

What People in Stevenage Think

The 2005 residents' survey –
Executive Summary

Research Study Conducted for
Stevenage Borough Council



September 2005

Introduction

In the summer of 2005, MORI surveyed the people of Stevenage. This report explores their views and compares them to the findings from a similar survey in 2001. The survey questionnaire, designed in conjunction with Stevenage Borough Council, covered a number of key issues, including:

- Perceptions of the Council;
- Views of Stevenage as a place to live;
- Attitudes towards community safety;
- Levels of advocacy for the Council and the town;
- Key Council services and priorities;
- Use of the Council's website; and
- People's experience of contacting the Council.

Methodology

MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,008 residents aged 16+ in 126 randomly selected Output Areas (OAs) across the Borough. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in home between 8 July and 23 August 2005.

The sample was stratified to ensure that at least 150 interviews were achieved within each of six areas within the Borough: Bedwell, Broadwater, Chells, Old Stevenage, Shephall and St Nicholas.

Within each OA, quotas were set using 2001 Census data to reflect the population profile of the neighbourhood. The data was then weighted at the analysis stage by sex, age, working status and area to reflect the known population profile.

Executive Summary

- **Stevenage Council is viewed favourably by most residents**
 - In terms of overall satisfaction, Stevenage Borough Council is viewed favourably by two in three residents – and this view is holding up well historically
 - Stevenage performs fairly well in comparison with other boroughs and districts surveyed by MORI over the last five years
 - Stevenage ‘outperforms’ its levels of deprivation when compared to other district councils, and rates favourably to other Hertfordshire authorities
 - Overall satisfaction levels are underpinned by positive ratings of Council services overall – a situation which remains broadly in line with the last survey
 - Residents living in Old Stevenage and Shephall tend to be more satisfied with the Council than those in other areas

- **Stevenage achieves a high level of satisfaction with its services overall, with nearly three in four residents saying that they are happy with council services**
 - Older people are much more likely to have a more positive image of Council services, as are home owners and people in the higher socio-economic strata
 - The Council has slipped considerably in terms of providing good value for money (falling 10% since 1998), although it has maintained its position in terms of not being seen as remote
 - Refuse collection and CCTV are seen as the most important services – but facilities for young people and town centre car parks are the services most in need of improvement
 - Residents would like you to focus resources on CCTV and facilities for young people and for elderly/disabled people

- **There is a strong correlation between how well informed residents feel about what the Council is doing and satisfaction with the Council, highlighting the important role of Council communications**
 - Overall, two in three people feel that the Council keeps them informed about its services
 - When those who are satisfied with the way the Council performs are looked at, 77% of them feel informed – compared to just 34% of those who are dissatisfied with the Council
 - Compared with other authorities, Stevenage remains at the top of MORI's table of local authorities – even improving on 2001 and far out-stripping the County Council
 - Nine in ten residents say they have seen a copy of *The Chronicle*, rising to 96% of 35-54 year olds
 - Over two in three residents have access to the internet, and one in three of these people have visited the Council's website in the last six months. This translates into one in four of all residents

- **Stevenage Council has a strong record in keeping its residents informed, the first step towards participation in the democratic process**
 - However, significant minorities of residents do not feel able to participate
 - Half of residents do not feel able to influence decisions made by the Council
 - One in three residents do not feel that the Council offers them the opportunity to participate in decision-making
 - Nearly three in five 'like to know what the Council is doing, but are happy to let them get on with their job' – down on 2001. The change can be accounted for by the rise in the proportion of people who would like to have *more* of a say in what the Council does (going from 20% in 2001 to 26% in 2005)
 - The ability to influence, the opportunity to participate and the desire to participate can act as proxies for how people talk about the Council. In 2005, though, for the first time, residents were directly asked about their levels of 'advocacy'
 - The findings point towards a 'hard core' of around one in six people who are 'critics' while one in three are 'advocates' – and Stevenage Council employees are more likely to have contact with 'critics'

- **Nearly nine in ten residents are satisfied with Stevenage as a place to live**
 - This is a dramatic improvement on 2001, when only three in four residents said that they were happy with the town

- Furthermore, in 2005, only 7% of residents are dissatisfied with the area – giving the town a +82% net satisfaction rating
- Nearly all of those who are satisfied with the way the Council runs things are also satisfied with life in Stevenage
- Conversely, nearly three in four of those who are dissatisfied with the Council are unhappy with the town
- Residents living in Chells or in Old Stevenage have the highest net satisfaction ratings
- Residents of Bedwell and Shephall are more likely to think that things have got better, while those living in Broadwater are more likely to think that things have got worse