

REPORT FOR CENTRAL SERVICES POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19 OCTOBER 2009

NI 4 – INFLUENCING DECISIONS

ABOUT NI 4

National Indicator 4 is ‘the percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area’.

This is collected once every couple of years by the Place Survey. The Place Survey is a postal survey of a random sample of the adult population. It is carried out to standards set by the Government.

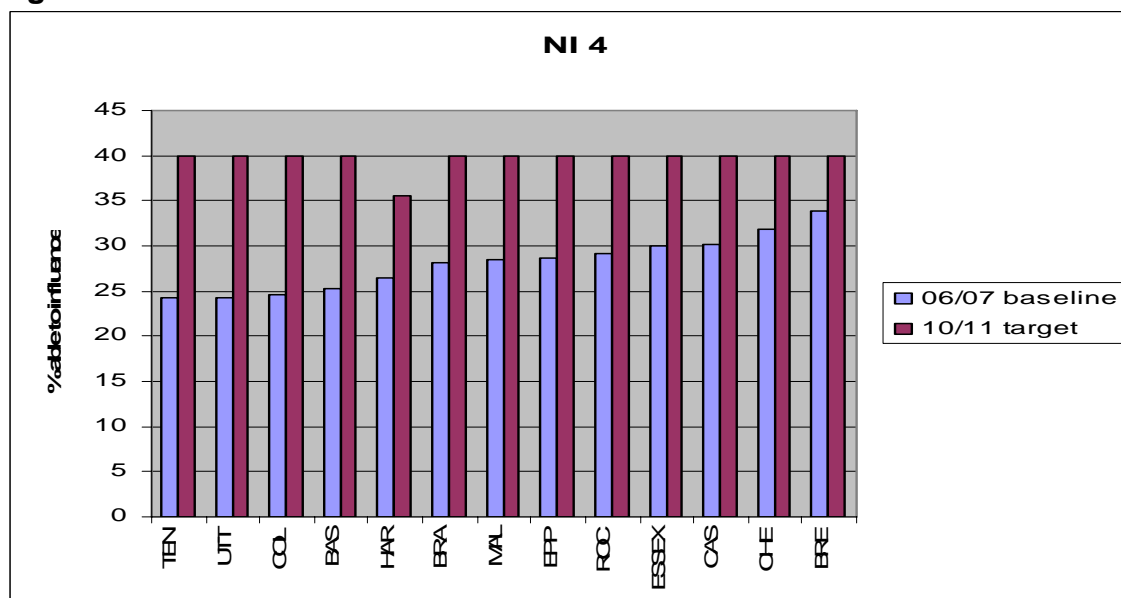
In the intervening period, Essex County Council uses its Tracker Surveys to monitor progress on this and other performance indicators.

The question is about one’s ability to influence any decisions that affect the local area, ie, it is not necessarily about the county council or indeed local government.

The original baseline for Essex as a whole in 2006/07 was 30%. The target for 2010/11 was 40%, with an interim target for 2008/09 was 33%.

Figure 1 gives details of the baselines and targets for Essex districts as well as the county as a whole.

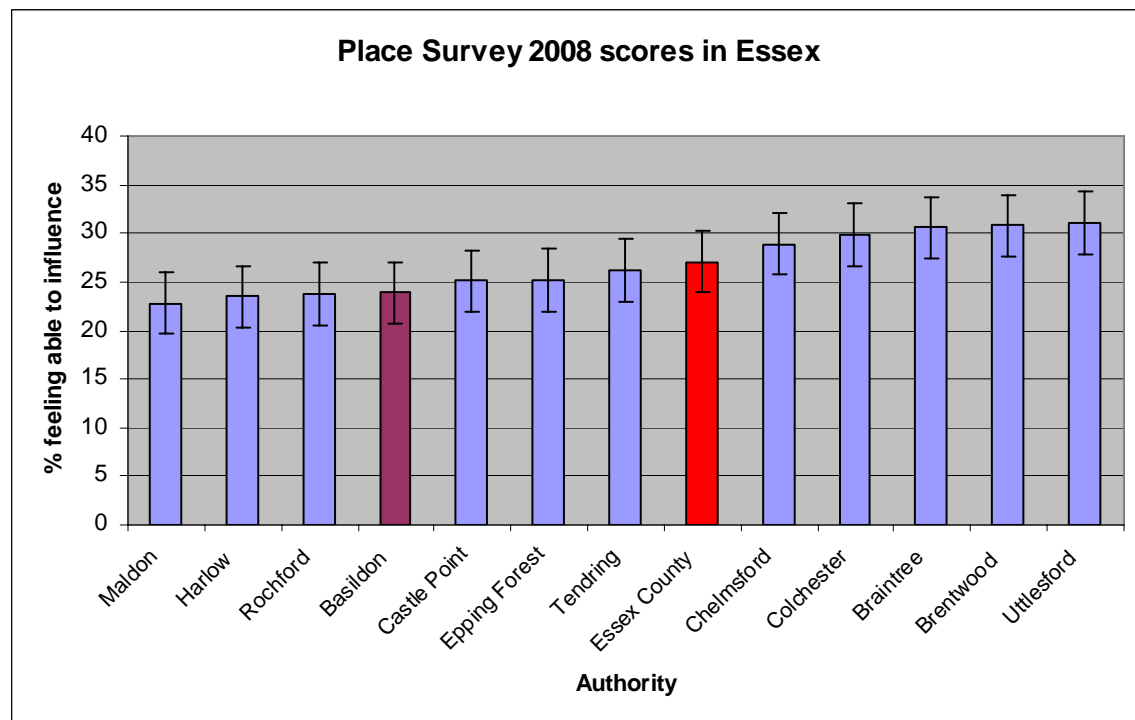
Figure 1



PERFORMANCE – TRENDS

Figure 2 gives the most reliable recent data for the position in Essex and its districts. This comes from the Place Survey in Autumn 2008. In this survey, Essex scored 27.1%.

Figure 2



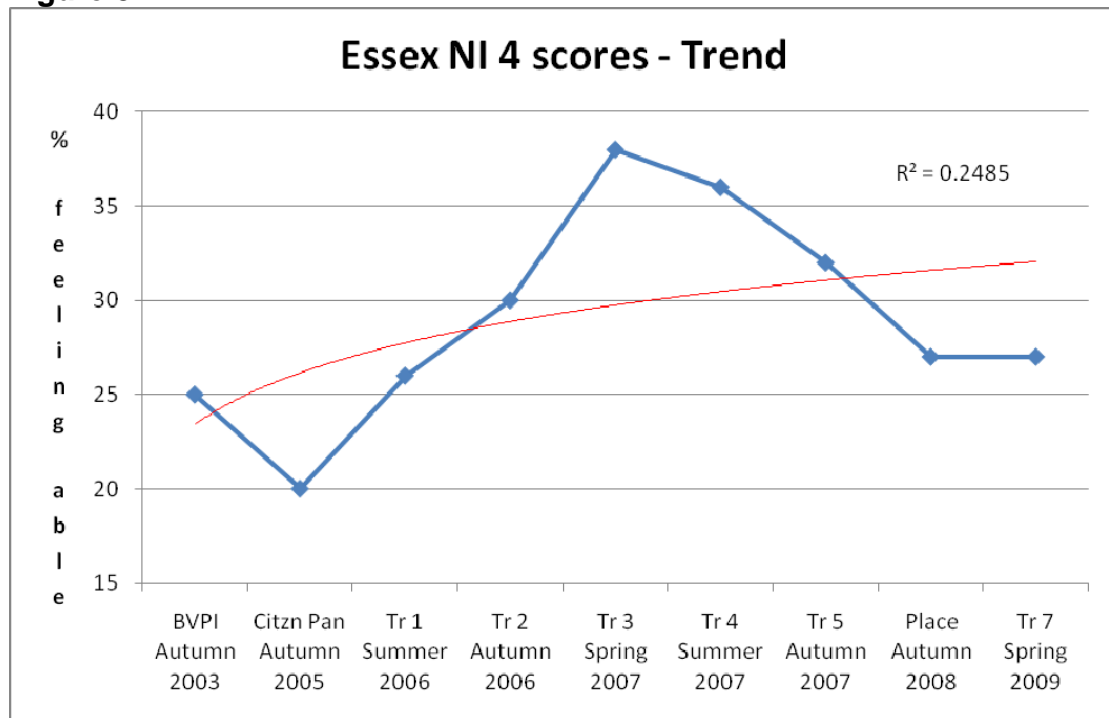
There is a more recent measurement for Essex as a whole. In the spring of 2009, the Tracker 7 Survey produced a score of 26.6%. As this is within the margin of error, it suggests no change since the Place Survey.

Figure 3 shows the trend over the last six years.

The very high scores for Trackers 3 to 5 may have been influenced by other neighbouring questions in the surveys. The 11% point fall in scores over the last couple of years is nevertheless very disappointing. Some of this may be due to extraneous factors such as the economic down-turn.

Despite the fall in scores, the best fitting realistic trend line (shown in red on the graph) remains upwards; and we hope that the graph is indeed levelling out now at about 27%.

Figure 3



COMPARATIVE DATA

Figure 4 shows national data on NI 4 from the Place Survey 2008. Essex is in the lower quartile with a score of 27.1%.

Figure 4

Type	Min	Max	Mean	St Dev	Min	Max
UA	20.9	35.3	27.89	3.31	Redcar and Cleveland	Luton
Mets	22.1	34	27.17	3.21	Doncaster	Manchester
London	24.8	45.7	35.16	4.69	Havering	Newham
Districts	28.16	38.9	28.16	3.29	Gosport	Cambridge
Counties	24.3	32.3	28.2	1.71	Derbyshire	Norfolk

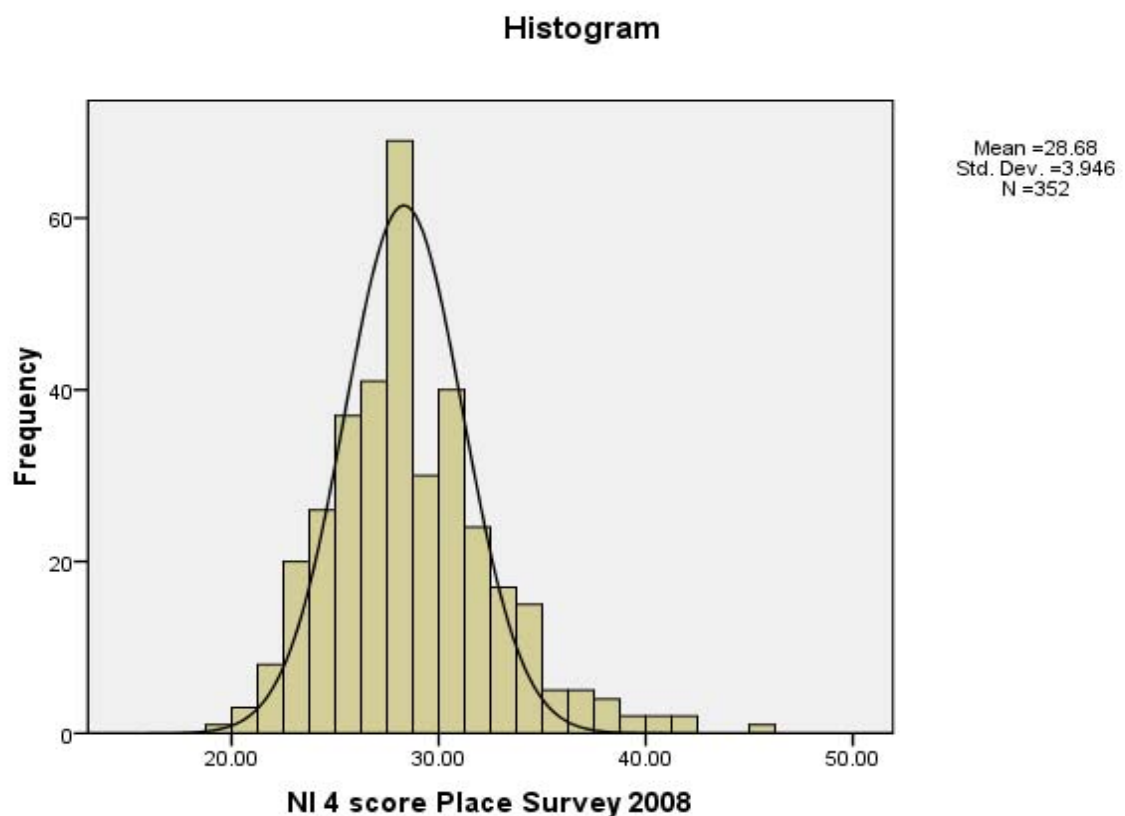
The highest scoring locality in the country – Newham – stood at 45.7%. This figure is actually lower than the maximum one from the 2006 Best Value Survey, when the City of London stood at 51%.

The London boroughs usually have significantly higher scores than other types of authority. This is clear from Figure 5, which shows the distribution of NI 4 scores across the whole country in the 2008 Place Survey. The London boroughs stand in the long right hand tail of Figure 5. It is uncommon for any other kind of authority to score above 40%.

The best scoring county at present is Norfolk with a figure of 32.3%.

This comparative data suggests that Essex's target for 2010/11 of 40% is actually quite ambitious.

Figure 5



WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO INFLUENCE

In the Tracker 3 survey in Spring 2007, we asked people what types of issue they most wanted to have some influence over. Figure 6 below shows the percentage who mentioned each topic.

Figure 6

- **Lowering crime – 44%**
- **Recycling etc – 40%**
- **Access to NHS – 31%**
- **Public transport – 31%**
- **Access to parks – 26%**
- **Good road links – 25%**
- **Schools – 22%**
- **Services for older and vulnerable people – 22%**
- **Shopping facilities – 22%**
- **Access to sport and leisure facilities – 19%**
- **Affordable housing – 18%**
- **Cultural facilities – 15%**
- **Youth services – 11%**
- **Business and jobs – 10%**
- **Libraries – 9%**
- **Childcare & nurseries – 8%**
- **Fire safety – 5%**

WHAT PUTS PEOPLE OFF

In the same survey, we asked people what made them feel unable to have an influence. Figure 7 gives the answers.

Figure 7

- **I don't have time – 44%**
- **I don't know enough about it – 33%**
- **I don't think it will make any difference – 30%**
- **I don't know how to get involved – 16%**
- **I'm too old – 11%**
- **I'm not really interested – 7%**
- **Prefer the Council do it – 7%**
- **I don't think they'll let me – 6%**
- **I don't have the skills – 6%**
- **It will cost me money – 5%**
- **No need to, happy now – 5%**

POSSIBLE CAUSES OF THE RESULTS

General influences

Academic research suggests that two main factors are at work in NI 4. Both of these could have been adversely affected by the growing sense of economic gloom during the fieldwork period of the two recent surveys.

The first factor is whether people feel they have the personal resources to exercise any influence. This covers self-esteem, confidence and education. There is also a clear relationship with personal income. Participation in the voluntary sector also increases this sense of 'internal efficacy'.

The second factor is whether people feel that public decision-takers take any notice of them. The literature suggests that this is influenced by:

- Age, education and income
- Community participation
- Political interest or knowledge
- Political partisanship
- Being in the majority
- Agreeing with public policy
- Electoral and campaign participation
- Attention to news media
- Critical news reports
- Government performance

Key Drivers

The public engagement team has identified some key drivers for 'feeling able to influence decisions'. Our regression model, which is based on combined tracker data, accounts for about 28% of the pattern of variation in NI 4 scores.

This model - taken together with actual indicator data - suggests that the decline in performance over the last couple of years might be due to:

- a view that information on decision-taking is harder to find, and
- falling service satisfaction scores.

The fall might have been bigger but for improvements in some place-based scores.

Figure 7 gives an overview of the Essex 'key drivers' model. The biggest single factor is 'information on how to get involved' which is given a score of 100 and the rest have been assigned a proportionate score to show their relative importance.

Figure 7

- **Information on how to get involved in local decision taking – 100**
- **Kept informed about benefits and services provided by ECC – 85**
- **Satisfaction with planning – 53**
- **Satisfaction with LEA – 37**
- **Age – 30**
- **Information on what council is doing to tackle ASB – 30**
- **Safe outside after dark – 29**
- **Information on what council spends its money on – 25**
- **How well people from different backgrounds get on well together – 23**

Information is clearly the most important driver. Between Tracker 2 (which was in fact the BVPI Survey 2006) and Place Survey 2008, the 'information for decision making' score fell by 10%. Over the same period, the NI 4 score fell by 3% points.

The significance of 'satisfaction with planning and LEA' may suggest that people may have long memories for consultations on major projects of salience to them or their families.

FUTURE ACTION

There is an NI 4 action plan under the LAA which focuses on:

- Agreeing shared standards for public engagement across the Partnership
- Making 'Engage Essex' widely available as a portal and resource centre for public engagement
- 'On the street' engagement with LSPs in localities chosen on the basis of local knowledge and statistical evidence
- Ensuring agencies join up to act on local views
- Improving feedback to communities including a concerted approach to good news stories through the mass media

Action is in hand on all of these points.

However, more effort does need to be given to improving information and feedback to Essex citizens. This will be a particular focus over the remainder of the LAA period.

Members may well have views on how these aspects of public service could be improved.