

# Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel

**Date: Tuesday, 14th May, 2024**

**Time: 4.00 pm**

**Venue: Council Chamber - Guildhall, Bath**

**Councillors:** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Ian Halsall, Hal MacFie, Onkar Saini,  
Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby and Colin Blackburn



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1. **Inspection of Papers:** Papers are available for inspection as follows:

Council's website: <https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

2. **Details of decisions taken at this meeting** can be found in the minutes which will be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting. In the meantime, details can be obtained by contacting as above.

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## Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel - Tuesday, 14th May, 2024

at 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber - Guildhall, Bath

### A G E N D A

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS
2. EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair will draw attention to the emergency evacuation procedure as set out under Note 6.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

At this point in the meeting declarations of interest are received from Members in any of the agenda items under consideration at the meeting. Members are asked to indicate:

- (a) The agenda item number in which they have an interest to declare.
- (b) The nature of their interest.
- (c) Whether their interest is **a disclosable pecuniary interest** or an **other interest**,  
(as defined in Part 4.4 Appendix B of the Code of Conduct and Rules for Registration of Interests)

Any Member who needs to clarify any matters relating to the declaration of interests is recommended to seek advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer or a member of his staff before the meeting to expedite dealing with the item during the meeting.

5. TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN
6. ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING
7. MINUTES (Pages 7 - 18)
8. CABINET MEMBER UPDATE
9. DEBATE NOT HATE (UPDATE) (Pages 19 - 24)
10. UPDATE ON PROCUREMENT

There will be a presentation on this item.

11. VOICEBOX - OUTCOMES OF RESIDENT SURVEY (Pages 25 - 46)
12. PANEL WORKPLAN (Pages 47 - 50)

This report presents the latest workplan for the Panel. Any suggestions for further items or amendments to the current programme will be logged and scheduled in consultation with the Panel's Chair and supporting officers.

The Committee Administrator for this meeting is Michaela Gay who can be contacted on [michaela\\_gay@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:michaela_gay@bathnes.gov.uk), 01225 394411.

**BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

**MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

Tuesday, 12th March, 2024

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Ian Halsall, Hal MacFie, Onkar Saini, Toby Simon, Colin Blackburn and Ruth Malloy (in place of Oli Henman)

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Malcolm Treby

**56 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**57 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

**58 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Oli Henman gave his apologies.

Councillor Malcolm Treby gave his apologies.

**59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

**60 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

**61 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING**

There were none.

**62 MINUTES**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

**63 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

There was none.

**64 HERITAGE SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN**

The Chair invited Councillor Paul Roper, Cabinet Member for Economic and Cultural Sustainable Development and Robert Campbell, Head of Heritage Services to introduce the report.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Halsall stated that the good news in the report was testament to all teams involved. He added that it was good news regarding access to the records office. He asked about the upper area in the Victoria Art Gallery and when the roof repair was expected so that there was a limit to this cultural loss. The officer explained that there had been a historical underinvestment in the roof and there was no choice now but to fix it so the gallery is closed until this can be done otherwise art could be damaged. The extent of the work is unknown until an inspection is carried out. He explained that listed building consent is expected in March/April and an inspection will follow. It is possible that there will need to be further listed building consent but if not, it is hoped that it can open in September. Confirmation can be given once the extent of the damage is known.

Councillor Blackburn stated that the report is shown as a Business Plan but is actually an Executive Summary. He asked what was being done to make things happen in terms of returning markets and protecting the asset. He asked what the big jump in education visitor numbers cost. He stated that income per visitor seems to be reducing but no reason is given for this. The Cabinet Member stated that 'Visit West' is used to promote the city. He explained that Asian tourism has not recovered since the pandemic, but this may be a geopolitical issue. The officer added that we do market in China on social media and trade delegations. We were only put back on the pre-approved travel destination last year. We are proactive and the market is likely to return in 2025/26. Regarding educational visitor costs, the officer did not have the exact costs but explained that there was a large education audience (around 16-19 thousand pupils) which is in line with a mandate set for the Council as an investment in improving the lives of local people. He stated that this is a long-term investment which will ensure future support of the monument. Councillor Moss stated that this is missing from the risk register in terms of the impact on profitability. Also, as numbers increase – visitor enjoyment may go down – a difficult balance. He agreed that educational experience is of benefit going forwards. The officer agreed regarding the balance between commercial activities and socially minded activities but added that some philanthropic donations can be linked to socially minded activities – the aim is to diversify the income streams to mitigate risk in times such as the pandemic.

Councillor Blackburn stated that scrutiny members are here to help but do need more details in reports.

Councillor Simon asked if a gazebo could be constructed for the people queuing for the Roman Baths which would enhance the visitor experience. He asked if the Pump Room Catering contract could be extended to allow for opening in the evenings. He also asked about combined tickets as many cities have, which include a package for public transport/open top bus tours and visitor attractions which may help to drive footfall.

Councillor MacFie asked about Heritage Services in terms of Northeast Somerset and if so, could it be included in the report. The officer explained that the schools programme includes all schools in BANES. He added that there had been a pop-up museum on Keynsham High Street and there had been a festival of archaeology in Stanton Drew. He stated that there will be more things like this going forwards.

Councillor Saini asked about the timeline for repayment of the Capital Grant; How the fund-raising scheme is structured and about the role and responsibility of independent charities. The officer explained that the grant is the responsibility of the Corporate Estate so he would refer to his colleagues. He explained the fund-raising structure as a well-trodden path – there are anchor givers such as the Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund. He explained that the role of independent charities is the same model as the Roman Baths and that will apply to the Fashion Museum.

Councillor Halsall asked about Discovery Cards and asked if people could just take a utility bill to gain access. The officer explained that the benefits are wider than just free access to venues – there are discounts elsewhere and the card is a vehicle for other businesses to sign up to it. He further explained that the technology behind the cards is holding us back from remote sign up at present but will be moving towards that system. There has been increased sign up – 24k before the pandemic and now there are 40k.

Councillor Hodge asked if there is a risk to other services if a surplus in this service is not achieved (this is not shown in the risk analysis). She asked about ticket prices increases and concessions. She also asked about visitor driven staffing. The officer stated that he was not sure about the risk to other services, but the risk always depends on footfall. He stated that he would supply the Panel with the ticket price information with variable pricing strategy and concessions. In terms of visitor driven staffing, he explained that staff numbers are increased at times of high visitor numbers.

In a response to questions from Councillor Malloy, the officer explained that the Heritage Advisory Board has external voices which have expertise in different aspects of the Heritage Sector. He explained that the aim is to bring these voices to have a stronger bearing earlier on in the budget process. In terms of cultural audit, he explained that an internal audit is happening now before the summer. He stated that the service is always happy to work with the Great Spa Towns as the opportunities arise.

Councillor Moss asked if the paintings in storage could be used in the Guildhall. Councillor Hodge asked if a variety of genders could be portrayed. The officer stated that he was happy to consider this, taking into account practicalities and cost.

## **65 COMMERCIAL ESTATE UPDATE**

The Chair invited Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources and Richard Long, Head of Commercial Estate to introduce the report.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Blackburn stated that he would like more information in order to understand the Commercial Estate. He asked about the recent budget which had identified a number of properties up for sale in order to pay off the WECA Post Office loan. He also asked about the amount of money needed for repairs and the impact of the voids. The Cabinet Member explained that the sale of properties was not in the Commercial or Corporate Estate but part of treasury management. The officer explained that he had been campaigning to get a war chest to address disrepair and resources are being combined to bring some properties back. He explained that disposals are dealt with in a different team and a partner is being commissioned to help form a process for declaring certain assets surplus. The Cabinet Member for Economic and Cultural Sustainable Development explained that currently data on Corporate Assets is held on 7/8 IT systems and work is being done on the specifications for a new system. There is a move to a new corporate landlord model. He explained that payments to WECA will be made over the next 5 years and part of this may be found in the disposal of Corporate Assets.

Councillor Halsall asked if most people in arrears eventually fulfil the debt and is there a cost to chase people. The Cabinet Member for Resources explained that there is a red/green split – some we are expecting to be paid and some is seen as risk. The officer added that we now chase all debt.

Councillor Hodge asked if there is a strategy to address outstanding works. The officer explained that it was done purely on the dateline. He explained that there is a backlog on maintenance and work is being done with the resources available, currently there is a focus on 18 properties.

Councillor Simon asked about the £220k debt (rated green but now 4 quarters old). He also asked if conversions to residential use can be part of a strategy to address housing. The officer stated that the debt is made up of areas where we are in dispute with the tenant over the level of debt. On the second point, he explained that we must comply with the Article 4 directive (which protects employment space) which means properties must have been marketed for employment purposes.

Councillor Saini asked about the key drivers of the Commercial Estate and how we compare regarding IPD (standard property index). He asked about notable trends and strategies to optimise performance going forwards. The officer explained that there had been concern about the trend for online shopping and how this would affect retail. Regarding the IPD, we are on par with similar mixed bag portfolio areas. He further explained that there is a landlords' forum to ensure local landowners support each other and the BID to collaborate on events.

Councillor Halsall asked if there is a list of properties and if there are any commercial properties outside of the district. The officer explained that the Council has records of titles and land ownerships. We can raise this with corporate landlords group – there is no reason not to make the list public. Regarding properties outside of the district – there are several including 2 office buildings in Aztec West and industrial buildings in Melksham and Chippenham. None of these defaulted during the pandemic.

Councillor Hodge asked if any of the pop-up businesses in void properties go on to have a long term let. The officer explained that there are pop ups in both commercial and corporate properties and some transition into long term lets.



Councillor Moss asked about the boundary between corporate and commercial properties, he stated that it would be useful to see where the line is drawn. Councillors could have access to commercial information as they are corporate trustees. He asked about the Community Asset Transfer process and asked about benchmarking opportunities with places such as York and Chester. The officer explained that we are a member of a historic cities group, but the nature of each estate is very different. Councillor Roper (Cabinet Member for Economic and Cultural Sustainable Development) explained that the split between the commercial and corporate estate is complex with regard to Community Asset Transfer.

**66 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the workplan.

Councillor Moss explained that there are ongoing discussions with Group Leaders and Cabinet Members regarding the presentation of items at PDS Panel meetings.

The meeting ended at 5.44 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**

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## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

Tuesday, 16th January, 2024

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Lucy Hodge, Ian Halsall, Hal MacFie, Onkar Saini, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby and Colin Blackburn

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Oli Henman

#### **36 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **37 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillor Oli Henman sent his apologies.

#### **39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Moss informed the Panel that he would step down as Chair for item 10 on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone as he is parish clerk for Farrington Gurney Parish Council. The Vice Chair, Councillor Lucy Hodge will Chair for this item.

#### **40 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

#### **41 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING**

Councillor Shaun Hughes made a statement on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

Councillor Sam Ross made a statement on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

Angharad Barber made a statement on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

Margaret Heffernan made a statement on the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

Andy Jeffery, Farrington Gurney Parish Council, made a statement regarding SVEZ

#### **42 MINUTES**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

#### **43 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

#### **44 AEQUUS UPDATE**

The Cabinet Project Lead for Built Environment and Sustainable Development - Councillor Deborah Collins (with officer support – Simon Martin, Director of Capital and Housing Delivery and also Tim Richens - Aequus) gave a presentation which covered the following:

- Aequus Group – Company Background
- Company Achievements 2022/23
- Company Aims – Updated
- Pipeline – BANES Housing and Regeneration
- Pipeline – Partnership Working
- Meeting the Climate Emergency
- Efficient Company Structure
- Sustaining Financial Returns to Shareholder
- Financials – ACL Forecast P & L
- Financials – Forecast Returns to Shareholder
- Draft Company Objectives (Operational)
- Draft Company Objectives (Financial & Corporate)
- Business Planning Next Steps
- And Finally – Examples of Achievements

Panel members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Blackburn asked about the risk element of projects such as the impact of the deficiencies regarding the Keynsham Riverside Site and remedial work at Sladebrook. Tim Richens explained that there is a 2-year post completion defect liability which is all within the budget. There is no impact on the Council. There is also 10-year NHBC insurance contract in place.

Councillor Blackburn asked what ‘cost price’ means in relation to social housing. Tim Richens stated that the Council look at the business plan some sites are challenging and costs have to be factored in.

Councillor Blackburn asked where scrutiny would be appropriate in the tendering process. Councillor Moss stated that the Aequus Business Plan is going to the March meeting of the Cabinet where questions can be submitted and the item will be coming back this Panel every 6/12 months.

Councillor Blackburn asked about interest paid on borrowings and the impacts on returns to the Council. He asked about consultancy fees and commissioned services in term of the amount. Tim Richens stated the consultancy fees would cover getting the site ready for delivery. In response to a further question about last years costs, Mr Richens explained that this was considered last November by the Corporate Audit Committee and the information is publicly available.

Regarding Wellington buildings, Mr Richens explained that this is owned by the Council and he could not comment. Simon Martin (Council officer) explained that the site is currently being reviewed to enable us to instruct Aequus. In response to a query from Councillor Blackburn on how long the Council had been aware of the issues, the officer explained that he could not give a direct timeline at present, some properties were tenanted and from an executive point of view, the Council has accountability for the work.

Councillor Treby asked about Aequus' part in the Council's objectives. The officer explained that an update on KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) will be reported to the Panel every 6 months. The Cabinet Project Lead added that the Council will be working on the Housing Delivery Plan.

Councillor Hodge asked if the fixed revenue return of £1m would come forward before 2026/27 and when does the overage profit come through. Tim Richens explained that the cost of sales depends on the development and approval process. The Overage profit flows once the development is complete which depends on the rate of sales.

Councillor Simon asked if Aequus risk register is shared with the Council. The officer explained that, from the Council perspective the risk is picked up in the Sustainability Communities risk register. The risks are not currently escalated, there is a regular monthly meeting to assess risk. Tim Richens explained that Aequus have a low level risk register that is escalated to the board if necessary. Aequus has an Audit and Risk Committee with an independent Chair.

Councillor Moss referred to the delivery of 22 homes towards the Council's housing stock – he asked if there is a delivery schedule and is preparatory work being done on a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) which is needed on reaching 200 dwellings. Tim Richens stated that there are 26 homes separate to Newbridge and work is being done on the future pipeline, there will be more details in March. The Cabinet Member explained that work is being done on a pipeline for homes. She confirmed that work is being done regarding the need for an HRA.

Councillor Moss asked the number of social houses at the moment. The officer explained that there are categories such as 'supported lodging' and 'general needs'. The HRA would take into account 'general needs'. He stated that he would report back on exact numbers.

## **45 SOMER VALLEY ENTERPRISE ZONE UPDATE**

### **Councillor Lucy Hodge (Vice Chair) was Chair for this item.**

The Cabinet Member for Built Environment and Sustainable Development - Councillor Matt McCabe (with officer support – Richard Holden, Operations Manager, Bath Enterprise Zone) gave a presentation which covered the following:

- Somer Valley Enterprise Zone (SVEZ) Cabinet Decisions – 1<sup>st</sup> Feb
- SVEZ Redline Plan
- SVEZ LDO Illustrative Masterplan

- Map - Distance between home and work (2021 census)
- Map - Mode of travel to workplace (2021 census)
- Housing within the Somer Valley
- Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
- Air Quality – Farrington Gurney and Temple Cloud
- Statutory Consultation (16<sup>th</sup> Jan – 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023)
- Revised Statutory Consultation (22<sup>nd</sup> Sept – 26<sup>th</sup> Oct 2023)
- Parish and Town Council Responses
- Demand within the Somer Valley

Panel member made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Treby asked if commuting times would be reduced or improved. The officer explained that, with the road mitigations, there would be an anticipated improvement to the network. The aim is to encourage active travel (with cycle tracks). There will be a dialogue with First Bus regarding the possible re introduction of services when the SVEZ opens.

Councillor Halsall asked if there are design codes regarding the build and can the Council use enforcement if these are not followed. The officer explained that there are design codes along with planning permission. The design codes are plot specific and set certain parameters for developers. If a plot is not needed for a hotel (for example) then another use can come forward.

Councillor Simon asked what the status of CPO (Compulsory Purchase Orders) are at present and is there an order/phasing for the plot development. The officer explained that the Council do not own the land and have been in negotiations since 2019. The paper going to Cabinet on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 - will enable us to continue negotiations, and a potential future CPO decision to be made. It would depend on funding from WECA for the land acquisition. Regarding the plot development, he explained that the LDO will be in place for 20 years, it is likely the development will take circ 10 years. Ideally the industrial units will be delivered at an early stage as there is demand. Food and beverage units would change if there is no demand.

Councillor Blackburn asked what had changed to cause the postponement. The officer explained that there was statutory consultation in January 2023 but there was not enough time before the elections to get responses back from all the statutory consultees. Development Management have taken a prudent and transparent approach by undertaking the revised consultation (October 2023) in response to adjustments made following the January 2023 statutory consultation. The changes are around dark corridors, increasing the depth of the perimeter (which protects bats) and extended perimeter parking. These are all in response to consultation comments.

Councillor Blackburn asked what made the site attractive to employers. The officer explained that the aim was to reduce the amount of commuting out of the Somer Valley. He stated that there was a local work force and a local College.

Councillor Blackburn asked about the financial risk. The officer explained that £30million will bring the scheme forward. A wider conversation with WECA is needed.

Councillor Saini stated that there had been changes to office culture since the pandemic and asked if there had been any research done since then regarding the potential impact. He also asked what the impact would be on local businesses and suppliers. Regarding working practices, the officer explained that office units would only come forward if they are pre let. He added that working practices had now moved towards hybrid working rather than working from home. Regarding impact on local suppliers and business, the officer explained that there is a strong demand for industrial space. He stated that some plots (D4) could be occupied by a local business, and they are making sure there is no conflict with Midsomer Norton high street.

In response to a query from Councillor Treby regarding air quality in the area, the officer responded that this is not anticipated to be a problem with or without the scheme.

Councillor Halsall stated that the scheme would be attractive as they would not need to seek planning permission and have no business rates. He asked if there would be ancillary uses. The officer stated that the LDO is the planning decision, there have been a number of conversations with potential occupiers. Ancillary use such as a hotel and pub would need a critical mass of development before they go in.

Councillor Simon stated that there is a risk with a scheme 15 years in the making that it loses relevance, but this is not the case due to the scheme's flexibility. People still need employment in an area where housing is increasing. He recognised that a lot of work on mitigation has been done.

Councillor Hodge asked about the employment figures and asked if the retail would conflict with local providers. The officer explained that expected employment numbers had been reduced from 1,700 to 1,300. There is no retail planned on the site.

Councillor Treby asked about the business case and whether WECA would commit to subsidise a bus service from day 1.

Councillor Blackburn stated that there are a huge number of objections, this is a risk factor. If we move towards CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order), the level of objections should be noted.

The Panel noted that the minute of the Panel comments would be circulated to Cabinet Member.

## **46 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan

The meeting ended at 6.50 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**



<b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b>	
MEETING:	<b>Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b>
MEETING DATE:	<b>14<sup>th</sup> May 2024</b>
TITLE:	<b>Debate Not Hate Update</b>
WARD:	All
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>	
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b>	
Letter to Chief Constable Sarah Crew	

## **1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 This paper is to provide an update to Corporate PDS Panel on the actions taken so far and proposed actions on the recent Debate Not Hate motion agreed by Council on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the actions taken so far.
- 2.2 Provide input and a steer on the proposed plans to provide further support for members and officers on their safety and wellbeing whilst undertaking council business.
- 2.3 Agree to take further reports and recommendations following a regular review of support available to members and officers in respect of abuse, intimidation and safety.

## **3 THE REPORT**

### **Motion agreed at full Council meeting**

- 3.1 On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024, the Council unanimously agreed the Debate Not Hate motion proposed by Councillor Lesley Mansell. The full debate can be found [here](#). Based on the LGA's national Debate Not Hate campaign toolkit information, the motion included ten points of action for the council to take.

## Examples from members and officers

- 3.2 During the Council meeting, councillors recounted their experiences of being threatened and intimidated by members of the public. We have also since collected additional reports of threatening and abusive behaviour (13 in total) and these have been shared with members.
- 3.3 In work undertaken by council officers in 2021 and 2022, numerous examples of threatening and abusive behaviour towards officers were captured in a report. This included one officer being threatened with a hammer, another being followed home, multiple incidents of abusive language and threats made to staff answering the telephone in customer facing roles (such as parking and housing) and waste and recycling crew members reporting members of the public shouting abuse and driving at them whilst they were undertaking their work. From April 2023 to March 2024 139 incidents were captured on the council's incident reporting system.

## Actions taken far

- 3.4 **Public statement:** The council has signed the LGA's Debate Not Hate public statement [here](#) which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support for those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.
- 3.5 **Press release:** The council issued a press release ([here](#)) on 3 April 2024 to share news of the Debate Not Hate campaign and to raise public awareness.
- 3.6 **Letter to Ministers:** At the end of March, a cross party letter was sent to local MPs asking them to support the campaign and to the Government to ask it to work with the LGA to develop and implement a plan to address abuse and intimidation of people working and holding office in local government.
- 3.7 **Meeting with MP:** Group Leaders met with Wera Hobhouse MP on 12 April 2024 to discuss these issues. She has since raised the issue in parliament (see [here](#)) and has issued her own press release. She has also written to Chief Constable Sarah Crew at Avon and Somerset Police to request further support from local police.
- 3.8 **Policy:** The council launched a Violence, Aggression and Threatening Behaviour (Staff Safety) Policy ([here](#)) in April 2023 covering both members and officers. This was underpinned by work carried out through focus groups and analysis in 2022. A set of powerful campaign messaging was launched as part of this campaign and have been used by the council on posters and on social media ([here](#)). A new Health & Safety incident reporting system ([here](#)) was also launched at the same time. Further work to promote both of these is needed.
- 3.9 **Standards Committee:** On 23 April 2024, the Council's Standards Committee supported the Monitoring Officer's proposal to take a more sympathetic approach to requests by members to withhold from publication their home address, as a sensitive interest, where that member has concerns about violence or intimidation. Further information was circulated to members and co-opted members on the 26 April 2024.

## Proposed future actions

- 3.10 **Virtual briefing:** We will hold an online, virtual briefing for all councillors in June to provide further information on personal safety and lone working, (including technology available) online safety and signpost the resources, e-learning and support available. It will be recorded and shared for any that cannot make the date.
- 3.11 **Regular updates:** We will arrange quarterly email updates for all members and officers to remind them of all of the resources, information and support available.
- 3.12 **Communications:** We will build on the LGA's Debate Not Hate communications toolkit to develop resources similar to those developed for the Violence and Aggression campaign highlighted above. We will also designate one specific day annually where we raise awareness through our communications of the work that we are doing.
- 3.13 **Police liaison:** We will follow up on Wera Hobhouse's letter to the Chief Constable and raise issues at the fortnightly meeting with our Neighbourhood Policing team. We will also raise with Community Safety Partnership colleagues.
- 3.14 **Parish liaison:** This will be put forward as an agenda item for the Parish liaison meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> June to raise awareness and highlight support and resources available.
- 3.15 **Wellbeing:** We have in place a wide range of resources to support officer and member wellbeing, and we will promote and publicise these further in the briefings and updates, ensuring that there is a nominated officer to support member wellbeing.

## 4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 Legal duties fall under The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HASWA), Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW), The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (as amended) and Health and Safety (Consultation with Staff) Regulations 1996 (as amended) and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. These frameworks require that the council ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of staff at work.
- 4.2 Although the above Health and Safety duties do not relate to councillors as they are not staff, the council is clearly committed, through this piece of work and more generally, to protect and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of its councillors.

## 5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 There are no significant resource implications as a result of these proposed actions.

## 6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## 7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken relating to this work. It should be noted that abuse and intimidation can happen to any councillors and we have heard of the impact of abusive and threatening behaviour towards both male and female councillors, of a variety of ages and from every political group.

7.2 We will monitor the incidents and reports of abusive and threatening behaviour to see if any protected characteristic group is affected more or less than any other.

## 8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 N/A

## 9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 N/A

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The actions in this report have been developed by a small group of officers from across the Resources Directorate with support from Political Assistants.

10.2 The S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer have cleared this report for circulation.

<b>Contact person</b>	Cherry Bennett, Director of People & Change 01225 477203
<b>Background papers</b>	Debate Not Hate motion to Council <a href="#">here</a> Letter to S Crew
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	



**Wera Hobhouse MP**  
Member of Parliament for Bath  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 020 7219 2093/01225 307024

Sarah Crew, Chief Constable Avon and Somerset Constabulary  
Police Headquarters  
PO Box 37  
Valley Road  
Portishead  
BS20 8JJ

18<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Dear Sarah

Since the horrific murders in recent years of MPs Jo Cox and David Amiss we have become all too aware of the risks which our politicians, both national and local, can face. Indeed the Local Government Association's (LGA) councillor census of 2022 reported that seven out of ten councillors had experienced abuse or intimidation in the last year.

As a result the LGA has launched a campaign entitled "Debate Not Hate" which aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the support for local politicians facing unacceptable behaviour towards them.

Apart from the tragic human consequences which can arise in these circumstances, I am concerned about the undermining effect this abuse and intimidation can have on democracy, whereby elected members are prevented from representing the communities they serve, and people are deterred from even standing for election in the first place.

I met with representatives from all the council groups in B&NES last week to discuss this issue. They shared some examples of the intimidation and abuse they and council officers had experienced. These included one worker who was driven at by a car, another (female) colleague who was followed back to her workplace and threatened with physical violence, and another who was threatened with a hammer. These were just a few of the accounts.

Naturally we went on to discuss the support and security that councillors and officers receive, and I was shocked to learn that when they have reported incidents in the past to local police, they have received limited practical support.



**Wera Hobhouse MP**  
Member of Parliament for Bath  
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 020 7219 2093/01225 307024

You will, I am sure, agree that this is unacceptable, and that it is extremely important that:

- a) records are kept of all such incidents, so that the true scale of the issue can become known  
  
and
- b) that they are all investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted, so that victims can feel more secure, and perpetrators are absolutely clear that there is a zero-tolerance approach in relation to this type of conduct.

I would be grateful for your assurances to this effect, and for details of the steps your force will take to reinforce them.

With best wishes,

**Wera Hobhouse**  
**Member of Parliament for Bath**

<b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b>			
MEETING	<b>Policy Development &amp; Scrutiny Panel</b>		
MEETING	14 May 2024	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:	
		E	9999
TITLE:	<b>Findings from 2023 Voicebox Resident's Survey</b>		
WARD:	All		
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>			
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b>			
Appendix 1 – Voicebox 2023 results summary			

**1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 This report presents summary findings of the 2023 Bath and North East Somerset resident's survey, known locally as Voicebox.
- 1.2 This report outlines key findings from the survey for review.

**2 RECOMMENDATION**

**The Panel is asked to:**

- 2.1 Review the findings of the survey.**

**3 THE REPORT**

- 3.1 Voicebox is a random probability sampled survey, which means it gives a broadly representative picture of the views and opinions of residents. More detail on methodology and detailed figures are available in the summary report (Appendix 1 attached);
- 3.2 Please note that headline figures will also be reported in the Councils 2023/24 Annual Performance Plan, which is being reported to Cabinet at its June meeting.
- 3.3 Key findings are summarised below:
- 3.4 Satisfaction with how the Council runs things and provides value for money remain lower than national benchmarks and have reduced.**
  - (1) Changes in levels of satisfaction have largely followed national patterns although they have both been consistently lower than the national levels.

- (2) Greater levels of dissatisfaction reported by older working age adults. This cohort of the population also report generally [lower life satisfaction](#).
- (3) Despite this, satisfaction with recent customer experience is notably higher (67% compared to 47%). Respondents satisfied with customer experience but dissatisfied with how the Council runs things are also more likely to be aged 45-64.
- (4) Comparative council tax data demonstrates [that residents pay less than the regional average in Council tax](#) per head of population

### **3.5 11% of respondents feel they can influence decisions, a reduction of 9% points from 2022**

- (1) No benchmarking data is available for this information.
- (2) Fieldwork took place when decisions about bus provision were causing significant debate, and when difficulties with local government finance were also in the national and regional news
- (3) Giving people a say is a key strategic priority for the organisation.

### **3.6 There are lower levels of satisfaction with the Council website than for customer contacts overall. Figure given for those expressing an opinion. Note that nearly 30% of respondents had never used the website.**

- (1) These findings should be considered in terms of a high level of respondents having no stated opinion of the website and the fact that a high proportion of respondents stated that they have never used the website
- (2) The Council's Digital strategy provides strategic alignment for this issue.

### **3.7 Perceptions of safety notably lower for children and during the night and worsening over time (from 23% to 34%). (Note level of crime and anti-social behaviour as a priority (Appendix 1, section 1).**

- (1) These findings can be read in the context of several high-profile serious violence incidents, both in B&NES and neighbouring local authorities.
- (2) Whilst the Avon & Somerset Violence Reduction Profile notes that the age of violent offenders is getting younger, comparative rates of violent crime in B&NES remain lower than both [national](#) and [regional](#) figures
- (3) A multi-agency response to community safety and violence reduction form part of the agenda of the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership.

### **3.8 There is broad support for renewable energy generation, particularly domestic and commercial solar.**

- (1) All areas of renewable energy generation experience popular support, aside from ground mounted solar.
- (2) Improving renewable energy infrastructure is part of the Council's response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.



**3.9 Positive responses to more sustainable travel activities have reduced, but in terms of more sustainable transport choices, walking more is both most popular and seen to be most achievable.**

- (1) There remains a disparity between people supporting more sustainable transport routes and feeling that they can achieve them within their lifestyle.
- (2) The reduction is particularly marked regarding public transport, which can be seen in context of recent changes to local provision.

**4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 None

**5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 None

**6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision-making risk management guidance.

**7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 The Voicebox survey captures respondent demographics. These are used to weight the results to ensure that they are representative of the population. In addition, where relevant to the analysis, questions are available broken down by demographic characteristics. This can, however, be limited by small numbers in many cases and may not be able to be provided.

**8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 The Voicebox survey tracks public opinion on a range of measures which can help reduce carbon emissions.

**9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 None

**10 CONSULTATION**

10.1 S151 and Monitoring Officer have been consulted.

<b>Contact person</b>	Jon Poole, Business Intelligence Manager
<b>Background papers</b>	Voicebox 32 – Full Report will be available on the Strategic Evidence Base Library.
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	

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# Voicebox 2023 Summary Findings

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Bath & North East  
Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives





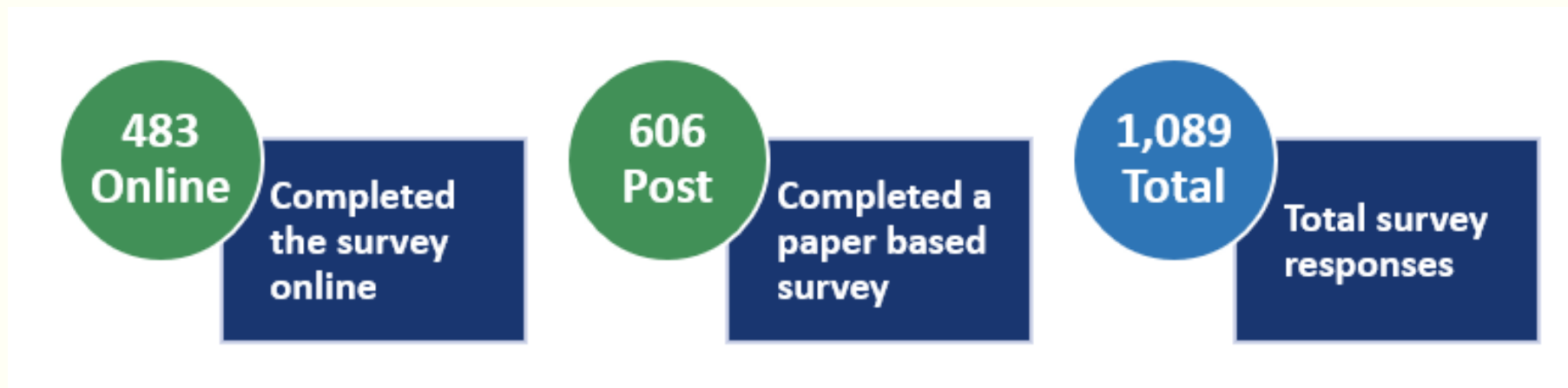
# Purpose

The aim of this report is to:

- Provide background to and summary findings of the Voicebox annual population survey.
- Consider local and national contexts to key findings and outline strategic alignment, recommendations and next steps arising from these findings

# Background

- Corporately funded resident satisfaction survey.
- Questions developed with service areas and ratified with CMT:
  - Second year of surveys – comparison provided where available.
- Random probability sampled postal survey (3,961 households) with online response options (44% online)  
Fieldwork – Oct-Dec 2023, 28% response rate



# Random Probability Survey Sampling

Population size	Required Sample MoE $\pm 5\%$	Required Sample MoE $\pm 3\%$
500	218	341
5,000	357	880
50,000	382	1,045
100,000	383	1,056
160,000	384	1,061

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Note: B&NES population aged 18+ is c160,000 (2022)

Samples need to be drawn at random from the population (everyone has an equal chance of being selected). If they are, then survey sample sizes can be calculated using the following information:

- Population size
- Margin of error (MoE) (Likelihood of results being accurate)
- Confidence level (typically set at 95%) (Likelihood of the sample being representative of the population)
- As can be seen, once the target population exceeds 50,000, the number of completed surveys required increases by very little
- For the UK, required sample size is 1,068 (for a 70m population)
- c1,050 completed surveys gives a good level of confidence in the VB results

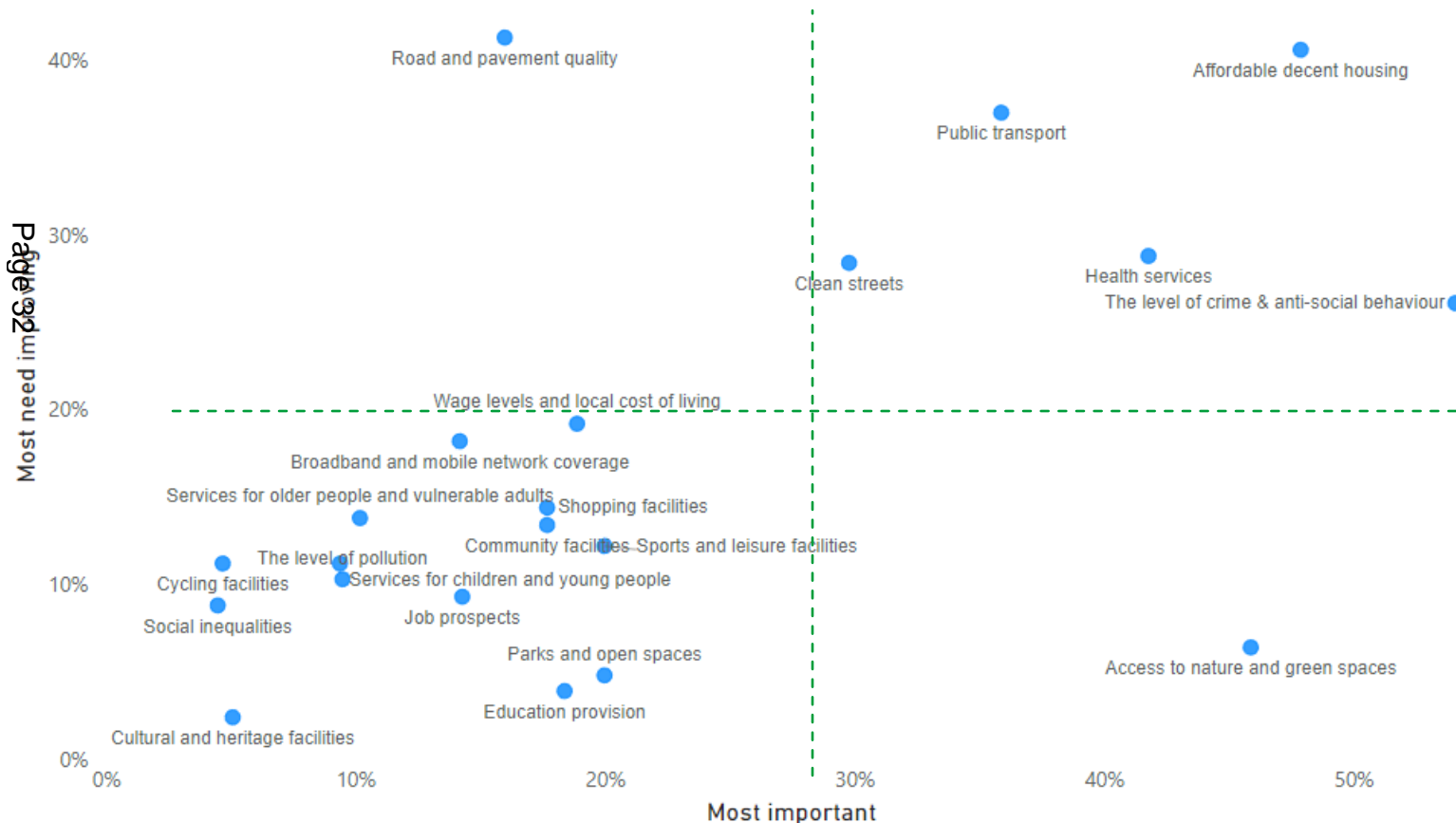


# Headline findings

1. Local Priorities
2. Resident Satisfaction, Priorities and Involvement in decision making
3. Customer Services & Digital
4. Cost of living and food insecurity
5. Working from Home
6. Community Safety
7. Energy Efficiency
8. Transport

# 1. Local Priorities

Most important and Most need improving by Item



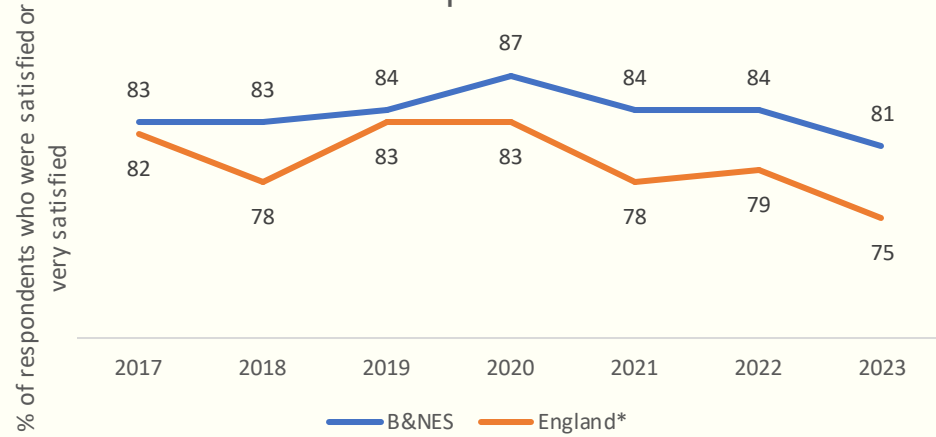
These priorities are similar to those recorded in 2022. Affordable decent housing had a 7% increase in residents saying that the issue needs improving.

Fieldwork was undertaken at a time of significant national coverage of industrial relations in the health service and findings from consultation on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy confirm the priority. It is also in the context of local news regarding serious youth violence both in B&NES and neighbouring authorities.

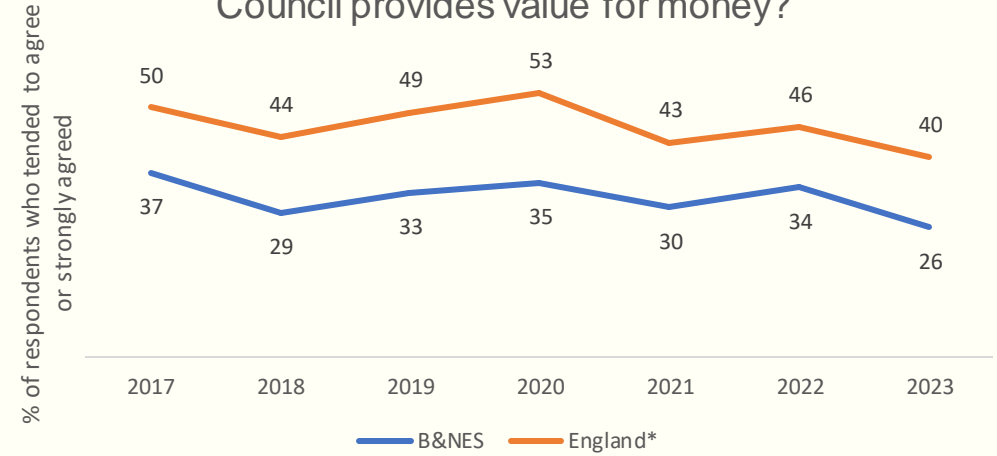


## 2. Satisfaction

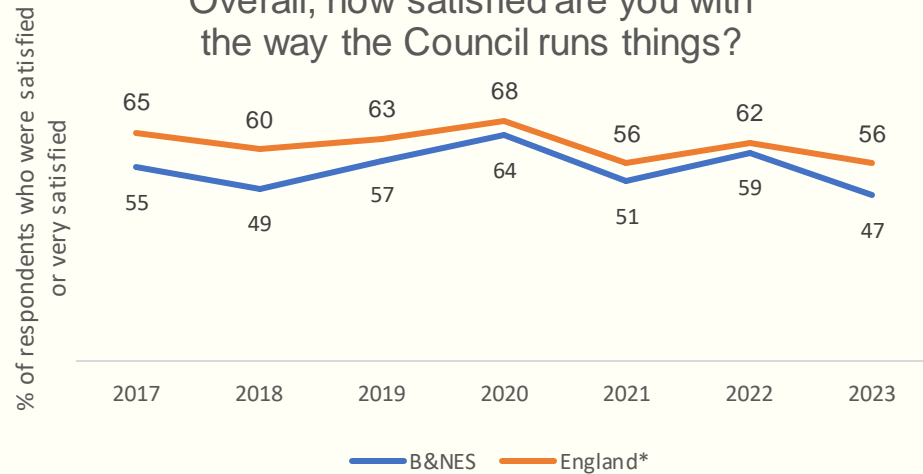
Overall, how satisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?



To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council provides value for money?

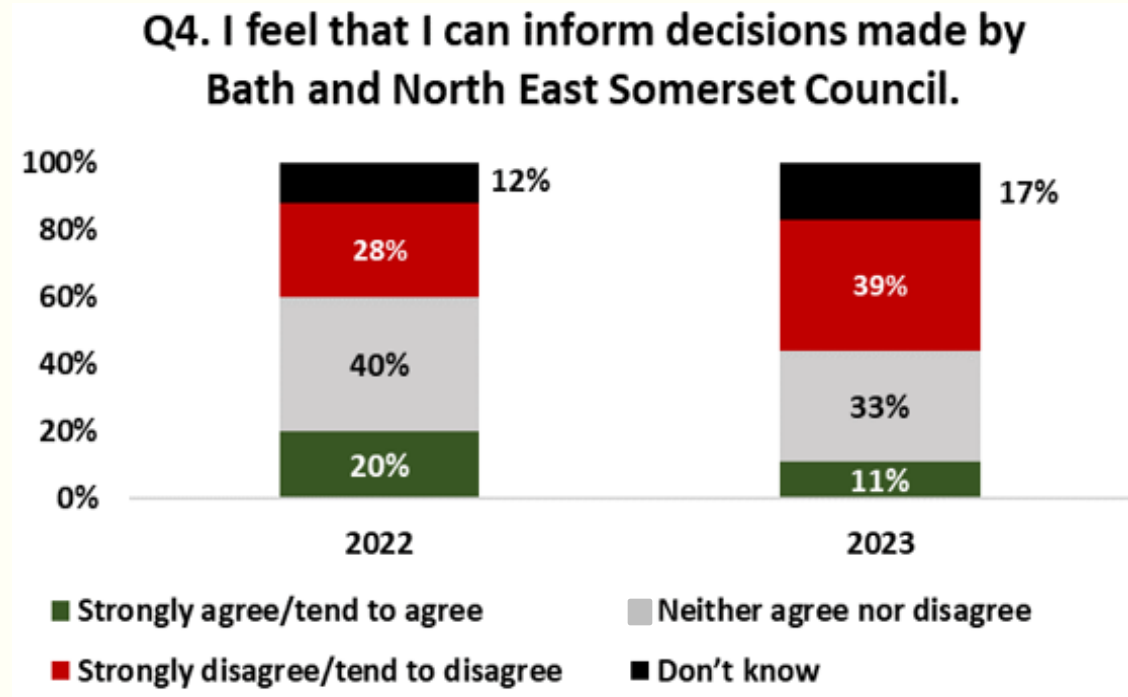


Overall, how satisfied are you with the way the Council runs things?



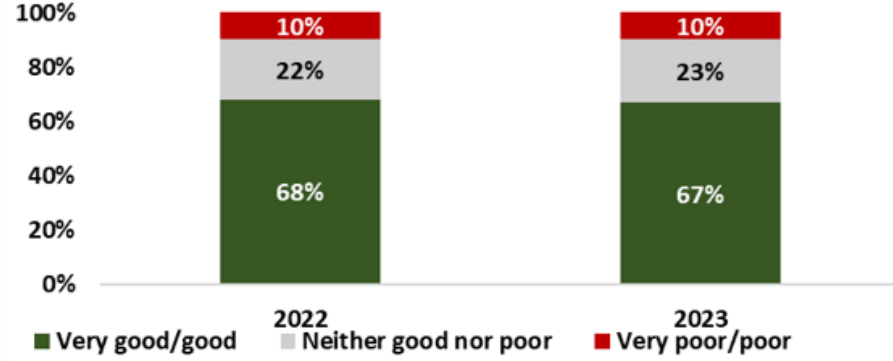
\* Source: Local Government Association (2023) [Polling on Resident Satisfaction with Councils: Round 36](#)

### 3. Decision Making

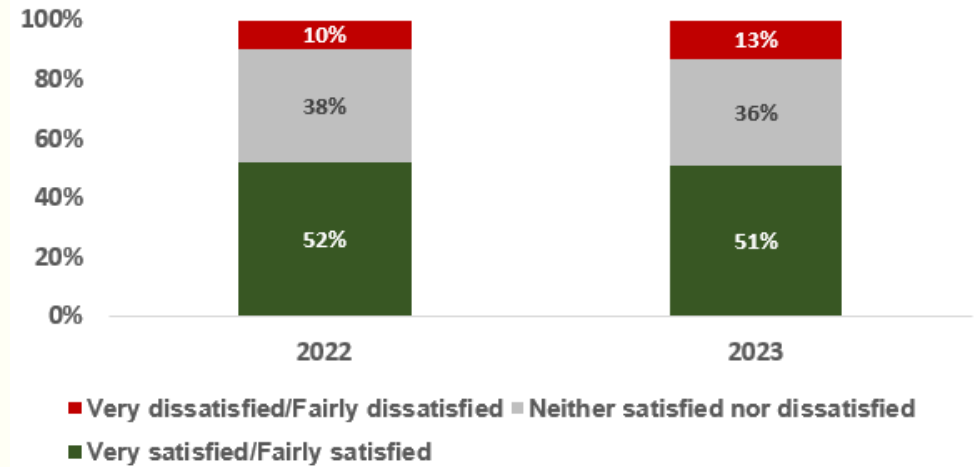


## 4. Customer Services

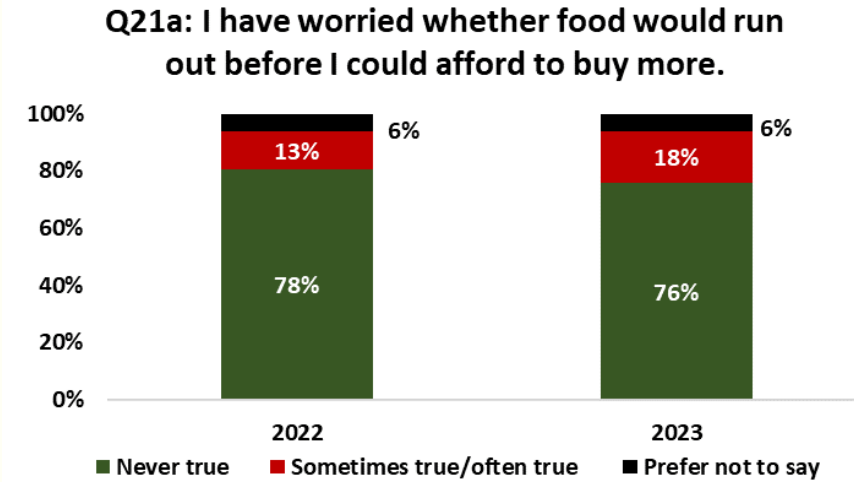
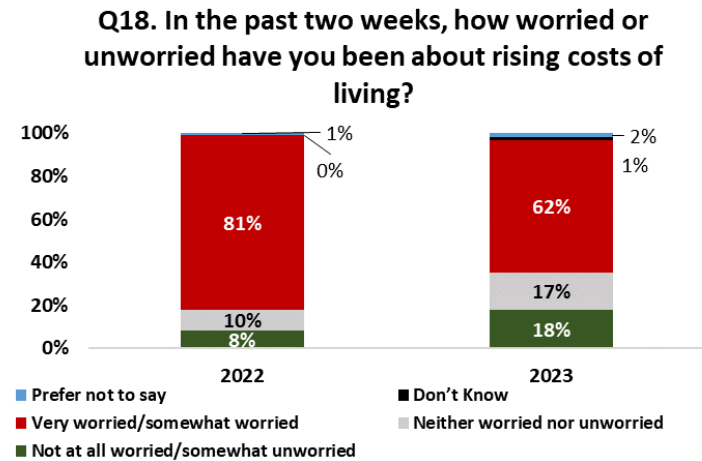
**Q17. Based on your most recent interaction with the Council, how would you rate your experience?**



**Q12. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the Councils current website?**



## 5. Cost of Living and food insecurity



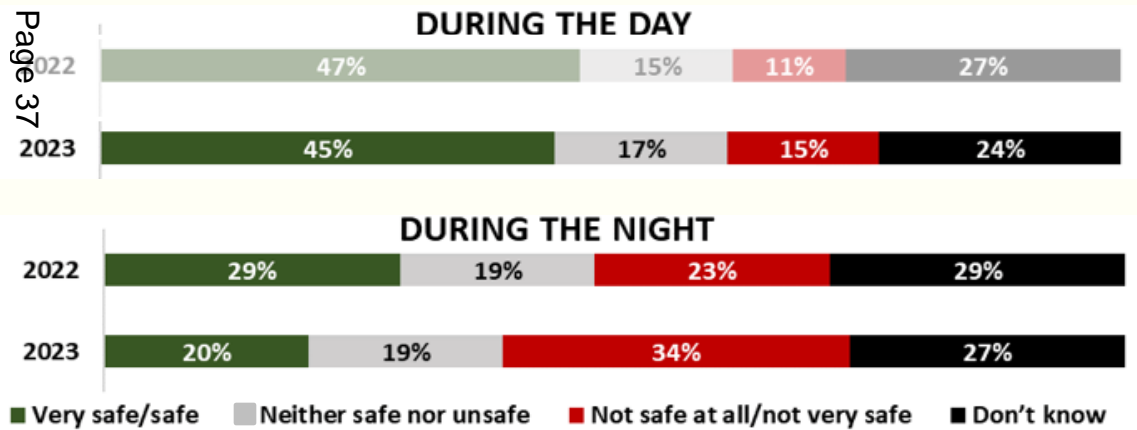
These findings are largely reflective of the national experience of cost-of-living changes and are likely to be largely influenced by national factors.

The increase from 13% to 18% in respondents reporting worry about food security is reflective of the impact of cost-of-living challenges on the area's most vulnerable households. This is supported by national trends reported by the [Citizen's Advice Bureau](#).

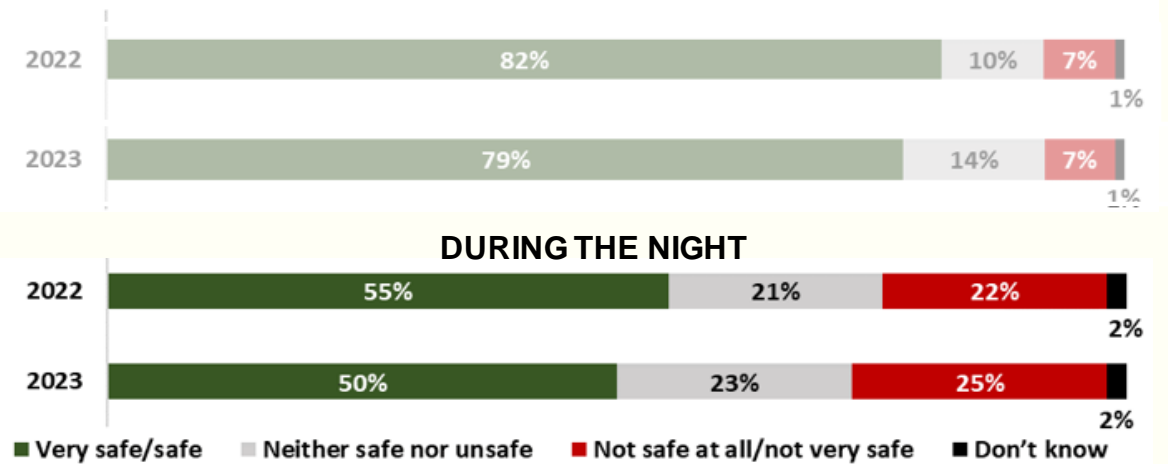
## 6. Community Safety

Q25. How safe do you feel children are from violence outside the home in Bath & North East Somerset?

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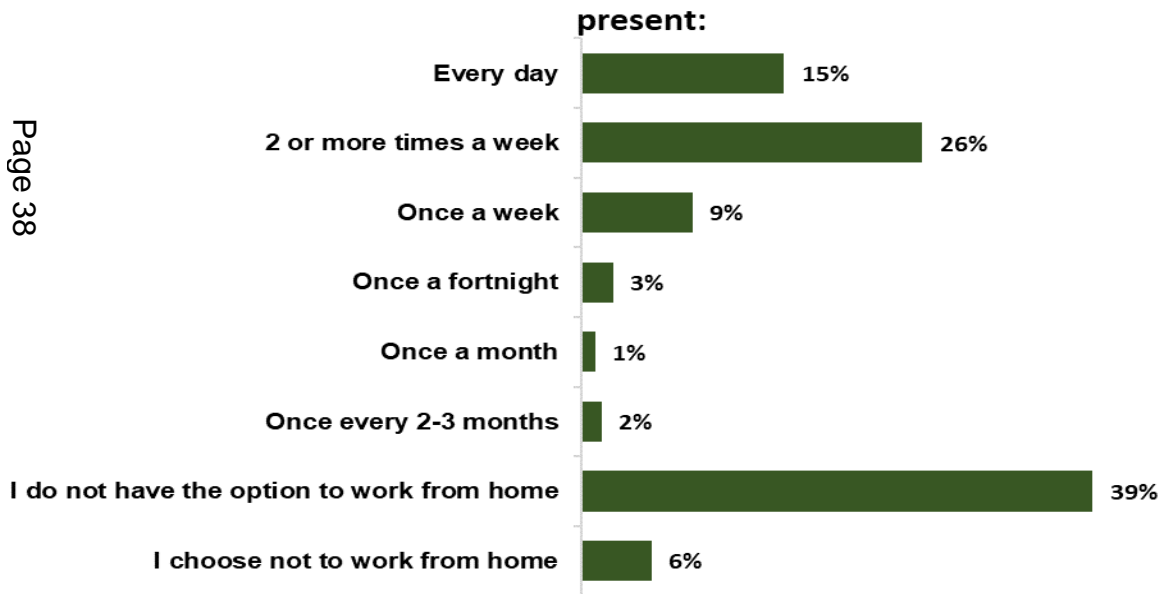


Q24. How safe do you feel from violence outside the home in Bath & North East Somerset? DURING THE DAY

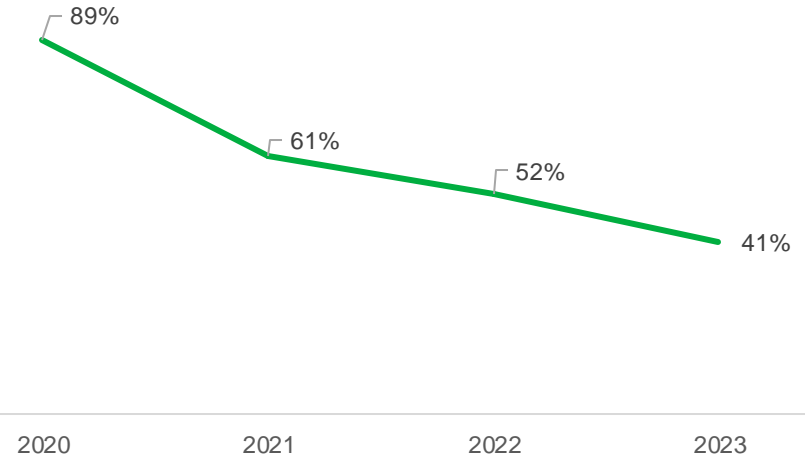


# 7. Working from home

**Q23. If you are currently employed, self-employed or run a business, please state how regularly you work from home at present:**

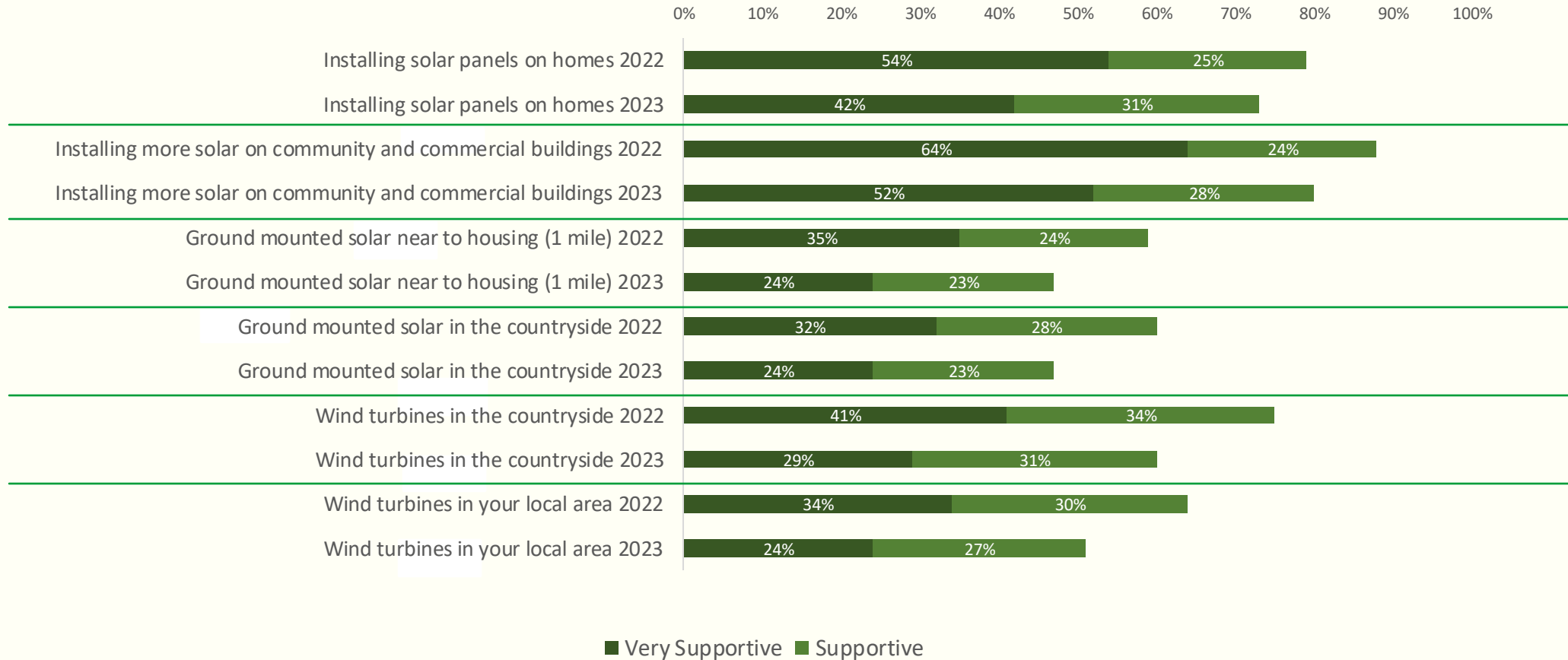


% Working at home at least 2 days a week



# Energy Generation and Efficiency

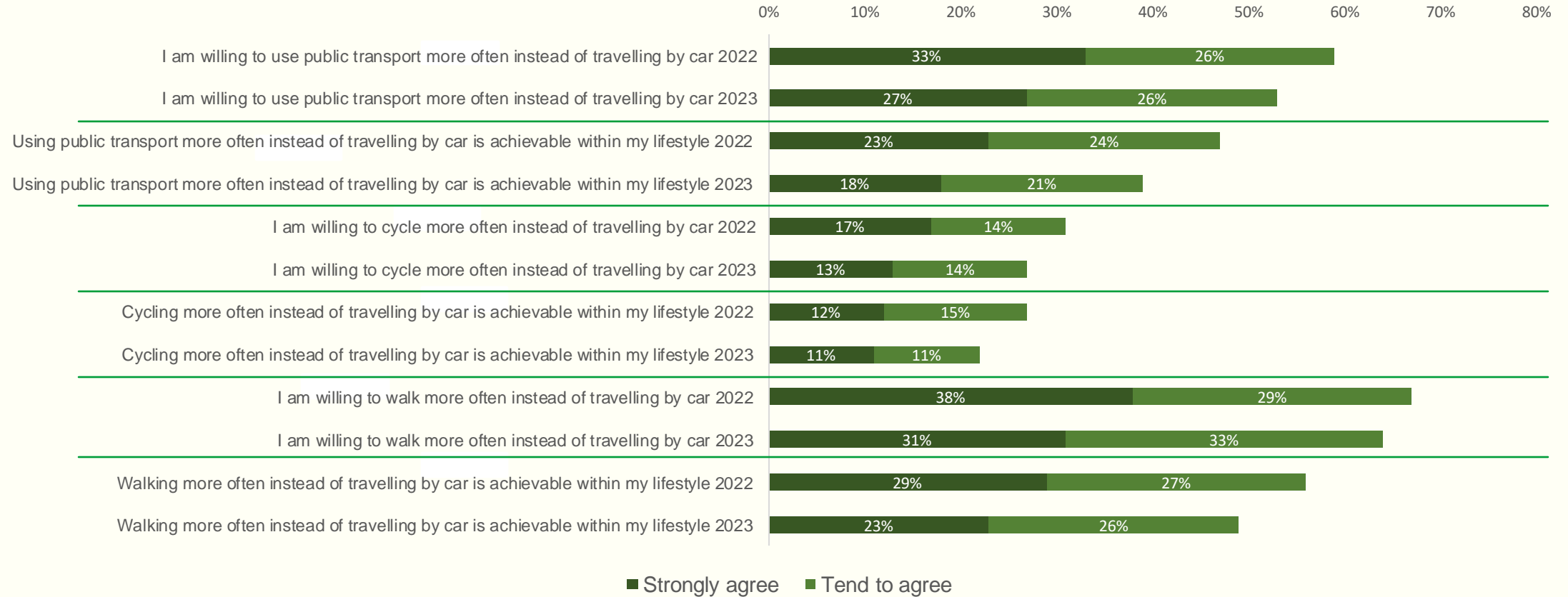
To what extent do you support the following renewable sources of energy generation?



Broad support for renewable energy generation, particularly domestic and commercial solar and rural wind turbines, but reduction across all sources since 2022.

# Transport

Please say the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about actions that could be taken to help reduce the impact of climate change:





# Key Findings for Discussion

Key findings	Context and Interpretation	Strategic Alignment
<p>Satisfaction with how the Council runs things and provides value for money remain lower than national benchmarks and have reduced</p>	<p>Changes in levels of satisfaction have largely followed national patterns although they have both been consistently lower than the national levels.</p> <p>Greater levels of dissatisfaction reported by older working age adults. This cohort of the population also report generally <u>lower life satisfaction</u>.</p> <p>Despite this, satisfaction with recent customer experience is notably higher (67% compared to 47%). Respondents satisfied with customer experience but dissatisfied with how the Council runs things are also more likely to be aged 45-64.</p> <p>Comparative council tax data demonstrates <u>that residents pay less than the regional average in Council tax</u> per head of population.</p>	
<p>11% of respondents feel they can influence decisions, a reduction of 9% points from 2022.</p>	<p>No benchmarking data is available for this information.</p> <p>Fieldwork took place when decisions about bus provision were causing significant debate, and when difficulties with local government finance were also in the national and regional news.</p>	<p>Giving people a say is a key strategic priority for the organisation.</p>
<p>There are lower levels of satisfaction with the Council website than for customer contacts overall. Figure given for those expressing an opinion. Note that nearly 30% of respondents had never used the website.</p>	<p>These findings should be considered in terms of a high level of respondents having no stated opinion of the website and the fact that a high proportion of respondents stated that they have never used the website</p>	<p>The Council's Digital Strategy</p>

# Key Findings Continued

Key findings	Context and Interpretation	Strategic Alignment
<p>Perceptions of safety notably lower for children and during the night and worsening over time (from 23% to 34%).</p> <p>Note level of crime and anti-social behaviour as a priority (section 1).</p>	<p>These findings can be read in the context of several high-profile serious violence incidents, both in B&amp;NES and neighbouring local authorities.</p> <p>Whilst the Avon &amp; Somerset Violence Reduction Profile notes that the age of violent offenders is getting younger, comparative rates of violent crime in B&amp;NES remain lower than both <u>national</u> and <u>regional</u> figures.</p>	<p>A multi-agency response to community safety and violence reduction form part of the agenda of the Community Safety and Safeguarding Partnership.</p>
<p>Broad support for renewable energy generation, particularly domestic and commercial solar.</p>	<p>All areas of renewable energy generation experience popular support, aside from ground mounted solar.</p>	<p>Improving renewable energy infrastructure is part of the Council's response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.</p>
<p>Positive responses to more sustainable travel activities have reduced, but in terms of more sustainable transport choices, walking more is both most popular and seen to be most achievable.</p>	<p>There remains a disparity between people supporting more sustainable transport routes and feeling that they can achieve them within their lifestyle</p> <p>The reduction is particularly marked regarding public transport, which can be seen in context of recent changes to local provision.</p>	<p>Active and sustainable travel informs both Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities and objectives to reduce vehicle mileage.</p>

For more information

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[Download the Full report.](#)



Further research can be requested from the Business Intelligence Team

From the Council network, please use the [Business Intelligence Request form](#)  
Or e-mail [research@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:research@bathnes.gov.uk)

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## CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

This Forward Plan lists all the items coming to the Panel over the next few months.

Inevitably, some of the published information may change; Government guidance recognises that the plan is a best assessment, at the time of publication, of anticipated decision making. The online Forward Plan is updated regularly and can be seen on the Council's website at:

<http://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/mgPlansHome.aspx?bcr=1>

The Forward Plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to openness and participation in decision making. It assists the Panel in planning their input to policy formulation and development, and in reviewing the work of the Cabinet.

*Should you wish to make representations, please contact the report author or, Democratic Services (). A formal agenda will be issued 5 clear working days before the meeting.*

*Agenda papers can be inspected on the Council's website.*

Ref Date	Decision Maker/s	Title	Report Author Contact	Director Lead
<b>14TH MAY 2024</b>				
14 May 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	Debate Not Hate (update)	Cherry Bennett Tel: 01225 47 7203	Director of People & Change
14 May 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	Update on Procurement	Jeff Wring Tel: 01225 477323	Executive Director - Resources (S151)
14 May 2024 Page 46	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	Voicebox - outcomes of resident survey	Steve Harman Tel: Mob: 07530263207	
<b>23RD JULY 2024</b>				
23 Jul 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	Performance Indicators	Steve Harman Tel: Mob: 07530263207	Executive Director - Resources (S151)
23 Jul 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	2023/24 Outturn and 2024/25 Quarter 1 Monitoring Reports	Gary Adams Tel: 01225 477107	Executive Director - Resources (S151)
<b>17TH SEPTEMBER 2024</b>				

Ref Date	Decision Maker/s	Title	Report Author Contact	Director Lead
17 Sep 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	Corporate Asset Strategy		Executive Director - Resources (S151)
<b>19TH NOVEMBER 2024</b>				
19 Nov 2024	Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	2024/25 Quarter 2 Monitoring Report	Gary Adams Tel: 01225 477107	Executive Director - Resources (S151)
The Forward Plan is administered by <b>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES:</b> <a href="mailto:Democratic_Services@bathnes.gov.uk">Democratic_Services@bathnes.gov.uk</a>				

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