



Trust and Confidence in Councils: What the Public Think

Analysis of the Suration/APSE poll 2021

To: All Chief Executives, Senior Policy Officers Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Brief Overview

Suration were asked by APSE to provide a public opinion survey of attitudes to local neighbourhood services in 2021, covering the range of council services that would appear in their local area. The poll has found three times as many people trust their local council over the Government to make decisions about how services are delivered in the local area.

[This is a link to a PDF of a presentation on the survey findings - delivered by Damian Lyons-Lowe, Chief Executive, Suration - at the Performance Networks Seminar 2021.](#)

Methodology

Suration were asked by APSE to provide a public opinion survey of attitudes to local neighbourhood services in 2021, covering the range of council services that would appear in their local area. Most questions mirrored questions asked in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 with additional questions relating to efforts to tackle climate change.

Polling was conducted by Suration with field work taking place between the 20-23 October 2021. The polling sample consisted of 1651 UK residents Aged 18+, including

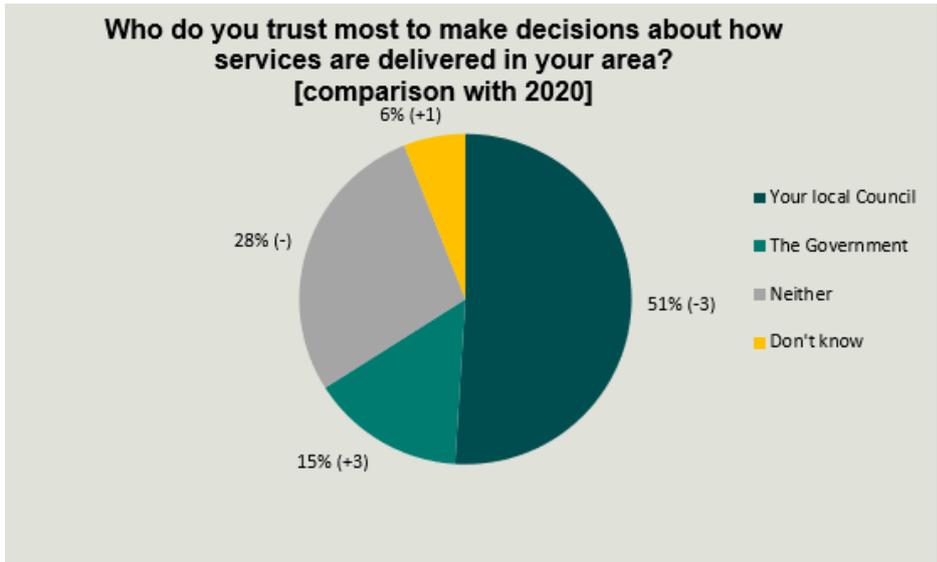
booster samples in Northern Ireland & Wales to ensure sub-samples of at least 100 persons in those regions. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, household income, education, 2019 GE vote and 2016 EU Referendum to be representative of all UK adults aged 18+.

Key Findings

The survey found trust in councils and councillors is still high overall compared to trust in Government and ministers. In other findings, the data suggests that climate change remains a priority for the public and they expect councils to take a leading role in responding to it.

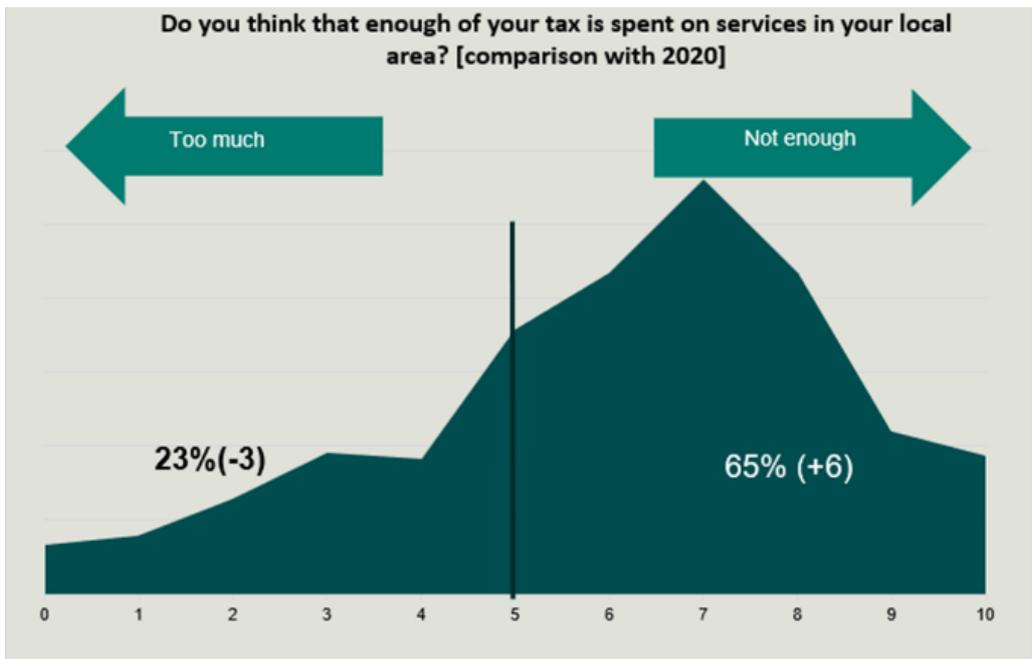
It is bad news for Government and ministers with three times more trusting councils than Government, and over seven times more trusting councillors over Government ministers. Just 12% of the public trust ministers to make decisions about their local areas:

- Three times as many trust the local council (51%) over the Government (15%) to make decisions about how services are delivered in your local area.
- Seven times as many trust local councillors (51%) over Government ministers (7%) to make decisions about their local area.
- Nearly four times more people trusted councils (49%) to deliver local services over a private company (13%) or the Government (12%).



Not enough taxes spent in the local area

When asked whether enough tax is spent on services in the local area, a comprehensive 65% responded with 'not enough', an increase of 6% on the previous year. Even more comprehensive was the response to the follow-up question, in which 77% of people preferred the Government to set aside more money for local councils than for national spending.



Councils most trusted to make decisions on local planning

On the hot topic of local planning, the public are nearly three times as likely to trust councils over the Government and over four times as likely to trust them over developers. A point the Government would do well to consider ahead of it setting out its response to feedback on the planning white paper, scheduled to take place in early 2022.

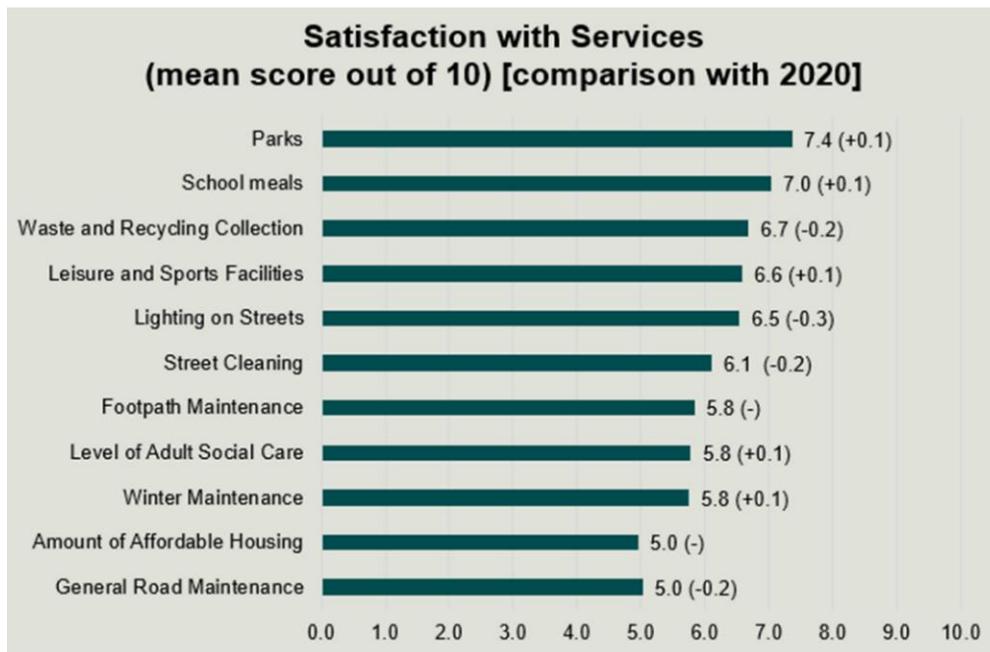
Funding social care

The Health Foundation has estimated that the funding gap for social care services in England will increase to £6.1 billion by 2030/31. When asked which tax they would prefer to increase in order to meet this shortfall, Income Tax came out top (32%), after the "Don't know"(32%) option and National Insurance (22%), Council Tax came last at (14%).

School meals move up the menu in service satisfaction

Satisfaction levels with services are broadly the same as 2020 with a range of positive results for local council frontline services amongst the public. However, satisfaction with School Meals, has had a significant increase. The top scores, with a mean score out of ten, for public satisfaction go:

- Parks (7.4)
- School meals (7.0)
- Waste and recycling (6.7)
- Sports and Leisure (6.6)



These satisfaction ratings are also somewhat reflected in where the public would like to see more money spent. We asked “If you had a choice, what percentage of the extra money would be spent on the following 11 services?”

- Waste and recycling and sports and leisure services both increased as public priorities in 2021 up on 2020, perhaps reflecting public experience or consciousness of these vital services during the pandemic. Social care topped the list of priorities (12%), followed by affordable housing and road maintenance both on 11%.

That said, when local climate action was added to the list of 11 services, it emerged as the equal second highest new spending priority after Social Care and Housing, on par with Road Maintenance – leisure and sports decreasing as a priority. This demonstrates the tricky balancing act councils are confronted with now that climate change has reached a point of critical concern which is gaining parity with social care as a core issue for the public.

A sense of a decline in services follows the disruption caused by COVID and the lingering effect of austerity

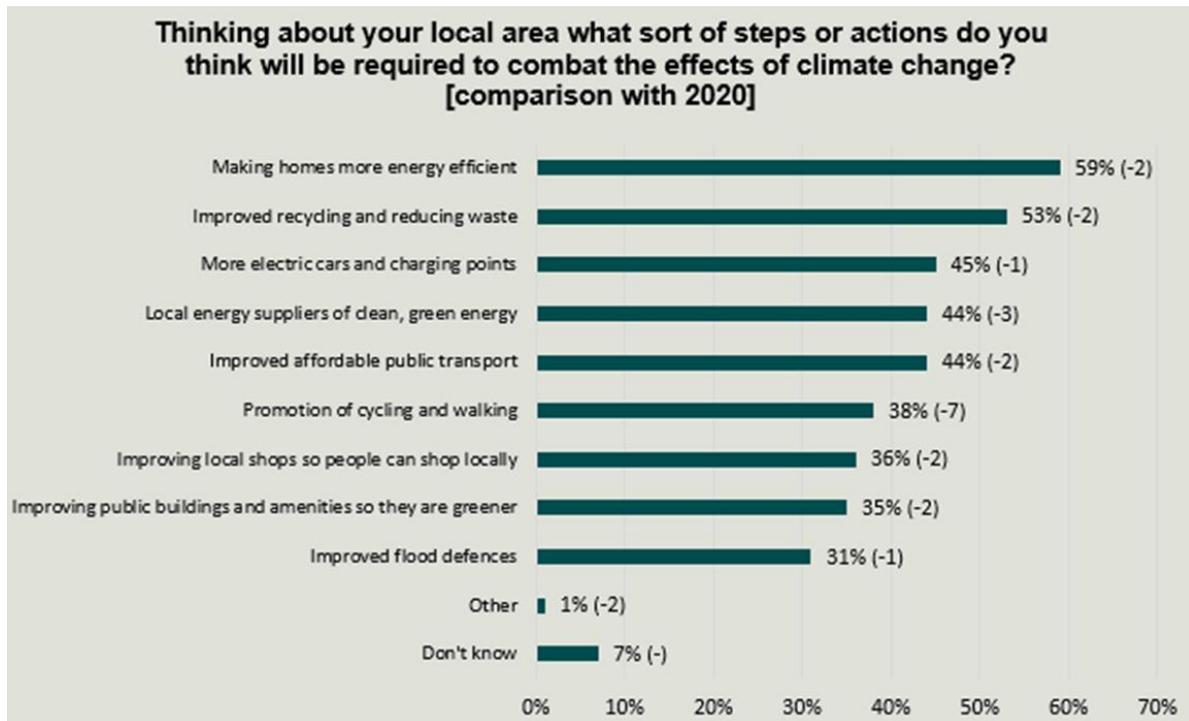
A plurality of respondents believe that services have declined in their local area in recent years (45%), with 38% saying it has stayed the same. This sense of decline is likely a result of two things: disruption throughout the pandemic when areas like household waste recycling centres were forced to close alongside leisure centres and swimming pools, and also overall budget cuts that have impacted the sector for over a decade. It should be noted that overall satisfaction remains high for local councils but we should treat this result as a sign that the impact of cuts to the sector is filtering through into frontline services, further exacerbated by the disruption of COVID.

Councils best-placed to combat the effects of climate change

When it comes to the climate emergency, an overwhelming majority of the public expect that local communities will need to respond to the effects of climate change on the local environment in the next 10 years. The public think councils are best placed to combat the effects of climate change in their local community with big support for making homes more efficient:

- 59% say the specific local climate action they most support is making homes more energy efficient. This is slightly down on last year. The next priority is improved recycling and waste reduction (53%).
- 54% would like to see more of their taxes given to their local council to address climate change.

- 37% see councils as best placed to implement local steps to combat the effects of climate change compared to 30% for the Government.



Underlining the case for an empowered and well-resourced local government

Speaking of the poll, APSE Chief Executive Paul O'Brien said, *"These findings are really encouraging for anyone who works in local government. When it comes to delivering the neighbourhood level public services communities want and need, public trust remains strong; testament to the phenomenal work undertaken by local authorities over the past year in the face of extraordinary pressures."*

However, recognising some of the challenges presented by the results, Paul went on to say:

"Though the survey should bring some reassurance to the sector, it should also serve as a spur to action in convincing Government of the need to grant councils parity of esteem when delivering improvements at a community level. As laid out in the APSE Local Government Commission 2030 report – Local by Default – the roles and responsibilities of local authorities must be broadened and deepened, especially in areas like climate change, if we are to meet the big public policy challenges of the future effectively and with popular support. A sustainable financial settlement is also imperative, one that ensures every council has sufficient resources to exercise its roles and responsibilities and meet the ever-growing needs of its communities."

[This is a link to a PDF of a presentation on the survey findings - delivered by Damian Lyons-Lowe, Chief Executive, Survation - at the Performance Networks Seminar 2021. The presentation contains the full list of questions asked by Survation and accompanying graphs. You can also view the data set on the page.](#)

Matthew Ellis

Communications Officer