



**SBC Policy Briefing:**

December 2015

**Local Area Perception Survey 2015**

**To** All Members

**Cc** Strategic Management Team, Heads of Service and Third-Tier Managers

**Summary**

This briefing considers the results of the 2015 local area perception survey, focusing on elements of the survey which will be of interest to a wide range of teams and individuals. These include the 18 corporate indicators which are derived from the survey data, and the features of local life identified by survey respondents as being most important in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live, and as being most in need of improvement within the local area.

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**1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This briefing considers the results of the 2015 local area perception survey (LAPS), a postal survey which has been run each year since 2010 as a means of providing a statistically robust set of data about residents' views of the Council, the services it offers, and the quality of life in the Borough.
- 1.2 The briefing is concerned solely with the sections of the survey which are likely to be of interest to individuals and teams across the Council, including outturns against the 18 corporate indicators which are based on survey data and results from the section of the survey which asks respondents what is most important in making somewhere a good place to live and what most needs improving in Swale.
- 1.3 The full dataset, which contains results from a broader range of more specific questions, is available on the intranet at: <http://sbcintranet/council-customer-insight/default.aspx>

**2 Methodology**

- 2.1 A total of 4,000 questionnaires were mailed to randomly selected addresses within Swale during October 2015. The results are based on 984 completed questionnaires, representing a 25 per cent response rate; this is an improvement of two percentage points on last year, and compares with a 'best year' of 30 per cent (2011), and a 'worst year' of 19 per cent (2010).

- 2.2 There is always a margin of possible error in any survey which questions a random sample of the population rather than 100 per cent of the population. Broadly speaking, this margin of error is a function of the size of the random sample relative to the size of the whole population. In this survey, our 984 responses have given us a margin of error of slightly less than four percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level, meaning that if 50 per cent of the respondents to this survey give a particular response, we can be 95 per cent confident that the 'true' percentage if all adults in Swale had answered would be somewhere between 46 per cent and 54 per cent. **This means that changes in results from last year to this of less than four percentage points are technically not statistically significant**, although they may still be suggestive of real change.
- 2.3 In recent years we have struggled to identify appropriate comparator data to show the meaning of our survey results in the context of those of other councils. Minor changes were made to the survey methodology a couple of years ago to enable us to use the LGA's 'LG Inform' website to benchmark our results against those of other LGA members. While the LGA has made some limited progress with this piece of work, there are still too few comparator datasets available to facilitate robust benchmarking for this year, and too few common questions to be really useful.
- 2.4 In the absence of more recent results, the most useful comparator dataset we have is the national set from the last Place Survey, which took place in 2008. In previous years we have continued to benchmark our results against this data, but the validity of doing so has of course diminished over time. With the Place Survey data now seven years old, and with the global economic crisis and two changes of national government having occurred in the intervening period, it is simply no longer tenable to continue to benchmark against this dataset. Comparisons with the 2008 Place Survey data have therefore been largely omitted from this briefing note, although quartile positions in that data continue to be shown for information on the graphs in Appendix I.

### 3 Corporate indicators

- 3.1 Appendix I provides a graphical representation of results against all 18 corporate LAPS indicators, showing changes in outturns each year between 2011 and 2015. The indicators can be divided between those covering perceptions of the Borough at large (indicators 1 to 4), those dealing with perceptions of the Council as a whole (indicators 5 to 11), and those covering satisfaction with individual Council services (the remainder).

- 3.2 Considering all 18 indicators together, we can see that when the issue of statistical significance (cf. § 2.2 above) is not taken into account, 11 (61 per cent) have improved from last year, six (33 per cent) have deteriorated, and one (six per cent) has remained static. However, when the approximate margin of error of plus/minus four percentage points is factored in, we can be sure only that three indicators (17 per cent) have improved, whilst a further three (17 per cent) have deteriorated, meaning that 12 indicators (67 per cent) have technically remained static.
- 3.3 Table 1 shows a similar analysis broken down by the categories of indicators listed above. We have already noted the limited value of benchmarking Swale’s results against the 2008 national Place Survey data (§ 2.4 above). Results this year are therefore not compared with quartile positions in that data, but Table 1 does provide a summary of the total number of indicators above and below the median in the 2008 national data.

*Table 1: Analysis by indicator category*

	<b>All indicators</b>	<b>Quality of life in the borough</b>	<b>Overall perception of the council</b>	<b>Satisfaction with individual services</b>
Count of indicators	18	4	7	7
Improved	11 (61%)	2 (50%)	6 (86%)	3 (43%)
Deteriorated	6 (33%)	1 (25%)	1 (14%)	4 (57%)
Static	1 (6%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total better than median*	6 (46%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	2 (40%)
Total worse than median*	7 (54%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	3 (60%)

\*‘Median’ is the median in the 2008 national Place Survey data. This comparator data only exists for 13 indicators.

- 3.4 As has been the case for the last couple of years, a clear split is visible here between perceptions of the Borough in general as a place to live, and perceptions more specifically of the Council. In terms of the former, Swale has always struggled to match the perceived quality of life achieved by other areas; this has not really demonstrated any significant improvement this year, although the headline measure of ‘general satisfaction with the local area as a place to live’ (LAPS 01) has seen statistically significant improvement since 2011.
- 3.5 The picture with regard to general perceptions of the Council is much more positive, with 75 per cent of indicators performing above the 2008 national

median, and 86 per cent showing further improvement this year. Again, on two of the most general measures of satisfaction ('proportion of people satisfied with the way the council runs things' and 'agreement that the council is making the area a better place to live', LAPS 05 and 06), there has been statistically significant improvement over the past five years.

- 3.6 With regard to satisfaction with individual Council services, the picture is more mixed, with one showing statistically significant improvement, but three showing statistically significant deterioration over last year. Paradoxically in view of the longer-term improvements in overall perceptions of the Council (§ 3.5), there has been more statistically significant deterioration than improvement in satisfaction with individual services over the past five years.
- 3.7 With reference to Appendix I, some of the more notable year-on-year changes in individual indicators include:
- LAPS 03: the proportion of people perceiving antisocial behaviour to be a problem is back up to its 2013 level, although this remains better than the 2008 national median figure. In 2008, the Swale figure was fully 25 per cent;
  - LAPS 04: the proportion of people who are regular volunteers appears to have increased by around two percentage points, and although this is not technically of statistical significance it could still be suggestive of real change. This would appear to indicate that the Volunteering Strategy and associated work over the last couple of years (e.g. the Swale volunteer awards) are having the desired effect;
  - LAPS 07 and 13: satisfaction with keeping the streets free of litter appears to be slightly improved again, giving Swale its the second-best result over the last five years. More generally, agreement that the Council is making the area cleaner and greener shows statistically significant improvement over last year, although this measure remains below its 2012 peak, and well into the worst quartile in the 2008 national data. National research indicates that litter is one of the most important drivers of overall perceptions of councils' effectiveness;
  - LAPS 14 and 20: this year sees a reversal of last year's trend, in that satisfaction with refuse collection is showing a statistically significant improvement, while satisfaction with kerbside recycling shows statistically significant deterioration. Swale is placed above the median but below the best quartile on both of these measures in the 2008 national data;
  - LAPS 17: service users' satisfaction with the planning service appears to have begun to bounce back following a low point last year, although the

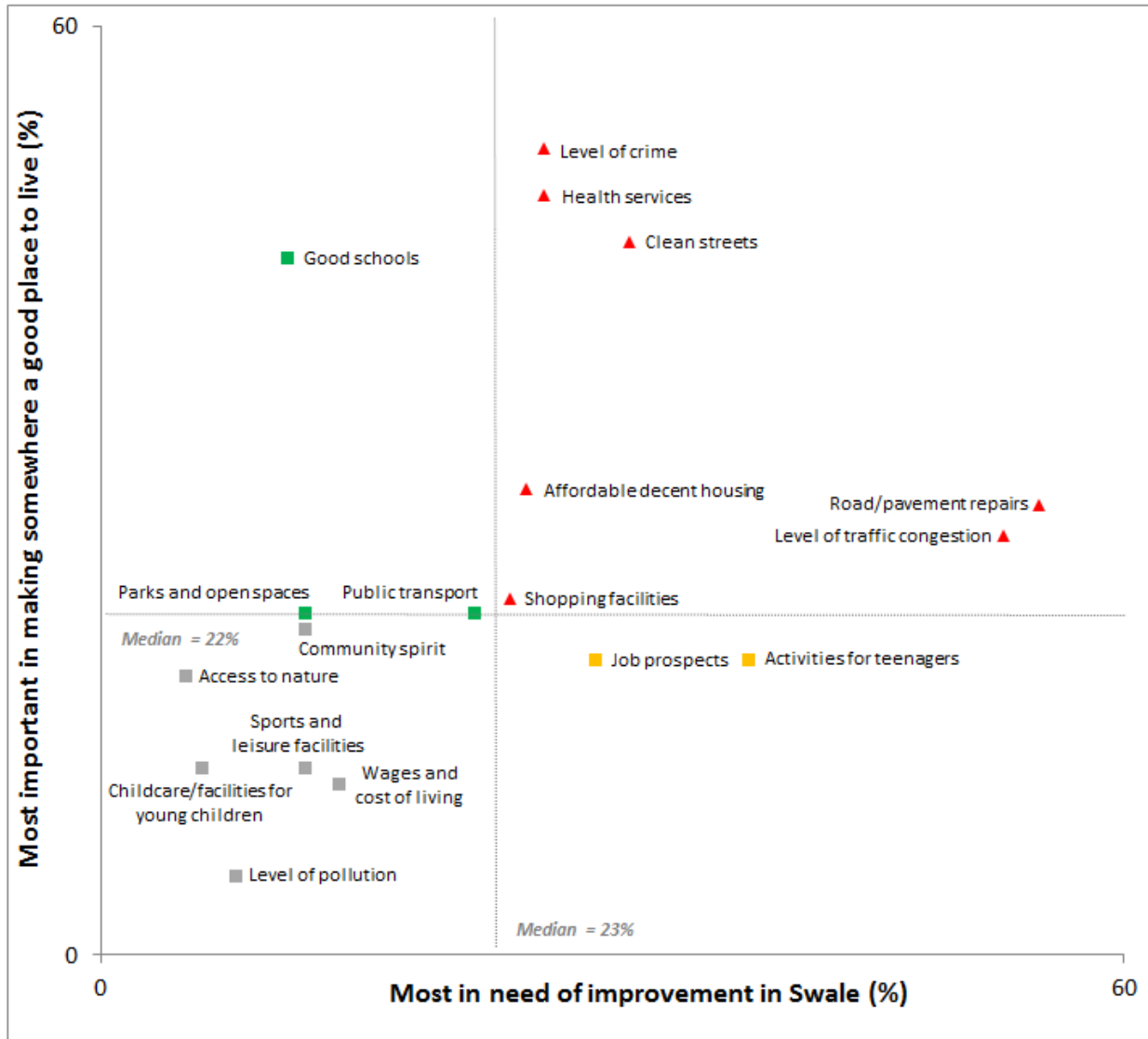
extremely small base of respondents here (around 60 people) gives a very high margin of error, and the improvement therefore cannot be regarded as statistically robust; and

- LAPS 18 and 19: service users' satisfaction with parking enforcement and sports/leisure facilities appears to have experienced statistically significant deterioration, but the low number of respondents on these measures make for a high margin of possible error. Nonetheless, the results may be suggestive of a real deterioration in service users' perceptions.

#### **4 Quality of life: What is important and what needs improving locally**

- 4.1 Each year the LAPS asks respondents to select up to five features of local life from a defined list of around 20 features which they believe (i) to be most important in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live, and (ii) to be most in need of improvement in their local area.
- 4.2 Figure 1 plots the responses to these questions for 2015. The position of each feature on the chart is the result of two percentages, each representing the proportion of respondents who have selected that feature as one of their top five, either as being most important in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live (vertical axis), and/or as being most in need of improvement in their local area (horizontal axis). The median proportions for each of these two measures are shown with grey lines, dividing the chart into four unequal quadrants.
- 4.3 Features shown with grey squares in the bottom-left quadrant are thus those which have been selected both as important and as in need of improvement by fewer respondents than the median. The three features shown with green squares in the top-left quadrant are seen as being important by many, but in need of improvement only by a few, while the two features shown with amber squares in the bottom-right quadrant are seen as important by few, but in need of improvement by many.
- 4.4 The most significant features from the Council's perspective will be those shown with red triangles in the top-right quadrant, which have been selected both as being important and as being in need of improvement by an above-median number of respondents.

Figure 1: Features of local life most important and most in need of improvement 2015



- 4.5 'Road and pavement repairs' and the 'level of traffic congestion' are outliers here, with more than half of all respondents listing each of these among their top-five features most in need of improvement in Swale. Also ranked highly as being in need of improvement is 'activities for teenagers' (listed by 38 per cent of respondents), although this is seen by fewer people as being important in making somewhere a good place to live.
- 4.6 The three red triangles at the top of the chart are those most commonly selected as being one of the five most important in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live: these are 'level of crime', 'health services', and 'clean streets', each selected by roughly half of all respondents.

4.7 'Good schools' are also widely seen as being important in making somewhere a good place to live, but fewer respondents identified this feature as being in need of improvement in Swale.

4.8 It is of interest to consider how the ranking of which features are most in need of improvement in Swale has changed over the last couple of years. Table 2 shows these features with their 2015 'score' (i.e. the percentage of respondents who selected them for their top five), together with the change (in percentage points) that this 2015 score represents from the same feature's score in 2014 and 2013. The table is sorted by the degree of change from 2013, with those towards the top of the table having gained in importance over the last two years, and those towards the bottom having diminished.

*Table 2: Relative change in 'most in need of improvement in Swale' 2013-2015*

	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Score in 2015</b>	<b>Change from 2014</b>	<b>Change from 2013</b>
<i>More in need of improvement now</i>	Level of traffic congestion	53	+13	+19
	Affordable decent housing	25	0	+6
	Health services	26	-1	+2
	Level of crime	26	-5	+2
	Public transport	22	0	+1
<i>Static</i>	Level of pollution	8	-1	0
<i>Less in need of improvement now</i>	Wages and cost of living	14	-1	-1
	Parks and open spaces	12	-2	-1
	Good schools	11	-3	-1
	Access to nature	5	-2	-1
	Clean streets	31	-1	-2
	Community spirit	12	-1	-3
	Sports and leisure facilities	12	-1	-3
	Childcare/facilities for young children	6	-4	-3
	Activities for teenagers	38	1	-6
	Road/pavement repairs	55	-6	-9
	Shopping facilities	24	-7	-9
Job prospects	29	-3	-12	

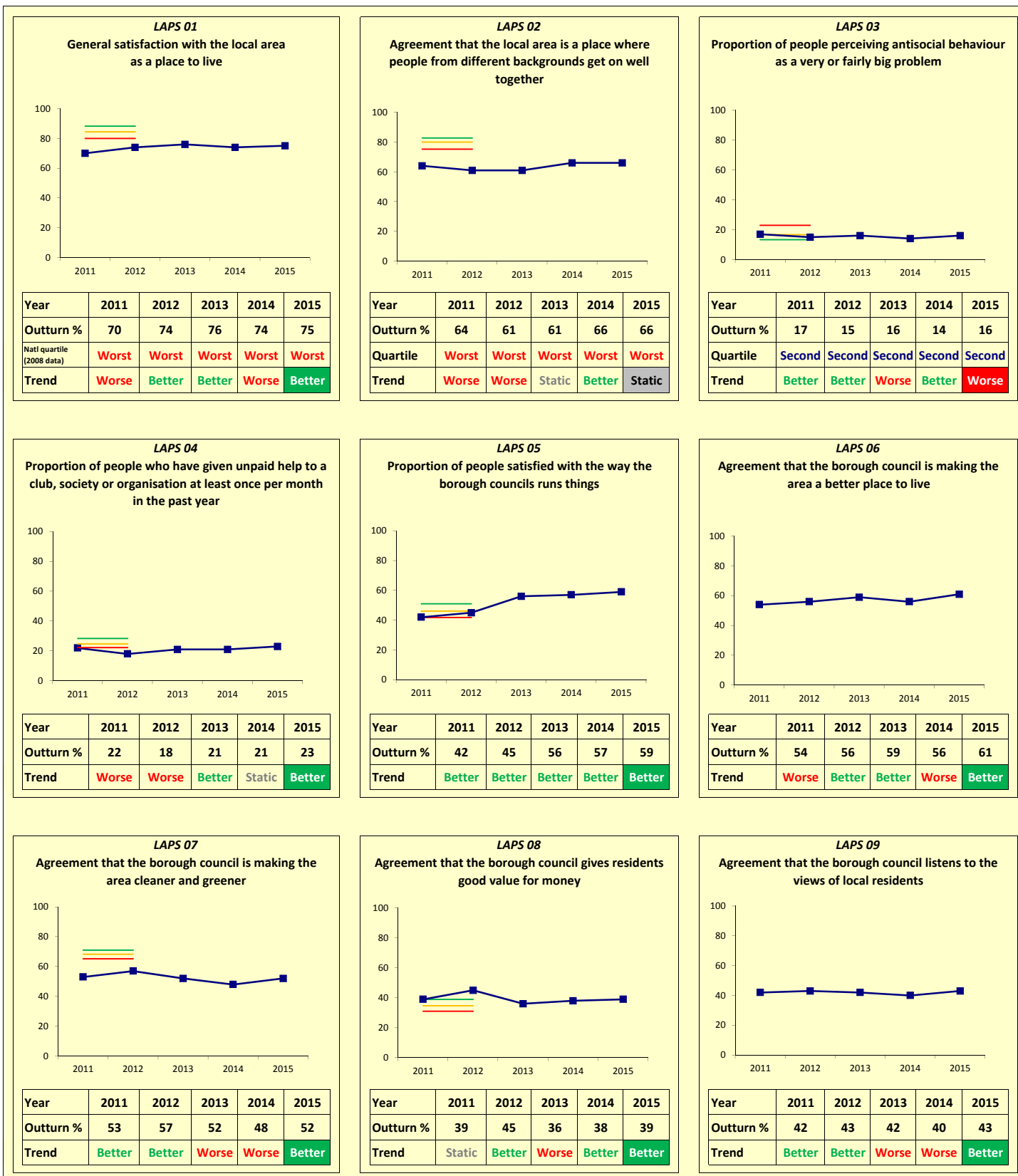
- 4.9 As can clearly be seen, the feature which has gained most in importance over the last two years is the level of traffic congestion. This is most pronounced in the Sittingbourne area (where it was selected by 57 per cent of respondents in 2015) and Sheppey (56 per cent), and considerably less so in the Faversham area (37 per cent). Traffic congestion was selected by 34 per cent of residents across the Borough in 2013, making it the fourth most frequently selected feature that year. In 2015 it is the second-most selected feature, behind only road and pavement repairs.
- 4.10 The prominence of traffic congestion and road repairs in Figure 1 and Table 2, both of which are primarily the business of KCC Highways, once again demonstrates that many of the issues considered most important by Swale residents are either the sole responsibility of outside agencies, or matters over which the Council has only limited influence in conjunction with local or national partners.
- 4.11 This once again underlines the vital importance for the Council of fulfilling its community leadership role by sustaining effective partnerships at both strategic and operational levels, as a means of influencing both long-term decision-making and day-to-day service delivery within the Borough by partner organisations. The continuing importance of the Public Services Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Community Safety Partnership, and the Joint Transportation Board – among others – is once again borne out by the results of this year's survey.
- 4.12 The only feature of local life shown in the top-right quadrant of Figure 1 which falls exclusively into the Council's remit is 'clean streets'. This was listed by 46 per cent of respondents as being among the top-five most important features in determining whether somewhere is a good place to live, and by 31 per cent as being among the top-five features most in need of improvement in Swale. With this in mind, the information on the LAPS indicators 07 and 13 in Appendix I and paragraph 3.7 above will be of interest.

## 5 Further information

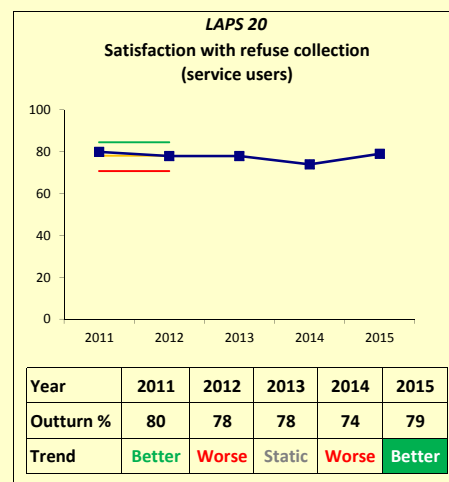
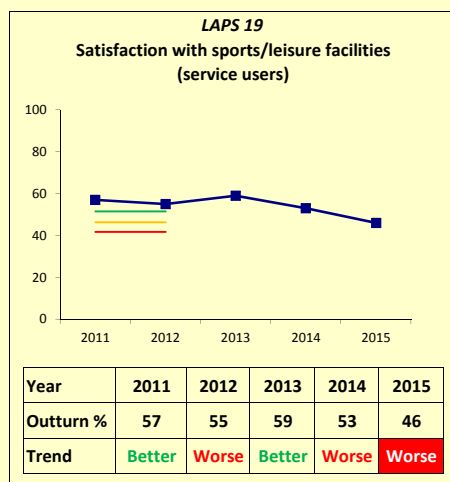
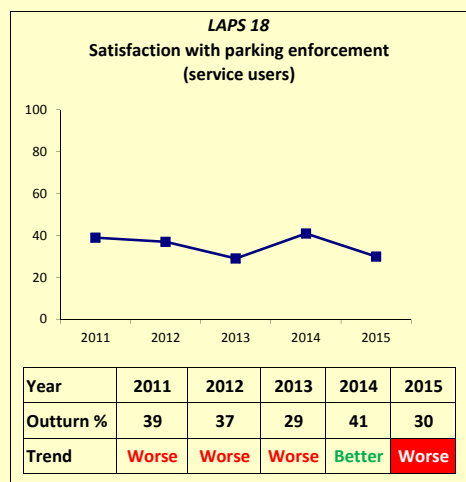
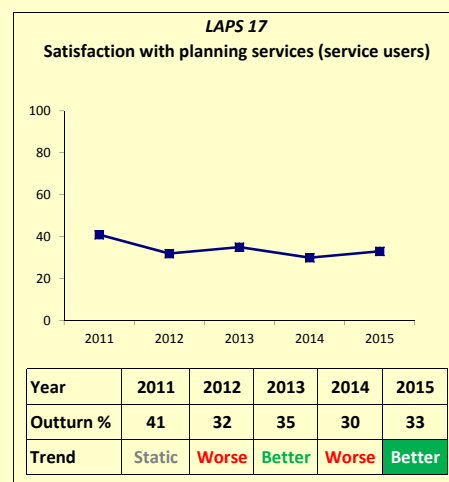
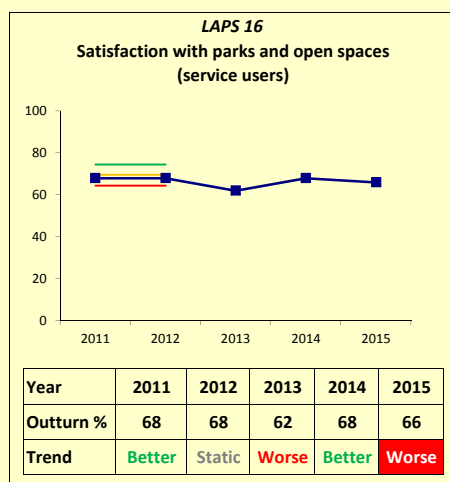
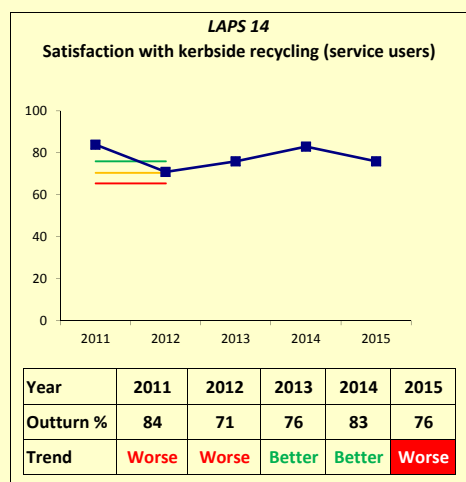
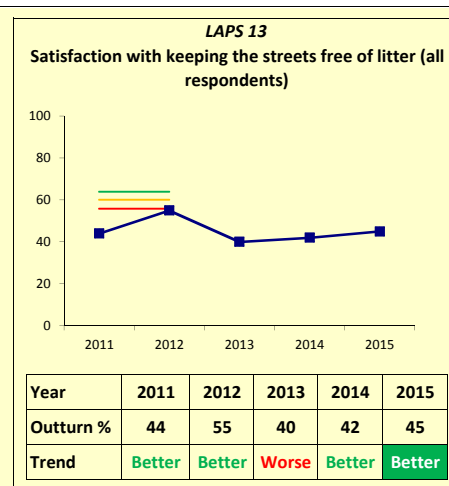
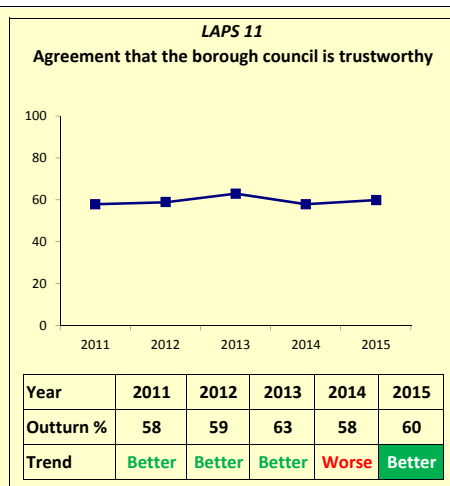
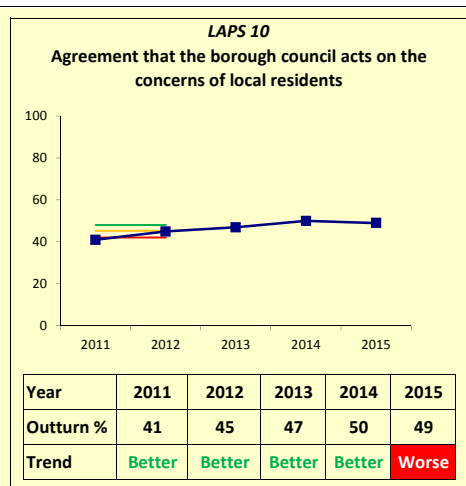
- 5.1 Further information on the survey results for 2015 is available from the Policy Team, and the entire dataset can be downloaded from <http://intranet/council-customer-insight/default.aspx>.

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Green, amber and red bars represent respectively the best quartile, median and worst quartile in the 2008 national dataset.



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