



# Research Note

December 2009

Briefing Note 7

## **PLACE SURVEY 2008/09: RESULTS SUMMARY**

The Place Survey is the new biennial statutory survey which all lower and upper tier local authorities in England are required to carry out. Together with the tenant satisfaction (STATUS) survey, it replaces the suite of Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) user satisfaction surveys, which have been carried out since 2002.

The survey was conducted via a postal self-completion approach, as prescribed by the Audit Commission and the Department of Communities and Local Government. Fieldwork was carried out from 26 September to 19 December 2008. A total of 1,545 responses were achieved and data has been weighted to ensure results are reflective of the wider population in the Borough, and to account for non-response bias.

The findings from the Place Survey are important because they help the Council and its local partners on the local strategic partnership (LSP) [including the police, fire and health services, and the voluntary and community sector] understand how they are performing in relation to each of the new citizen perspective indicators prioritised by the government, and how residents' views have changed over time in relation to key local public service and quality of life issues.

### **The Local Area**

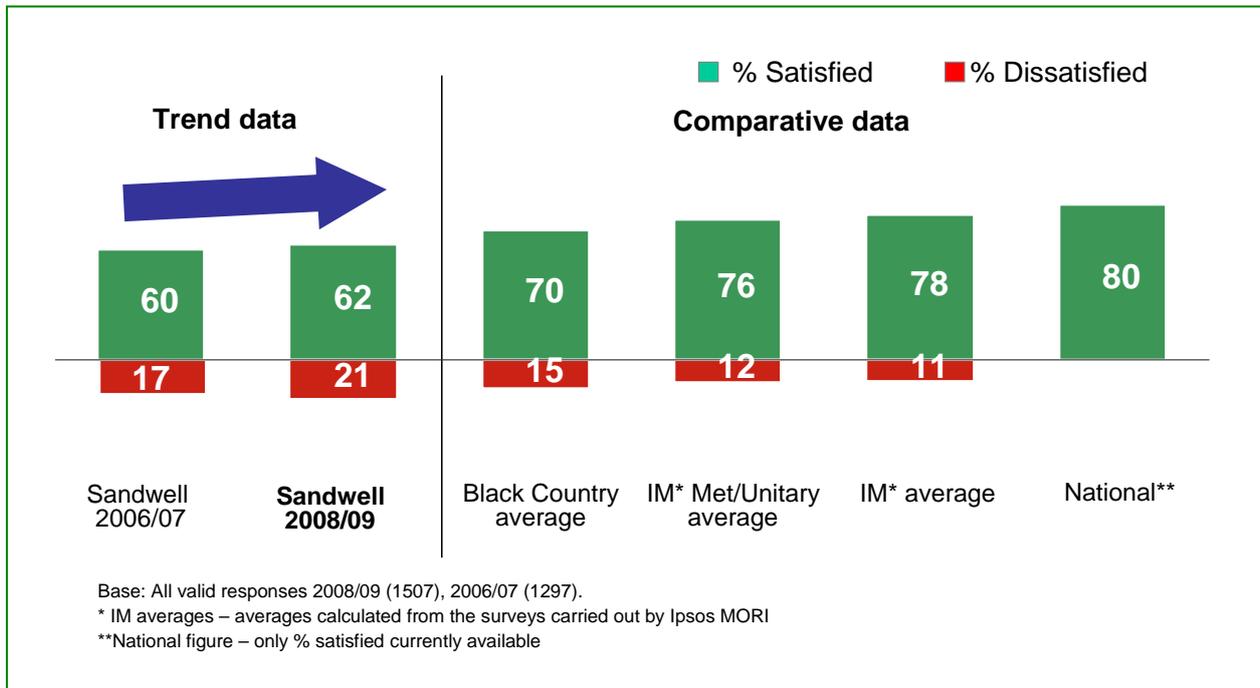
NI 5 (overall satisfaction) has seen an improvement since the last LGUSS<sup>1</sup> in 2006/07. Overall, 62% of respondents are satisfied with their local area (compared with 60% in 2006/07) – key groups who are more likely to be

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<sup>1</sup> The Local Government User Satisfaction Survey – the general survey of the suite of BVPI surveys

dissatisfied include younger adults, BME groups, and those in West Bromwich and Smethwick. Despite the improvement, Sandwell ranks third worst out of all Metropolitan (Mets) & London Boroughs on this indicator.

Graph 1. NI 5: Satisfaction with the local area as a place to live



53% of respondents feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood (NI 2).

- Those in Tipton are most likely to feel strongly that they belong to their local area.

In terms of quality of life; crime, clean streets, health and housing remain the most important things in making somewhere a good place to live. In terms of the aspects that most need improving in Sandwell; activities for teenagers, clean streets, the level of crime, road and pavement repairs, and job prospects all feature highly.

The key areas in Sandwell which residents score above average on both importance and in need of improvement are the level of crime and clean streets, which is consistent with previous survey results.

### Local Public Services

Residents were asked about the extent to which a series of statements apply to local public services and, overall, views are mixed. On balance, residents are most positive about the extent to which public services treat all types of people fairly and feel that they are generally working to make the area safer (+21% net great deal/some extent and +15% respectively). Overall, they are also positive

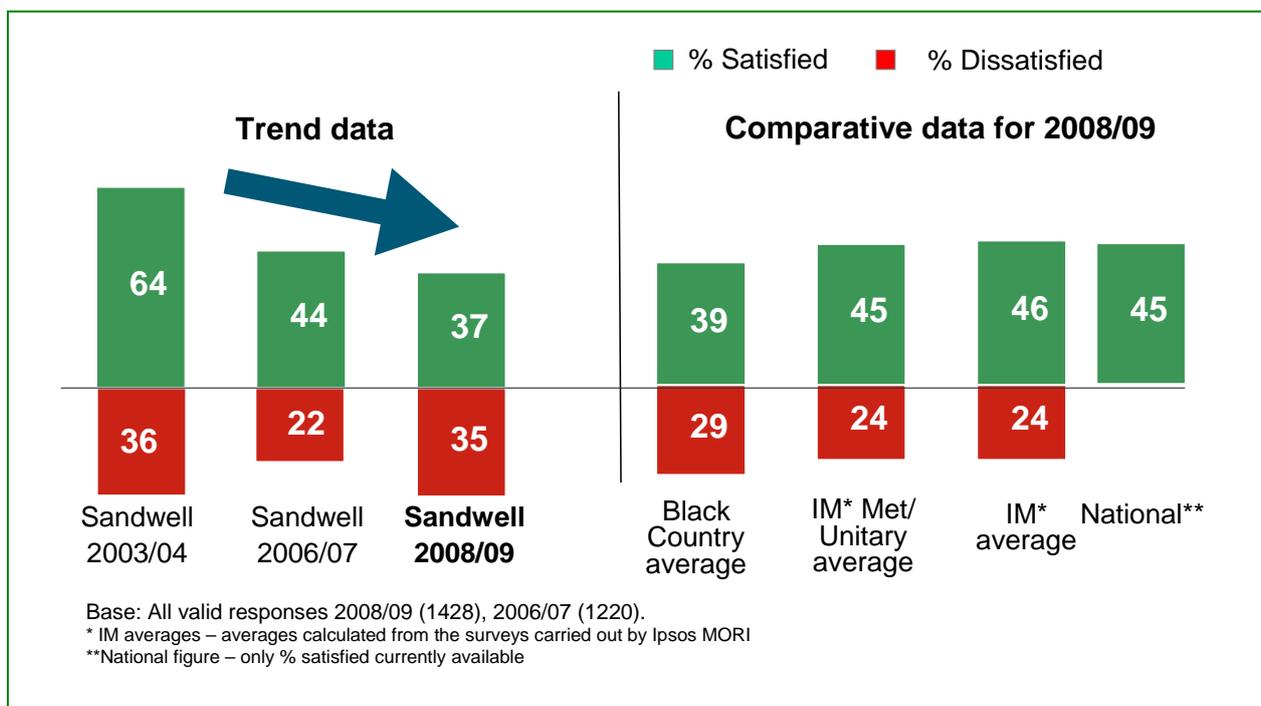
about the way local public services are working to make the area cleaner and greener, although the balance of opinion is more clearly divided here (+5%). However, residents are negative about the extent to which public services promote the interests or act on the concerns of residents (net scores of -31% and -27% respectively).

In terms of Value for Money (VfM) – the LGUSS found that in 2006/07 41% thought the Council provided VfM – this has now declined to 25%. Net agreement that the Council provides value for money stands at -15% - this means that more people disagree than agree that we provide VfM.

- The figure for West Bromwich is more than double this at -34%. This could perhaps be attributed to the significant adverse publicity locally and nationally around The Public in the autumn, when the survey was conducted.

BV3 (overall satisfaction with the way the Council runs things) continues to decline – 53.2% in 2000, to 44% in 2006 and 38% in 2008 - although this is part of a continuing national trend [satisfaction levels did increase considerably in the 2003/04 survey, but this was due largely to a change in survey methodology in Sandwell for this wave of the LGUSS]. Net satisfaction also declined from 21% in 2006 to 3% in 2008 – meaning that on balance only slightly more people are satisfied with the way we run things than dissatisfied.

Graph 2. BV3: Satisfaction with the way Sandwell MBC runs things



Among the range of local public services that residents were asked about, satisfaction with health services is highest; seven in ten say they are satisfied with

their GP and local hospital (72% and 69% respectively). However, satisfaction with dentists is slightly lower (62%). Among the other emergency services, attitudes are more positive towards the West Midlands Fire Service than the West Midlands Police (60% and 48% satisfied respectively).

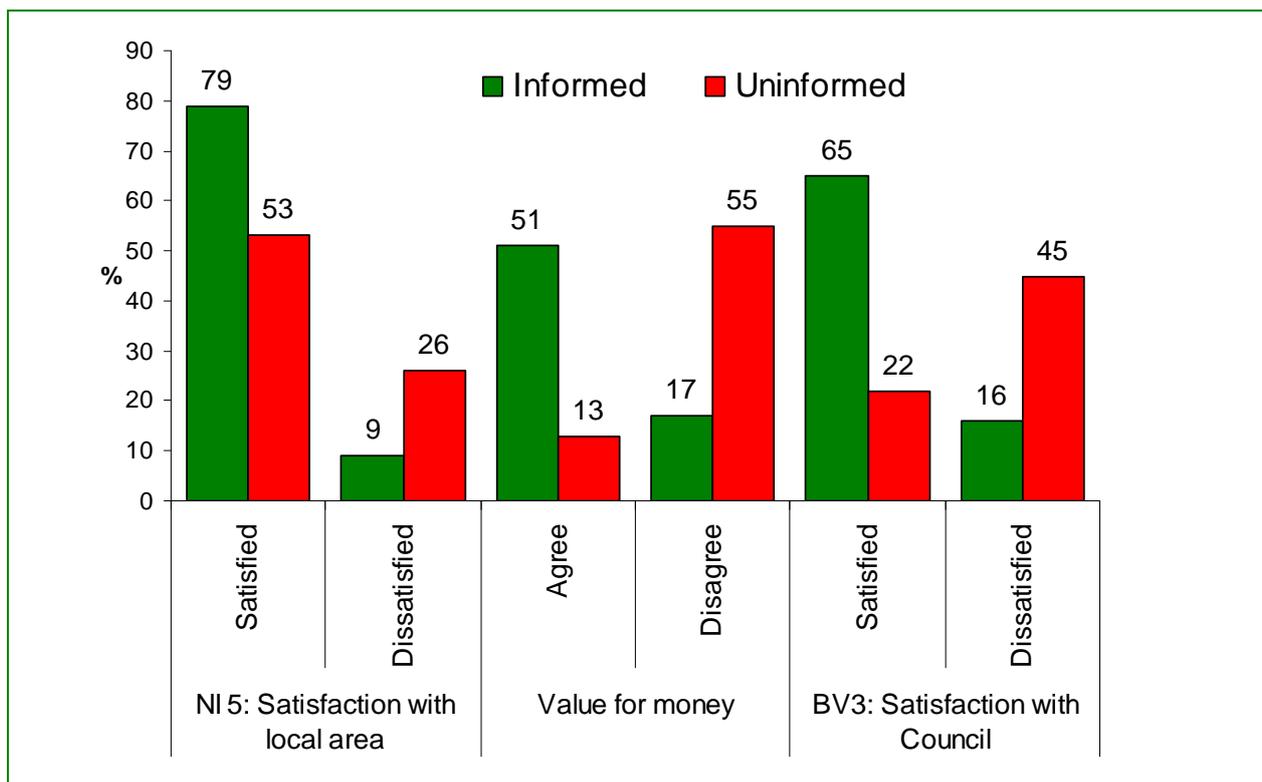
- There have been significant falls in the proportion who feel the Council keeps public land clear of litter - from 57% to 39%. There has also been a sharp decline in satisfaction with local tips/household waste recycling centres (but this still remains high at 67%) and a slightly smaller decline in satisfaction with sport/leisure facilities (just over a third of respondents are satisfied).

### Information

Overall, 33% feel well informed about local public services, but over a quarter feel “not well informed at all”. It is well known that satisfaction levels rise as people feel more informed; therefore this is a key area to address for the Partnership and individual agencies within it. For example:

- Satisfaction with the local area rises from 53% of those who don’t feel informed to 79% amongst those who do.
- 65% of those who feel informed are satisfied with the way the Council runs things compared with 22% of those feeling uninformed.

Graph 3. Feeling informed



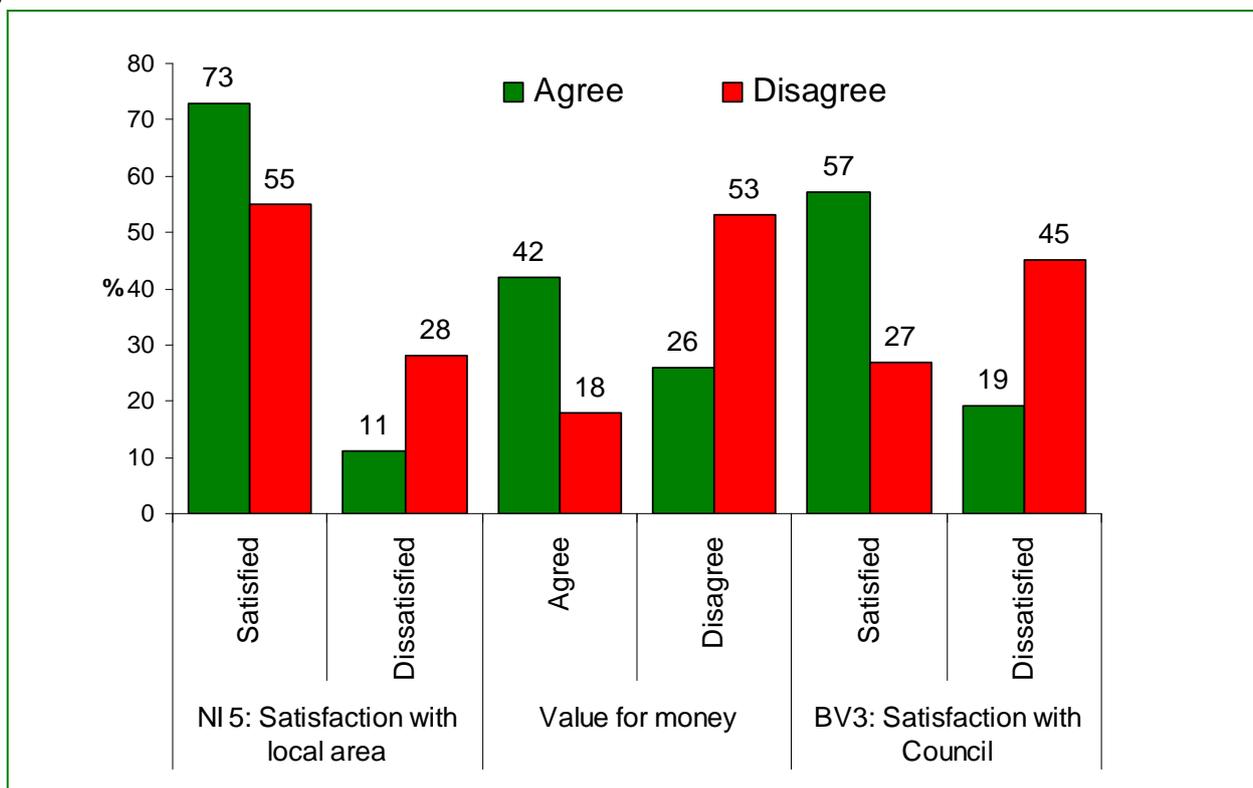
People feel relatively well informed about how and where to register to vote, and how Council tax is spent, but less well informed in terms of how to get involved in decision making (25%), how to complain about services (31%), and what to do in the event of a large-scale emergency (15% - however this is NI 37, on which Sandwell is the best in the Black Country). This data has implications for better promotion of our customer complaints, compliments and suggestions service, and for all services across the Council and partners where decisions are made that could better serve local people (e.g. participatory budgeting, town level fora etc.).

### Local Decision Making

There has been a fall in the proportion who feel they can influence decisions from 33% in 2006/07 to 26% (NI 4), and over a quarter of respondents would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area.

- Those who feel they belong to the local neighbourhood are more likely to feel they can influence decisions (35% compared with only 16% who don't).
- And those who feel they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area are more likely to be satisfied with the local area as a place to live, are much more likely to think the Council provides value for money, and are also more satisfied with the Council.

Graph 4. NI 4: Able to influence decisions



When we consider those who want to get more involved in decision-making - generally it's younger residents, men, those in BME groups and those in private rented accommodation that want to get more involved– and it is these residents that are most dissatisfied with their local neighbourhood as a place to live, and most dissatisfied with the Council. Those living in Smethwick are also significantly more likely to say that they want to be more involved.

## Helping Out & Getting Involved

Almost two-thirds of respondents haven't given any unpaid help in last 12 months.

NI 3 shows that 13% of respondents participate in civic activities in Sandwell. The most popular form of participation is as part of groups making decisions on services in the local community.

These two areas of the survey (local decision making and helping out/getting involved) seem to suggest people want to be more active in the decisions that affect their communities and is something warranting further investigation about how, on what, when – in essence, developing the whole area of engagement.

## Respect and Consideration

Only 19% of respondents agree that parents take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children (NI 22).

- Over 65s and BME respondents are more likely to agree that parents take enough responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

57% of respondents say they have been treated with respect and consideration by local services (NI 140), with 13% saying this is “all of the time”. However, Sandwell ranks 3rd worst of the Mets & London Boroughs on this indicator.

- Those groups scoring particularly low include younger adults & BME groups.

There has been a fall in the proportion who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together - however this still represents almost two-thirds of respondents (compared to 75% in 2006). This indicator doesn't just refer to differences in ethnicity – it also covers other areas such as social class, education, religion, household type.

- Those in Smethwick are most likely to agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. This is a very diverse neighbourhood and seems to suggest that on the ground, where people live

closely together and interact, there is harmony. This is something that also comes across anecdotally through the survey.

## Community Safety

The Place Survey shows that a third of respondents feel safe when outside after dark, and 73% when outside during the day. These figures are considerably less positive than those reported by the 2008 Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) & Liveability Survey<sup>2</sup>, which were 64% and 94% respectively. This variation will be partly due to differences in methodology (postal questionnaires like the Place Survey tend to show more negative outcomes than telephone or face-to-face interviews).

- Younger adults (18-35s) and older (over 65s) are far more likely to feel unsafe after dark than other age groups.

In terms of individual aspects of ASB, the greatest problems are perceived to be rubbish and litter lying around and teenagers hanging around on the streets (60% and 55% of respondents consider these to be a problem, respectively). The Place Survey has also seen an increase in the overall perception of ASB indicator (NI 17) – in 2008, 34% of respondents perceive ASB to be a problem, compared with 19% in 2003 and 28% in 2006.

Although Sandwell fairs better in terms of NI 21 (dealing with concerns about ASB) and NI 27 (understanding local concerns about ASB) compared to the rest of the Black Country, only a fifth of respondents feel local public services are successfully dealing with ASB and crime issues, and a quarter feel that people's views are sought about these issues. These figures may warrant further investigation to better understand these issues.

## Health and Independence

Subjective measures of health and well being are an important indicator of the general health of the population and are used to measure progress in improvements to general health and well-being in the local area.

Accordingly, residents were asked to provide a self-reported measure of their general health. The majority say their health is good; overall, three in five (64%) say good, although more say it *is good* rather than *very good* (38% and 26% respectively). Three in ten (28%) say it is fair and eight per cent say it is bad, including 1% very bad. This gives Sandwell an NI 119 score of 64% – the percentage of people who say their health is either very good or good. This figure

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<sup>2</sup> A telephone survey of around 6200 Sandwell residents. The Safer Sandwell Partnership (in conjunction with Research Sandwell) has carried out 5 surveys to date since September 2006.

is the lowest out of 69 Mets and London Boroughs, and compares with a national average of 75.8%.

Among the main sub-groups, as we may expect, younger residents are more likely to say their health is good compared with their older counterparts (83% 18-34 year olds compared with 43% aged 65+). Tenure is also closely related to health status, with owners and private renters more likely to say they are in good health (70% and 81% respectively) compared with those living in socially rented accommodation (44%). Across the Towns within the Sandwell MBC area, residents in Tipton are also less likely to say their health is good (51%) whilst perceptions of good health are highest amongst residents of Wednesbury (70%).

A third of Place Survey respondents said they have a long-term illness, disability or infirmity, and of these, 74% say this limits their activities in some way.

The Place Survey also collected data on NI 139. 30% of respondents felt that older people in the local area are able to get the services and support they need to continue to live at home for as long as they want to. This figure is similar to the national average.

## Summary

Although satisfaction with individual services (such as Police, Fire, health services, refuse collection, bus services and libraries) is reasonably high, satisfaction with Sandwell Council overall is falling (a trend that is mirrored across the country), the perception of providing value for money is also declining, and local services are not thought to treat people fairly (NI 140). Key factors in improving these scores appear to be keeping people informed, involving them in decision making, and increasing the sense of belonging to a neighbourhood – developing social capital, the Duty to Involve and Engagement Strategies seem to be paramount in any approach to improve satisfaction.

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