

A. Overall Priorities for Improvement

The Quality of Life Survey 2005

There have been two previous Quality of Life in Cheshire Surveys conducted in 1995 and again in 2000. The results of these surveys have been used extensively by the County Council and partner organisations to inform policy development, service planning and bids for external funding. The 2005 Quality of Life Survey has been supported by the Cheshire Partnership.

The Quality of Life Survey 2005 will monitor changes in public perceptions of quality of life priorities. These will feed into development of the Corporate Plan and the review of the Cheshire Community Strategy. It will also inform a wide range of public sector planning responsibilities where public perceptions are essential. These include the Community Safety Strategies, Best Value Performance Plans, Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Local Agenda 21, Local Transport Plans, Waste Management, Social Exclusion, Regeneration, Health Improvement and Lifelong Learning.

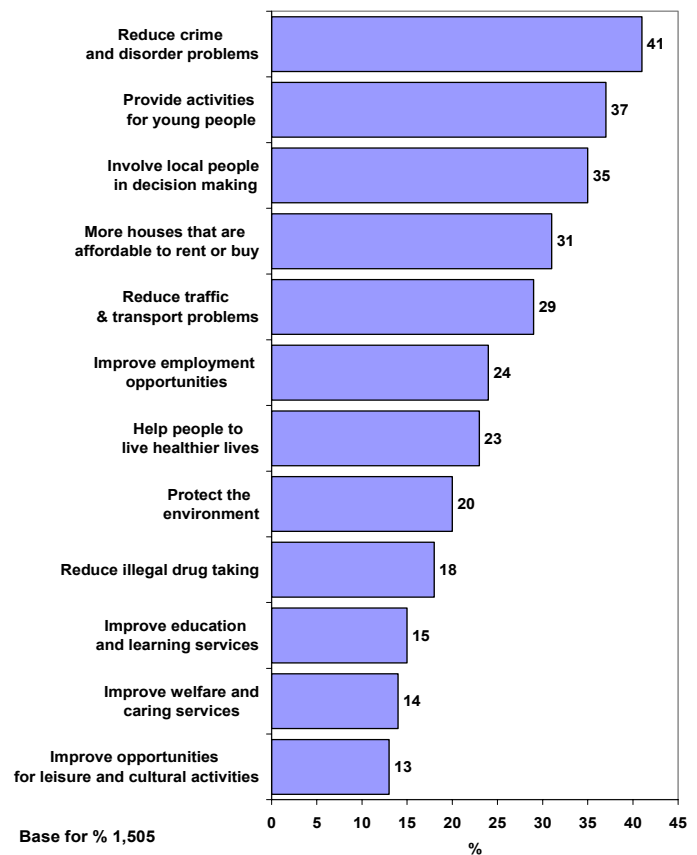
The Survey

The sample base for the survey was the Citizen's Panel (Cheshire's Voice). In Congleton, Crewe & Nantwich and Ellesmere Port & Neston districts the sample was enhanced by recruiting participants in selected wards in the districts. The sample was enhanced also to include a representative number of young people aged between 14 and 17. Interviews were completed with 1,505 people during January to March 2005.

Overall Priorities

The chart below shows twelve priority actions for improving the quality of life in one's local area. Respondents were asked to rank these actions in order of importance, indicating their top 3 priorities for their local area. The percentage of respondents who placed each action in their top 3 priorities is a measure of the relative local importance of that action. The results for Cheshire are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Overall Priorities for Improving Quality of Life
Intensity of Feeling (% in top 3 priorities)



Note that from 1st April 1998, Halton and Warrington became Unitary Authorities and no longer form part of Cheshire County. Results from the 1995 Quality of Life Survey therefore include Halton and Warrington, whereas the surveys in 2000 and 2005 exclude them.

Key points from the analysis of overall priorities showed that:

'Reducing crime & disorder' remains the top priority for improving quality of life. However, it was less dominant as the main priority than before (41% in top 3, compared with 61% in 1995). All but one social group of respondents ranked 'reducing crime & disorder' as their top priority, the exception being those respondents in social class AB (managerial, professional) who placed it third. It was ranked first in all districts, except Crewe & Nantwich. It was also ranked 1st by urban and 3rd by rural dwellers

'Provide activities for young people' has maintained the second rank position as in the 2000 survey (ranked 7th in 1995). This was ranked first by young people aged 14-17

'Involve local people in decisions that affect them', first introduced in 2000, has proved to be a higher priority in 2005, ranked 3rd, than in 2000 when it was ranked 5th. This issue was ranked in the top 3 by over a third of respondents

'More houses that are affordable for people to rent or buy' has become more significant, ranked 4th in 2005 (=6th in 2000 and 9th in 1995) This ranking is consistent across all groups

'Reduce illegal drug taking' has fallen in priority, ranked 9th in 2005 compared with 3rd in 2000 and 2nd in 1995. This option was ranked in the top 3 by less than one in five respondents in 2005 (18%). It was, however, ranked 3rd by young people, with 30% placing this issue in their top 3.

There were some local differences in priorities:

'Provide activities for young people' was the top priority for Crewe and Nantwich district, with 43% placing this priority in their top 3.

'Reduce traffic and transport problems' was a higher priority for Macclesfield district, ranked 2nd with 40% placing this priority in their top 3 (ranked 5th overall in Cheshire)

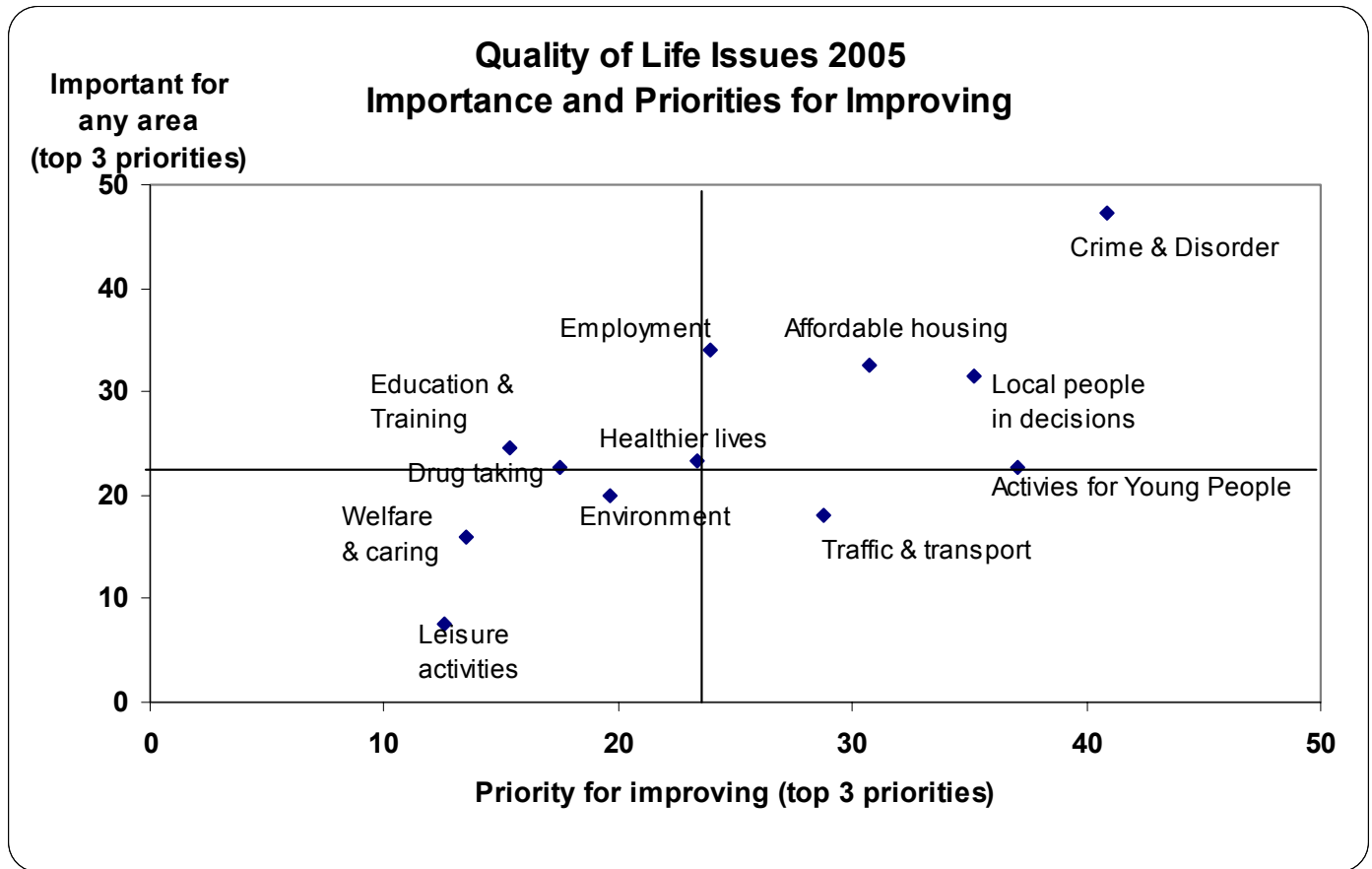
'Help people to live healthier lives' was a greater priority for older people, ranked 3rd and =2nd respectively by 65-74 and 75+ age groups. This priority was ranked 7th overall.

Table 1 - Priorities for 2005, 2000 & 1995 by Intensity of Feeling (% top 3 priorities) and Rank

Priority Options 2005	2005 (% top 3)	2005 (Rank)	2000 (% top 3)	2000 (Rank)	1995 (% top 3)	1995 (Rank)
Reduce crime and disorder problems	41	(1)	46	(1)	61	(1)
Provide activities for young people	37	(2)	32	(2)	25	(7)
Involve local people in decision making	35	(3)	27	(5)	*	(-)
More houses that are affordable to rent or buy	31	(4)	22	(6=)	19	(9)
Reduce traffic & transport problems	29	(5)	22	(6=)	21	(8)
Improve employment opportunities	24	(6)	28	(4)	27	(6)
Help people to live healthier lives	23	(7)	20	(8=)	*	(-)
Protect the environment	20	(8)	21	(10)	30	(4)
Reduce illegal drug taking	18	(9)	29	(3)	34	(2)
Improve education and learning services	15	(10)	20	(8=)	28	(5)
Improve welfare and caring services	14	(11)	17	(11)	32	(3)
Improve opportunities for leisure and cultural activities	13	(12)	16	(12)	11	(10)

Note: Some changes have been made to the wording during the series although they relate to similar topics. In 1995, 11 options were provided and a further option on public transport had been removed altogether.

Figure 2 – Quality of Life Issues 2005: Importance and Priorities for Improving



Importance and Priorities for Improving

In addition to questions about priorities for improving their quality of life, respondents were also asked about how important these aspects of life were to them. A comparison between degree of importance and priority for improvement could give some powerful indication of the impact that action by public agencies could have on public perception of quality of life. As Figure 2 above shows, some topics receive high scores on importance and priority for improvement.

Activities in the top right quadrant of the figure indicate those areas of service where people see action is needed in what they consider to be the more important aspects of their lives. These are:

- ‘Reducing crime and disorder’
- ‘Affordable housing’
- ‘Involving local people in decisions that affect them’
- ‘Providing activities for young people’.

In terms of a consensus of where people want to see changes made, this analysis provides quite a powerful

message, particularly for crime and disorder and local governance

At the other end of the spectrum, we find activities that are seen as less important to people and which are not considered as high priority for improvement. These include:

- ‘Leisure activities’
- ‘Welfare and caring’.

Priorities for Action

Crime and Disorder

The 3 priority actions to reduce crime and disorder were seen as:

- ‘More visible police presence’ (71% in top 3)
- ‘More things for young people to do’ (44% in top 3)
- ‘Tackling the drugs problem’ (34% in top 3)
- ‘Court sentencing providing a more effective deterrent’ (34% in top 3).

In 2000, 82% placed **'more visible police presence'** in their top 3 (ranked 1st) and 48% placed **'tackling the drugs problem'** in their top 3 (ranked 2nd). Although the rankings are similar to 2005 for both, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents placing these actions in their top 3 (71% and 34% respectively for 2005).

Illegal Drug Taking

Priorities for actions to deal with drugs were:

- **'Stricter punishment for illegal drug dealers'** (72% in top 3)
- **'Drug awareness education in school'** (57% in top 3)
- **'Educating parents about illegal drugs'** (38% in top 3).

Young people (14-17 age group) had less concern with **'drug awareness education in school'** (38% in top 3, ranked 3rd) and more with **'stricter punishment for illegal drug users'** (42% in top 3, ranked 2nd; 29% for Cheshire, ranked 5th).

'Stricter punishment for illegal drug dealers' and **'drug awareness education in school'** stood out above the other actions as ways of reducing illegal drug taking, as they had done so also in 2000 (with similar percentages).

Young People

The 3 main priorities for action were:

- **'More youth centres for meeting people of their own age'** (58% in top 3)
- **'Make leisure facilities more affordable'** (55% in top 3)
- **'Listen to young people more'** (43% in top 3).

Young people (14-17 age group) had less support for **'more youth centres'** (40% in top 3, ranked 4th).

These 3 priority actions received the same rankings in 2000 with similar percentages.

Local Environment

The main priorities for improving the local environment were:

- **'Provide more recycling facilities and kerbside collections'** (44% in top 3)
- **'Reduce industrial air pollution'** (35% in top 3)
- **'Clean the streets more regularly'** (34% in top 3).

In Ellesmere Port & Neston, **'reduce industrial pollution'** (59% in top 3) was significantly the highest priority action.

Interestingly, the action **'stricter enforcement of penalties for dog fouling'** has become less of an issue in 2005. In 2000, this action was ranked 1st (41%) but in 2005, it was ranked 5th (33%).

Transport and Traffic

The priorities given for improving the traffic and transport situation were:

- **'Improve public transport'** (48% in top 3)
- **'Better road maintenance'** (42% in top 3)
- **'Measures to reduce traffic in town centres'** (36% in top 3).

Older people (75+ age group) particularly wanted improved standards of footpaths and pavements (57% put this action in their top 3, 33% for Cheshire).

The action **'introduce more cycle lanes to make it safe for cyclists'** was ranked 3rd in 2000 (with 39%). In 2005, the importance given to this action has decreased; it was ranked 8th (with 22%).

Health and Well Being

Of the 11 options given to respondents, the top priorities were:

- **'People taking responsibility for their own health'** (47% in top 3)
- **'Smoke free buildings'** (46% in top 3)
- **'Increase access to physical activity'** (37% in top 3).

Although overall **'reduce industrial air pollution'** was ranked 8th with 19% putting it in their top 3 priorities, 38% in Ellesmere Port & Neston did so (ranked 2nd in this district).

2 new priorities for the 2005 survey; **'smoke free buildings'** and **'increase access to physical activity'** had significant support as priority actions for improving health, ranked 2nd and 3rd.

Social Support

Unlike the other topic areas, respondents were asked to state if they had any problems with a number of health or disability situations rather than prioritise actions. These responses relate only to respondents who had some form of problem with their general health. 32% of respondents answered these questions.

The most significant problems for most of these respondents were:

- **'Getting transport when I need it'** (8% major problem, 16% minor problem)
- **'Being able to access leisure and cultural facilities and activities'** (8% major problem, 14% minor problem)
- **'Knowing what services are available to me'** (4% major problem, 19% minor problem).

Unemployment, Employment and Training

The main priorities for unemployment, employment and training were:

- **'Child care to enable parents to work'** (45% in top 3)
- **'Better paid part time jobs or more job share opportunities'** (43% in top 3)
- **'Attracting/ retaining those industries which create most jobs'** (43% in top 3)
- **'More employers offering flexible working hours'** (42% in top 3). This action was not asked in 2000, however, results from 2005 show it is an increasingly important issue with Cheshire respondents.

Education and Learning

Respondents were given a list of 13 priorities for improving education and learning in their area. There was significant support for:

- **'More discipline in schools'** (49% in top 3)
- **'More investment in schools on books and equipment'** (39% in top 3). This was also ranked 2nd in 2000, but with a higher percentage (50%)
- **'Schools and parents working more closely together'** (39% in top 3).

Housing

Priority actions for improving housing were:

- **'Build more affordable houses to buy'** (58% in top 3)
- **'Build new homes on previously developed or derelict land'** (47% in top 3)
- **'Renovate existing or disused buildings'** (46% in top 3).

There has been a significant increase in the prioritisation of affordable housing across Cheshire since 2000. In 2005, 58% placed 'build more affordable houses to buy' in their top 3, an increase from 38% in 2000.

Leisure, Recreation and Culture

As before 'improving opportunities for leisure activities' was given the lowest overall priority, however, the contribution that leisure plays to other aspects of quality of life was acknowledged by its position in other categories, such as youth issues.

The priority actions for this topic were:

- **'Lower entrance cost to leisure facilities'** (47% in top 3). This was also ranked 1st in 2000 but with a higher percentage (57%)
- **'More information about what's on in my area'** (44% in top 3)

- **'Better public transport to help get to places'** (37% in top 3).

Overall Priorities for Actions

The priority for individual actions within each topic area is shown in the table below.

Table 2 - Top Priority Actions by Topic

Topic (Priority Rank Order)	Action	% in Top 3
Crime & Disorder	More visible police presence	71%
Youth Issues	More youth centres for meeting people of their own age	58%
Unemployment, Employment & Training	Child care to enable parents to work	45%
Housing	Build more affordable houses to buy	58%
Drugs	Stricter punishment for illegal drug dealers	72%
Transport & Traffic	Improve public transport	48%
Health & Well-being	People taking responsibility for their own health	49%
Environment	Provide more recycling facilities and kerbside collections	44%
Education & Lifelong Learning	More discipline in schools	49%
Leisure, Recreation & Culture	Lower entrance cost to leisure facilities	47%
Base for % = 1,505		

Table 2 shows that a 'more visible police presence' still has significant support compared to other actions for improvement. 43% of respondents put this action as their top priority (and 71% in their top 3). However, compared to 2000, this has fallen from 82% of respondents placing this action in their top 3 priorities.

Although as an overall priority 'reduce illegal drug taking' has fallen, it is still a significant action for improvement

with 72% of respondents placing **'stricter punishment for illegal drugs'** in their top 3 priorities for tackling the drugs issue.

Youth issues were thought to be best addressed, as in 2000, by **'more youth centres for meeting people of their own age'** (58% in the top 3).

Unlike in 2000, **'build more affordable homes to buy'** (58% in top 3) has become a more significant action for improvement.

Implications

Many issues remain as significant in 2005 as in the previous two surveys. Crime and disorder continues to be an area where improvement is most needed. Other areas have become more or less important for Cheshire respondents since 2000 as shown below.

'Reduce crime and disorder' is still the main priority (ranked 1st), but it is considered less of an issue than it was in 1995 and although there is still an enthusiasm for a greater police presence, the percentage has decreased from 82% in 2000 to 71% in 2005. There appears to be less concern about crime and disorder issues now than in 2000 and 1995, this suggests improvements and changes made across Cheshire are working and effective.

The most significant issues were:

- Continued importance of ways of helping young people
- Increased importance of involving people in local decision making
- Continued priority to improve public transport although decrease in the importance of more cycle lanes
- Higher priority to provide more recycling facilities and kerbside collections
- Higher priority for more affordable housing
- Higher priority for more childcare facilities to enable parents to work
- Less importance given to reducing illegal drug taking.

Other developments on issues not surveyed in 1995 and 2000 were:

- Support given to court sentencing providing a more effective deterrent
- Priority for improving health was given to the actions of 'smoke free buildings' and 'increase to physical activity'
- Importance attached to 'more employers offering flexible working hours' as a priority for encouraging employment prospects.

There were also variations in priorities that reflected individual circumstances. For example, older people were more concerned about health and welfare, younger people about things to do and cheaper use of leisure facilities and Ellesmere Port and Neston residents about the environment.

Context

These findings should be set against the background in which views are expressed. The majority of people (92%) liked living in their home area. When respondents were asked specifically about their quality of life, 94% described it as very or quite good. 2% said it was very or quite poor. Respondents were also asked to say whether their area had got better or worse over the last five years. 52% said that the area had not changed with 25% saying it had got worse and 22% felt that it had got better.

More Information

This summary is one of a series on the following topics:

Volume

A	Overall Priorities (summary)
B	Safer and Stronger Communities
C	Children and Young People
D	Healthier Communities and Older People
E	Sustainable Communities and Transport
F	Overview of Survey

Summary Report

1	Chester
2	Congleton
3	Crewe & Nantwich
4	Ellesmere Port & Neston
5	Macclesfield
6	Vale Royal

Summary and detailed reports are available from:

Andrew Pomfret/ Jean Stelfox/ Alison Bones
Research & Intelligence Unit
Policy and Performance Department
Cheshire County Council
County Hall,
Chester,
Cheshire, CH1 1SF

Tel: (01244) 602064/ 602027/ 602117