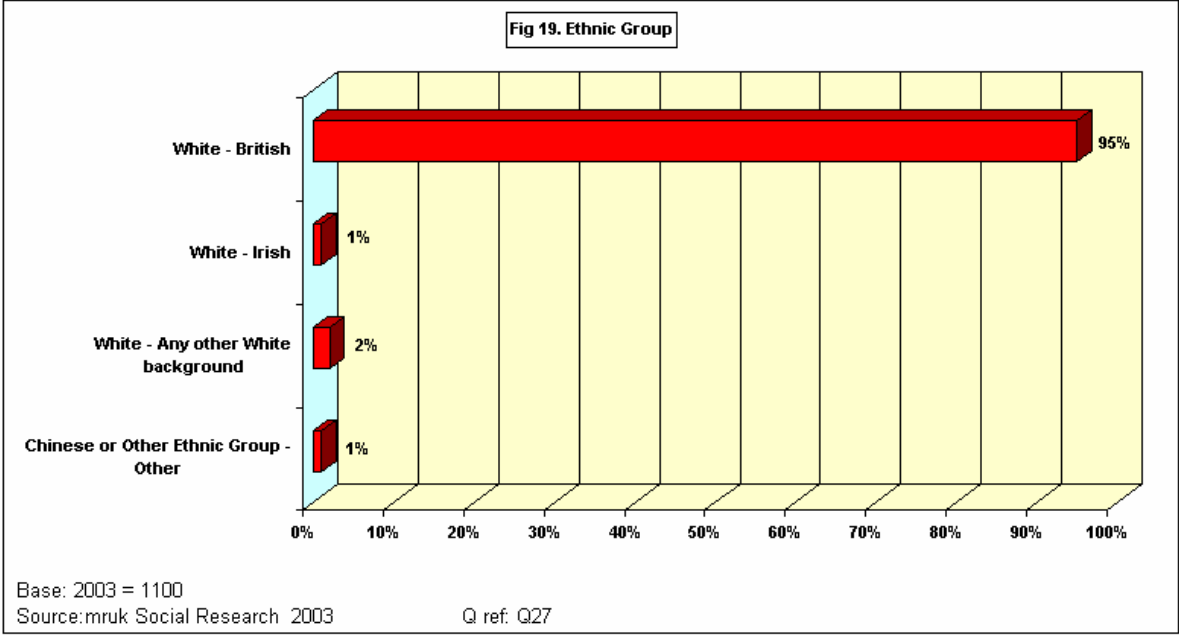
Aspirations for the next 20 years include: -

- More provision for young people and families
- Improve ‘cleanliness’ of the Borough
- Preserve and improve ‘green’ areas
- Improve hospital provision / health care
- Better schools / education
- Improve local public transport

7. RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The following illustrate the key characteristics of respondents to the survey:





Key issues to emerge from this second major programme of research to help inform the Community Strategy include:

- Evidence that there is some improvement in perceptions of the local areas in which respondents live. In particular this is reflected in a higher proportion (when compared to 2002) who are satisfied with cleanliness of their local neighbourhood.
- Concerns about personal safety increase significantly when respondents are out alone after dark. A higher proportion of females feel unsafe at this time than males.
- The most significant fears about personal safety relate to potential harassment and/or intimidation from gangs of youths along with potential physical attack. Notably highest levels of concern over noise is also attributed to gangs of youths.
- Whilst many find it easy to access quite a wide range of services and facilities the single biggest problem in this context remains access to a local hospital.
- Findings indicate a moderate improvement in the proportion who feel they can influence local decision making.
- Whilst the majority of respondents feel able to contact the Council when they want there is also some indication that extended opening hours during weekdays and on Saturday mornings would be welcomed.
- Key priorities which are identified by respondents remain those associated with: -
 - Crime / safety
 - Cleanliness / the environment
 - Provision for young people / children (including links with wider Education issues)
 - Transport / congestion

