

TO: Overview and Scrutiny Commission
DATE: 23 March 2013

RESIDENTS SURVEY 2012 RESULTS

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To brief the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on the Residents Survey 2012 results.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Note the Resident Survey 2012 results report at Annex One and the statistical comparison table at Annex Two**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with the results of the Residents Survey 2012.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Introduction

- 5.1 As an outcome of the 2011 Neighbourhood Engagement Review the Executive agreed that the Council would conduct a biennial residents survey of all households to ensure that adult residents' views continue to shape the Council's strategy and that the Council remains informed of residents' perceptions of its services. (Surveys of younger residents are undertaken separately). This report outlines the findings of the 2012 Residents Survey conducted by QA Research, the Council's provider of independent consultation and engagement services. The aim of the survey was to gather the views of a representative number of Bracknell Forest residents on a variety of issues relating the Council as well as attitudes towards Bracknell Forest as a place to live and work.
- 5.2 The Council has previously conducted a number of residents surveys. These include neighbourhood surveys undertaken in 2007, 2008 and 2009 in partnership with Thames Valley Police to inform the work of the Neighbourhood Action Groups. The Place Survey was also conducted in 2008, with a central Government designed methodology and set of questions. The Council's 2012 Residents Survey has incorporated some questions from both the Place Survey and the Council's neighbourhood surveys so comparisons can be made and trends tracked over time.

Methodology

- 5.3 The Royal Mail were commissioned to deliver a 6-sided household survey to all 47,000 + households in the borough. The survey was in a self seal format with the return freepost address printed on it. The survey is attached at the end of Annex One, the results report. Residents were also given the option of completing the survey online and were given a contact number in case they had any questions. As an incentive those that completed the survey were given the option of being entered into a free prize draw for the chance to win £250 of Waitrose vouchers. The survey was delivered in the week commencing 29th October and closed on 7th December 2012.
- 5.4 In total there were 4816 postal and 292 online surveys returned, giving a total response of 5109. This is a response rate of 11%, which compares favourably to a national average response rate for this type of household drop survey of between 3-5%. The response rate to the Neighbourhood Survey in 2009 was 14%. There appears to have been a delivery failure in the Ascot ward and we are investigating ways of doing a follow-up survey in this area. QA Research have analysed the differences in responses between residents from different demographic groups and wards, as well as understanding the changes in residents' perceptions over time where relevant.

Key findings

- 5.5 A copy of the QA Research results report as attached at Annex One and it includes a copy of the survey as an appendix. Attached at Annex Two is a statistical comparisons table which compares the 2012 Residents Survey results for the key national indicators to the results of the Place Survey in 2008 and Neighbourhood Survey 2009. Due to differences in question ordering and overall questions content comparisons between surveys should be taken as indicative only.

The headline results are as follows:

Summarised responses	2012	2008 or 2009
Can influence decisions in their locality	30%	28%
Participate in regular volunteering (monthly)	28%	21%
Satisfied with local area as place to live	85%	83%
Like best - parks and open spaces	58%	61%
Like best - access to nature	50%	63%
Like best - low level of crime	34%	19%
Believe people from different backgrounds get on well together	87%	82%
People in the area not treating one another with respect and consideration is a problem	14%	30%
Satisfied with the way the Council runs things	60%	50%
Council offers value for money	55%	35%
Very well or fairly well informed by the Council	64%	39%

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The single most important area residents wanted the Council to focus on was the regeneration of the town centre (20%).

Demographic Profile of respondents

- 5.6 The report at Annex 1 provides a full breakdown of the respondents by demographic profile and ward area in section 4.1. The respondent profile is skewed toward older female respondents and black and minority ethnic (BME) respondents are underrepresented in the responses. This needs to be borne in mind when interpreting the results and preparing for the Council's next residents survey in 2014, and will need to try to increase participation levels through the Action Plan. This skew towards older female respondents is typical for this type of household survey, with the female in the home completing the survey for the household.

Involvement and Influence over local decisions

- 5.7 Residents were asked a question about whether they felt they could influence decisions in their local area. 30% of respondents agreed they could influence decisions in their local area, compared with 28% who agreed with this statement in the Place Survey in 2008. Males were more likely to disagree that they could influence decision as were white respondents compared to BME respondents. BME respondents were more likely to respond that they 'don't know' suggesting a lack of awareness amongst this group about how they can influence decisions. Older residents were significantly more likely to feel that they could influence decisions with younger people also significantly more likely to state that they 'don't know' how to influence decisions. Follow up work to raise awareness of how to get involved in decision making could be needed with young people and those from BME groups.
- 5.8 Residents were asked to state if they regularly participated in 'formal' volunteering; 28% indicated that they give unpaid help at least once a month, this compares to 21% in the 2008 Place Survey. This shows an increase in volunteering over the last 4-5 years; however older people are more likely to volunteer and so the high proportion of older respondents may be influencing responses.

Residents' attitudes towards their local area

- 5.9 The majority of residents 85% indicated they were satisfied with the local area as a place to live, with just 7% indicating they were dissatisfied. This is a slight increase on the 2009 Neighbourhood Survey result where 83% of residents indicated that they were satisfied with the local area as a place to live; although the high proportion of older people responding could account for this difference. There was a large level of association between those who felt they were able to influence decisions and those who were satisfied with their area as a place to live.
- 5.10 There were some differences in satisfaction between different age groups with people under 35 and those approaching retirement age (55-64) being most likely to demonstrate the highest levels of dissatisfaction. Satisfaction with the local area as a

place to live was highest among residents in Crowthorne and Central Sandhurst. It was lowest in Great Hollands North, Wildridings and Central and Bullbrook.

- 5.11 Respondents were asked to state the things they liked best about living in the borough; the top answers were 'parks and open spaces', 'access to nature' and the 'low level of crime'. These responses are similar to those in the 2009 Neighbourhood Survey when 'parks and open spaces' and 'access to nature' were also ranked most highly. However the biggest change since 2009 relates to the 'low level of crime' which was ranked at 6 in 2009 with 19% of respondents rating this as one of the best elements of living in the borough, that has increased to 34% in 2012 and a ranking of 3.
- 5.12 The survey demonstrates that levels of community cohesion remain high in the borough. In 2008 82% of respondents to the Place Survey felt that people from different backgrounds got on well together in the borough. In 2012, once the answers are recalculated to make them comparable with 2008, this has increased to 87%. BME respondents were more likely than white respondents to agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well with one another (69% to 61%). The majority of residents (78%) felt that there was little problem with people not treating each other with respect within their local area; a minority of residents (14%) considering this to be a problem. This is a significant improvement on the 2008 Place Survey where 30% considered this to be a problem and the 2006 Best Value Survey where 48% found it to be a problem.

Use of and satisfaction with specific council services

- 5.13 The most frequently used Council services by respondents were 'refuse collection/recycling' followed by 'parks and open spaces' and 'local tips/household waste recycling centres'. Age, and linked to this, life stage were important determinants of the services in use by respondents. There were a number of differences in the services used by gender and age. Some variations are also evident in the analysis by ward; see section 4.4.1 of Annex One.
- 5.14 Respondents were asked to give their satisfaction levels with the services provided by the Council. Satisfaction levels were highest for 'parks and open spaces' and 'local tips'. There were a high number of 'don't knows' for a number of these services. The high proportions of 'don't knows' relate to services with a low usage figures such as 'youth services' 78% and 'childcare services' 76%; these results being influenced by the profile of the survey respondents.
- 5.15 Figure 22 in section 4.4.2 of Annex One illustrates the satisfaction levels with services once the 'don't knows' are excluded. The highest rated services remain similar but services such as 'planning' and 'road maintenance' appear lower down the chart; 40% of respondents expressing a rating for 'road maintenance' stated they were 'dissatisfied' with the service; with 30% dissatisfied with the 'planning service'. Similar proportions 26% were dissatisfied with the Council's efforts at 'keeping public land clear of litter and refuse'. Section 4.4.2 shows interesting variations in satisfaction levels by gender, age, ethnicity, religion and ward. There appears to be low satisfaction levels with some services the respondents either don't use or have

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little experience of and we need to do more work to understand this further. This will be followed up in the Action Plan.

Perceptions of the Council overall

- 5.16 The satisfaction of residents with the Council was measured by a number of questions including overall satisfaction with the Council, perceptions of value for money offered by the Council and improvements the Council could make with the services it provides. Three out of every five respondents (60%) are satisfied with the way in which the Council is running things, of the 60% a tenth (10%) indicating they were 'very satisfied'; those that are dissatisfied are in the minority (14%), although just under a quarter (24%) were neither satisfied or dissatisfied. In the 2008 Place Survey half (50%) of residents indicated they were at least 'satisfied' with the way that the Council runs things which means there has been a significant improvement over the past 4 years.
- 5.17 Overall satisfaction was significantly linked to satisfaction with each of the specific services. As the number of individual services with which respondents express dissatisfaction increases, so does the likelihood that respondents express dissatisfaction with the Council overall. There is a marked increase in the level of dissatisfaction between those dissatisfied with 2 and 3 services, as figure 27 in section 4.5.1 illustrates.
- 5.18 With regard to the value for money offered by the Council; 52% of residents indicated that they thought the Council offers value for money, 16% disagree and 27% around a quarter neither agreed nor disagreed. In 2008 the Place Survey 35% of residents agreed that the Council offers value for money, so there has been a significant increase in the number of residents feeling that the Council offers value for money over the past 4 years. However, the Place Survey results excluded 'don't know' responses when calculating overall agreement, when the same is done to the 2012 results the comparable perception of the Council providing value for money goes up to 55%, an even greater increase over the past 4 years. Those who felt that they could influence decisions within their local area were also significantly more likely to agree that the Council provides value for money than those disagreeing (73% compared to 39%).
- 5.19 Residents were asked what if anything the Council could do differently which would have a positive impact within Bracknell Forest. Unsurprisingly, the single issue mentioned most frequently by respondents was the need to focus on the regeneration of the town centre, mentioned by a fifth (20%). Improving the maintenance of public areas (14%), improve/change road maintenance/infrastructure (13%), improve/change communication with residents/act on residents concerns (10%) and return to weekly refuse collections (9%) were the next most popular answers as figure 30 in section 4.5.3 illustrates. When similar categories of answers are grouped together to aid interpretation the top two areas for the Council doing things differently are 'regeneration and maintenance of public space/the town centre' and 'transport improvement', see figure 29.

Communication with the Council

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- 5.20 Residents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt informed about the Council and the services and benefits it provides. Just under two thirds (64%) of respondents felt at least 'fairly well informed' by the Council, with just under a third (29%) indicating they felt 'not very well informed' and 6% 'not well informed at all'. In the 2008 Place Survey 39% of respondents felt at least 'fairly well informed' about local public services.
- 5.21 Although the wording of the question and question ordering has changed, clearly there has been an improvement in residents feeling informed. Informed residents were significantly more likely to feel they could influence decisions in the local area. Informed residents were also more likely to be satisfied with the way the Council is running things (74% to 33%) and feel it provides value for money (66% to 28%). Younger residents under 35 years of age were significantly more likely to feel 'not very well informed' or 'not informed at all' than respondents age 35+ (38% to 27%).
- 5.22 The most commonly used method for accessing information about the Council and its partners were the Town and Country newspaper (68%), leaflets and partnership publications through the post (64%) and local newspapers and radio (60%). Online was the fourth most common method for receiving information (29%); however it was the fourth most popular method for receiving information (41%). Social media's popularity as a method of communication with the Council also outstrips its current usage. As respondents age decreases so does their preference increase for accessing information online and via social media; around a quarter (23%) of those aged 16-24 indicated a preference for using social media compared to just 1% of respondents age 65+. Those in the 65+ age range are disproportionately reliant on Town and Country for their information 75%, compared to 42% for those under 35.
- 5.23 Residents were asked if they had had contact with their Town and Parish Council during the past year and if they were aware of the services provided by their Town and Parish Council. Over half of respondents (56%) were not aware of the services provided by their Parish and Town Council although the number of people contacting their Parish or Town Council has increased since the 2009 Neighbourhood Survey (23% to 30%). There was an association between overall dissatisfaction with the Borough Council and increased contact with the Parish or Town Council. Residents unaware of the services provided by their Town and Parish Councils may be more likely to attribute service failings in these areas to the Borough Council and vice versa; although further research would be needed to confirm this is the case.

Conclusions

- 5.24 Some care needs to be taken in interpreting the results of the survey and comparing them to those of previous surveys due to the differences in the survey methodology and question order. However, overall the surveys results demonstrate there have been a number of significant positive changes:
- Improved perception of the Council in terms of overall satisfaction with the way the Council runs things, perceptions of the Council providing value for money, feelings of being informed about Council services and being able to influence decisions in the local area.
 - The vast majority of residents (85%) are satisfied with Bracknell Forest as a place to live and the things that people like best are parks and open spaces, access to

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nature and the low rate of crime. Life stage and individual need has a significant effect on what residents think are the best features of the borough.

- There has been a decrease in the number of people who feel that people not treating each other with respect and consideration was a problem and levels of community cohesion remain high with the majority of residents believing that people from different backgrounds get on well together. This is positive given there has been a significant increase in the number of people from Black and minority ethnic groups living in the borough over the past 10 years.
- There were strong feelings that the key priority for the Council to focus on is the town centre regeneration.
- There was a strong correlation between residents' feelings of being informed and able to influence decisions and satisfaction with Council services. Effective community engagement, ensuring residents are able to influence decisions and feel informed about services drives up satisfaction. Further improvements could be made here.
- The Council information sources used by residents do tend to match their preferences however demand for online information and social media outstrips current usage particularly amongst younger people. The Council needs to increase its use of online information to satisfy this demand while continuing to provide hard copy information sources like Town and Country for older people.
- Unsurprisingly respondents who were dissatisfied with a greater number of individual services were more likely to be dissatisfied with the Council overall. Dissatisfaction with the Council overall spiked if residents were dissatisfied with more than 2 specific services.
- Future consultations need to explore mechanisms for encouraging increased participation from black and minority ethnic residents. As the proportion of respondents participating in the survey has remained relatively static over the past three resident surveys despite the numbers of people from a BME background increasing in the borough.
- Residents unaware of the services provided by their Town and Parish Councils may be more likely to attribute service failings in these areas to the Borough Council and vice versa; although further research would be needed to confirm this is the case.

5.25 A communications plan has been developed to feed back the results of the survey to residents, partners and the Council's elected members and staff. Feeding back to residents using the strap line 'you said: we did' will help demonstrate the Council's commitment to acting on the results of the survey and increase the likelihood of maintaining a high response rate when the next survey is conducted in 2014.

5.26 An action plan will be developed to address any areas of improvement that are highlighted in the results report at Annex One.

Background Papers

Bracknell Forest Residents Survey 2012 – QA Research Results Report
Statistical comparisons table

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