

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

Prepared For: Thurrock Council

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1. INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Council conducted its fourth major quality of life survey in October 2005. The survey itself was conducted independently by **mruk research** and was designed to enable key results to be compared to the previous surveys conducted in December 2002, December 2003 and December 2004.

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

This report provides a summary evaluation of the principal findings to emerge from the 2005 survey and makes direct comparisons with the 2002, 2003 and 2004 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, 2003 and 2004 surveys in order to track any shift in views and opinions.

2.2 Methodology

In November 2002 the survey was carried out through a part telephone methodology combined with a door to door refreshment of one third of the Citizens Panel. At that time the panel recruitment was undertaken using a random route quota control method. The survey itself was conducted using the same questionnaire through two methods. A total of 1055 interviews were achieved for the Quality of Life (QoL) survey.

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 once 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.

In 2005 the survey was conducted entirely by telephone. Existing members of the Citizens Panel were again the primary initial source of respondents and then supplemented by a randomly selected sample of households. A total of 1105 interviews were conducted across the 4 Local Assembly Areas.

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

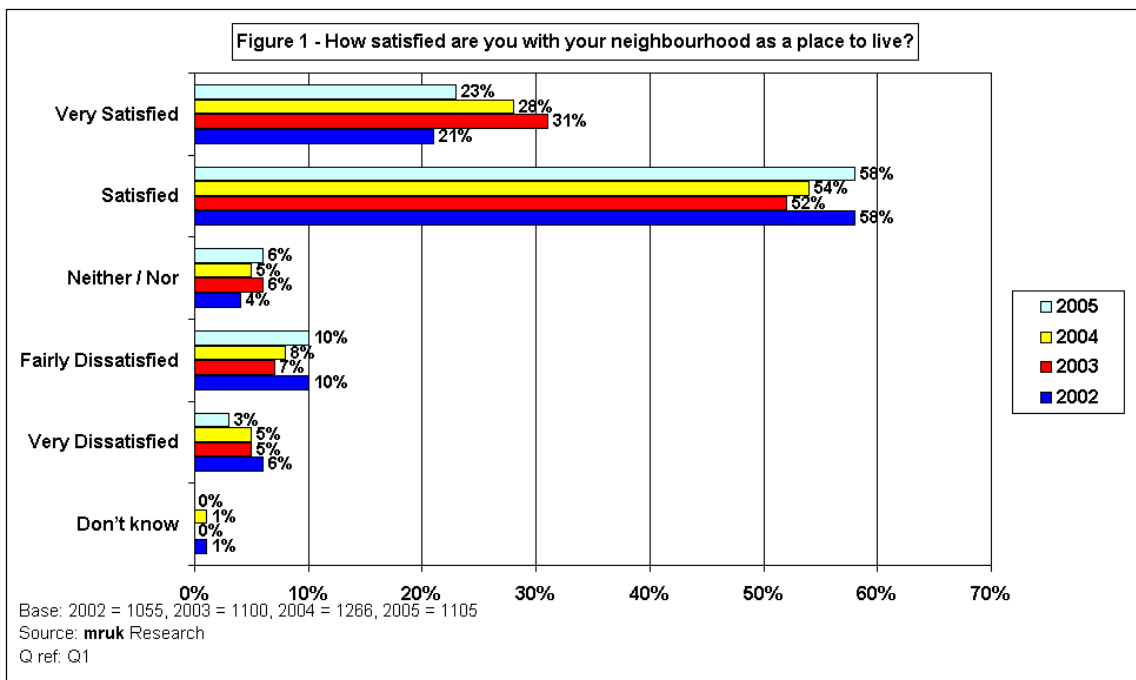
Overall, some 81% of respondents say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. This remains very close to the 82% outcome in 2004.

As one of the key quality of life indicators developed by the Audit Commission this maintains a fairly high satisfaction level with 23% who specifically say they are “very satisfied”.

Figure 1 below illustrates that overall, 13% express dissatisfaction while 6% do not express a view either way.

It is notable that in proportionate terms dissatisfaction appears highest amongst the South and the West Assembly Area respondents (16%) and satisfaction remains highest in the Central Area (83%).

In general the variations when compared to 2004 are marginal and (in aggregate terms) remain within the confidence interval.



3.2 Community Safety

The vast majority (91%) of respondents feel 'very' or 'fairly' safe if alone outside during the day. However, this drops significantly to around half (50%) if alone outside after dark. This is compared to 94% of respondents who felt safe during the day in the 2004 survey and 57% who said they felt safe after dark.

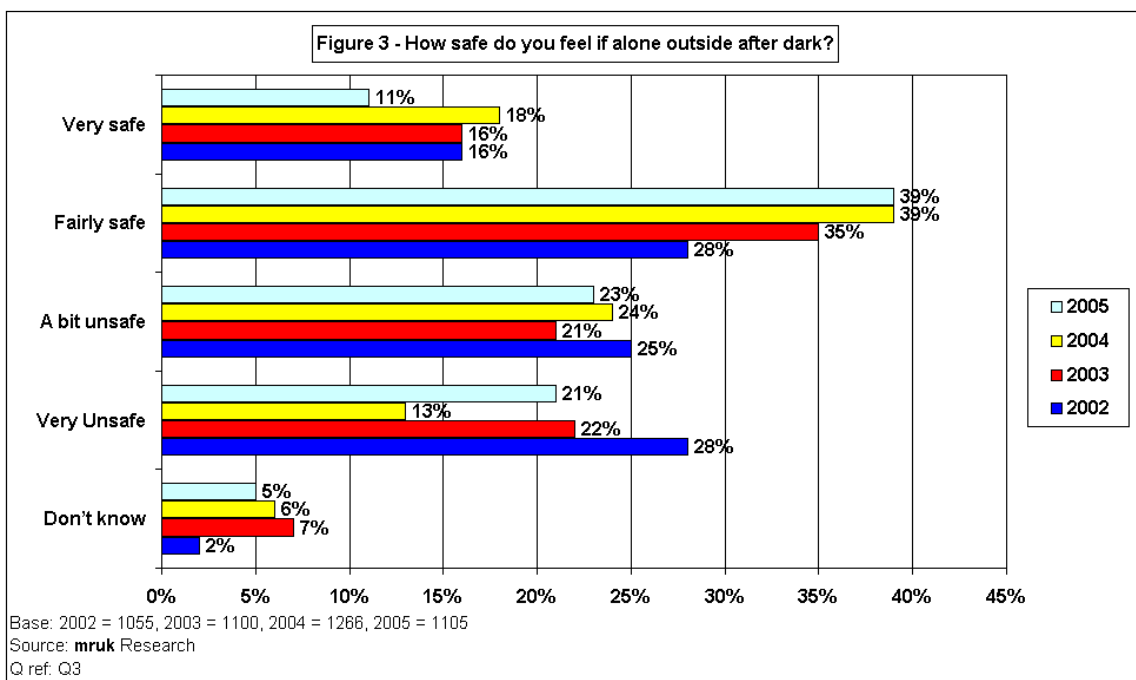
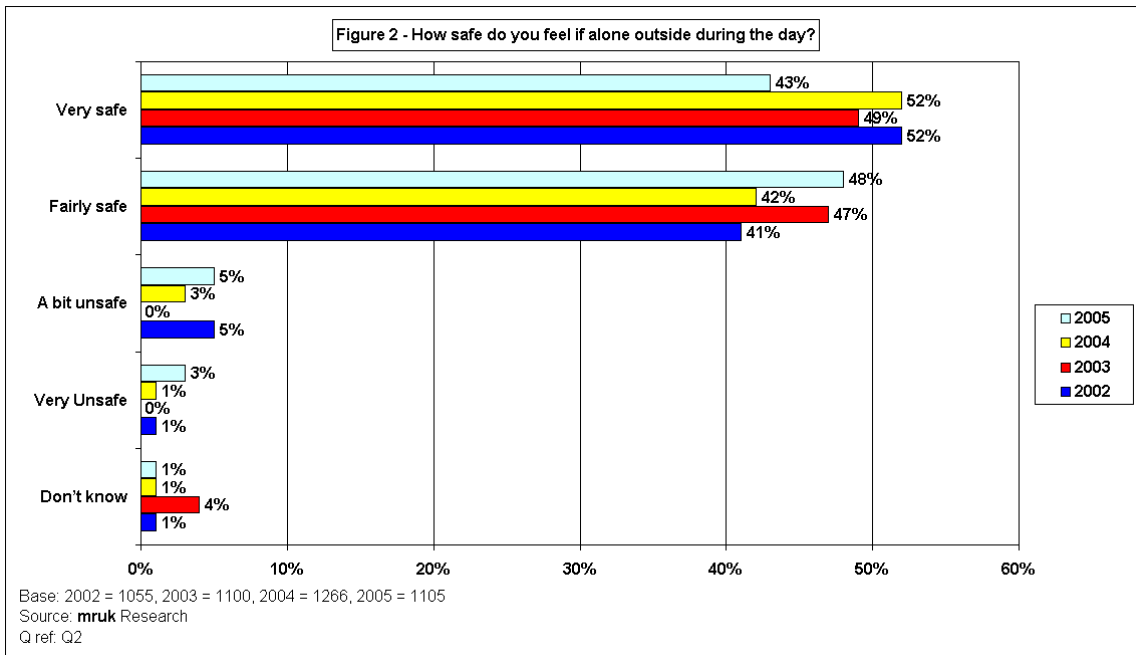
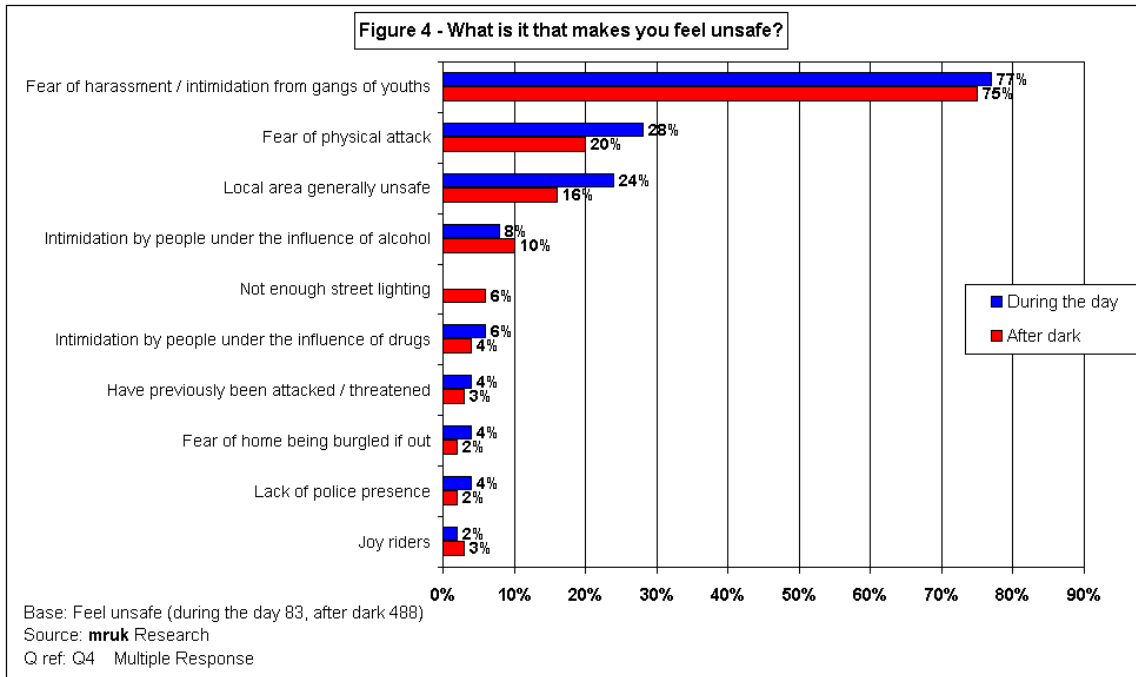
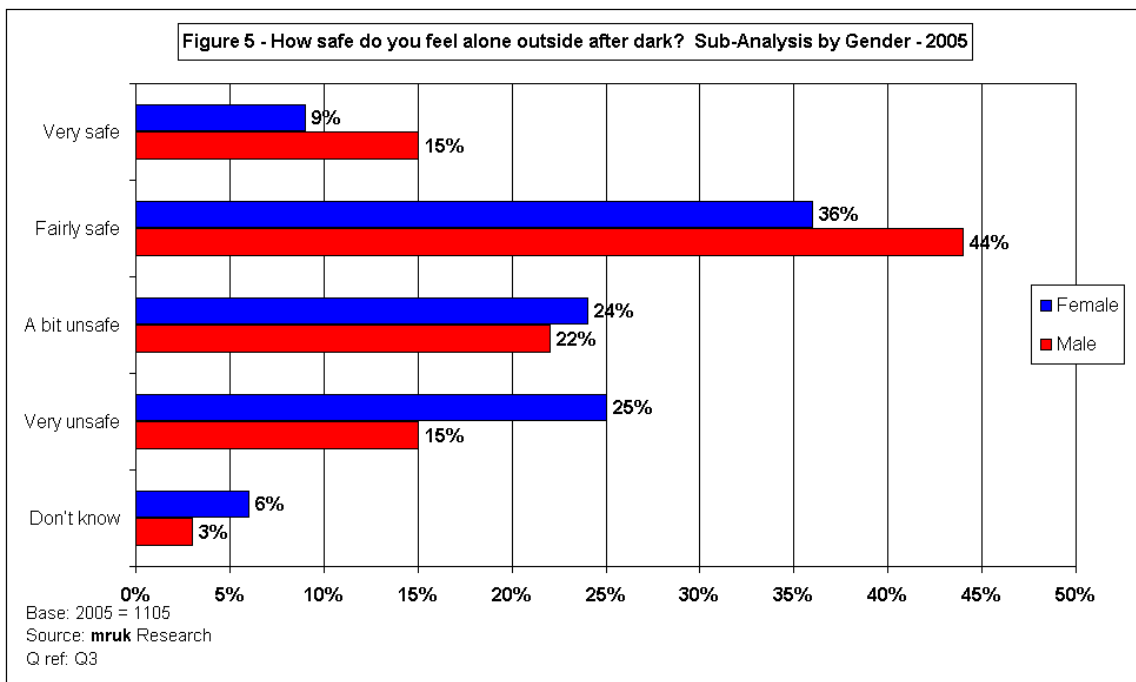


Figure 4 below illustrates the main reasons respondents feel unsafe both during the day and after dark. Around three quarters (77% during the day and 75% after dark) feel unsafe because they fear harassment or intimidation from gangs of youths. However this figure reduced to a level of between 56% - 59% in 2004 but has increased again to similar levels as 2003 (around 70%). A further 28% of respondents fear physical attack during the day and a fifth after dark. Just less than a quarter (24%) of respondents say they feel the local area is generally unsafe during the day and 16% after dark.

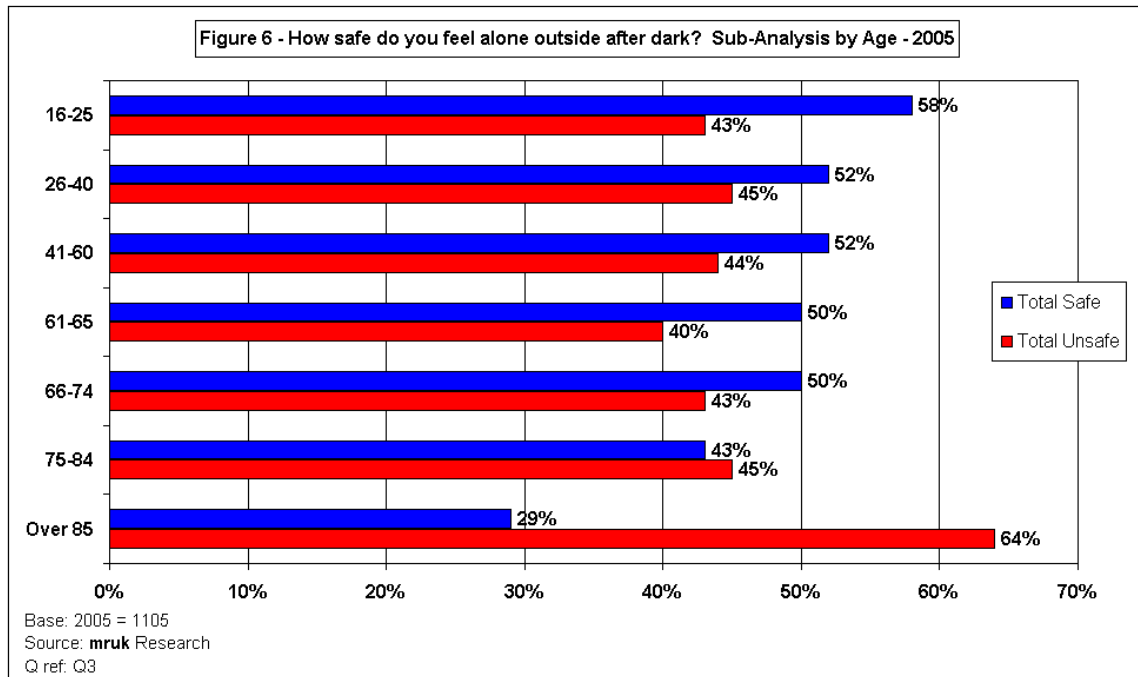


3.2.1 Sub Analysis By Gender/Age

Sub analysis of findings by gender and age reveal that overall, 91% of males feel safe when outside alone during the day compared to 92% of females. The variation between males and females when it comes to feeling of safety after dark (when out alone) is more pronounced. Some 60% of males feel safe (15% 'very' safe and 44% 'fairly' safe) compared to 45% of females (9% and 36% respectively). There is also a constant differential of around 10% between genders when those who specifically say they feel unsafe are sub-analysed (37% male/49% female).



Notably, when sub-analysing findings by age, the highest proportion of respondents who feel unsafe when alone outside after dark are aged over 85 years as illustrated below. By contrast the highest proportion who feel safe after dark (58%) are those aged 16-25 years.

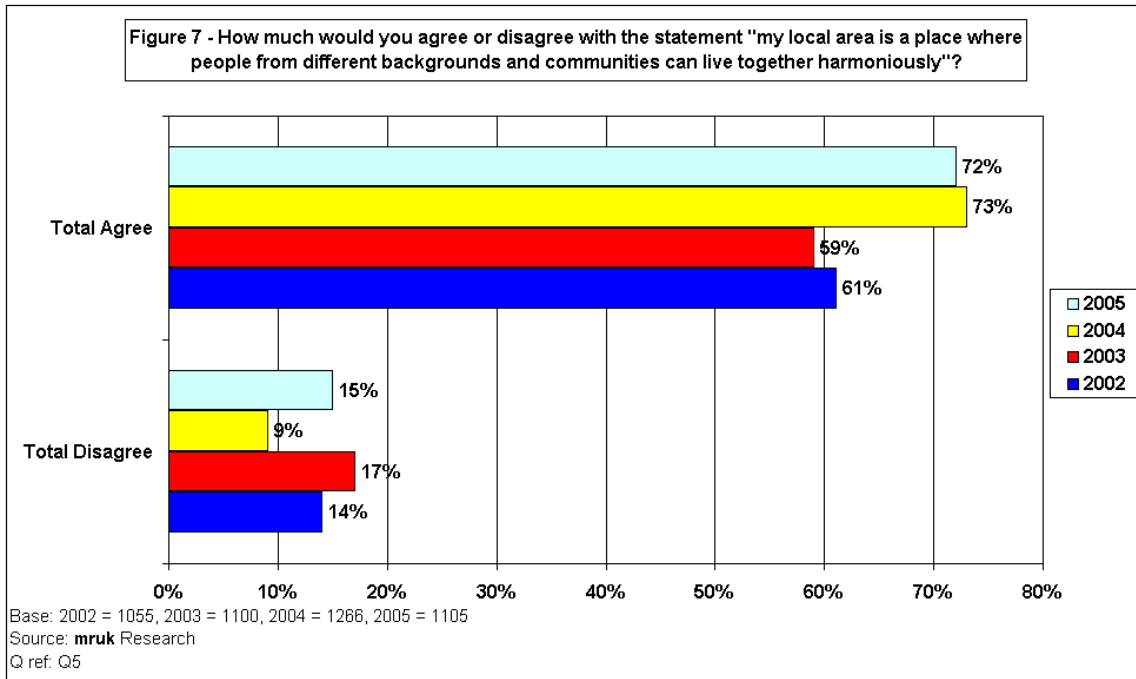


When sub-analysing the 'reasons' for feeling unsafe these tend to be consistent with the aggregate profile and do not show significant variations between gender and age (including the 65% of those aged 16-25 years who feel intimidated by gangs of youths after dark).

3.3 Community Harmony

Overall, 72% (consistent with 73% in 2004 and compared to 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”.

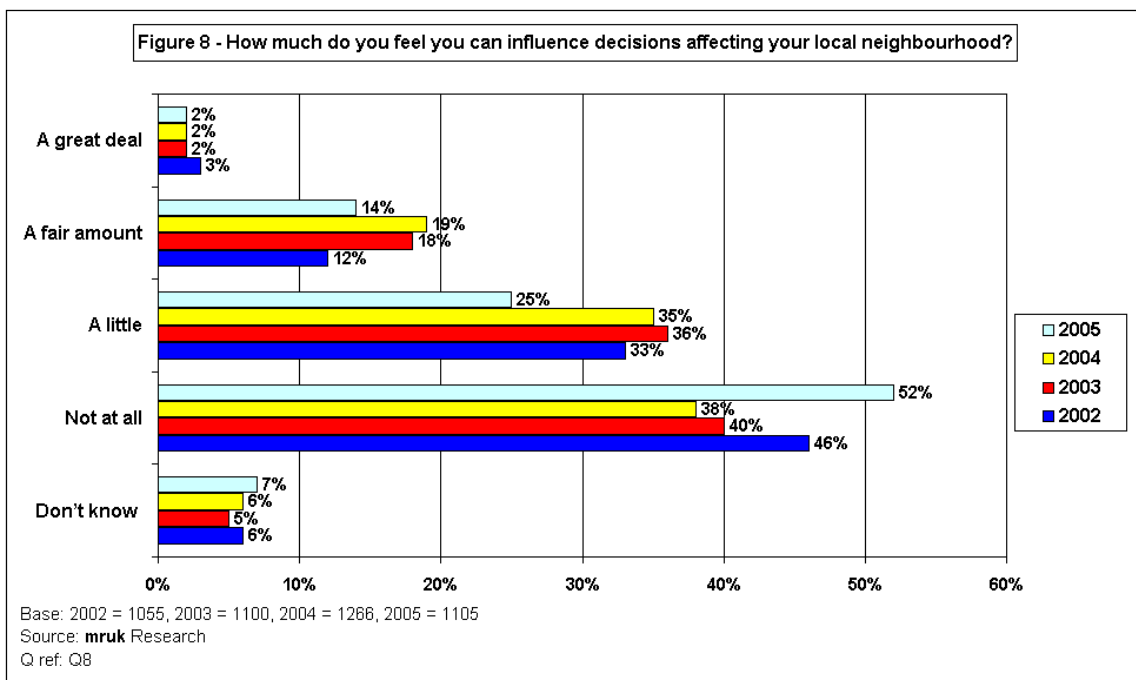
A total of 15% (9% in 2004, 17% in 2003 and 14% in 2002) disagree with this statement.



Sub-analysis of the findings by age shows a similar profile to the aggregate findings and a variation of no more than 10% between all age groups (with the exception of those aged over 85 where 93% agree). Similarly there is only a 3% variation in views between male and female (70% males agree with the statement compared to 73% females).

4.1 Influencing Decisions

Figure 8 below illustrates that only 16% of respondents believe they can significantly influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood although an additional 25% think they can exert a "little" influence. However, over half 52% say they cannot exert any influence at all. This represents some variation on the previous surveys and seems to indicate a growing feeling of remoteness from the decision making process.

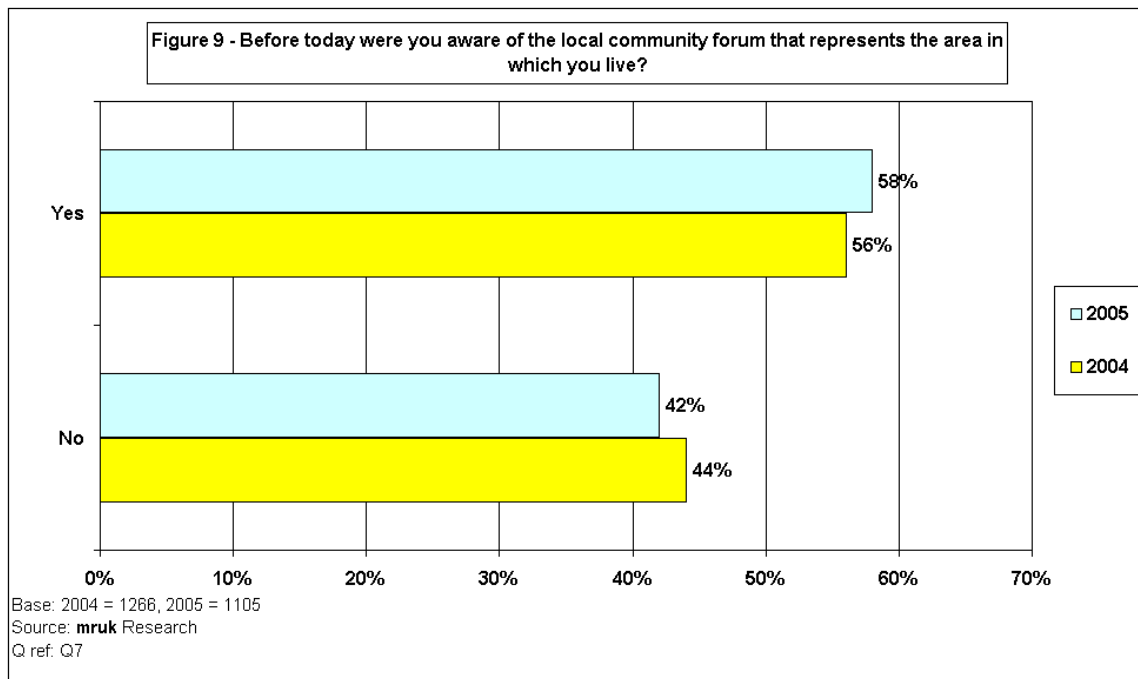


Notably, this year findings show older people (aged 75 and over) in proportionate terms are more likely to feel they can influence decisions than those in younger age groups (36% of over 85's say 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' compared to 10% in the 26-40 age group and around 15% in the 41-60 group).

4.2 Community Activity

4.2.1 Awareness of Local Community Forum

Before respondents took part in the survey, just over half (58%) were aware of the local community forum that represents the area in which they live. Some 42% were not aware. Levels of awareness have increased slightly since the previous survey in 2004 from 56%. Awareness is highest amongst those resident in the West Assembly Area (71%). Awareness is significantly lower (15%) amongst young people aged 16-25 years than any of the other age groups.



4.2.2 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 School (10%) followed by Community Forum (8%) and Church Groups (8%). Figure 10 below illustrates the responses.

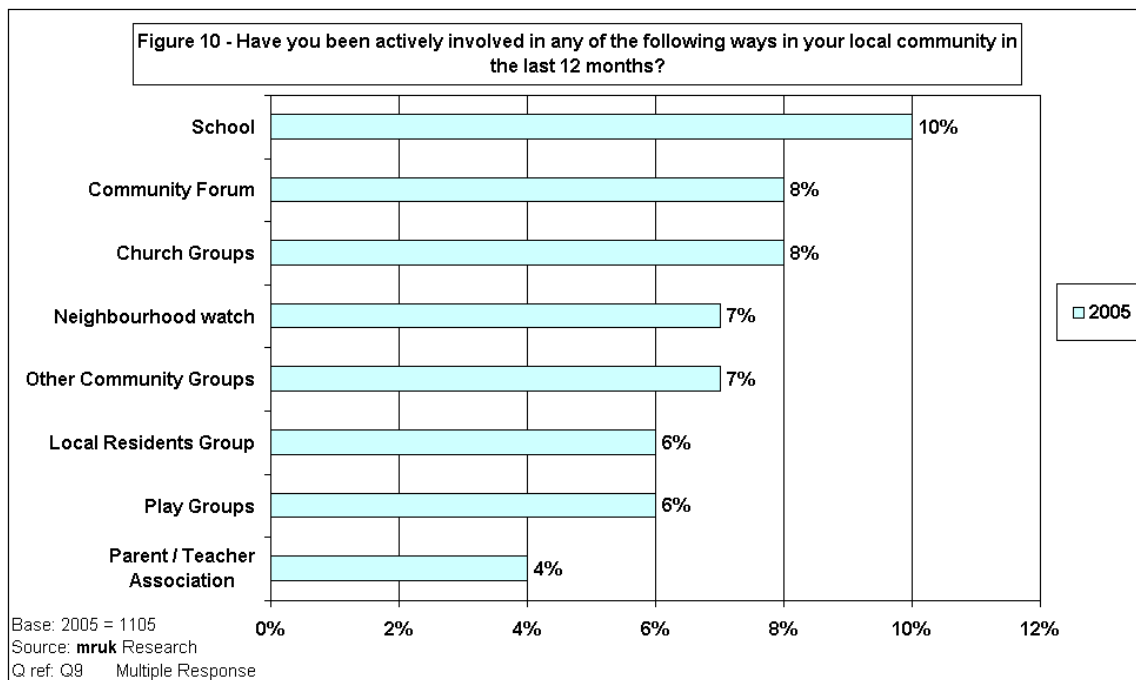
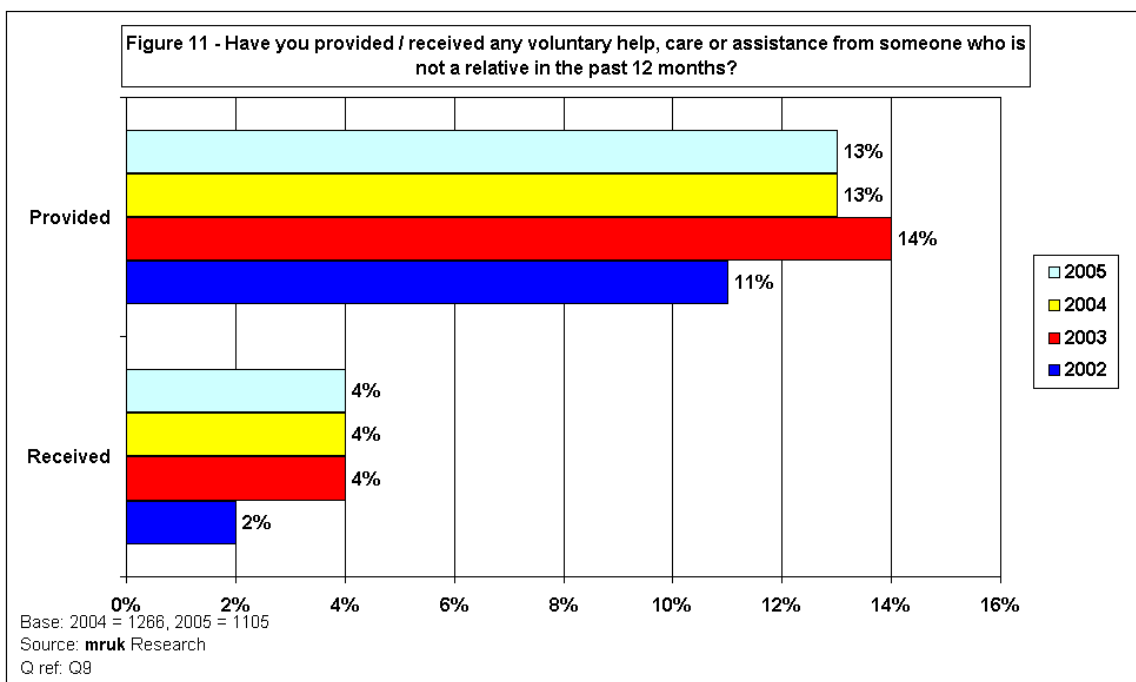


Figure 11 below illustrates the extent to which respondents are involved in their local communities in any of the ways highlighted.

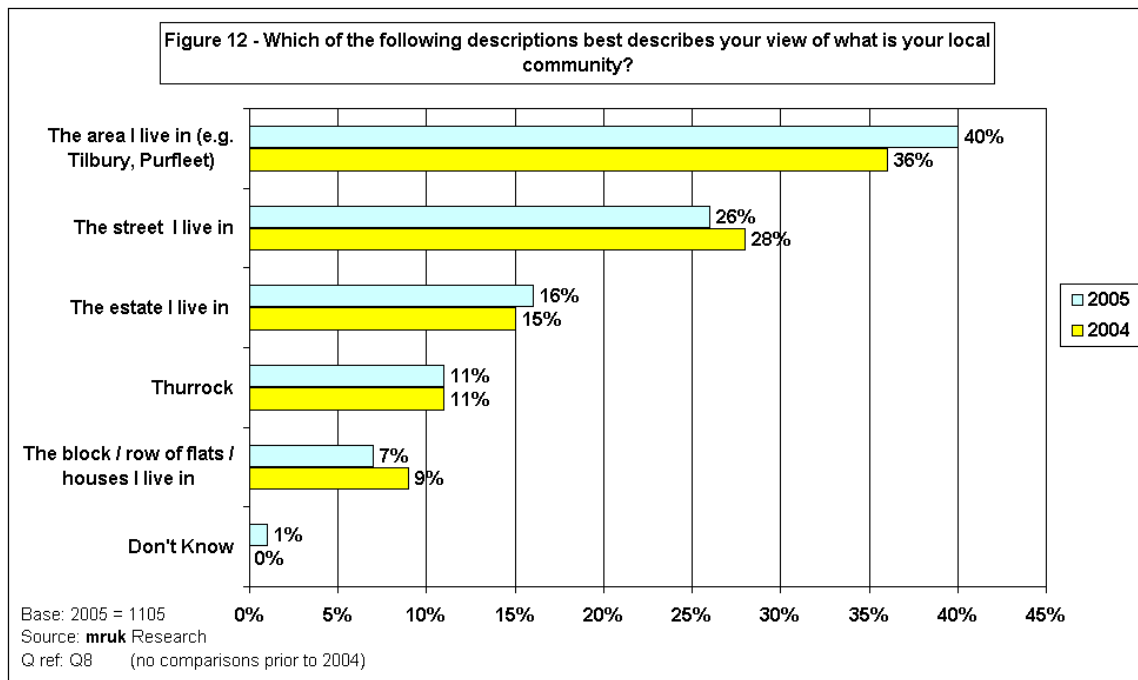
13% have been involved in providing some form of unpaid (except for expenses) work, assistance or care for someone who is not a relative over the last 12 months. By contrast only 4% have actually received such help or care.

Findings remain consistent to those in 2004 and 2003 and there is little variation between gender or age groups, with the exception of those aged 16-25 where none of them have been involved in providing unpaid work nor have they received any.



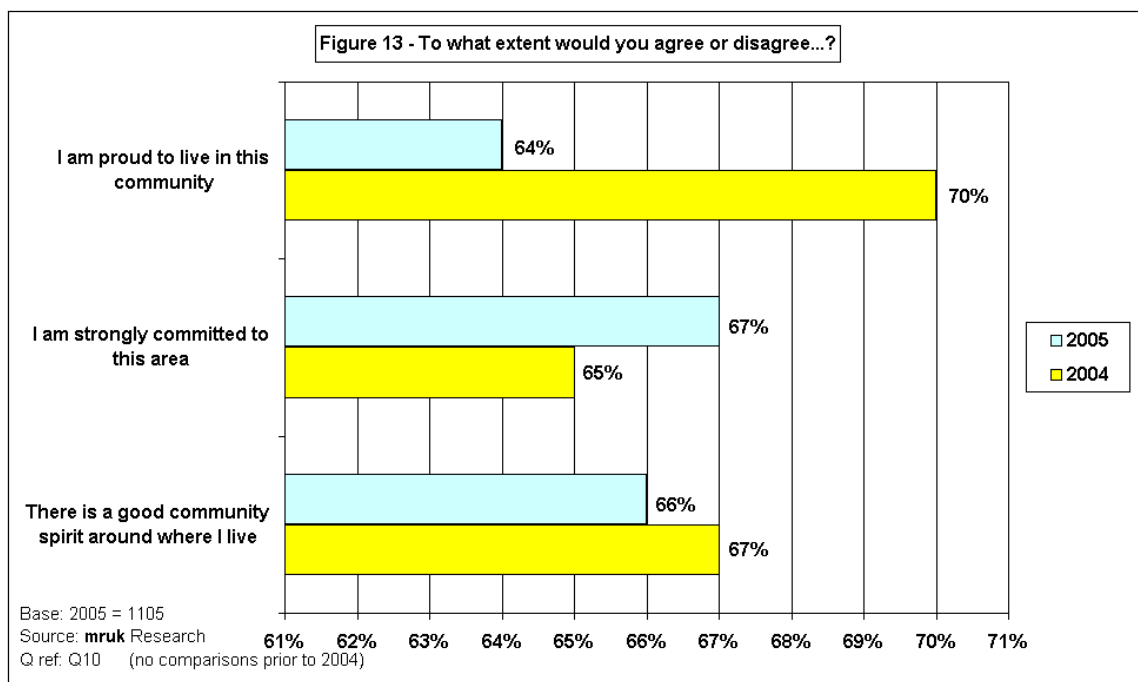
4.3 Views on Local Community

Respondents were asked what they would describe as their local community. Some 40% of respondents feel their local community is the area in which they live, a further 26% feel it is the street they live in and 16% are of the opinion that their local community is the estate on which they live. Findings remain virtually the same as those in 2004 as illustrated below.



Approaching two thirds (64%) of respondents agree they are proud to live in their area, (16% agree strongly). Only 20% of respondents disagree. The highest proportion of those who disagree are resident in the South and Central Assembly Areas (22%). Just over two thirds (67%) of respondents agree they are strongly committed to the area they live in (19% agree strongly with this). 23% of respondents disagree with this. Two thirds (66%) of respondents agree there is a good community spirit around where they live (18% agree strongly).

While views on community spirit and commitment to the area are broadly consistent with 2004 it is notable that the proportion of respondents who say they are “proud to live in this community” has decreased from 70% and, there has been a corresponding increase in those who disagree with that statement from 14% in 2004 to the present level.



In sub-analysing 2005 responses by age the highest (proportionately) levels of pride living in the community are exhibited by older people (aged 75-84). 85% of this age group say they are proud to live in their community compared to around 55% of those in the 16-40 age groups. For those 85 years or over levels of pride is around 71%. Slightly more women (67%) than men (59%) are proud to live in the community.

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.

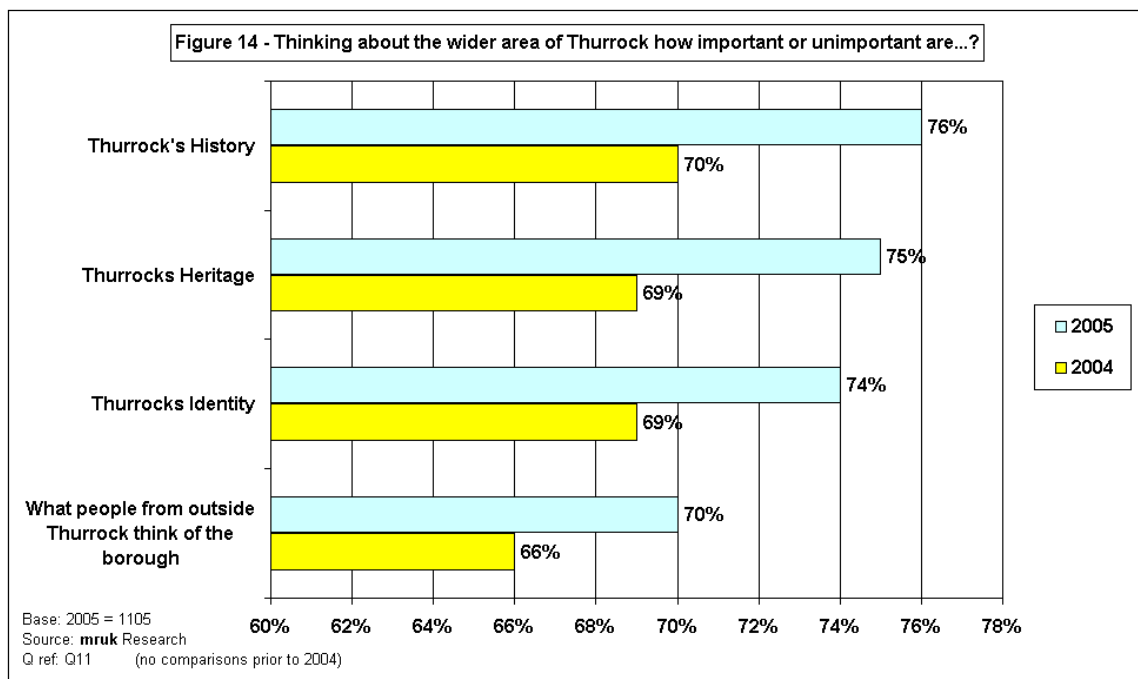
4.4 The Wider Area of Thurrock – Identity, History and Heritage

Three quarters of respondents (75%) feel Thurrock’s Heritage is important (with 32% who feel it is very important). Only 9% do not consider this to be important and 15% do not have an opinion either way. This is an increase of importance since the previous 2004 survey where 69% of respondents felt Thurrock’s Heritage was important. However, in comparison to all other age groups fewer younger people (aged 16-25) consider it important (in proportionate terms it is 53% of this group).

Some 76% of respondents believe Thurrock’s History is important (including one third who said it was very important). 7% said this was not important and a further 2% said it was not important at all. A further 15% do not express a view.

Thurrock’s identity is seen to be important by 74% of respondents and unimportant by 10%. An additional 15% 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. 70% feel this is important (31% said ‘very important’) and 14% did not feel this was important. Again this is an increase in importance since 2004 (from 66%). Importance is greatest amongst residents living in the West and North East Assembly Areas.

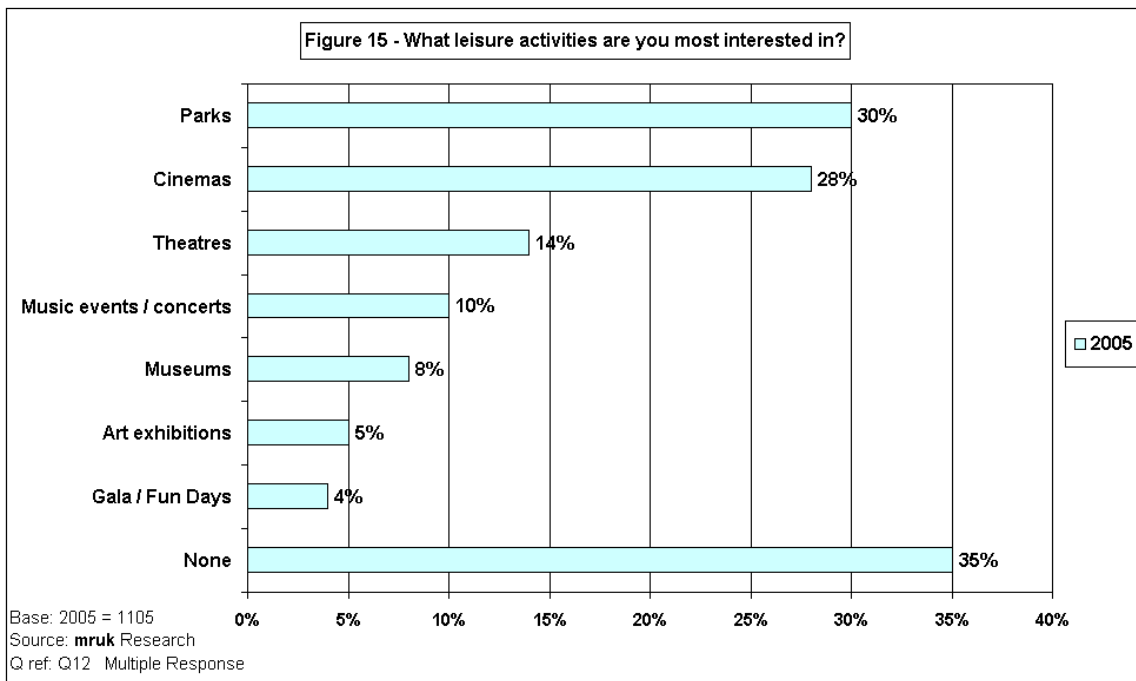


Consistent with 2004 and again allowing for the relatively small number of younger respondents (i.e. 47) in the 16-25 age group there is a lower response to the perceived importance of issues raised in this suite of questions than for all other age groups.

5.1 Leisure Activities and Sports

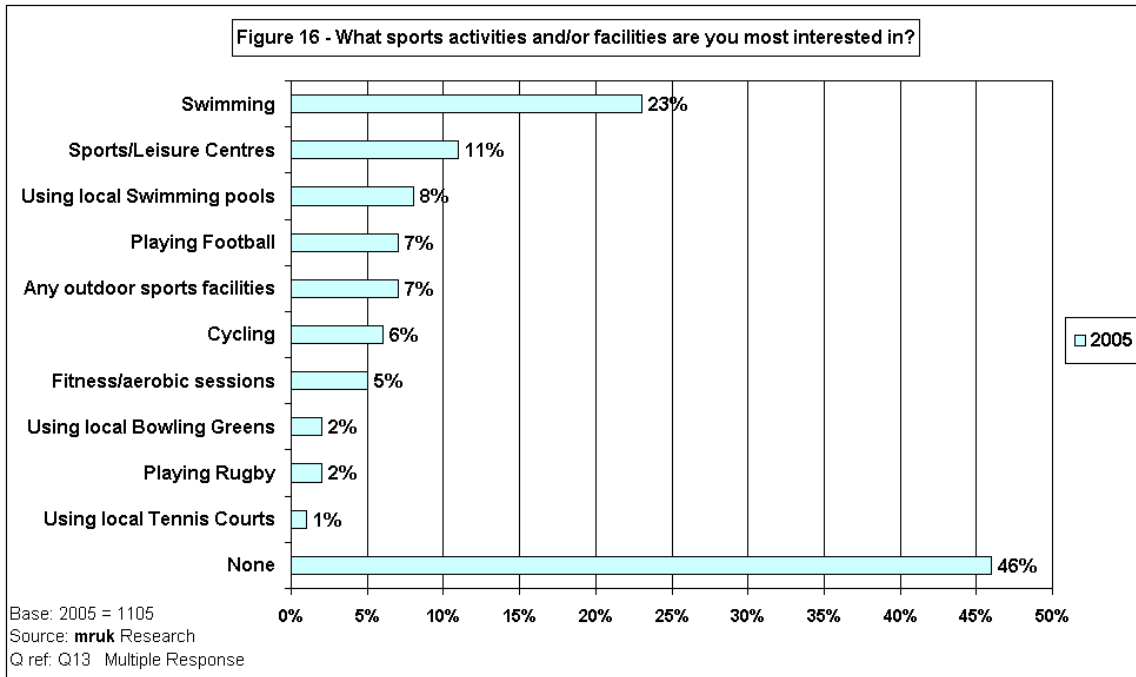
Figure 15 below shows which 'leisure' activities respondents are most interested in.

30% of respondents are interested in using parks, 28% show an interest in going to the cinema, and a further 14% stated they would be interested in going to theatres. The breakdown is illustrated below.



In turn Figure 16 below shows which 'sports activities and facilities' respondents are most interested in.

23% of respondents are interested in swimming, 11% express an interest in using sports and leisure centres, and a further 8% stated they would be interested in using local swimming pools as illustrated below.



5.2 Transport

Approaching three quarters (72%) of respondents say their usual form of transport is by car, 15% travel by bus and a further 7% choose to walk. Few respondents travel by train, taxi or bike.

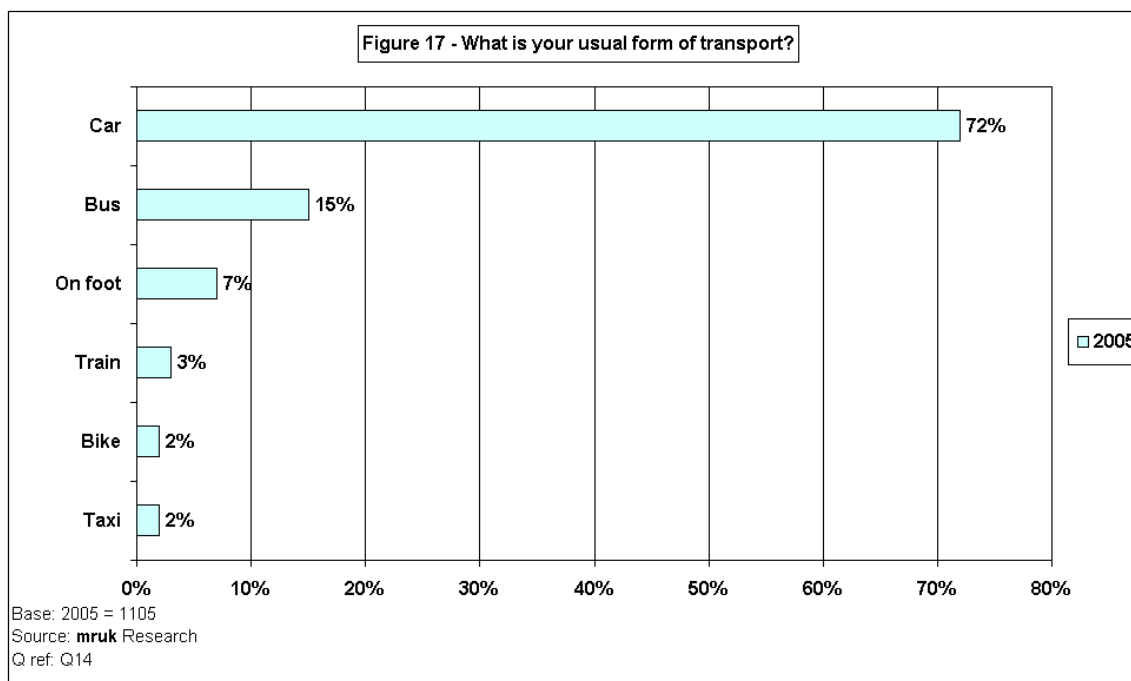


Figure 18 below illustrates respondent's estimate of journey times from their homes to the various sports facilities in the borough using their normal methods of transport.

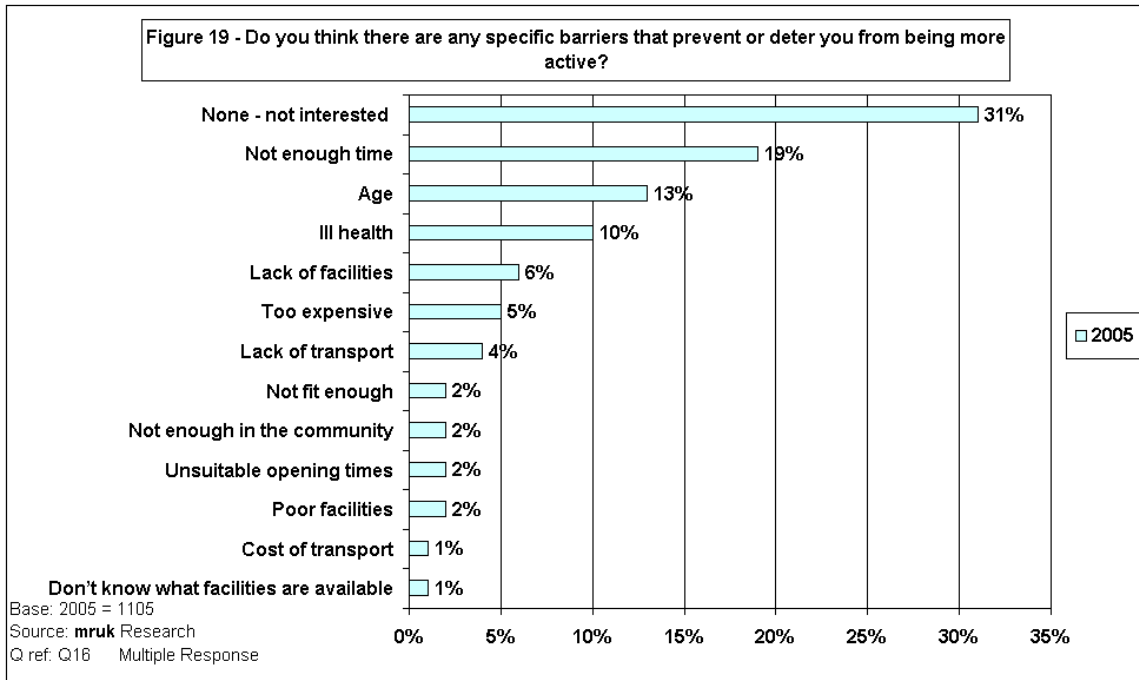
Figure 18 - From your home how long does it take to reach...?

	Less than 5 mins	5 - 10 mins	10 - 20 mins	Over 20 mins	Don't know
Sports/Leisure Centres	25%	37%	16%	6%	17%
Swimming Pools	23%	36%	15%	6%	19%
Outdoor sports facility	21%	31%	15%	6%	27%
Tennis Courts	16%	22%	12%	5%	45%
Bowling Green	16%	23%	11%	6%	45%

Base: 2005 = 1105
Source: mruk Research
Q ref: Q15

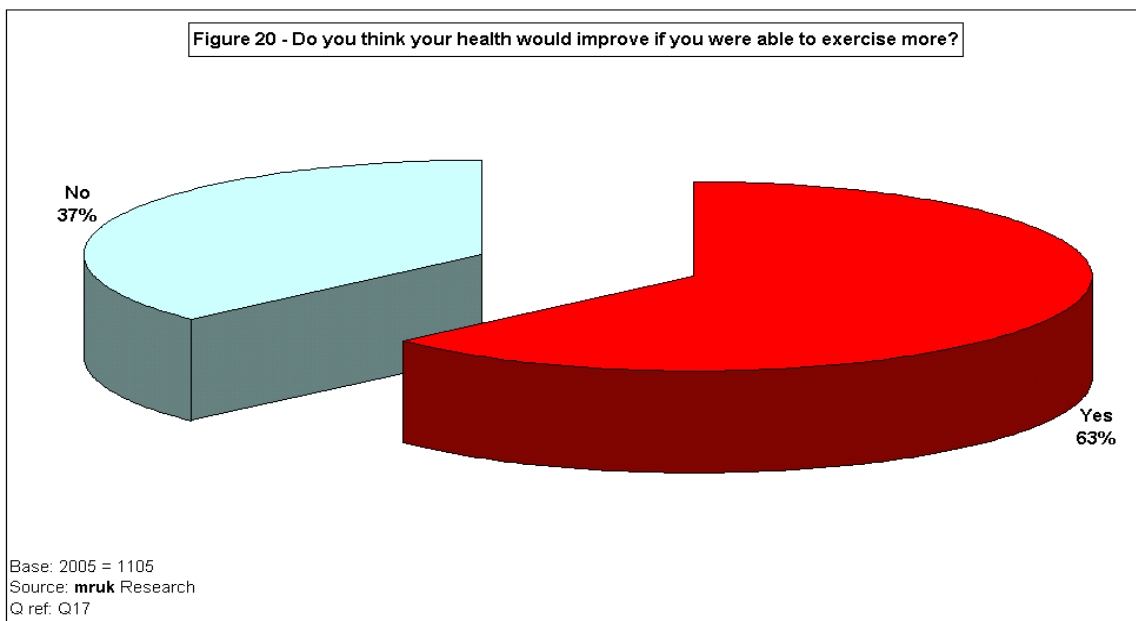
5.3 Barriers to Being More Active

Some 31% of respondents stated that they simply were not interested in being more active (proportionately highest amongst the 26-40 age group). 19% of respondents said they do not have enough time for leisure activities/sports, 13% find their age as a barrier and 10% said ill health prevented them from being more active.

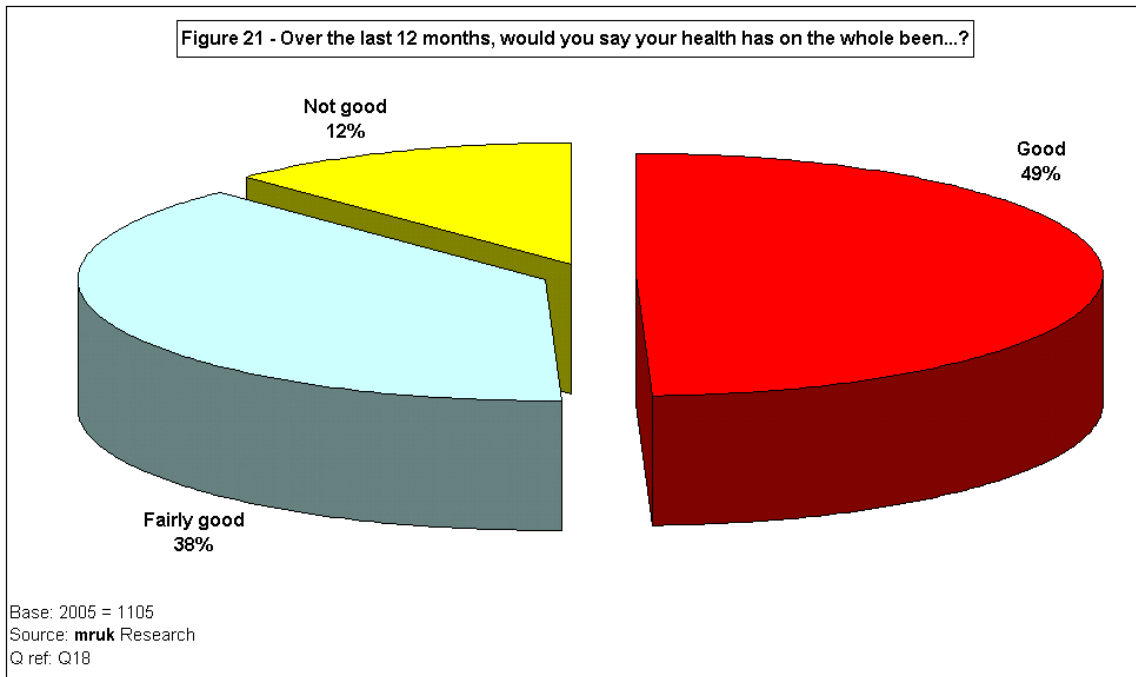


5.4 Health

Approaching two thirds (63%) of respondents say they believe their health would improve if they were more active, 37% do not. Mostly younger respondents feel their health would improve with exercise.

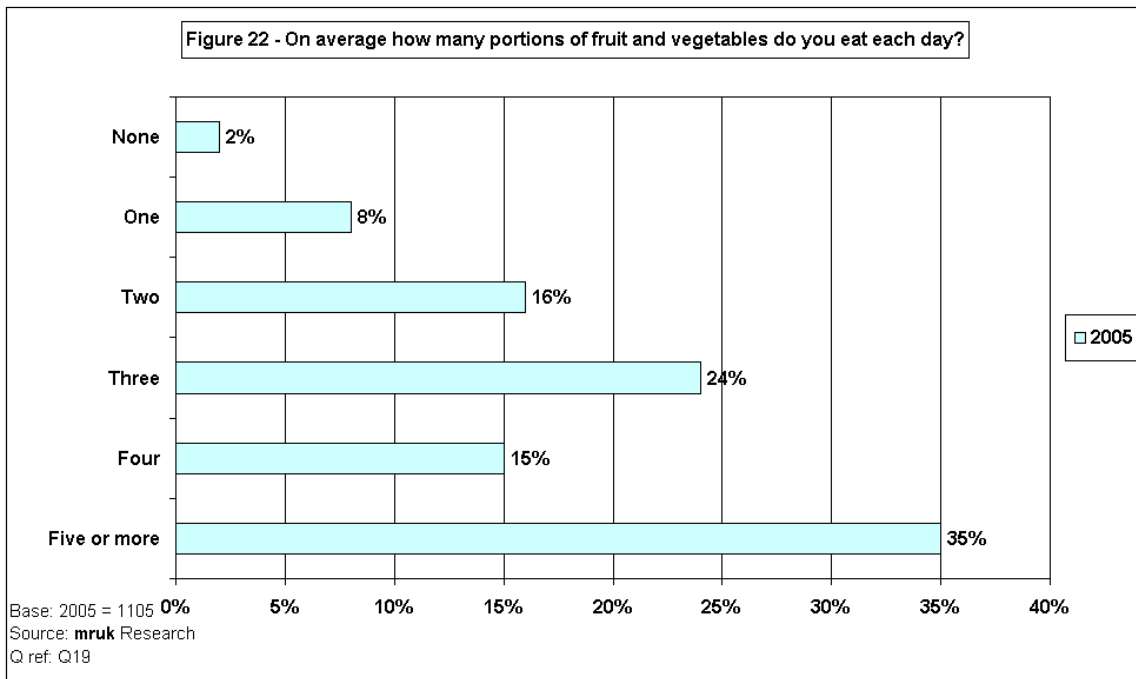


Over the last 12 months just less than half (49%) of respondents say their health has been on the whole 'good', 38% say 'fairly good' and only 12% say their health has not been good (these are predominantly respondents aged over 65).



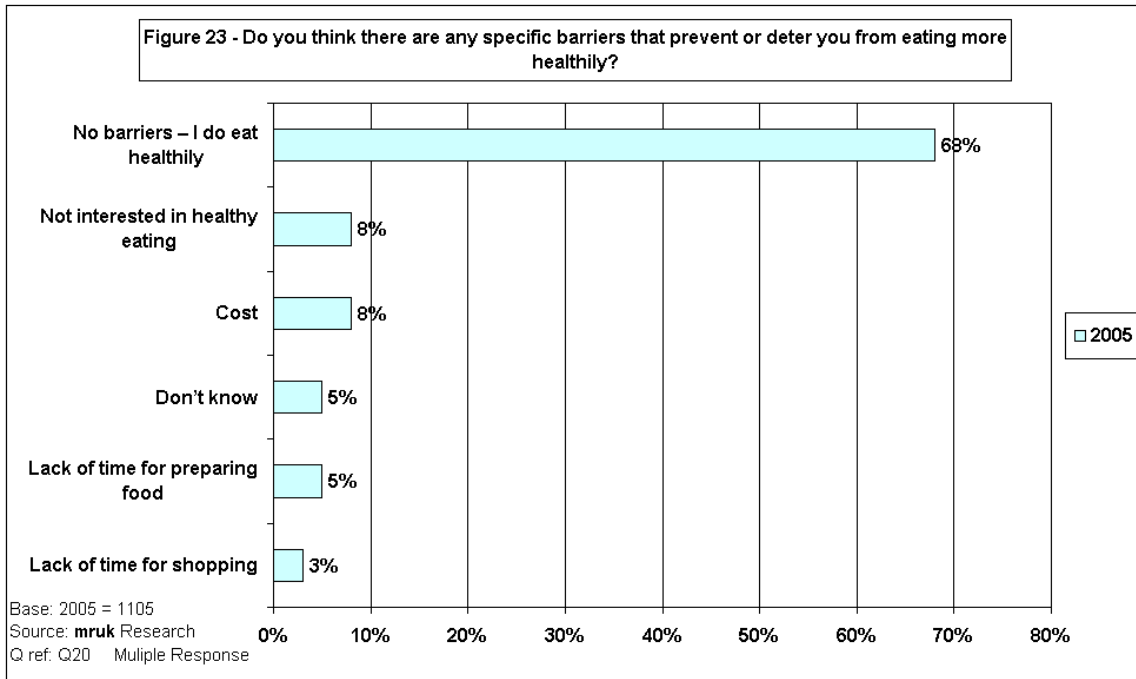
5.5 Healthy Eating

Over a third (35%) of respondents say they eat the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables each day. 15% of respondents eat four portions, just less than a quarter (24%) say they eat three portions and 16% eat two. Only 8% say they eat one of the five recommended daily portions and few (2%) say they eat none.



5.5.1 Barriers to Eating More Healthily

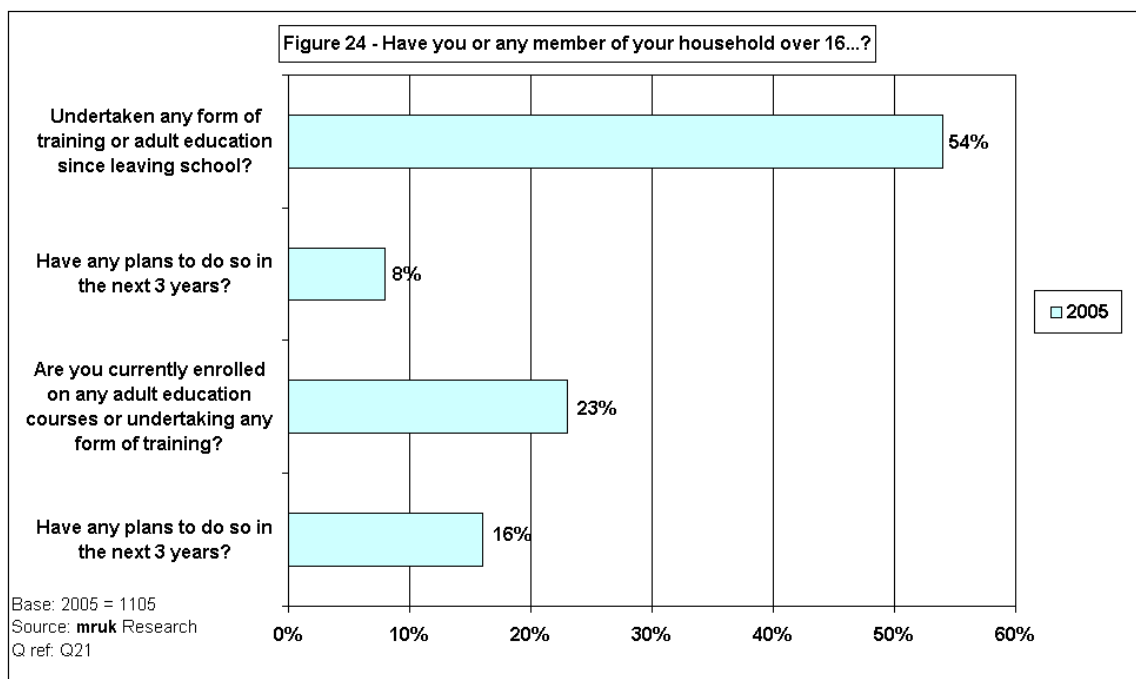
A relatively high 68% of respondents say that they currently eat healthily. However, some 8% are not interested in healthy eating, 8% find cost a barrier and 7% do not know what prevents them from eating more healthily. Figure 23 illustrates findings which remain relatively consistent with 2004.



6.1 Training and Adult Education Since Leaving School

Just over half (54%) of respondents or their household members have undertaken some form of training or adult education since leaving school. Only 8% of respondents have plans to undertake training or learning in the next 3 years.

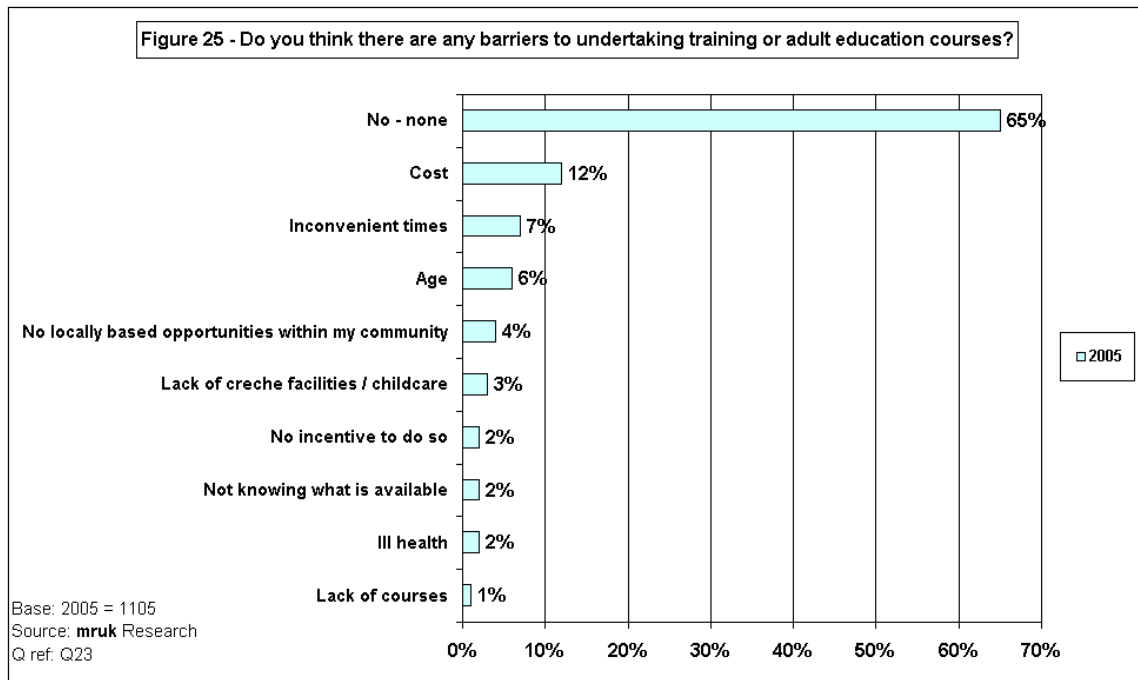
One fifth (23%) of respondents or their household members are currently enrolled on an adult education course or are undertaking some form of training. An additional 16% have plans to do so in the next 3 years as illustrated below. Findings remain relatively consistent with the equivalent outcomes in 2004.



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 (66%) simply are not interested and a further 15% said they don't know what would persuade them to undertake training or learning in the next three years. More positive responses included "if related to job" (6%), "more convenient times" (3%), "self motivation" (3%), "better price" (2%) and "better choice of courses" (2%).

6.2 Barriers to Learning

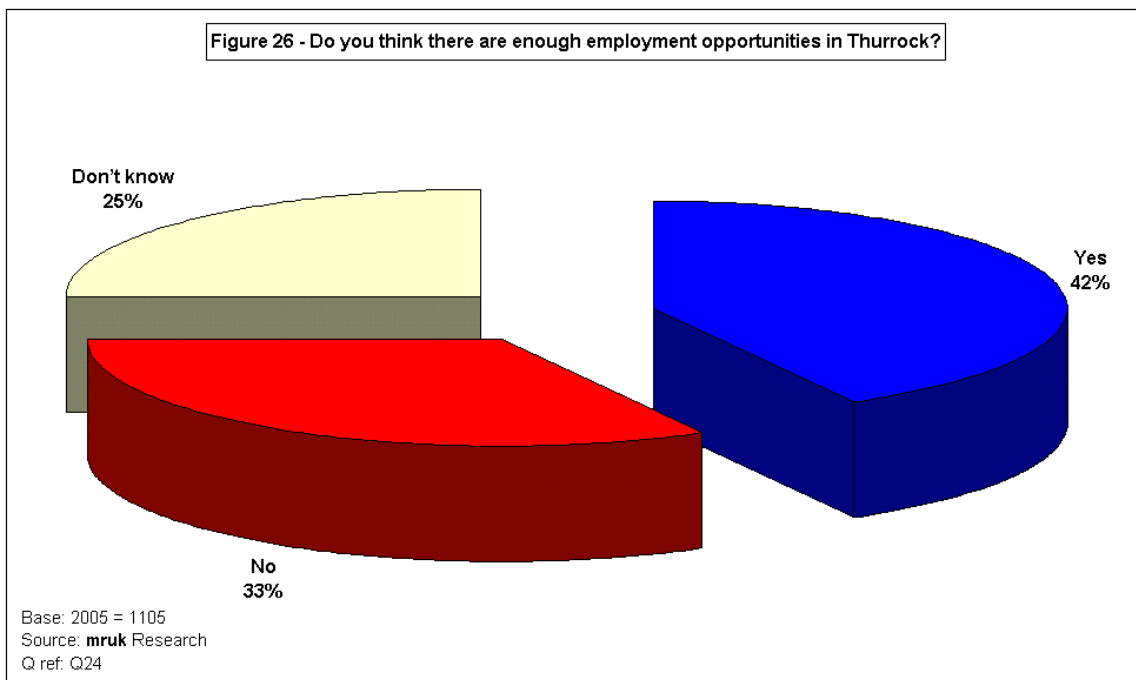
Approaching two thirds (65%) of respondents said there are no barriers to undertaking training or adult education courses. 12% of respondents stated cost (a rise of 4% against 2004 findings), 7% inconvenient times and 6% consider their age as a barrier. All responses are shown below in figure 25.



6.3 Employment Opportunities

Just less than half (42%) of respondents think there are enough employment opportunities in Thurrock. One third (33%) feel there are not enough opportunities (a rise of 6% against 2004 findings) and a further quarter said 'don't know'.

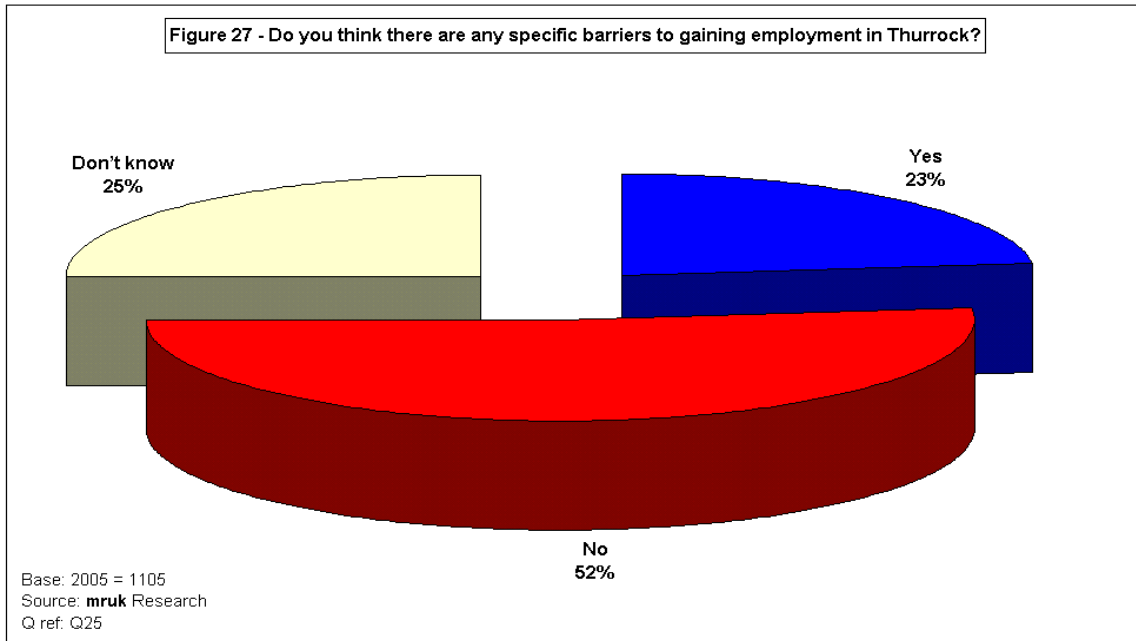
Of those respondents who do not feel that there are enough employment opportunities the highest in proportionate terms are resident in the South and West Assembly Areas (36% and 38% respectively).



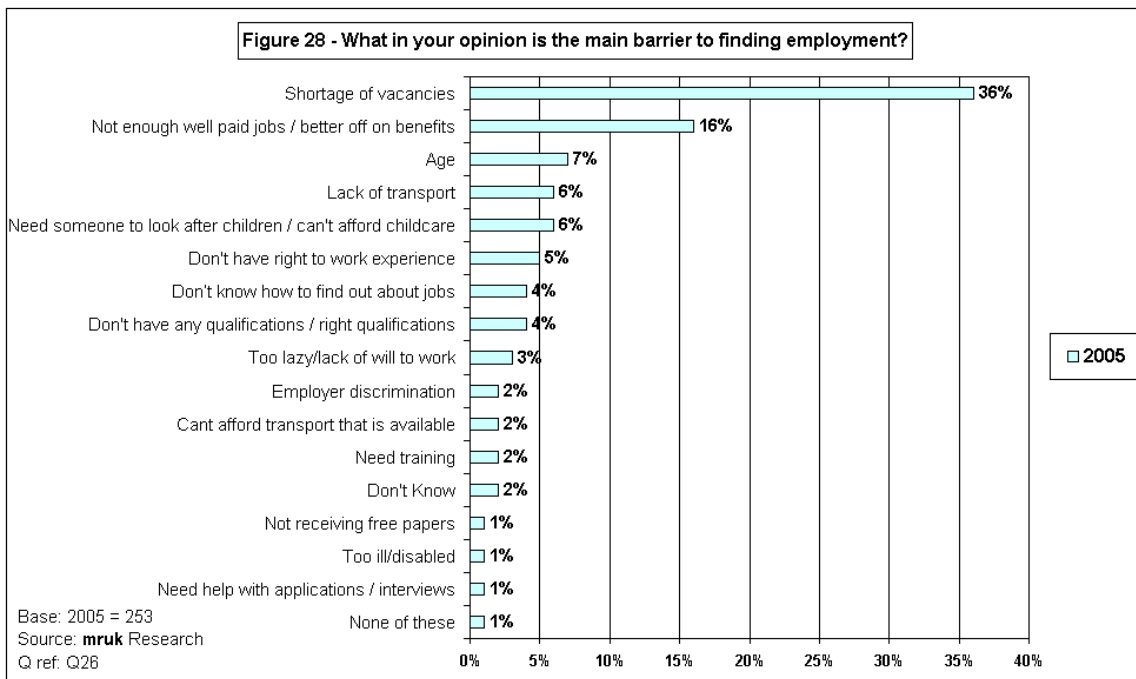
Sub-analysis of age groups shows that proportionately the highest numbers of those who do not think there are enough employment opportunities are young people (16-25). Around half (53%) of respondents aged 16-25 express such a view compared to 36% of 41-60's and 21% of those aged over 75.

6.4 Barriers to Employment – Main Reason

Just less than one quarter (23%) of respondents believes there to be specific barriers to gaining employment. Over half (52%) do not believe there are any specific barriers and a further quarter stated that they don't know.



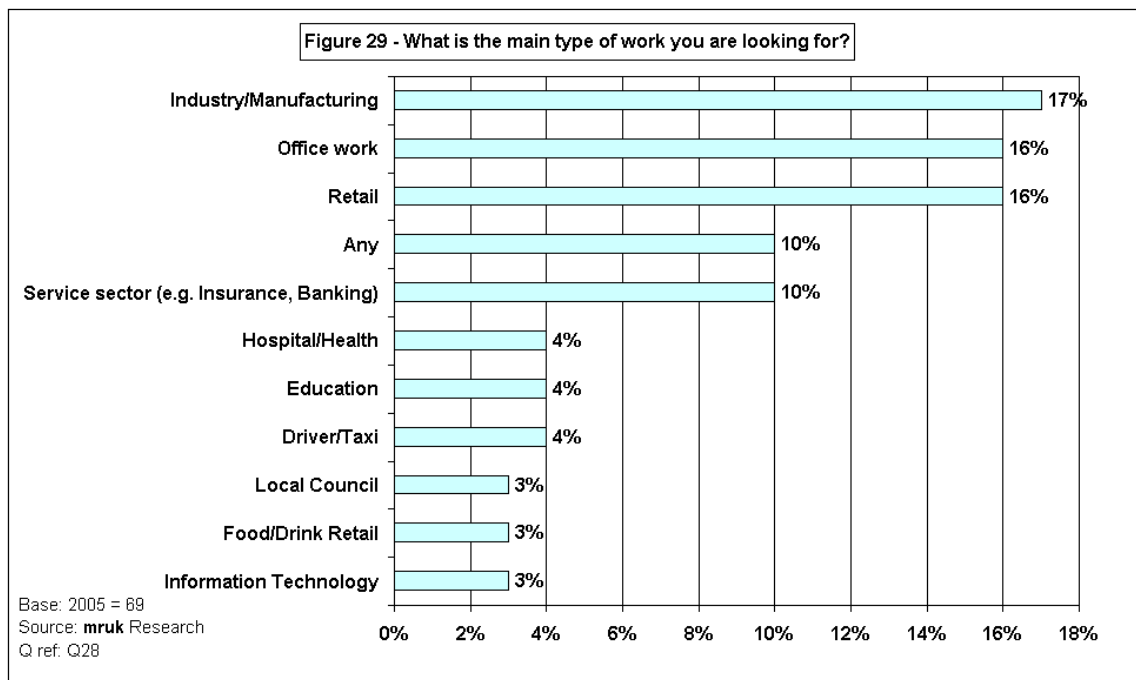
In relation to those who think there are specific barriers, over a third (36%) of respondents concerned feel there is a shortage of vacancies. Some 16% believe there is a lack of well paid jobs (and think they are better off on benefits). Figure 28 below illustrates findings.



6.5 Looking for Employment

At present some 6% of respondents are currently looking for either full or part time work. 94% are not. All respondents looking for work are aged less than 65 years.

The main types of work respondents are currently looking for are shown below in figure 29.



6.6 Starting Up Own Business

One fifth of respondents have considered starting up their own business with the highest proportion aged between 26 and 40 years. 29% of men have considered setting up their own business compared to 15% of women.

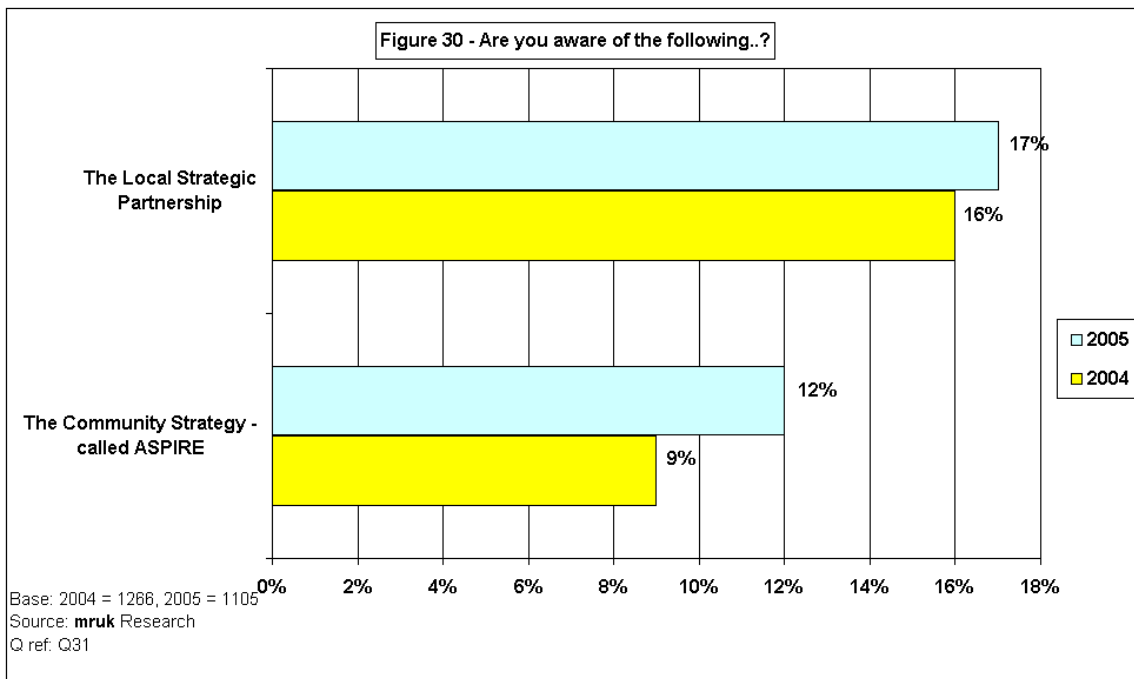
The main types of business respondents have considered setting up include:

- Trade Business (11%)
- Construction (6%)
- Catering (5%)
- Retail shop (5%)
- Information Technology (5%)

7.1 Awareness

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the Community Strategy called ASPIRE, only 12% are aware of this (however, this is an increase from 9% last year).

Awareness of the Local Strategic Partnership is slightly greater at 17%. Awareness is highest amongst those residents in the Central Assembly Area (19%).



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/street wardens
- More for young people / children to do (along with improving schools/education)
- Need for cleaner streets / improving the environment
- Transport – more buses

Findings are consistent with the 2004 and 2003 surveys 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: -

- Hooligans / gangs of youths causing problems
- Litter / poor cleanliness
- Traffic / parking congestion
- Lack of buses / good public transport
- Vandalism / graffiti

Again (consistent with the last two years), 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.

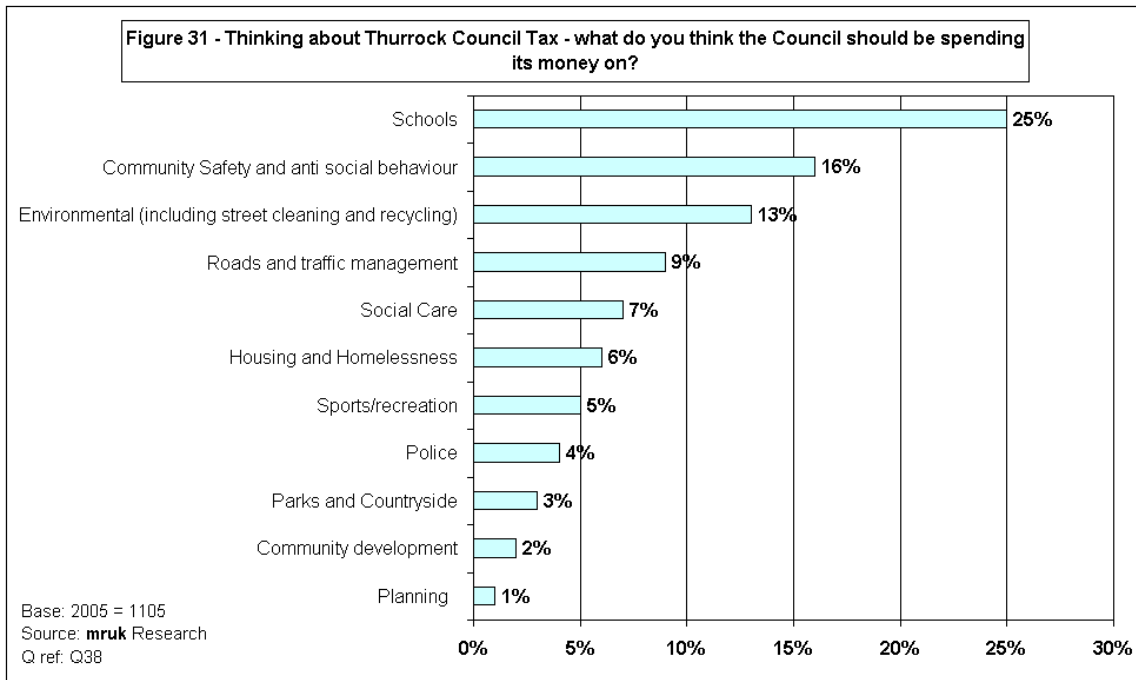
7.3 Moving Home

Respondents were asked if would like to move from their current home. Just less than a third (31%) of respondents say they would like to move, 69% would not. The highest proportions of respondents wishing to move are resident in the West Assembly Area and those aged between 26-40 years.

Of those respondents who would like to move, approaching two thirds (65%) would like to move outside of Thurrock, 16% elsewhere within Thurrock and 19% would like to move within their local area.

8.1 Priorities for Spending

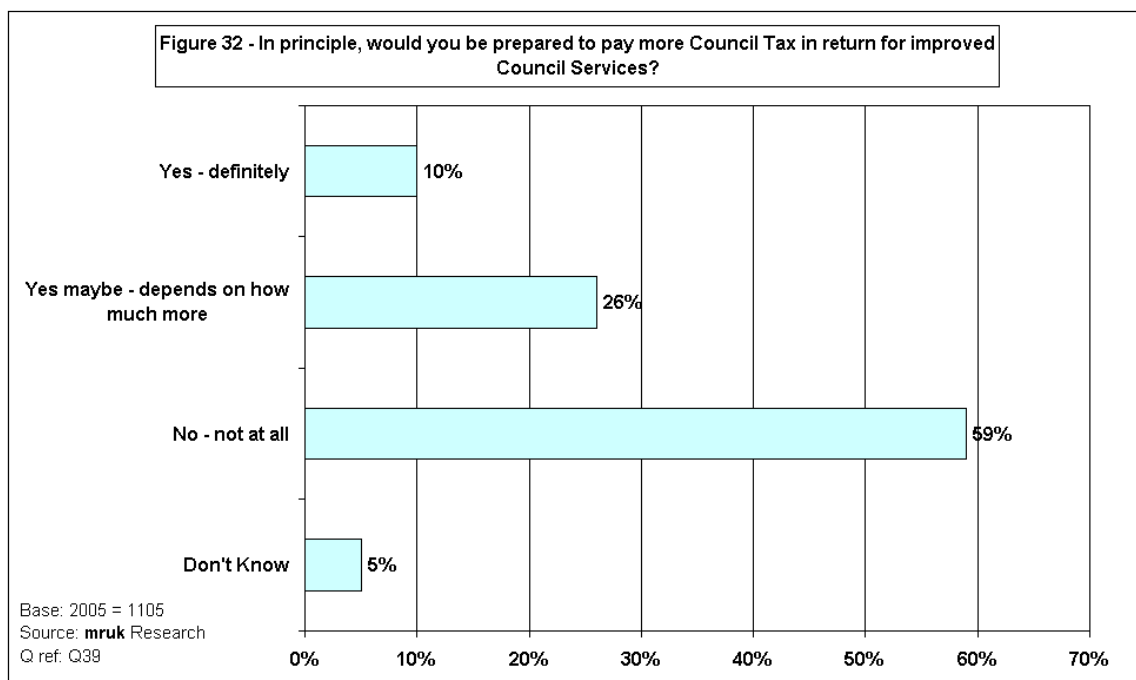
Respondents were asked what in their opinion they think the Council should be spending its money on. As their first priority one quarter (25%) feel money should be spent on schools, 16% community safety and anti-social behaviour and 13% say environment. Responses are illustrated below in figure 31 and remain broadly consistent with 2004. However, community safety has now overtaken environmental issues in the (1st choice) ranking .



8.2 Level of Council Tax Related to Improvements in Services

Over half (59%) of respondents would not be prepared to pay more Council Tax in return for improved Council services. Just over one quarter (26%) would consider paying more depending on how much more and a further 10% would definitely be prepared to pay more Council Tax. The proportion who would (definitely or maybe) be prepared to pay more has decreased by 7% from 43% last year.

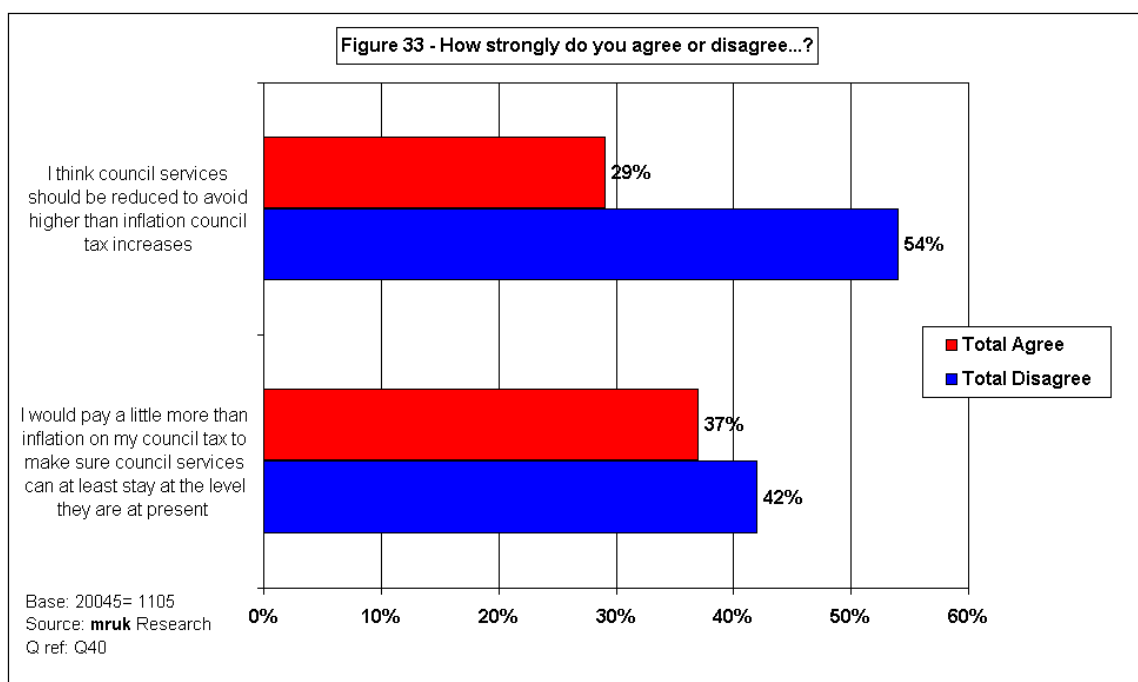
In proportionate terms, the highest proportion of respondents willing to pay more are resident in the Central Assembly Area with 13% who would definitely pay and 25% depending on how much.



8.3 Council Tax Factors

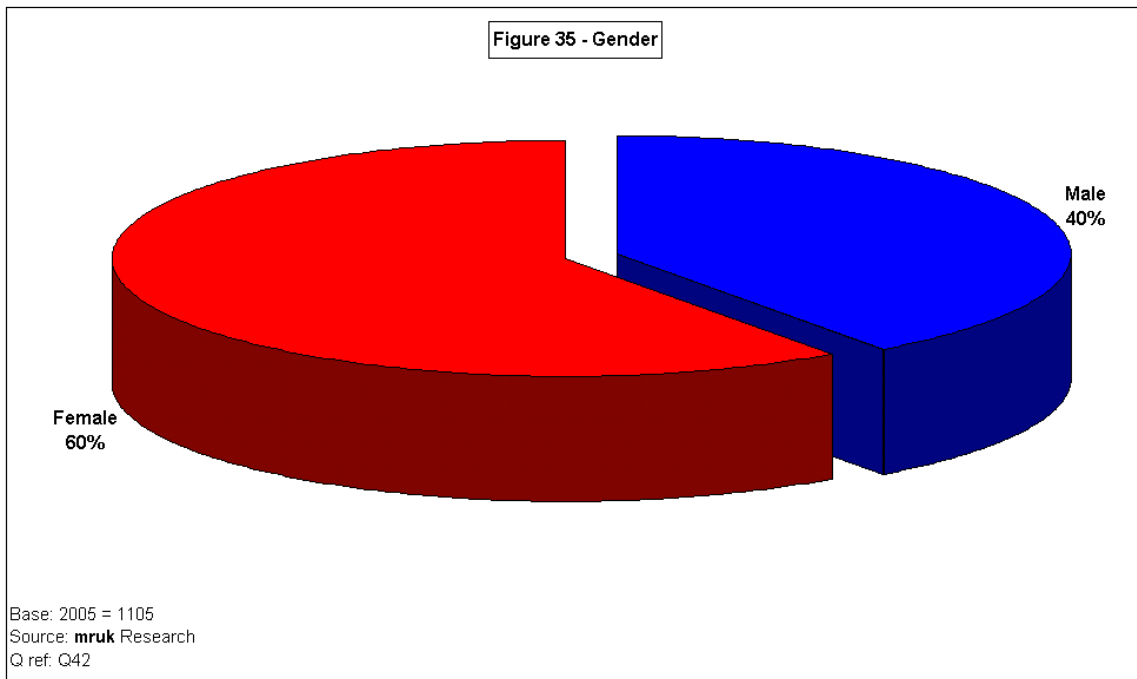
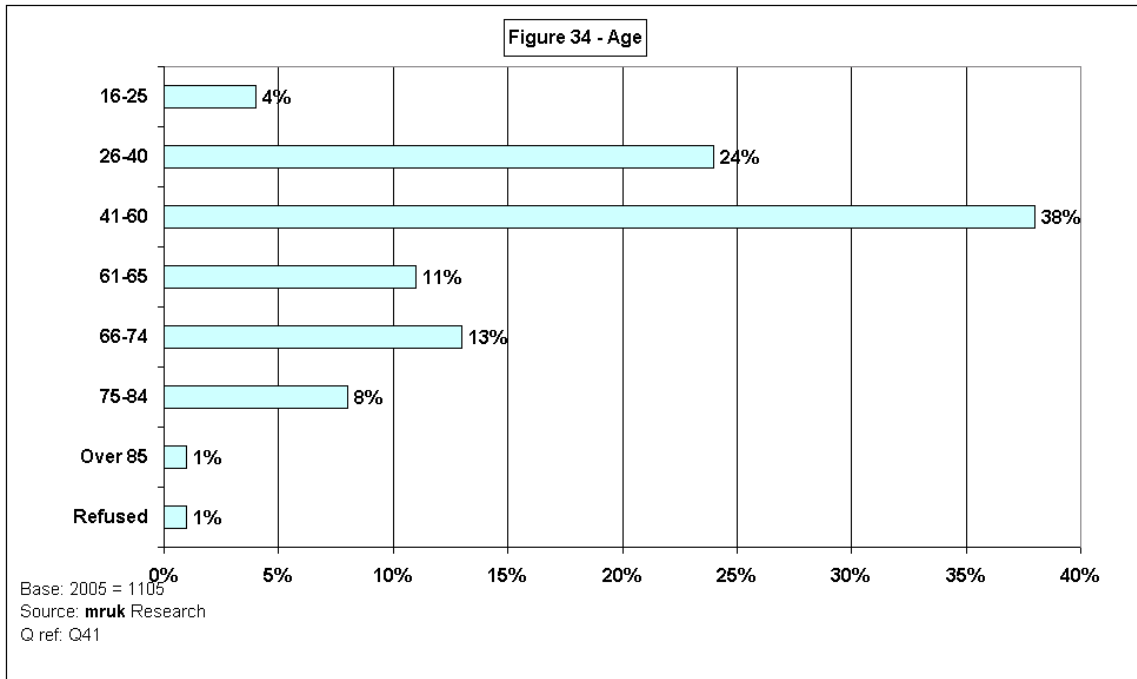
Figure 33 below illustrates how strongly respondents agree with the stated Council Tax factors. When asked if they think Council services should be reduced to avoid higher than inflation Council tax increases, over half (54%) disagree (with 15% who strongly disagree). However, 29% do agree with this and 6% don't know.

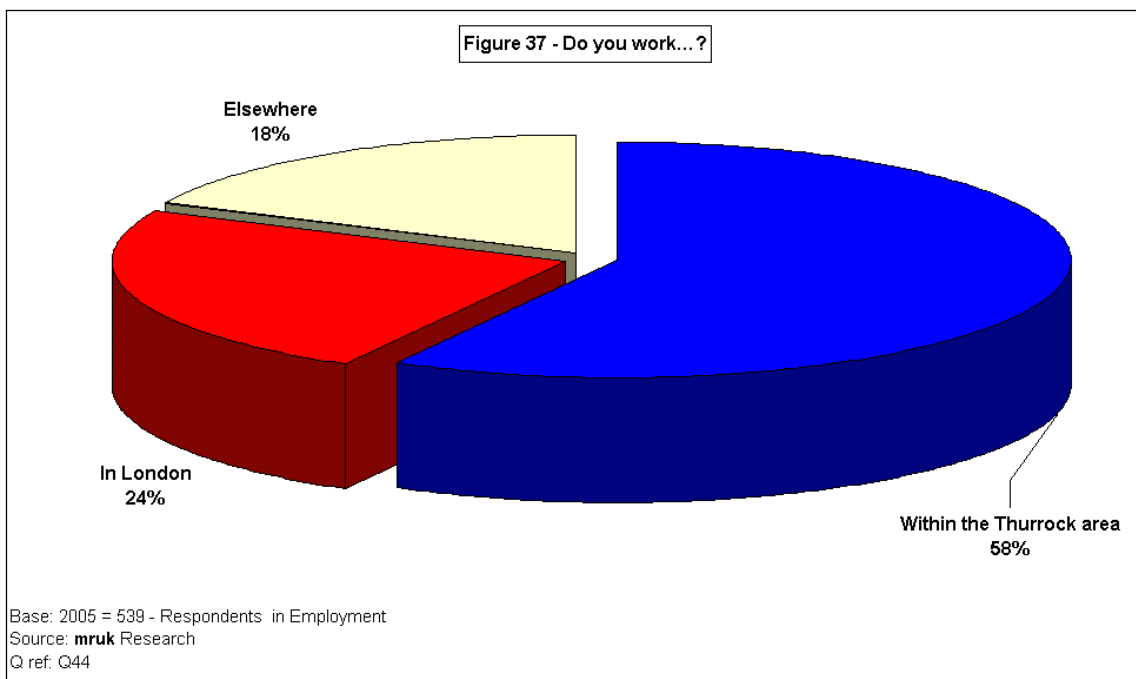
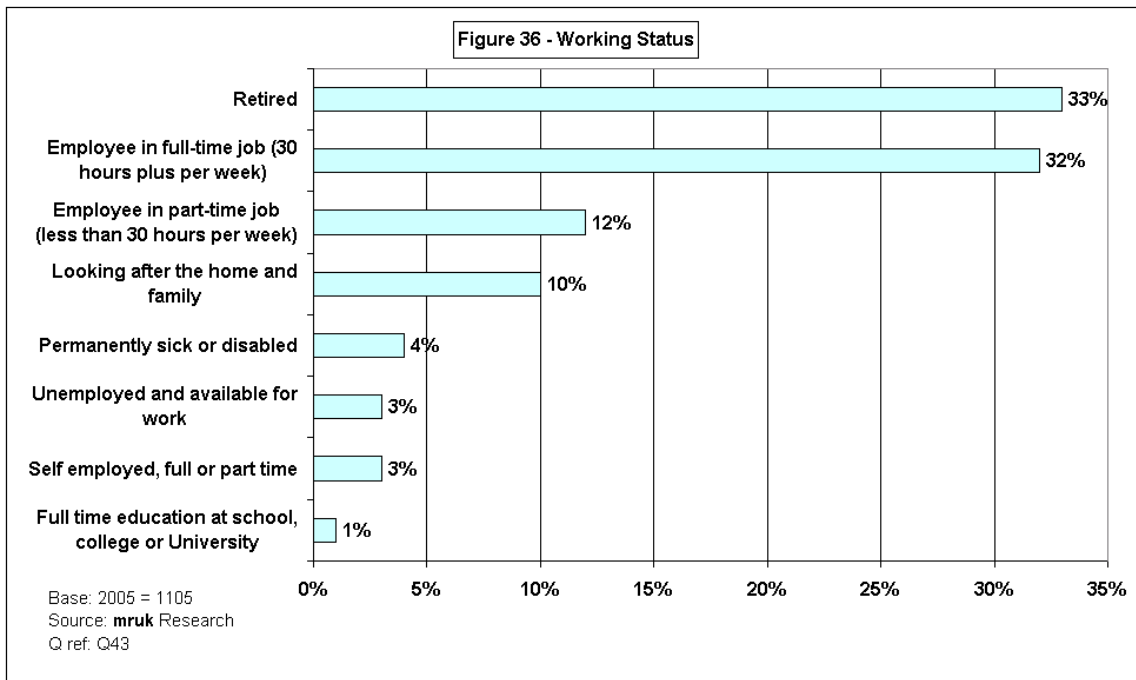
37% of respondents would pay a little more than inflation on Council tax to make sure Council services can at least stay at the level they are at present. 42% disagree (11% strongly disagree) and 8% don't know.

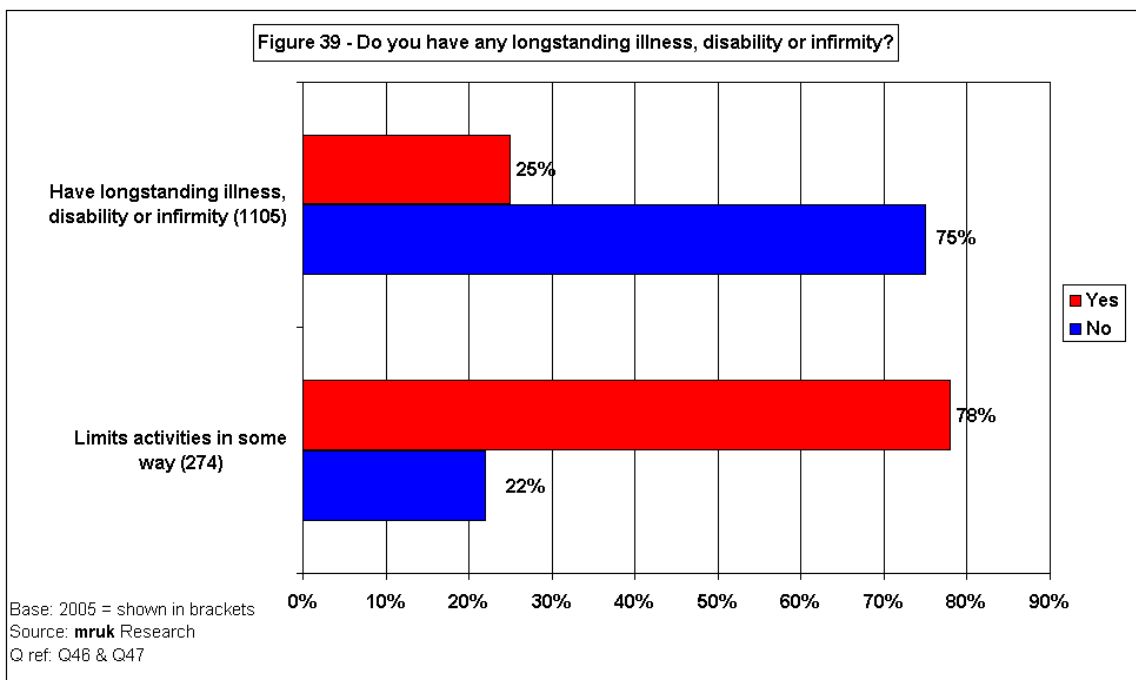
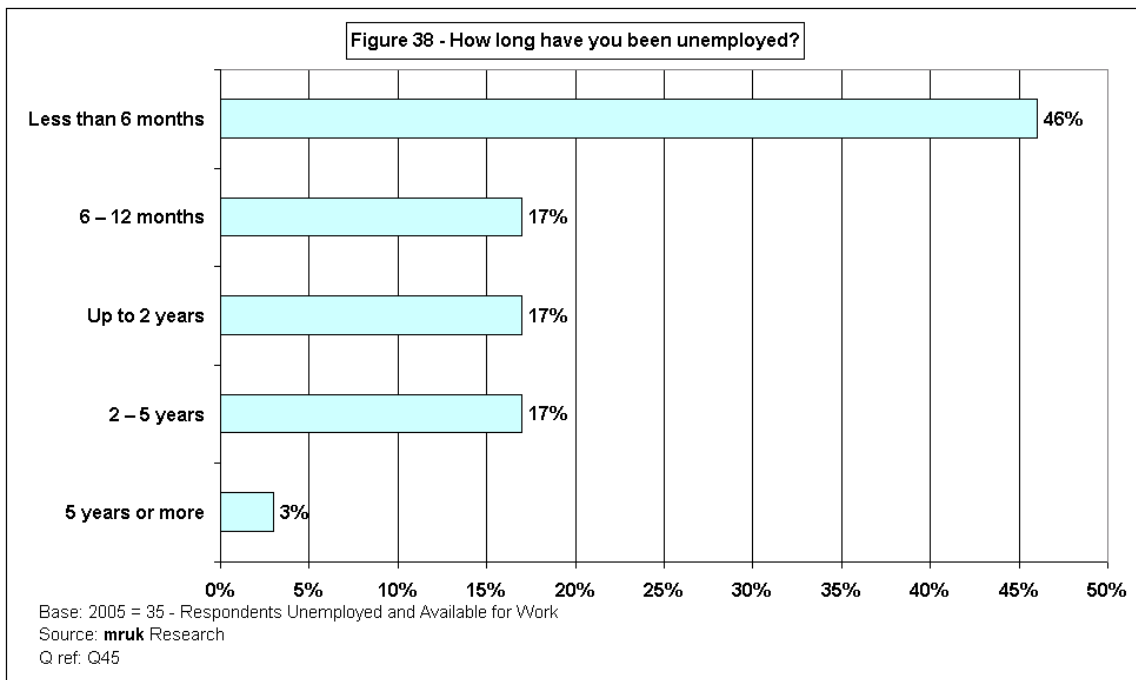


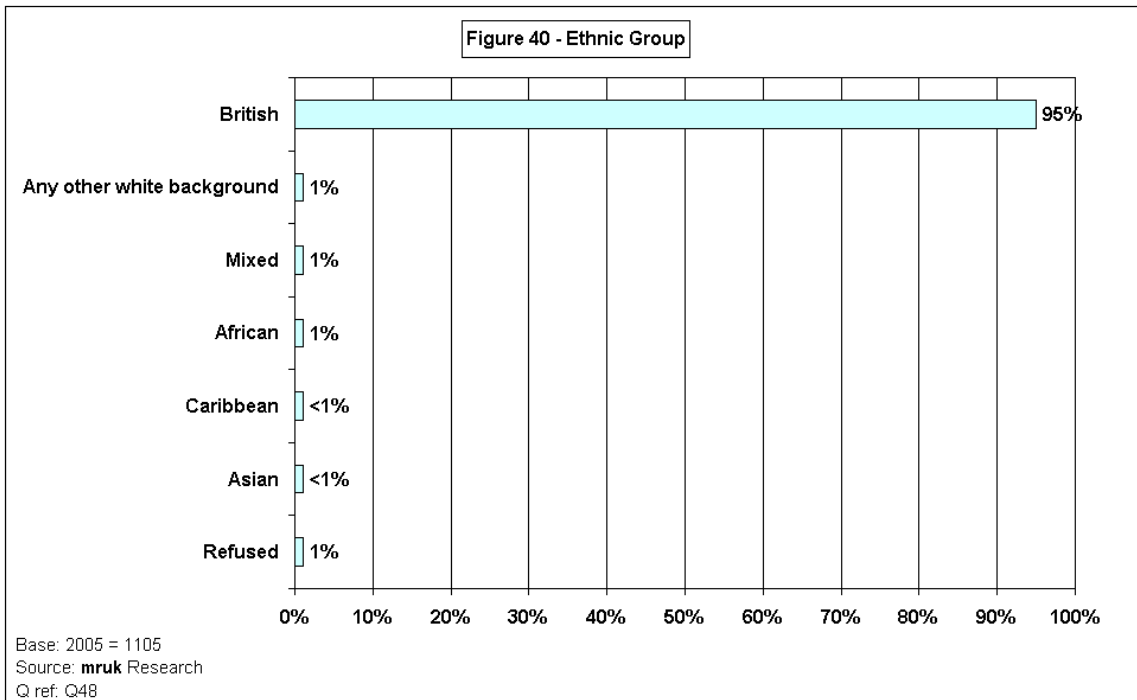
The instinctive views of respondents would suggest (by a fairly small majority) that they do not want services to be reduced. However, views are almost evenly divided (separated by 5%) on the extent to which they would pay more to preserve existing service levels.

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









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

- Evidence that there is consolidation of previous levels of improvement in perceptions of the local areas in which respondents live. In particular this is reflected in similar proportions (when compared to 2004 and 2003) who say they are satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- Concerns about personal safety show some increase since 2004 (particularly in relation to when respondents are out alone after dark) and a higher proportion of females feel unsafe at this time than males. However, the overall level expressing such concerns remains less than the first survey in 2002.
- The most significant fears about personal safety relate to potential harassment and/or intimidation from gangs of youths along with potential physical attack. This remains consistent with previous surveys.
- Findings indicate a decrease in the proportion who feel they can influence local decision making and this may signify a developing feeling of detachment from the decision making process.
- 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 has increased slightly since 2004. The Council may wish to continue to examine (with its partners) how this can continue to be raised.
- Schools is the most frequently identified target for spending (i.e. use of Council Tax). What remains a small majority are not prepared to pay more Council Tax in return for improved services and the proportion who may be prepared to do so is showing signs of decreasing. Views are becoming increasingly divided over the Council resisting Council Tax increases if it would mean reducing services.
- Key priorities which are identified by respondents remain those associated with: -
 - Policing / tackling crime/community safety
 - More for young people / children to do/educational support
 - Need for cleaner streets / environment
 - Transport – more buses

