

Caerphilly County Borough Council

The Caerphilly Conversation – Consultation Report

January 2021

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Introduction

Communities and public services right across the UK are facing significant challenges, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, climate change and the subsequent economic issues that these challenges inevitably present.

Despite these challenges, as we recover from the impact of COVID-19 and address these other challenges, there is a unique opportunity to reshape the future for our local area.

The experiences and views of our communities are crucial in helping the Council plan for the future and to shape our place and public services to reflect the social, economic and environmental needs of our residents.

Within this context, Caerphilly county borough council undertook a large-scale consultation called 'The Caerphilly Conversation'. The consultation survey was available on the Council's website between 18th November 2020 and 3rd January 2021 and promoted widely through digital media channels. To ensure as many people as possible were able to have their say, the survey was also included in a special edition of "Newslines" that was delivered to every home within the county borough and effort was made to engage with seldom heard communities.

Designed to seek the views of those who live and work within Caerphilly county borough, the survey provided people with the opportunity to share their experiences of life across the area; their views on public services and suggestions for where things could be improved as we look to the future. The council is also required, by law to set a balanced budget and Council Tax level each year.

The results of this survey will be important in influencing the delivery of services in future years and ensuring the effective use of resources. This report will be presented to Cabinet.

Overview of methodology

The consultation ran between **18th November 2019 and 3rd January 2020**. A survey was made available on the Council's website and promoted widely through digital media channels. During this period, COVID-19 restrictions were in place, which precluded any face-to-face engagement, something that has been key when engaging over the Council's budget proposals in previous years. To help ensure as many people as possible were able to have their say, in particular, those who are digitally excluded (those who do not have the digital skills and/or access to either a device and/or reliable internet access), a paper copy of the survey was delivered to every home within the county borough in a special edition of "Newslines". Key stakeholders and seldom heard communities were engaged with directly wherever possible.

Survey

An in-depth survey was developed covering the following key areas:

- Satisfaction with council services overall and satisfaction with a number of key frontline services provided by the council
- Understanding resident views on the council's response to COVID-19
- Helping shape the council's recovery over future years
- Helping inform our deliberations over next year's budget, including preferences on the Council Tax levels for the forthcoming year
- Informing our ongoing discussions around place shaping over the medium to longer term
- Providing specific insight that can help shape the ten corporate reviews linked to the Team Caerphilly – Better Together transformation strategy

A copy of the full questionnaire can be found in [Annex 1](#).

The full-length survey was made available on the Council's website, for the duration of the consultation period with a prominent front-page banner and a dedicated page linking directly to the survey for online completion. A printable version of the survey was also made available on the website.

To encourage those who are digitally excluded to take part in the consultation, the full-length survey was also included in a "special edition" of the December edition of Council's newsletter "Newslines". This was delivered to every household within the county borough. Any resident needing support in completing the survey was encouraged to contact the Public Engagement team.

A shorter version of the survey was also developed. This survey contained 6 key questions as identified by the Council's Cabinet:

- 1) Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council over the last 12 months?
- 2) How do you think Caerphilly County Borough Council has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) Which 3 services provided by the Council are most important to you/your household?
- 4) What is your preference about Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year?
- 5) Do you agree or disagree with incentives being offered to communities to encourage them to take more pride in their local area?
- 6) Do you have any ideas for how we could provide services differently in the future and how we could work with you and your community to do this?

The purpose of this shorter version of the survey was twofold:

- To form a starting point for discussion when running online sessions with those who are seldom heard

- To form part of the social media campaign to encourage residents to engage via Facebook and Twitter and prompt completion of the full version of the survey.

To encourage participation, all those completing the survey or taking part in online sessions were able to enter a free prize draw.

Digital media and media campaign

During the consultation period, a range of web, media and social media activity was carried out to promote the consultation as widely as possible and to encourage residents to take part and have their say.

Activities carried out as part of this work included:

- A dedicated web page and banner on the home page of the Council's website
- A dedicated edition of "Newslines"
- Media releases
- Regular digital media posts throughout the duration of the consultation period including:
 - Facebook
 - Twitter and
 - NewsOnline: 3 bulletins were sent to 25, 575 subscribers during the consultation period

Further details of the digital media activity undertaken can be found in [Annex 2](#).

Targeted engagement with stakeholders and seldom heard residents

To encourage those with a particular interest in the consultation to take part and ensure that seldom heard residents were able to have their say, details of the consultation, including a link to the survey, were shared widely with a range of key stakeholders and groups. The stakeholder contact list is included in [Annex 3](#). Contact was made, in the first instance, via e-mail.

A number of groups took part in an online discussion and were encouraged to complete the survey if they wished to give a more detailed response:

- Caerphilly County Borough's Welsh Language Forum
- Caerphilly People First
- Caerphilly Youth Forum
- Town and Community Councils

Others promoted and shared with their networks and distribution lists.

Results

A total of 1055 completed surveys were returned by the closing date of 3rd January 2021. Seven of these were completed in Welsh.

In addition to the survey responses, additional feedback was received from residents via e-mail and social media and from those who attended an online discussion.

Full details of these additional responses can be found in [Annex 6 - Digest of additional responses/notes of group discussions](#) and [Annex 7 - Digital media responses](#). Whilst numbers are too small for statistical analysis, the views expressed through these additional responses are broadly reflective of those to the survey.

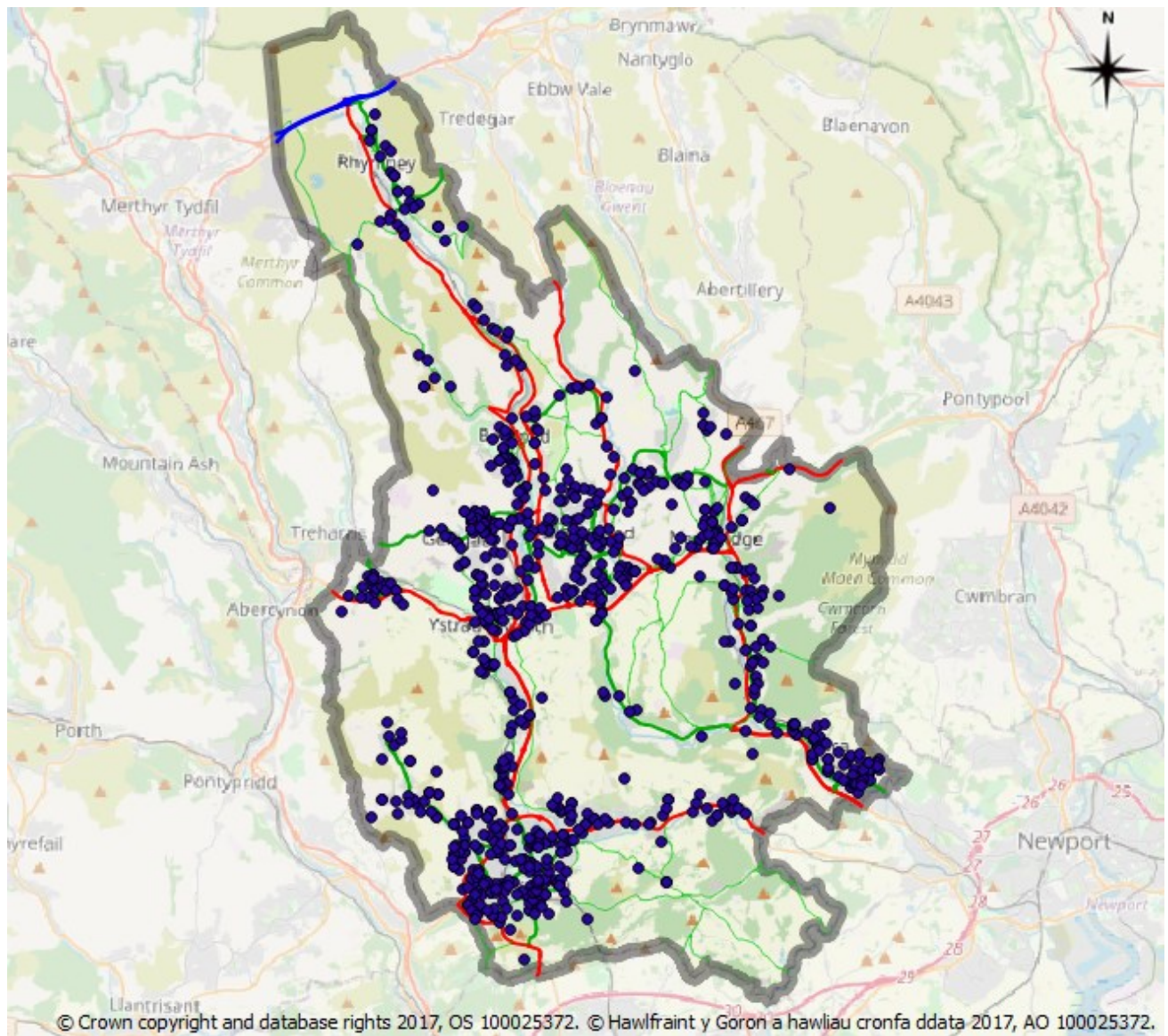
*Note: The statistical data presented within this report relates to full survey responses received online or in paper format. The number of responses received for individual questions may be lower than the total number of completed questionnaires returned. Percentages are therefore based on the number of responses to individual questions (n=number of responses). **For consistency and to allow comparison with previous household surveys, only those who have expressed a view have been included in the statistical analysis with the exclusion of “don’t know” responses.***

A full breakdown of the closed survey responses can be found in [Annex 4](#) with a digest of comments in [Annex 5](#).

Overall, 97% of those who completed the survey were resident of Caerphilly county borough. Where a valid postcode was provided, the responses were mapped and as highlighted in MAP 1, there was a good geographical distribution of respondents from across the county borough.

Just over half (55%) of respondents indicated that they were female, and 15% indicated that they have a disability. The largest proportion of respondents were in the older age groups. A full respondent profile can be found at the end of [Annex 4](#).

Map 1: Postcode distribution of survey respondents

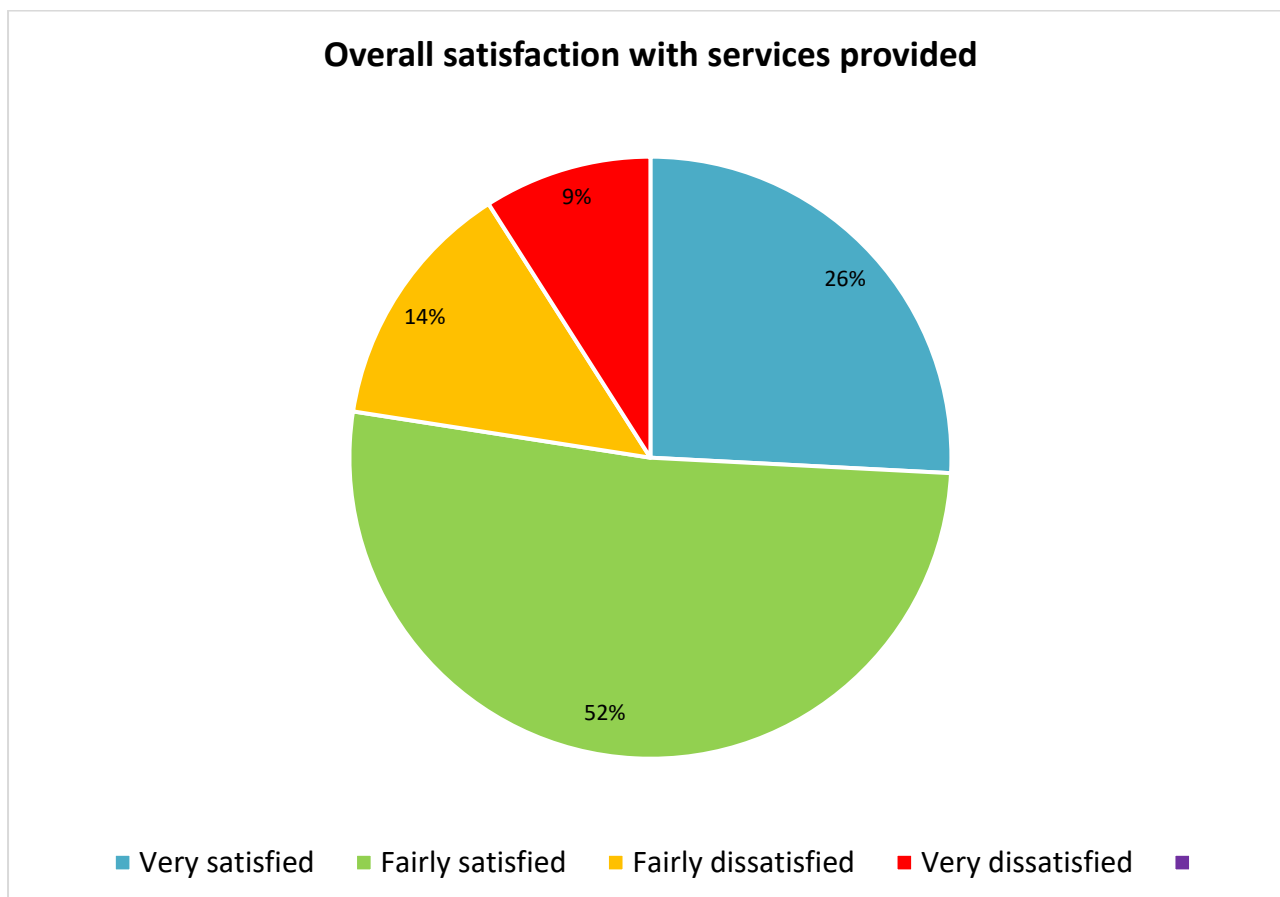


Key Findings and Themes

Overall satisfaction with Council Services

Taking everything into account, **77%** of respondents were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the overall service provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council over the last 12 months.

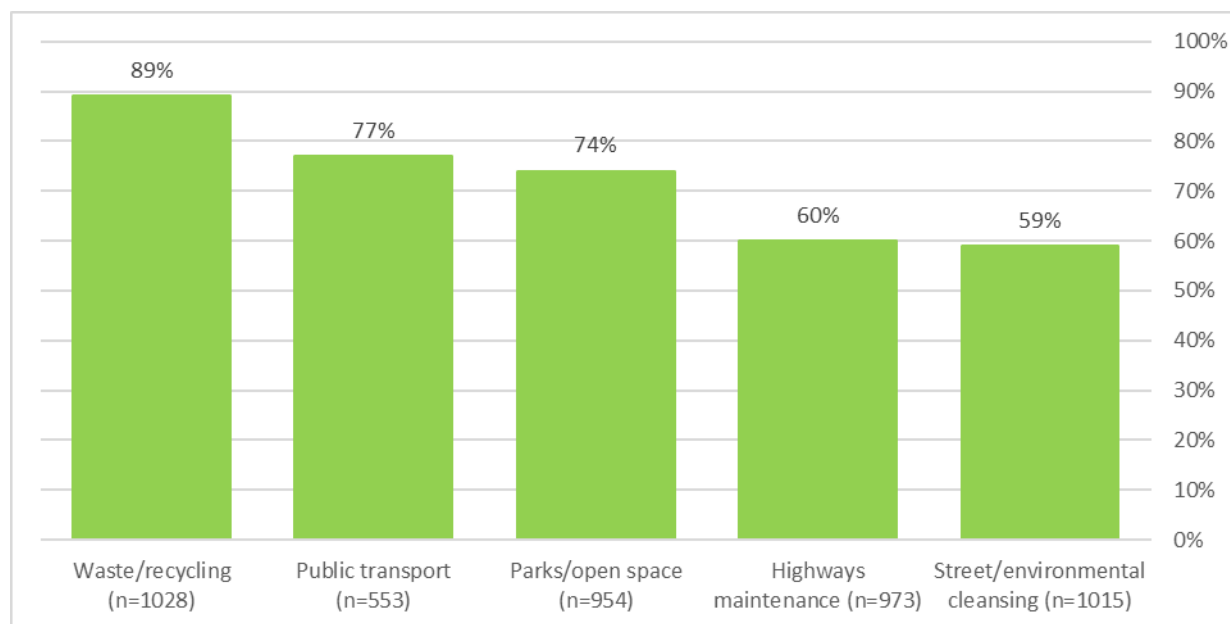
Graph 1: Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council over the last 12 months (n=991)



Satisfaction with aspects of Council services

Overall, 89% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with waste and recycling collection. Of those who responded, 77% were satisfied with public transport, 74% were satisfied with parks and open spaces whilst a lower proportion of respondents were satisfied with highway maintenance (60%) and street and environmental cleansing (59%).

Graph 2: Percentage of respondents very or fairly satisfied with aspects of frontline Council services:



Factors affecting the appearance of neighbourhoods

Respondents were asked to identify the single biggest factor affecting the appearance of neighbourhoods. This was an open-ended question with the responses reflecting lower levels of satisfaction with street and environmental cleansing and highway maintenance. Comments related to the area being “unkempt” and “run-down” and specifically:

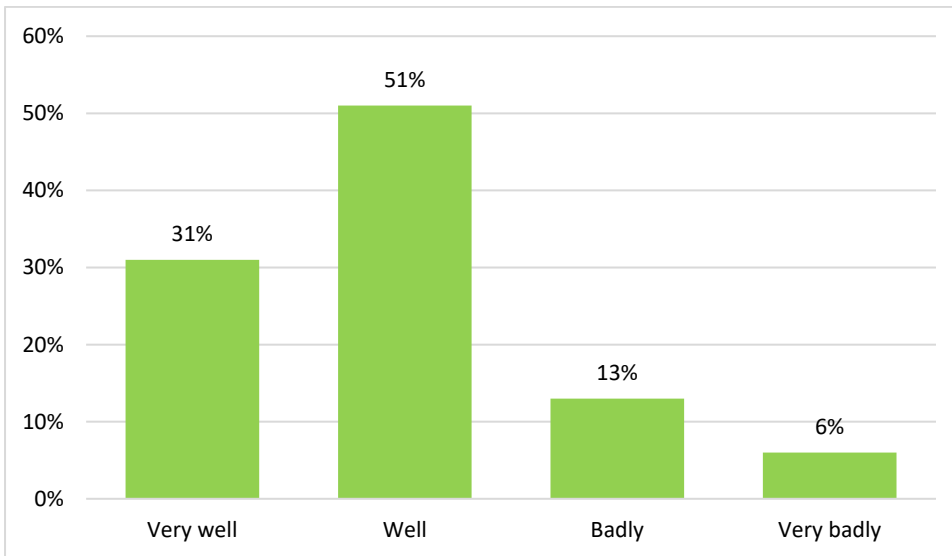
- Lack of cleanliness
- Litter
- Dog fouling
- Lack of street cleansing
- Overflowing bins (in particular dog waste bins)
- Overgrown grass, verges, hedges, weeds
- Fly-tipping
- Poor maintenance of roads and pavements
- Poor maintenance/blocked drains and gullies - (especially leaves)

Anti-social behaviour, parked cars, cars on pavements, building on green field sites were also noted as factors affecting the appearance of neighbourhoods.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

As shown in Graph 3, 82% of respondents felt that Caerphilly County Borough Council has responded well or very well to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Graph 3: How do you think Caerphilly County Borough Council has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic? (n=942)

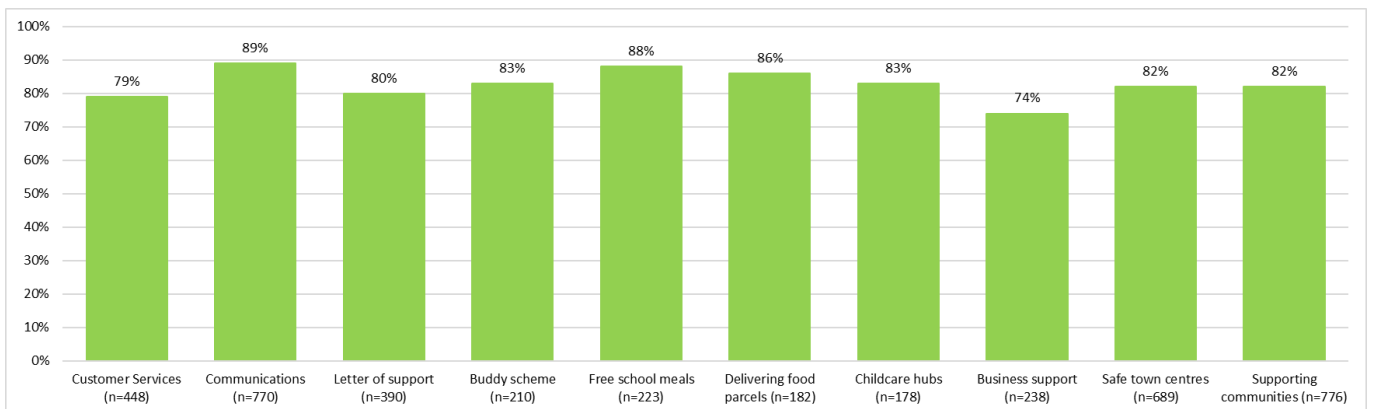


Services accessed during the pandemic

The most widely accessed services during the pandemic were communications, supporting communities, supporting safe opening of town centres and customer services.

Graph 4 shows how well people felt we delivered services during the pandemic. Across all services listed, respondents felt that we had delivered these services well or very well with the highest levels relating to communications e.g. news updates, website and digital media (89%) and the free school meal delivery service (88%).

Graph 4: Percentage of respondents who considered Caerphilly County Borough Council delivered these services well or very well during the pandemic.



A number of services and buildings were closed or had limited access due to COVID-19. The council offered services in a different way to try to enable residents to continue to receive certain key service. Around half of those who responded were aware of the repackaged services although awareness was highest in relation to the financial helpline. The service most used during this time was the enhanced telephone facility to access customer services. This is shown in Graph 5.

Graph 5: Please tell us whether you were aware of these repackaged council services, whether you made use of them during the pandemic or would like to make use of them in the future.



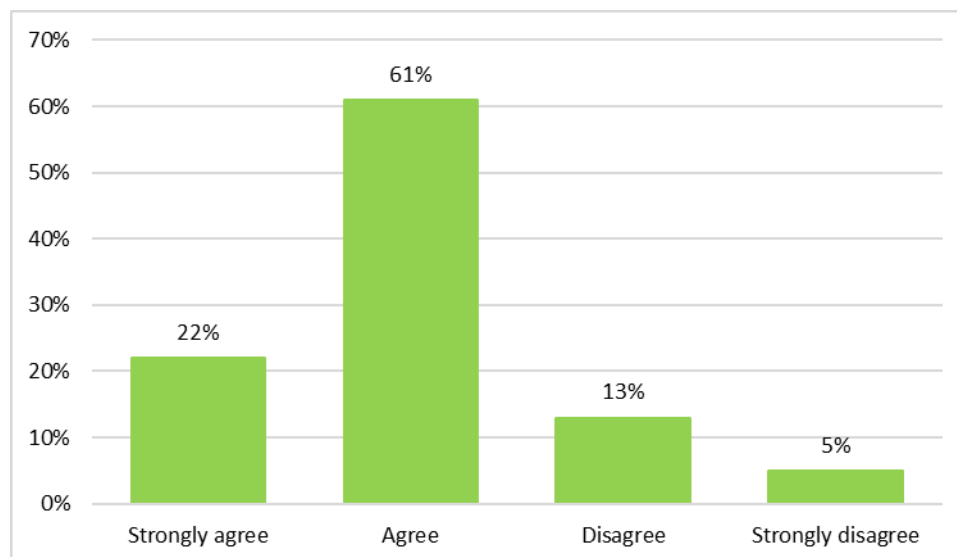
Just over two thirds of respondents (64%) felt that it was very or fairly important to have support from the council, as well as community and voluntary organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communities playing their part

Caerphilly county borough communities came together with voluntary organisation and public bodies including the Council during the pandemic, to provide crucial support to each other.

As shown in Graph 6, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their neighbourhood is a place where people get on well together and help each other.

Graph 6: My neighbourhood is a place where people get on well together and help each other (n=980)



Of those who responded, 46% felt that there was more community spirit as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in their local area (estate, village, town or the county borough as a whole). A number indicated that they have been involved in organising or contributing to a good neighbour scheme, a foodbank or online support groups. Whilst 35% felt that the level of community spirit had stayed the same, 11% felt that there was less community spirit during this period (n=1031).

Of those who felt that community spirit had increased during the pandemic, the main reasons given included:

- By being at home, people have had more opportunity and time
- A feeling that we are all in this together e.g. clapping for the NHS
- More people exercising locally and shopping locally
- Many supporting others with shopping and collecting prescriptions

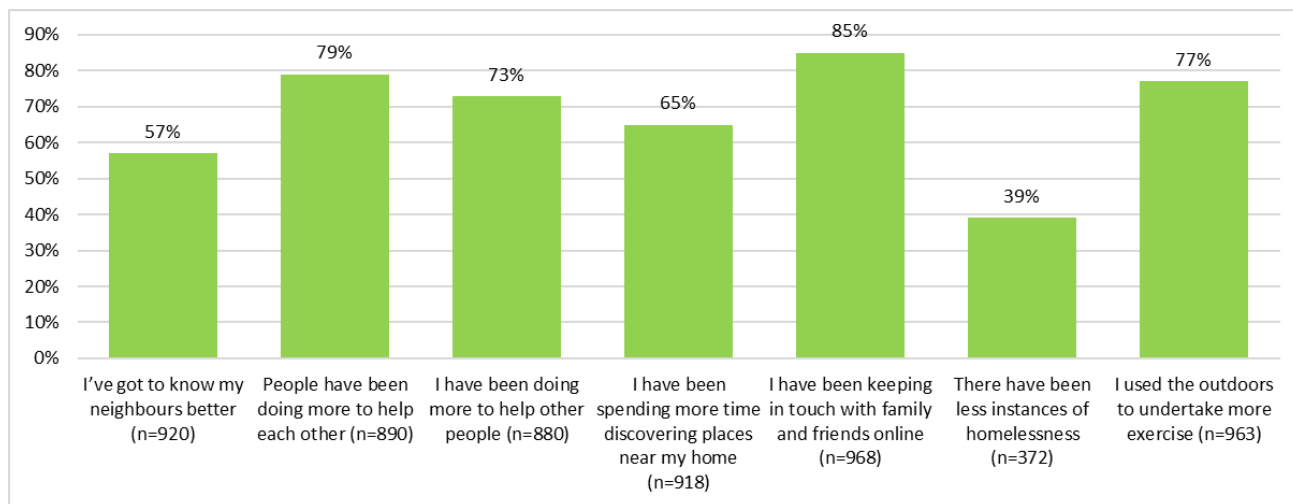
Amongst those who felt that community spirit had stayed the same, the comments were mixed. Some felt that whilst community spirit increased initially, this has since reduced again, others indicated that there has always been good community spirit in their area.

For those who felt there is less community spirit, reasons given include selfishness, fear, frustration with restrictions, people not following rules and others being judgemental. Lockdown restrictions and the closure of community venues e.g. sports clubs, pubs, has reduced the number of opportunities available for people to meet with friends and neighbours.

What changed for you during COVID?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of changes to the way we live our lives, affecting how we go to work, go to school, shop, travel and see friends, family and neighbours. Graph 7 highlights the ways in which people have changed their habits during the pandemic.

Graph 7: Percentage who agree or strongly agree with the statements

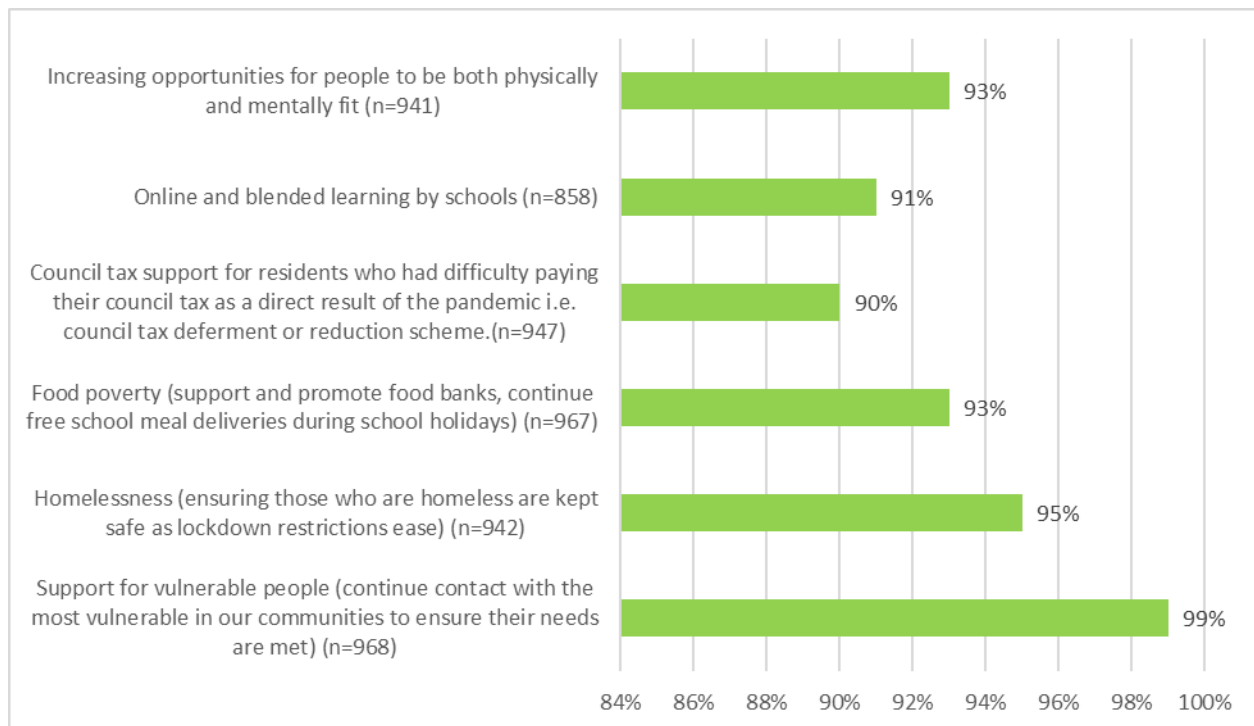


Of those who responded to the survey, 39% indicated that the pandemic hasn't affected their employment situation (although indicated that the way they work had changed). A further 28% indicated that they were not working before the pandemic, many being retired from work.

Priorities for recovery

As shown in Graph 8, key service areas identified were considered to be very or fairly important by over 90% of respondents. Support for the vulnerable in our communities was considered the top priority for the Council as we recover from the pandemic.

Graph 8: Areas that are important or very important for the Council to focus on as we recover from the pandemic



The services considered to be most important to survey respondents include many of the key frontline services, such as refuse and recycling collection, that have been identified as important in previous household surveys. As a result of the pandemic, a number of other services were highlighted in this survey e.g. food poverty and free school meal deliveries. Services felt to be most important to respondents include:

- Waste, refuse collection and recycling services
- Roads and highway maintenance
- Cleansing, maintenance
- Education and schools
- Parks and outdoor open spaces
- Leisure centres
- Libraries
- Street lighting
- Social care and services for the vulnerable in particular, older people and children
- Food Poverty and Free school meals
- Financial and Council Tax support
- Community Safety
- Housing and homelessness
- Public transport
- Online services

Supporting businesses

Creating opportunities for job creation was considered to be important or very important by 97% of respondents (n=964).

Ninety five percent (95%) felt it was important or very important that the Council should focus on support for local businesses both in terms of grant support and preparation for when lockdown restrictions have been eased (n=939). Business start-up support was also considered important in the “other” response box.

Eighty seven percent (87%) felt that it was important or very important to promote town centres as a place to visit (n=967) and 83% felt that it was important or very important to support the visitor economy activities and services at our tourist attraction areas (n=958).

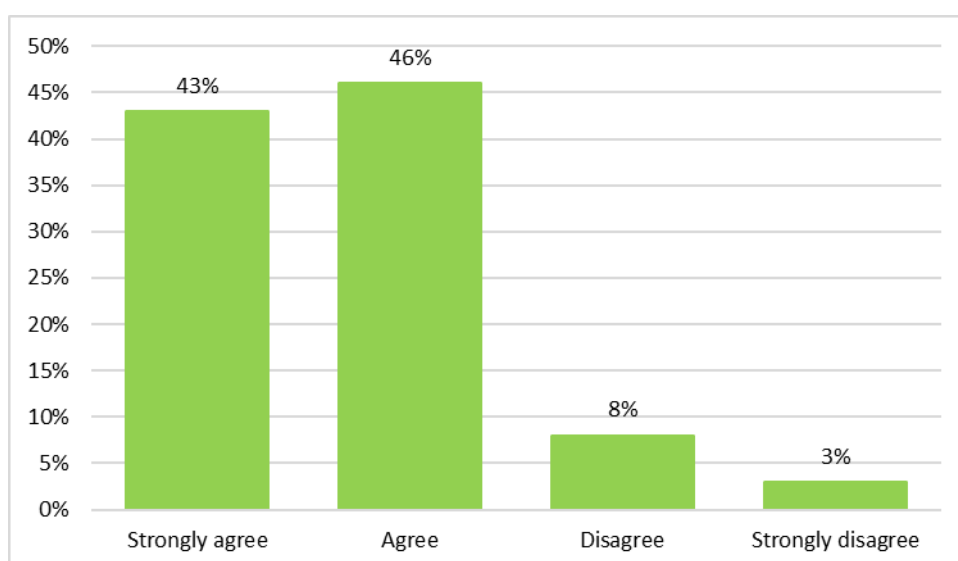
The sustainability of culture and leisure venues was considered important or very important to 82% of respondents (n=969).

Working better with communities

Of those who responded, 21% indicated that they currently volunteer. The area most would be interested in getting involved in is community volunteering e.g. litter picking etc. In total 174 people provided contact details to be added to a register of volunteers.

78% felt that it was a good idea to make a community budget available to residents to do more things for themselves in the future and as shown in Graph 9, 89% agreed or strongly agreed with incentives being offered to communities to encourage them to take pride in their local area.

Graph 9: Incentives being offered to communities to encourage them to take pride in their local area



Council Service transformation

Accessing services and contacting the Council

Of those who responded to the survey:

- 2% said that they can't or don't want to access the internet and
- 4% indicated that they do not have affordable internet access
- a small proportion visited Council *buildings* regularly prior to the pandemic with 94% saying that they visited Council buildings to pay bills or access service less than fortnightly

Thirty seven percent (37%) of respondents indicated that they have needed to contact the Council since the offices closed in March. The main reasons given were in relation to recycling and waste collection and Council Tax.

The main way of contacting the Council during this time was via the telephone (69%) with 41% using e-mail and 37% using the website. Overall, 73% said that they found contacting the Council very easy or quite easy during the lockdown period.

Cash payments

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council has been unable to take cash payments and have helped people to switch towards paying their bills in a different way. . 76% agree that the Council should be encouraging people to continue to pay their bills in this way. A number of comments related to ensuring that a range of options are available and ensuring that alternatives are available for those without bank accounts and those who are digitally excluded (those without the skills to use and/or those with no access to a device or internet). A small number indicated that there is mistrust of systems.

Improving access to services remotely

Respondents were asked to identify what the Council could do to further improve the way residents are able to access services remotely (either over the phone or online). The following areas were highlighted:

- Phones are important for those who are digitally excluded
- Ensure phones are answered promptly
- Ensure staff who answer calls are able to respond to queries and that there is consistency
- Improve systems
 - Ensure website forms etc are easy to use
 - Improve chat facility
- Extend opening hours – not a 9-5 service

Services considered necessary for face to face delivery moving forward include:

- Registration services

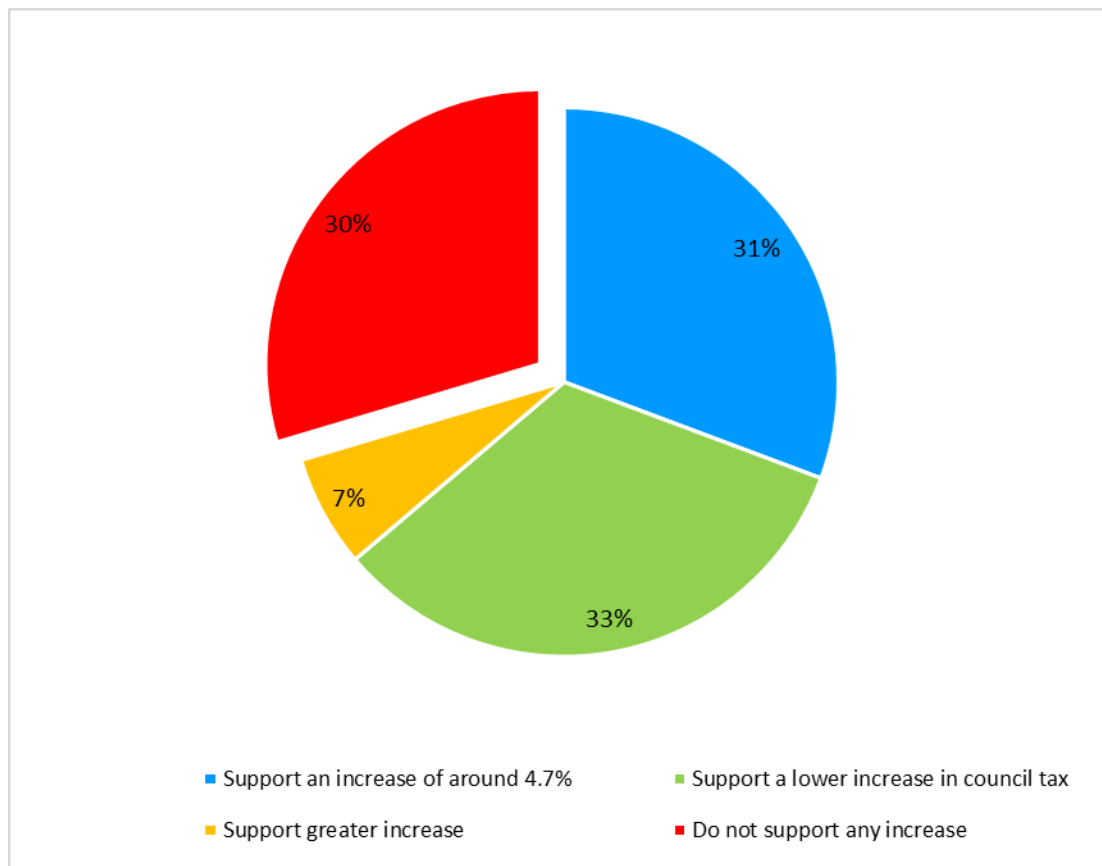
- Libraries
- Help and advice/support
- Care/social services and
- Schools

Council budget and council tax setting

At the time of undertaking the consultation, councils across the country had not received a detailed indication of their financial settlement for the forthcoming year. Councils have a legal obligation each year however to set a balanced budget, with determined council tax levels. Council tax raises around £72.8 million a year. This represents 20.4% of our total budget. In 2019/2020 council tax increased in Caerphilly county borough by 4.7%. In light of the situation, residents were asked to indicate their preference in relation to an increase in Council Tax:

Graph 10 shows that 31% of respondents would support the proposed increase of 4.7% with a further 7% being prepared to pay an even greater increase. Thirty three percent (33%) would support a lower increase. However, 30% do not support any increase in Council Tax at all.

Graph 10: Preference for Council Tax Increase 2021/22 (n=1006)



When asked how else the Council could meet the financial challenges faced, if not through an increase in Council Tax the comments related to:

- Consideration of the current financial hardship people are facing in relation to job losses/furlough etc
- Improving efficiency in the delivery of services – waste less
- Reducing the number of senior management roles/general staffing levels and salaries
- Moving towards providing more services in a digital way
- Streamlining the provision of non-core functions – with suggestions that some services can be removed completely or provided by another organisation
- Reduce the number of buildings and associated costs (considering increase in home working).

Many of the responses to this question were of a similar nature to those given in relation to how the Council could provide services differently in the future and how the Council can work with the community to do this (please refer to [Providing services differently in future](#)).

Place shaping ambitions becoming a reality

The Council is transforming services as part of its ‘Team Caerphilly – Better Together’ Strategy, looking at how we can do things differently; prioritise our services, explore opportunities for greater customer focus, digital delivery, partnership working and a taking a more commercial approach. COVID-19 has accelerated the speed and shape of change in the way we deliver our services and we have had to adapt quickly.

The council has already made significant progress in its journey of transformation, with a number of further priority development areas within its emerging place shaping ambitions.

Housing

The council is currently nearing completion on its £261m physical improvement programme to its housing stock through the delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Going forward, the council will continue to invest in its existing housing stock to provide quality, energy efficient, affordable homes as well as a partnership new build programme.

Respondents were asked what they felt good quality housing looks like and what is important for the Council to consider. Responses focussed on the following:

- Sustainability
 - Green homes – energy efficiency,
 - Not building on greenfield sites or floodplains
- Access to (appropriate) outdoor space
- Accessible – close to amenities/local community facilities
- The need for a strong infrastructure to support new homes
 - Roads
 - Essential services,
 - Future proof – sustainable infrastructure
 - Active travel routes

- Homes that are safe and secure
- Tackling homelessness as a priority
- Accommodating changing family structures e.g. homes for single people/smaller families

Jobs and Economy

The council is a key partner in the Cardiff Capital Region, which is made up of ten local authorities. The UK Government and Welsh Government have committed £1.1bn to the City Deal – which is supported by an additional £120m committed by the 10 local authority partners.

The City Deal’s longer term aims are to help boost economic growth, by improving transport links, increasing skills, helping people into work and giving businesses the support they need to grow.

The survey asked for views on what a strong and prosperous economy looks like and what, as a resident of Caerphilly county borough, is important when it comes to the local economy. Key issues raised include:

- Local jobs and employment opportunities
 - Sustainable local economy
 - Support small and local businesses
 - Encourage investment
- Opportunities for young people
 - Training
 - Education
 - Apprenticeships
- “Thriving” and “vibrant” town centres with no empty properties
 - Not just shops
 - Leisure venues/restaurants to encourage people to visit and spend in the area
- Good transport links
- Reduce inequality
 - Reduce the poverty gap
 - Eradicate homelessness

Views were sought in relation to ideas for attracting new business and visitors to town centres and high streets, particularly in light of changing shopping habits. A number of themes emerged:

- Free and improved town centre car parking
- Lower business rates to encourage new businesses
- Financial incentives to businesses – grants
- An “unique” offer in town centres to make them a “go to destination”
 - individual shops
 - variety and quality

- A need to acknowledge that habits are changing and to change what is on offer to match this
 - “reimagined” town centres
 - not just a 9-5 economy
 - a mixed economy - recreation and residential use - not just shops
- A clean and safe place to visit
- A need to improve the general appearance of town centre/area to make it attractive and to encourage visitors
- Improve cycle networks and public transport
- Support digitally enabled business opportunities i.e. ensure reliable broadband for businesses
- Reduce the number of empty properties – not just shops in town centres but out of town retail areas too
- Learn from others
- Promote what is on offer

Education fit for 21st Century – ‘Shared Ambitions’:

The council’s ‘Shared Ambitions’ strategy aims to raise standards and ensure that learners are healthy, confident, proud and ambitious and can benefit from high quality educational opportunities, settings and experiences.

We also have the 21st Century Schools investment programme, which is helping transform schools and other settings into first class educational facilities.

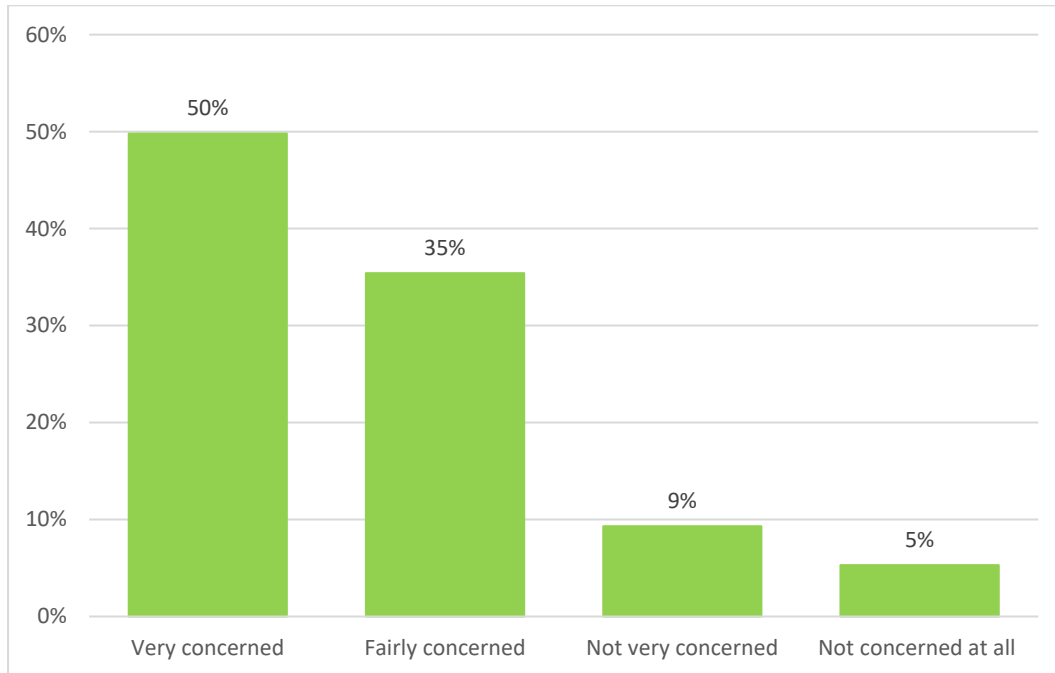
Respondents were asked to identify what is most important to them in relation to education. Recurring points raised include:

- Ensuring that education provides skills for jobs and work and that vocational education is future proof
- The curriculum should focus on providing practical, broad ranging, life skills and not just academic achievements
- School buildings and facilities need to be
 - Modern and fit for purpose
 - Provide a safe environment
- Teaching should be of a high quality
- Education needs to be diverse and inclusive and accessible to all (disability, Welsh language provision)
- Adult education is also important
- Access to technology for all including reliable broadband will support education
- Encourage higher aspirations and raise expectations

The environment/Climate change

The council has declared a climate change emergency and is committed to the ambitious target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. As shown in Graph 11, 85% of those who responded were very or fairly concerned about climate change.

Graph 11: How concerned are you about climate change? (n=995)



In relation to what people could do to help the council and other partners to reduce the impact of climate change over the coming years, the following themes emerged in the comments:

- A strong infrastructure needs to be in place to encourage and enable people to travel in a more sustainable way:
 - car charging points for electric cars
 - affordable, green and reliable public transport
 - good cycle paths and
 - safe walking routes to encourage walking – especially for shorter journeys
- Reduce travel - maintain home working to reduce the need to travel
- Encourage people to shop locally
- Larger organisations to take the lead e.g. reducing single use plastic
- Improve recycling
- Aim for zero waste
 - use less
 - waste less
 - upcycle
 - promote circular economy

- Education and raising awareness in relation to sustainability – clarity over what needs to be done e.g. recycling
- Plant trees (don't cut down trees)
- Grow own food

Many of those who responded indicated that they were already doing several of these things.

Providing services differently in future

The final question in the survey asked respondents to identify how the Council could provide services differently in the future and how the Council could work with the community to do this. Suggestions included:

- How the authority at all levels (including elected members) communicate and engage with residents
- Listen to communities and become more aware of what residents need
- Encourage volunteering and work with volunteers and local groups to deliver services
- Ensure that there is easy access to services – for all whether this be online, over the phone or face to face.
 - Digital access to service should be available wherever possible but acknowledge that some are digitally excluded
 - Some services have to be delivered face to face e.g. libraries and leisure centres
 - Making services more difficult to access can have a knock on effect e.g. it is perceived that reduced access to Household Waste Recycling Centres has led to an increase in fly tipping
- Use existing buildings to co-locate services e.g. libraries as “Hubs” where residents can access many services in one place, in the community
 - Share resources – between service areas, with partners, local volunteering organisations, local businesses
- Work with neighbouring local authorities to deliver services
- Carry out a review of services. As needs have changed, so service provision should change too
- Improve efficiency (using technology to do so) and reduce bureaucracy
- Ensure sustainability of service development and provision
 - e.g. green and efficient transport services, good cycle networks provision of electric charging points
 - maintain home working where possible reduce the number of office buildings etc

Next Steps

This report and the findings of this survey will be shared with the Council's Cabinet and Senior Management Team.

List of Annexes:

- 1) [Consultation Survey](#)
- 2) [Digital Media Campaign](#)
- 3) [Targeted Stakeholder Engagement](#)
- 4) [Summary of Closed Survey Responses](#)
- 5) [Digest of Comments](#)
- 6) [Digest of additional comments](#)
- 7) [Digital media responses](#)