

# **Residents' satisfaction - continuous monitoring**

## **Annual review & trends report**

**November 2010**

## INDEX

page no.

1. Summary.....	2
2. Value of the process.....	2
3. Recommendations.....	3
4. Review of the findings – trends.....	4
5. Other comparisons with the Place survey.....	7
6. Appendix A Background & Methodology .....	10
7. Appendix B Annual review of service work - actions.....	11
8. Appendix C Corporate values table.....	16

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### **1. Summary**

**1.1** The annual programme of consultation was introduced to provide us with a flexible means of testing residents views and satisfaction with living in Aylesbury Vale and our services. It replaced the biennial household survey.

**1.2** Three surveys were conducted in Autumn 2009, Spring and Summer 2010, mailed to households in the Vale and posted on our website. Corporate and service questions were included in each survey. A residents panel was formed and grew as each survey was conducted.

**1.3** Residents satisfaction with living in Aylesbury Vale was tracked and increased with each survey to 88%, up from previous Place survey and BVPI surveys.

**1.4** Residents satisfaction with our performance increased to 66%, 16% higher than the Place survey.

This report covers the key corporate results and identifies any trends from previous surveys. Service actions taken as a result of the survey, are listed in Appendix B.

### **2. Value of the process**

**2.1** The programme gives us the opportunity to track residents views more regularly and be more responsive in adapting to changing perceptions.

**2.2** In the past services have regularly undertaken consultation on an ad hoc basis. Centralising consultation budgets into a central mechanism helps avoid duplication and gives a coordinated approach to both residents and businesses. In the past year, almost all consultation by services has been through this programme, except statutory work.

**2.3** Services have been able to participate in consultation in a more timely manner through this process – rather than the biennial household survey it replaced.

**2.4** Acting on the findings has been key to the success of services use of the programme. The summary of how services involved over the past year have used the survey findings is included in Appendix A, demonstrating that we understand residents' needs better and are able to shape our service delivery to meet them.

### **3 Recommendations**

**3.1** Note the trends emerging.

**3.2** Note the actions from services included in Appendix B.

**3.3 Satisfaction with our performance** - As a corporate action, that each service publish their 'Standards of Service' - post them on their website pages, display them in our Customer Service Centres and any other media they feel appropriate eg Planning Bulletin. With a realistic expectation, residents may be able to judge better whether they are 'satisfied with our performance', and that 'we provide value for money', or not.

**3.4 Value for money** - As a corporate action, that services should work with Communications & Marketing, extending the corporate 'Value for Money' campaign, by promoting the 'cost of service' on their website pages and other relevant media.

**3.5 Corporate Values** - As a corporate action, we should develop a campaign to improve our ratings, sharing these results with staff and reminding them why they are important to us. For example, taking the worst scoring 'value' first '*Providing a great service every time*', greater consideration could be given to improving the customer experience when Corporate Board and senior managers look at redesigning services, with efficiency savings in mind.

And, continue to monitor the Corporate Values using the remaining examples of how we demonstrate them.

**3.6** Agree to the continuation of the consultation programme in 2011/2012, with a minimum of three surveys per year recommended. However, measuring satisfaction with the council will be reviewed by the Business Transformation Sponsor Board before deciding whether to continue to ask this in the next survey.

**3.7** To continue to use and build the residents panel, to be more efficient and minimise survey costs.

**3.8** With efficiencies in mind, to agree to us exploring the possibility of panel sharing with local partners, such as the police and health authorities.

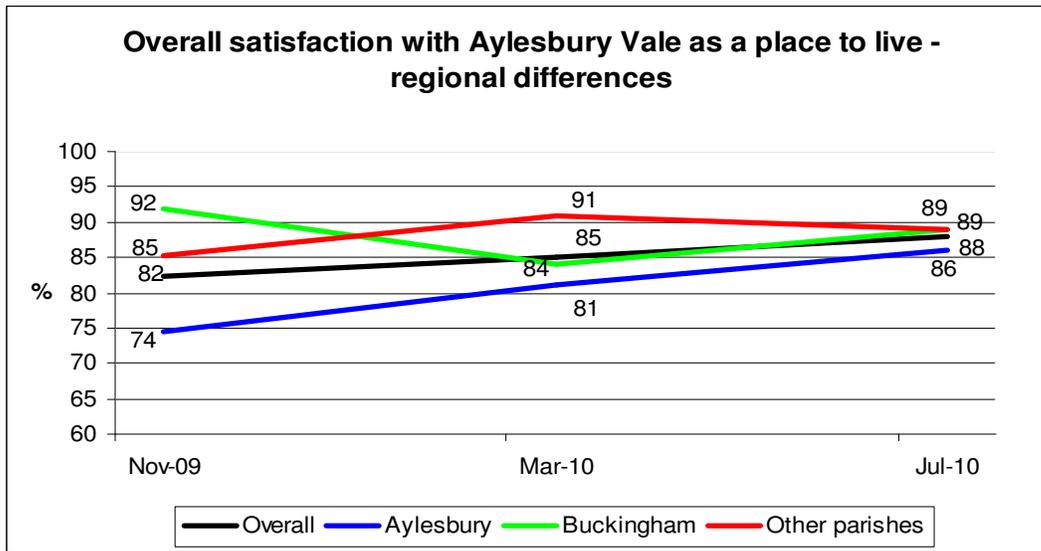
**3.9** Whilst no survey was planned for this autumn (originally, the governments' Place survey was due to take place then), the next survey is scheduled for Feb/March. Topics for further questions are being sought from Corporate Board.

### **4 Review of findings – trends**

**4.1 Satisfaction with Aylesbury Vale as a place to live**

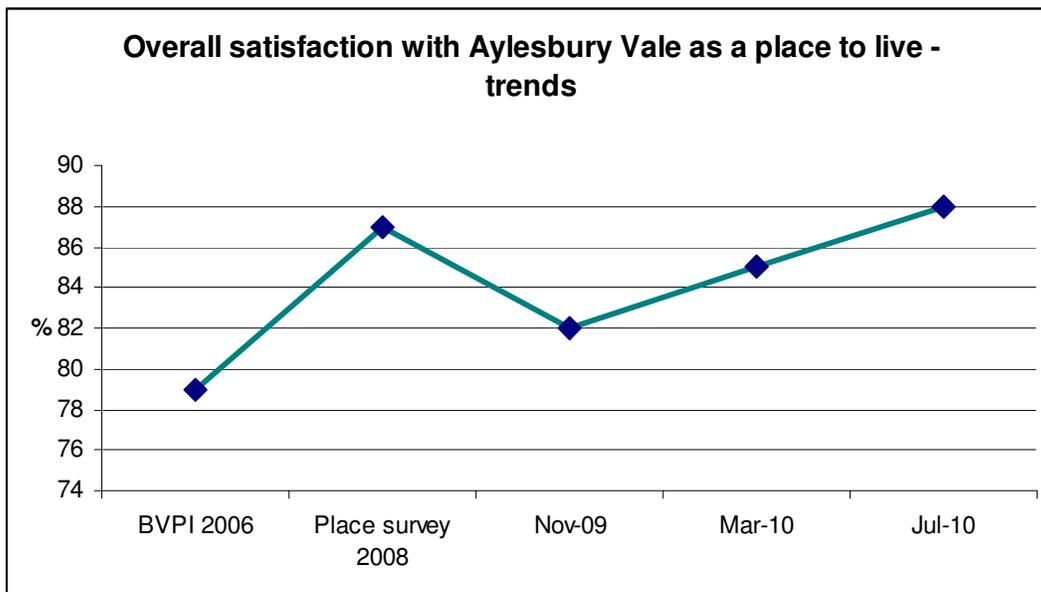
An encouraging trend emerged with overall satisfaction increasing with each survey, +7% from the first to the third survey.

In the March survey there was a downward blip in Buckingham, which normally scores highly. We had added a booster mailing there (which coincided with adverse publicity in the local press over council tax and budget cuts).



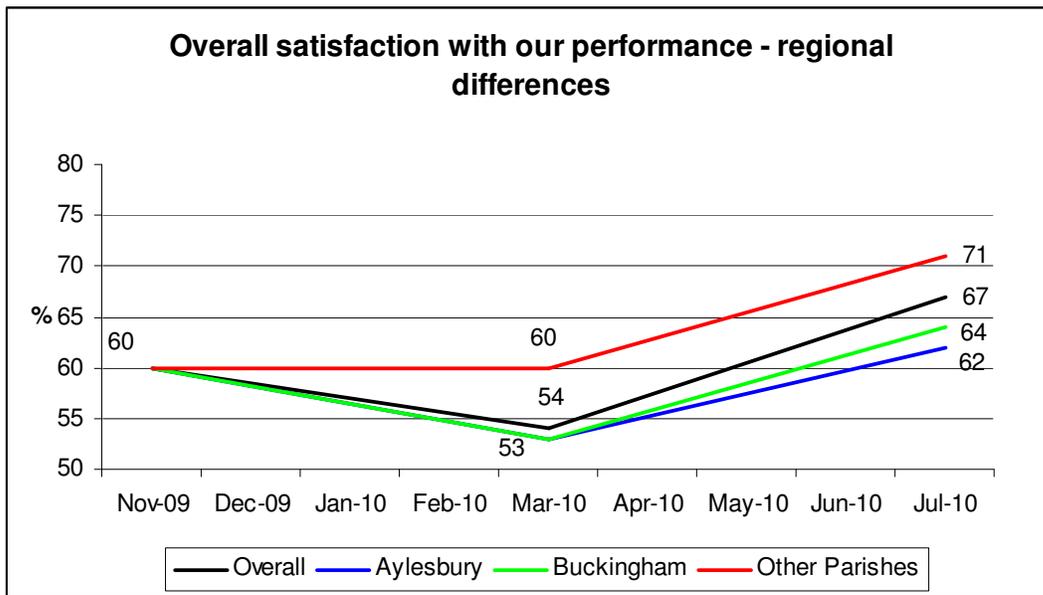
The final figure in July was very similar to the 2008 Place survey, where satisfaction stood at 87%. In the previous 2006 BVPI survey, this scored 80%.

It will be interesting to see if the growing trend continues in future surveys as cuts to budgets take place.



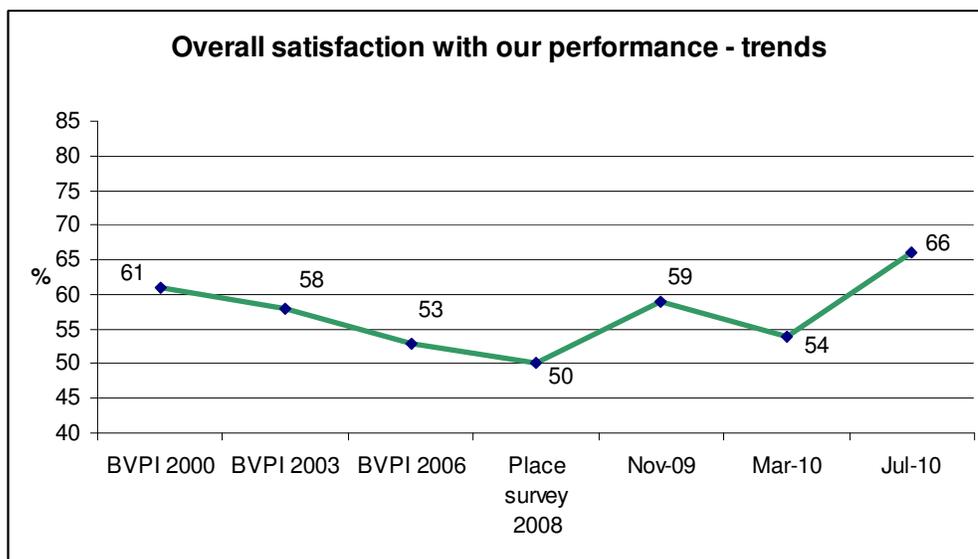
## 4.2 Satisfaction with our performance

It was pleasing to see that the drop in satisfaction in March wasn't repeated in the July survey, and satisfaction increased +7% from it's November base, 59% to 66%. The drop in March may be partly explained by timing of council tax and budget setting publicity.



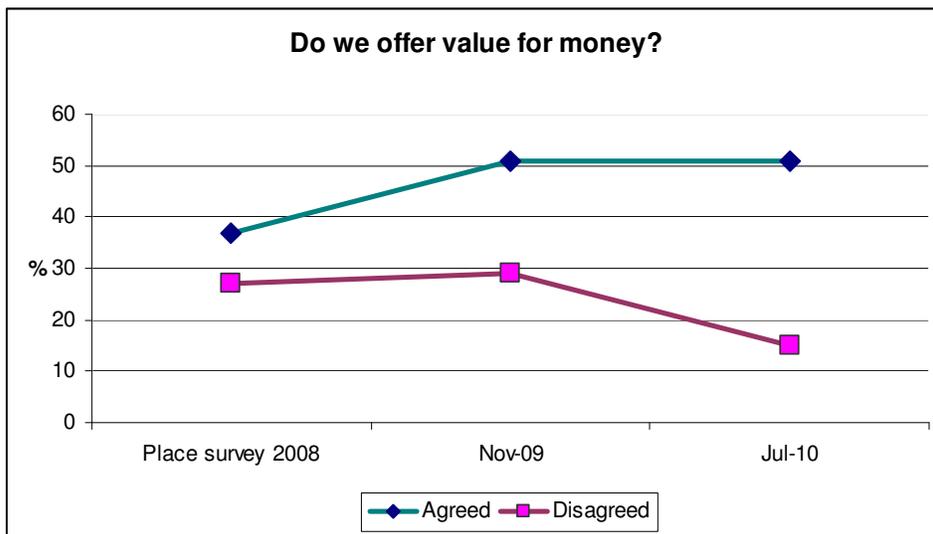
Residents that are the most satisfied continue to be those living in 'other parishes' (including Winslow), where satisfaction rose to 71%, by far the highest satisfaction with our performance score we've recorded in a self-completion survey.

Again, the trend from previous surveys shows our performance improving, up by 16% from 50% we scored in the 2008 Place survey, which followed a declining trend, as the



#### 4.3 Value for money

Overall, 51% of residents agreed that we offer value for money in the July survey – showing no change from November – though showing a marked improvement from the 2008 Place survey where only 37% agreed. (This question was not asked in previous BVPI surveys).



It is encouraging to note that fewer people ‘disagreed’ in the July survey (almost halving to 15% versus 29% in November), but frustrating all the same that despite describing how the total amount of council tax paid we keep, we still find it difficult to convince residents that we offer value for money.

There is still confusion among residents over which council delivers what service, so we may be judged on the performance of our partner authorities, as well as our own in this. This level of understanding is made more complicated for residents, as we collect council tax on behalf of all the other public services providers. Nearly a third, 29% didn’t know we collect this money on behalf of the other authorities.

#### 4.4 Corporate Values – see appendix C

All five corporate values were probed twice in the annual programme. The key differences highlight that our most positive scores are for being ‘*Open and trustworthy*’, averaging at 48%.

Scoring least well was ‘*We will treat people as individuals and with respect*’ where our average score across both examples was 23%. However, both instances of questioning this value were within the first survey, where generally all values scored less positively, (25%; 22%; 22%; and 20%). It would worthwhile probing this value again in a future survey – and at a different time of year - to see if this arrives at a similar conclusion.

The lowest positive score against a single example was under the value ‘*Providing a great service every time*’, where the question asked ‘AVDC design their services around residents known and anticipated needs’, scored 20%. The second time this value was probed, asking ‘AVDC deliver on their promises’ resulted in a positive score of 37%.

- The challenge remains, what can we do for residents for them to think differently about us?

- What actions can be used to demonstrate how we can improve?
- Testing the corporate values on our staff is suggested. Where would they see themselves on this scale?

## 5 Other comparisons with the Place survey

### 5.1 What's important to residents living in Aylesbury Vale

Previous Government's Place and BVPI surveys asked residents what factors makes somewhere a good place to live. We included a similar bank of questions in our November survey.

The following table illustrates, where the services or features were comparable, the top three priorities for residents don't change and consistently score highly:

- Community safety,
- Health services, and
- Clean streets.

Rank	How important are these services provided by AVDC	Which of the following services would you say are most important in making somewhere a good place to live		
		AVDC Survey 2009	Place Survey 2008	BVPI 2006
1st	Making sure the area is a safe place for everyone	Level of crime	Level of crime	Level of crime
2nd	Health services	Health services	Health services	Health services
3rd	Clean streets	Clean streets	Affordable housing	Affordable housing
4th	Parks & open spaces	Affordable housing	Clean streets	Clean streets
5th	Local job prospects	Traffic congestion	Shopping	Traffic congestion
6th	Public transport	Parks & open spaces	Access to nature	Shopping
7th	Traffic congestion	Public transport	Traffic congestion	Access to nature

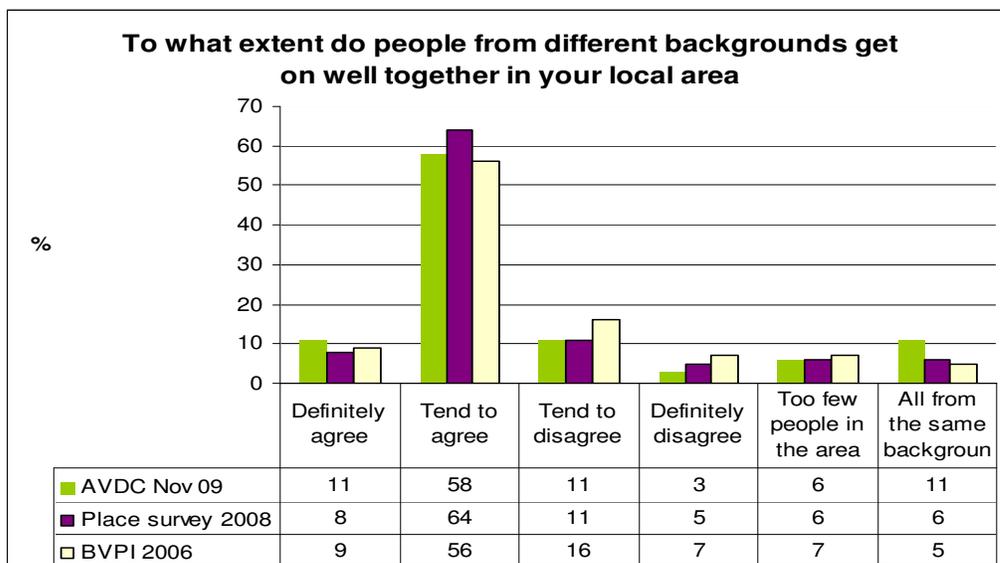
Interestingly, 'affordable housing' didn't feature as highly in this latest survey. This may be a consequence of recent new housing developments including a higher percentage of social housing.

Unsurprisingly, in the current economic climate, local job prospects scored higher than before.

This information may be useful in understanding which cuts to services may be a tipping point in terms of satisfaction with the council and also for helping the administration shape their manifesto.

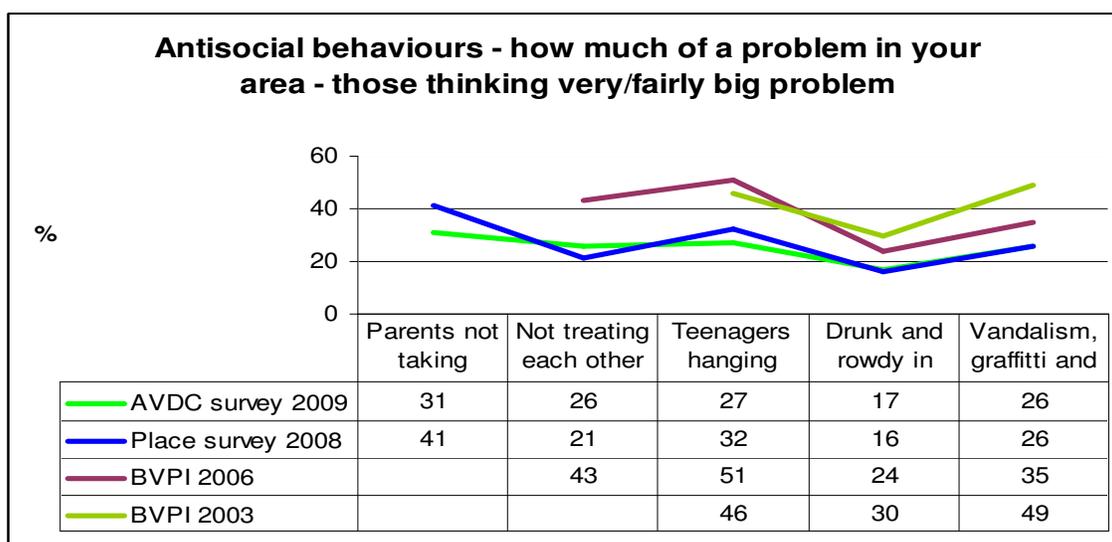
## 5.2 Community cohesion

Those agreeing that **‘people from different backgrounds get on well together’** showed a slight decrease from the Place survey, 72 - 69%. This scores much higher in the Buckingham area than elsewhere , +9%.



## 5.3 Anti social behaviours

Generally speaking, tracking any trends from previous Place or BVPI surveys, show most antisocial behaviours having stayed the same or improved. The exception to this is **‘not treating each other with respect and consideration’** where there was a 5% increase in those thinking it ‘was a big problem’. Conversely, there was a fairly significant improvement, 10%, of those thinking **‘parents aren’t taking responsibility for their children’**, and a 5% improvement in **‘teenagers hanging around streets’**.



*(Gaps in the table indicate where factor wasn't included).*

It would be useful to continue to track these community cohesion questions in future surveys to monitor what impact budget cuts will have on residents perceptions of us, our services and service delivery.

### Background and Methodology

- The annual programme of residents' satisfaction continuous monitoring, of three surveys a year, was designed to help us get closer to residents and to understand better what is important to them.
- We adopted an on-going measurement monitor, which we have used to track our performance using market research principals that are rooted in the idea of delivering 'benefits' - because people are more content when they feel they are receiving 'benefit'.
- In addition, the programme provided the opportunity for individual services to regularly consult with local residents, as service issues arise. In total eight services have been involved throughout the year with 17 different sets of service related questions included across the three stages.
- The three stages were conducted - Autumn 2009, Spring and Summer 2010.
- All surveys were self-completion questionnaire format. The first survey also invited residents to join a newly formed residents panel, to take part in future consultations.

The first stage was distributed by:

- posting on our website, and
- mailed to a random sample of 3000 households across the district.

Thereafter, the survey was distributed to:

- residents who'd joined the newly formed residents panel
  - those residents living in Aylesbury Vale in Bucks CC Resident's Panel,
  - posted on our website, and
  - mailed to 1000 households in the specific areas, the second survey in the Buckingham area, the third in the Winslow area.
- Residents were encouraged to complete the surveys online, of which a growing number do - in the last survey, over a third did.
  - Improving response rates - The order of questions was changed for the last survey in the summer, with the service related questions featured at the start, corporate last. This did seem to increase response rates – though it is often the issues consulted upon that has the maximum affect.

Other ways of improving the look of the survey will be developed so it always looks interesting and different from any previous surveys.

### **Annual review of service work - Service actions**

#### **1. Council tax leaflet**

Advertising in the leaflet did not appear to have any adverse effect on whether residents would read it or not.

Residents wanted to see benchmarking information, comparisons with other authorities, details of Councillors expenses, and information relating to council salaries and pensions included in the leaflet.

Whilst there is not space to include any extra information as such, particularly as potentially more space will be given up for advertising in the next leaflet to reduce budgets, we may be able to include web links to this. Whilst consideration will be given to residents views, this would have to be generally approved by all partners.

#### **2. Customer Service Centre**

a. The survey asked residents what other organisations they would like to see share our Customer Service Centre in the future, mentioning that this could be a joint venture with Buckinghamshire County Council, and gave an example of 'the Police. The results were primarily used a part of the outline business case for more joined up Customer Service working with Bucks CC. This project is no longer being progressed, although officers continue to maintain work in relation to 'Tell Us Once'. The newly formed Business Transformation Project looking at the council's service delivery will be able to make use of this data.

b. Results from the survey about our performance was displayed and shared with Customers at 66 High Street. Clearly the economic downturn has increased demand, and in some cases, waiting times at 66 High Street have increased, but still remained within performance targets.

As part of the Business Transformation Programme, we are now working with some back office departments to 'pull' extra resources to the front end during busier periods and minimise the waiting times.

We continue to carefully monitor waiting times and review arrangements periodically.

#### **3. Democratic services - making a complaint about a local councillor**

Following the survey, publicity for the process was checked to ensure it was accessible.

However, since then the coalition government has announced proposals to abolish the current standards regime and new guidelines for councils to work with will be published formally next year.

#### **4. District Link / Aylesbury Vale & County Times**

We used the findings from the second and third surveys to compare how readers find the new joint magazine compared to the previous District Link. We had concerns that

some of the changes to the magazine (such as the inclusion of advertising, changes to content and design) may have had a detrimental effect on our readers' enjoyment and readability of the magazine.

We can now say that the changes have been well-received by our readers. Although we wouldn't wish to pre-empt any decisions to be made by CADEX or members, I would be happy to recommend that we continue with the joint magazine, from the viewpoint of reader satisfaction.

To carry out this consultation on its own would have been prohibitively expensive

## **5. Eye opening campaign**

In last November's survey, 38% of respondents had seen the eye opening posters and of these, 46% felt they had learnt something new. From this, we can extrapolate that posters in just two, free locations in Aylesbury town centre had the potential to inform approximately 20% of residents.

This confirms the value and impact of both the campaign itself and key poster sites as a communications medium. In response to this, we will continue to use and extend the campaign, both through similar, no-cost poster sites and in other media, such as the literature and exhibition materials we have produced over the past year.

Furthermore, as 88% of those who had not seen the posters were from the Buckingham area and 69% were from other parishes in the Vale, we are looking for ways to fill this gap and take this campaign into these areas. (One example of this is through regular coverage in the Aylesbury Vale and County Times). We are also considering opportunities such as an exhibition stand at the open day at the Buckingham Area Office in January 2011.

## **6. Housing services**

We are pleased to see that 62% of respondents felt they had been dealt with very or fairly well, but there is still room for improvement. We have introduced a new Customer Satisfaction Survey form, which is available to be completed in both paper format and online, as this will help us to continue to monitor the level of satisfaction. These survey forms will be passed across to the Head of Housing Needs & Advice if there are any complaints about the service received, and the customer has provided their contact details. Returned forms will also be monitored as they come back in, both online and hard copies.

We have also updated our website and produced some more information leaflets covering all of the housing services that a customer can access, eg. advice on homelessness, advice on housing options, advice on housing debt advice etc, which we are in process of uploading to our internet site.

In relation to the younger people contacting the service for debt advice, within the Housing Youth Pack that we produce we have included a page with a budget planner after advice from our Housing Debt Advisors.

## **7. Leisure centres**

Whilst user feedback already takes place on an ongoing basis, the surveys highlighted the issues for non-users. Actions taken as a result of both sources include:

**a. Activities** – an increased range of classes are now being offered, including dance and exercise such as Zumba and Polenastics, however, performance monitoring routinely takes place to ensure patronage levels are maintained. Faltering classes are provided with assistance and where no increase in attendance is achieved, the classes are replaced. Industry monitoring is ongoing to ensure that last trends are catered for.

**b. Changes to pricing packages at Aqua Vale and Swan Pool** are continually reviewed, likewise AVCT newsletters. Fees, charges and membership structures are also compared to those of competitors in order to remain competitive and aid retention.

**c. The coffee shop and catering facilities** have been improved. Time and effort has been placed on improvements within the Coffee Shop in terms of not only providing new tables and chairs earlier this year, but also staff training and awareness. AVDC's Environmental Health Officers have recognised the Centres efforts, by awarding the coffee shop with five stars (highest achievement) from the 'Scores on the Doors' campaign.

**d. Better transport links** have been sought with colleagues in Bucks County Council, we have experienced resistance to providing a bus service to Aqua Vale. Direct liaison with the Bus Service also proved fruitless as it was stated that the given route that passes in close proximity to the Aqua Vale has no scope for an additional 'drop off' point due to tight time restrictions placed on the current route. Despite a valid business case being presented in relation to the centre footfall and the opportunity to reduce domestic vehicular transport to the centre.

**e. Improvements to changing facilities and car parking** are part of the major development proposals for Aqua Vale. This capital programme is subject to both planning permissions and funding. Cabinet are being asked for acceptance of the project in November 2010. Planning applications are to be submitted to AVDC's Planning Officers in November 2010 which takes account of the changing facilities and car park arrangements.

## **8. Parking services**

**a. Comments about cleanliness** – the car parks are regularly cleaned and we are happy with the standard of cleaning. However, since residents say it is an issue, an audit of all car parks will be undertaken to check for general untidiness, scruffy notice boards etc. We will act on any results and also feedback any possible areas for improvement to other partner organisations where appropriate, eg Aylesbury/ Buckingham Town Councils.

**b. Security** –eight of our car parks have ‘Safer car park’ awards and all the multi-storey car parks have CCTV cameras. We are developing a communications plan and publicity campaign to reassure users that we operate a safe environment for them to use. Assistance from colleagues in Communications & Marketing in this matter will be sought.

**c. Civic Centre car park** – clearly remains a firm favourite with users. We need to develop a strategy to encourage users to develop an allegiance with another car park in the town. This is particularly important as location, eg being nearest the shops, is much more important to users than we believed and previous surveys suggested. We have a number of good car parks within the town centre that have capacity to accommodate greater usage that must be promoted. A comprehensive communications plan for the demolition of the Civic Centre, including the car park, has been drafted that takes into account these issues.

The survey was very useful to Parking services, providing the opportunity to respond to customer feedback. Results will be shared with users. The service did not have the budget to undertake this exercise independently.

## **9. Recycling**

The business review of the refuse and recycling service will take into account residents views on all the different aspects of the recycling service from this survey, and feedback in due course. This review is currently underway and is scoping the possibility of:

- Increasing the number of materials collected to include cardboard
- Provide residents with a wheeled bin for the collection of recycle to simplify the collection process for residents
- Moving to a fully comingled collection to allow for glass to be collected 2 weekly instead of 4 weekly.

Bucks County Council are responsible for providing disposal outlets for ‘organic waste’, therefore we will continue to work with BCC with the long term aim of providing a garden waste collection service.

Changes to the recycling collection service form part of the proposals laid out in the Waste Transformation project, with the overall aim of decreasing costs of the service, maximising efficiency, improving recycling rates and improving customer satisfaction.

## **10. Text alerts**

The key finding from the survey was the need for more promotion of the service. Whilst there is no budget for a big publicity campaign this at present, we will continue to press services to encourage more customers to sign up eg Leisure and Refuse.

We now have more than 5,500 subscriptions, so it is growing steadily and we will continue to promote it as any opportunities arise, such as in the Aylesbury and County Times.

## **11. Town Centre events**

In the past we have consulted residents at each event, but not consulted the wider public within Aylesbury Vale. The key findings from the last survey suggest that 55% don't come to our events, 45% of whom say the range of events doesn't hold any appeal for them.

From consultation at events themselves, feedback through the retail study and the Tourist Information Centre, we believe our events have broad appeal and are varied, so would welcome any other feedback from residents. Further probing in future surveys would help us understand non-attendee residents needs better. Any potential changes could be built into future planning and would be closely monitored to ensure we were delivering good value to all residents.

We will be reviewing the potential of social networking sites with a view to extending our publicity and advertising next year. Since we already advertise extensively, covering a wide range of local outlets, feedback from all residents, particularly those living outside Aylesbury as to where they would prefer to see events advertised, would ensure we are getting our message to a wider audience

## **12. Website sponsorship**

Following the survey, where 69% thought it was a good idea for our website to carry advertising and 80% said that advertising would make no difference to their usage, Corporate Board agreed that we should seek sponsorship for our website from a company that compliments our services.

Colleagues are planning to meet with Chiltern Railways soon to discuss this opportunity and will feedback in due course.

## **13. Winslow office**

The survey findings are helping us to measure usage and success of the new office following the move into Winslow library, and accurately plan staffing for Winslow Office from April 2011.

46% said that community safety advice and 36% said that housing surgeries would be useful to them. Discussions have been held with services to arrange surgeries in the new office location, and a community safety event was held on the 14 September 2010 in Buckingham and another one will follow on the 1 December. Housing surgeries will commence from Jan 2011. Surgeries will be advertised locally and take up will be closely monitored and will be reviewed at the end of quarter 4.

**Corporate Values**

The grid below shows the *net* scores on how residents see the value in actions from AVDC, (net = positive score minus negative score).

There are two values where residents positively agree or where there is less disagreement with:

- ‘Be open and trustworthy’, where at almost half see and feel this from the AVDC,
- ‘Finding ways of doing things at less cost’, where there is lower overall positive score and higher numbers remaining neutral.

Value and statements, agreement with the following statement	Net residents agree % (those agree – disagree)
<b>Value: We will treat people as individuals and with respect</b>	
AVDC recognise that individual needs vary and treat residents accordingly	5
AVDC listen to each resident, and do not make assumptions about their needs	-2
<b>Value: Plan for the future</b>	
AVDC have a good understanding of residents, their different communities and their different needs	-10
AVDC involve local communities in major decisions that affect us and the future of the district	-4
<b>Value: Provide a great service every time</b>	
AVDC design their services around residents known and anticipated needs	-17
AVDC deliver on their promises	20
<b>Value: Be open and trustworthy</b>	
AVDC make sure that residents are well informed about Council decisions and the services they are entitled to	24
AVDC make it easy for us to contact them and get the services we need	36
<b>Value: Find ways of doing things at less cost</b>	
AVDC are continually improving by providing higher quality, faster and cheaper services	6
AVDC looks at new ways of working and giving value for money	12