CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Growth

Environment

Communities

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Every year the council conducts a residents' survey to capture the feedback of a random selection of local people. The survey is carried out to understand the priorities of residents and to ask for feedback on a range of key council services.

1.2 Results are used to help inform the annual budget setting process and to ensure that resources can be directed towards the areas that matter most to local people. Feedback regarding satisfaction with key council services is also used as part of the way that the council monitors its overall performance to understand trends in satisfaction.

1.3 The 2021 survey was conducted at its usual timeframe of the Autumn, in order to feed into the budget process. This follows the delayed 2020 survey which took place in February - March 2021 having been impacted by the temporary hold on business as usual activities during the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 The survey was conducted in October 2021.

2.2 The same methodology was adopted for the survey compared to previous years to ensure consistency. Postcards were issued to a random sample of 6,000 local households using records from electoral services. Although the 6,000 households were selected at random, the selection is weighted to ensure proportional distribution to the more densely populated areas of Thanet.

2.2 Broadly speaking the same questions were included within the survey to allow an opportunity for benchmarking results. The supporting contextual information was updated to reflect the latest financial situation.

3.0 Summary of results - regular questions

3.1 A total of 676 people responded to the survey. This represents a 11% response rate of the sample and is a decrease from the record 17% (1,028 respondents) in 2020. Overall, this number of responses gives a sampling error of +/-4 %. What this means is that we can be 95% confident that if we received a response from every resident across the district, the responses would lie 4% points above or below the percentages reported.

Residents' priorities

3.2 When invited to select three responses from a given list of priorities, feeling safe (43%) remains the top response in making Thanet a good place to live. The number of people who selected this increased slightly (by 2%) compared to last year.

3.3 This year, thriving towns (40%) is the second most commonly selected priority for respondents - previously third. Quality of beaches (38%) has shifted from second into third priority and clean streets (35%) remains fourth. Despite this change in order of priorities, it is worth noting that there are only five percentage points between the second, third and fourth priorities.

3.3 When asked to select three responses from the same list of priorities, which reflect areas within the council's control that most need improving, clean streets (50%) remain the top and thriving towns (34%) remain second. Affordable, decent housing (32%) is now third above feeling safe (29%) which is once again fourth, however this is slightly higher (by 3%) than it was in the 2020 survey. Job prospects (28%) has fallen to fifth place having been third in the 2020 survey.

3.4 Despite some of the changes in order of priority, when considering the responses of 'most important' together with those 'most in need of improving', clean streets, thriving towns and feeling safe once again remain the overall priority areas.

Satisfaction with local area

3.5 When asked about their local neighbourhood, 70% of respondents are satisfied compared to 16% who are dissatisfied. Satisfaction has decreased by 5% compared to last year while dissatisfaction is up by 4%. The number of respondents who were very satisfied with their neighbourhood has fallen by 10%.

Feedback about the council

3.6 Respondents were asked how strongly they either agreed or disagreed with six statements about the council. Of the six statements asked, two have improved slightly compared to the previous survey in 2020.

3.7 Respondents were most likely to agree that the council is raising the profile of the district as a visitor destination (44%) and that the council is attracting investors (36%). Respondents were twice as likely to agree (35%) than disagree (17%) that the council has helpful and friendly staff; however compared to 2020, agreement has fallen by 9% and instead the ambivalence score has risen.

3.8 There were high levels of ambivalence with three of the statements with more respondents selecting 'neither agree nor disagree'. This was most notably the case for 'whether the council is doing a better job now than last year' (54%), 'whether the council has helpful and friendly staff' (48%) - up from 40% in 2020 - and 'whether the council is helping to make Thanet a safer place' (44%).

3.9 When asked whether the council listens to the concerns of local residents, over half of respondents were more likely to disagree (51%). This is higher than in 2020 where fewer than half (44%) believed this to be the case.

About the council

3.10 When asked to select three options, from a list of 16, to describe how respondents would like the council to be in the future, being efficient (40%) again remains the top response. This has been the top response since the question was introduced in 2017.

3.11 Trusted (31%) was second, while responsive (27%) and transparent (27%) are joint third. This reflects a slight shift in priority however, the top four responses remain the same as they were in 2020.

Satisfaction with council services

3.12 In terms of council services, respondents were most satisfied with the household black bin collections (78%), which is a very slight increase from 2020 (77%). Satisfaction also remains high for the household recycling collection (70%) - although this figure has dropped slightly from 71% in 2020.

3.13 Respondents were more likely to be satisfied with the beach cleaning service (59%) and local parks (51%) than they were dissatisfied. However, while beach cleaning and local parks see an improvement since 2020, satisfaction with the seafront and promenades was (50%) down from (55%) in 2020.

3.14 For play areas (32%), cultural facilities (32%) and leisure/sports facilities (25%) satisfaction was lower but these are an improvement on or equal to 2020 levels - however a higher number of respondents said they were either; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, or indicated that they did not use the service.

3.15 Satisfaction levels are lowest for public car parks (25%) and street cleaning (27%) with almost half of respondents (49%) dissatisfied with the street cleaning service.

3.16 A new question on the garden waste service was included this year. In total 35% of respondents were satisfied with the service. A third (34%) indicated that they do not use the service. Overall more than half of actual users are satisfied.

Funding from central government

3.17 When respondents were asked whether they were aware that the council had seen an £8 million (60%) drop in funding from central government, the majority (70%) said they were aware, compared to 30% who were not. This is a 10% increase in awareness when compared to 2020.

The budget

3.18 When asked how surprised they are that Thanet District Council receives just 12p in every £1 from residents' overall Council Tax bill, over half, 58% were surprised compared to 42% who weren't. Levels of awareness have increased when compared to 2020.

3.19 When asked whether they thought Thanet District Council provides value for money, 37% agreed, a decrease of 6% from 2020. In addition, 30% disagreed, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed while 2% indicated that they didn't know.

3.20 Respondents were asked, if a service they cared about were at risk of being cut, how likely or willing would they be to support eight different suggestions.
The most popular suggestion was that of the council moving to cheaper and smaller offices which received the support of 83% of respondents. Transferring appropriate services to town/parish councils (63%) and the move to digital delivery of services (62%) were second and third respectively. The sale of assets no longer required was supported by 57%. Although respondents were less likely to support paying a new or higher charge each time they use the service (45%), volunteering some of their time (41%), paying more Council Tax (32%) or making a one off contribution (31%), support for each of these options has increased slightly or stayed the same when compared to the 2020 survey.

Communication and feeling informed

3.21 When asked which channels respondents currently use to find out information about the council, most said the council website (83%) this is more than double the number from

2020 (38%). Previous top response, word of mouth was second (46%), written media (44%) and broadcast media (37%), all have increased versus 2020.

3.22 Respondents were slightly more likely to say they did not feel well informed about the services the council provides (50%) compared to those who said they did feel well informed (49%). However, levels of feeling informed have increased for the second year running, up from 43% in 2020 and 35% in 2019.

4.0 New questions

Communications campaigns

4.1 New questions were added this year to highlight communications campaign activity that had taken place in the preceding six months. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had seen the campaigns, if so where and what their opinion of them was.

4.2 When asked if they had seen the No Excuse for Abuse campaign, encouraging respect for council staff which began in August 2021, almost two-thirds (63%) had done so.

4.3 The Respect, Protect, Enjoy summer seasonal campaign, encouraging people to enjoy our beaches and open spaces in a responsible way, which began in April, had a slightly higher recognition rate with almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents having noticed it.

4.4 Respondents were asked if they had seen the campaigns where they had done so, our beach banners (24%), waste and recycling trucks (20%) and poster sites (18%) were the most popular responses.

4.5 When asked to select three words from a list to describe the No Excuse for Abuse campaign, thought provoking was the lead response (55%). Attention grabbing was the second most popular response (39%) while one third (33%) felt the campaign lacked originality and 31% felt it was boring.

4.6 When asked to select three words from a list to describe the Respect, Protect, Enjoy campaign, creative (46%), cheerful (44%) and attention grabbing (32%) were the most popular responses.

Beach management plan

4.7 Following the implementation of a number of additional actions and provision of additional resources around our beaches and bays this summer, residents were asked to indicate how aware they were of a range of different aspects of the plan.

4.8 The elements of the plan people were most aware of were the additional litter bins (55%), the Viking Bay lift reopening (49%), the addition of recycling bins at Blue Flag beaches (46%). The new dog poo bag dispensers were also noted with 45% of respondents indicating they were aware of them. People were much less likely to be aware of the newly launched Beach Check UK app (15%) and the Thanet Coast Project’s 20th anniversary (14%).

Getting involved

4.9 When asked if they would like to be more involved in decision making at the council, almost two thirds of respondents (61%) said they would be interested in taking part in online surveys. 25% said they would be interested in taking part in consultation or engagement events and 21% would like to be part of a focus group. These are all improved responses when compared to 2020. More than a quarter (28%) said they were not interested.

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