

Briefing Note for Forward Plan Committee meeting – 6th January 2010

2009 Residents' Attitude Survey Feedback – proposal to undertake this survey biennially.

1. A Brent residents' attitude survey has been undertaken every three years since 1990. The methodology employed in all of these surveys has been 'face to face' interviews with a stratified sample of local residents. In order to collect ward level data, the sample size is 2,100 and with a minimum 100 interviews undertaken in each ward. The residents' attitude survey provides robust data on overall satisfaction with the Council, service and area satisfaction plus a range of additional and benchmarkable information on rating the council, communications, community safety, contact & customer services, volunteering, community cohesion and jobs and employment. The residents' attitude survey data is a key element of the Council's evidence base which in turn supports the Council's new service planning framework.
2. The council is legally required to conduct a place survey. This is recent legal requirement on all local authorities across England and Wales and the place survey results provide the key evidential measure on which the audit commission bases its comparative assessment of local authority performance as part of the comprehensive area assessment process. The place survey is scheduled to be conducted every three years.
3. The findings from the 2009 RAS are very encouraging for Brent and there are significant differences and improvements recorded in the answers to the same or similar questions asked in both the RAS and the place survey. In many cases the RAS results demonstrate that respondents are more positive about their local area and the services the council provides than seen in the place survey results. For example the results on overall satisfaction with the council show a 20-percentage point increase over the place survey result. Comparable improvements are seen in regard to satisfaction with local area; in this case the increase is 15-percentage points over the place survey results.
4. The residents' attitude survey has provided the Council with a more robust measure of resident perception and a fair reflection of the improvements the council has undertaken to deliver better quality services to its residents. By comparison the place survey paints an almost unrecognisable picture of the borough. The disparity between place survey and residents' attitude survey results is clearly linked to the differences in methodology. The main differences and their impact are listed below:
 - Respondents to postal surveys are self-selecting. Self-selection has an impact on the reliability of the data produced because survey sample is

frequently skewed with white middle class, middle aged and settled respondents being disproportionately over represented in the sample.

- Self-selection also means that respondents who may have literacy or language difficulties, younger respondents and respondents from some ethnic minority groups are more likely to self-exclude.
 - The cumulative effect of self-selection is that data is less reliable and greater weighting factors need to be applied in the analysis to attempt to rebalance the sample.
 - Questions may be misinterpreted or misunderstood. This was particularly the case with the place survey where a change in emphasis from the BVPI survey to 'place' with its focus on wider local public services, (which rolls up the local authority, health, transportation and the emergency services), is seen to be confusing to some respondents.
5. Costs – the 2009 residents' attitude survey cost £112k. The next proposed survey would be 2011. The cost of that is projected to be £112k plus an amount for inflation, but subject to any savings gained through a competitive tendering process. There is no specific provision in the base fund for the 2011 survey, so members are being asked to agree in principle to a survey every two years. If members do agree the proposal will be included in the budget process and funding would need to be identified.

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