THE WRONG PACKAGE

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Adam Smith Institute

London

2001

Bibliographical information

Published in the UK in 2001 by
ASI (Research) Ltd, 23 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BL
www.adamsmith.org.uk

The authors thank Dr Roger Mortimore and Steven Bettison for help with the preparation of this work.

ISBN: 1-902737-21-0

Printed in the UK by Imediaprint Ltd

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1. Introduction

In a normal competitive market, businesses pay close attention to their customers. They try to satisfy their requirements, and to anticipate their needs and desires with improved products and service offerings. They are constrained in the prices they can charge by the presence of competitors, ever anxious to win those customers over to their own goods and services.

Adam Smith famously remarked that the end of all production is consumption. In a normal market situation, this is why people produce things. This is why those engaged in production must pay close attention to the wants and requirement of consumers. There are, however, certain circumstances and situations which subvert that relationship. In a monopoly, for example, the consumer has no alternative to the product in question, and loses the ability to shop elsewhere. Deprived of this, the consumer loses power. Without any input, he or she may often be ignored.

A similar circumstance seems to exist when goods or services are commanded by a third party, using resources obtained from consumers. In such cases, the producers have no need to pay heed to the wants and needs of the consumers: they attend instead to the wants and needs of those who commission the goods and services on behalf of the consumers, for these are the ones with power.

This describes to some extent what can happen when government commissions goods and services on behalf of its citizens. The power which those citizens might have exercised over the quality and price of them, passes instead into the hands of government. It applies even more strongly when government does not merely commission these goods and services, but actually embarks upon the production of them with its own workforce.

Economists call this process 'producer capture.' Whenever the consumer loses the ability to shop elsewhere for a cheaper and better product, the production is effectively captured by the producers, and begins to serve their needs instead of those of the consumers.

In the absence of any outlet for consumer needs to express themselves through choices, the most extraordinary results can follow. Thus in 1980s Britain it was claimed that the purpose of coal-mining was not to provide coal for people to use as fuel, but to provide jobs for coal-miners. At its extreme form was the claim that this included jobs for their yet unborn sons, and the permanent survival of the village communities in which coal was mined.

Similar claims have been made for other industries, including textiles and ship-building. The emphasis has been on the life and working conditions of producers as the prime aim of the exercise. The rule is that whenever consumer influence is denied an outlet, or made ineffective, then producer interests will dominate.

The public services

The public services do not constitute a special case. For most of them the purchasing and decisions are made by government at national or local level, nominally on behalf of the public at large as customers. The public itself has lost control of the money; it was taken in taxation and is now controlled by others. The power, which would have resided with the public as customers, has now been transferred to those others.

It would be unsurprising if the public services saw power transferred away from their ultimate customers, that is, those who receive the goods and services produced, and towards those engaged in the production side of the process. We would expect, perhaps, to see power in the hands of civil servants, government ministers, any businesses involved in production, and with trade union leaders and works committees. Given this, we would also expect that the services concerned would to some extent follow the agenda of these producer groups, rather than any agenda preferred by the consumers. This is one of the hallmarks of producer capture.

Several measures have been introduced to combat this process, but none has been effective for long. If the direct consumer power of being able to shop elsewhere is absent, the ability to comment officially on the process has been offered as a substitute. Users' Councils have been established. In the jargon of sociology, 'voice' has been offered in place of 'exit.'

This has not worked in practice simply because words are no substitute for deeds. Often appointments to Users' Councils and other 'representative' advisory bodies are filled with place–men and women, trade union barons, corporate spokesmen and 'representatives' of ethnic minorities chosen for their political clout, and 'consumer representatives' are often chosen from party stalwarts, local government councillors and shop stewards.

If the consumer has no power, no–one need take particular notice of his or her voice. In many cases the User Councils themselves quickly become detached from the real public, and operate in a kind of producer triumvirate alongside government and the actual producers of the service.

The 'consumer deficit' was recognized years ago by some local authorities. As early as 1979 a few local authorities extended surveys beyond the behavioural measures that typified both local and national surveys up to that time, e.g., traffic flow, housing condition and electoral roll registration, to measure people's attitudes.

One public body that saw this consumer deficit early on was The Audit Commission. When Sir John Banham took over the chairmanship of the Audit Commission, he directed his colleagues to reach out to assess what people expected from their local councils, what they valued from their local authority, and how well they thought the services they valued were being performed. This was conducted in 1986, and Banham's intention was to have it carried out annually, to provide a national comparison for local authorities to use when assessing their own performance against a national benchmark, but when he moved on, his successor decided to cancel the updates.

Following this, perhaps the boldest attempt to reverse producer capture (outside of outright privatization, of course) was the introduction of the Citizen's Charter Unit in the Cabinet Office. This attempted to impose on both local and national public services the obligations and duties which would have been put in place for solid commercial reasons in the private sector, listening to the consumer.

The Citizen's Charter required every public service to set forth what it was attempting to achieve in output terms, a means of measuring that output, and a redress mechanism for when it fell short. In many, perhaps most, areas of public service, they had operated for decades without even thinking about, much less declaring, what it was they were trying to do. It was a bold attempt, but ultimately it fell short of its goals because it had few sanctions to back it up. The private sector is consumer responsive because it has to be. The public sector is not, because it does not have to be. It does not lose business; it does not go broke.

Major improvements in public services did follow in the wake of the Citizen's Charter. Not the least of these was a realization on the part of public servants that ordinary members of the public were just as much their customers as if they had paid for the service directly, rather than through taxes. A second was the realization that something specific was expected of them: that is that they were required to achieve certain targets.

One of the failings of the Citizen's Charter was that it provided very little opportunity for the public services to change what they were doing. The emphasis was in getting them to do what they did in better, more sympathetic, more responsive ways. There was not built into it a means whereby a more fundamental question could be asked: should the public services be doing this at all, or should they be doing other things instead?

The Citizen's Charter did achieve some noteworthy successes, though, and established clearly the idea that people who have paid taxes, which means everybody, are entitled to receive something in return, and should not be fobbed off with shoddy or inadequate goods and services simply because these come from government. It gives people consumer rights in addition to their citizen rights.

Research carried out for the Citizens' Charter Unit showed that this was especially valuable among the working classes, the ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged, because the Charter empowered them against the establishment, the hospital administrator, the police, the local authority bureaucrat.

While some commentators take the view that this undermines citizenship, it certainly equips members of the public with a mechanism and a procedure by which they can personally and individually secure improved services for themselves and perhaps, in the process, for others. We do not buy video–recorders by voting collectively, nor do we try to control their quality through the political process. It seems entirely reasonable that we should subject the public services to some of the disciplines which benefit consumers in the private sector.

Value for money

In the absence of competition, or the ability to take our money elsewhere, it is very difficult to estimate whether or not we are receiving value for money. In fact we all put different amounts of money into most public services because we pay different levels of taxation. At national level we pay different amounts of income tax, depending on what we earn, and different amounts of VAT, depending on what we spend and how we do so. At local level we are banded differently for Council Tax, depending on the type of house we have and where we live. In any case, this makes up only the small proportion of local spending which does not come from general taxation via a government allocation. There are, in addition, the taxes on business and investment, and on pensions, and the excise duties on fuel, tobacco, and alcohol, plus the dozens of stealth taxes added by the current Chancellor.

The tradition, and part of the ethos of public services, is that we are supposed to receive the same level of service regardless of what we pay in. We are supposed to receive either identical services, or ones based on our needs, regardless of our contribution. In practice, though, the articulate middle classes have always known how to work the system better. They secure places for their children at the good state schools, and they get better, and more prompt, treatment from the NHS.

Most people have no way of knowing even if society collectively is getting value for the money which it puts in. People have no concept of what a private police force might be like, what it might do, or how much it might cost. The roughly 90 percent who never use private education or private health services similarly have little basis for comparison. Indeed, it is only the recent advent of mass foreign travel which has inclined people to note what services are like in other countries and to become, in some cases, more critical of those provided in their own country. This, plus the general rise of consumerism and the increased propensity to complain or even to sue, have created a climate of criticism which opens up questions concerning the public services, what they do, and the level of funding which is appropriate for them.

The agenda

It may be hard to calculate the value we receive for our money from the public services, but it is possible to see to some extent what they are doing, and to compare that with what we think they *should* be doing. When the various service departments were asked to produce their individual parts of the citizen's charter, only a very few undertook market research to discover what their public thought they ought to be doing, and which services they should be providing. Most looked at what they were already doing, and sought to do it in more efficient and user-friendly ways.

An important question to ask of the public services is*: In spite of the efforts of the Audit Commission at the local level, and the Charter Unit's work, is there still a producer agenda in Britain?* Given the propensity of public services to producer capture, we can ask to what degree they follow the needs and comforts of their producers, rather than what their consumers would prefer. To what extent do they do what government, civil servants, managers and

workers want them to do, as opposed to what the public would freely buy if they were spending their money directly?

The question which follows that is the one which asks if there is a consumer agenda which differs. Are there things which the public wishes the service to do, but which it does ineffectively or not at all? Does the public's view of what the priorities are correspond with those emphasized by the service itself? Or are there huge disparities between what the producers concentrate on doing, and what the public would prefer to see them do?

These questions are important because in a debate about what public funds these services should receive, and which party is best equipped or most likely to deliver it, it is pertinent to ask if the existing funds are being spent properly, on the things which ordinary citizens would prefer to see them spent. If they are not, then it adds a new dimension to the debate to ask which party might best succeed in getting the public services to do what people want them to do.

2. The New Evidence

The Adam Smith Institute has commissioned a nationwide survey carried out by MORI to discover what people regard as the priorities in the provision of three key public services. Those looked at were the police, schools, and local government.

The MORI sample of nearly 2,000 people nationwide, interviewed in March 2001, were asked to pick out — from among ten possible alternatives — the two or three activities which they regarded as the most important. They were similarly asked to select the two or three activities which they thought least important. In practice this proves to be a good way of ascertaining priorities. Instead of simply saying that everything which they do is worthwhile, or indeed useless, people have to make choices, and their sense of the priorities emerges when forced to — 'trade-off' — one service against another.

For each of the three services, the list of ten activities was drawn up after discussion with people about things that the services were doing, wanted to do, or might be expected to do. For some services, including the three chosen for this survey, there is a great deal of publicity for some of the things they fail to do, and which attract public criticism. Failing schools, for example, attract huge amounts of media coverage. Standards of literacy and numeracy are now closely monitored. Where they fail to achieve acceptable levels, it is assumed that the schools are not doing some of the things which it is thought they should be doing.

When figures for street crime or burglary (questionable though they are) show increases, there is huge public discussion of how this can be turned around, and what the police might do that they are not already doing.

Some local governments come under similar criticism over housing estates which are allowed to fall into disrepair, or to remain too long in such state, or when problem families are allowed to terrorize an estate.

For each service there is also publicity given to what are presented by some media critics as inane or bizarre activities which waste resources and achieve silly or negative results. The police might feel comfortable about prosecuting motorists seen eating a sandwich or a Mars bar at traffic lights, but the attention given to such stories in the media, and the outrage expressed, suggest that many do not.

Similarly in some schools, what are seen as examples of absurd political correctness sometimes attract adverse criticism. When a school bans any references to Christmas, for example, and refuses to allow decorations or a Nativity play, this is seen by some critics in the media, and presumably by some of their readers, to be a misuse of time, resources and energy.

Local government can attract similar criticism when it devotes resources to the provision of racial awareness programmes, or selects employees on the basis of ethnic background, or when it elevates the provision of counselling to local people over what it might take to reduce the need for counselling in the first place. The media seems to have a different sense of priorities, and it is quite possible that the public might also.

THE POLICE

The police generally come into contact with people when they are victims of crime which they report, when they are accused of breaking the law themselves, usually through a traffic offence, when their help as witnesses is sought, or when they encounter public order arrangements, such as happen at celebrity events or bomb scares.

It is generally understood that the crime figures, which record crimes reported to the police, vastly understate, the actual crimes which have been perpetrated on the citizenry, half of whom in surveys report they have been victims of crimes which have gone unreported.

There have been highly publicized stories of what the police would like to do. They strongly backed an attempt to reduce the lower limit of alcohol in the bloodstream permitted for drivers from 80mg per 100ml of blood down to 50mg. There was much criticism of this because Britain already has a very low rate of drunk driving, and it is more vigorously enforced here. Furthermore, it was pointed out from police figures themselves that the problem is not accidents caused by drivers with between 50mg and 80mg of alcohol, but those caused by drivers many times over the limit. Incidentally, it counts as an alcohol related road accident if a completely sober motorist strikes a pedestrian who has been drinking.

Police urged “zero tolerance” of speeding, and wanted to act firmly against drivers doing “even one or two mph over the speed limit.” A Home Office document wanted to impose an immediate ban on drivers doing over 85mph, even for a first offence.

There are also the stories about people being hauled into court for eating Mars bars and sandwiches at traffic lights. Clearly, on motoring, the police want to tighten up. They already devote a huge slice of resources and manpower to it.

The problem is that the UK already has one of the lowest road accident rates for advanced countries. While it might be true, as piously claimed, that new laws would “save lives,” even more would be saved if a speed limit of zero were imposed and no motorists drove anywhere.

One can see why the police might want tougher motoring laws. They are easy to process and collect statistics for, and mostly involve safe, docile, middle–class motorists. Action against more dangerous, harder to catch, criminals would be less easy to show good results on, as well as being more difficult to do.

Again, counselling is offered to crime victims. Someone whose house has been burgled or who has been robbed in the street is usually offered counselling. This, again, is easy to do. It can be listed among activities and ticked off as an achievement. The burglary or robbery is much harder to deal with, and to achieve successes with.

The most contentious cases involve those in which householders use force against burglars. They are nearly always prosecuted, and often receive stiffer sentences than the burglars themselves. In the Martin case, a chief constable described it as a vicious and cold-blooded murder, even though most people thought it clearly was nothing of the sort. The general view shown in opinion polls appears to be that criminals are asking for it, and that force is acceptable when they break in or attack people. This appears to be another case where the police agenda differs markedly from what people want them to do.

In the light of the Macpherson report into the handling of the Lawrence murder, police have stepped up efforts to promote racial awareness and to build good relations with ethnic minority communities. There are reports, though, that less people are stopped and searched because police fear charges of racism, and that street crime has increased in consequence.

It is entirely possible that, based on some of the cases described above, people's view of what the police should concentrate their efforts on has been coloured to some extent by the media. This does not make their priorities any less real, or any less firmly held. It is equally possible that the media coverage has been influenced by what those public priorities are perceived to be in the first place.

THE SCHOOLS

There is widespread evidence that people want their children to be educated, and that they would like the schools to do it. They are reported to want the schools to help them to impart good character to their children. It is when the type of education comes into question that a possible difference of agendas begins to emerge.

The disastrous experiment with comprehensive education allowed standards of competence to fall as other goals were followed. Those driving the system appeared more concerned to promote social equality, and to prevent talented children forging ahead of others, than to equip as many as possible with the basic skills needed for success in life.

Various experiments have been introduced from time to time, some of which have encountered public criticism from education specialists. For example, children, especially younger ones, have been seated facing each other in small groups, rather than facing the teacher. This might encourage social interaction, but some say it impedes education. Child–centred learning was introduced, but was criticized on the basis that there are basic skills to be imparted and acquired, rather than discovered, and that self–education cannot take place until this has been done.

Stories like this indicate that teachers, or perhaps politicians and civil servants, have been pushing values onto the classroom situation in ways

which might be detrimental to the kind of teaching that parents would choose, had they a say in the matter. Given a choice, they might prefer comprehension to empathy.

Some education analysts suggest that the drive to teach children in mixed ability classes resulted in poorer education. Studies have suggested that the children who are above average ability in particular subjects are demotivated when the teaching has to cope with the pace of the slower students in the class. While mixed ability classes were pushed hard by those involved in education, it may be that parents themselves would have preferred, and still prefer, to have their children taught with those of similar ability in particular subjects.

There are areas where a producer agenda might coincide with a consumer agenda, perhaps for different reasons. Teachers, for example, might find small class sizes less demanding and less arduous. Parents might prefer the same objective because the smaller classes promise more attention to each child. On the other hand, given that resources are not infinite, parents might give the smaller class sizes higher priority than, say, pay increases for teachers, which the teachers themselves might prefer.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government is not well understood in Britain. Previous surveys have shown that few people claim either understanding of it or interest in it. Local government election turn–outs are invariably smaller than those for general elections, typically averaging in the mid–30s, rather than the 70s which general election polls produce.

There is widespread confusion of which local jurisdiction is responsible for delivering which service. Surveys also reveal that people are by no means sure what the division of responsibilities is between local and national government. A large part of the average MP's postbag has to be sent to the appropriate local authority with a covering letter. In addition, few people realize just how large a proportion of the local budget comes from nationally collected sources and is passed down from central government. The council tax pays a tiny proportion of the total, but this is not generally understood.

The question examined in the new MORI poll is whether local government does what its electors want it to do, or what it prefers to concentrate on instead. It has been many years since the days when "looney left" councils spent their time and resources on such things as foreign policy and nuclear free zones: or, for that matter, in banning certain children's books and songs, and promoting alternative lifestyles in primary school texts.

Nowadays the priorities are less exotic, and some of them are, indeed, mandated by central government. There are, however, choices to be made about the energy and attention which various local governments devote to different types of activity. There are judgements to be made, too, by local citizens about the kind of things they would prefer to see prioritized, and whether they share the agenda set by their local authority.

There are items which affect the physical environment, such as litter, graffiti and dog dirt. There are council estates where dilapidation and vandalism might degrade people's lives by the unpleasantness of the physical environment. There are items which affect people's sense of ease in their community, including closed circuit TV cameras which might help keep down levels of crime and vandalism.

People might think it important that vulnerable groups such as elderly people should have better housing facilities provided. They might wish that local councils would be swifter and tougher in acting against problem families who terrorize others on their estates.

Local councils would naturally like to have decent pay and working conditions for their employees. Many, if not most of them in big cities, have training programmes for them in racial awareness. Some councils, particularly in rural areas, face a very difficult task in controlling the planning system, weighing the wish of people to improve their homes against the desire of their neighbours to keep the physical environment intact.

Just as the police do, local authorities usually make counselling available to local people who need it. It is extraordinarily difficult to assess how much people value this kind of service. If asked, most people would say yes to most services on offer. One of the few ways of finding out how important people think it to be is to ask them to rank it in importance against other services and activities.

Library facilities are rarely contentious. Most people, including the majority who make no use of them, support them. The question to which the answer is sought here is how *important* are they thought to be. How do they rate compared with others activities and claims on resources?

The aim

The aim of the survey is to discover what, among the many things provided by public services, more people regard as important. It seeks to find out how far people think that what the public services regard as their task, and what they are actually doing, corresponds with what people would like them to concentrate on. It aims to see if there are separate and divergent producer and consumer agendas.

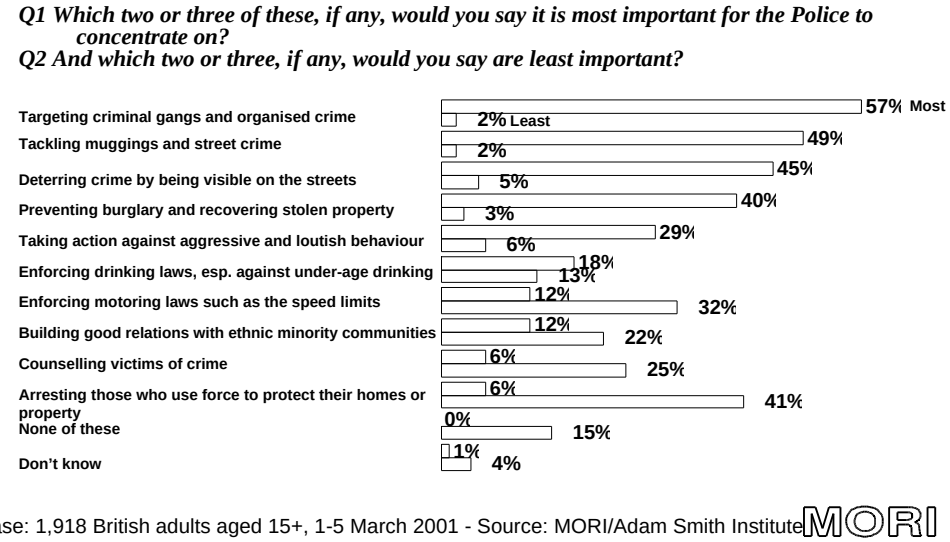
Since people lack the ability in public services to shop for themselves and to back their own priorities, it is by such surveys that their opinions and preferences can be known.

Public services are in the news, and the level of funding which might be appropriate and affordable is under discussion. This report aims to shed light on the question of whether their existing resources are being spent on the things which people think important. If they are not, it raises questions as to whether additional money might be similarly misspent.

3. Police — the Results

People were asked to pick out from a group of ten possible police activities which the police might do the two or three which they think it most important to concentrate on. (See Graph.)

Top of the list is the targeting of criminal gangs and organized crime. This was picked by 57 percent as one of two or three items which people in Britain think should be the top police priority.



Second, listed by nearly half of all people on 49 percent, is tackling muggings and street crime. Given that the police cannot do everything and have access to finite resources, the British people clearly think that their agenda should attack 'hard' crime, particularly, it seems, that which often involves violence. They want the country, and particularly the streets, to be safe from criminal activity, and think the police should be concentrating on that task.

The third priority, on 45 percent, is that people want the police to deter crime by being visible on the streets. Plainly, this fits in with their second choice of tackling street crime. They want the police out there, visible, to make potential criminals think twice, and to make crime harder to commit and to get away with.

Fourth on the list of important activities is action to prevent burglaries and to recover stolen property. This scores 40 percent. A clear pattern emerges.

People want the police to concentrate on the crimes which disturb them, and to which they might fall victim, or perhaps know victims. The top four areas cover criminal gangs, muggings, street crime and burglary. People want police to focus on these areas and to do something about them. They also want the reassurance of a greater police presence.

These are all areas with quite a low rate of prosecution and conviction. A victim of a mugging is unlikely to see the perpetrator punished, or their property recovered. The same is true of burglary. The burglars come and steal, but rarely are they brought to book or the property returned to its rightful owners. People in country villages speak of living under siege, and the hottest conversation is about whom has been burgled this week. Some inner city areas and council estates are reported to be virtual no-go areas, especially after dark.

Plainly the survey shows that this 'hard' crime is the major area of concern, and one on which people want the police to concentrate their resources. These are the public's priorities.

The picture at the bottom of the table is equally clear. When asked to list the two or three activities which they think to be least important, the greatest number, 41 percent, pick out the arresting of those who use force to protect their homes and property. They outnumber by almost seven to one the mere 6 percent who think this is important.

People think this is a misuse of police time and resources, and would rather they did other things instead. It is an interesting priority because the police almost always do arrest in cases where the home–owner or robbed individual has used force. The police talk of "not allowing people to take the law in their own hands," which is another way of saying that they are determined to retain their monopoly of force. The view of the public clearly suggests that if the police cannot stop these crimes, then ordinary people should not be acted against for doing so themselves.

The second activity listed as least important is the enforcement of motoring laws such as the speed limits. 32 percent, effectively a third of the population do *not* want the police to concentrate on this. In view of the effort and resources which the police put into controlling motoring and enforcing its laws, this is a very significant result. The police talk about punishing those who marginally exceed speed limits, or lowering alcohol breath levels down from 80mg to 50mg, but this is not what the public thinks is important by comparison with more serious, as they see it, law breaking.

One third of people in Britain want the police to turn their attention away from motorists and to do something about 'hard' crime instead. Only 12 percent think that it is important to enforce motoring laws. They are out–voted by more than two–and–a–half to one by those who think it is not.

The third activity rated least important for the police to be doing is offering counselling to crime victims. In fact if people are burgled or mugged, this is the one piece of help they are most likely to receive, if help it is. People do not rate it as important. 25 percent pick it out among their list of 'least

important,' which is over four times as many as the mere 6 percent who think it *is* important.

Close behind counselling in the list of things which people do *not* want as priorities is building good relations with ethnic minority communities. This might be a worthy thing, and people might generally approve of it, but they do not think it important. By nearly two to one, 22 percent to 12 percent, they rate it among the *least*, rather than among the *most* important.

Quite a clear picture emerges. When asked to determine what the priorities should be, people pick out 'hard' crime. Their top four list organized crime, street crime, visible police deterrence, and burglary. When asked what the lowest priorities should be they list pursuing those who protect their property by force, motoring offences, counselling, and ethnic minority relations. They want police to concentrate on the top four, and to give low priority to the second four.

Further down the priority table, after the four which cover 'hard' crime comes action against aggressive and loutish behaviour. By 29 percent to 6 percent they think it is important, but not as many people pick it out as such. Similarly, the enforcement of drinking laws, especially against under–age drinking, emerges as number six in the priority table, but with only 18 percent who think it a high priority, versus nearly as many, 13 percent, who think it should have low priority.

What the figures tell us is that people want the police to have a crime agenda rather than a social agenda. The actions which might curb criminal activity they regard as highly important. The actions which are more concerned with social behaviour are rated as least important. The message is *yes* to action on murders, muggings, rapes and burglaries, and *no* to action against those who defend their property, or motorists, and *no* to counselling or building good ethnic relations.

To some extent the social activities are easier to do. They can be organized, statistics collected, achievements recorded. They form a roster of outputs which are relatively easily measured, and are relatively easy to achieve. They constitute to some extent a typical producer agenda. The crime activities are much harder. Criminals have to be deterred, tracked down, prosecuted and punished. It is harder to measure because success might well lead to more reporting. It is reckoned that many burglaries and muggings go unreported simply because people think nothing will happen if they are reported, except, perhaps, an offer of counselling. Once action becomes effective, more are reported, making it look as though crime is rising. In other words, a police success can emerge from the figures looking like a failure. Harder to measure and harder to achieve they might be, but this is what people want. This is the consumer agenda.

The breakdown

1. Gender

There are noticeable differences between the answers given by men and women. Although both sexes give the crime agenda higher priority than the social agenda, women do so to a slightly smaller extent. Of the top four activities listed as most important, more men than women pick these priorities, except for a more visible police presence, where they answer nearly equally.

On targeting gangs and organized crime, it is 68 percent for men, 53 percent for women. Muggings and street crime score 51 percent for men, 46 percent for women. Action on burglary gets 44 percent from men, 37 percent from women. Deterring crime by greater street presence is favoured by 44 percent of men, 45 percent of women.

When it comes to the items listed as least important, there are similar differences. Men and women give equally low priority to prosecuting people who defend their property, in that 5 percent of men and 6 percent of women rate this important. Motoring sees a bigger divide. Only 9 percent of men think enforcement should be a priority, but 15 percent of women do so. Counselling is picked by 4 percent of men, 8 percent of women. Building ethnic relations scores 12 percent from each.

The interesting divergence comes on the middle, 'social' items. Action against aggressive or loutish behaviour is rated important by only 28 percent of men, but by 38 percent of women. Similarly, enforcement of drinking laws matters to 14 percent of men, but 21 percent of women. The pattern is of a slight tendency for men to rate the crime issues more strongly ahead of the social issues than is the case for women. It should be pointed out that women still put the crime issues well ahead of the social ones.

It could be argued that women might be less likely to engage in aggressive or loutish behaviour, or to break the drinking laws. It might even be that they feel more vulnerable than men do to this type of activity.

Women might be similarly less inclined to break motoring laws such as speeding, and perhaps feel more vulnerable to motorists who do.

2. Age

There are age differences, too. Young people are less concerned about drunken or loutish behaviour. 21 percent of the 15–24 age group pick it, as do 19 percent of the 25–34 age–group. This compares with 33 percent of the 45–54 group, and 39 percent of those aged 55–64.

Young people are more concerned about mugging and street crime, however. The two younger groups (15–24 and 25–34) see 55 percent and 54 percent respectively rating this important. For the 45–54 bracket it is 43 percent, and for the 55–64 group it is 48 percent.

The patterns suggest vulnerability and perceived threats. In fact young people are the main victims of street crime, and it could be argued that they are more likely to be the main perpetrators of aggressive and loutish behaviour.

The young do not rate police presence on the street as important as their elders do.

3. Others

There are differences in respect of social groups. More of those designated social class AB, the professional and managerial people which now represent nearly a quarter of the adult population, are concerned about aggressive and loutish behaviour (34 percent), and less of them think drinking laws important (12 percent). For group DE, unskilled working class, the corresponding figures are 26 percent on loutish behaviour, and 22 percent on drinking.

The biggest regional divide comes on criminal gangs and organized crime. Six in ten, 61 percent, of people in both North and Midlands choose this as important, but only just under half, 49 percent, do so in the South. More Northerners rate drink laws and police presence highly than do those in other regions.

Thus, with some differences for gender, age, class and region, the British people, by quite large margins, choose as important the police activities which pursue criminals, as opposed to minor law-breakers. A possible interpretation which could be put on this is that they think police are wasting time and resources pursuing those who commit minor infractions, which might include themselves, and should be targeting those who kill, rape, injure, steal and really degrade the social environment.

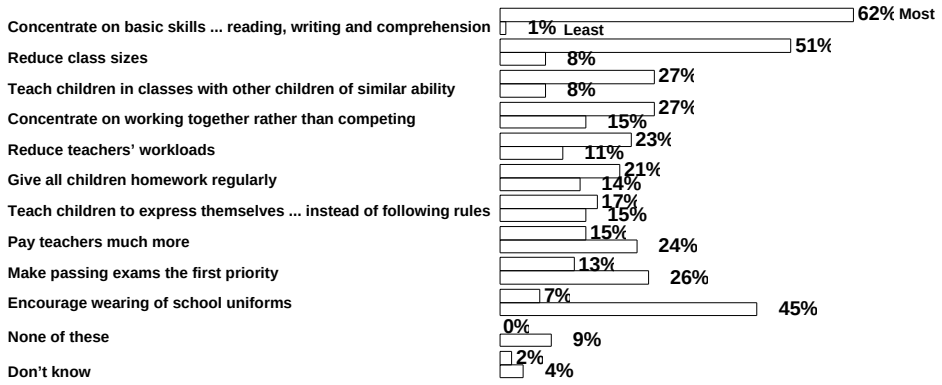
4. Schools — the Results

To ascertain what people think the priorities should be for schools, people were asked to pick out, from a list of ten possible activities, the two or three which they think it most important for the schools to be doing (Table 2).

Top of the list by a big margin is that schools should concentrate on the basic skills such as reading, writing and comprehension. It gained 62 percent of those replying, making it the top–scoring item in the entire MORI poll. Nearly two out of three adults in Britain think this is one of the most important priorities the schools should follow. Only 1 percent called it unimportant, giving it a net score of 61.

The Schools

Q1 Which two or three of these, if any, would you say it is important for schools to concentrate on?
Q2 And which two or three, if any, would you say are least important?



Base: 1,918 British adults aged 15+, 1-5 March 2001 - Source: MORI/Adam Smith Institute MORI

The second priority, with another majority score (of 51 percent), is that class sizes should be reduced. Thus over half of the public rate this among the most important goals. Only 8 percent rated this among the least important goals, giving a net score of 43 percent. What these two results tell us is that parents want their children to learn the basic skills, and they want them to receive sufficient timer and attention from teacher to make sure they do so. This represents a very traditional view of education, far from the 'social experiment' models so fashionable in the 1960s. Whatever anyone else wants, parents want schools to educate

Third equal on the list is that they want children taught in classes with children of similar ability. They plainly do not want children held back to the pace of slower students. This is another way of saying they want them to motivate each other. They want streaming. This item scores 27 percent as

most important and 8 percent as least important, more than three to one, and a net of 17 percent).

It compares with the 27 percent which list the importance of working together rather than competing. The latter, however, has rather more people who rate it among the least important, 15 percent, giving it a lower net score of 12 percent. The public apparently recognize that education is less stressful when children help each other, plan homework together, and encourage each other.

By the same net margin of 12 percent (23 percent to 11 percent), people think it important to reduce teachers' workloads. As with the smaller class sizes, this is another way to ensure that children gain more of the attention they need.

Regular homework scores positively, with 21 percent rating it a high priority, 14 percent a low one, a margin of three to two for a net score of 7.

The public is divided on self expression, with 17 percent listing it among most important, versus 15 percent including it among least important, a net score of 2.

All of this presents a very orthodox, even old-fashioned view of education. It tells us what would happen if parents had full consumer choices and could choose any state school for their children. They would choose schools which imparted the basics, teaching the tools without which no subsequent self-education is possible. They would pick schools which had classes small enough to give each child the attention needed, and small enough to make it easier to learn in a disciplined and ordered environment. They would opt for schools which practised streaming for different ability levels. If there were schools where the children were encouraged to work together and help each other, to boost each other's efforts, parents would prefer these over ones which generated more stressful, over-competitive pressures.

In fact, at the secondary level, this model of school might be said to resemble the old grammar schools, which did teach basics in smaller classes, streamed for ability, and creating a culture of everyone being there to learn. They were successful at that, but for far too small a proportion of the population. Only a few could benefit from what they offered. For primary schools the impression which comes across is that parents want them to have a sense of purpose, and that purpose should be to educate.

At the bottom end of the table come the activities rated among the least important for schools to concentrate on. Lowest of all was that the wearing of school uniforms should be encouraged. Parents plainly think this has little to do with education. 45 percent of people put this among the lowest priorities, versus 7 percent who put it among the highest, giving a net of –38 percent. School uniforms might encourage *esprit de corps*, good behaviour and good discipline, but parents think they have little to contribute to learning, which is what they want.

The second bottom item is that schools should make passing exams the first priority. Plainly the public think that schooling is about more than just exams. Exams might have their place in the scheme of things, but schools

which make them the first priority are getting it wrong, say the parents. This scores 26 percent thinking it unimportant, versus 13 percent who think it *is* important, two to one, and a net of –13 percent.

24 percent select paying teachers much more as a low priority item, but 15 percent choose it as a high priority item, for a net score of –9 percent.

A fairly coherent picture emerges. The public does want the basics, smaller classes and streaming. It does not care about school uniforms, making exam passes the top priority, or paying teachers much more.

It is no longer clear that school education in Britain pursues an agenda very different from the one parents favour. It certainly did some years ago. Those involved in producing education, including political leaders, civil servants, local authorities and teachers' unions, were using the classroom to promote ideas which parents themselves had little time for. Indeed, parents who remonstrated against school policy were sometimes accused of "interfering" in education.

It was widespread discontent with the poor standards of the state sector which paved the way for the 1988 Education Act, steered through by the then Secretary of State Sir Kenneth (now Lord) Baker. This introduced some measure of independence for schools, and some degree of choice for parents. It effectively made the consumer agenda respectable.

It seems that this consumer agenda, whose priorities are revealed in this survey, has already used the new opportunities to make its views felt. The current debate in education has recently centred more and more on imparting the basics and on reducing class sizes. The end of Labour's historic commitment to comprehensive education signals the probable emergence of more streaming in the state sector.

This suggests that, while there is still evidence of a producer agenda in education, it is very much weaker than it was. Further reforms to the school system will probably weaken it further by giving parents yet more choices, and allowing schools yet more variety. When parents have a range of choices from different types of schools, this survey suggests what they will be choosing. It will be education, education, education. And education done in traditional ways, too.

The breakdown

1. Gender

Although there are some differences between the answers given by men and women, this does not apply to the number one choice of teaching the basics. Men and women in equal numbers (62 percent) think this should have the highest priority.

Rather more women than men list smaller classes (53 percent to 49 percent) among the most important things.

Men and women back streaming equally (28 percent men, 27 percent women). On the question of children working together rather than competing, there is a clear difference in the net scores. For women this is 16 (29 say important, 13 say unimportant). For men the net score is only 8 percent (25 percent say important, 17 percent say unimportant). Men seem less concerned about co-operation over competition.

Similarly on exams, the net score for men is –7. For women it is –19. Again, exams being competitive, men seem less hostile.

There is a marked difference on paying teachers much more. Men rate this as unimportant by a net margin of –15 (15 percent to 30 percent). The net margin for women is only –4 (15 percent to 19 percent). They are less opposed to making high pay a priority.

2. Age

It should be borne in mind that the answers of the youngest age group, 15–24, might be coloured by the fact that some of them are still in education, and others left it only recently. Fewer of that age group rate the basics as very important. They score 47 percent, against an average score of 64 percent for all other age–groups.

There are no marked age group differences for smaller class sizes and streaming. They all rate these as priority items by similar margins.

On exams, however, the net score for the youngest age group was only just hostile. 19 percent listed making them the first priority as most important, and 20 percent listed them as least important, for a net score of –1. For the other age groups, 27 percent included exams in the least important priorities, against 12 percent who included them in the most important group, for a net score of –15. Clearly, more of the youngsters think exams should be a priority.

The two younger age groups were rather more hostile to uniforms than their elders. 52 percent of the 15–24 and 25–34 age groups included them among least important, only 42 percent of those aged over 35 did so.

On working together rather than competing, more in the two younger groups rated this important. 32 percent of the 15–24 and 25–34 groups listed it as a high priority, versus 13 percent who listed it as a low one, a net of 19 percent. For those aged over 35, 24 percent said important, against 17 percent who said unimportant, for a net of 7, significantly lower than for the younger people.

3. Other

A broad consensus appears to emerge across the different social groups, with a few points of variation. They plump for the basics to in roughly equal numbers, but conditions for teachers seem to be of more concern to those in the higher social groups. That teachers' workload should be reduced is counted as an important priority by 33 percent of the ABs, 24 percent of the

C1s and C2s, but only 16 percent of the DEs. Those who list this among the least important things are roughly equal.
Similarly, reducing class sizes appeals to 56 percent of the ABs and C1s, 49 percent of the C2s, and 44 percent of the DEs. More pay for teachers appeals to 21 percent in group AB, 16 percent in C1, 14 percent in C2, and 12 percent in DE. This is a fairly consistent pattern of greater concern over teaching conditions by the higher social groups.

Table 3

Q1 *Which two or three of these, if any, would you say it is important for schools to concentrate on?*

Q2 And which two or three, if any, would you say are least important?

Social Class Net Percentage rating each 'important'	**AB** %	**C1** %	**C2** %	**DE** %
teacher workload	21	14	12	6
Reduce class sizes	50	49	40	36
Higher teacher pay	-1	-7	-14	-12

There is an opposite divide over exams and homework. On these issues, the lower down the social groups one looks, the more support one is likely to find for both of these activities.

Table 4

	AB	C1	C2	DE
Net %age who rate exams important	-22	-13	-12	-8
Net %age who rate homework important	-4	+4	+7	+15

There is a steady decline in hostility to exams as one moves from the ABs to the DEs, and a steady rise in support for homework. A net of 22 percent of group AB regard exams as among the least important things, but this is down to 8 percent by the time we reach those in the DE group. And while the AB group rate homework among the least important things by a net of –4 percent, the C1s reverse this to a net of +4 percent who include it as important, rising to +7 for the C2s, and +15 percent for group DE.

Again, there is a clear pattern across the social groups. The further down, the more value is placed on exams and homework. One can only speculate on the reason for this. It might be that those in group AB have other advantages to equip their children for a start in life, but education is one of the few chances for the lower social groups. It might be a cultural thing, with the lower groups exhibiting a traditional respect for disciplined learning, where the higher groups might value less tangible social skills.

The variation across the regions is not a marked one, but there is a tendency for more of those in the South to attach high importance to teaching conditions than there is for those in the North and Midlands.

More of those in the South count teacher workload as important, and less of them count teacher pay among the least important, with no significant difference on class sizes. This tendency for more Southerners to pay attention to teaching conditions might be a reflection of the earlier finding on social class. It could be that there are more of the upper social groups in the South. Or again, it could be a cultural difference between the traditional attitudes of the regions.

Table 5

	North	South	Midland
Net %age who rate teacher workload as important	9	19	8
Net %age who rate class sizes as important	44	43	42
Net %age who rate higher teacher pay important	-16	-4	-15

Despite these minor, but interesting, variations over gender, age, social group and region, there can be no doubting the overall strength of a clear consumer agenda. The huge support, right across the spectrum, for an emphasis on the basics of reading, writing, and comprehension, demonstrates what the British people want from education. They want smaller class sizes and streaming, too, to make it easier for the first goal to be secured.

Education theorists have talked in the past about allowing children to develop naturally, at their own pace. Social theorists have argued for treating all children the same. Politically inspired producers have spoken of using education to create a new society, scornful of wealth and material possessions. None of this cuts any ice with the public. In overwhelming numbers they say that the top priority of the schools should be to *educate* the children.

While the consumer agenda is clear and overwhelming, it is less clear whether there is, as there used to be, a divergent producer agenda. The talk in both major political parties, and the reforms which they propose to the school system, talk the language of that consumer agenda, and promise more ways of achieving its priorities. It could be that a new consensus is beginning to emerge in education, and that it is a consensus led by what the public think that education should be all about.

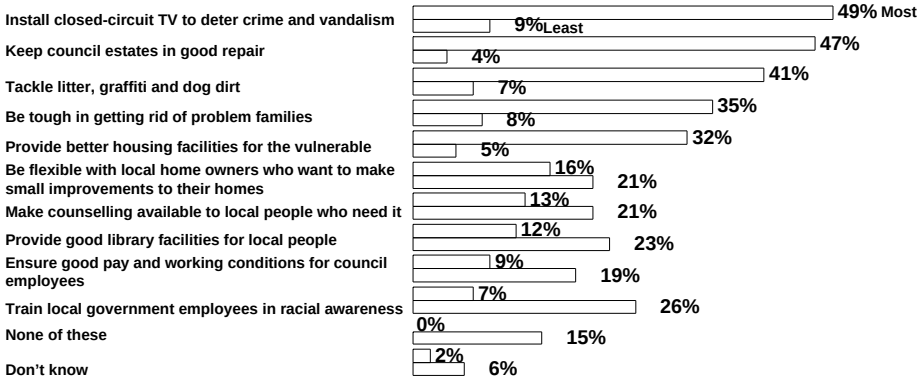
5. Local Government — the Results

From a series of activities which local government performs or might perform, people were asked to select the two or three which they feel to be the most important ones. They were then asked to pick the two or three which they feel are the least important (table 6).

The top response was that which covers the installation of closed–circuit TV (CCTV) to deter crime and vandalism. Despite initial misgivings among civil libertarians when these cameras were first installed, they are now listed as the top priority for local government by more people than chose anything else. 49 percent put it among the top priorities, with only 9 percent rating it among the least. This gives a positive net score of 40 percent.

The Local Council

Q1 Which two or three of these, if any, would you say it is most important for the Local Council to concentrate on?
Q2 And which two or three, if any, would you say are least important?



Base: 1,918 British adults aged 15+, 1-5 March 2001 - Source: MORI/Adam Smith Institute MORI

The second choice is for keeping council estates in good repair. Just under half, 47 percent, think that it is important for local councils to concentrate on this, with only 4 percent thinking it unimportant. This gives a net score of 43 percent, even higher than that for CCTV cameras.

Third priority is for councils to tackle litter graffiti and dog dirt. This scored 41 percent, with 7 percent rating it unimportant, and a net score of 34 percent.

The fourth most popular priority selection is that councils should be tough in getting rid of problem families. 35 percent picked it out, versus 8 percent who think it does not matter, a net score of 27 percent.

The top four priorities, in the view of the general public, include CCTV, repair of estates, litter, graffiti & dog dirt, and getting tough with problem families. These are all hard issues which concern the living environment. People want crime and vandalism to be deterred, and abusive and threatening neighbours restrained, and they want action taken against the physical degradation of the space they live in.

What they want, it seems, is resolute action against the things that can spoil or mar a decent life. This is what they think local governments are for, and on what they should be concentrating their resources and their priorities. The picture presented is one of threats to physical and psychological well–being, and the feeling that local government should play its part in easing or preventing them. One can infer from the answers that crime and vandalism are problems for many people, and that the same is true for the general squalor and untidiness which blight some living spaces. Finally, there are the "neighbours from hell" who terrorize decent people attempting to build better lives in what are sometimes difficult conditions.

We may talk about citizenship and playing a part in the community, but for most of the public the reality of local government is, or should be, about services which improve the quality of life. It is their job, say people, to set up the cameras, clean up the streets and the estates, and protect us from anti–social thugs. We can elect people to do this, but we do not need to. Most of this work is of a mechanical nature which could easily be performed by professional city managers, as in some US communities.

At the bottom end of the scale people were asked to pick out what are the *least* important things for local authorities to be doing. Bottom of their priority list comes training local government employees in racial awareness. 26 percent think this is not important, versus 7 percent who think it is. This gives a net score of –19. The provision of good library facilities comes second bottom, scoring 23 percent who think it unimportant, and 12 who think it is important, a net of –11 percent.

The third lowest priority people choose is making counselling available to those who need it. It scores 21 percent, versus 13 percent who rate it important, a net of –7 (rounding up). The fourth is ensuring good pay and working conditions for council employees. This scores 19 percent who rate it unimportant, against 9 percent who say it does matter, for a net of –10 percent, higher than that for counselling.

Being flexible with home–owners who want to improve their property is low priority, say 21 percent, but 16 percent say otherwise, for a net score of –5.

It looks as though people are picking out as unimportant the things which might not directly affect their own lives. They select the items which do not diminish threats from crime or bullying neighbours, or in any way clean up of improve their living space. Training employees in racial awareness might have no effect on crime or squalor. Most people do not use library facilities. They are probably skeptical of the value of counselling, and would prefer the council to make it unnecessary in the first place. Good conditions and pay for employees might be a good thing, but most people do not see it as a priority in their own lives.

The consumer agenda emerges clearly from these answers, and it is a very practical one. People want their local authorities to concentrate on things which make a direct difference to their own lives. If they send out a message to local government it is this: cut crime and intimidation; deter vandalism; clean up mess; try to make things look nice.

This agenda is hard–edged. It is not concerned with feel–good social concerns, but with the realities of living in a perhaps difficult, at times dangerous, environment. Racial awareness and good terms for employees might be fine things, libraries, too. But people give them very much lower priority than they accord to the things that affect the immediate quality of their own lives.

Since people order their priorities in this way, we could reasonably suppose that if they had to spend money on them themselves, as opposed to doing it through government, these are the services they would choose to spend it on. The things which local government chooses to spend its resources on, and is directed by national government to spend it on, may not follow the same priorities.

The breakdown

1. Gender

Men and women are quite consistent in their replies, and no great pattern of difference emerges. On the contrary, with minor variations they follow the same agenda with the same priorities. One minor difference is on training local government employees in racial awareness. For men the net score is –24, made up of 6 percent who include it in most important, and 30 percent who put it in least important. For women the net score is –14, made up of 8 percent important and 22 percent unimportant.

Slightly more women than men rate it most important to tackle litter, graffiti and dog dirt, with a net score of 37 percent for women, 31 percent for men. No other obvious differences stand out.

2. Age

There are, however, some age differences. Fewer of the 15–24 age group rate CCTV cameras as important. Their net score is 31 percent who do rate it highly, versus 40 percent for the other age groups.

The younger people similar are less inclined to pick out problem families as deserving of high priority. 21 percent say they are, but 15 percent do not think so, giving a net score of 6 percent. More of those in other age groups think it matters. 38 percent rate it important, versus 7 percent who think it is not, giving a net score of 31 percent, five times the size as that for the younger group.

Table 7

(age)	15-24	25+
Net %age who rate CCTV as important	31	40
Net %age who rate problem families as important	6	31
Net %age who rate counselling as important	10	-11

The young are more in tune with counselling, though. 20 percent of the 15–24 year-olds rate it important, versus 10 percent who call it unimportant, a net of +10 percent. Their elders are more hostile. 23 percent of them think it does not matter, against 12 percent who think it does. This gives them a net score on counselling of –11 percent.

3. Other

Some differences emerge from the figures, showing that while the various social groups hold the same priorities, they do so to a different degree. More of the AB group rate CCTV cameras as most important. As one goes down the scale, so do the numbers rating them as a priority diminish.

For council estates, however, it is those in the lower social groups who are more likely to rate it important to keep them in good repair.

A similar result appears for problem families. Moving down the social brackets brings increased numbers who think it very important to deal toughly with them.

Table 8

	AB	C1	C2	DE
Net %age who rate CCTV as important	44	39	39	36
Net %age who rate estate repair as important	34	38	44	51
Net %age who rate litter, graffiti etc as important	32	34	37	34
Net %age who rate problem families important	18	21	29	36

An obvious explanation is that perhaps those in the top social brackets are less likely to move through high crime and vandalized areas than those in the lower groups. This makes it of less concern. On the other hand, it is the bottom groups who are more likely to be on council estates, and who naturally attach importance to keeping them in good repair. They are also more likely to be beset by neighbours who require council action.

Regional differences appear. It is in the North that more people plump for the repair of council estates, with a net score of 48 percent, as against 39 percent for the Midlands and the South. But Northerners are less likely to plump for better housing facilities for the vulnerable, with a net of 21 percent, versus the 31 percent in the Midlands and South.

On problem families, a net score of 37 percent of Northerners think tough action matters, as against 28 percent of Midlands people, and 15 percent of Southerners.

Libraries seem somewhat less unimportant to Southerners. They achieve a net score of –4. For the Midlands the net is –10, and for the North it is –18. As with gender, age and social group, they follow the same agenda, but to a different degree.

Thus, with modest variations based on gender, age group, social group or region, a clear and strong picture emerges. The consumer agenda for local government is for activities which improve the fabric of the world around them. It is not communitarianism or the public expression of shared values; it is the physical improvement of living space, and the removal of some of the perceived threats to it.

The obvious question is that if this is what people so overwhelmingly want, why do they not get more of it? Why are there run-down estates, no–go areas, dirt, squalor, intimidation and crime? Given that local government is democratic, why do people not simply elect people who will implement this consumer agenda?

One cannot help but notice how low the polls are in local elections. A typical poll might be about 30 percent, compared with nearly 70 percent for a national election. This might indicate that people do not expect it to make any difference. Indeed, in the ASI/MORI survey *The Big Turn Off*, many said that their vote would make no difference. It could be that the parties which contest local polls are mostly locked into a set of priorities and a way of doing things which fail to interest or excite their public.

It could be that elected councillors and local officials simply do not realize what it is their public would like them to be doing, and in which areas their resources should be concentrated. In which case, this survey should give them something to think about.

If a current political party or a new one stepped forward with a programme to clean up and make safe the physical environment, and cut down drastically the resources going to other activities, this survey suggests that it might strike a chord with the public, and perhaps do well.

6. Summary and Conclusion

Some of the public services are not attaching enough importance to what the public wants them to do. They are spending time and resources on activities which the public does not value, and not devoting enough effort to what the public does want.

In the case of the police, schools and local government services, a strikingly clear picture emerges of what the public thinks the priorities should be. Asked what they should be concentrating their energies and efforts upon, the top four priorities named by the public give a clear expression of what they think the goals of the public services should be. These priorities are held, by and large, despite differences in gender, age, social group, or region. They constitute, in effect, a truly national agenda.

The same is true for what the public thinks the priorities should *not* be. Asked what they think the *least* important goals should be, a further picture appears of what the public clearly thinks should be the lowest priorities. Put simply, these are things which the public services are doing, but which the public thinks are not worth the time and resources put into them. They would prefer that time and those resources to be spent on more important things.

There are, to some extent, two public service agendas. There is the *producer* agenda, consisting of what those who deliver the service want to produce. There is also the *consumer* agenda, consisting of what the general public who receive the service want it to deliver. The producers, be they political leaders, civil servants, local administrators, or the workforce and its unions, have a sense of what they feel able to deliver, or regard as worthwhile goals. The consumers, the general public which pays for the service through taxation, are now shown to have a clear sense of what they think the service should be delivering, and what its priorities should be.

Police

The top priorities named by the public are:

- Targeting criminal gangs and organized crime
- Tackling muggings and street crime
- Deterring crime by being visible on the streets
- Preventing burglary and recovering stolen property

The priorities named as least important are:

- Arresting those who use force to protect their homes or property
- Enforcing motoring laws such ass speed limits
- Counselling victims of crime
- Building good relations with ethnic minority communities

Other facts:

- 40 percent think that the arrest of those using force to protect homes and property is a wrong priority. Only 6 percent think otherwise.
- 32 percent (one in three) think the police should *not* be giving priority to enforcing motoring laws such as speed limits. Only 12 percent think it important to enforce motoring laws.
- More women than men favour action against aggressive or loutish behaviour, and the enforcement of drinking laws.
- Fewer young people (15–24) are concerned about loutishness or drinking laws, but more of them want action against mugging and street crime.
- More people in the higher social groups are concerned about loutishness, but fewer think drinking laws are important.
- Fewer Southerners are worried by criminal gangs and organized crime. Many more in the North and Midlands think this important.
- More Northerners rate drink laws and police presence highly than do those in other regions.

Schools

The public want the schools to:

- Concentrate on basic skills such as reading, writing and comprehension
- Reduce class sizes
- Teach children in classes with other children of similar ability

They do not think it important to:

- Encourage wearing of school uniforms
- Making passing exams the first priority
- Pay teachers much more

Other facts:

- 62 percent of parents want a concentration on the basic skills. Only 1 percent think otherwise.
- Parents do not think school uniforms important to education. 45 percent say no, only 7 percent say yes.
- It is important to reduce teachers' workloads say 23 percent. 11 percent say no. For class size reduction the margin is even bigger. 51 percent want them reduced, versus 8 percent who rate it unimportant.
- 27 percent want to concentrate on working together rather than competing, but 15 percent put this among the lowest priorities. More women than men favour it.
- Streaming is backed equally by men and women.
- Women are rather more hostile than men are to exams.
- Women are less opposed than men to making high pay for teachers a priority.

Local Government

People identify their top priorities as:

- Install closed circuit TV to deter crime and vandalism
- Keep council estates in good repair
- Tackle litter, graffiti and dog dirt
- Be tough in getting rid of problem families

They regard it as least important to:

- Train local government employees in racial awareness
- Provide good library facilities for local people

- Make counselling available to local people who need it

- Ensure good pay and working conditions for council employees

Other facts:

- 21 percent think it is not important to be more flexible with people who want to make improvements to their homes, but 15 percent think it is.

- More women than men rate it important to tackle litter, graffiti and dog dirt.

- Fewer of the 15–24 age group rate CCTV cameras as important. And the younger people do not pick out problem families as deserving of high priority.

- More of the young favour counselling. They give it a net score of +10 percent, versus –11 percent which their elders give.

- Support for CCTV cameras is greatest among the higher social groups.

- For council estates, it is those in the lower social groups who are more likely to rate it important to keep them in good repair. Similarly, moving down the social brackets brings increased numbers who think it very important to deal toughly with problem families.

- More Northerners rate the repair of council estates important. Similarly, more Northerners think that tough action against problem families matters.

- Libraries matter less to Northerners. They achieve a net score of –4 in the South. For the Midlands the net is –10, and the North it is –18.

Conclusion

The public are quite clear about what they want the public services to be providing. The services do not always appear to understand or to follow the public's agenda. There are activities which are easy to engage in and to measure, but which the public might not rate as particularly important. Similarly, there are activities which the public wishes to be one, but which are in practice difficult to achieve or to quantify.

If there is dichotomy, there is a tendency for it to be between the 'hard' services which the public wants (lower crime, more educated children, and cleaner, safer living space), and various soft options (pursuit of motorists, counselling, community relations).

It is instructive to note that recent local polls, in which electors have been offered better services at higher tax rates, have all resulted in people voting for then lowest tax option. It may be that they feel the services they receive have the wrong priorities.

At a time when there is much debate over how much funding should be directed towards the public services, it is highly relevant that the public do not think the existing funds are necessarily being spent on the right priorities. In addition to the debate over extra funding, it might be appropriate to first tackle the way in which the present resources are being spent. Perhaps the package is wrong?