

## **Burning our money**

28.2.08

I wonder what Gravesham Council will make of this? EVERY town hall has been ordered to send out surveys demanding local residents' personal information and opinions. The forms will ask householders to give details of their children, mortgage, ethnic background, religion and sexual orientation.

This is very intrusive and very sinister and after the recent debacle on lost data I fear that any information handed over risks not remaining confidential.

Ministers have even given instructions that local councils must try to disguise their involvement in the survey to avoid attracting criticism. And they have ruled that the questioning must be paid for out of council tax and carried out every two years.

The New Place Survey - which is expected to be launched next autumn after trials in the spring - is likely to cost at least £15million by 2012.

But the questionnaire does not ask about householders' attitudes to libraries, rubbish collections or schools - all of which are the responsibility of councils. Instead, it solicits information on whether people think local parents are controlling their children's behaviour properly and whether different ethnic communities in the area are getting on with each other.

It is a pointless waste of money. Councils should be trying to make people's lives better by reducing the burden of taxes and improving crumbling services, and not be forced to poke their noses into our lives.