

Borough Wide Survey 2011

Executive Summary

31 January 2012

London Borough of Sutton

Introduction

This executive summary highlights the findings from the latest wave of the Sutton Residents' Survey. This is a face-to-face in-home survey of 1,014 residents aged 16+ and was designed to track progress, measure satisfaction and understand emerging issues in the borough. Quotas were set on age, gender and work status to ensure the responses are representative of the broader population of Sutton. As such this survey provides a look at the issues, satisfaction and opinions of the average Sutton resident.

Overall, the findings from the 2011 survey are positive, with the direction of travel remaining stable and in many instances improving. Satisfaction with the local area, the Council and the majority of Council services has remained in line with previous years, and for some services has improved. In a number of cases, strength of sentiment has actually increased, with higher proportions saying they are '*very satisfied*'. This might be seen positively, given the current backdrop of huge public sector cuts and significant budget pressures facing the Council. In many cases Sutton is in line with, or outperforming, trends seen nationally or in other local authority areas surveyed by Ipsos MORI.

But there is still room for improvement and the survey offers several areas for future action. One in four think their local area has got worse, more than half think they can't influence local services, and residents continue to have *local* concerns. In particular anti-social behaviour remains the main concern for residents.

1. Council and Council Services

Views of the Council overall remain in line with previous years. 73% of residents are satisfied with the way Sutton Council runs things, with higher proportions now '*very satisfied*'. Sutton performs better than nationally on this key measure and when compared to other local authorities. One in 10 residents are dissatisfied, a slight rise since 2009.

Resident satisfaction levels with most Council services are encouraging. **Satisfaction with key environmental services/ maintenance services has increased since 2009.** This is important when considering that satisfaction with these services seems to be associated with higher levels of satisfaction with the local area and the Council overall.

For other services, although overall satisfaction remains the same as in 2009, there has been a real change in positive sentiment over the last two years – **more are '*very satisfied*'** than before, reflecting a pattern seen elsewhere in the survey.

There remains room for improvement in a few key service areas, where there has been a small decline in overall satisfaction levels since 2009: libraries, sports and swimming facilities and social services. Users specifically also express lower levels of satisfaction for social services, benefit services and social housing.

'Feeling informed' is another area where council performance has dipped; **less than half of residents feel informed about how council tax is spent and what services and benefits the Council provides** (45% and 49% respectively). How well informed residents feel has been steadily falling since 2003 and Sutton performs below the national average on this measure; this is a key factor that influences satisfaction with the Council.

Although increasing proportions say they feel they can influence Council-run services in their area since 2005, over half actively disagree this is the case (53%). Only one in five residents are interested in having more of a say or getting more involved in what the Council is doing. When asked about contact, three in five residents (58%) have contacted the Council in the last two years; and for 15% of residents this has been to make a complaint. Residents are most likely to have contacted the Council by phone through the call centre (72%). 65% of residents were satisfied with the outcome after contacting the Council; but those making complaints were more likely to be dissatisfied.

2. Local Area and Quality of Life

Most (91%) residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, even more so than they were before - with the number *very satisfied* having increased since 2009. While the majority have not seen much change in their local area as a place to live, **one in four think it has got worse**. More specifically, *parking* remains a big concern for residents, and *dog fouling* is increasingly perceived as an issue. Against a tough financial backdrop it is perhaps encouraging that this figure has not increased since 2009 (and is in fact lower than figures recorded earlier in the decade). But, there are core segments of Sutton's population where this issue is particularly acute.

In line with the national picture, four in five residents (81%) agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their area. While the majority of residents (74%) have friends and family they could call on for help, loneliness is a problem for a small number, especially according to tenure and household composition.

When it comes to community spirit, one in four regularly volunteers and one in three has volunteered in the last 12 months. There is appetite to help out in the community more, although **this seems to be driven by those who already do their bit**.

Levels of perceived safety are around the same levels as in 2009; the proportion of residents feeling **safe after dark has been increasing steadily** since 2005 and stands at 62% in 2011. The proportion of residents feeling '*very safe*' during the day has also increased significantly since 2009.

Anti-social behaviour is still the main concern for residents – over half cite it as a priority for the police and Council to tackle, followed by burglary or theft. Importantly, priorities are clearly defined by people's backgrounds and where in the borough they live.

When asked about health, the vast majority (82%) of **Sutton residents say they feel in good health** and three quarters of Sutton residents exercise regularly at least once a week (above the national average).

3. Conclusions: Looking Ahead

As the Council continues to transform services, the survey suggests that it will be important to bear a number of things in mind if resident satisfaction is to be maintained.

- Satisfaction with **key universal services**, particularly environmental services, is improving in many cases. This will be important to maintain given satisfaction with such services is strongly correlated to overall satisfaction with the area and the Council overall.
- When it comes to maintaining happy residents, the Council needs to focus on the things that matter – **parking, dog fouling, vandalism**. These continue to be the top-of-mind issues for residents, and appear to drive overall views about the local area. Being seen to tackle these could present ‘quick wins’ for the Council.
- Furthermore, it will be important to **address issues at the very local – or LCA - level**. Different areas of the borough appear to be grappling with different issues and thus have differing priorities.
- **Information and communication** will remain important for the Council. This measure has actually seen a decline, with lower proportions feeling informed in 2011. This is pertinent when we consider how better information is strongly linked to overall satisfaction levels with both the area, the Council and the services it delivers.
- In terms of **customer contact**, the majority of residents use the contact centre and their experiences are generally positive when compared to some other modes. Online contact is generally low; only 4% who have contacted the Council last did so via the internet. But, willingness to communicate online is arguably increasing (around one in three would be happy to make contact or submit their views via the web). The great majority of residents now have access to the internet at home, further suggesting that online modes could be more effectively utilised going forward (albeit traditional means of contact will remain important for a minority).
- The results suggest an appetite for **more involvement and engagement** with the Council: one in five residents are interested in having more of a say or getting more involved in what the Council is doing, and three in 10 like the idea of giving local people more control over public money. But, the Council's efforts here may be better focused in mobilising those individuals already doing their bit, since it is those people already volunteering in their community that are more likely to say these things.
- When it comes to possible **service reduction or reconfiguration**, residents are reluctant to see service cuts, preferring other options such as more joint delivery with partners. This is important to bear in mind when conveying the very difficult messages about how the Council is prioritising its spending. Ipsos MORI's wider research suggests that where residents better understand the issues and trade-offs being made by councils, the more empathetic and understanding they can be as to the choices being made.

As well as delivering key services, the survey points to other areas where the Council has an important role to play, particularly given the tough financial climate. A large proportion of **residents**

are being adversely affected by the economic downturn and are in or may be in need of help, particularly the most vulnerable (they are already more likely to have contacted the Council). We cannot say whether this is driving views about social services, housing and benefits services, but certainly the results do point to declining satisfaction amongst users of these services.

In addition, there is minority of **residents who feel lonely** and the Council may want to consider its role here too. When it comes to **health**, there seems to be a big issue about the cost of food and particularly leisure and gym facilities. The Council has direct control over much of the latter so in this way could be helping residents to lead a healthier lifestyle.

4. Further Information

The following reports and materials are being prepared and will shortly be available on the Council's website:

- Residents Survey Report: a full report providing a detailed look at the findings from the survey
- Raw data: an excel spreadsheet published on the Council's Open Data webpages which shows the raw results of the survey to enable further analysis
- Output Area Classification Analysis: a report identifying the breakdown of the results by Output Area Classification for Sutton residents
- Local Committee reports: 6 reports have been produced identifying key trends and findings for each of the six local committee areas (Beddington and Wallington; Carshalton South and Clockhouse; Cheam North and Worcester Park; Sutton; Sutton South, Cheam and Belmont; and St Helier, the Wrythe and Wandle Valley)
- Action Plan: providing detailed follow up work the Council is doing to further analyse and implement the findings
- Detailed analysis: briefing reports are being prepared over the coming months which will look in more detail and the key issues arising from the report

For further information on the Residents Survey and the information detailed above please contact **Rebecca Escott-New** (020 8770 6880 / Rebecca.escott-new@sutton.gov.uk) or **Julie Young** (020 8770 5163 / Julie.young@sutton.gov.uk).