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What factors are linked to people agreeing that their local area has a **sense of community**?

Future Generations Indicator 27

This report is based on National Survey interviews carried out in 2021-22. It provides an update of [previous analysis based on the 2018-19 results](#). The National Survey for Wales is a continuous, large-scale, random sample survey covering people across Wales. Prior to the start of the Covid-19 (coronavirus) pandemic in March 2020, the survey was carried out face-to-face in people's homes; since April 2020, it has been carried out by telephone instead (with an online section for some respondents). Due to the difference in mode and possible changes because of the pandemic, care should be taken when making direct comparisons with results from previous years.

This report outlines some factors linked to whether people think their local area has a strong sense of community. The [National Survey for Wales](#) measures a person's experience of sense of community based on three individual factors: feeling of belonging to the local area; whether they feel people from different backgrounds get on well together in the area; and whether people in the area treat each other with respect and consideration.

Key findings

Holding other factors constant¹, the factors below were found to be linked with people feeling that their local area has a sense of community.

- Being older
- Feeling safe walking in the local area and at home after dark
- Being satisfied with the local area as a place to live
- Not being bothered by noise from outside the home
- Being highly satisfied with life
- Having a good understanding of what the local councillor does for the community
- Feeling able to influence decisions affecting the local area
- Feeling satisfied with the availability of local services and facilities

¹ For this analysis, we have controlled for a range of factors so that even if they are related (e.g. general health and age), the link between each factor and the percentage of people feeling that their local area has a sense of community can be explored independently.

Other factors included in our analysis and found not to be linked to people feeling a sense of community are listed in Section 5. As with all analysis of this type, we are unable to attribute cause and effect or to allow for factors not measured in the survey.

Contents

1.	Background	4
2.	Questions used in the National Survey	4
3.	Method of analysis	5
4.	Main factors linked with a sense of community in the local area	5
5.	Factors not linked to a sense of community in the local area.....	8
6.	Analysis of individual questions.....	9
7.	Summary and recommendations for further research.....	12

1. Background

[The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) focuses on improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales. To achieve this, the Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about long-term issues and targets, work better with communities and stakeholders, and to take a more joined-up and cohesive approach to decision-making. To ensure that this vision is achieved, the Act put in place seven well-being goals² (Figure 1).

The Act requires the Welsh Government to set [national indicators](#) measuring achievement against the well-being goals. The [National Survey for Wales](#) measures progress against 15 of the 46 national indicators. The survey in 2021-22 involved telephone interviews with a random sample of over 12,000 people across Wales.

This report focuses on [National Indicator 27](#): 'Percentage of people who agree that their local area has a sense of community (that they belong to the area; that people from different backgrounds in the area get on well together; and that people in the area treat each other with respect and consideration)'.

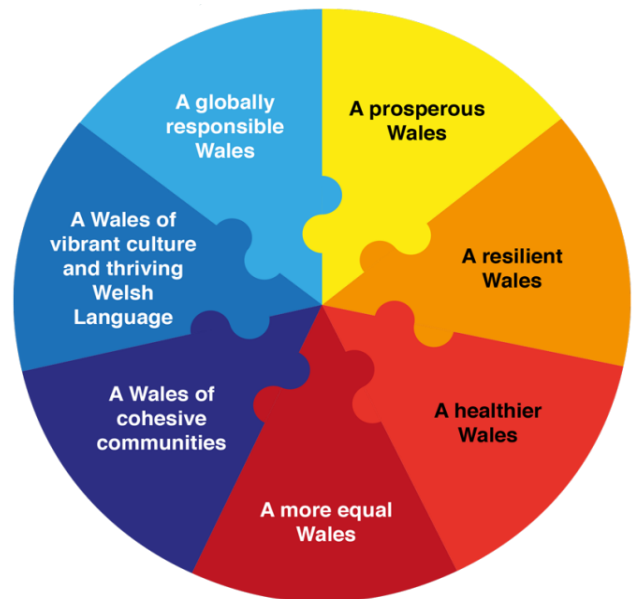


Figure 1. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: seven well-being goals².

2. Questions used in the National Survey

Information relating to National Indicator 27 was collected by asking National Survey respondents to what extent they agreed that the following statements were true for their local area: 1) sense of belonging to local area; 2) people in the area from different backgrounds get on; 3) people in the area treat each other with respect and consideration.³ Each of these three statements were answered using a five-point Likert scale ranging from '1 = strongly agree' to '5 = strongly disagree'. For the analysis in this report, respondents who answered 'strongly' or 'tend to' agree were grouped together. Respondents who answered, 'strongly disagree' and 'tend to disagree' to the sense of community questions were also grouped together. People who had 'neutral' responses to this question were not included in the analysis.

Overall, 64% of adults agreed that there was a sense of community in their local area, a marked increase from 52% in 2018-19.

² Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: The Essentials, which can be viewed [online](#).

³ See the National indicators for Wales [technical document](#) for more information.

3. Method of analysis

To get a clear understanding of how particular factors contribute to whether people feel their local area has a sense of community, we used a statistical technique⁴ to explore the link⁵ between each factor and sense of community, whilst holding all other factors constant. Holding other factors constant (also referred to as controlling for other factors) is important because it allows us to look at each predicting factor independently (i.e. ensuring that the effect we are measuring is not influenced by external factors). We can then get a much clearer idea of how one single factor links to sense of community, without the influence of other factors.

The complexity of relationships between factors

To understand these results, we cannot always be sure about what factors are linked to, and which are affected by, people feeling their local area has a sense of community. For some factors the relationship is clear based on prior knowledge while for other factors, this relationship is not as obvious⁶.

Interpreting the results

All of the factors presented in the charts in this report are statistically significant predictors of people feeling their local area has a sense of community, as tested by our chosen regression model. In this report, we use 'predictive margins' – presented as percentages (%) – to show the probability of a relationship between each factor (whilst holding other factors constant) and the dependent variable (people feeling their local area has a sense of community). The results show within a particular factor (e.g. sex) the likelihood of one 'average' group of people with a shared characteristic (e.g. females) feeling their local area has a sense of community, compared with another 'average' group of people with a different shared characteristic (e.g. males). Error bars on the charts show the 95% confidence interval of the predictive margins for each group. Overlapping error bars mean that while a factor is a significant predictor of people feeling their local area has a sense of community, it is not entirely clear which group within the factor is the most predictive.

4. Main factors linked with a sense of community in the local area

Overall, 64% of National Survey respondents agreed that there was a sense of community in their local area. The following charts show the individual factors (whilst holding other factors constant) which were found to have an association with people feeling that their local area has a sense of community. Within each factor, the group with the highest probability (percentage) of feeling that their local area has a sense of community is highlighted in light blue. Also, the explanatory factors can be grouped into themes shown by the sub-heading titles.

⁴ This technique is known as logistic regression. More information about the methods used in this report can be found in the accompanying [regression methodology report and technical report](#).

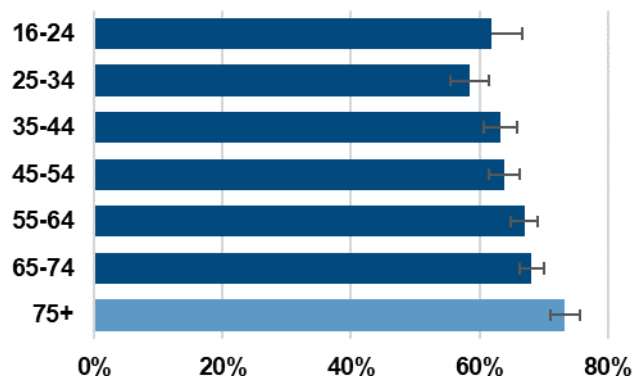
⁵ While this analysis can tell us about the likelihood of relationships between factors, it cannot tell us about causal relationships (e.g. it would be incorrect to say that feeling unsafe in their local area causes people to feel their local area has no sense of community).

⁶ This relationship can be even more complex, as there could be other factors which we haven't considered (and are not available from the National Survey) which may be linked to feeling an area has no sense of community and feeling unsafe.

Demography

Age group

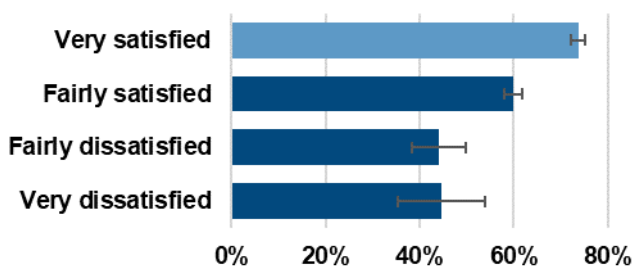
Older people were more likely to feel that there was a sense of community in their local area, compared with younger people.



Community

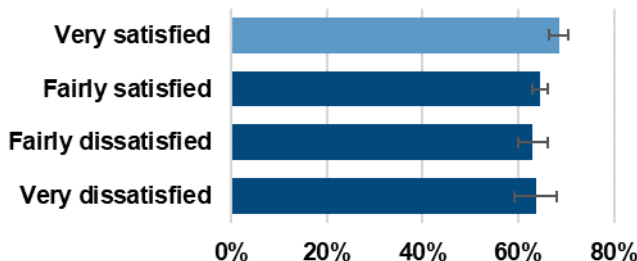
Satisfaction with local area

People who were 'very satisfied' were the most likely to agree that there was a sense of community in their local area, compared with those who were 'very dissatisfied'.



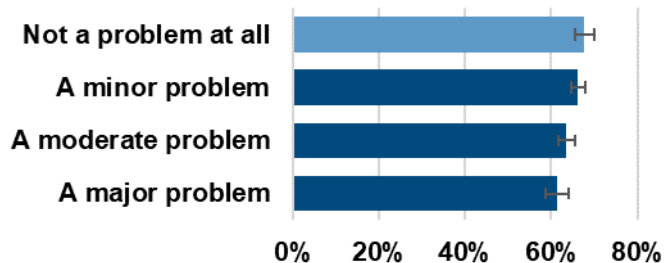
Satisfaction with availability of local services and facilities

While a relationship exists between sense of community and availability of local services and facilities the error bars overlap showing no significant difference between categories.



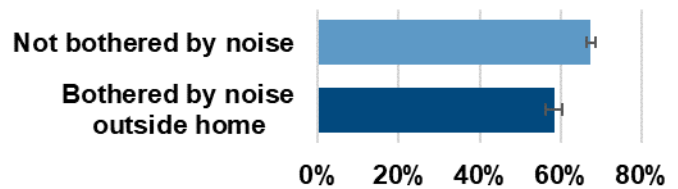
Whether littering is a problem in local area

People who view littering as not a problem at all were more likely to feel that their local area has a sense of community, compared with those who view littering as a major or moderate problem.



Whether bothered by noise occurring outside the home

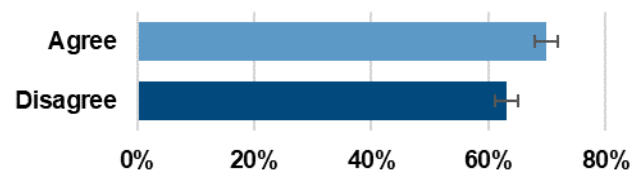
People who did not regularly experience noise coming from outside their home were more likely to feel a sense of community.



Local democracy

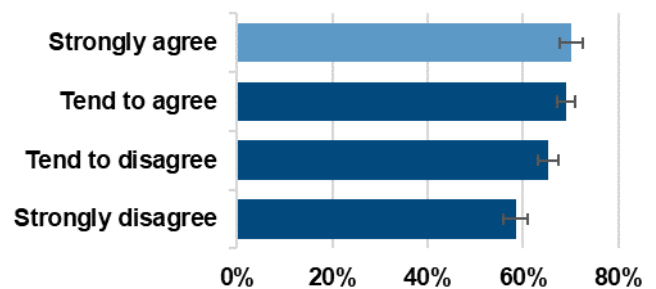
Ability to influence decisions affecting local area

People who felt they can influence decision making in their local area also felt a greater sense of community.



Whether has a good understanding of what local councillor does for the community

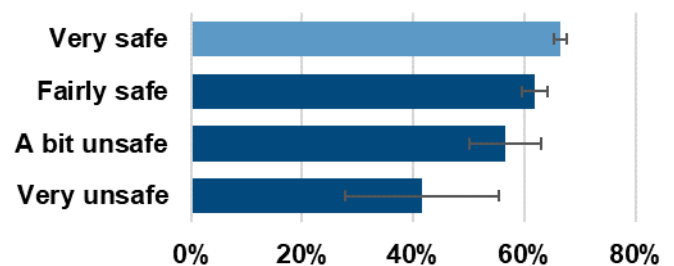
People who strongly agreed that they understand what a local councillor does were most likely to also feel their area has a sense of community.



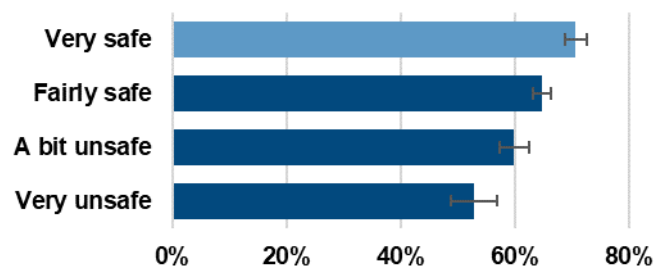
Well-being

Whether feel safe at home after dark

People who feel safe after dark at home or when walking in the local area were more likely to feel that their local area has a sense of community when compared with those who do not feel safe.

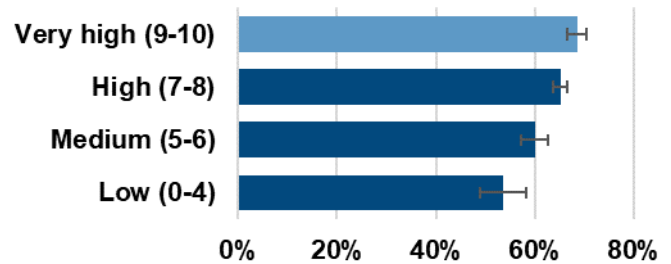


Whether feel safe walking in local area after dark



Level of life satisfaction

People with very high levels of life satisfaction were the most likely to feel that their local area has a sense of community, and people with low life satisfaction were the least likely.



5. Factors not linked to a sense of community in the local area

In this analysis, other factors were included in our regression model, but we did not find a link between the following factors and people feeling that their local area to have a sense of community:

- Tenure type.
- Sex.
- Whether a person has a long-term limiting condition.
- General health.
- Whether a person speaks Welsh.
- Ethnicity.
- Religion.
- Material deprivation.
- Economic status.
- Whether urban or rural location.
- Whether children in household.
- Local authority.
- Whether graffiti is a problem.
- Whether fly-tipping is a problem.
- Whether dog-fouling is a problem.

6. Analysis of individual questions

National indicator 27, sense of community, is a single measure which consists of three individual questions about: 1) sense of belonging to the local area; 2) people from different backgrounds getting on well together in the local area; and 3) people treating each other with respect and consideration in the local area. In the previous section we looked at factors relating to this combined measure; in this section, we look at factors linked to each of these three questions separately to see whether the factors were the same as for the single measure.

Sense of belonging to the local area

Overall, 79% of people agreed that they feel a sense of belonging to their local area⁷. Table 1 provides a summary of all the factors linked to this individual measure of sense of community.

Table 1. Summary of factors found to be linked to people feeling a sense of belonging to the local area.

Theme	Factor	Most likely to feel sense of belonging to local area
Demographic factors	Age	Older people
Well-being	Feeling safe	Feel safe walking in local area
Community	Overall satisfaction with local area	Satisfied
Local democracy	Understands what local councillor does for local area	Has strong understanding

⁷ 12% answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.

People from different backgrounds get on well together

Overall, 82% of people agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well together in the local area⁸. Table 2 provides a summary of all the factors linked to this individual measure of sense of community.

Table 2. Summary of factors found to be linked to feeling that people from different backgrounds get on well together in the local area.

Theme	Factor	Most likely to feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together
Well-being	Feeling safe Health	Feel safe at home and walking in local area Good or very good health
Housing	Tenure	Homeowner
Community	Overall satisfaction with local area	Satisfied
Local democracy	Ability to influence decisions affecting local area	Agree

⁸ 10% answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.

People in the local area treat each other with respect and consideration

Overall, 82% of people agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area⁹. Table 3 provides a summary of all the factors linked to this indicator of sense of community.

Table 3. Summary of factors found to be linked to feeling that people in the local area treat each other with respect and consideration.

Theme	Factor	Most likely to feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together
Demography	Age	Older people
Housing	Tenure	Homeowner
Well-being	Feeling safe Life satisfaction	Feel safe at home and walking in local area High level of life satisfaction
Community	Overall satisfaction with local area	Satisfied
Local democracy	Whether local councillor works closely with local community	Agree

⁹ 10% answered 'neither agree nor disagree'.

7. Summary and recommendations for further research

In summary, we have provided an analysis of individual factors (and overall themes) linked to Future Generations National Indicator 27: 'Percentage of people who agree that their local area has a sense of community (that they belong to the area; that people from different backgrounds get on well together; and that people treat each other with respect and consideration). Overall, five central themes emerged from our analysis:

- Demographic factors
- Housing
- Well-being
- Community cohesion
- Local democracy

The relationship between named factors and people feeling that their local area has a sense of community is likely to be more complex than suggested in this analysis and will be influenced by factors not measured in the National Survey. Many of the related factors first discussed in the earlier [2018-19](#) report remain true following analysis of the 2021-22 National Survey results. The regression models undertaken for both years remained broadly the same but due to the changing content of the survey some variables included in the 2018-19 analysis were not present in 2021-22 and vice versa. To investigate these associations further then additional research methods could include more small-scale investigations involving qualitative¹⁰ or mixed-methods¹¹ approaches.

¹⁰ [Qualitative research](#) is often used to understand people's underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations to uncover trends in people's thoughts and opinions to provide a better understanding of a particular issue. Qualitative data collection methods are often small-scale and collect non-numeric data by using techniques such as interviews and focus groups. On the other hand, quantitative research seeks to understand a problem by collecting numerical data which can be used in statistical analysis, often to produce generalised results for a large sample of a population (e.g. attitudes, behaviours, and opinions). For example, the National Survey for Wales predominantly collects and analyses information in this way.

¹¹ '[Mixed-methods](#)' is an approach to research which involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data within the same study. As policy makers, practitioners, and others in applied areas strive to produce well-informed research based on multiple forms of evidence (such as the multi-faceted well-being of communities and future generations), mixed-methods research can be a good way to explore these complex social situations.

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

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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