

Dadansoddi ar gyfer Polisi



Analysis for Policy

Ymchwil gymdeithasol  
Social research

Rhif/Number: 30/2015

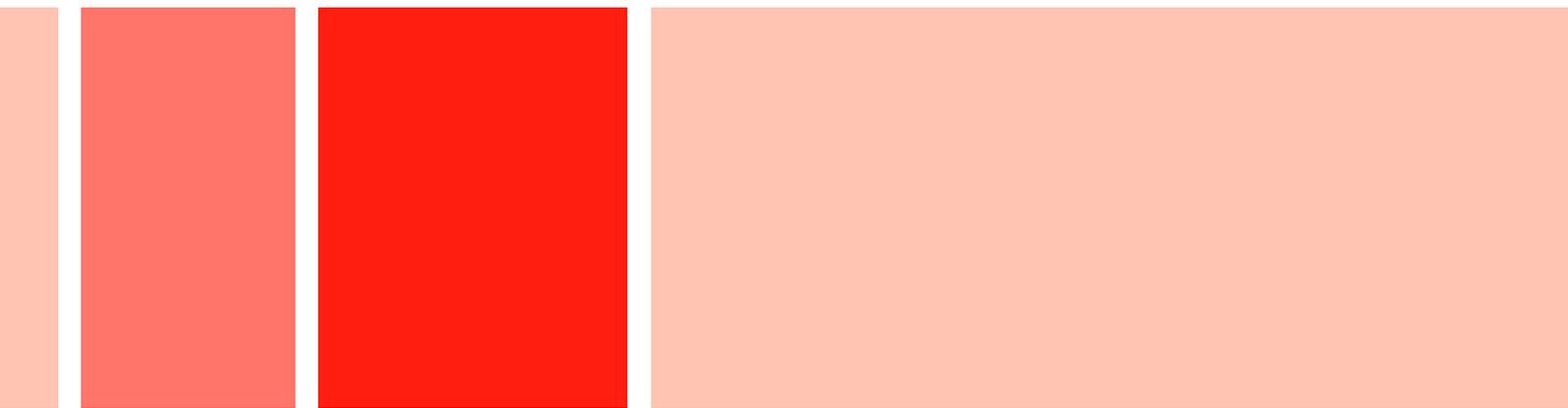


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# Public Views and Opinions of Community Engagement in Local Government in Wales

## FINAL REPORT



# **Public Views and Opinions of Community Engagement in Local Government 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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Welsh Government Social Research, 12 June 2015

ISBN 978-1-4734-4011-1

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# 1 Summary

## Project Background

1. Following the recent report on the governance and delivery of Welsh public services published by the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery and the subsequent White Paper on Devolution, Democracy and Delivery, the Welsh Government (WG) published further information on the Local Government reform programme in the Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People White Paper.
2. In order to ensure that policy is evidence-based, this research was commissioned to ensure that fully informed decisions are made.
3. This summary gives an overview of the research findings which are based on a comprehensive quantitative telephone survey and follow up qualitative depth interviews with a proportion of the general public to establish information to fill evidence gaps on engagement with local government and involvement in community-led activities.
4. The fieldwork was conducted during November-December 2014 in order to gather a sound evidence base to inform the Welsh Government's (WG) Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People White Paper.

## Awareness of plans for reform

5. Two fifths (40%) are 'not aware at all' of WG plans for reforming local government. Six in ten respondents (60%) are aware to some degree including 22% who are 'very aware'. Respondents over 55 have the greatest awareness (76%) as well as those in social group AB (70%).
6. Those aware of the plans for reform have found out mainly through local media particularly local news on TV, radio and press. Follow up research highlighted the need for different forms of communication to be used to reach different groups of residents and reflect their preferred methods of communication.

## Involvement in consultation activities

7. Based on a prompted list of different types of consultation activity, 86% of those interviewed said they have not taken part in any forms of

consultation activities such as surveys, consultation events, council meetings, specialist groups or local councillor surgeries. Consultation activity in this instance is taken to mean activity where local authorities seek the opinion of members of the public as a whole rather than just the formal consultation process for proposals.

8. 43% of those not taking part in consultation say that a lack of awareness of opportunities to participate is a key reason why they haven't been involved although 33% say they are too busy and 26% are not interested in taking part in the first place. Other factors include lack of interest in the topic, doubts that contributions will make any significant difference to the outcome of the consultation and disability, illness or age.
9. The most frequently mentioned topics of consultation are planning (27%) and schools/education (27%) followed by health and social care (21%) all of which have a statutory duty for consultation.
10. The issues on which the respondents felt they should be consulted are varied but include health and social care along with schools, education and learning, budgets and spending and general consultation on all issues affecting residents. A quarter had no specific ideas on this matter.

### **Involvement in consultation**

11. The main motivating factors for taking part in consultation activities are where there is a personal impact or connection with the topic - particularly amongst service users – but also where respondents are 'community minded'. Establishing a connection to the subject matter is an important issue to consider for future engagement activities.
12. Satisfaction with consultation activities is varied depending on whether those involved feel that their voices have been heard and that the engagement was meaningful. In some cases, consultation is considered to be a 'formality' rather than a real attempt at engagement. Ensuring that the consultation process is undertaken when there is still an option to influence decisions is very important. Ensuring adequate time, publicity and opportunity is provided for effective consultation is also important to the public.

13. Those involved in consultation activities found out about the opportunity through general council communications (23%), word of mouth (17%), through contact with a service or department (12%), their own proactive enquiries (12%), local press or media (10%) or via their councillor (9%).

### **Interest and involvement in local government decision making**

14. 45% are interested to some extent in having a say in local government activity and how local government is run compared with 39% which show little or no interest. Those under 35 show slightly less interest (40%) whilst those in higher social groups (AB) are most interested.

15. 50% of respondents are dissatisfied with the level of opportunity they have to influence local government activities, particularly amongst those aged 35 to 54 (60%) but less so amongst under 35s (40%).

16. Respondents typically feel that they are not given enough information on how local government is run and what it does. Some recall information provided through council newsletters but others say they have to actively seek information if they want it, for example, through a local authority website. Information on local authority activities and performance reported in the press is sometimes treated with caution for fear of 'spin' from the press and the preference would be to be given information by local government directly.

17. Comments from respondents suggest that a lack of information on performance can lead to a perception that local government lacks transparency, particularly when there are 'closed' meetings or information is difficult to identify on websites.

### **Reaching and engaging the community**

18. Respondents highlight that future information and communication should focus on direct communication from local government, particularly through newsletters and social media as well as adverts in the local press to raise awareness of consultations and council meetings. In addition, greater connections with members of the community affected by proposals is important, particularly at an early stage in the decision making process.

Timely communication well ahead of meetings is also seen to be important.

19. Engagement in general should be encouraged more actively in the community, particularly amongst young people or vulnerable groups which are less likely to get involved. Respondents highlighted appropriate channels should be considered to reach different sections of the community where they feel most comfortable and able to respond.
20. The most frequently mentioned types of consultation activities which the public would like to see include more contact with councillors (29%), consultation activities/surveys (29%), consultation events (25%), council meetings/scrutiny (19%). Deliberative events (16%), focus groups and workshops (16%) and specialist forums or groups (15%) were also of interest.

### **Interest and involvement in community-led activity**

21. A third of respondents (33%) are interested to some degree in becoming involved in community-led activity. 53% are not interested in getting involved. One in five of those interviewed in the qualitative stage said they were already involved in community activities.
22. Motivating factors which encourage respondents to take part in community activities include the level of connection respondents have with the type of activity, particularly when they have personal experience as a user. Those who have this kind of connection typically also take a more proactive approach to getting involved. Some are interested in activities because they have personal experience and an existing involvement in the area of work, and want to make a contribution themselves. Others want to 'give back' to the community but also find their involvement personally rewarding when they see the outcomes of their involvement.
23. Word of mouth is a key means of finding out about community-led activity according to respondents.

### **Civic responsibilities**

24. Whilst most respondents agree that people and communities should work together to deliver community services, there are concerns that this should

be done in partnership. Where services currently delivered by local government become difficult to maintain, some respondents believe that responsibilities should be handed over to communities who understand local needs rather than lose the service.

25. However, there are strong caveats from many respondents who argue that delivery should still involve the public sector to a greater or lesser extent and that community-led activity should not be used as a cost-cutting exercise or a way for local government to be absolved of all responsibility for service delivery.

### **Drivers of disengagement in community-led activity**

26. The reasons why the respondents do not get involved in community-led activities include the time commitments resulting from work, family and other responsibilities. Lack of awareness of what is happening in the local area is also a barrier and where action can be taken. Letting people know how they can become involved is important in encouraging engagement in community activity. General apathy within the community is also evident particularly when the respondent is not a service user or affected by the service. If there is no impact on them, they are less likely to get involved.

27. Those who are elderly, infirm or disabled are also less likely to get involved in community activity either because of they feel they can make a limited contribution or because they have already 'done their bit' for the community.

### **Encouraging engagement and involvement**

28. Respondents highlight that helping residents establish some engagement with the subject matter or type of activity is likely to be important in encouraging involvement in consultation or community-led activities. This would create a connection and some interest which may encourage involvement.

29. Communication and publicity of opportunities to get involved is also viewed as key. It is important to let people know what kind of activities they can become involved in and what impact they could have.

30. Ensuring all sections of the community can take part will involve some thought on the most appropriate methods and channels of communication and these will vary for different parts of the community. One method does not suit all, and each method will involve a different 'style' and speed of communication.
31. Timing of communications should also be considered. Respondents note that issuing information too close to an event or deadline will mean people cannot find the time to get involved.
32. Those participating in this research indicate that educating children at a young age through citizenship or civic responsibility programmes in or out of school would also be useful in the longer term. This could encourage a greater understanding of how local government and services are run and highlight the importance of ownership and civic responsibility.

### **Local Councillors**

33. 51% of respondents know who their local councillor is and of this group, 48% have had contact with them in the last two years. Some recall direct contact particularly where they have had an issue and have contacted their councillor personally, by phone or email about a letter affecting them. Others recall seeing their councillor at council or community meetings.
34. Few respondents know a lot about the role and responsibilities of their councillor in detail but most are aware that they represent their ward and something of the broad remit. Where there has been some direct contact, some respondents are better informed of the role and responsibilities of their councillor.
35. Despite a relatively low level of awareness of who their councillor is, 31% gave a positive rating of satisfaction with their councillor, rising to 55% amongst those who have had contact with them. The level of awareness of local councillors has an impact on the satisfaction ratings given by respondents - 44% of those who know who their councillor is gave higher satisfaction ratings compared to just 17% for those who don't. 23% gave a lower rating of satisfaction but 29% had no strong views either way.
36. Informed views on the performance of councillors are limited amongst qualitative respondents as relatively few have much awareness of roles

and responsibilities to begin with. Where they are able to comment, views are mixed on how well councillors perform. Those who have had a positive experience of their councillor typically see them engaging with the community, communicating regularly and becoming involved in standing up for things which are important to the ward. In contrast, those who have had a negative experience with their local councillor see little community involvement and action on community issues.

### **Awareness and views of councillors' remuneration and working hours**

37. 73% of respondents believe that local councillors are paid for the work they do. In the qualitative interviews, many thought councillor's salary would be in the range of £10,000-£14,000 plus expenses although others expected higher salaries and some recognise that remuneration depends on the role of the councillor, for example, up to £30,000 for a cabinet member and £120,000 or more for a Chief Executive.
38. Those who don't think or are unsure if councillors are paid think they are compensated for attending meetings with a high level of expenses and allowances.
39. The extent to which salaries are reasonable depends on the level of salary respondents believe is paid, how active they deem their councillor to be, and the extent to which they represent their community. Several respondents suggested that remuneration should be related to the level of 'effort' councillors apply to serving their community.
40. Three in five qualitative respondents think councillors work on a part time basis and almost one in five think they are full time. The remainder are unsure or suggest that it depends on their role.

### **Interest in becoming a councillor**

41. This was explored in the qualitative phase of the project. Three in five (32) would not consider becoming a councillor and the main reasons are time constraints and other commitments, age (too old or not enough life experience), and lack of interest or confidence to take on the 'political' aspects of the role. Those who expressed interest in the idea said that part time roles would be of more interest; particularly if they were at a life stage

where this was more manageable e.g. after children have grown up or in retirement.

42. Whilst some respondents believe that life experience is important in such a role, others would like to see 'new blood' from younger people.
43. Many participants are disillusioned with the political aspects of the role of councillor, particularly if they have no political leanings, even when the 'community involvement' aspects of the role are attractive. The political aspect and the need to be elected can be off-putting to some.
44. Respondents indicate that the demographics of councillors should reflect the profile of the local community either in terms of their own background but alternatively, as long as they have roots in the community and understand the needs of the ward they could be a good representative.

## **2 Introduction**

2.1 Details of the research and policy context are provided below along with information on the evidence gaps and how the findings will be used.

### **Research and Policy Context**

2.2 The Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery (“the Commission”) reported on how Welsh public services are governed and delivered, and made suggestions for future delivery. One key recommendation was the reduction of the number of Local Authorities (LAs) from 22 to 10-12 creating potential for greater efficiency and better use of resources. The report also highlighted other issues including the need for:

- greater engagement between LAs and communities to design service delivery
- greater use of scrutiny to enable LAs to make difficult decisions e.g. determining budget priorities

2.3 The Devolution, Democracy and Delivery White Paper sets out how the Welsh Government (“WG”) believes reforms could be achieved. It refers to the need for a ‘new relationship’ between communities and LAs to improve the level of engagement and involvement.

2.4 Evidence from the National Survey of Wales points to a lack of perceived quality in LA services and ineffective communication on performance. There is a desire for greater public involvement in local decision making but also a low level of perceived ‘power to influence’ decisions (24% feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area). The variation in LA satisfaction is thought to be influenced by respondent characteristics (e.g. age, level of education) rather than geographical location.

2.5 The current scope and effectiveness of engagement activities is extremely variable between LAs partly due to the variation in size, internal resources, services provided and population profile.

2.6 This has implications on how local government engages with communities in the future.

## **Building the evidence base**

- 2.7 The Welsh Government is currently considering the best way forward for Local Government reform across Wales.
- 2.8 In order to inform policy decisions, WG commissioned this research to gather public views on local government engagement in Wales and involvement in community activities. WG needs to understand more about a range of factors relating to these issues including the level and type of community engagement currently experienced and expectations for the future.
- 2.9 Current research on the views of the public on local government engagement and community involvement is mainly limited to information provided by the National Survey of Wales. There is an evidence gap on the views of the general public on the:
- extent and type of engagement with local government
  - perceptions on what engagement is appropriate or inappropriate
  - expectations and effectiveness of local government engagement and the influence the public should have on service delivery
  - views on civic responsibility and ‘co-production’
  - understanding and awareness of the local government reform programme and how information is accessed
- 2.10 This research provides evidence to support policy decisions which will have an impact on Local Government reform in Wales.
- 2.11 The research findings will be used, along with the Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People White Paper consultation responses, to review the next steps in the Welsh Government’s plans for reforming local government. WG needs to be fully informed of public opinion so that decisions on this critical issue are fully evidence-based.

### **3 Research Objectives, Method and Reporting**

3.1 Detailed here are the overall aim and objectives of the project, information on the methodology employed and the approach to reporting.

#### **Aim and Objectives**

3.2 The overall aim of this research is to provide a greater understanding of public opinion of local government engagement and to identify key drivers and barriers involved.

3.3 The specific project aims and objectives agreed are outlined below:

*Aim 1: Develop an understanding, from the public's perspective, of engagement in local government in Wales.*

*Aim 2: Explore what the public wants and expects from local government, in terms of engagement and influence.*

*Aim 3: Understand the level of public awareness of the reform of local government.*

*Aim 4: Develop an understanding of the public's views on democratic institutions and elected members.*

#### **Methodology**

3.4 The research was carried out in two phases of work. The first part was a quantitative research project consisting of 1000 telephone surveys with members of the general public across Wales. This method was chosen because it offered the ability to conduct a substantial number of surveys in a relatively short space of time and within a restricted budget.

3.5 The research provides a 'snapshot' of how the general public perceive and get involved with consultation and community delivery activities and what the issues surrounding engagement are. The sample is not sufficiently robust to allow it to be a fully representative study. The data cannot be reliably analysed by variables such as local authority area, for example, but is sufficiently robust to allow for analysis by 'type' of location i.e. rural or urban and by other demographic factors such as age and social group.

- 3.6 The confidence interval for the quantitative survey is +/-3.1 indicating that if a response of 50% is given for any particular answer, the true value would be between +/-46.9% and 53.1%.
- 3.7 In order to obtain more detailed information on some of the issues surrounding local government reform, a second phase of qualitative research was undertaken. This provided the opportunity to verify the survey results from Phase 1 clarify some of the points raised and give a deeper understanding of the issues already touched upon.
- 3.8 During this second phase, fifty in depth discussions with respondents who had taken part in the first stage telephone interviews were conducted. A selection of those agreeing to take part in a follow up depth interview were re-contacted. Following an agreed topic guide, we delved further into public opinions on local government and community engagement.

### **Part 1 – Quantitative Research Method**

- 3.9 In total, 1000 telephone surveys were conducted with members of the public across Wales. Quotas were set by geographical location and age groups to ensure a good distribution of interviews across Wales and to reflect the fact that political engagement varies significantly with age.
- 3.10 Interviews were carried out from the end of November to the beginning of December 2014 in either Welsh or English according to the language preference of the respondent.

#### *Questionnaire*

- 3.11 The questionnaire used in Part 1 of the research was developed in consultation with WG based on the evidence required to inform the White Paper. The topics covered on the questionnaire included:
- Awareness of Welsh Government reform of Local Government
  - Current level of engagement
  - Involvement in consultation activities and how they heard about this
  - Impressions of current and future engagement including levels of interest in community delivery
  - Awareness of councillors, level of contact and satisfaction

## Sampling

3.12 The sample interviewed is shown in the table below:

**Table 1: Sample interviewed in Part 1**

| Location     | Age      |         |         | Total |
|--------------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
|              | Under 35 | 35 - 54 | Over 55 |       |
| Urban        | 169      | 231     | 255     | 655   |
| Rural        | 77       | 118     | 150     | 345   |
| <b>Total</b> | 246      | 349     | 405     | 1,000 |

3.13 Using information on occupations provided by respondents during the course of the telephone interviews, an indication of the social grade was determined using Market Research Society Occupation Groupings<sup>1</sup>. The sample interviewed by social grade is provided in the table below:

**Table 2: Part 1 Quantitative sample by Social Grade**

| Location       | Interviews | % Sample |
|----------------|------------|----------|
| <b>AB</b>      | 249        | 25%      |
| <b>C1</b>      | 246        | 25%      |
| <b>C2</b>      | 292        | 29%      |
| <b>DE</b>      | 160        | 16%      |
| <b>Refused</b> | 53         | 5%       |
| <b>Total</b>   | 1000       | 100%     |

## Part 2 – Qualitative Depth Interviews Method

3.14 The second part of the project involved in-depth telephone discussions with 50 of those interviewed in Part 1 to explore some of the issues in greater detail following an agreed discussion guide. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes on average.

### *Discussion Topics*

3.15 The discussion guide was developed in consultation with WG and some of the issues identified in Part 1 were explored in more depth whilst other issues were covered for the first time. The topics included in the discussion guide included:

- Local government reform – more in depth discussion on awareness of WG plans and how the public has heard about the plans

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<sup>1</sup> Based on “Occupation Groupings: A Job Dictionary”, MRS, 2010. Further details on the MRS Classification can be found at <https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/occgroups6.pdf>

- Understanding and satisfaction with Local Authorities – are the public given enough information on how the local authority is run and what it does? Do they feel that the local authority operates in an open and honest manner? Do they have confidence that it operates in the best interest of its constituents? What could be changed about how local government is run? What should be done differently? What changes are needed on how it communicates with the public?
- Local councillors – awareness of who local councillors are, how much contact they have had, perceptions of councillor remuneration, hours worked and responsibilities and how well the role is fulfilled, thoughts on what councillors should be doing and how they communicate with the public.
- Interest in becoming a councillor and the barriers to doing so and reasons why people do not, how to encourage a wider range of residents to become councillors, perceptions on whether councillors should reflect the profile of the local community
- Civic responsibilities – involvement in consultation activities (beyond formal consultation) or community-led activities, the motivations and barriers to getting involved, drivers of engagement or disengagement
- Encouraging greater involvement in consultation or community led activity and the types of involvement which should be considered.

### *Sampling*

3.16 The 50 telephone depth interviews were conducted with respondents who agreed to follow up research in Part 1. Sampling reflected the population of Wales by type of location and age, and efforts were made to ensure that interviews were conducted with members of the public from a wide range of backgrounds.

**Table 2: Sample interviewed in Part 2**

| Location     | Age      |         |         | Total |
|--------------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
|              | Under 35 | 35 - 54 | Over 55 |       |
| Urban        | 11       | 10      | 12      | 33    |
| Rural        | 2        | 6       | 9       | 17    |
| <b>Total</b> | 13       | 16      | 21      | 50    |

## **Report structure and data presentation**

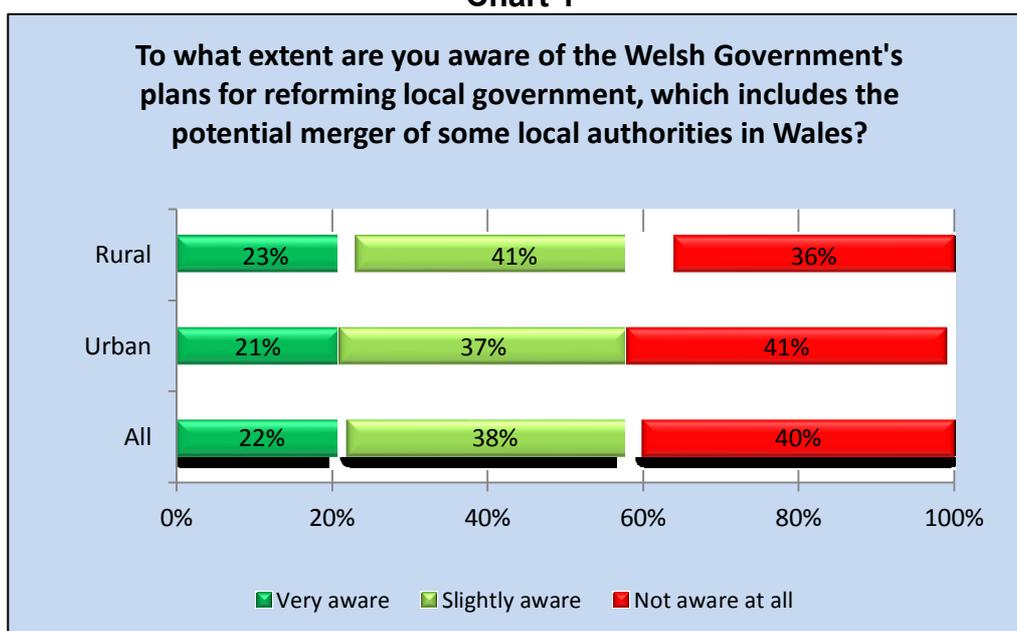
- 3.17 The report broadly follows the themes discussed in the questionnaire and discussion guide used in the fieldwork. Because of the overlap between the two phases of work, responses from the qualitative research conducted in Part 2 have been incorporated with results from Part 1 where relevant and particularly where they expand on the points raised in the first phase of work. The comments indicate where information was gathered from the quantitative or qualitative research phase.
- 3.18 Where relevant, commentary and charts show analyses of the quantitative results by social grading, age or type of location. Due to rounding, some of the sample sizes are small when looking at data at this level. Where this is the case, interpreting the results should be viewed with caution as a small change in response can change the results significantly. The base figures are shown below each chart or table to indicate the number of respondents answering any particular question and also indicate where there is a small base.
- 3.19 Due to rounding of data to the nearest whole percentage, the data provided in tables and charts may not add up to 100% in some cases. For some questions, multiple responses were permitted so the data provided will often exceed 100% when totalled as a result.

## 4 Awareness of Welsh Government Reform of Local Government

4.1 In this section of the report we discuss general awareness of the plans for reform amongst the public, the extent of that awareness and how information is obtained and awareness of the impact on the local area.

### Awareness of plans for reform

Chart 1



Base: 1000 respondents

- 4.2 Respondents were asked briefly about their awareness of the plans for Local Government reform and six in ten (60%) were aware to some degree, rising to 64% in rural areas.
- 4.3 Over three quarters (76%) of over 55s had some awareness and almost a third (32%) of this group were 'very aware' of the plans for reform. Under 35s were least aware (34%) with just 7% indicating that they are 'very aware' of the proposed changes. 70% of those in the AB group are aware of the reforms with a third of these being 'very aware'.
- 4.4 By contrast, two fifths are 'not aware at all' (40%) and this is most evident amongst C2 (45%) and DE groups (46%) but particularly under 35s (65%). This suggests that the Welsh Government should tailor communications on Local Government reform to take into account factors such as age and social group, particularly amongst those aged under 35.

- 4.5 Feedback gathered during the depth interviews points to the need for different forms of communication for those under 35 as they do not necessarily see the more traditional forms of communication which are sent by councils and councillors and are not always the main contact within the household so will not necessarily have access to this information.
- 4.6 This echoes the findings of a report based on analysis of data from the National Survey for Wales<sup>2</sup> which suggests that young people in particular feel that local government does not communicate very well with younger people about performance. The report highlights the need for different ways of engaging this audience. The report also mentions the need for 'extra efforts' to engage other potentially vulnerable groups such as poorer people, those less well educated and older people due to their lack of perceived 'power to influence' local government decisions for reasons including lack of information or interest.

#### **Extent of awareness of local government reform**

- 4.7 Information gathered during qualitative interviews suggests that very few have a detailed knowledge of what the proposed plans are, rather the general concept of reducing the number of councils, and that there is a need for councils to become more cost effective in the light of the reduction in government funding. The exception to this is those working in local government or who are involved with community councils where their awareness is much more extensive.

*"I work in local government so I'm fully aware of it and I don't think it's going far enough. The reorganisation is absolutely inevitable."* Over 55, male, rural

*"I know that it was suggested that they would merge themselves, rather than being done by force. There's been a lot of change over time and here we go again. It's like a circle, when they're big they think it's too big and when they're small, they think it's too small."* Over 55, male, urban

*"I don't know anything specific but I know they need to save money and I think they've just finished the voluntary stage of reshuffling."* Under 35, female, rural

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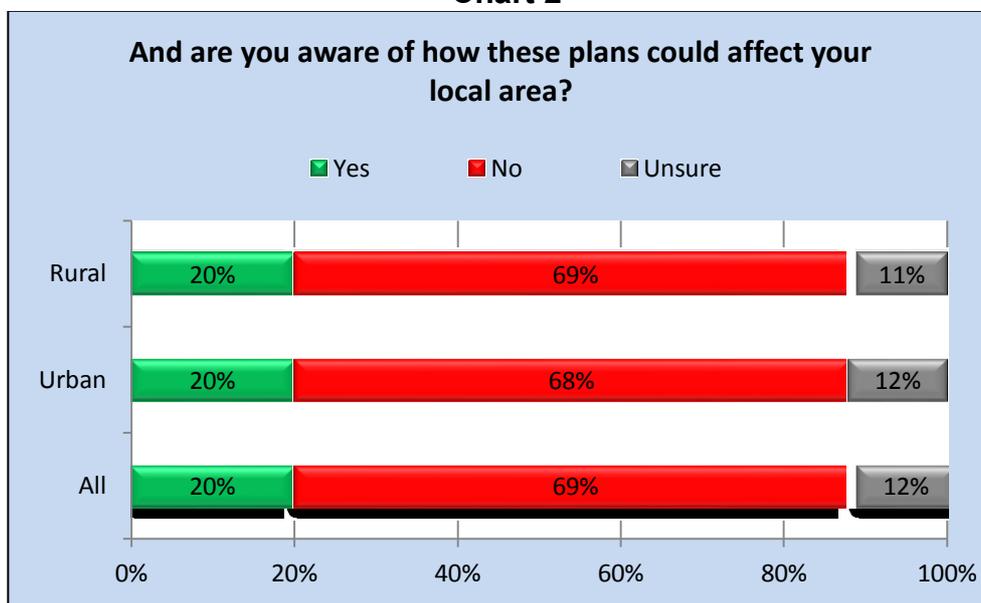
<sup>2</sup> National Survey for Wales, 2012-13: Satisfaction with local authority services, WG, 2014

## Sources used to find out about local government reform

- 4.8 Most of those interviewed in Part 2 have heard about the reform programme in the media, particularly through local news on TV, online, radio and in the local press. BBC and S4C channels were specifically mentioned by around one in five respondents.
- 4.9 Four respondents found information on the proposed reforms at council meetings and one heard from their local councillor by newsletter but mostly respondents are informed through mainstream media.

## Awareness of impact of plans on the local area

Chart 2



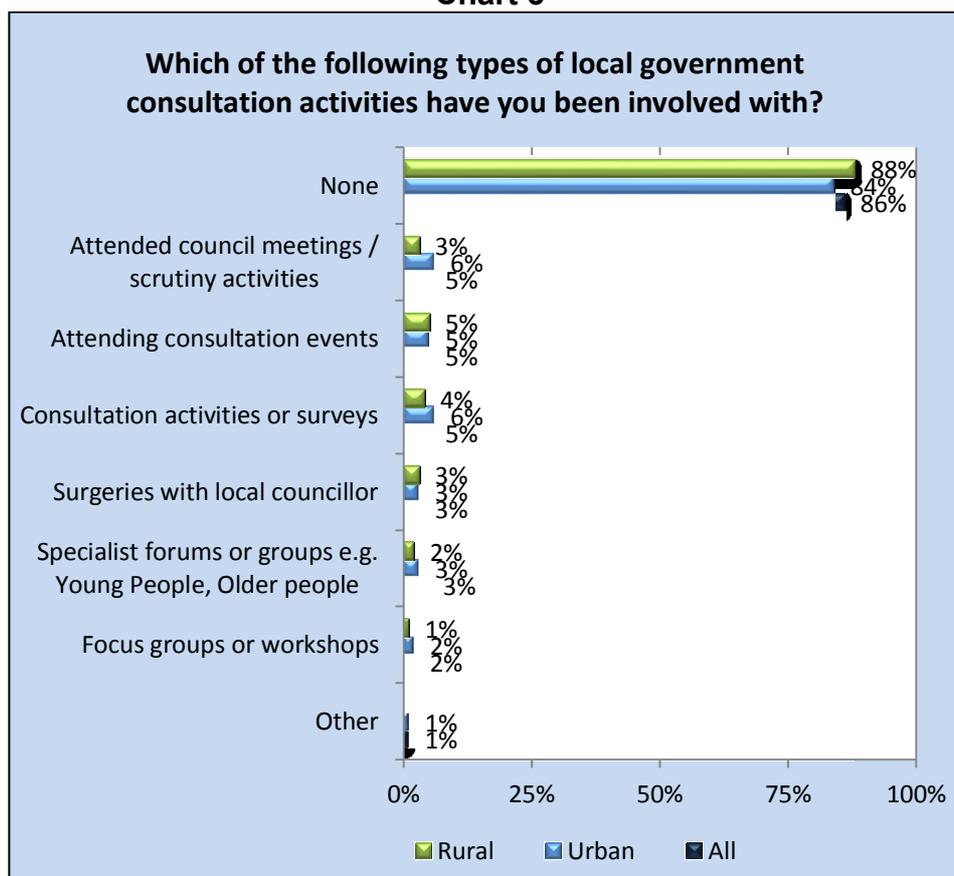
- 4.10 A fifth of respondents are aware of how plans for local government reform could affect their local community, with no variation by type of location.
- 4.11 Amongst those who were 'very aware' of the reforms to begin with, 52% say they are aware of the impact on their local area and 34% do not, suggesting they have little detailed knowledge even when they know about the reforms.
- 4.12 Under 35s have the least awareness of the potential local impact (10%) compared with 20% overall. Men are most aware of the impact (25%) compared with 16% of women. The AB social group are most aware of the possible impact (27%) compared with far fewer in C2 (15%) and DE groups (18%).

## 5 Current Level of Engagement with Local Government

5.1 A number of questions were asked about the level of current engagement with Local Government through consultation activities such as those outlined in the chart below. This chapter covers type of consultation, frequency of recent engagement, the topic of consultation, how respondents became aware of the consultation and the reasons why some did not take part were explored. Consultation activity in this instance is taken to mean activity where local authorities seek the opinion of members of the public as a whole rather than just the formal consultation process for proposals.

### Participation in consultation activities

Chart 3



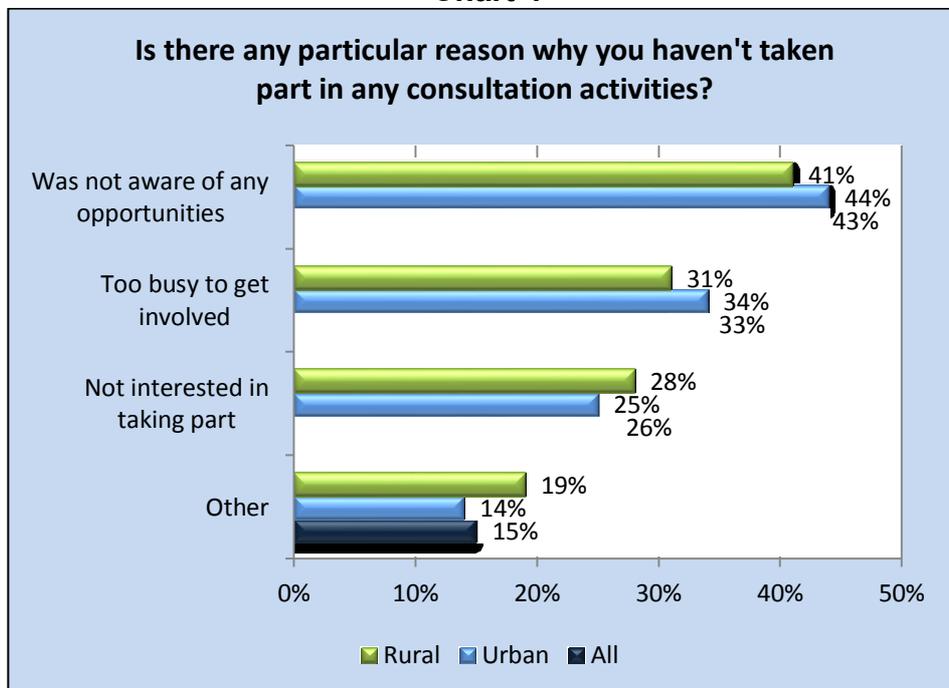
Base: 1000 respondents

5.2 Respondents were prompted with a list of the various types of consultation activity which they may have encountered. Almost nine in ten respondents (86%) said that they had not been involved with any of

these activities. There is little variation by urban or rural location. However, those in the lower social groups (C2 and DE) are least likely to be involved (88% and 89% respectively) compared with those in the higher social groups - AB (81%) and C1 (82%).

5.3 Where respondents had been involved in consultation activities, the most frequently mentioned were ‘attending council meetings or scrutiny activities’ (5%), ‘attending consultation events’ (5%) and ‘consultation activities or surveys’ (5%).

**Reasons for lack of participation in consultation activities**  
**Chart 4**



Base: 855 respondents; those not taking part in consultation activities

5.4 When asked about the reasons for not taking part in local government consultation activity, unprompted responses were coded into the themes above.

5.5 More than two fifths (43%) were unaware of opportunities to become involved in these activities, with little difference by location type.

5.6 A third (33%) said they were too busy to get involved and a further quarter (26%) said they were not interested in taking part.

5.7 Some did not give any particular reason but others said the following factors had a bearing on their level of involvement:

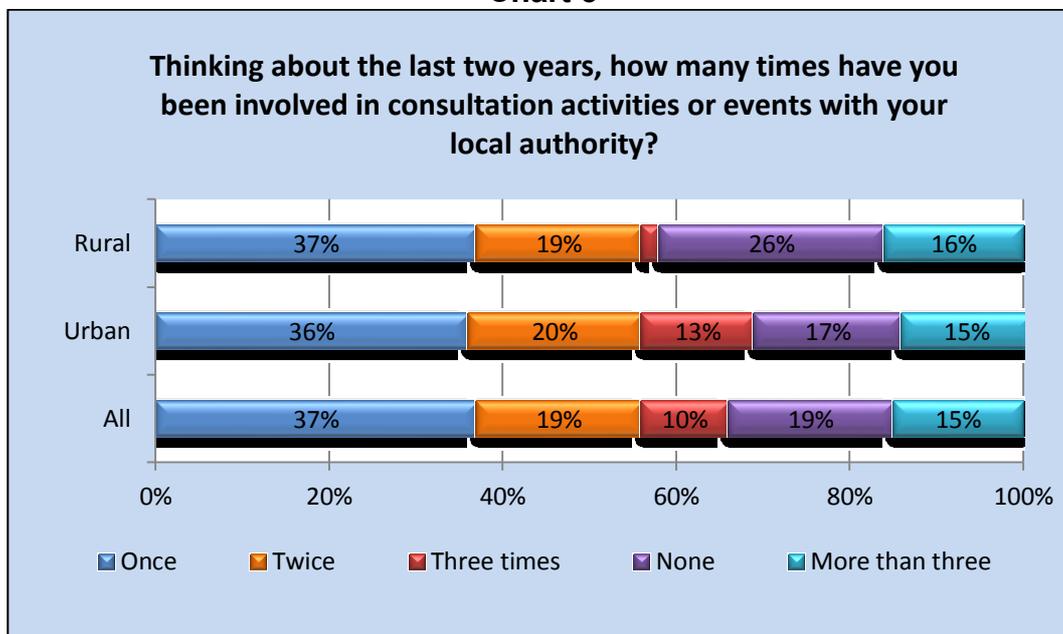
- Lack of interest in the topics/nothing of interest has come up

- Belief that contributions would not make any real difference
- Ill health
- Disability, inaccessible
- Elderly, inaccessible
- Carer, so unable to get out of the home
- Don't know how to become involved

*“Usually a foregone conclusion beforehand so don't see the point.”*  
*“There was nothing that grabbed me why I would want to get involved.”*

### Frequency of involvement in consultation activities

**Chart 5**



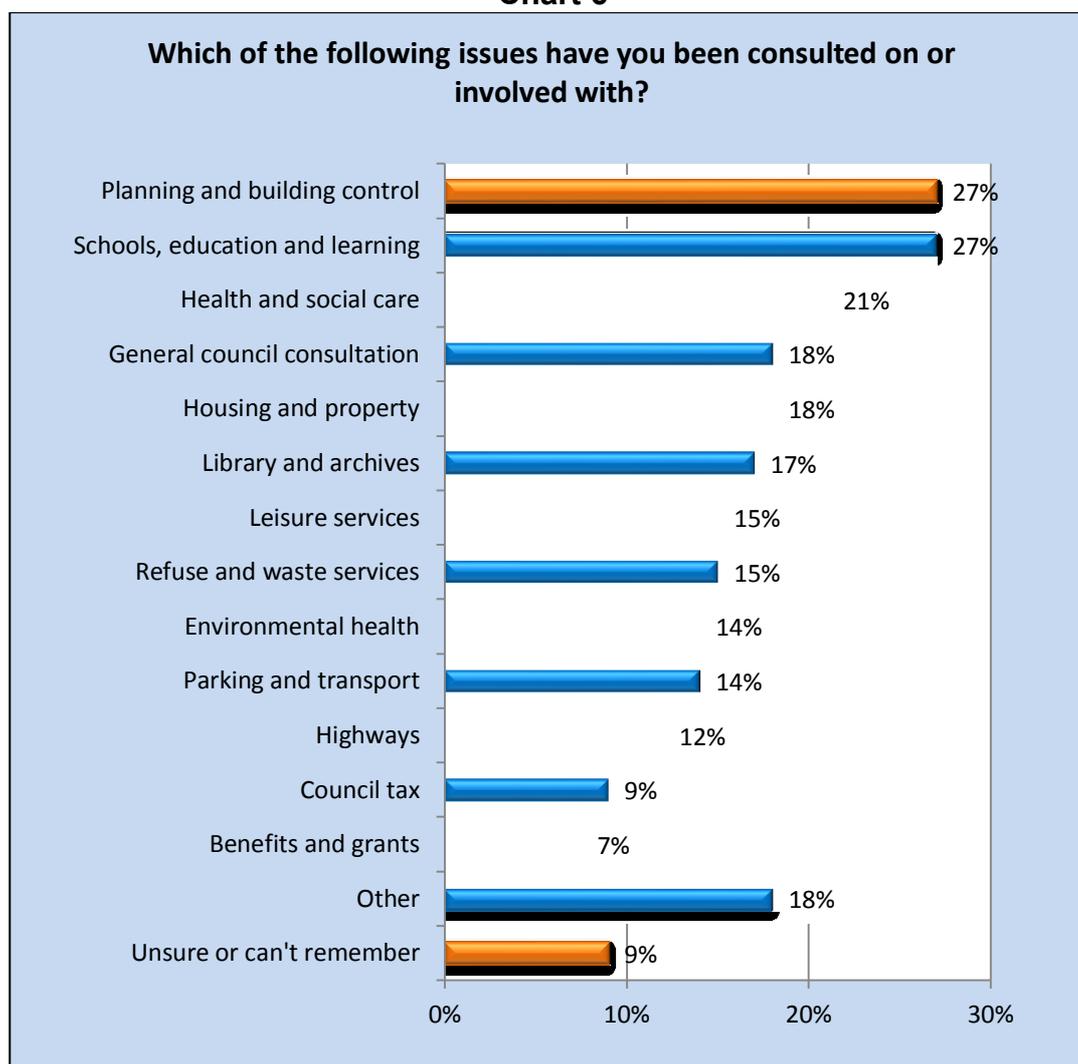
Base: 145 respondents; those taking part in consultation activities (note small base)

5.8 Of those taking part in consultation activities, almost two fifths (37%) recall only one occasion that they have taken part in this type of activity in the last two years and this does not vary by location. This points to a relatively low level of involvement in engagement activities amongst the general public.

5.9 A fifth said they had not been involved in consultation in the last two years (19%) but had been prior to this. This was most often the case amongst those in rural locations (26%).

## Consultation topics

Chart 6



Base: 145 respondents; those taking part in consultation activities (note small base)

- 5.10 The most often mentioned consultation topics are planning matters and schools or education, recalled by over a quarter (27%). There has been a substantial programme of reform in some areas of Wales on some of these service areas, particularly on education due to proposed changes to education provision and this is reflected in the topics recalled.
- 5.11 Health and social care, general council consultations, housing and property and library services were mentioned by around a fifth of respondents who have taken part in consultation activities.
- 5.12 'Other' topics of consultation were varied and included neighbourhood watch, specific local issues, enterprise and local development, general council issues, licensing, floods, amenities for the elderly and disabled and tree control.

- 5.13 Some service areas such as highways, parking and transport, and planning will often involve consultation with only those residents directly affected by proposed changes based on factors such as location.
- 5.14 This research highlights that the proportion of residents consulted on some service areas will be determined by the services they access which is in turn linked to their stage of life or personal choices e.g. health and social care, leisure services and so on. Users of a service will be more aware of proposed service changes compared to non-users and this will affect the extent to which they are aware of consultation on those service areas.

### **Issues on which local government should consult**

- 5.15 All respondents were asked what issues they think it is important for local government to consult with the public on. This question allows us to identify which issues are front of mind priorities amongst respondents. This was an open-ended question rather than a prompted list so the responses given below are based on the themes drawn from the comments made by respondents.
- 5.16 The issues raised were extremely varied but the most frequently mentioned were similar to many of those which respondents recall being consulted on (shown in Chart 6), although ranked slightly differently.
- 5.17 Almost a quarter (23%) had no specific ideas on what local government should consult on.
- 5.18 Interestingly, few residents recall being consulted on 'budget and spending' but one in ten (9%) mention it as an issue they think they should be consulted on.
- 5.19 'Health and social care' is the most frequently mentioned topic which should be consulted on compared with a rank of third in the consultation topics which have been the subject of consultation:
- Health and social care (15%)
  - Schools, education and learning (11%)
  - Budgets and spending (9%)
  - General consultation on all issues (9%)
  - Roads and highways (6%)

- Leisure, amenities and facilities (6%)
- Planning or building control (6%)
- Cuts, closures or major decisions in general (5%)
- Cleansing, waste and refuse (5%)
- Youth issues (4%)
- Parking and transport (4%)
- Other issues were suggested including policing (3%), greater transparency (3%), housing (3%), library services (3%), council tax/benefits (2%), environmental health (2%) and employment (2%).

*“Really how we need to be spending more money on local services such as health care”*

*“I think it is important for local government to consult with the public on issues such as social care provisions and residential structures. Other important topics to consult on with the public are building and maintaining libraries and leisure centres because we don't want to lose those.”*

*“Should be more play areas for children. More involvement in the education system and children should go to school at 3 years old”*

*“How our money is spent, where our taxes go, when they cut services we should be consulted.”*

*“How much the councillors get paid, they should have consulted with us before giving themselves a pay rise and sacking council workers to pay for it.”*

### **Motivation for taking part in consultation activities**

5.20 Those interviewed in the qualitative phase of work were asked about their involvement in consultation activities over the past two years and nine of the fifty respondents indicated that they had taken part.

5.21 Most took part in planning consultations related to proposed activities such as the building of a new prison or school, or in some cases were consulted on plans to close a local facility such as a Post Office or library.

5.22 These respondents often attended council meetings or consultation events. One respondent had attended a focus group in the past two years whilst two respondents are on council residents' panels and regularly complete questionnaires as part of council consultation exercises.

5.23 Personal motivation is the most frequently-mentioned reason for becoming involved in consultation activity for these respondents. If the proposed closure of a service – or the creation or building of a new one – is likely to have a personal impact on them, they are much more likely to want have a say in what happens:

*“I had a personal desire to get involved”*  
55+ year-old, rural, male

*“It was of interest to me and had an effect on myself and people around me, that’s why I got involved”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

5.24 One in five respondents are generally ‘community minded’ and report that they attended consultation activity because they want to be involved in the issues affecting their community.

*“I’ve been in the village a long time and now at a certain age and want to do more for community”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, male

5.25 Other consultation topics, of which attendance is driven by personal experience, included roads and access, signage, lighting, public transport, park maintenance, speeding and refuse collection.

### **Becoming involved in consultation activities**

5.26 The way in which respondents have become involved in consultation varies, and can be either pro-active or reactive. Word-of-mouth plays a part in how people learn about consultation activity, as they speak to friends, neighbours and work colleagues.

5.27 Others mention newsletters or stories in local newspapers. One respondent said they were approached by the council’s chairman and become involved in that way.

### **Satisfaction with the level of engagement and outcome**

5.28 Satisfaction levels among the nine respondents who have been involved in consultation activity in the last two years is varied, with some reporting to be very satisfied, and others very dissatisfied.

5.29 Those who say they are satisfied say it felt like their voice had been heard and were pleased to have been given the opportunity to not only have their say but also to learn more about what was happening.

*“I thought as they were there meeting the local community it was my opportunity to go and ask questions - I thought it was good”*  
35-54-year-old, rural female

5.30 Those dissatisfied felt like the consultation process was a ‘tick box exercise’ and only paid lip service to their views. They felt that decisions had already been made and were far less likely to believe that their opinions were fully considered, especially on matters which require consultation as a matter of law. This is a major barrier to engagement as is evidenced by the quantitative research where similar issues were identified.

*“Most of the time the agenda had already been determined and it was a mere formality to by law consult the public”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, male

5.31 The two respondents who are on a residents’ panel would like to know how, if at all, their contribution has been used. While they are pleased to be involved, they would like to know the outcome of their input. Adding some feedback into the process would be helpful and encourage future engagement. Ensuring that there is a feedback process which demonstrates how decisions have been impacted by consultation and what action has been taken would help with overcoming this issue to some extent.

5.32 Most respondents report to be satisfied with the outcome of their involvement, even if they did not get the outcome they were hoping for. Some do understand that changes happen, or facilities close, despite a strong effort from the consultation activity and the effort of councillors.

*“Cau wnaeth yr ysbyty ond o leiaf roedd y cynghorwyr yna’n cwffio. Doedd na ddim byd arall fasa’r cynghorwyr na’r gymuned wedi gallu gwneud – doedd na ddim bai ar y cynghorwyr”*

*[“The hospital did shut down but at least the councillors were there fighting. There was nothing else that the councillors nor the community could have done – there was no blame on the councillors”]*  
Under 35-year-old, rural, female

## **Opportunities to take part in consultation exercises**

- 5.33 Opinions on whether the public is given the opportunity to become involved in local government issues are mixed from respondents. While some are happy with the opportunities available, others believe that those opportunities only transpired as a result of community pressure and in some cases negative publicity.
- 5.34 Some comment that they would like to see more opportunities to take part in meaningful consultation activities and believe that this should be commenced much earlier in the process, well before decisions have been made, so that there is still an opportunity for their input to hold some sway.
- 5.35 Some respondents would like to see a general increase in public consultation on all major issues, others would prefer to be given the opportunity to suggest consultation activity on matters that directly affect them or impacts on their community e.g. flood defences.

*“When things have come up that affect our local community”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

## **How do residents hear about consultations?**

- 5.36 In the quantitative survey, those who have been involved in consultation were asked how they heard about the activity. The most popular methods were:
- General council communications (23%)
  - Word-of-mouth (17%)
  - Through contact with a council department or service (12%)
  - Respondent raised the issue that affected them (12%)
  - Local press or media (10%)
  - Through contact with a councillor (9%)
- 5.37 Respondents from the qualitative phase mentioned similar channels. Local press – both print and online – was frequently-mentioned, as were adverts in local shops and amenities. While many like to go online to receive information, comments from respondents suggest that not all have access to the internet or are comfortable using it and would prefer printed material.

5.38 Word-of-mouth remains an important means by which people find out about local government activity that might affect them.

**Council communication tools most often recalled**

5.39 Hard copy newsletters or newspapers are mentioned by one in three and are the most recalled general council communication tool used to find out about consultation activities amongst those in the quantitative study.

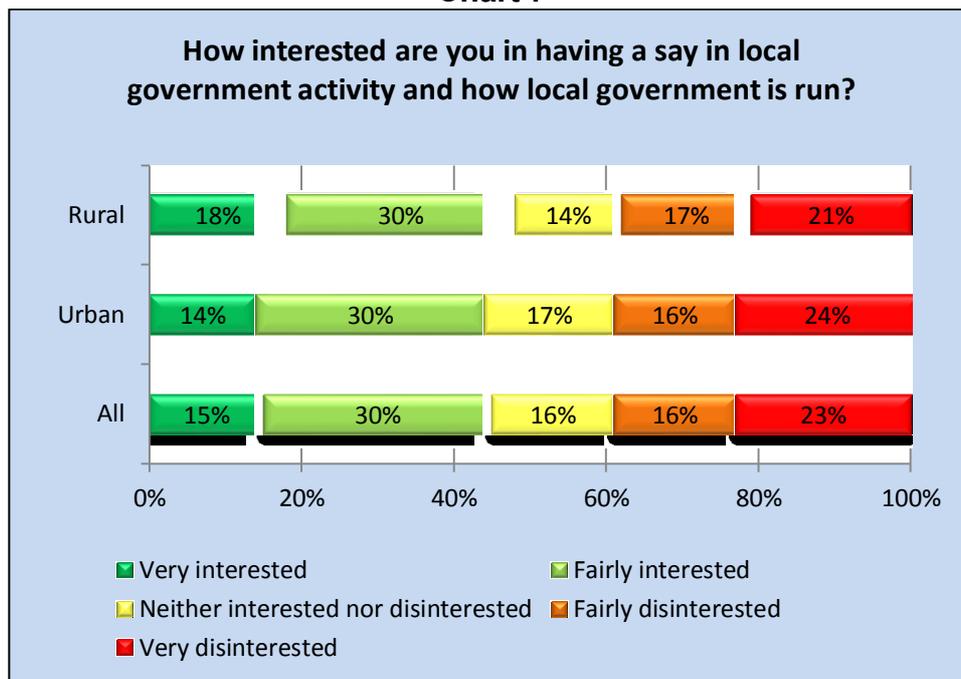
5.40 Other council communications mentioned included emailed newsletters, general emails and council meetings.

## 6 Impressions of Current and Future Engagement

- 6.1 Part 1 quantitative research explored the levels of interest in consultation, satisfaction with current experience, the type of involvement which should be considered in the future and the interest getting involved in community activity in the local area.
- 6.2 The qualitative research undertaken in Part 2 built on these themes and looked further at the satisfaction with the information provided, perceptions of local authority transparency, confidence in decision making, changes in how decisions should be made and how local government communicates with the public.

### Level of interest in local government decision making

Chart 7



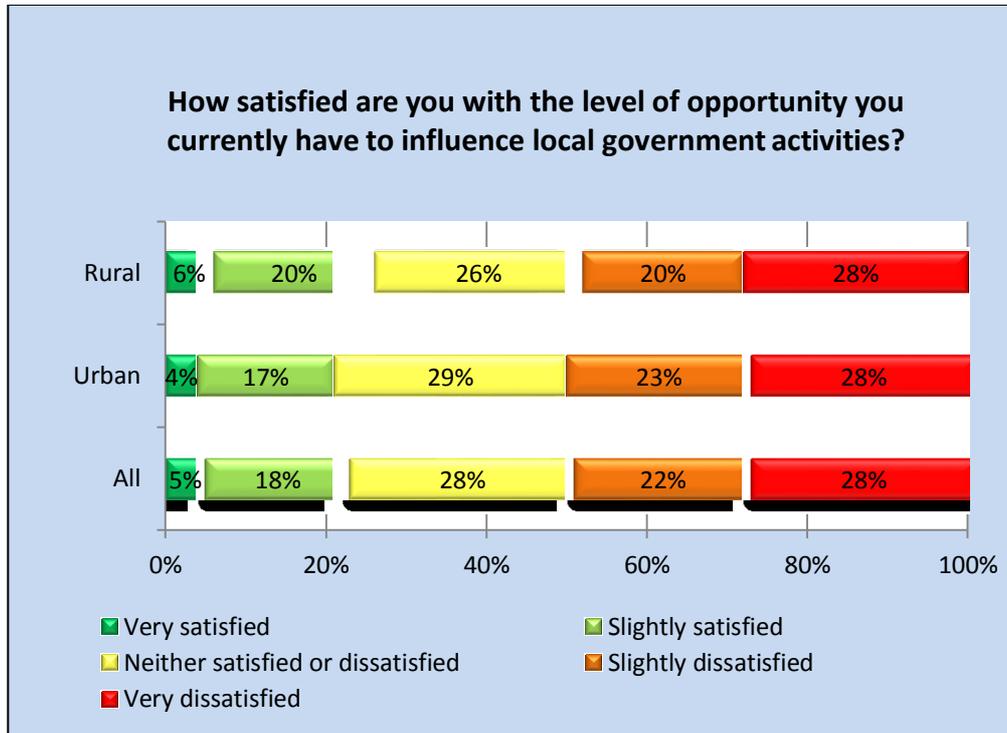
Base: 1000 respondents

- 6.3 There is substantial interest amongst the general public in having some input into local government activities and how local government is run with just under half (45%) indicating some level of interest, rising to 48% in rural areas.
- 6.4 Although interest is strong for some, views are mixed as there is also a substantial proportion of the general public which show little or no interest in engagement with local government decision making or activities (39%).

6.5 Those under 35 show slightly less interest (40%). Respondents in social group AB are the most interested (57%) compared with those in C2 (38%) and DE groups (37%).

**Satisfaction with the opportunity to influence local government activities**

**Chart 8**



Base: 1000 respondents

6.6 Half of those interviewed (50%) were dissatisfied with the level of opportunity they have to influence local government activities and there is little variation for urban or rural locations. This dissatisfaction rises to 60% for those aged 35 to 54 but is less commonly found amongst under 35s (40%).

6.7 Although still relatively low, those in the AB social group are most satisfied with their level of influence (26%) compared to 23% overall. There is little difference by gender.

## Information on how local authorities are run

- 6.8 In the qualitative phase of the research, respondents were asked whether they feel they are given enough information on how the local authority in their area is run and what it does.
- 6.9 The majority of respondents believe that they are not given enough information. This is also evidenced in the findings of the National Survey for Wales in which 52% of respondents agreed that they would like more information on how their council is performing.
- 6.10 While some respondents report receiving a council newsletter through their door with some information of council activity updates, others say they have to actively seek out information, for example, through a local authority website – if they want to find out more about what their local authority is doing or planning.
- 6.11 Some respondents, however, are satisfied with the amount of information they are given by their local authority – but these respondents were in the minority.
- 6.12 Some of the comments from participants reflect views on the information provided:

*“I don’t think you really know where the money is being spent and it’d be nice to see where your council taxes and general taxes are going”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, male

*“This calendar year I got less information than usual, only something about council tax changes.”*  
35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“So far as being given information, there’s not a great deal given, but if you take a bit of an interest, you can work out what’s going on”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

*“We get a free newspaper which outlines cost and what they are trying to do”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

- 6.13 The extensive use of local media to disseminate council activity to the public receives mixed views. While many of respondents use local or regional newspapers and websites to learn about their local authority, some believe that the information would be better coming directly from the council, as they fear ‘spin’ from the press.

## Local government transparency and trust

- 6.14 During the qualitative interviews, respondents were also asked about their perceptions of the transparency and level of trust they have in local government to act in the best interest of the public.
- 6.15 With a perceived lack of information from local authorities, many respondents believe that they might not act in an open manner. This is often due to a lack of readily-available information, ‘closed-door’ meetings, or the inability to easily access council updates and activities through the local authority itself. Whilst this is a strong perception, it may be a consequence of the reality and complexity of managing access to local government information and details of activities.
- 6.16 Some respondents believe that they only hear about news once a council has made a decision and that engagement with the public is either not publicised well or that it is merely a ‘box ticking exercise’. There is a feeling amongst respondents that if local government truly wanted involvement and a valuable consultation process they would introduce these exercises much earlier in the process of decision making.

*“If you wanted to find out anything, like the relief road for the M4, you have to spend ages searching for details for exactly what’s happening”*  
35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“They operate on the basis of telling public just before they make decisions or changes – leave it until just before they are about to be implemented rather than giving the opportunity to voice an opinion to say that something is wrong”*  
35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“People couldn’t have any real influence on the decision, it was just giving people information and the ‘consultation’ process was not involving... it should start way before that”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

- 6.17 There is, however, a strong proportion of respondents who report to trust that local authorities are operating openly and honestly, but a lack of information – either through time pressures or apathy – means that they rely on local authorities to operate in the best interest of their constituents without being fully informed about council activity.

*“It’s hard to say without getting really involved in what they do, but we trust that they do”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“I don’t know enough about it, that’s the problem. I can’t give an opinion because I don’t have the information about it”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

6.18 Some comment that they have more trust in council staff rather than councillors, with some reporting a distrust of ‘political agenda’ among councillors.

*“I think most councillors are in it for their own good – only a couple doing it to help – majority I honestly believe they are doing it for their own aims”*

35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“I am probably of opinion of most people, MPs and councillors look after their own area and that’s it”*

55+ year-old, urban, female

*“It’s the politics bit that doesn’t work for me. Politicians can’t be honest. Ultimately we elect them and we have to trust them”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

*“Mae’r cyngor, sef swyddogion y cyngor, yn gweithio’n galed iawn. Yn anffodus, maint yn cael eu rheoli gan wleidyddion, ac mae’r gwleidyddion yn aml yn gweithio ar raddfa sydd ddim er lles yr etholwyr”*

*[The council, of which I mean the civil servants, work very hard. Unfortunately, they are being controlled by politicians, and the politicians often work on an agenda that is not for their electorate’s well being”]*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

### **Future changes and communication**

6.19 Those interviewed in the qualitative phase were asked about how they would like to see things done differently in the future in terms of communication and the approach to consultation activities.

6.20 Direct communication from local government, rather than through the media, is key according to respondents. Being open in the way local government operates – and regularly relaying activity – would impart more confidence in the public.

6.21 While the way in which people like to be communicated with varies substantially, the two most frequently-mentioned means are printed newsletters and social media. When it comes to council meetings, adverts in the local press are also mentioned by some respondents.

- 6.22 Closer consultation with the public, especially on matters which might directly impact a community, is another regularly-mentioned change respondents would like to see adopted by local government. Although this may currently happen, some respondents report being unaware of consultation opportunities until well into or after the process.
- 6.23 With this in mind, stronger communication, well ahead of meetings is sought after by respondents. Some believe that the public should be meaningfully engaged earlier in proceedings in order to gain public opinion.
- 6.24 Early engagement is not only mentioned in relation to specific issues, but also in the wider context of the community. Getting young people engaged in community and council activity is important to some respondents. Adopting or increasing the use of channels used by younger people – such as social media – has been suggested.

*“They should make more of an effort to provide information”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“Communication and openness and transparency – educating people on what they do and then if they need to garner support for a specific proposal, people would understand why the council are doing this”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“Better communication and actually more communication with the public”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“Dwi'n meddwl bod lot ohono fo'n dod lawr i jyst cyfathrebu a siarad efo'r bobol. Mae rhywun yn deall bod pres yn brin ond wrth guddio pethau mae nhw ond yn colli trust”*

*[“I think a lot of it boils down to simply communicating and talking to people. People understand that money is scarce but in hiding things they are only losing people's trust”]*

Under 35-year-old, rural, female

*“I think when they proposing to close facilities like libraries and leisure centres, before they make decisions they need to consult local people more closely”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

*“Involve people in the consultation process much earlier before decisions are already made”*

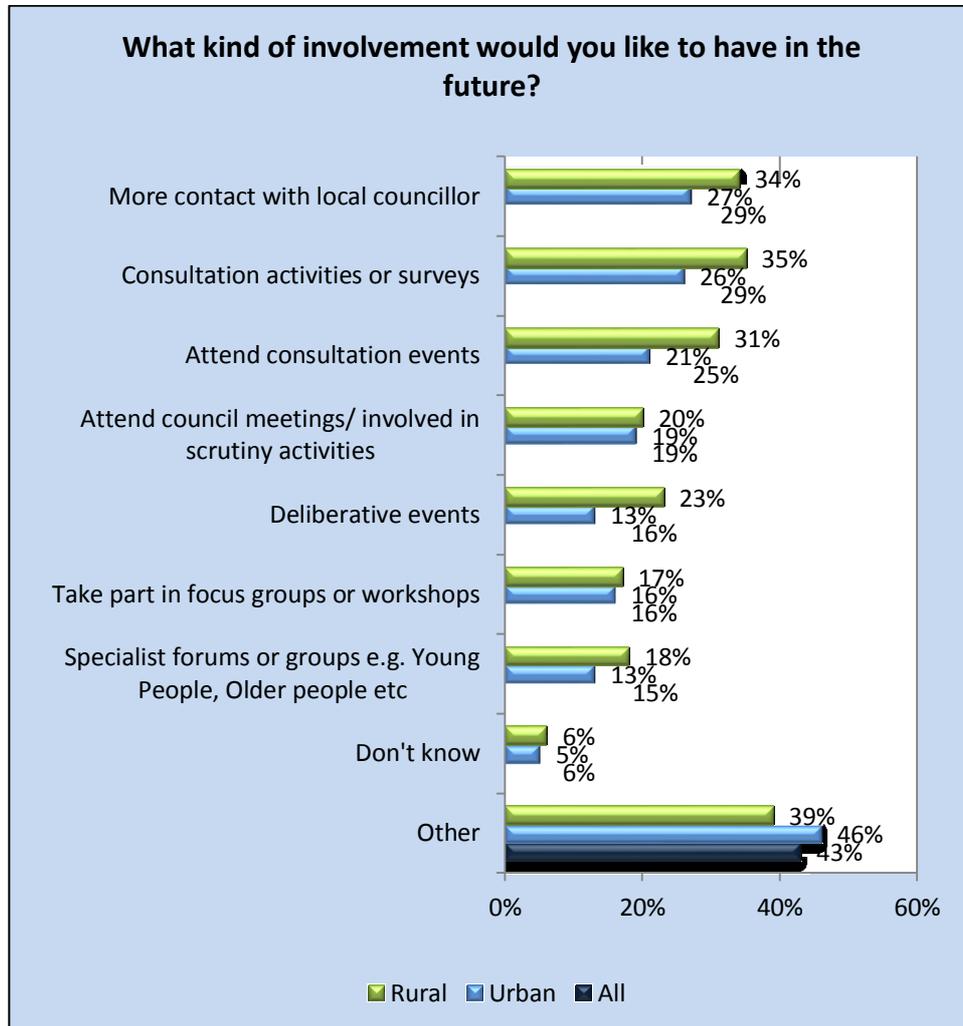
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

*“I think they need to consult a lot more and a lot more widely, and use different formats. More electronic formats to engage with the younger generation”*

Under 35-year-old, urban, female

### Preferred types of future consultation involvement

Chart 9



Base: 1000 respondents

6.25 When asked what kind of consultation activity they would like to have in the future, the most frequently mentioned types were more contact with councillors (29%), consultation activities/surveys (29%), attending consultation events (25%), and attending council meetings/scrutiny (19%).

6.26 Deliberative events<sup>3</sup> were also of interest to 16% of respondents, as were taking part in focus groups or workshops (16%) and specialist forums or groups (15%).

6.27 The majority of the 'other' responses were individuals who said they were not interested in involvement in general (36%) or specifically due to

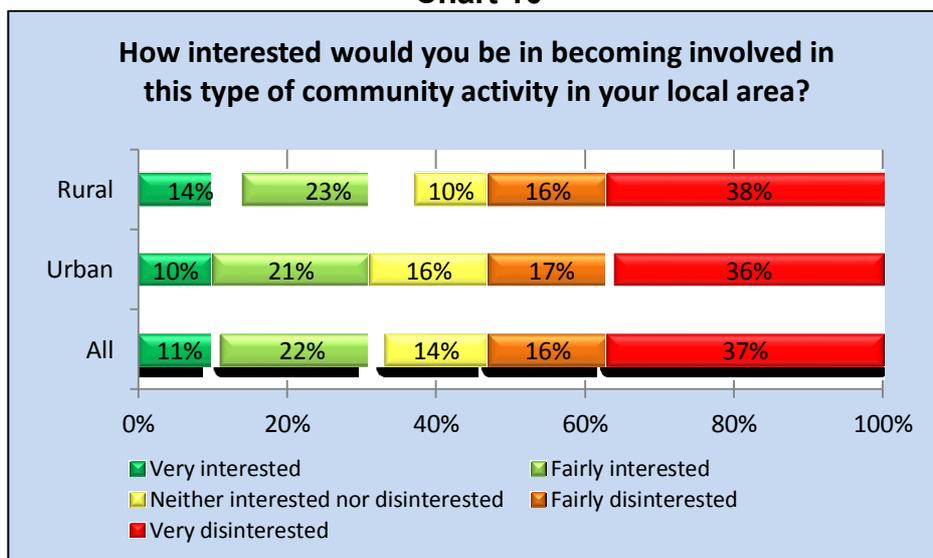
<sup>3</sup> Deliberative events were defined as "taking part in a detailed group consideration of a particular topic" and examples used, where necessary to explain this further during surveys.

time constraints (2%), disability or age (2%) or because they didn't think any action would result as a result of involvement (1%).

6.28 The level of potential involvement is much higher than it currently is and it is clear that no one form of consultation suits all. Similar themes were identified in the follow up research on the National Survey report<sup>4</sup>, which found that certain groups of residents are less likely to feel that they have the 'power to influence' decisions made on local government activities. Respondents highlight that there is a need to ensure that consultation activities are designed in order to give access to all those who should be given the opportunity to respond because they are affected by the topic of consultation. Consideration will need to be given to the accessibility of the consultation process and a range of points of access – on and offline - reviewed to reflect the needs of residents.

### Level of interest in becoming involved in community activity

Chart 10



Base: 1000 respondents

6.29 Respondents were given examples of how some communities have taken on services previously delivered by local government such as local libraries, community centres, leisure centres, speed watch schemes and running community events.

6.30 A third of all respondents (33%) said that they are interested to some degree in becoming involved in community activity in the local area and

<sup>4</sup> National Survey for Wales, 2012-13: Satisfaction with local authority services, Welsh Government, 2014

this rises to 37% in rural areas compared with 31% in urban areas.

Similarly, age plays a part in levels of interest; those under 35 are most interested (44%) compared with just 28% of those over 55.

6.31 Interest is highest amongst women with over a third (35%) showing interest compared with 30% of males. Likewise, social group AB showed a slightly higher level of interest than average (36%).

6.32 Over half (53%) are not interested in becoming involved, particularly those over 55 (59%) compared with 42% under 35. Social group C2 are the least interested (58%) compared with 46% of the AB group. There are a range of reasons for the apparent lack of interest in taking part in community activity and these are explored more fully below.

### **Involvement in community-led activities and key drivers**

6.33 Building on the quantitative research findings, respondents in the Phase 2 qualitative research were asked about the extent to which they were involved with community-led activities. We defined 'community-led activities' as 'setting up, running or delivering services or events in the local community often previously delivered by local government such as community libraries, community centres, leisure centres, speed watch schemes and running community events.'

6.34 Out of the 50 respondents interviewed, ten have been involved in community-led activity. Community-led activity has similar drivers to involvement in local government consultation, as respondents are more likely to be involved in a matter that means something to them, but it is more likely to be emotionally driven and involvement more proactive with respondents making the decision to actively become involved. For example, one respondent with a disabled son became involved in a carers forum, another who was involved in music got involved with delivering a music festival.

6.35 Community-led activity is viewed by respondents as more like charitable work and a way of giving back to the community, compared to consultation activity which is considered to be more akin to 'problem fixing'.

- 6.36 Giving time as a volunteer – whether it’s public park maintenance, raising money for local charities, or working with the disabled or elderly – is seen by respondents as rewarding work but requires investment of time, energy and effort. The impetus to get involved in these types of activities tends to come from personal experience of a service or awareness of a need.
- 6.37 As with consultation activity, some respondents heard about community-led activity by word-of-mouth, while others actively seek out ways to become involved. If they, or a family member, have been positively affected by a service, they will often look for ways to support that service by giving up their time to help, raise money or spread awareness.
- 6.38 For some respondents, the apparent lack of interest in becoming involved sometimes reflects a lack of ability to rather than a lack of desire to get involved. This is covered in more detail later in the report.

*“I was a service user myself. I’d been in hospital for months, then the nurse let me know about the involvement project. I’m really glad she did or I wouldn’t have known about it otherwise”*

Under 35-year-old, urban, female

*“It was just word-of-mouth and I know other neighbours were on it, so I went along”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

- 6.39 The desire to become involved with some kind of community activity has driven some respondents to seek out volunteering groups to see where their help could best be used.

*“I went to AVOW in Wrexham – a local volunteering group, like a recruitment centre – they gave me a list of options”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“Through Communities First”*

Under 35-year-old, urban, female

- 6.40 Most respondents involved in community-led activity are satisfied with the level of their involvement and the outcome of their efforts. They feel rewarded by the outcomes of the collective effort of working with others in the community.

*“I’m really, really happy with it all – we all do our bit”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

## **Attitudes towards civic responsibilities in the community**

- 6.41 Respondents in the qualitative phase of work were also asked about their attitudes towards civic responsibilities, such as involvement in community activities, events and council activities. Respondents broadly believe it is important that people and communities work together to deliver community services but there are number of concerns on how this can be achieved and that the community should not become overloaded and solely responsible for delivery of services.
- 6.42 If it is not financially viable for local government to maintain a service, some respondents believe that the responsibility should be handed over to communities. Respondents suggest that not only is this to make sure services continue to be delivered, but that they are delivered by people who have an understanding of how the community will most benefit from the service or event.
- 6.43 However, most respondents believe that there still needs to be a level of public sector involvement and delivery should be a partnership not just a handover. This public support should include either funding or at least other non-financial support which would enable service delivery to be continued, for example, facilitation or co-ordination support. Most do not believe community-led activity should be used as a cost-cutting exercise or as a way for councils to absolve themselves of responsibility for service delivery.

*“Without a doubt. If there is a need for that service to be maintained. If it's not financially viable for a council to keep running it then we have to keep it going”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

*“People with local knowledge can do a lot to help, it's important to have that knowledge that only a local would have”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“We need to keep it going, otherwise we'll lose it”*

Under 35-year-old, urban, male

*“If there's a playing field and we need to save it, its better that it's the people that actually use the playing field that get involved”*

55+ year-old, urban, female

## **Drivers of disengagement in community activity**

- 6.44 The reasons why the public do not get involved in community-led activities were also explored in the qualitative research phase.
- 6.45 Work commitments, family life and other responsibilities often mean people cannot afford to commit time to the support of a local service or event. This is one of the key drivers of disengagement with community activities. Sometimes the desire is there to get involved in activities but the effort and organisation required in becoming involved is a difficult barrier to overcome.
- 6.46 Another frequently-mentioned reason for people not getting involved in community-led activities is a lack of awareness of what is happening in their area, what help is needed, and how people can become involved in a service being taken over by the community.
- 6.47 Respondents indicate that a high level of apathy within the community from some people – even if they begrudge the disappearance of a service – means some community-led activity struggles to find the support needed. If they do not personally use the service, or its withdrawal has little or no impact on them, it is less likely that they will feel the sense of any civic responsibility.

*“Time – if you’re working and have a family, then time is probably the biggest issue”*

Under 35-year-old, urban, male

*“Can’t be bothered, just apathy really”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“Lack of time and interest to get involved”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“I don’t think most people even know these things are going on and people only tend to get involved with things that have a direct impact on them”*

35-54-year-old, rural, male

## 7 Addressing Barriers to Engagement and Involvement

- 7.1 This section of the report draws on the responses from the Part 2 qualitative research, the majority of which do not take part in consultation activities or community-led activities.
- 7.2 In this section, the reasons for the lack of involvement in any activities are covered. Those not involved in either activity were also asked whether they would know how to become involved should they wish to and the likelihood they would consider getting involved in the future.
- 7.3 There is inevitably some crossover with earlier parts of the report in this section although the findings outlined in this section relate to those who are not engaged with local government at all.

### Drivers of disengagement

- 7.4 The main factors at play here include time constraints, awareness issues, health and levels of interest in the subject matter. General apathy with local government is also a significant barrier.
- 7.5 Time constraints are a frequently-mentioned reason for some respondents not becoming involved with local issues. Working full time and raising a family or having other commitments leaves little time for some to engage in either consultation or community-led activity.

*“My workload is too much, and I have a child so I can't do evenings”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

*“I work six days a week and am studying part-time for a degree”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, male

- 7.6 A lack of awareness of any opportunities to get involved is also regularly mentioned by respondents. Having no knowledge about public consultation activity in the community means they do not become involved, although some say they would have, if they had prior knowledge of the event.

*“Basically it's communication. If I'm not aware that something is happening, how can I get involved?”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

*“Communication needs to be improved to get people involved - there were people that wanted to go to a meeting that didn't purely because they didn't know about it”*

35-54-year-old, rural, male

- 7.7 Health is a factor that has stopped a few respondents from becoming involved in either public consultation or community-led activity.

*“I’m unable to due to disability, I don’t have the energy to get involved with things”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

*“I’m not very mobile now. I’ve done years of service in the village I live in and there comes a time when you think ‘I’ve done enough’”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

- 7.8 Some respondents believe they would become involved, if it was a matter that either interested them or affected them. But if an activity holds no significance to them, then they remain uninvolved.

*“I think it’s issue led, if there were significant issues I’d like change to the service I’d do it”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

- 7.9 Apathy does account for some respondents not becoming involved in activity. Others have become disillusioned and believe that their input would make no difference to an eventual outcome.

### **Knowing how to become involved**

- 7.10 Respondents are split when it comes to knowing how to become involved with activity, if they wanted to.

- 7.11 While one in five respondents report not to know where they would turn, others mention council websites, newsletters, local papers, speaking directly to a councillor or by joining a community group.

### **Encouraging engagement and involvement**

- 7.12 As a large proportion of the respondents are not involved in either consultation or community-led activity, changing these perceptions and addressing the issues involved presents a significant challenge. Respondents were asked about what could be done to encourage future involvement and the likelihood that they might become involved.
- 7.13 Some respondents who have not been involved in any type of activity in the past two years said that they might consider it in the future, if they either had more time, were interested in or affected by the subject of the

activity. However, others say they could not think of anything that would encourage them to become involved

- 7.14 When it comes to encouraging future involvement in consultation activities or particularly community activities, communication is key. Many respondents believe it is important to let people know what kind of activities they can become involved in and what impact they could have.

*“Publicity - so just getting the word out there”*  
35-54-year-old, rural, male

- 7.15 Participants highlight that any communication should be timely, giving people advance notice of how they can become involved – not leaving it too close to the event or activity.

*“Weithiau pan mae nhw’n cymryd rhan mewn pethau cymunedol, fel goleuadau Nadolig, wneith nhw ofyn am help gan bobol yn y gymuned ond gofyn diwrnod cyn y digwyddiad – os fasan nhw’n gofyn mis ynghynt mi fasa pawb wedi gallu helpu”*

*[“Sometimes, when they are taking part in community events such as switching on Christmas lights they will ask for help from people in the community, but ask the day before. If they asked a month beforehand then everyone could have helped”]*  
Under 35-year-old, rural, female

- 7.16 Advertising notices in local papers, newsletters and advertising in shops, libraries and local services are frequently-mentioned ways of letting people know what is going on at local government level and in the community. Social media and the internet should also be harnessed and used to encourage involvement. These methods are broadly in line with how respondents said they find out about local government consultation activities.

*“Put more in the press beforehand – get people debating, talking about it before and they will turn up”*  
35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“Advertise them, and not just on the internet - on boards in the Post Office, community centres and libraries”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

- 7.17 Respondents argue that educating the public goes hand-in-hand with communication. Engaging people at a young age could help tackle apathy as new generations grow up. Including citizenship in schooling

has been suggested by some participants, as a way of encouraging younger people to become involved in how local government is run and highlight the importance of taking ownership of communities.

*“They could get involved at youth level, there are youth groups around so get involved with them and try to help people that way”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

7.18 Education and raising awareness should not stop with young people, according to some respondents. The high level of apathy that is perceived by some could be mitigated by regular updates and information given to the public.

*“A lot of it is to do with awareness – getting people aware of what the issues are, what they can do, where to go and who to contact”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, male

*“If people are informed it will impact on their life they will be more likely to get involved”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

7.19 Holding regular and topical public meetings could encourage more people to become involved with consultation activity, according to some respondents.

*“Monthly meetings, but it all depends on what the council agenda is. They need to provide full information in advance and full details of what the meeting involves”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

### **Deliberative approaches and survey consultation**

7.20 In terms of what kind of involvement people should have, variety is important. Again, respondents indicate that regular meetings at an early stage of consultation would make people feel like they could have more of an impact than some currently do.

7.21 These should not just be ‘surface meetings’, as respondents like the idea of more deliberative events concerning issues that they feel strongly about or will affect them.

*“It should be more meaningful and earlier on in the process before decisions are made”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

*“Deliberative events sound great. I think we should all do that. You also find out about other people's opinions in the community”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

7.22 To reach a larger audience, surveys have been suggested by respondents as a means of getting people engaged as the consultation comes to them and requires less effort from the apathetic, time-pressured and people with health problems.

*“Surveys are a good idea, I don't mind filling in surveys but then very often I do a survey then don't hear any more about it, so maybe have a follow up - let us know what the outcome is”*

55+ year-old, urban, female

*“A combination of attending meetings and doing surveys to allow everyone to have a say”*

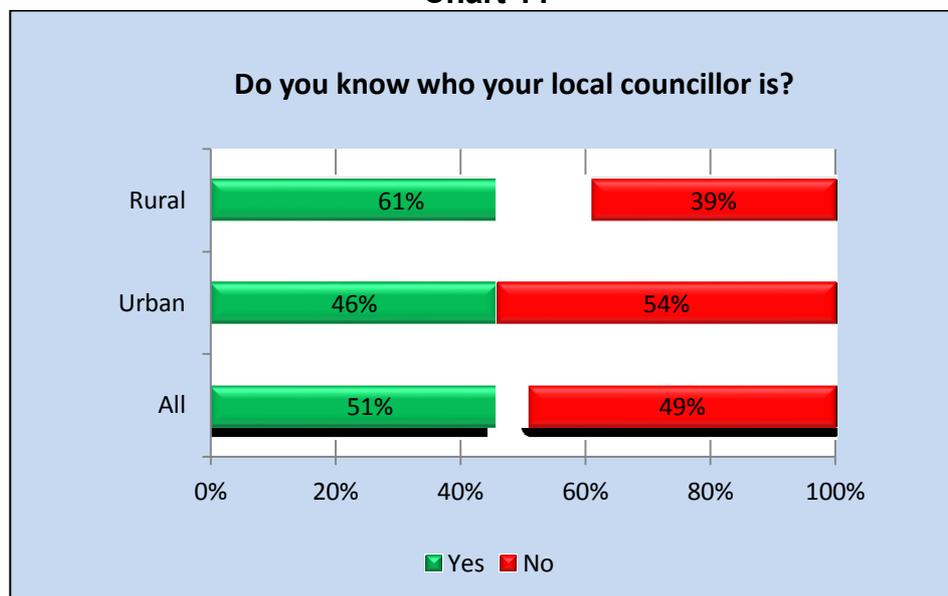
35-54-year-old, urban, female

## 8 Local Councillors

- 8.1 In this section, we provide details of information gathered in both parts of the survey. The Part 1 research covered awareness of local councillors, level of contact, and perceived satisfaction with the work of councillors and councillor remuneration.
- 8.2 The Part 2 research covered some of these topics in more detail and gathered information on the awareness, type of contact and how they communicate with residents, councillor remuneration and the perceived value of this, the role of councillors and how well this is fulfilled and ideas on what activities/tasks councillors do and should undertake.
- 8.3 Expanding this further, the qualitative research also explored levels of interest in becoming a councillor, the barriers which hamper people coming forward and the extent to which the age and background of councillors should reflect the local community.

### Awareness of local councillors

Chart 11



Base: 1000 respondents

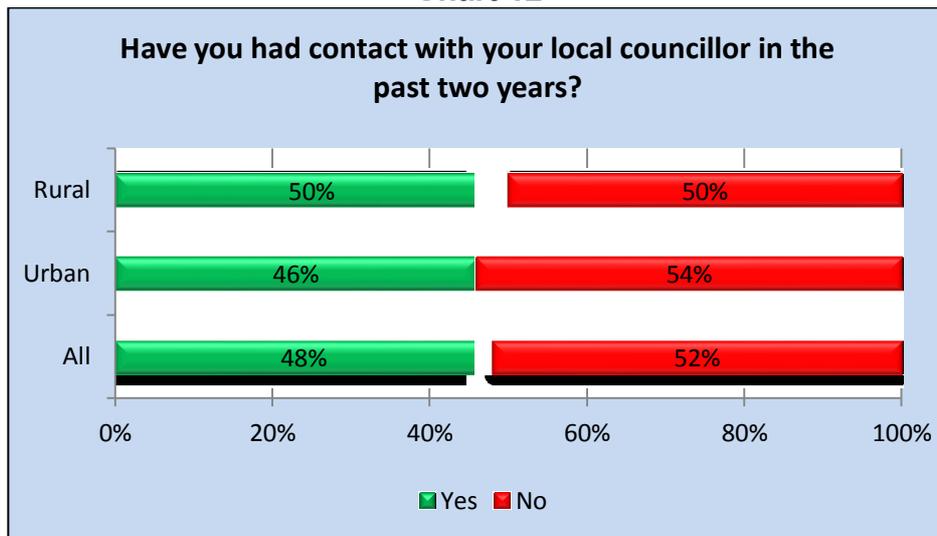
- 8.4 Overall, just over half of all respondents (51%) say they know who their local councillor is. Awareness is highest in rural areas where six in ten (61%) say they know compared with less than half (46%) in urban areas.
- 8.5 The level of awareness also increases with age with just 20% of those under 35 knowing who their councillor is compared with 48% for those

aged 35-54 and over two thirds (67%) of those over 55. There is no difference by gender.

- 8.6 Those in the AB social groups are most likely to know who their councillor is (59%) and DE groups also have slightly higher awareness (54%) compared with 51% for those C groups.

### Contact with Councillors

Chart 12



Base: 513 respondents; those aware of their local councillor

- 8.7 Respondents were asked about any contact they have had with their local councillor in the last two years. No specific forms of contact were mentioned when asking this question, so the responses could relate to a wide range of different forms of contact such as personal meetings, visits, telephone calls and posted information. Contact could also refer to solicited or unsolicited communications.
- 8.8 Almost half (48%) of those aware of their local councillor have had contact with them in the last two years with little difference by rural or urban location.
- 8.9 However, there are notable differences by age and social group. Just over a third of those under 35 have had contact with their councillor (35%) compared with 48% overall and over half of those over 55 (53%). This suggests that younger age groups have less engagement with local councillors which may indicate they have less call for their assistance or

that communications are not particularly targeted or reaching this age group.

- 8.10 Those in the AB social group have had the most contact with a councillor (53%) compared to C2's who have had the least contact (44%).

### **Type of contact with councillors**

- 8.11 The qualitative phase of research explored the awareness and level of contact and communication with councillors in more detail. 29 of the 50 people we spoke to knew who their local councillor was.
- 8.12 Of those 29, 14 have had some form of communication with their local councillor in the past two years.
- 8.13 Some mention that they have had direct contact, speaking to their local councillor personally, over the phone or via email about a matter affecting them or others in the local area. Some mention that they have approached their councillors for advice and support but have not always found them able to help because action could not be taken on the issue or they had no response.
- 8.14 Others have seen them at council meetings or community-led meetings such as consultation events or Neighbourhood Watch meetings. Only one respondent reported visiting their local councillor at a surgery.
- 8.15 A few respondents stated that they only know their councillor socially so see them around the local area and have generally not had the need for other contact with them.

### **Councillors' roles and responsibilities**

- 8.16 The qualitative research also explored public awareness of the role and responsibilities of councillors.
- 8.17 Although 12 of the 50 respondents say they are unsure of the role and responsibilities of their local councillor, the majority understand that councillors are elected to represent people in their ward and what the broad remit of councillors is, but beyond that, specific responsibilities of their own local councillors are not well known, unless they have had direct dealings with them.

*"Dwi wedi dysgu lot am rol y cynghorydd o ddod I ymwneud efo'r ysgol"*  
*["I've learnt a lot about the councillor's role in my involvement with the school"]*

35-54 year-old, urban, female

*“He worked all night supervising and phoning people to deal with our floods. He helps with problems. He has people’s numbers that we need, and is a good networker”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

### Satisfaction with the work of councillors

Chart 13



Base: 999 respondents

8.18 All respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with the work councillors do, irrespective of their level of awareness. Respondents were asked to score their satisfaction level on a scale of one to ten where one indicated that they were ‘very dissatisfied’ and 10 that they were ‘very satisfied’.

8.19 Overall, just under a third (31%) gave a score of seven or more indicating a relatively positive rating. This was higher in rural counties where almost two fifths (38%) gave this rating. Respondents who have had contact with councillors were the most positive and 55% of this group gave a rating of seven or more. Satisfaction is highest amongst respondents which are over 55 years (39%) compared with less than a quarter (23%) of those under 35.

8.20 Those who know who their councillor is give much higher satisfaction ratings (44%) compared to those who don’t (17%).

- 8.21 Almost a quarter (23%) gave a rating of between one and four pointing to lower levels of satisfaction, particularly in urban areas (25%) and for those who do not know their councillor (26%).
- 8.22 Almost a fifth (17%) said they 'don't know' and a further 29% have a middling score of 5 or 6 indicating that they have no strong views either way.

### **Views on councillor performance and communication**

- 8.23 Qualitative respondents were asked about how well their councillor fulfils their role. As most have little awareness of the role of their councillor to begin with, it is unsurprising that most do not have any strong opinion on how well their local councillor performs their role.
- 8.24 For those able to comment, views are mixed on how well councillors perform with some indicating that some councillors perform well, while others are not effective in their position. Ten respondents think their local councillor does not fulfil their role well, twelve think that they do.
- 8.25 Experience of councillors' activities and communication with the community varies widely between respondents. Those who speak favourably of their local councillor have often seen them engaging with the community, communicating regularly and are seen to be fighting for things that are important to those in the ward. Comments from respondents suggest that those who have had contact are often more familiar with what councillors do compared to those who have little or no contact.
- 8.26 By contrast, respondents who believe their local councillor does not fulfil their role well have typically had an unsatisfactory experience when in contact with their councillor or generally feel that their councillor does not stand for the views and opinions of those they represent.
- 8.27 A few respondents comment that they believe that councillors do not necessarily need to have to have expertise, qualifications or training and that their ability to win an election is the only prerequisite.
- 8.28 Some respondents recall receiving councillor communications but many would like to see more communication from their local councillor – not

just around election time – largely because they do not know what their locally elected representative is doing.

*“I think some do very well but I don’t think all do”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

*“Yes, they take an active role if something significant is happening in the community”*

Under 35-year-old, rural, female

*“Not at all – he’s unapproachable”*

35-54-year-old, rural, male

*“I can’t say he does, because I hear from him occasionally, usually around election time”*

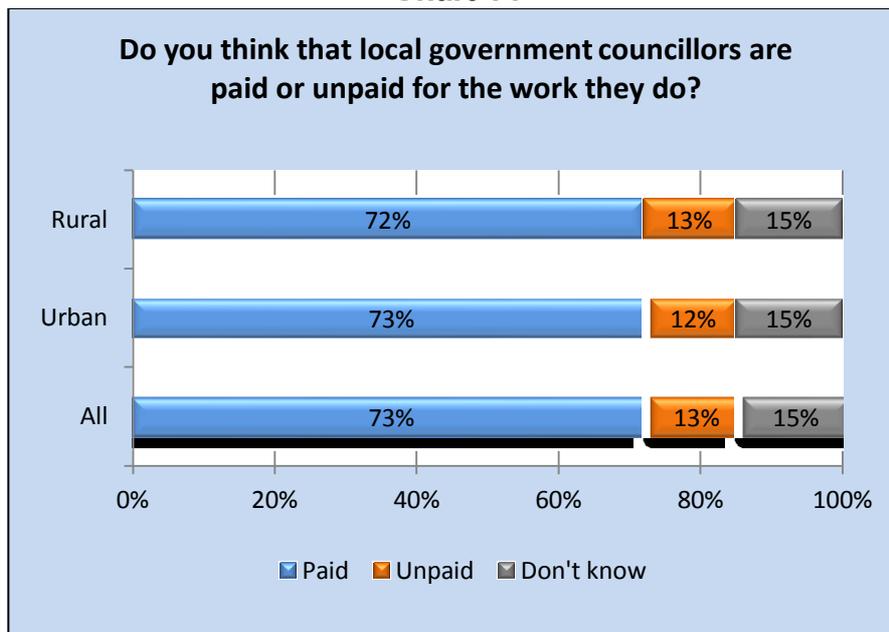
55+ year-old, urban, male

*“I don’t receive any communication from them”*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

## Awareness of councillor remuneration

Chart 14



Base: 999 respondents

8.29 Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) believe that local councillors are paid for the work they do. There is little variation by location but there are some age group differences. A fifth (20%) of those under 35 say they don’t know if councillors are paid or not and a lower than average 67% think they are paid.

8.30 Respondents in social groups C2 and DE are most likely to think that councillors are paid (77%) but those in group AB are least likely to with 67% believing councillors are paid and 20% unpaid.

8.31 Further information gathered during the depth interviews suggests that while most respondents (32) believe that councillors are paid, eight thought they were on expenses only and three do not think they are paid at all. The remaining respondents were unsure as to whether councillors are paid or not.

### **Perceptions of the level of councillor remuneration and working hours**

8.32 Further information gathered from the Part 2 respondents suggests that when it comes to councillors' wages, the amount that respondents believe councillors are paid varies widely.

- One in three respondents, who believe councillors are paid, think a local councillor's salary would be £10,000 - £14,000 plus expenses.
- Others report figures of between £30,000 and £40,000.
- Some respondents believe there is a pay structure, ranging from around £10,000 for a local councillor to £30,000 for a cabinet member.
- One person thought that Chief Executive's would be paid £120,000 to £140,000 and the Vice Executive around £80,000.

8.33 Some respondents believe councillors are compensated for attending meetings and receive a high level of expenses and allowances to top up their income.

8.34 Whether respondents think their wage is reasonable largely depends on the salary they believe they get, how active they deem their councillor to be, and how well they represent their community. Several respondents suggest that the remuneration should be related to the level of 'effort' which councillors make to serve their community.

*"It's hard to say because it all depends on how much time they spend doing what they need to do"*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*"They should get paid depending on how many hours they put in"*

55+ year-old, rural, male

8.35 Most in depth interview respondents (31) believe councillors work on a part-time basis. Only eight people believe councillors are full time, with the remainder either unsure or believing that it depends on their role within local government.

### **Interest in becoming a councillor**

8.36 The majority of Part 2 respondents (32) say they would not consider becoming a councillor. A number of factors influence this but in the main, this is often down to either time constraints or because people believe they are too old. Other commitments, such as family and work, understandably make taking on additional responsibilities impractical for respondents. Others feel that their age is a detractor rather than an asset; they feel that they've 'done their bit' for the community in some instances but that the demands of being a councillor are too demanding.

*“Not now I’m a bit over the hill now - far too old”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

*“I work full time, so until I stop work there's no time to be a councillor, even if it could fit around work, I have no time”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, male

8.37 It is interesting to note that the perception of being 'too old' to be a councillor differs with other Welsh Government research which indicates that over half of elected county councillors across Wales (57%) are over the age of 60<sup>5</sup>.

8.38 There are also respondents who just have no interest in becoming a councillor or lack the confidence to do so. The demands of the political aspect of the job are either unattractive or too daunting.

*“I’m not wanting to get involved to be honest”*  
55+ year-old, urban, male

*“No, not for me, I’m too shy. Councillors need to be good at communicating, knocking doors for votes etc. I don’t have that confidence”*  
35-54-year-old, urban, female

8.39 However, ten respondents did express an interest in becoming a councillor, especially if the role was part-time, or once they had more time on their hands after children have grown up or during retirement.

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<sup>5</sup> Local Government Candidates Survey, Welsh Government, 2012

*“I would consider becoming a councillor, I would consider part-time”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, male

*“If it was part-time it would be of more interest”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

### **Barriers to becoming a councillor**

- 8.40 When it comes to perceived barriers to becoming a councillor, respondents highlight a number of factors including time constraints, lack of involvement with young people, life experience, the required involvement in political campaigning and the lack of appreciation that goes with the job.
- 8.41 Time constraints are a frequently-mentioned issue that can discourage people from standing as a councillor. As a result, respondents believe this is a major factor as to why the majority of councillors are those of post-retirement age.
- 8.42 There is a belief among some, that with age comes the experience needed to represent a ward and the issues constituents face.
- 8.43 However, one in five respondents commented that they would like the fresh ideas and ‘new blood’ that younger councillors would bring. With this in mind, respondents think more needs to be done to encourage younger people to consider standing as a councillor. This includes giving people a better understanding of what councillors do and how young people could become involved perhaps through greater integration with the school curriculum.

*“That’s the problem; all councillors are old because they’re the ones with the time to do it”*  
55+ year-old, urban, female

*“Wel, chi’n gwybod, mae eisiau i bobol ifanc gymryd drosodd ond wedi dweud hynny mi ddylai pobol hefyd gael tamed bach o brofiad byw cyn mynd yn gynghorydd”*

*[“Well, you know, young people need to take over but having said that, people should also have some life experience before being a councillor”]*  
55+ year-old, rural, female

*“There is a lack of understanding from younger people, especially as to what the role is and what the demands are on their time”*  
Under 35-year-old, urban, female

*“It's nice to have people who have travelled on life's highway, because they have experience, but it would be nice to have some modern ideas and a healthy blend of old and new”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“It would seem logical to have more young people. It would be an encouragement for young people to be engaged. They see it from a different angle”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“I'd like to see more encouragement of younger people. I'd like to see local councillors going in to schools and telling children: "This is what we do, can you think of a way forward?"”*

55+ year-old, urban, female

8.44 There is also a sense amongst participants that people are either becoming disillusioned with the political side of the councillor's role or have no interest in local government activity. This is because becoming a councillor requires election, and this can be off-putting for those with no political leanings despite the fact that the 'community involvement' side of the role might appeal. Getting over the hurdle of becoming elected could be a major stumbling block for many because they don't necessarily wish to associate themselves with a political party and a 'defeat' could also be personally humiliating. This ties in with the reasons given earlier for lack of interest in becoming a councillor.

*“It's rather sad, I know some talented young people who would make good councillors, but I think people are disillusioned with politics”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“Dwi'n meddwl fod pobol wedi cael llond bol o wleidyddion. Dydi pobol ddim yn eu trystio”*

*[“I think people have had enough of politicians. People don't trust them”]*

35-54-year-old, urban, female

8.45 While people are quick to complain about local government and issues directly affecting them, they do not want to become involved in what is often thought of as a 'thankless role'.

*“You'll always get people that will complain, will find fault, but they're not prepared to stand up for it”*

55+ year-old, rural, male

*“You need sufficient time and for all people that get involved in politics it’s a thankless task, as always a percentage who think you get it wrong, will always have some negative comments”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

### **Should councillors reflect the local demographic profile?**

8.46 On the whole, respondents believe that it is important that councillors reflect the profile of the local community, but that doesn’t always come down to background. Having a councillor that has roots in the community, understands the needs of the ward and is proficient in their role is considered to be more important than their age or background.

8.47 Some respondents report that it is important for councillors to have different opinions and life experiences to reflect the variety of people in their area.

*“If he does his job well what his background is and where he comes from doesn’t mean a damn thing as long as he’s capable”*

55+ year-old, urban, female

*“A councillor should reflect the area as he’d have some idea of problems within the community”*

55+ year-old, urban, male

*“It’s better they have a broad range of experience so they can bring different things into the community”*

35-54-year-old, rural, female

## 9 Conclusions

- 9.1 In general, awareness of plans for local government reform is mixed, and only one in five respondents say they are very aware of the proposed changes. People aged over 55 and those in social groups AB are the most aware. Most have found out what they know from local media rather than by direct communication from the public sector. Respondents highlight that a range of direct communications will need to be considered for future engagement to reflect preferences and accessibility to information – both online and offline.
- 9.2 A large proportion of the public have not been involved in consultation activities. The reasons for this include a lack of awareness of opportunities to get involved, time constraints and apathy either in general or with the subject matter in question. Respondents indicate that future engagement activities will need to tackle these issues including how local government communicates with the public and the stage at which this happens. Comments from respondents make it clear that the public needs to believe that any contribution to consultation activity has the ‘power to influence’ decisions. This can only happen if engagement takes place early enough in the policy or service development cycle and before decisions have already been made.
- 9.3 This research highlights that helping the public to connect with the subject matter is also an area for attention. Engagement is more likely where the public has a connection to the topic, particularly when they are service users or will be affected by the outcomes of consultation.
- 9.4 The research findings indicate that the public is more interested in having an input into local government issues in comparison with the limited extent to which they are currently engaged. There is a strong level of dissatisfaction with the level of opportunity to influence what happens in local government, especially for the middle age groups but less so for younger members of the public.
- 9.5 The views of respondents highlight that ease of access to information on performance and activities and generally transparency are key issues for consideration. Direct communication from local government is needed to engage with service users and residents. The public would like to see

more contact with councillors and have more involvement through consultation activities including surveys, consultation events, council meetings, deliberative events, focus groups, workshops and specialist forums or groups.

- 9.6 Whilst there is some interest amongst respondents in becoming involved in community-led activities, the key drivers of disengagement are other commitments such as work, family and other responsibilities. Those respondents who already get involved in community activities are often driven by their personal experience of services or because they feel a strong sense of civic responsibility and find their involvement personally rewarding when they see the outcomes of their joint efforts with others. That said, making opportunities to get involved at a local level more visible would encourage an uptake in community involvement as lack of awareness of what is happening locally is an issue for some.
- 9.7 This research indicates that although there is interest in the community working alongside local government to deliver services, there are strong feelings amongst many about ensuring that this is done in partnership and that the public sector retains some level of responsibility for service delivery.
- 9.8 The research suggests that in the medium to long term, educating the younger generation will be an important means of improving awareness of local government activities and the importance of engagement. Improving awareness of what is involved in local government and engendering a sense of 'civic responsibility' for the local community either within or outside of the school environment would help to tackle the general 'apathy' currently found amongst some members of the public.
- 9.9 The research shows that the public has a relatively low level of awareness of their local councillors and what they do other than a broad understanding that they are there to represent the ward. Those who have had some contact have a better idea of what their councillor does. Levels of satisfaction with the performance of local councillors are affected by this lack of awareness. Those who have had some contact have mixed views, whilst others are very positive about their experience

and see their councillors taking action on community issues and getting involved in community events. The public would like to see councillors who serve their community based on a good understanding of the needs of the community.

- 9.10 The research shows that the public wants councillors to represent their community based on an understanding gained either from their own background or because they have roots in the community and understand local needs. Although many feel that councillors should have sufficient life experience to cope with the role, some would like to see younger representatives.
- 9.11 Whilst most respondents think that councillors are paid, awareness of councillor remuneration is limited but most realise that this varies depending on the role of the councillor. Views on whether remuneration is 'reasonable' vary depending on the role of the councillor but there is a general belief amongst participants that it should be related to the extent to which they serve the community.
- 9.12 The research indicates that encouraging people to stand for election as a councillor will be challenging in the face of the demands and responsibilities which members of the public feel in their daily lives. However, the idea of part time involvement is more attractive to some. Putting the issues of time and work commitments and other responsibilities to one side, one of the biggest barriers to face is the general disillusionment with the political side of the role of the councillor. The community involvement aspect of the role is attractive to some but the need to become involved in local politics may discourage them.