

**THURROCK COUNCIL
QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY
(COMMUNITY STRATEGY)
SUMMARY EVALUATION
FEBRUARY 2005**

Prepared For: Thurrock Council

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Council conducted its third major quality of life survey in December 2004. The survey itself was conducted independently by **mruk social research** and was designed to enable key results to be compared to the previous surveys conducted in December 2002 and December 2003.

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 2004 survey and makes direct comparisons with the 2002 and 2003 research where possible. The report is accompanied by a detailed output 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 and 2003 surveys 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.

In 2004 the survey was again combined with panel recruitment for cost effectiveness reasons and this resulted in 400 interviews being achieved through in-home interviews supplemented by some 866 conducted by telephone (including 600 with Panel members). A total of 1266 broadly stratified by Local Assembly Area therefore provides the most robust findings so far.

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

3. LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

3.1 Satisfaction With Local Neighbourhood

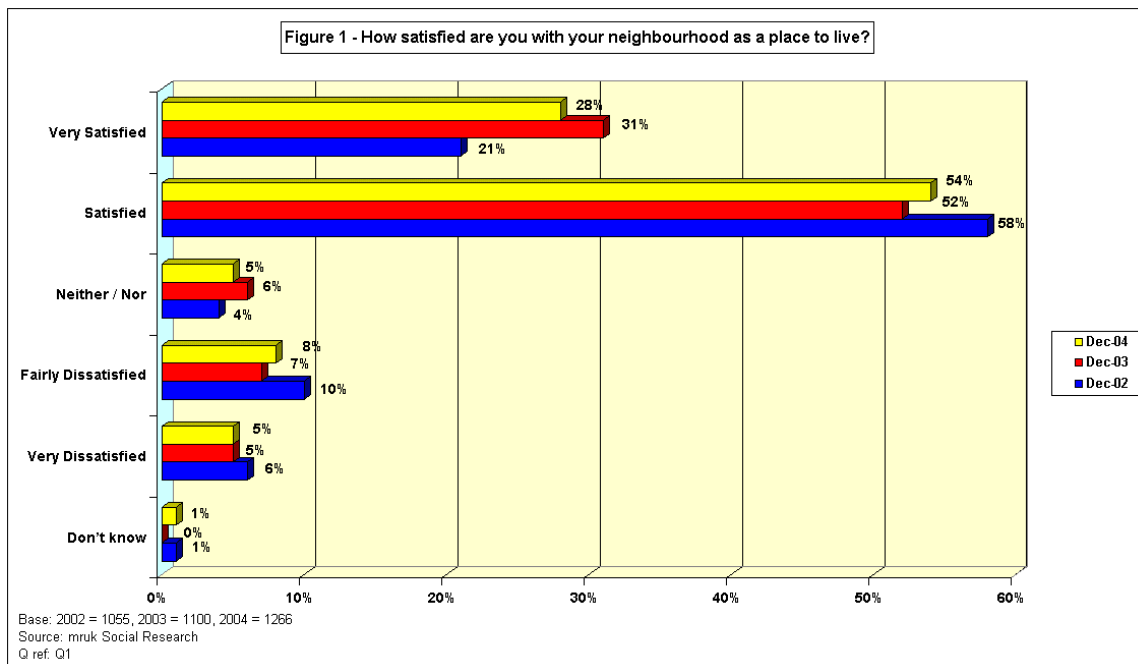
Overall, some 82% of respondents say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. This represents a slight decrease from 83% in 2003.

As one of the key quality of life indicators developed by the Audit Commission this maintains a fairly high satisfaction level with 28% who specifically say they are “very satisfied”.

Figure 1 below illustrates that 12% express dissatisfaction while 5% do not express a view either way.

It is notable that in proportionate terms dissatisfaction appears highest amongst the West Assembly Area respondents (15%) and satisfaction is highest in the Central Area (84%).

However, in general the variations when compared to 2003 are marginal and (in aggregate terms) remain within the confidence interval.

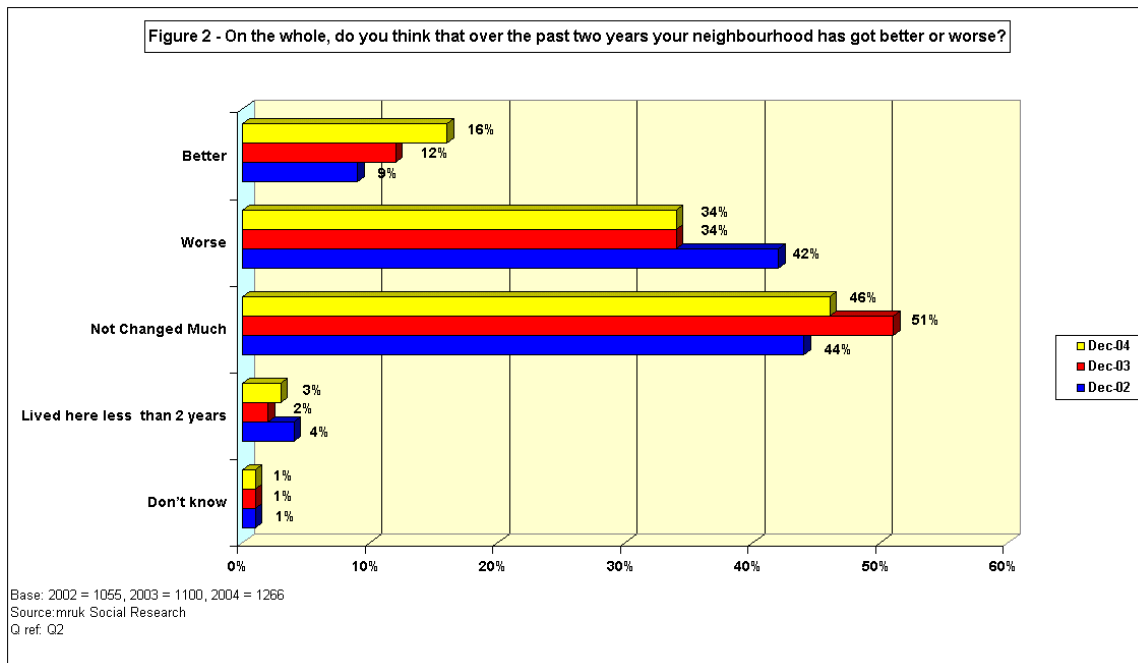


3.2 Neighbourhood Improving / Deteriorating

Some 34% (compared to 42% in 2002) of respondents consider that their neighbourhood has deteriorated over the last 2 years. While 46% say it has not changed much and 1% were unable to answer, some 16% believe their neighbourhood has improved (compared to 12% in 2003 and 9% in 2002).

Proportionately, 36% of respondents in the South and West Assembly Areas believe their neighbourhood has become worse which appears to be the highest levels of the four. However, it is an improvement on the findings recorded at the 2002 survey for the South Assembly Area (at which time 49% said the area was deteriorating).

The Council will be encouraged at the gradual trend towards perceived improvement.



3.3 Noise In Local Area

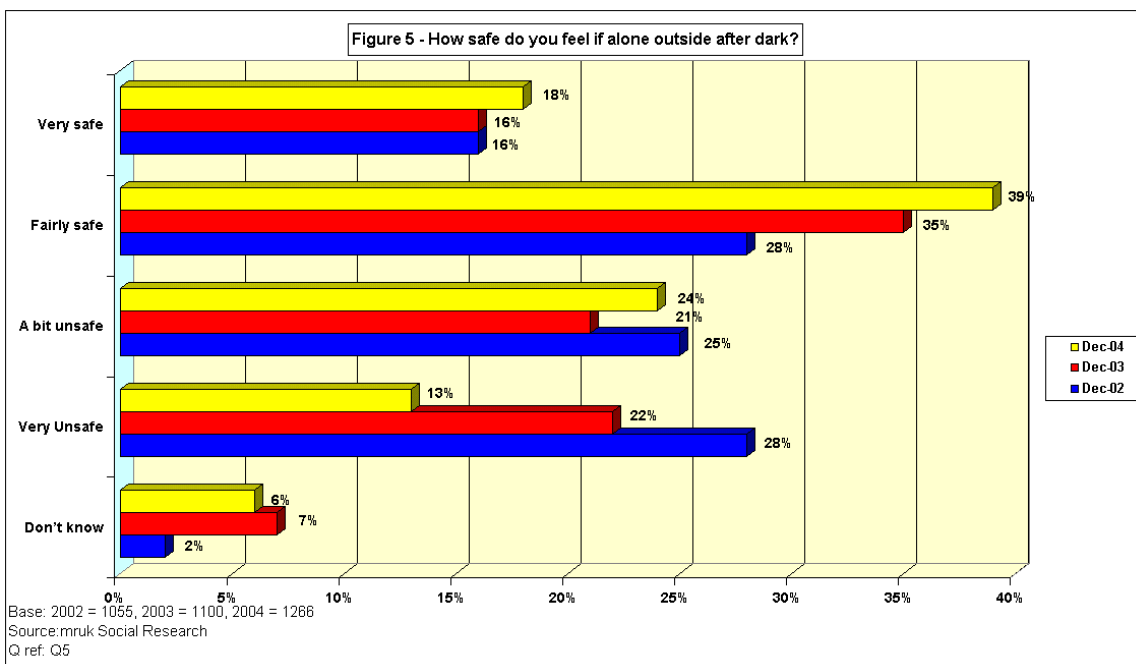
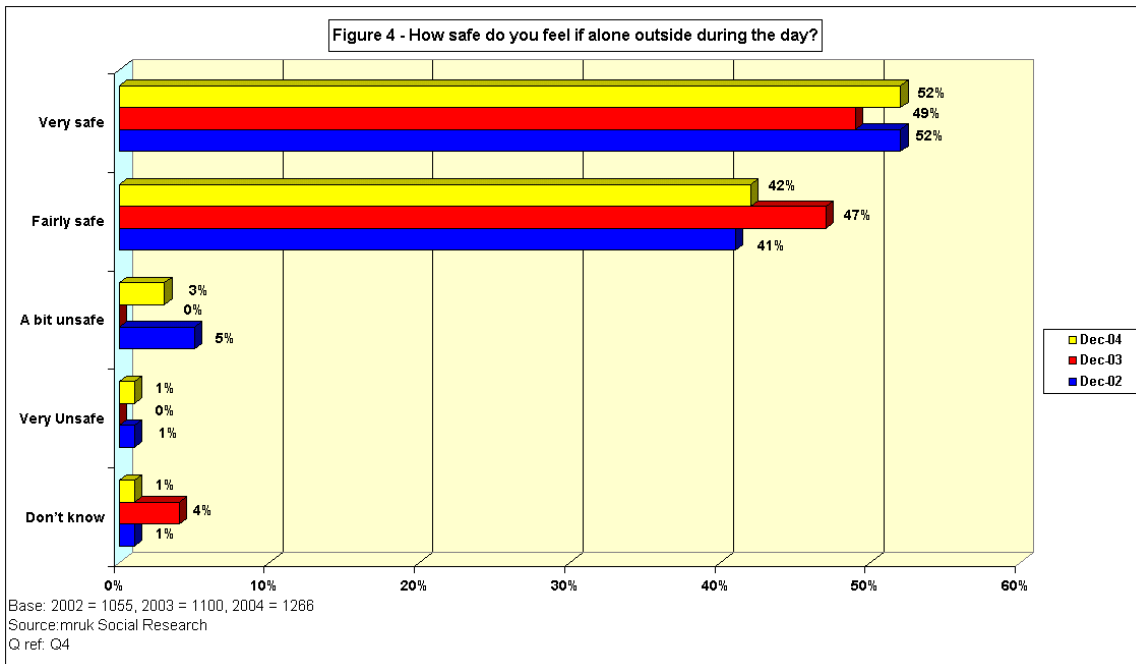
Figure 3 below illustrates the extent to which respondents believe the specified types of noise pose a problem of some sort in their local area.

Figure 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-04	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-04	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-04	Dec-02	Dec-03	Dec-04
Road Traffic	12%	15%	12%	21%	20%	21%	65%	65%	67%	1%	0%	0%
Aircraft	1%	2%	2%	8%	9%	9%	88%	88%	88%	2%	0%	0%
Trains	2%	2%	1%	4%	6%	6%	92%	91%	93%	1%	0%	0%
Industrial / commercial premises	2%	3%	3%	6%	8%	7%	89%	88%	90%	2%	0%	0%
Road works	3%	4%	3%	9%	10%	8%	86%	87%	89%	2%	0%	0%
Construction / demolition	2%	3%	2%	5%	5%	7%	91%	92%	91%	3%	0%	0%
Pubs, clubs or other place of entertainment	4%	4%	2%	9%	8%	8%	85%	88%	90%	3%	1%	0%
Neighbours	6%	5%	4%	10%	9%	8%	83%	86%	88%	2%	0%	0%
Gangs of youths congregating	18%	22%	12%	24%	31%	26%	57%	47%	62%	1%	0%	0%

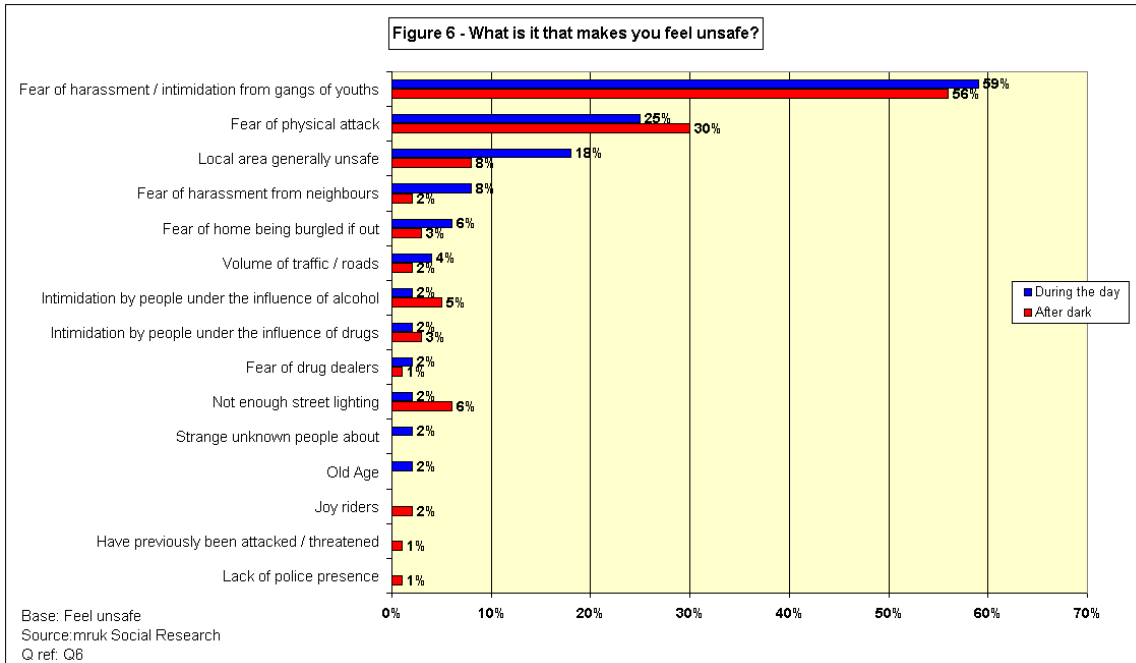
In most cases the vast majority of respondents do not consider noise to be a problem from these sources. Improvements are apparent even related to the key sources of road traffic and, gangs of youths congregating (while 38% consider the latter to be a problem of some sort this compares very favourably with the previous high of 53% in 2003).

3.4 Community Safety

The vast majority (95%) of respondents feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe if alone outside during the day. However, this drops significantly to around half (56%) if alone outside after dark. It is notable that over the previous survey more respondents now feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe when outside after dark than they did in 2003 (51%) and 2002 (44%). Again, this represents an encouraging improvement in confidence levels amongst residents.

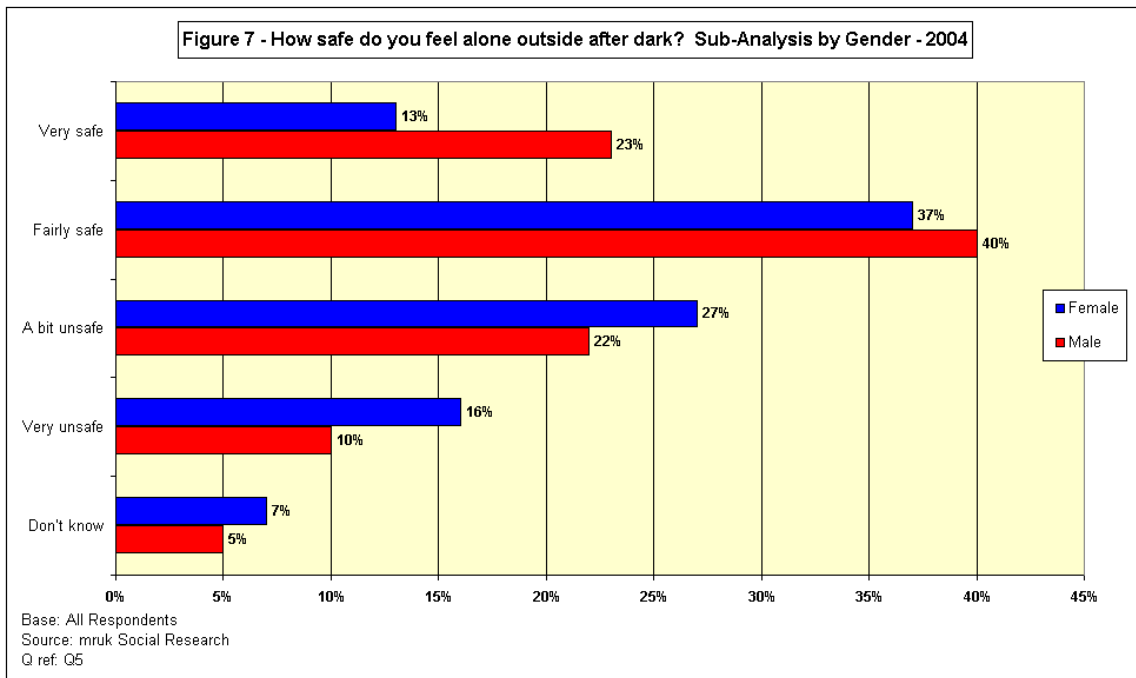


Amongst those who feel unsafe the most significant fear (expressed by between 56% - 59%) is that of harassment and/or intimidation from gangs of youths. However this is reduced from a level of 70% in 2003. Some 25% - 30% of such respondents also fear physical attack.



3.4.1 Sub Analysis By Gender/Age

Sub analysis of findings by gender and age reveal that overall, 96% of males feel safe when outside alone during the day compared to 93% of females. The variation between males and females when it comes to feeling of safety after dark (when out alone) is more pronounced. Some 63% of males feel safe (23% 'very' safe and 40% 'fairly' safe) compared to 50% of females (13% and 37% respectively). There is also a constant differential of around 10% between genders when those who specifically say they feel unsafe are sub-analysed (32% male/43% female).



Notably, when sub-analysing findings by age, the proportion of respondents in each age group who feel unsafe when alone outside after dark increases for each age band (except for over 84's of whom there were only a small number).

Some 21% of under 25's feel unsafe at this time. However, that feeling increases to 39% for the 41-65 age groups and to 45% for 66-84 age groups.

Figure 8 - How safe do you feel alone outside after dark? Sub Analysis By Age - 2004

Age Group	Total Safe	Total Unsafe
16-25	77%	21%
26-40	64%	31%
41-60	57%	39%
61-65	57%	38%
66-74	47%	45%
75-84	38%	45%
Over 85	50%	30%

When sub-analysing the 'reasons' for feeling unsafe these tend to be consistent with the aggregate profile and do not show significant variations between gender and age (including the relatively high proportions of young people who feel intimidated by gangs of youths).

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 from their home by using their usual form of transport.

A significant majority of those to whom it applied (usually 80% or more) find it easy to access: -

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

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

- Local hospital (37% find it difficult)
- Bank / cash point (16%)
- Public transport facility (11%)
- Sports/Leisure Centre (11%)

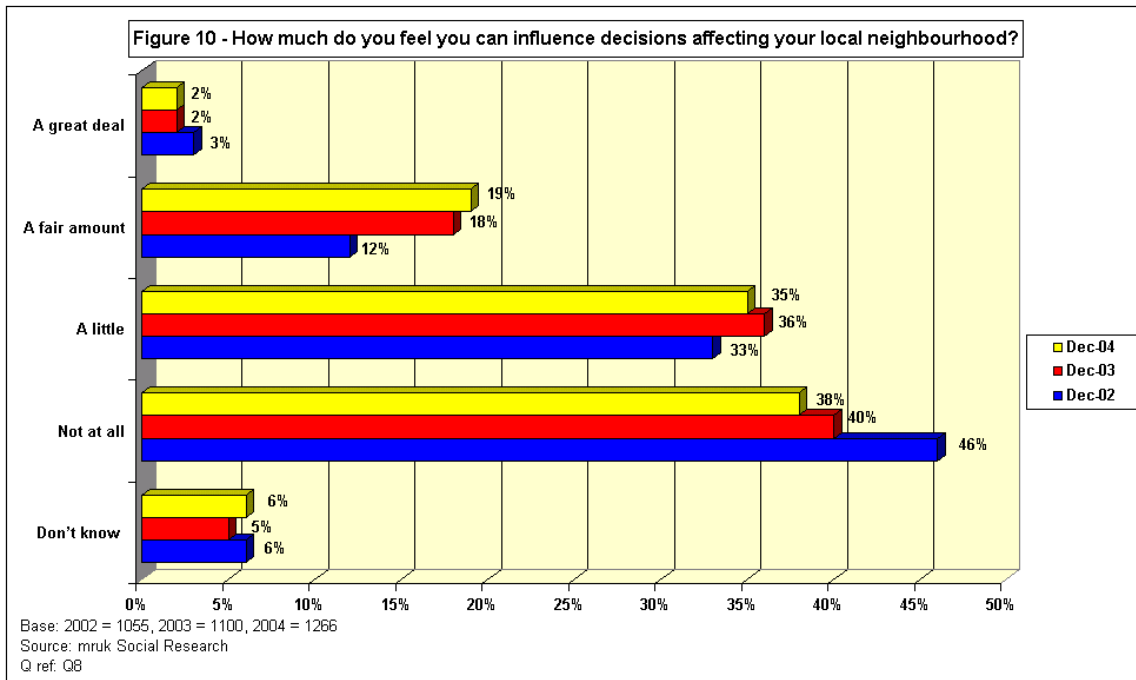
Figure 9 below illustrates the 2004 findings.

Figure 9 - From your home, how easy is it for you to get to the following places using your usual form of transport? (2004)						
	Very Easy	Fairly Easy	Neither / Nor	Fairly Difficult	Difficult	Don't Know / NA
Local Shops	61%	33%	1%	3%	2%	1%
Shopping centre / supermarket	49%	38%	3%	6%	3%	1%
Post office	52%	37%	3%	5%	3%	1%
GP	51%	38%	4%	4%	2%	1%
Chemist / Pharmacy	52%	38%	3%	3%	2%	1%
Local Hospital	23%	32%	7%	21%	17%	1%
Publicly accessible green space (e.g. park)	45%	40%	5%	4%	3%	3%
Public transport facility	36%	36%	6%	7%	4%	10%
Recycling facility	33%	37%	6%	10%	6%	7%
Sports / Leisure Centre	36%	39%	6%	7%	5%	8%
Bank / Cash point	36%	39%	4%	9%	7%	2%
Council / Neighbourhood office	34%	41%	6%	6%	4%	9%
Childcare facilities	21%	23%	12%	2%	2%	40%
Local school	31%	29%	9%	2%	1%	28%

While the profile of services/facilities which people have some difficulty accessing remains consistent with 2003 it should be noted fewer respondents are expressing this concern (i.e. 37% finding it difficult to access a local hospital compared to 57% in 2003). There is a distinction between age groups in this context (using access to a hospital as a continuing example no more than 33% aged up to 40 years experience difficulty whereas this rises to 40% for the 41-65 age groups and up to 46% for 66-84 age group).

3.6 Influencing Decisions

Figure 10 below illustrates that only 21% of respondents believe they can significantly influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood although an additional 35% think they can exert a "little" influence. However, some 38% say they cannot exert any influence at all. This represents slight improvement on the previous survey and some improvement on the 2002 survey when the equivalent figures were 15%, 33% and 46% respectively.



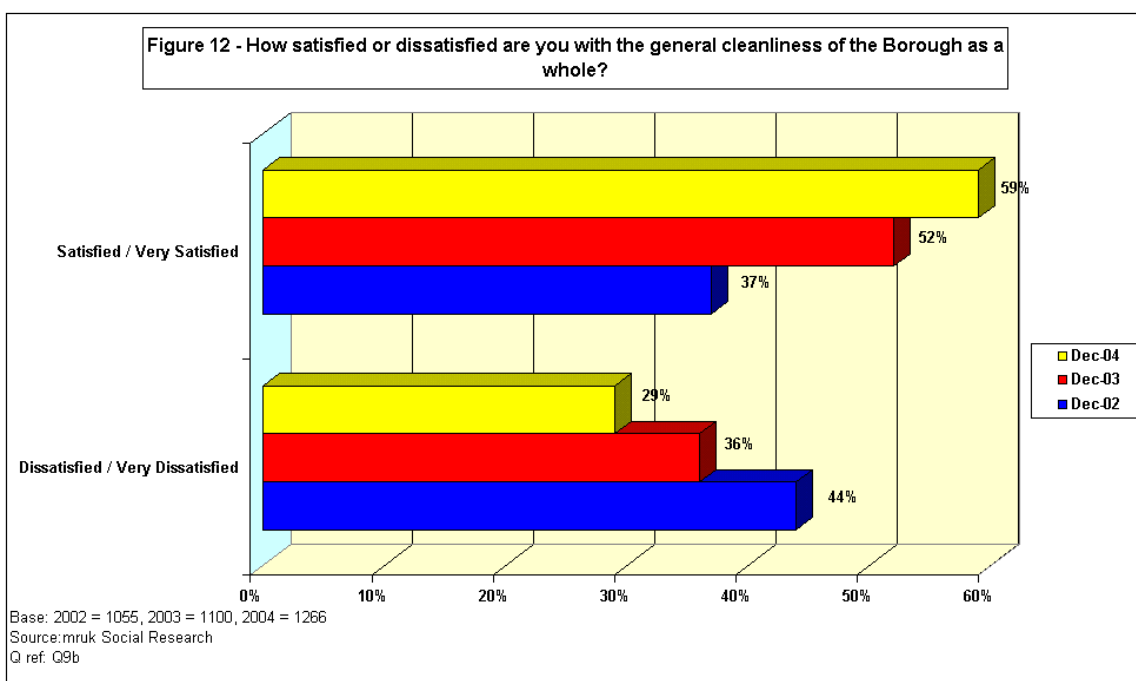
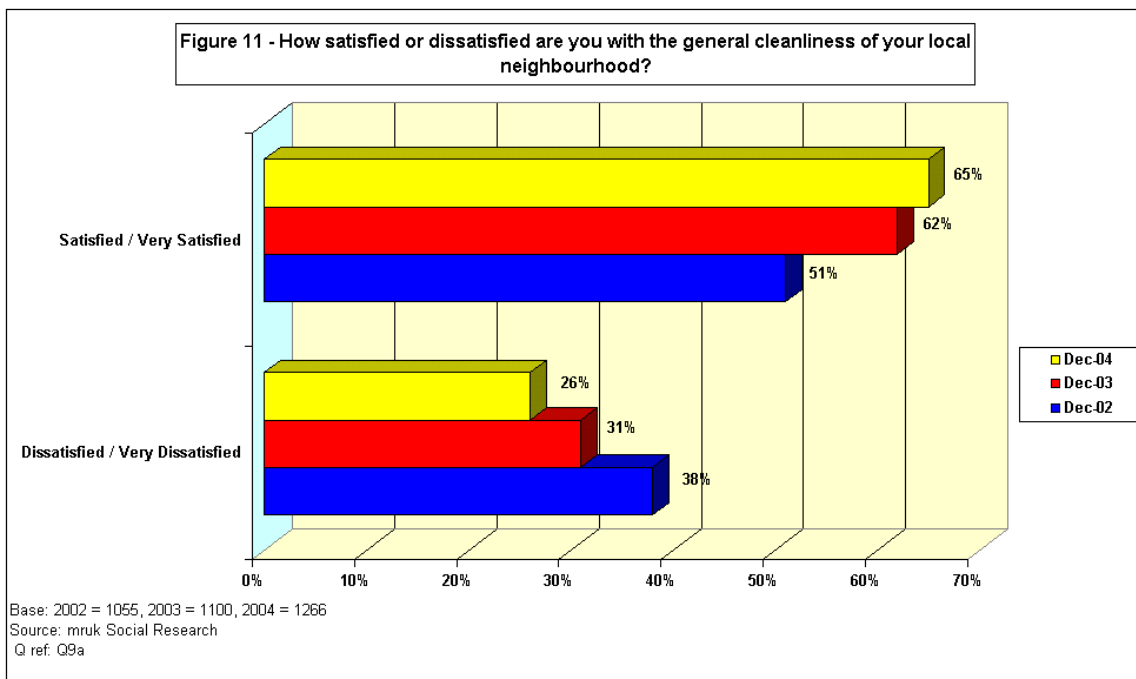
Notably, younger people (aged 16-25) in proportionate terms are more likely to feel they can influence decisions than those in older age groups (29% say 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' compared to 18% in the 26-40 age group and around 25% in the 61-74 groups).

3.7 Cleanliness of Local Neighbourhood

65% (up from 62% in 2003 and 51% in 2002) say they are satisfied with the cleanliness of their local neighbourhood. 26% specifically say they are dissatisfied. This compares with 59% who express satisfaction with the general cleanliness of the Borough as a whole and now only 29% who say they are dissatisfied.

In proportionate terms the highest level of local dissatisfaction is from those resident in the South Assembly Area (29%) whereas highest satisfaction is in the North East and Central Assembly Areas (68%). Local satisfaction remains fairly consistent with the previous survey where highest satisfaction was 67% in the North East.

Findings represent further evidence of trends towards improved perceptions which will be a source of encouragement to the Council.



3.8 Community Harmony

Overall, 73% (an increase from 59% in 2003 and 61% in 2002) agree or strongly agree that their area “is a place where people from different backgrounds and communities can live together harmoniously”.

Only 9% now (17% in 2003 and 14% in 2002) disagree with this statement and 18% do not know / are unable to express a view either way.

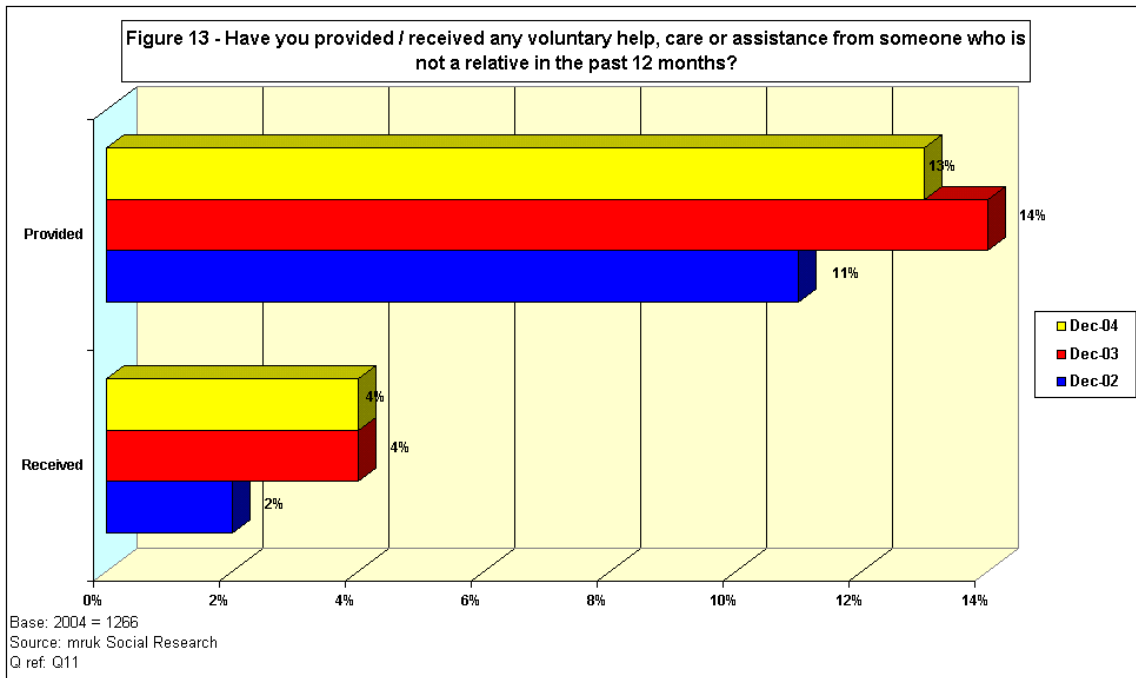
Sub-analysis of the findings by age shows a similar profile to the aggregate findings and variation of no more than 7% between all age groups. Similarly there is only a 3% variation in views between male and female (71% males agree with the statement compared to 74% females).

4.1 Community Activity

Figure 13 below illustrates the extent to which respondents are involved in their local communities in any of the ways highlighted.

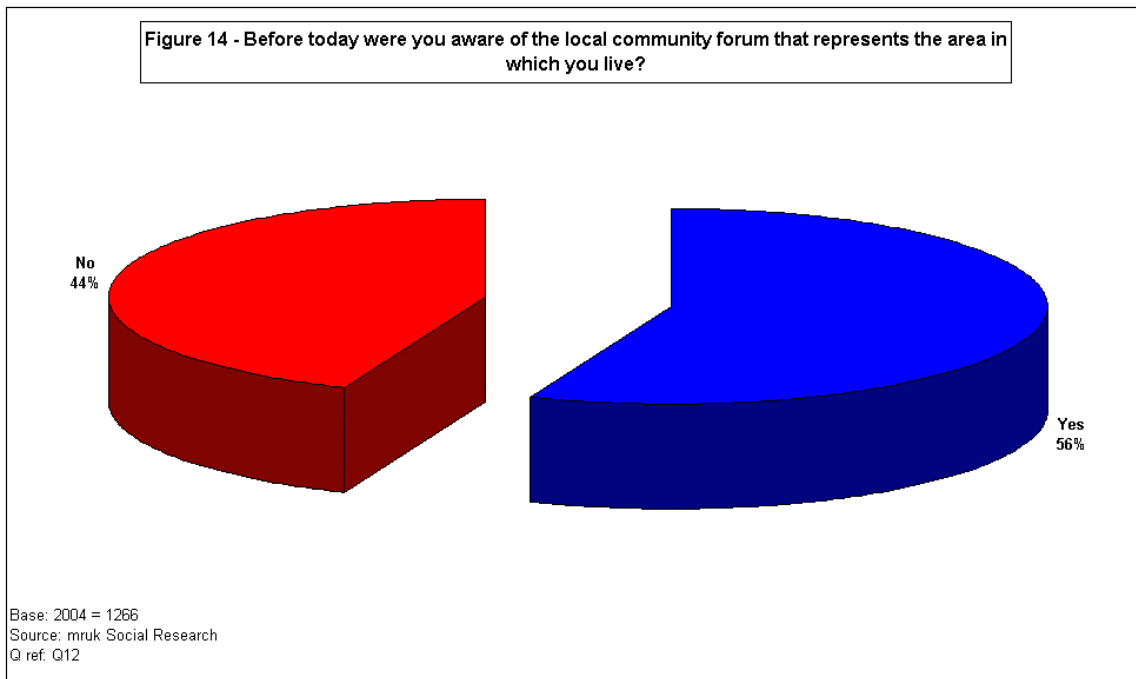
13% have been involved in providing some form of unpaid (except for expenses) work, assistance or care for someone who is not a relative over the last 12 months. By contrast only 4% have actually received such help or care.

Findings remain close to those in 2003 and there is little variation between gender or age groups.



4.1.1 Awareness of Local Community Forum

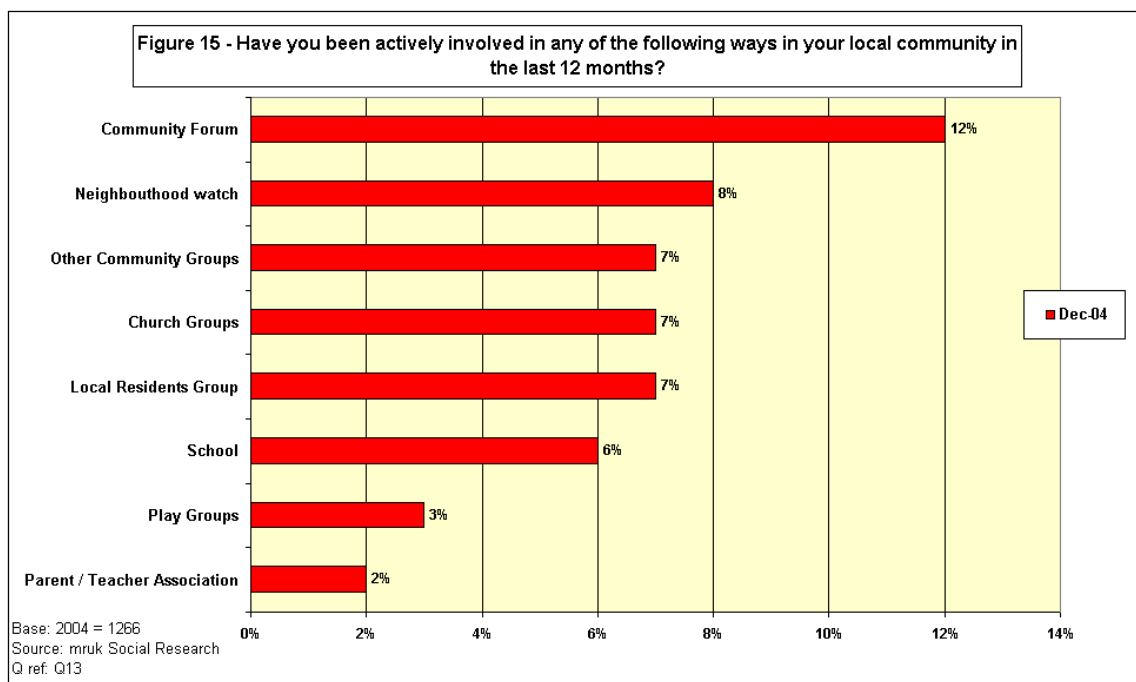
Before respondents took part in the survey, just over half (56%) were aware of the local community forum that represents the area in which they live. Some 44% were not aware. Awareness is highest amongst those resident in the West Assembly Area. Awareness is significantly lower (18%) amongst young people aged 16-25 years than any of the other age groups.



4.1.2 Community Involvement

Respondents were then asked if they had been actively involved in any of a number of community groups in their local community within the last 12 months.

Few respondents have been actively involved within the last year, however highest involvement is with the Community Forum (12%) followed by Neighbourhood Watch (8%). Figure 15 below illustrates the responses.

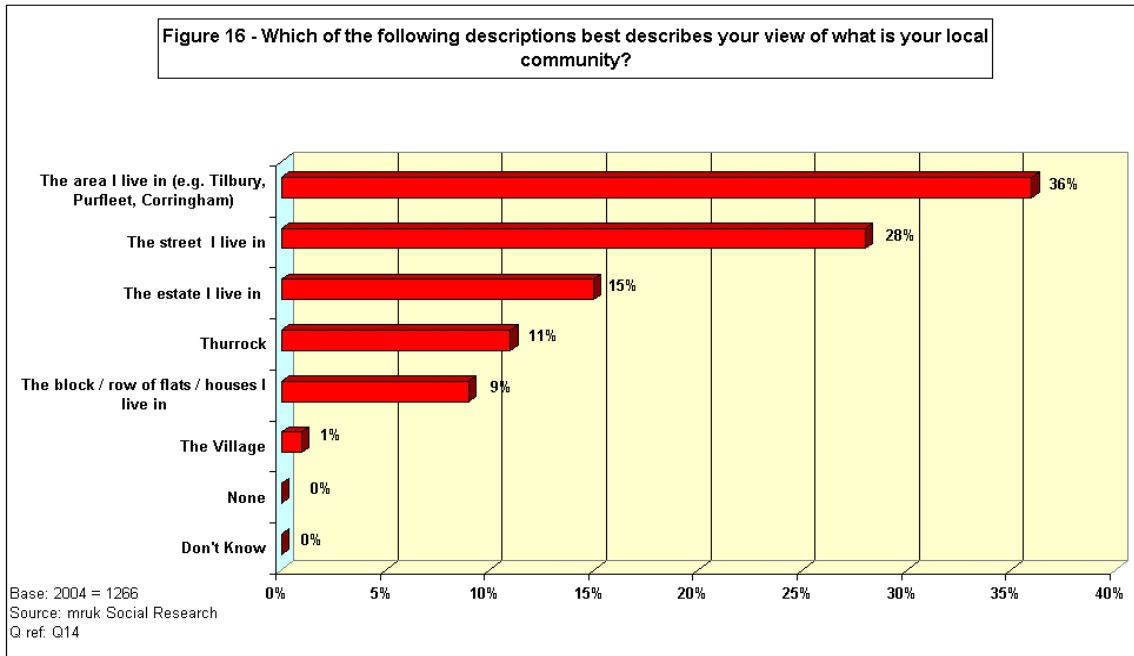


In sub-analysing responses by age the highest (proportionately) levels of pride living in the community are exhibited by young people (aged 16-25). 90% of young people say they are proud to live in their community compared to around 64% of those in the 26-60 age groups. For those 60 years or over levels of pride rise again up to as much as 89% (amongst 75-84 age group). There is little difference in opinion expressed by each gender.

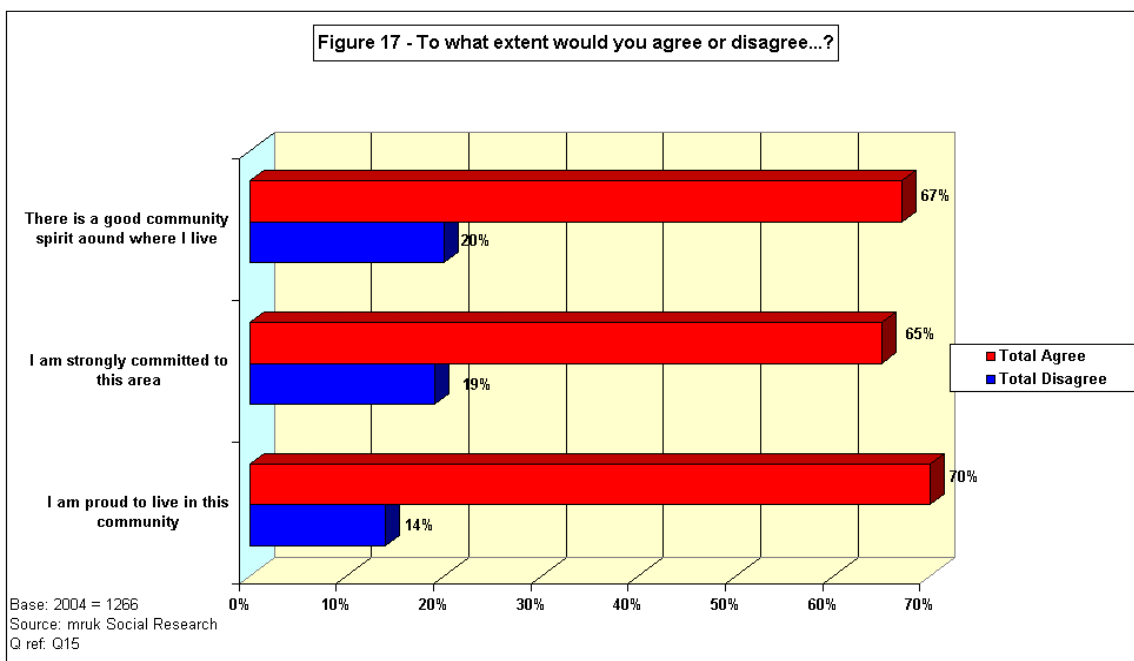
A similar profile is evident in relation to the questions on how strongly committed respondents are to their area and that a good community spirit exists.

4.2 Views on Local Community

Respondents were asked what they would describe as their local community. Just over one third (36%) feel their local community is the area in which they live, a further 28% feel it is the street they live in and 15% are of the opinion that their local community is their estate on which they live.



70% of respondents state that they agree they are proud to live in their area, with 21% who agree strongly. Only 14% of respondents disagree. The highest proportion of those who disagree are resident in the West Assembly Area. Approaching two thirds (65%) of respondents agree they are strongly committed to the area they live in (20% agree strongly with this). 19% of respondents disagree with this. Over two thirds (67%) of respondents agree there is a good community spirit around where they live (20% agree strongly).



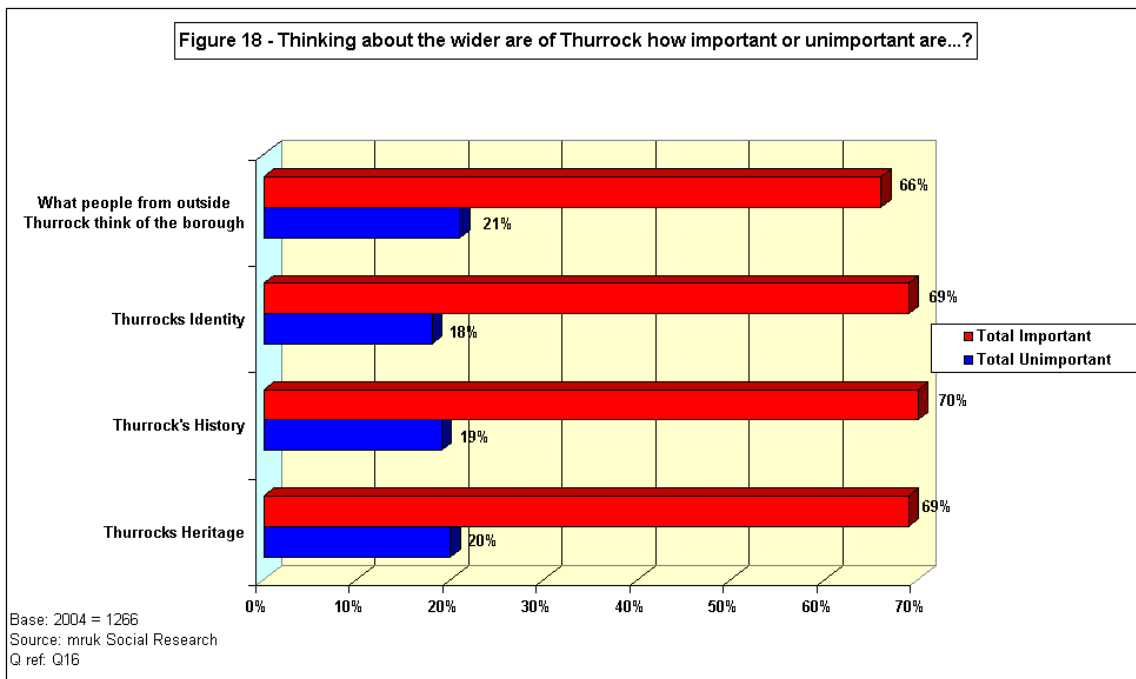
4.3 The Wider Area of Thurrock – Identity, History and Heritage

Over two thirds of respondents (69%) feel Thurrocks Heritage is important (with 24% who feel it is very important). 20% do not consider this to be important and 11% don't know or do not have an opinion either way. However, in comparison to all other age groups fewer younger people (aged 16-25) consider it important (in proportionate terms it is 44% of this group).

Some 70% of respondents believe Thurrock's History is important (including one quarter who said it was very important). 13% said this was not important and a further 6% said it was not important at all. A further 10% do not express a view.

Thurrock's identity is seen to be important by 69% of respondents and unimportant by 18%. An additional 13% do not know or do not express a view either way.

Respondents were asked how important it was to them what people from outside Thurrock think of the borough. Two thirds (66%) feel this is important (one quarter said 'very important') and 21% did not feel this was important. A further 13% did not know if it was important or not. Importance is greatest amongst residents living in the Central Assembly Area.

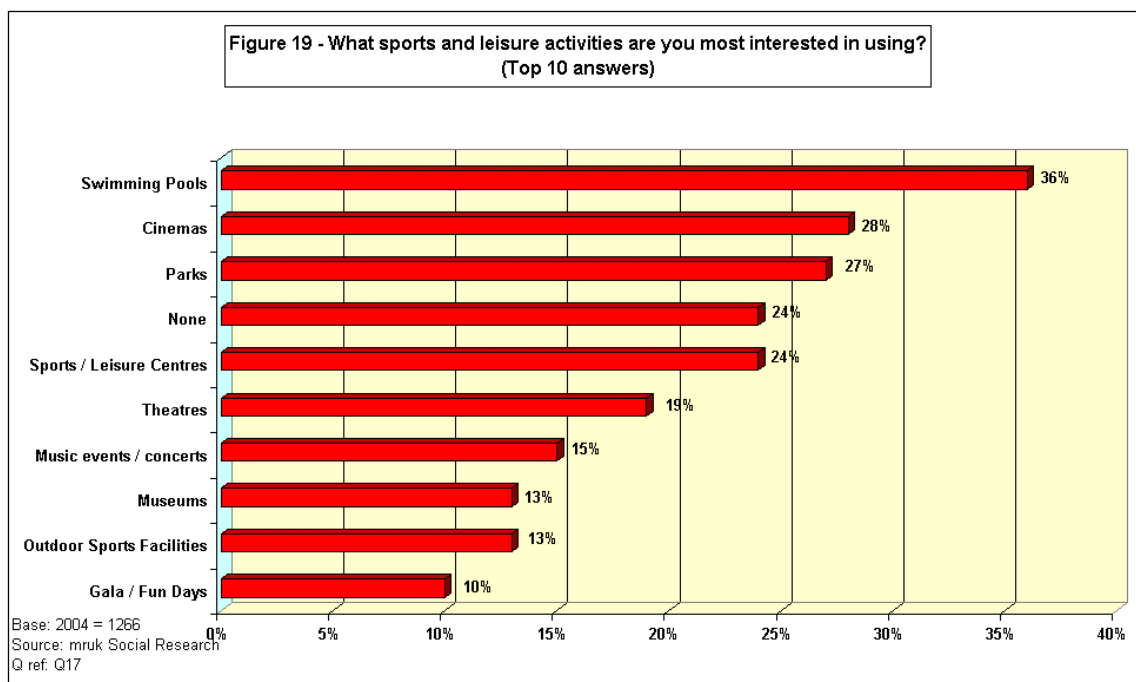


Allowing for the relatively small number of younger respondents (i.e. 39) in the 16-25 age group there is nevertheless a consistently lower response to the perceived importance of issues raised in this suite of questions than for all other age groups. In terms of engaging younger people this may be an overall area the council wish to consider further.

5.1 Leisure Activities and Sports

Figure 19 below show which sports and leisure facilities respondents are most interested in using.

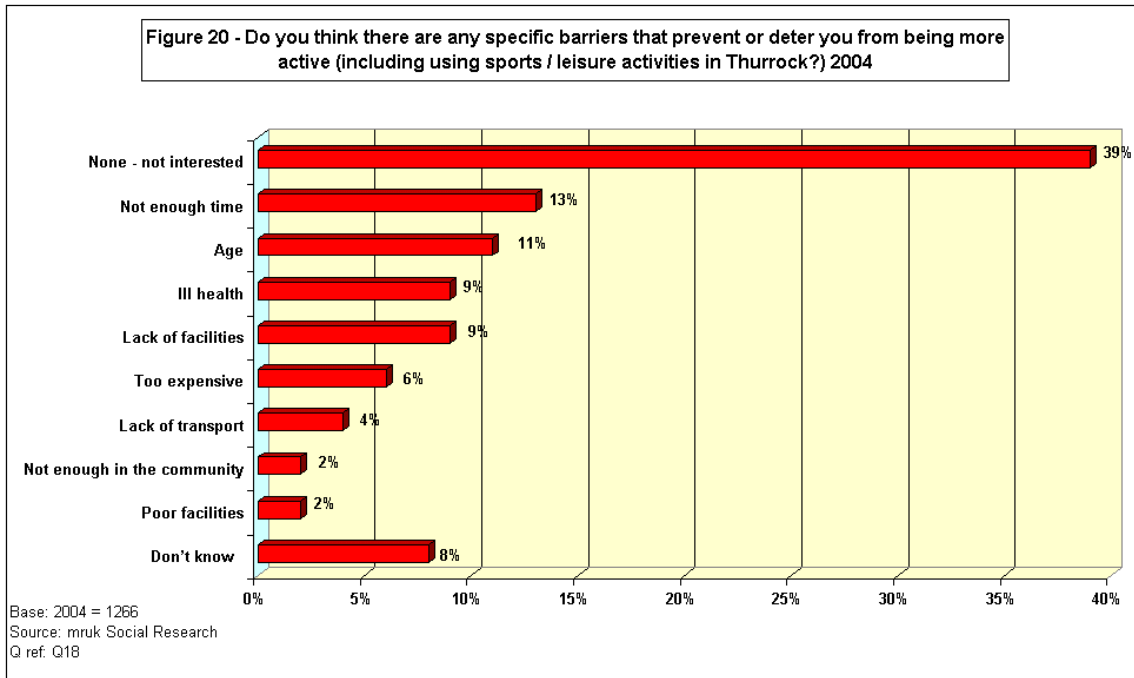
36% of respondents are interested in going swimming, 28% show an interest in going to the cinema, and a further 27% stated they would be interested in using parks. The breakdown is illustrated below.



Note: This was a multiple response question so respondents could choose more than one answer.

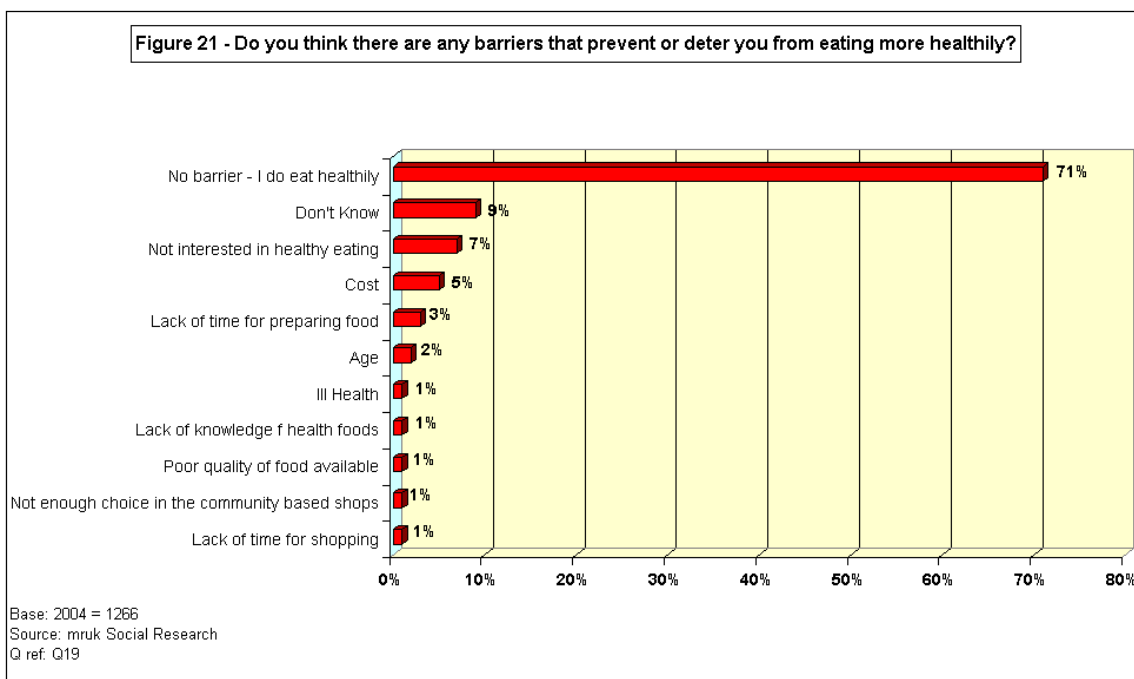
5.2 Barriers to Leisure Activities/Sports

Some 39% of respondents stated that they simply were not interested in being more active. 13% of respondents said they do not have enough time for leisure activities/sports, 11% find their age as a barrier and 9% said ill health prevented them from being more active along with “lack of facilities”.



5.3 Barriers to Eating More Healthily

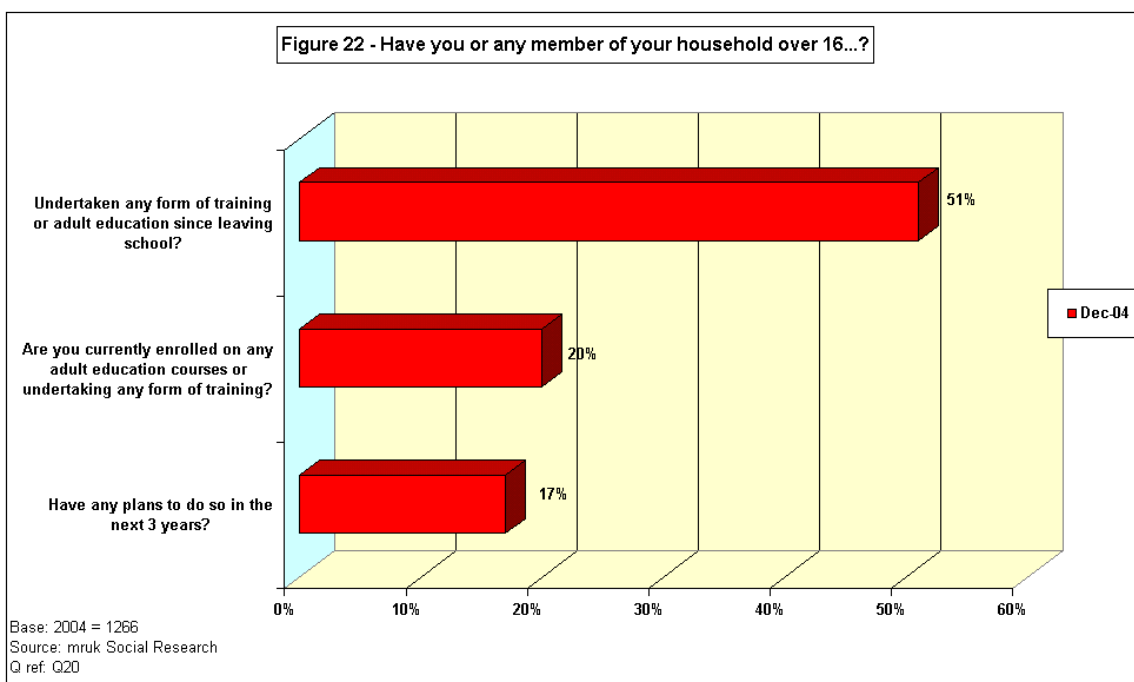
Some 71% of respondents said that they currently eat healthily, 9% do not know what prevents them from eating more healthily and 7% are not interested in healthy eating. Figure 21 illustrates findings from 2004. This profile is relatively consistent across all age groups.



6.1 Training and Adult Education Since Leaving School

Just over half (51%) of respondents or their household members have undertaken some form of training or adult education since leaving school.

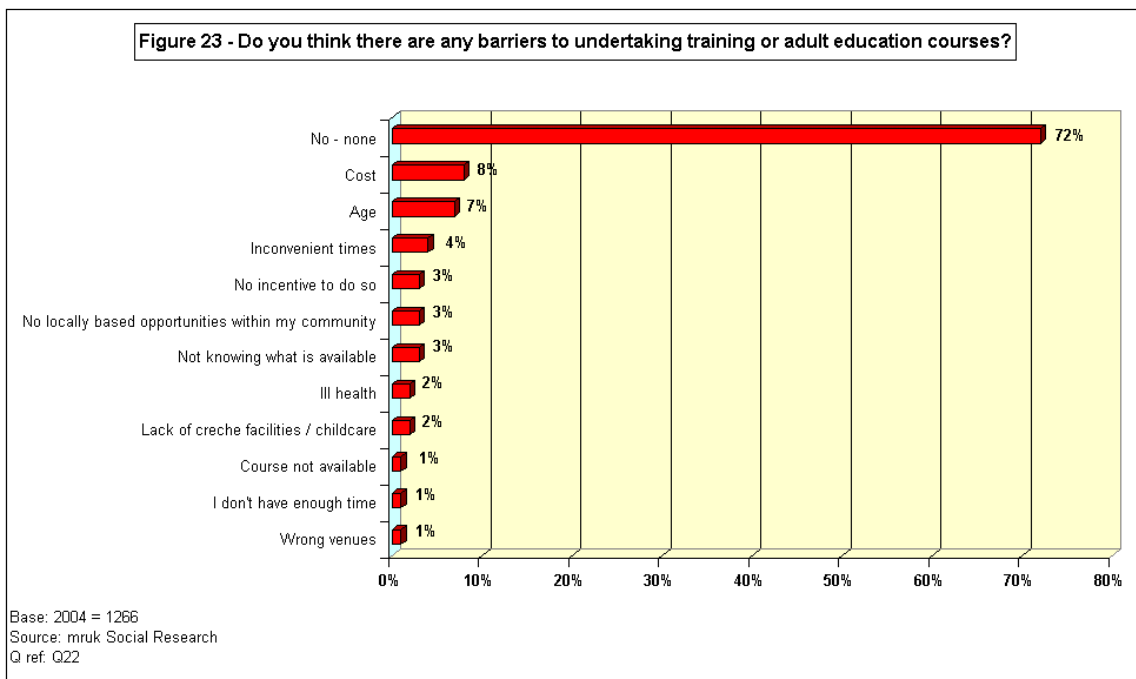
One fifth (20%) of respondents or their household members are currently enrolled on an adult education course or are undertaking some form of training. An additional 17% have plans to do so in the next 3 years as illustrated below.



Of those who are not currently enrolled on an adult education or training course and those who have no plans to do so in the next three years, the majority (68%) simply are not interested and a further quarter said they don't know what would persuade them to undertake training or learning in the next three years.

6.2 Barriers to Learning

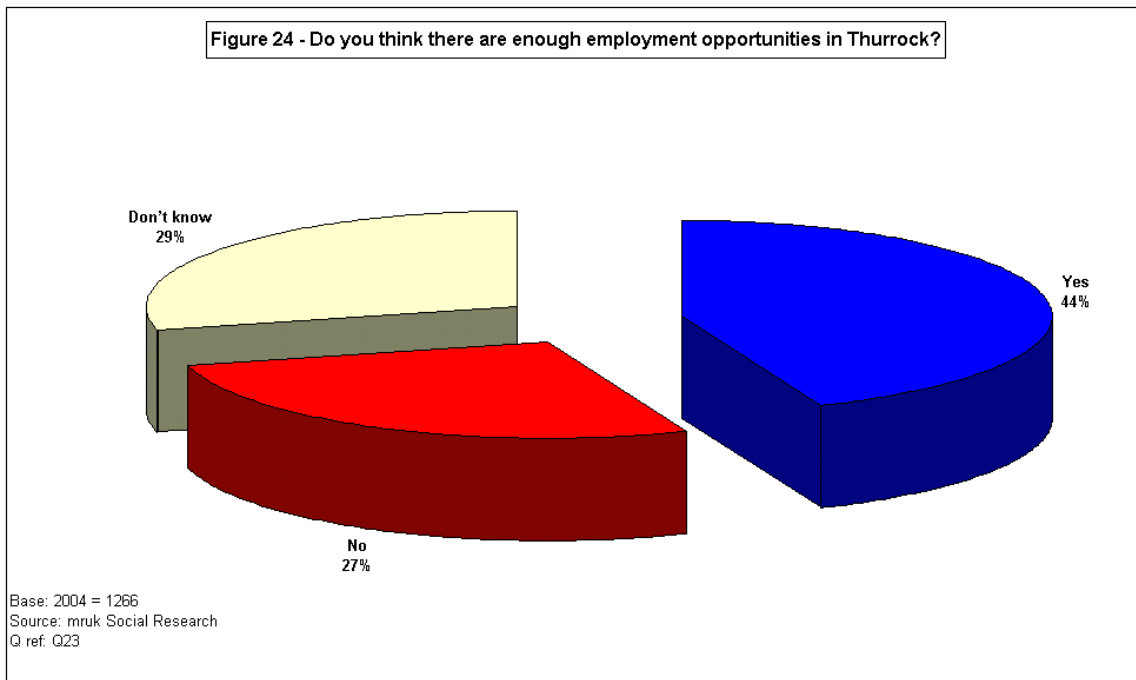
Approaching three quarters (72%) of respondents said there are no barriers to undertaking training or adult education courses. 8% of respondents stated cost, and 7% consider their age as a barrier. All responses are shown below.



6.3 Employment Opportunities

Just less than half (44%) of respondents think there are enough employment opportunities in Thurrock. Over one quarter (27%) feel there are not enough opportunities and a further 29% said 'don't know'.

Of those respondents who do not feel that there are enough employment opportunities the highest in proportionate terms are resident in the South Assembly Area (33%).



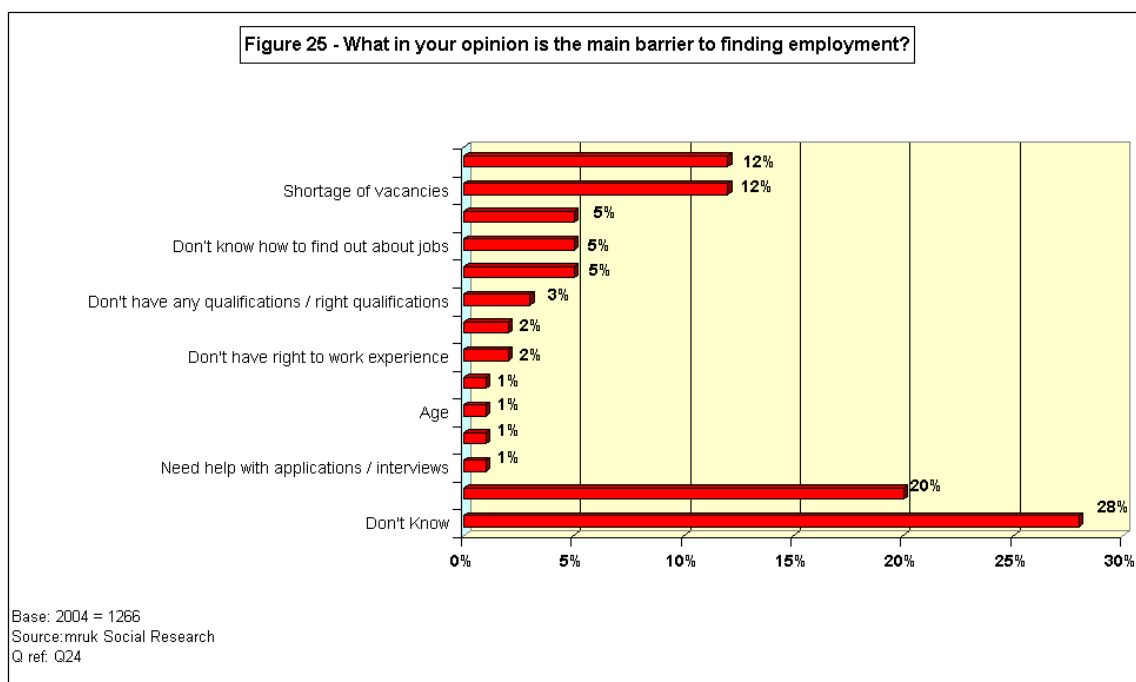
Sub-analysis of age groups show that proportionately the highest numbers of those who do not think there are enough employment opportunities are young people (16-25) and middle aged respondents (41-60). One third of both these groups express such a view compared to 25% or less of the other age groups.

6.4 Barriers to Employment – Main Reason

Over one quarter (28%) of respondents stated that they don't know what the main barriers to finding employment are, a further 20% said that they did not consider any of the reasons listed to be a barrier.

12% of respondents feel that there is a shortage of vacancies and a further 12% believe there is a lack of well paid jobs and they are better off on benefits. 5% of respondents stated:

- They don't know how to find out about jobs
- They need someone to look after their children/they cant afford to pay for childcare
- There is a lack of transport to get to work.



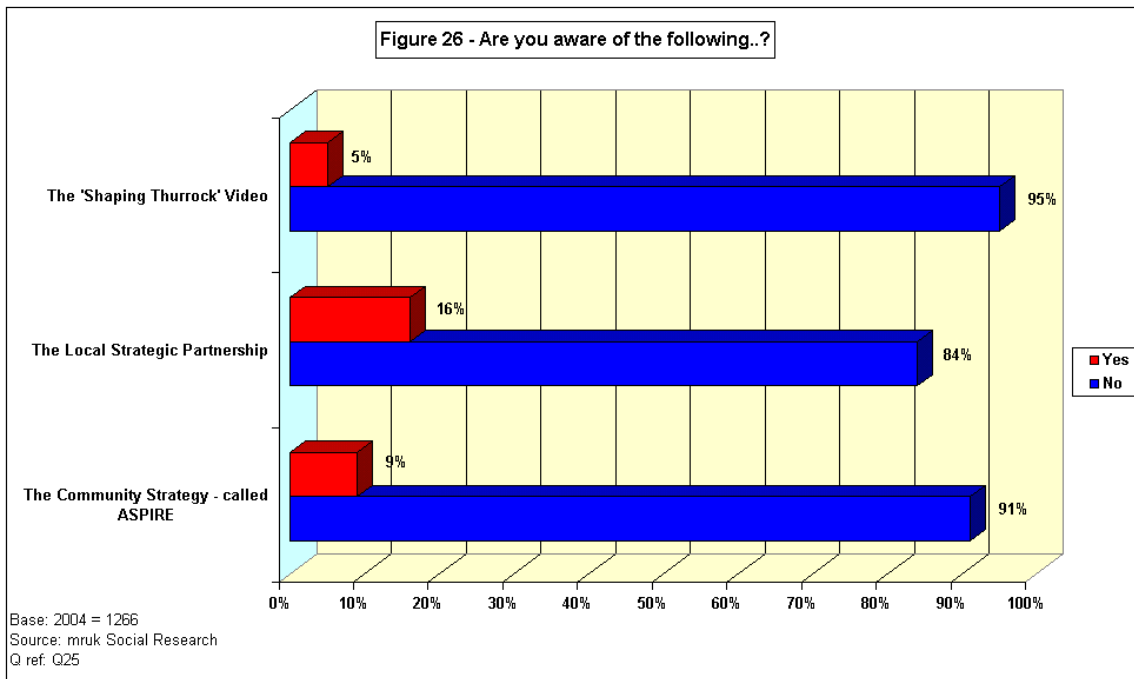
7.1 Awareness

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the Community Strategy called ASPIRE, few (9%) are aware of this.

Awareness of the Local Strategic Partnership is slightly greater at 16%. Awareness is highest amongst those resident in the South Assembly Area (20%).

Only 64 individual respondents (5%) have heard of the “Shaping Thurrock” video. Of those who are aware of the video only 28 respondents have seen it. 20 individuals thought the video was good and only 1 person thought it was poor, the remaining 11 did not say either way.

This relatively low level of awareness is an issue the Council may wish to address further.



7.2 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
- Transport – more buses
- More provision and support for young people / children (with education and schools a potential linked issue)

Findings are consistent with the 2003 survey and such issues remain broadly contained within the Councils existing strategic priorities. These issues 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
- Hooligans / gangs of youths causing problems
- Noisy atmosphere
- 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.

7.3 Achievements

When asked what the “best achievement has been for Thurrock in the past 20 years” over half (58%) were unable to identify one.

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

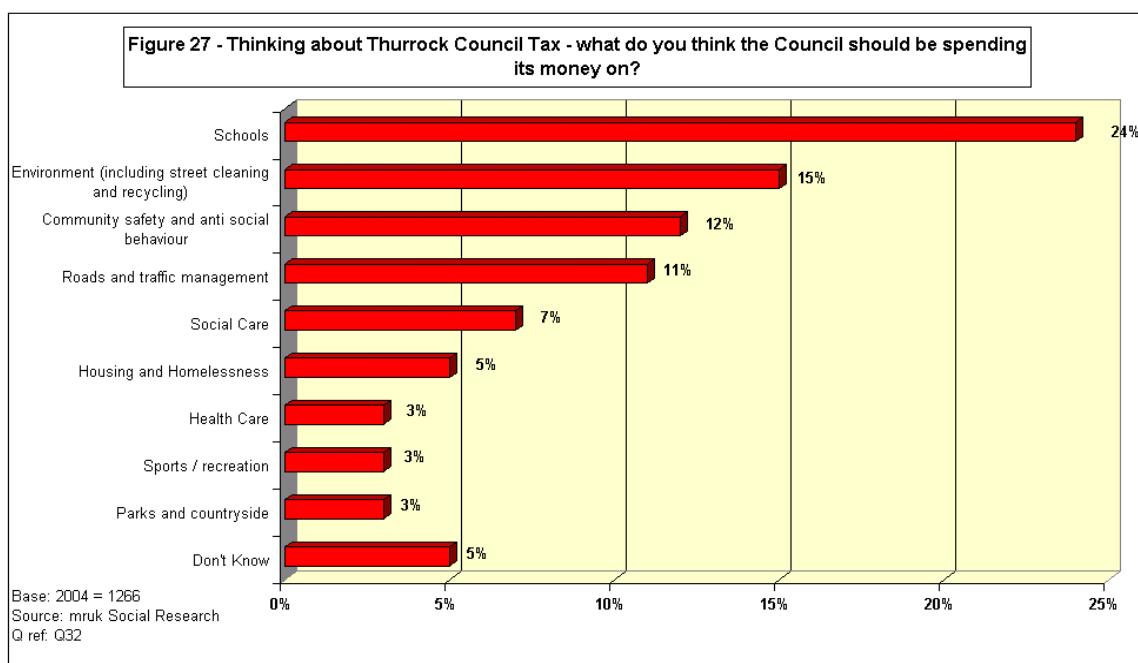
- The Lakeside Shopping (and other) Centres
- All round improvements to local services and facilities
- Better parks

Aspirations for the next 20 years include: -

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

7.4 Council Tax/Spending

Respondents were asked what in their opinion they think the Council should be spending its money on. As their first priority approaching one quarter (24%) feel money should be spent on schools, 15% environment and 12% said community safety and anti-social behaviour. Responses are illustrated below in figure 27.



Over half (53%) of respondents would not be prepared to pay more Council Tax in return for improved Council services. Nearly one third (31%) would consider paying more depending on how much more and a further 12% would definitely be prepared to pay more Council Tax.

In proportionate terms, the highest proportion of respondents willing to pay more are resident in the North East Assembly Area with 13% who would definitely pay and 35% depending on how much.

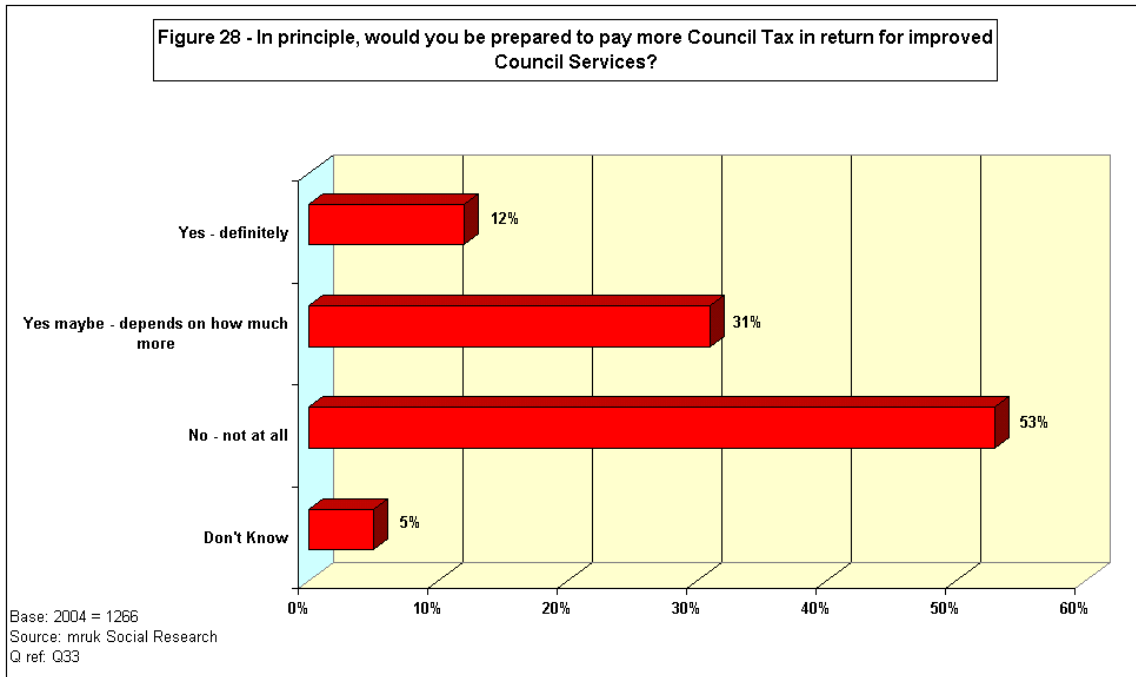
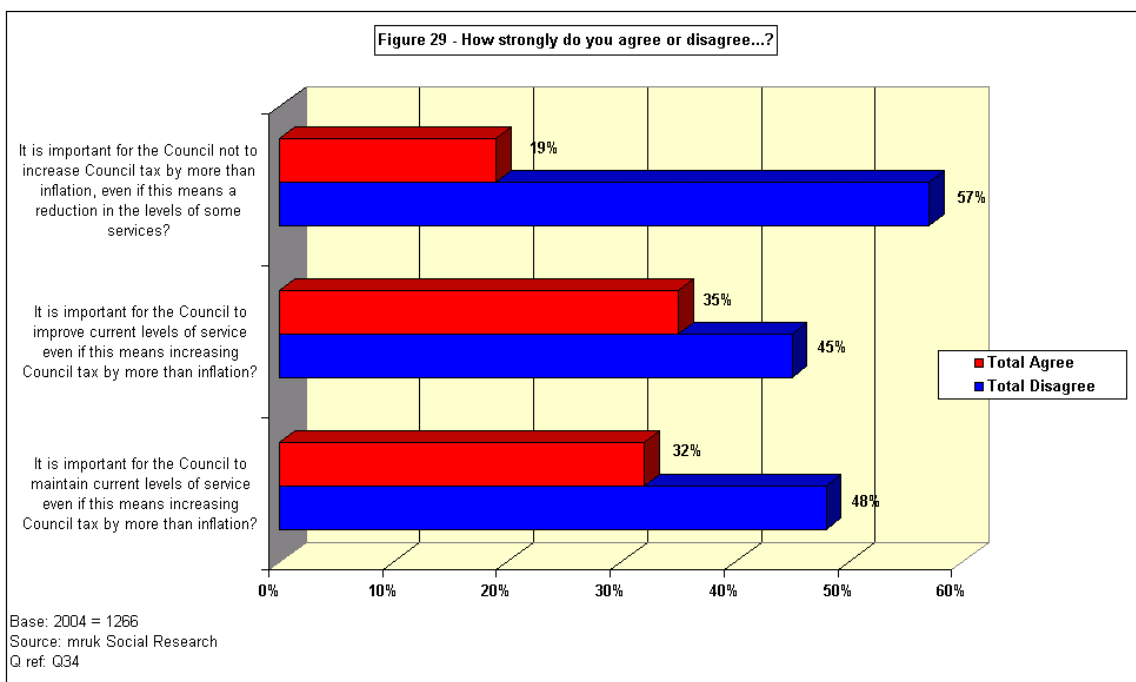


Figure 29 below illustrates how strongly respondents agree with Council Tax factors. 32% of respondents agree (8% strongly agree) it is important for the Council to maintain current levels of service even if this means increasing Council tax by more than inflation. 48% disagree (19% strongly disagree) and 19% don't know either way.

Over one third (35%) of respondents agree it is important for the Council to improve current levels of service even if this means increasing Council tax by more than inflation. 45% disagree (19% strongly disagree), 18% said 'neither/nor' and a further 3% don't know.

When asked how important it is for the Council not to increase Council Tax by more than inflation, even if this means a reduction in the levels of some services, some 57% disagree (with 21% who strongly disagree). Only 19% agree with this, 21% are unsure and 3% don't know.



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

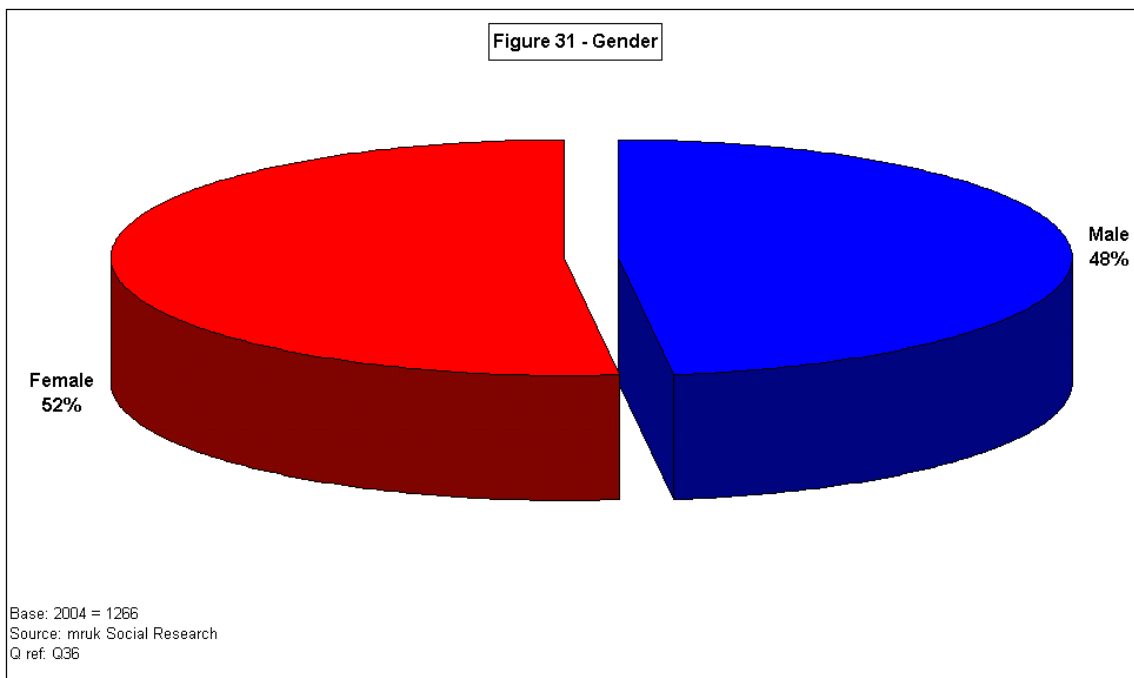
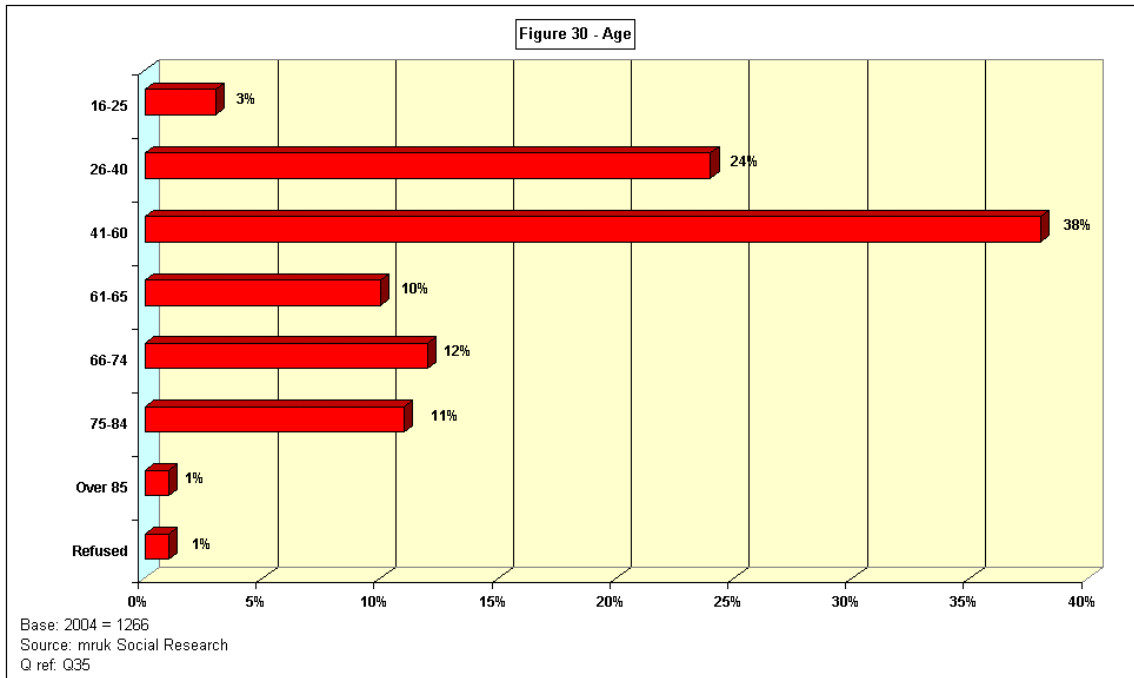
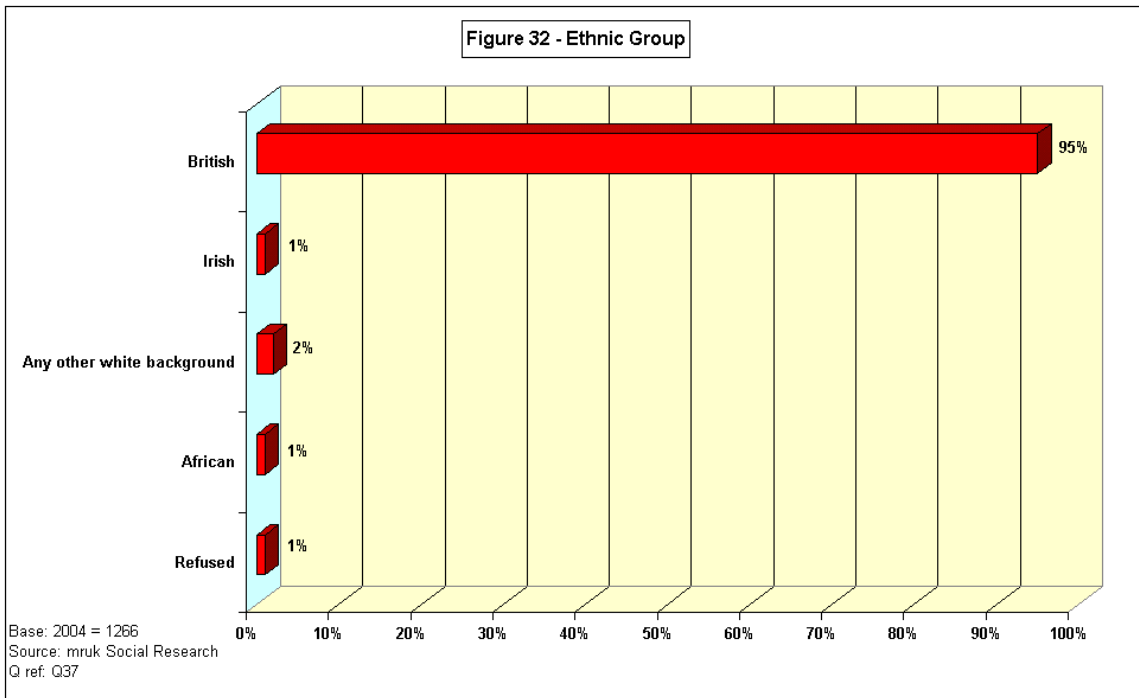


Figure 32 - Ethnic Group



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

- Evidence that there is continued improvement in perceptions of the local areas in which respondents live. In particular this is reflected in a higher proportion (when compared to 2003) who say their local neighbourhood has been getting better over the last two years.
- While concerns about personal safety increase significantly when respondents are out alone after dark and a higher proportion of females feel unsafe at this time than males the overall level expressing such concern is reducing.
- 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. This remains consistent with previous surveys.
- 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. However, this again is showing signs of improvement when compared to the previous surveys.
- Findings indicate a slight improvement in the proportion who feel they can influence local decision making.
- In general the majority are proud to live in Thurrock area and consider its identity, history and heritage to be important. However, fewer younger people seem to share views of the importance of history/heritage whilst remaining very proud to live in the area. The Council may wish to examine this further in the context of engaging young people.
- Awareness of the Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy is relatively low. The Council may wish to examine (with its partners) how this can be raised.
- Schools is the most frequently identified target for spending (i.e. use of Council Tax). While a small majority are not prepared to pay more Council Tax in return for improved services a sizeable minority may be prepared to do so. The majority would not agree with the Council resisting Council Tax increases if it would mean reducing services.
- 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.

