

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 15 November 2017

Subject: Results of the Residents' Survey 2017

Lead officer: Caroline Holland, Director Corporate Services

Lead member: Councillor Mark Allison, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Recommendations:

- A. That the Commission discuss and comment on the results of the Annual Residents' Survey 2017
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper reports the results of the latest Residents' Survey, highlighting key messages and findings. A detailed report from the research provider is available in Appendix 1.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Between 1999 and 2014 Annual Residents' Survey (ARS) was Merton's principal survey of local residents. It collected information on local people's concerns and their perceptions of local services, the image of the Council and a host of local issues based on the Survey of Londoners model previously commissioned by London Councils. The former provider withdrew from delivery of this survey in 2015. Discussions with neighbouring boroughs took place to explore options for a joint approach to surveying residents but due to their existing arrangements that was not possible. A competitive tendering process began in autumn 2016 to replace the Merton resident's survey.
- 2.2 In January 2017 BMG was appointed to deliver a face-to-face survey with 1,000 adults that reflect our local population – segmented by age, ethnicity, gender, tenure, residence, and family composition. In addition, a different survey of 200-250 young people aged 11 – 17 was carried out in parallel.
- 2.2 The survey fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2017. There is no longer a matching London wide survey to compare the results against but by incorporating standard questions set by the Local Government Association (LGA) it is possible to make some comparisons against a national telephone survey conducted by the LGA in February 2017.
- 2.3 Where it is possible to compare results to previous surveys in Merton the results have been tested for statistical significance to ensure that changes reflect public

perceptions. Changes quoted as significant have passed this validation. Testing for different demographic groups has also been conducted and any significant differences have been highlighted.

Highlights from the 2017 results

2.4 The most notable results, are:

- The vast majority of Merton residents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live (92%). This is a positive finding and is 12-percentage points higher than the national benchmark of 80%.
- A clear majority of residents felt safe in their local area both during the day (96%) and after dark (85%). Again, this compares favourably against national benchmarking.
- Almost all residents (93%) agreed that their local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together.
- Two-thirds (67%) of Merton residents were satisfied with the way the Council runs things, broadly in line with the national survey.
- 65% agreed that the Council provides value for money, well ahead of the national figure of 47%.
- Similarly 75% agreed the council acts on the concerns of local residents, and 81% agreed it keeps residents informed, both all well ahead of national benchmarking (59% and 60% respectively).
- There were significant improvements in residents agreeing the Council is efficient and well run; responds quickly when asked for help; and involves residents in decision making when compared to the 2014 results.
- However there was also a significant increase in the number of residents agreeing that it is difficult to get through on the phone.
- Across all respondents there were significant increases in satisfaction in leisure and sport; parking; repair of roads and pavements; and nursery, primary and secondary education.
- Parking and repair of roads and pavements saw significant increases in satisfaction amongst service users. Conversely, satisfaction with libraries amongst users has significantly decreased.

LGA Questions

2.5 A number of questions have been taken from the LGA's nationwide 'Are you being served?' question set so that comparison can be made with a national telephone survey conducted in February 2017. These are set out in the table below.

Question	Merton % positive	Nationwide % positive
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Satisfaction with the local area	92	80
Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things	67	65
Agree the Council provides value for money	65	47
Council acts on the concerns of local residents	75	59
Informed about Council services and benefits	81	60
Feel safe after dark	85	78
Feel safe during the day	96	94

- 2.6 The vast majority of Merton residents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live. Satisfaction levels were highest in Wimbledon, at 96%, compared to 89% in Mitcham and Morden, and both were significantly higher than the nationwide figure.
- 2.7 Satisfaction with the way the Council runs things is significantly higher compared to the average among residents aged 65+ but significantly lower amongst disabled respondents than non-disabled respondents.
- 2.8 The 14% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the Council were asked to indicate in their own words why this is. The responses given were grouped into themes after the completion of fieldwork so that responses could be quantified. The most common reasons given for dissatisfaction were issues relating to litter and street cleaning (5% of all those surveyed/33% of those dissatisfied), and refuse collection / recycling service (3% of all those surveyed/22% of those dissatisfied).
- 2.9 When the 67% of residents who were satisfied with the council were probed on why they were satisfied the most common responses were general/generic, e.g. everything is good / fine (21% of all those surveyed/31% of those satisfied) and that no problems or issues have been encountered (13% of all those surveyed/20% of those satisfied). The specific issues most commonly mentioned were the area being clean (4% of all those surveyed/6% of those satisfied) and refuse collection (3% of all those surveyed/4% of those satisfied)
- 2.10 Residents aged 65+ were significantly more likely, compared to those aged 45-64, to agree that the Council provides good value for money. Disabled residents were significantly less likely to 'neither agree nor disagree' and significantly more likely to disagree, compared to non-disabled residents.
- 2.11 The interaction between residents feeling informed and overall satisfaction with the Council shows a positive association. Among the 81% of residents who feel very or fairly well informed about Council services and benefits 72% were satisfied with the way Merton Council runs things, compared to 67% of all respondents.
- 2.12 Wimbledon residents were more likely to feel safe after dark than Mitcham and Morden residents (88% cf. 82%), who nevertheless feel more safe than the nationwide comparison. Female residents, disabled residents and those over 65

were less likely to feel safe after dark. Nationwide comparison figures are not available for different demographic groups.

Overall image of the council

- 2.13 A number of questions about the image of the council have been continued from the former survey. The results from these questions and a comparison with the results from 2014 are set out below.

Your council....	% In agreement	Change since 2014
Is doing a good job	82	+3
Is efficient and well run	76	+4
Involves residents in making decisions	62	+6*
Is difficult to get through to on the phone [^]	50	+11*
Responds quickly when asked for help	65	+13*
Has friendly and polite staff	78	0
Is doing a better job than one year ago	48	+1
Is making the local area a better place	76	+3

[^]Negative polarity – disagreement is desirable

* Significant change

- 2.14 The proportion stating that the Council is doing a good job; is efficient and well run, responds quickly when asked for help and involves residents when making decisions are all at the highest level to date. However, the proportion feeling that the Council is difficult to get through to on the phone has increased significantly.
- 2.15 In 2014 disabled respondents were less likely to agree the council was doing a good job, efficient and well run, responds quickly and is making the area a better place to live. There are no significant differences in the level of agreement from disabled respondents in 2017 in any of these questions. The percentage of disabled respondents agreeing the council is efficient and well run has increased from 63% in 2014 to 75% in 2017; the percentage agreeing the council responds quickly has increased from 41% to 72%.
- 2.16 Residents were also asked whether they would speak positively or negatively about the Council. Nearly two-thirds (64%) would speak positively whilst only 9% would speak negatively.

Budget issues

- 2.17 A set of questions were included in this survey of Merton residents to ascertain the current levels of understanding the public have of pressures on council budgets. This question set was used on BMG's monthly online omnibus poll of 1,500 GB residents in November 2016, allowing the views of Merton residents to be placed against those nationally

- 2.18 Over half were aware that the Council has had to make significant savings over recent years (59%), and that they understand the scale of savings that still need to be made (53%). These are similar to the national benchmarking (55% and 51% respectively).
- 2.19 Half (49%) agree that they have noticed changes to some Council services - this is higher than the national average (41%). However, the survey does not analyse whether this is because Merton residents feel better informed about changes, or because their own experience has been impacted.
- 2.20 Residents were more likely to agree than disagree that the Council seeks residents' views before making decisions (55% agree, 21% disagree), that it acts on residents' concerns (47% agree, 21% disagree), and that it explains decisions (45% agree, 23% disagree).
- 2.21 A question was asked in which residents were asked for their potential response if a service they cared about was at risk of being cut. In this scenario, residents were more likely to agree than disagree that they would volunteer some of their time to help maintain the service (46% cf. 33%). The options of making a one off donation, or paying a new or higher charge at the point of use, were also put to respondents. The proportion agreeing / disagreeing that they would be prepared to do this is similar (38/36% and 35/36%).

Satisfaction with services

- 2.22 Residents were asked to rate local services on a scale from very poor to very good. Compared to the 2014 survey a much smaller list of service areas was put to respondents, with those services that previously had high levels of non-response excluded. In addition a slightly different scale point was used so whilst we have compared the new scores with previous results this should be treated with some caution. The percentage of residents providing a positive rating to services is set out in the table below, along with the change since 2014.

Service	% Good	Change since 2014
Parks, playgrounds, open spaces	75	+3
Recycling facilities	71	-1
Street Lighting	70	-2
Refuse collection	69	-1
Libraries	68	+2
Leisure and sports	63	+19*
Street cleaning	53	-1
Primary education	51	+7*
Parking	51	+16*
Repair of roads	48	+6*
Nursery education	47	+14*
Secondary education	42	+9*

*Significant change

- 2.23 Respondents were asked to identify which services they or their family used from this list, so that we could compare responses from services users and non-service users. For service users there were positive changes in parking and repair of roads compared to 2014 whilst there was a significant decrease in satisfaction for library service users.
- 2.24 Respondents were also asked to consider how the Council deals with specific environmental issues. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents were satisfied with the way the council deals with graffiti, 63% with dog fouling, 60% with litter and 59% fly-tipping. This compares to 63% graffiti, 49% dog fouling, 61% litter and 54% fly-tipping in 2014.

The Council and the local area

- 2.25 Respondents were presented with a list of local information sources and were asked which they currently use to keep them informed about what's happening in Merton. The most-mentioned sources were produced by the Council: My Merton (43%), the Council website (33%), and Council information leaflets (33%). Almost one in three also refer to the Wimbledon Guardian (31%). A similar question in 2014 had My Merton at 37%.
- 2.26 Respondents were read a list of neighbourhood issues and asked to rate the extent to which these are problems in their local area. Of the issues listed, rubbish or litter was the issue most frequently described as a very or fairly big problem; although nearly twice as many people felt that it was not a problem (37% described it as a very or fairly big problem, whilst 63% did not think it was a problem). Mitcham and Morden residents were significantly more likely than Wimbledon residents to report noisy neighbours or loud parties, people using or dealing drugs, and groups hanging around the streets
- 2.27 One fifth of Merton residents have done voluntary work within the past 12 months. This is consistent with responses in 2014. Of the 80% who have not volunteered, the most common reason for not doing so they was that they do not have time to volunteer (61% of all those surveyed), with 6% of all those surveyed saying that it had never occurred to them.
- 2.28 Standard questions used by the Office of National Statistics to measure wellbeing were added to the 2017 survey. Merton residents were more positive about their health and wellbeing compared to London and UK-wide benchmarks across all four measures. The responses given by disabled residents were in general less positive compared to non-disabled residents, which is consistent with the national findings.
- 2.29 93% of respondents felt that people from different backgrounds get on well together, with just 2% disagreeing with this statement. This compares with 89% agreeing in 2014 although slightly different wording was used in that survey.

Young People's Survey

- 2.30 As with the adults the vast majority of young people in Merton were satisfied with their local area as a place to live (94%). 11-15 year olds were more likely to be satisfied than 16-17 year olds.
- 2.31 Most (84%) were satisfied with how Merton Council runs things, with just 4% dissatisfied. This compares favourably to the findings from the survey of adults, where 67% were satisfied.
- 2.32 Respondents were then asked to agree or disagree to statements about the Council relating to specific services and communications. Overall, respondents were more positive in relation to service delivery (doing enough to protect young people 57%; providing services which young people need 48%) than on engagement measures (listens to concerns of young people 47%; involves young people when making decisions 40%; keeps young people informed about what they are doing 38%).
- 2.33 In relation to safeguarding, respondents were shown a list of possible sources of help if they were worried about their health and safety and asked to select which they might use. Multiple responses were allowed. Much the most common response was family members (92%), followed by teachers (29%), and police (24%).
- 2.34 Respondents were asked to rate a series of local services in their area.

Service	% very good / good
Libraries	65%
Primary schools	64%
Public transport	63%
Secondary schools	60%
Leisure and sports facilities	59%
Local health services	58%
Parks, playgrounds and open spaces	56%
The police	56%
Support / guidance on future jobs/careers	50%
Sixth form/ Further Education college	47%
Activities for young people	47%
Street cleaning	42%
Social services for children/families	37%
Arts and culture	35%

- 2.35 Of a list of possible ways to get involved in their community, current or previous engagement is highest in terms of doing voluntary work (15%) and being a member of a school council (17%). However, in addition to this, for each activity at least one in three (35%) state that they will do this in the future.

- 2.36 Respondents were asked if they attend any of a list of activities out of school hours. The most popular activities, were sports and gym (45%), libraries and parks (39%), and after school clubs (36%).
- 2.37 Respondents were also shown a list of activities and facilities and asked which, if any, they would like to attend out of school hours. Up to two responses were allowed. The most popular activities were a place to meet my friends and other people (40%), and sports activities (37%). Around one in four also mention a place for play and hobbies (28%), a place for music, art, and drama (27%), and a place to do homework (25%).

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 None.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1 The survey was conducted with a sample of 1,020 people based on the key components of the local population. The survey is conducted by means of interviews in homes and public places, and also contains a specific set of questions for young people, which were put to 252 11-17 year-olds.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1 The results were made publicly available in July 2017 and have been shared with partner organisations.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The 2017 residents' survey has cost £24,950 met from departmental budgets.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has a best value duty to consult residents and the survey helps meet this duty.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 A number of questions in the survey measure equalities and community cohesion targets. The survey also enables the Council to understand the views and priorities of local people, so that services can be tailored accordingly.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The survey is a tool for identifying the crime and disorder concerns and priorities of local people.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None.

11 APPENDICES – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

11.1 Appendix I: Resident Survey 2017 Report.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS – the following documents have been relied on in drawing up this report but do not form part of the report

12.1 Resident Survey cross-tabulations and charts.

12.2 LGA Polling on resident satisfaction with councils February 2017

<http://www.local.gov.uk/polling-resident-satisfaction-councils-february-2017>