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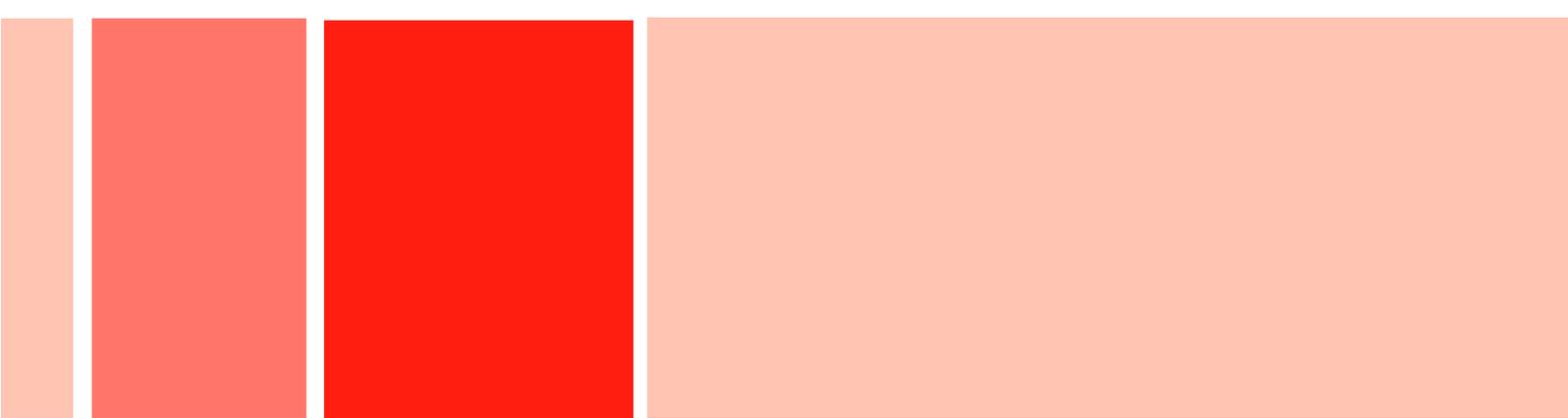
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Community and Town Councils in Wales



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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Table of contents

Contents: Tables and Figures	2
1 Introduction.....	3
2 Awareness.....	7
3 Accessibility.....	14
4 Value for money	17
5 Overall satisfaction	21
6 Conclusions.....	30

Contents: Tables and Figures

Table 1.1: Demographic profile of responses	5
Table 1.2: Profile of community and town councils	6
Figure 2.1: Awareness of community and town councils	7
Figure 2.2: Activities that the community or town council is responsible for in the local area (unprompted)	9
Figure 2.3: Activities that the community or town council is responsible for in the local area (prompted)	11
Figure 3.1: Contact with the community or town council.....	15
Figure 4.1: Approximate percentage of council tax that goes to funding community and town councils	18
Figure 4.2: Whether community and town councils represent good value for money.....	19
Figure 5.1: Overall satisfaction with the work of community and town councils	21
Figure 5.2: Reasons why individuals are satisfied with their community and town councils (unprompted)	23
Figure 5.3: Reasons why individuals are dissatisfied with their community and town councils (unprompted)	24
Figure 5.4: Whether it is worthwhile having community and town councils.....	26
Figure 5.5: Whether community and town councils represent the interests of everyone in their communities	27
Figure 5.6: Why community and town councils do not represent the interests of everyone (unprompted).....	29

1 Introduction

Background, aims and objectives

- 1.1 The Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery was set up by Welsh Government to review the way public services are organised in Wales, and how they could be improved. They published their report in January 2014, including a set of clear recommendations to reform Welsh public services.
- 1.2 There are 735 community and town councils in Wales, providing very local services such as maintenance of playing fields and open spaces, village halls and community centres, footpaths, war memorials and other community services. These councils cover 70% of the population in Wales (some 2.1 million people).
- 1.3 There is however an evidence gap in terms of these councils' effectiveness, both whether they have the resources to carry out their role effectively and whether they are able to represent the needs of the local community.
- 1.4 One issue identified in the Commission's report across the public sector was that of scale. The concern is that town and community councils may be too numerous to carry out all the services required of them effectively; indeed some of the 735 councils are very small with 18% of them representing fewer than 500 citizens. There is therefore a question over whether smaller councils have the resource to carry out their remit effectively, but there is little empirical evidence to support or refute this.
- 1.5 Conversely the authors expressed concern that Wales is made up of communities with very strong, very local links and these should be protected so that any new structure is able to represent democratically all of the areas it covers and be responsive to very local needs. The assumption here is that a smaller council will be more responsive to local needs however again no evidence exists to support or reject this as a hypothesis among community and town councils in Wales.

- 1.6 As such, Welsh Government commissioned this research to measure public awareness and opinions of their Community or Town Council. The objectives of the exercise were:
- To determine awareness among citizens covered by a Community or Town Council of its existence and the responsibilities it holds;
 - To measure engagement with the Council through the proportion of citizens who have made contact with the Council;
 - To assess satisfaction with the work of the Council, both in terms of how well it fulfils its roles and how well it represents the interests of the community.

Methodology

- 1.7 A total of 1,000 telephone interviews were conducted with members of the public (aged 18 plus) who live in areas covered by community and town councils across Wales.
- 1.8 Interviews were conducted by IFF Research, an independent research agency, using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Fieldwork took place from 5th to 19th August 2014. Households were telephoned and a “next birthday” technique was used to select a random respondent within the household. Interviews were conducted in Welsh or English, depending on the preference of the participant.
- 1.9 The demographic profile of responses achieved is shown in Table 1.1. At the analysis stage, data were weighted to an interlocking age and gender matrix to ensure results were representative of the overall population of Wales covered by community and town councils; Table 1.1 also shows the weighted profile of response. Overall, interviews collected were sufficient to represent the population as a whole whilst also containing enough interviews in each subgroup (with the exception of non-White British ethnicity) to allow for robust subgroup analysis.

Table 1.1: Demographic profile of responses

		Unweighted	Weighted
<i>Base</i>	<i>n</i> <i>(unweighted)</i>	<i>(1,000)</i>	<i>(1,000)</i>
		%	%
Gender			
Male	441	49	49
Female	453	51	51
Age			
Under 35	133	15	23
35-54	405	45	34
55+	355	40	43
Ethnicity			
White British	867	97	97
Other	24	3	2

1.10 The profile of responses was split equally by gender, but was very heavily skewed towards White British population (largely reflecting the ethnic makeup of the areas in question). Responses were more heavily skewed towards the older population although base sizes are large enough to report on differences between those aged under 35, those aged 35-54 and those aged 55 plus.

1.11 Table 1.2 shows the profile of community and town councils that were covered in this survey. The survey is representative of people living in areas covered by the councils and as such responses are more common from the larger councils (as they, by definition, cover more people). This does not impact the reliability of the results, but we must be clear that results analysed by size should be read as representative of the population, not representative of councils (i.e. a figure reported as “20% of people in small councils” would mean 20% of people covered by a council that represents a population of 500-999 individuals, not 20% of all councils of that size).

Table 1.2: Profile of community and town councils

		Unweighted	Weighted
<i>Base</i>	<i>n (unweighted)</i>	<i>(1,000)</i>	<i>(1,000)</i>
		%	%
Area profile			
Urban	557	56	56
Rural	443	44	44
Region			
North	266	27	27
Mid	93	9	10
South west	250	25	25
South east	391	39	38
Size (adult population covered)			
Very small (Less than 500)	23	2	2
Small (500-999)	66	7	7
Small-Mid (1,000-2,499)	149	15	15
Mid (2,500-4,999)	156	16	15
Mid-Large (5,000-9,999)	252	25	25
Large (10,000-19,999)	244	24	24
Very large (20,000+)	110	11	11

Reporting conventions

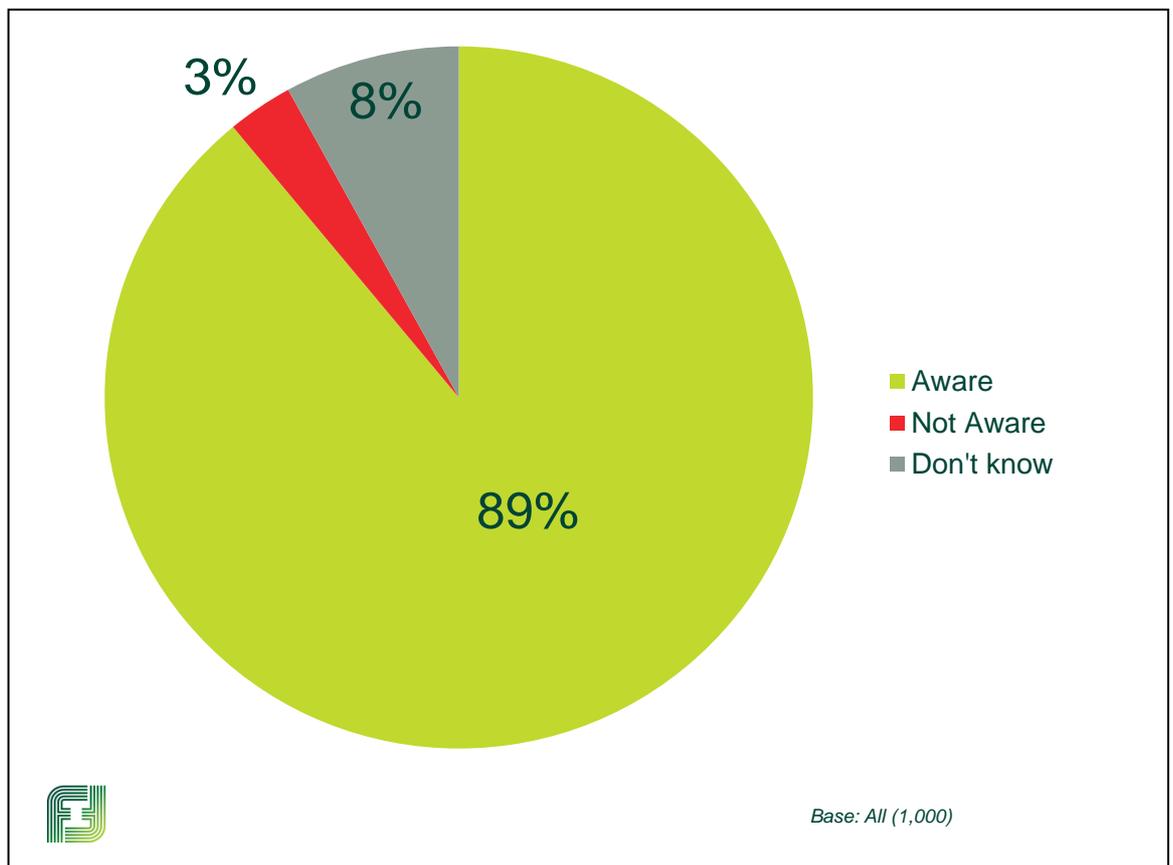
1.12 Wherever differences are discussed between respondent sub-groups these are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level, unless otherwise stated.¹

¹ 95% confidence means that statistically we can be 95% confident that the difference is a real difference, not one resulting from the fact that we spoke to a sample of the Welsh population

2 Awareness

- 2.1 In order to assess councils' effectiveness at engaging with their populations, it is important to gauge public awareness of community and town councils.
- 2.2 As shown in Figure 2.1, the vast majority of individuals were aware they had a community or town council (89%). Around one in ten were unsure of whether they had a community or town council (8%) and only 3% said that they were not aware.

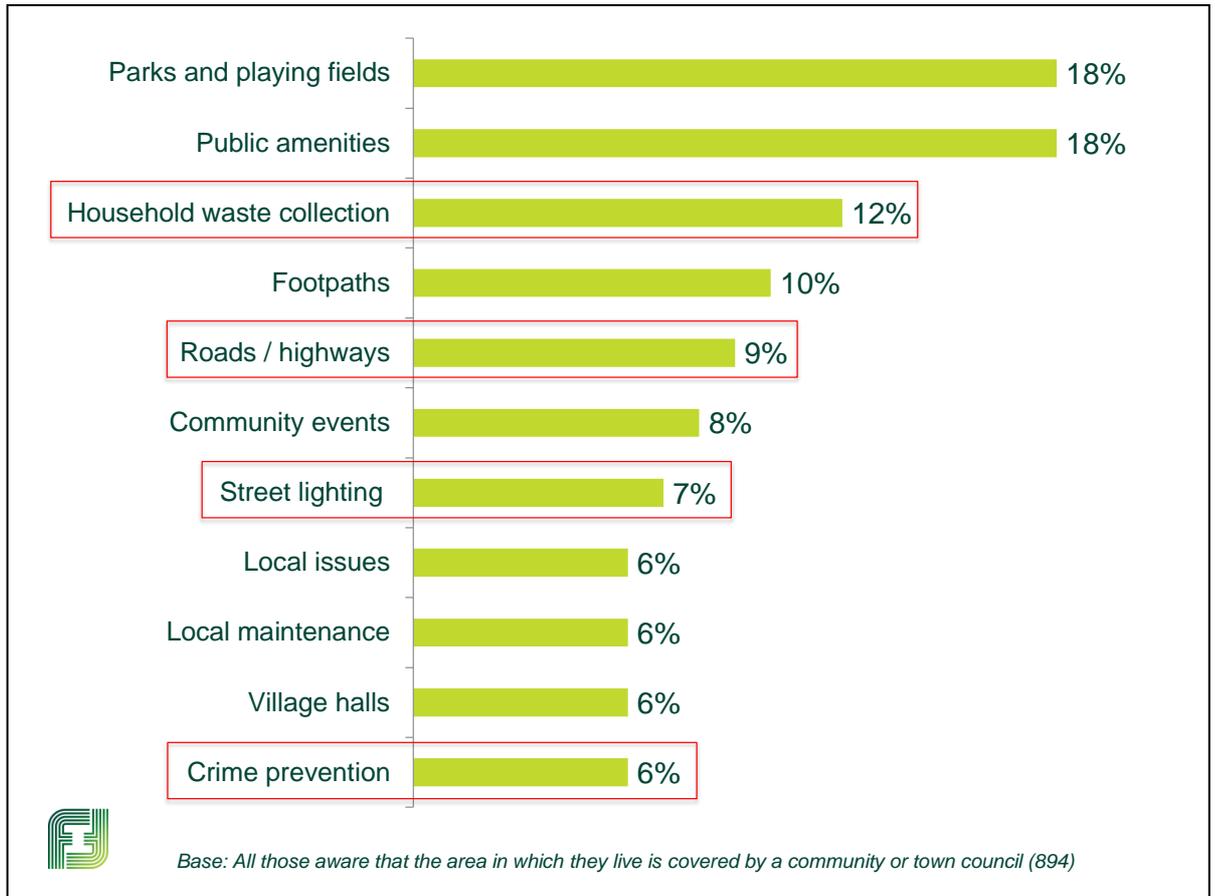
Figure 2.1: Awareness of community and town councils



- 2.3 Awareness was high across all age groups although younger adults were less likely to be aware of their community or town council (83% of those aged under 35 vs. 90% aged 35-54 and 92% aged 55 plus). There was little variation in the level of awareness by region of Wales or by size of community or town council.

- 2.4 To test awareness further, all participants who said they were covered by a community or town council were asked what the council was responsible for in their area. Responsibilities vary between council based on size, location and the needs of their community so we cannot say for sure whether the participants are correct in their answers, however comparing their responses against the areas typically in the remit of community and town councils indicates that there may be some confusion in what the councils are responsible for.
- 2.5 Over three-fifths (62%) of those aware that the area in which they live is covered by a community or town council were able to cite at least one activity that this council was responsible for. This meant however, that a significant minority of those aware of their council did not know what they were responsible for (38%). Younger adults (49% under 35 years) and those whose community or town council covered a larger population of 10,000 – 19,999 (44%) (although not those whose council covered 20,000 or more residents) were least likely to be able to cite any activity covered by their community council when asked to do so without being prompted.
- 2.6 Figure 2.2 shows the most commonly cited perceived responsibilities of the community and town councils.

Figure 2.2: Activities that the community or town council is responsible for in the local area (unprompted)

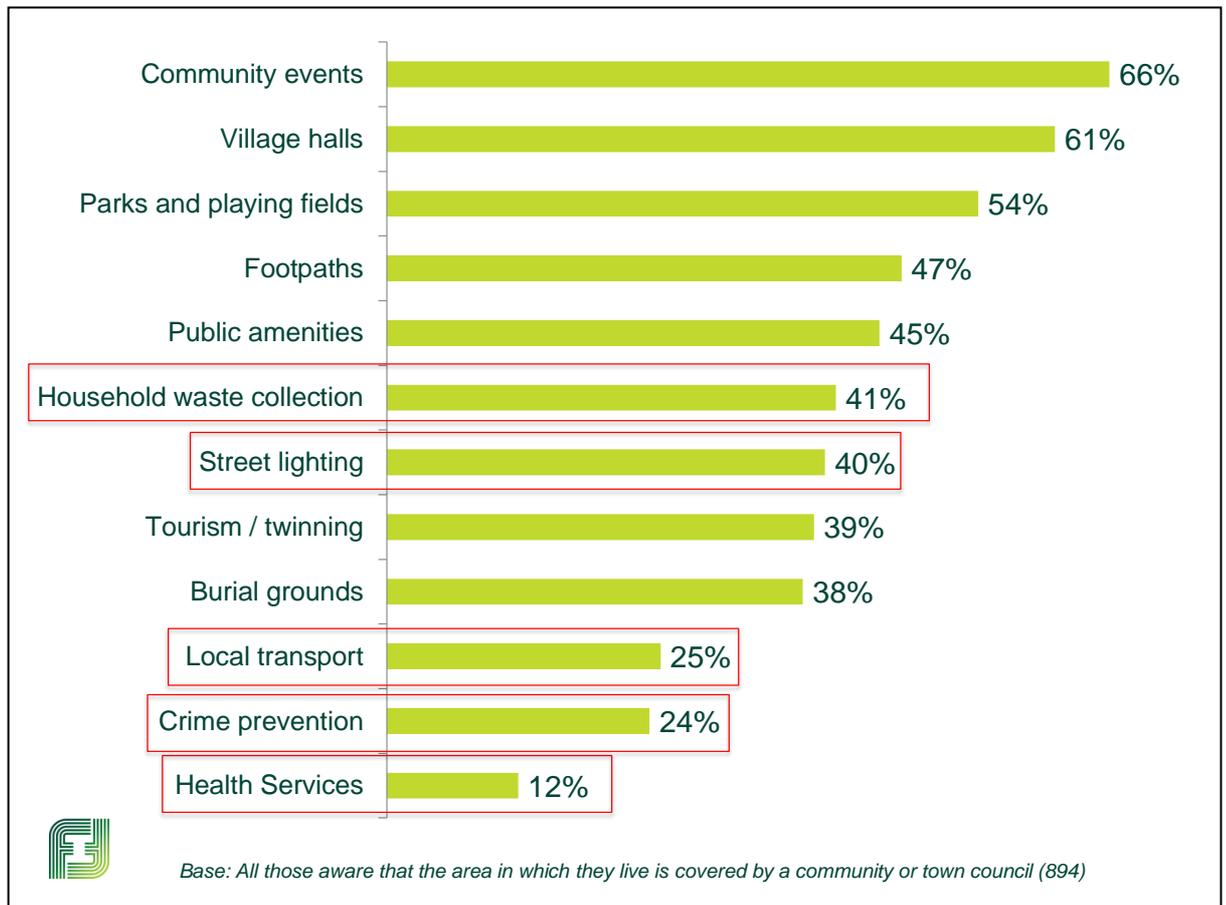


2.7 Members of the public aware of their town or community council were able to cite a fairly wide range of activities they thought their council was responsible for. As mentioned, the responsibilities of community and town councils vary from council to council, and so those cited may not necessarily be correct for each council. However, the activities most commonly cited, which include the maintenance of parks and playing fields (18%) and public amenities (18%), are indeed generally the responsibility of community and town councils.

2.8 A number of the activities cited as being under the remit of community and town councils are actually more commonly taken care of by local authorities. Such activities included household waste collection (which was the third most common activity cited at 12%), roads/highways, street lighting and crime prevention (6-9%).

- 2.9 Residents in the south west of Wales seemed to be more aware of what their community or town councils were responsible for (only 32% in the south west were unable to cite anything compared with 38% average). Specifically, they were more likely to mention parks and recreation grounds to be under the responsibility of the community or town council (23% vs. 18% average) and were also more likely to say that they were responsible for village / community halls (10% vs. 6%).
- 2.10 Participants aware of their community or town council were then presented with a list of activities involved in running, maintaining and promoting the local area and were asked to state for each one whether it was taken care of by their community / town council, their local authority or some other body or organisation. Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of the public who, for each activity listed, identified their community or town council to be responsible. The activities listed were activities that generally fall into the remit of the community or town council, with the exception of those outlined in red (which are more typically taken care of by the Local Authority).

Figure 2.3: Activities that the community or town council is responsible for in the local area (prompted)



2.11 Community events were the most likely to be identified as being run by the community or town council (66%) whilst three-fifths (still the majority) said that village halls were taken care of by their community or town council (61%).

2.12 Attribution of the majority of activities however were roughly split between the community or town councils and the local authority, suggesting that there is some confusion over what each council is responsible for. Members of the public were least likely to correctly identify tourism / twinning (39%) and burial grounds (38%) as being under the remit of community and town councils.

2.13 A significant minority identified their town or community council to be responsible for household waste collection (41%) and street lighting (40%) which are more commonly taken care of by the local authority,

and a smaller but still significant proportion of the public thought that they were also responsible for local transport (25%), crime prevention (24%) and health services (12%), services which again are more typically provided by the local authority. This again suggests that there is some confusion over the remit of and distinction between the local councils.

- 2.14 Although responses tended to be split between community or town councils and local authorities (with 'other organisation' also cited at times but less often), as many as one in six admitted that they were not sure who took care of tourism / twinning (17%), village halls, public amenities, or burial grounds (each 16%).
- 2.15 Those in urban areas of Wales (as opposed to rural) were more likely to correctly identify the typical responsibilities of community and town councils, including public toilets (49% urban vs. 41% rural) and burial grounds (43% vs. 32%). In contrast, those in rural areas of Wales seemed to have better knowledge about the responsibilities of the Local Authority; for instance household waste and street lighting were correctly identified by a higher proportion of rural (63% and 57% respectively) as being under the remit of the Local Authority compared with urban (51% and 48% respectively). This indicates that those in urban areas of Wales may have more awareness of what their community or town council does than those in rural areas, although it could also reflect the differing remits of councils operating in urban and rural locations.
- 2.16 Those who live in the smallest communities tended to mention fewer responsibilities falling to their community or town council: those who reside in areas where the council looks after a population of fewer than 500 were less likely to have said that they cover community events (42% vs. 66%), village halls (41% vs. 61%), footpaths (24% vs. 47%) and burial grounds (18% vs. 38% average), although these residents may very well be accurate given the small size of their councils.
- 2.17 Among those who were unaware of their community or town council (11% of the population covered by such a council), activities taken care of by the community or town council were generally thought to be the responsibility of the local authority. The most common activities

identified as being under the remit of the local authority included maintenance of parks and recreation grounds (82%), footpaths (78%) and public amenities (73%).

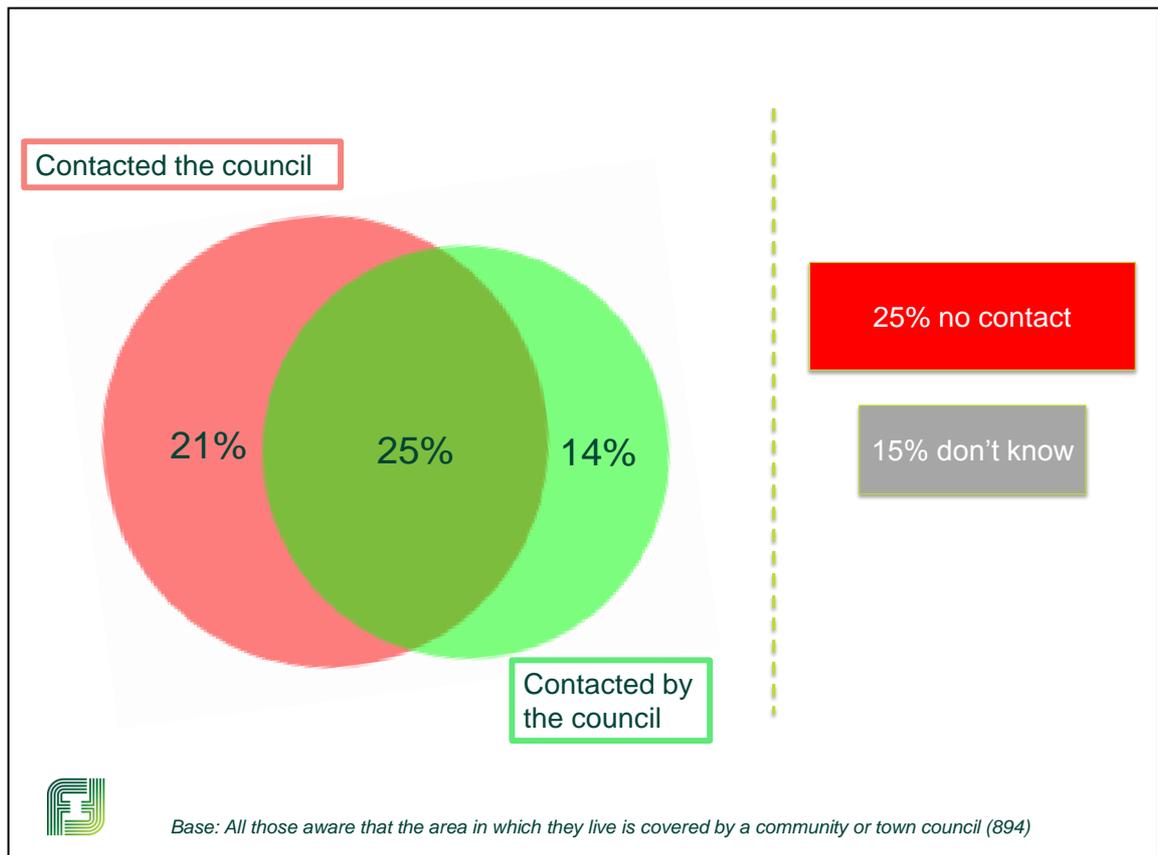
3 Accessibility

- 3.1 Engagement with community or town councils can be gauged by the degree of contact that members of the public have with their council. Councils may contact residents to update them on their activity, alert them to particular local campaigns or regarding elections; residents may contact councils when they have a local-level issue to raise or to comment on, or when they need support (for example for/against planning applications). There may also be local meetings that residents are welcome to attend. It should be noted that high levels of contact with the community or town council can be positive or negative.
- 3.2 Just over half (53%) of the Welsh public had had some contact with their community or town council, including contact with any of the councillors. This equates to 60% of those who were aware of their local council.
- 3.3 Among those aware of their community or town council, the majority (83%) said they knew how to contact the council. There was no significant difference in awareness of how to contact the council by region or size of town or community council. This suggests a high level of accessibility should residents have an issue they need to raise.
- 3.4 Contact with the community or town council was more likely to be initiated by the public than by the council. Almost half (46%) of those who knew they had a community or town council had contacted their council at some point whilst a smaller proportion (38%) said that the council had initiated the contact on at least one occasion. (This equates to 80% of those who had had any contact having initiated contact and 64% having been contacted by their council).
- 3.5 As these figures show, there were a number of people who had contacted their council on at least one occasion and had also been contacted by their council on at least one occasion. Of those who had had contact, over a third (36%) had only ever initiated contact with their council, 23% whose contact had only ever been initiated by the council and 41% whose contact had been initiated both by themselves and the council.

3.6 Figure 3.1 shows these figures based on all those who were aware of their community or town council.

Figure 3.1: Contact with the community or town council

3.7 Data suggest that middle sized communities are more in touch with their



community or town council, compared to larger communities where most contact is initiated by the local residents. Those living in areas where the community or town council covered a small to mid-sized community (1,000-2,499 residents) were most likely to have had contact with their council (initiated either by the local residents or the council) (71% vs. 60% average). Although those living in the largest areas covered by a town or community council were as likely to have had any contact with their council as average, they were less likely to have been contacted or consulted by their town council (29% of those in areas of 20,000 plus had been contacted by their council vs. 38% overall).

3.8 Members of the public in the south west of Wales were more likely to have had any contact with their community or town council than average

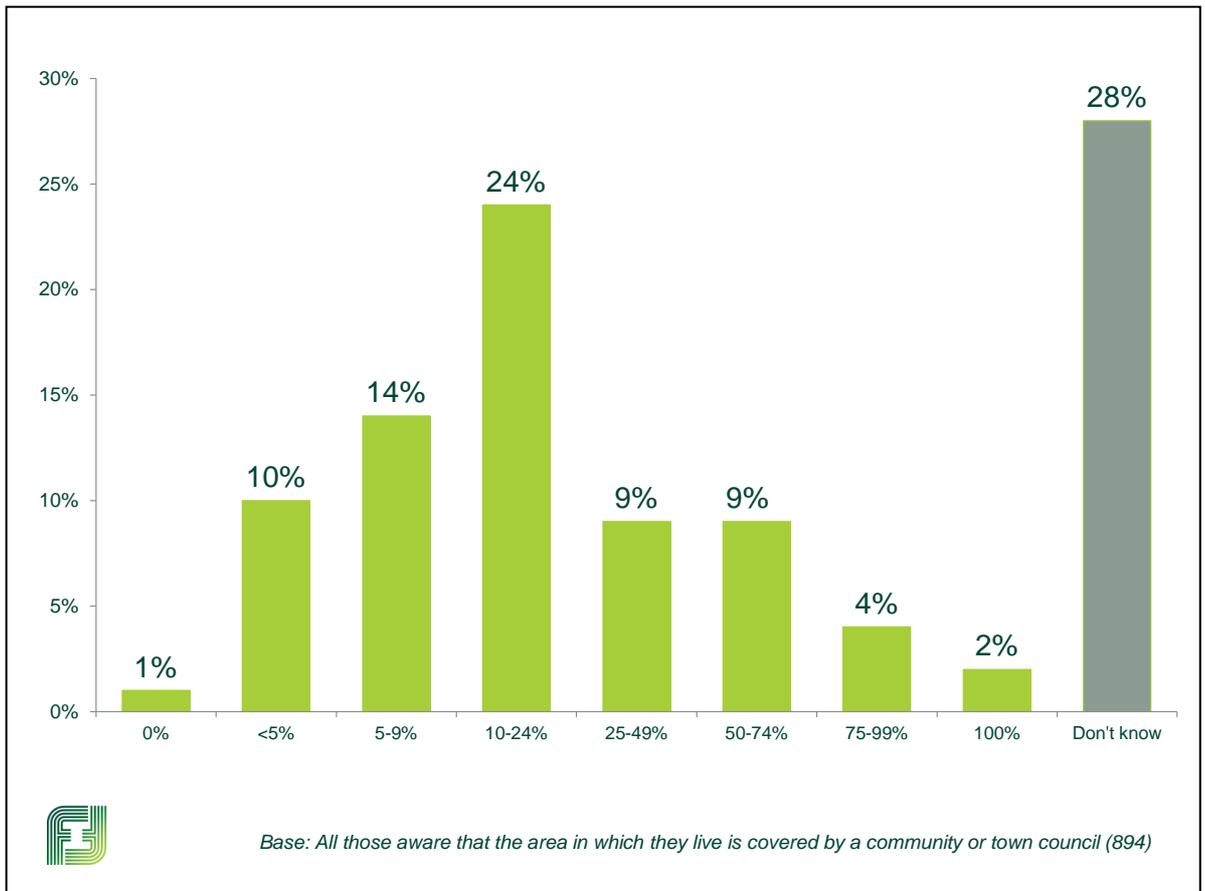
(67% vs. 60%), whilst those in the south east were the least likely (52%). The lower levels of contact in the south east seemed to be a combination of this population being less likely to initiate contact with their community or town council than in other areas (41% had initiated contact vs. 46% overall) and south east councils being less likely to contact their local residents than other areas (31% had been contacted vs. 38% average).

- 3.9 Age was a significant factor predicting engagement with the community and town council. The likelihood of having had any contact with the community or town council increased with age: 23% aged under 35 had had contact with their council compared with 34% aged 35-54 and 43% aged 55 plus. Older adults were both more likely to have initiated contact with their community or town council (56% aged 55 plus vs. 42% aged 25-54 and 32% aged under 35); and to have ever been contacted by their council (45% aged 55 plus vs. 38% aged 35-54 and 26% aged under 35).

4 Value for money

- 4.1 The amount of money that the public pay towards their community or town council varies, with councils able to set their own levy. Typically, only 2% of each individual's council tax funds their community and town council.
- 4.2 A significant minority (28%) of the public aware of their community or town council could not make a guess (even when prompted) of how much of their council tax goes towards funding it. A range of answers were given by those who could provide an estimate (including some who could only make a guess when prompted with ranges). Only one in ten (10%) gave an estimate that fell into the typical range of 1-5% council tax. The vast majority therefore thought that a higher proportion of their council tax went towards funding their community or town council than is typically the case, with the most common estimate being between 10-24% council tax (24%) (See Figure 4.1).

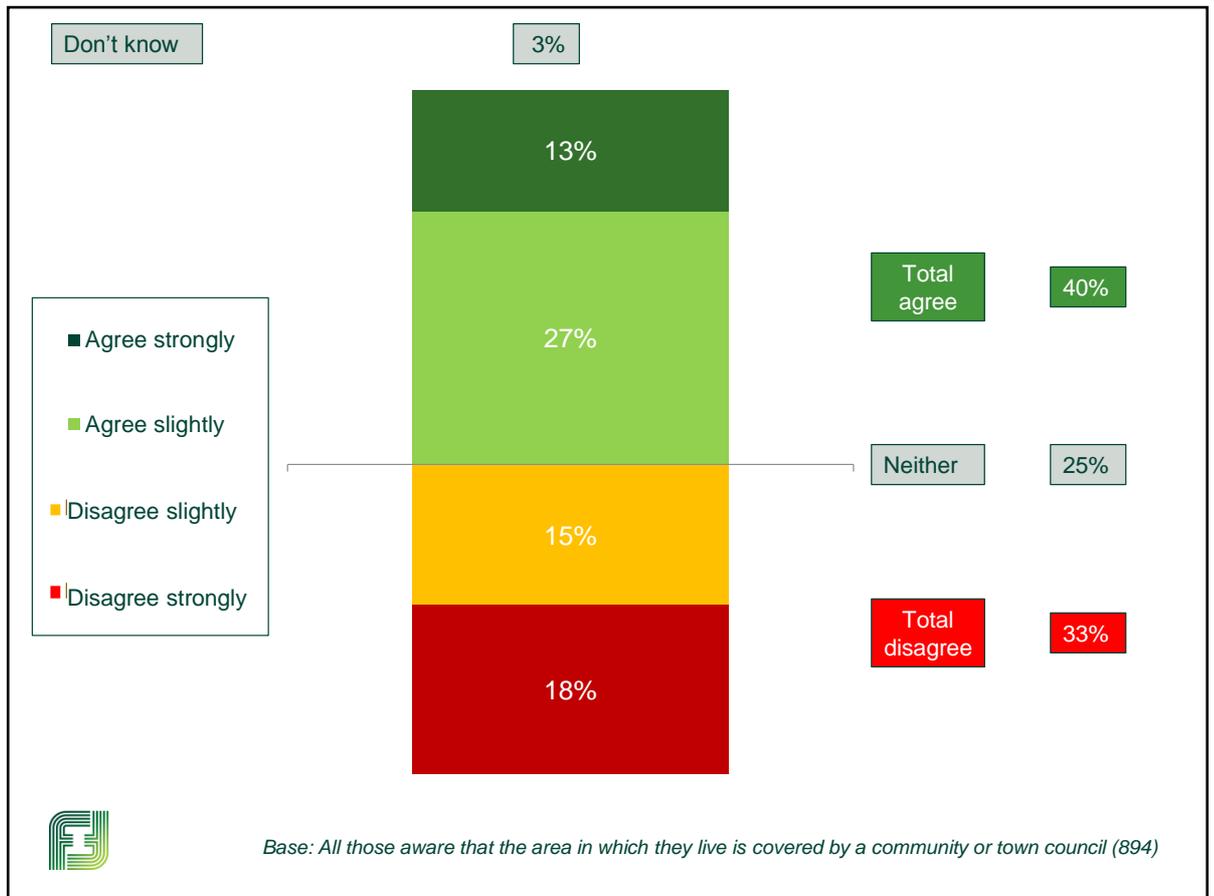
Figure 4.1: Approximate percentage of council tax that goes to funding community and town councils



4.3 As shown in Figure 4.2, two-fifths (40%) of those who were aware of their community or town council agreed that it represented good value for money, whereas one third (33%) disagreed. One quarter (25%) stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

4.4 Value for money did not appear to be linked with the proportion of council tax that the public estimated went towards funding the community or town council. This further suggests that there is some confusion over how these councils are funded (and how much they are funded) and what they do.

Figure 4.2: Whether community and town councils represent good value for money



- 4.5 Those who had had contact with their community or town council were more likely to agree that it represented good value for money compared with those who had not had any contact (44% vs. 33% respectively). This could be related to greater engagement and knowledge about what they do, and could in part explain why the older population (who had had more contact with their community or town council) were more likely to agree that it represented good value for money (46% compared with 35% aged 35-54 and 35% aged under 35).
- 4.6 Those whose community or town councils cover large (and very large) populations were more negative about their council representing good value for money than average (36% 10,000 plus populations disagreed that it represented good value for money vs. 33% average) compared with those in smaller communities who were less negative than average (25% in small to mid-sized communities (1,000-2,499) disagreed). Overall, the extent to which members of the public agreed or

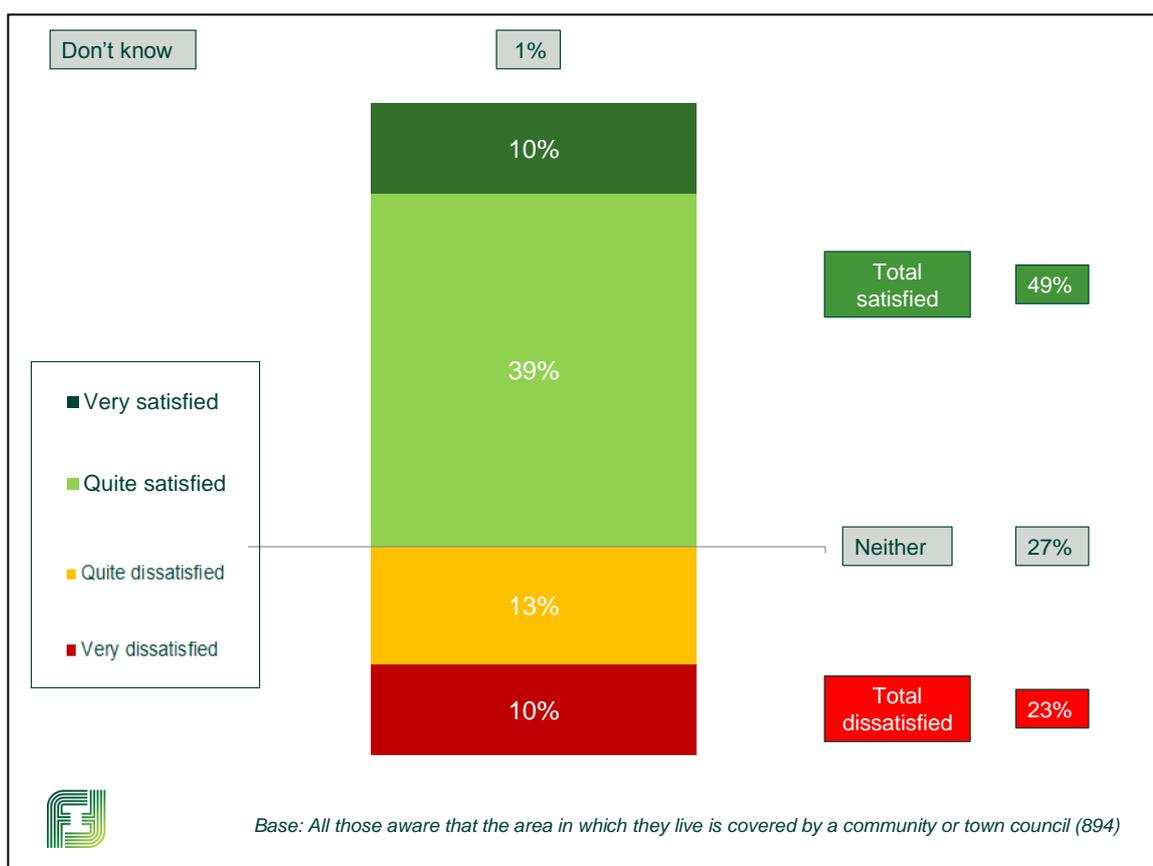
disagreed that their community or town council represents good value for money did not significantly differ by region.

- 4.7 Members of the public in urban locations were more negative about their community and town councils when asked whether they represented good value for money: those in urban locations were more likely to disagree than those in rural locations (37% vs. 27% respectively).

5 Overall satisfaction

- 5.1 Overall, the public were more likely to be satisfied (49% of those aware of their council) than dissatisfied (23%) with the work of their community or town council, although a significant minority said either that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (27%) (See Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Overall satisfaction with the work of community and town councils

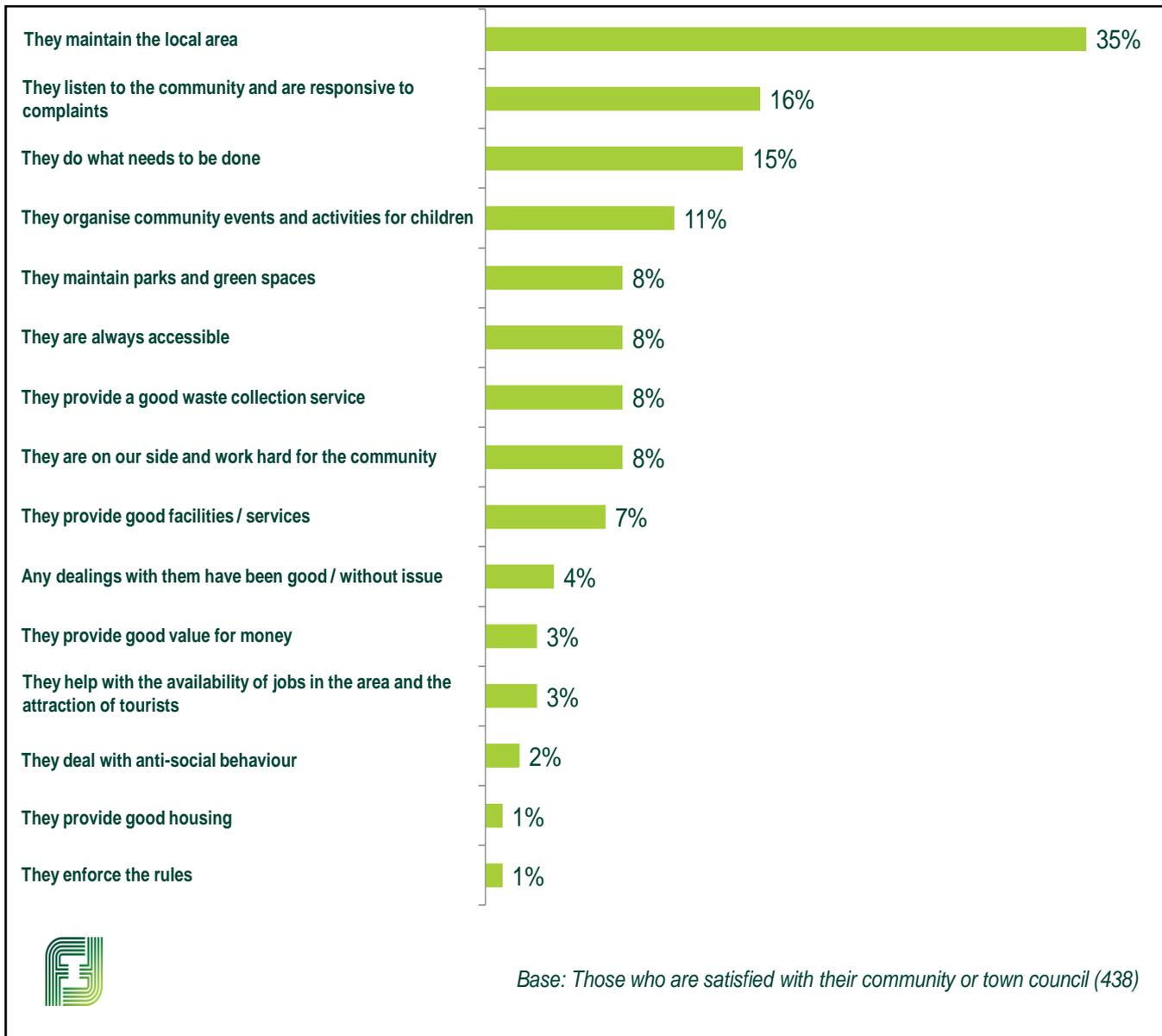


- 5.2 Those who had had contact with their community or town council were more likely than those who had not had contact to be satisfied with their council overall (53% vs. 44%). Again, a higher level of contact with the council could relate to greater engagement and knowledge about what they do, so it is encouraging that this is related to higher levels of satisfaction.
- 5.3 Levels of satisfaction were also linked with whether the contact had been initiated by the council or not, with those whose contact had been initiated by the council being more satisfied (54%) than those whose

contact had never been initiated by the council (46%). A higher level of contact by the council may relate to a greater feeling of the council trying to engage with the community.

- 5.4 This may (at least in part) explain why those who live in rural locations (who are more likely to have been contacted by their council (42% vs. 35% urban) were more likely to be 'very satisfied' with their community or town council than those who resided in urban locations (13% vs. 8% respectively).
- 5.5 Those who lived in areas whose council covered a mid-sized population (as opposed to small or large) were more likely to be satisfied with the work of their council: two-thirds (61%) of those whose town and community councils cover small-to-mid populations (1,000-2,499) were satisfied, compared to only two fifths (41%) of small populations (<1000) and 46% of large populations (10,000 plus).
- 5.6 Overall, levels of satisfaction did not vary significantly by region.
- 5.7 Those aged 55 plus who were aware of their community or town council were more likely than those aged 35-54 and those aged under 35 to be satisfied with the work it does overall (55% compared with 46% and 43% respectively), again perhaps linked with the fact that the older population is more likely to have had contact with the council.
- 5.8 The 49% who were satisfied with the work of the community or town council gave a variety of reasons for their satisfaction as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Reasons why individuals are satisfied with their community and town councils (unprompted)

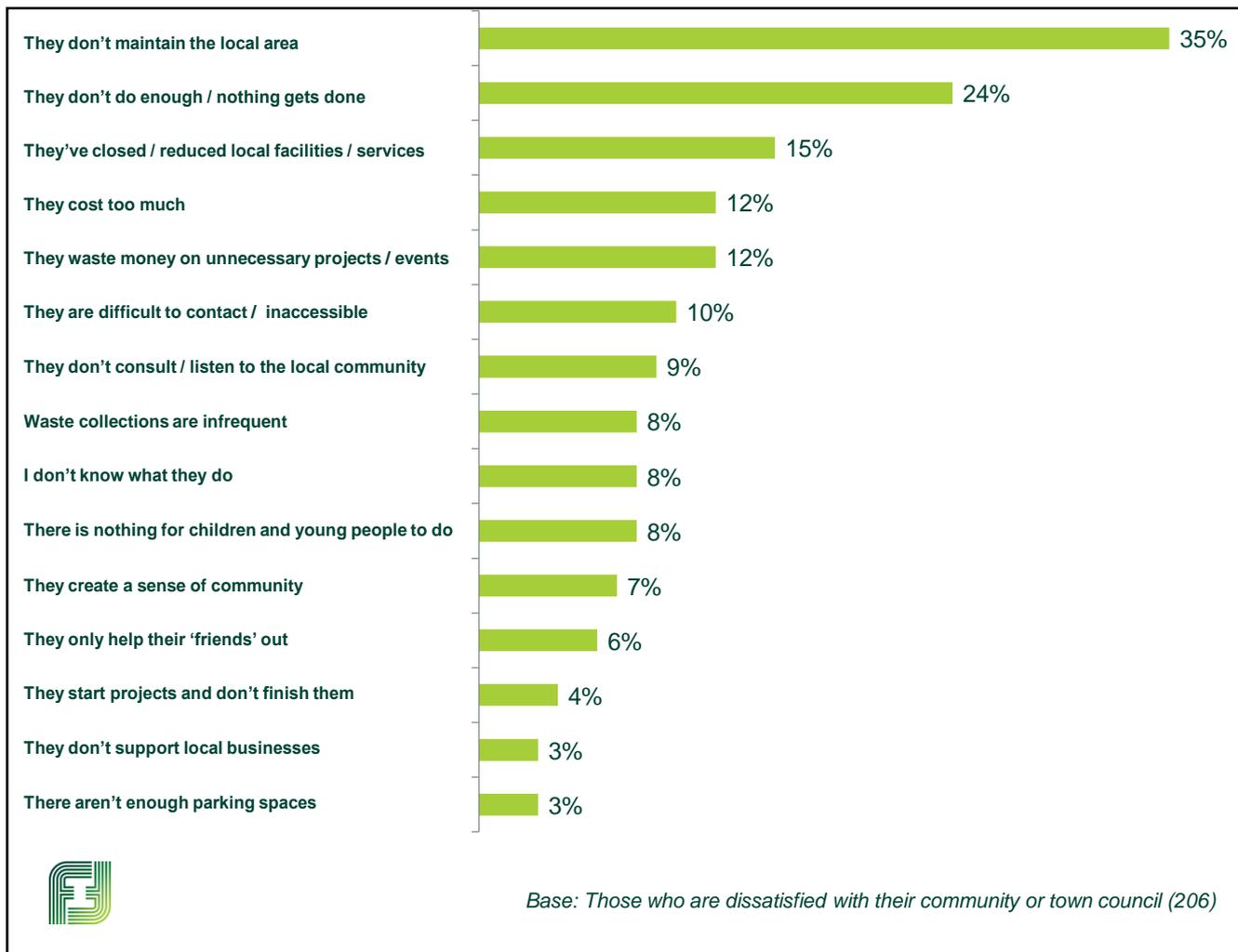


5.9 Most commonly, reasons for satisfaction centred round the list of jobs that the town or community council do, suggesting that these jobs are important to the community. The jobs listed included maintaining the local area (35%), organising community events and activities for children (11%) and maintaining parks (8%). Eight per cent also listed satisfaction with the waste collection service as one of their reasons for being satisfied overall; however this is typically under the remit of the local authority.

5.10 The next most common reasons for overall satisfaction focused around the public feeling that the council listened to the community and are responsive (16%) and that they are accessible (8%). Thus, engagement with the community and the council being representative seem to be highly valued.

5.11 The 23% who were dissatisfied with the work of the community or town council gave a variety of reasons for their dissatisfaction as shown in Figure 5.3.

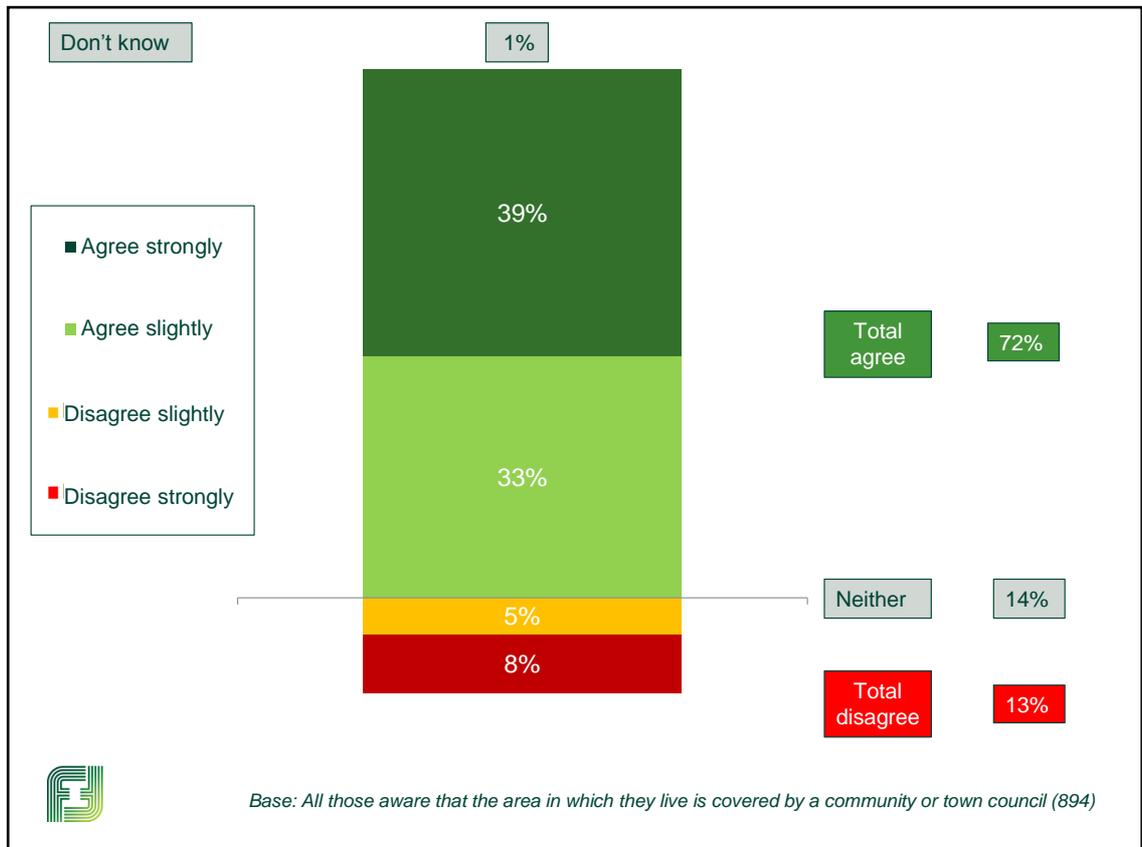
Figure 5.3: Reasons why individuals are dissatisfied with their community and town councils (unprompted)



5.12 Most commonly, reasons for dissatisfaction centred around the community or town council not doing their job: over a third said that they don't maintain the local area (35%) and around a quarter (24%) said that nothing gets done.

- 5.13 Others thought that, whilst their town and community council were doing their job, they were doing it badly. Some were unhappy because they had closed or reduced local services and facilities (15%) suggesting that councils are not always responding to the needs of the community (indeed, not listening to the community was the cause of dissatisfaction for 8%). Some thought that they were not doing their job well as they were wasting money on unnecessary projects (12%).
- 5.14 The next most common causes for dissatisfaction related to the cost of their services and poor accessibility. Around one in eight (8%) said that they cost too much, whilst one in ten (10%) said that they were difficult to contact. Those in rural areas were more likely to state inaccessibility as a cause for their dissatisfaction than those in urban areas (16% vs. 6% respectively).
- 5.15 Larger areas (those whose councils covered a population of 20,000 plus) were more likely to complain about their town or community council not doing their job properly and wasting public funds: Over half said that they did not maintain the local area (54% vs. 35% average) and a quarter said that they wasted money on unnecessary projects / events (24% vs. 12% average).
- 5.16 Members of the public in the south west were also more concerned about the cost of the community or town councils services, being more likely to say that they waste money on unnecessary projects and events (20% vs. 12% average).
- 5.17 Those in rural locations who were more likely than those in urban locations to be dissatisfied with their community and town councils due to the fact that they are difficult to contact and thus inaccessible (16% vs. 6%).
- 5.18 Overall however the Welsh public are very positive about their community and town councils. The majority of members of the public who were aware of their community or town council agreed that they were worthwhile having (72%), whereas only 13% disagreed. A sizable minority neither agreed nor disagreed (14%) and 1% did not know (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4: Whether it is worthwhile having community and town councils



5.19 Three quarters (75%) of those who have had any contact with their town or community council stated that it was worthwhile having, compared with two thirds (67%) of those who have had no contact.

5.20 Around four fifths (82%) of those in mid Wales who were aware of their town or community council agreed that it was worthwhile having, a proportion significantly higher than those who were aware in the south west and the south east (70% and 69%) respectively.

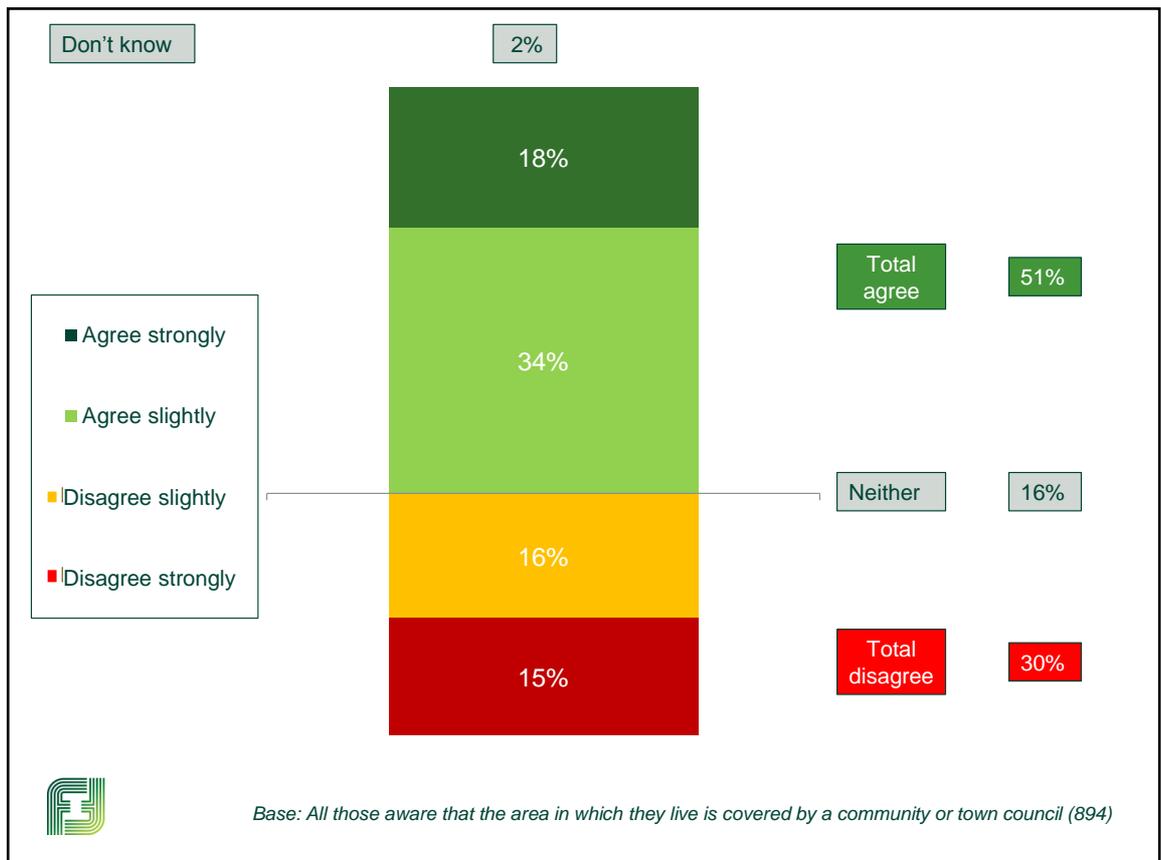
5.21 Those in rural locations who were aware of their town or community council were more likely to agree that they were worth having than those in urban locations who were aware (78% vs. 67%).

5.22 Those in small to mid-sized communities were generally more positive towards their community or town council, especially when compared against the much larger communities: Those in areas with a population of 1,000-2,499 were more likely to agree that their council was worthwhile (80% vs. 72% average, with 53% agreeing strongly compared with 39% average), whilst those in larger communities

(10,000 to 19,999 people) were less likely to agree (67% vs. 72% average).

5.23 Around half (51%) of members of the public who were aware of their community or town council agreed that it represented the interests of everyone in their community, whereas three in ten (30%) disagreed (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5: Whether community and town councils represent the interests of everyone in their communities



5.24 Those who had been in contact with their community or town council were more likely than those who had never been in contact to agree that it represents the interests of everyone in their community (56% vs. 44%). It is perhaps not surprising that councils who have higher levels of contact with their residents are more likely to be seen as representing these residents, as the residents will have had more opportunity to share their views.

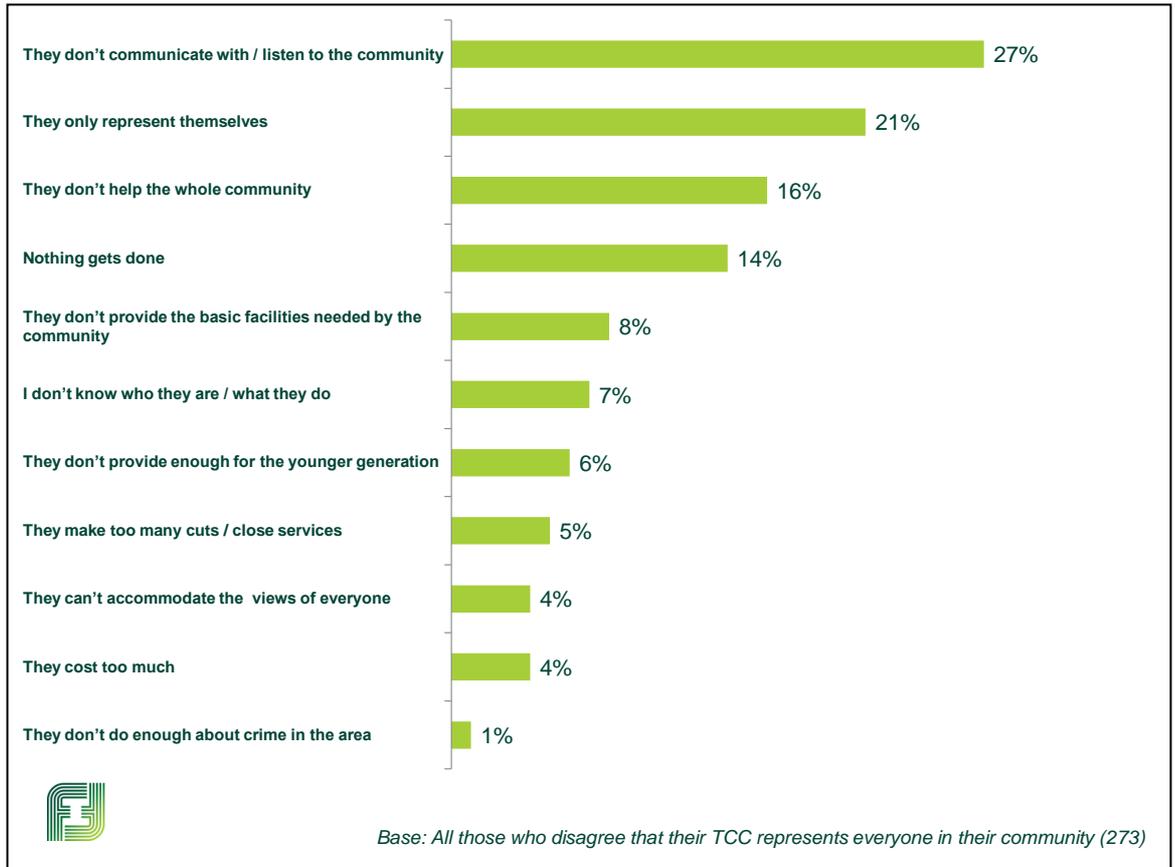
5.25 Again, a higher level of contact with the community and town council may help explain why older people (who are more likely to have had

contact with their council) were more likely to agree that their community and town council represented their needs: Those aged 55 plus who were aware of their community or town council were more likely than those aged 35-54 and those aged under 35 to agree that it represents the interests of everyone in their community (56% compared with 47% and 48% respectively).

5.26 Those in smaller communities were more likely to think that their community or town council represented the interests of everyone in their communities: three-fifths (60%) of those whose town and community councils cover small to mid-sized populations (1,000-2,499) thought that their town or community council represents the interests of everyone in their community, compared with 47% of those whose town and community councils cover large populations (10,000 plus). This lends weight to the hypothesis that smaller councils best represent local needs, that can get lost in councils covering larger areas.

5.27 The majority (68%) of those in rural locations who were aware of their town or community council agreed that it represented the interests of everyone in their community compared with less than half (46%) of those in urban locations.

Figure 5.6: Why community and town councils do not represent the interests of everyone (unprompted)



5.28 Those who thought that their town or community council did not represent the interests of everyone in their community cited a range of reasons to explain why this was the case (see Figure 5.6). The most common reasons cited were that they don't communicate with / listen to the community (27%), that they only represent themselves (21%), that they don't help the whole community (16%) and that nothing gets done (14%).

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Overall there seems to be a high level of awareness of the existence of community and town councils among those living in areas covered by them. This was higher among older residents than younger. However, as demonstrated by the confusion over the roles of the community and town councils and Local Authorities (noted in the next paragraph), we cannot be certain that the public were thinking about the right council when asked about their awareness.
- 6.2 There is some confusion, however, as to the exact roles that fall within their remit with many confusing jobs which are the responsibility of the local authority and other bodies as being the responsibility of the community and town council. There is also a low level of awareness of how the councils are funded; this does not seem to be influencing people's views of the councils, but does suggest a greater degree of transparency is needed to make people aware of this.
- 6.3 There is also a high level of positivity towards community and town councils with half satisfied with their work and almost three-quarters believing they are worthwhile. There are however a lot of neutral opinions, rising largely from the lack of awareness of what the councils do.
- 6.4 One way of measuring the engagement residents have with community and town councils is to look at the levels of contact between them and the council. Contact levels were fairly high at around half of all residents covered by a community or town council; this was again particularly the case among older residents. Contact with the council is strongly linked to higher levels of satisfaction and general positivity about the council suggesting that where they are engaging with the communities they serve this is having a positive effect.
- 6.5 However the fact that this contact is more prevalent (or more memorable to) the older residents has implications for the representativeness of the councils – if it is mainly older residents sharing their views younger residents may not be represented to the same extent, a concern which

was raised by a small but significant number during the survey. Whether this is due to older residents taking more interest and note of communications from the council and local issues or whether it is due to the councils communication strategies being less effective at reaching younger residents we cannot say from the data, but it is an area that will need addressing to ensure representation for all.

6.6 The research was able to test whether the size of council is related to satisfaction and feelings of representation of the whole community. The suppositions were that smaller councils may be limited in their resource to serve the needs of the community adequately and robustly, but that conversely larger councils may lose that connection to the community and the very niche local issues.

6.7 By and large the data support both hypotheses – mid-sized councils were most highly rated in almost all measures in the survey. Engagement was higher, as was perceived value for money, and overall satisfaction. Those living in areas covered by smaller community and town councils were most likely to say the council represented the interests of everyone in their communities.

6.8 In summary, the data suggests that whilst there is a lot of positivity and value to community and town councils, there are areas that need addressing to increase engagement with communities and to increase their effectiveness. The key areas highlighted by the survey in this respect include their clarity of purpose, their accessibility, their engagement with the public and the extent to which they are perceived to be representative of all those in their community. These factors were strongly linked with satisfaction and appear to be central to the success of community and town councils in delivering their remit, in the view of the people they represent.