

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**17 MARCH 2020**

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY 2019 – KEY FINDINGS**

REPORT OF: THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

CURRENT COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

NEW COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COUNCIL

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

To advise Cabinet of the key findings and action points arising from the 2019 District Wide Survey.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet comment on and note the key findings and observations from the District Wide Survey.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note that the results will be considered by Senior Management Team in conjunction with Executive Members, to inform the service planning process and future consultation activity.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the results and any trends from previous surveys and how the results will be used to inform future service delivery.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 None

**5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1. The biennial District Wide Survey is one of the Council's key mechanisms for seeking the views and opinions of North Hertfordshire residents on a range of services and issues. The Leader of the Council with responsibility for consultation and the Senior

Management Team, have been briefed on the key findings from the report. The results will also be shared at a staff briefing.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 1 November 2019.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

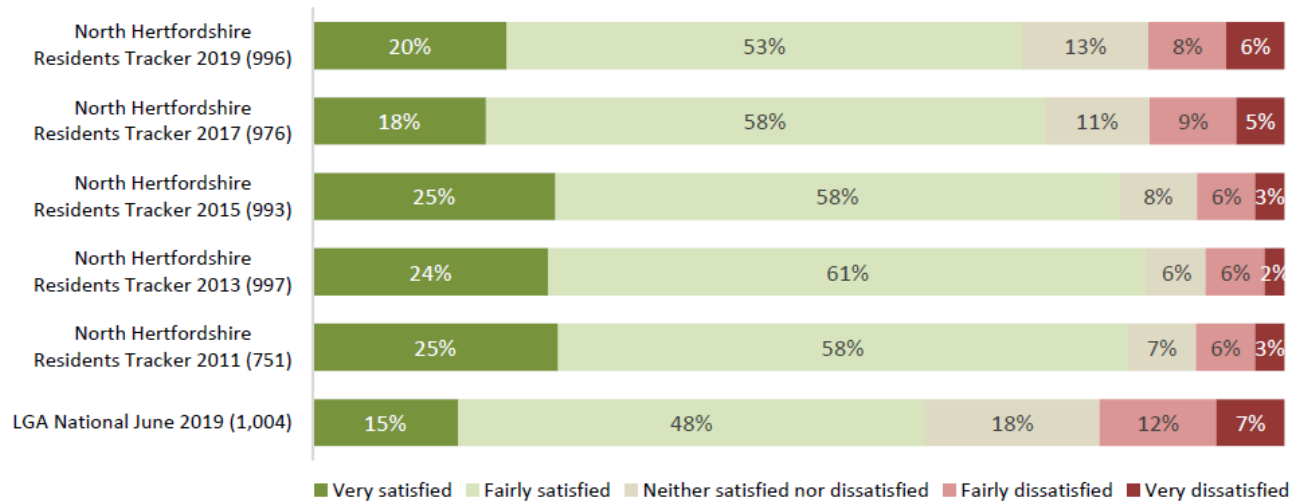
- 7.1 The 2019 District Wide Survey was carried out in line with the Council's agreed Consultation Strategy 2015-2020. The survey is carried out every two years in order to capture residents' views and perceptions of services and facilities provided by the Council.
- 7.2 Opinion Research Services, an independent research agency, were commissioned by the Council to carry out the research on our behalf. They conducted 1000 telephone interviews of North Hertfordshire residents between 7 October 2019 and 19 January 2020. Quota controls were used to ensure a representative sample. The returned sample was subsequently weighted by tenure, working status, ethnic group, age and gender to achieve results which are broadly representative of the North Hertfordshire population.
- 7.3 The question set remains largely consistent from one survey exercise to the next (with some minor variations) to allow benchmarking from year to year. Comparisons with previous results are made at appropriate points in the survey. Prior to 2011 the survey was carried out face to face rather than on the telephone and therefore those results are not directly comparable. Comparisons with national figures are, in the main taken from the Local Government Association national survey, which is carried out three times a year with around 1,000 British adults by telephone.
- 7.4 The results of the survey will be considered by the Senior Management Team in conjunction with Executive Members to help inform the Council's service delivery plan and service action plans and to plan potential future consultation activity.
- 7.5 The figures and tables in the report are extracted directly from the full research report prepared by Opinion Research Services. As only a selection of the figures and tables appear in this report, the numbering is not always in sequential order.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

### **8.1 About your Local Area / Overall Satisfaction**

- 8.1.1 The vast majority of residents (92%) are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. This compares favourably to the latest LGA benchmark from June 2019, where satisfaction was 80%, 12 percentage points lower than in North Hertfordshire.
- 8.1.2 Overall satisfaction with the way the Council runs things has decreased from 76% in 2017 to 73% in 2019. However, satisfaction is still well above the LGA national benchmark from 2019, where satisfaction was 63%. See Figure 2 for comparisons since 2011.

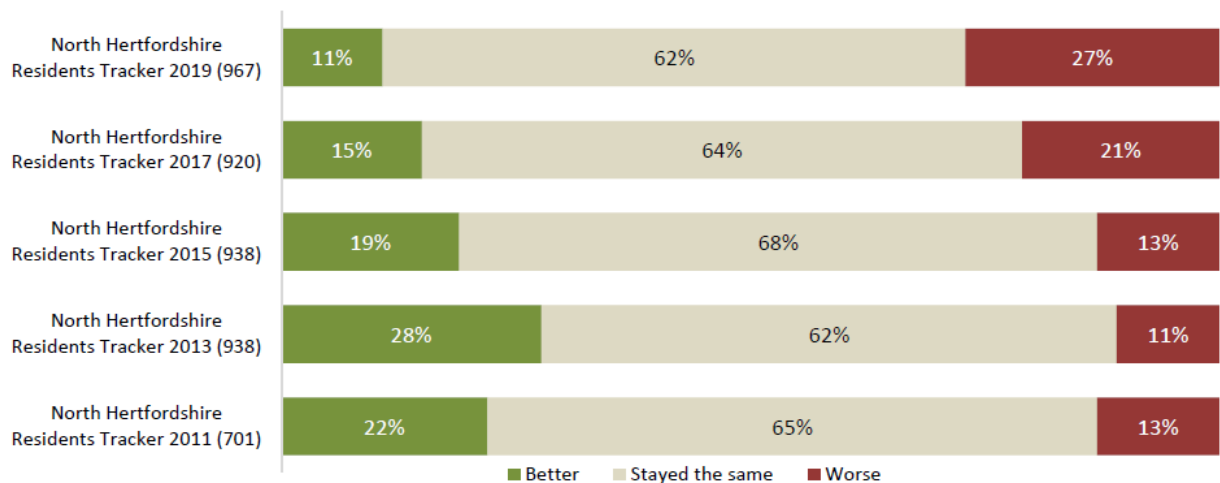
**Figure 2: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way North Hertfordshire District Council runs things?**



**Base: All Residents (Number of residents shown in brackets)**

8.1.3 11% of residents think that the way NHDC runs things has got better over the last two years, a significant decrease since 2017 (15%). Figure six shows comparisons since 2011.

**Figure 6: Thinking about the way North Hertfordshire District Council runs things, do you think it has got better, stayed the same or got worse over the last two years?**



8.1.4 Those residents who expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Council runs things, were invited to comment on how they feel the Council could improve the running of North Hertfordshire. These comments are coded into themes. The top themes are that dissatisfied residents feel the Council should:

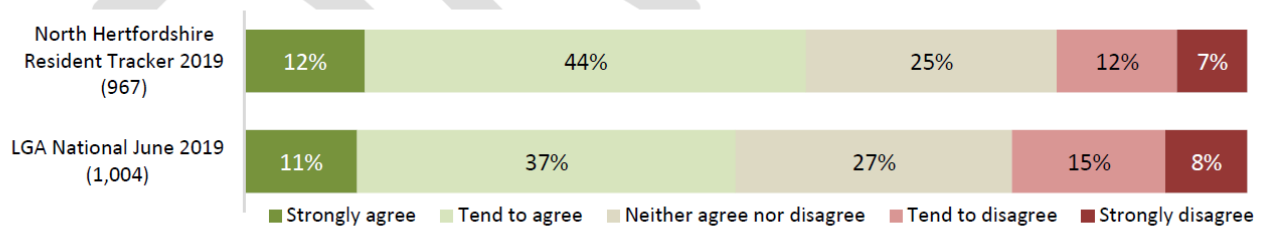
- Improve refuse / recycling collections (37%)
- Make improvements to the area / community (33%)

- Stop wasting money (25%)
- Listen / consult more (23%)
- Improve communication (19%)
- Improve the planning process (17%)

A further top theme was road / pavement maintenance e.g. potholes, cited by 19%, however this is not an NHDC function. It should be noted that only 175 residents answered the supplementary question about how the Council could improve the running of North Hertfordshire.

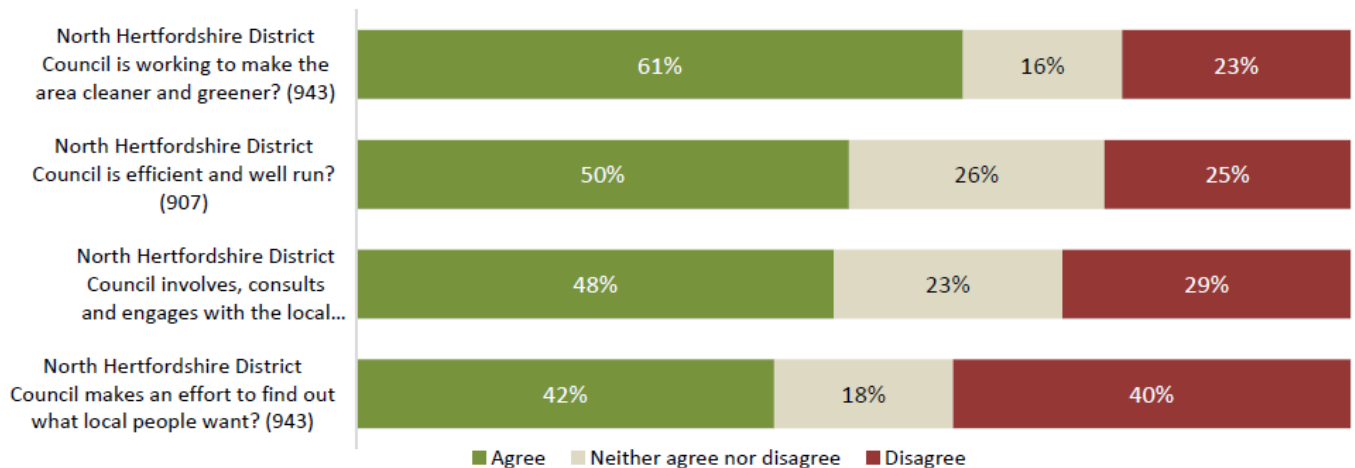
8.1.5 Figure 4 shows that over half (56%) of residents agree that the Council provides value for money, while 19% disagree. Overall agreement that the Council provides value for money is higher than the national LGA figure of 48%.

Figure 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that North Hertfordshire District Council provides value for money?



8.1.6 Residents were asked about a number of statements regarding the Council and their agreement levels with those statements recorded. 61% of residents agree that NHDC is working to make the area cleaner and greener, while just under one quarter (23%) disagree. Half of residents (50%) agree that NHDC is efficient and well run, while one quarter (25%) disagree. Half of residents (50%) agree that NHDC is efficient and well run, while one quarter (25%) disagree. See figure 8.

Figure 8: Do you agree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree with the following...?



- 8.1.7 There has been a significant increase in the number of residents agreeing with the four statements since 2017 as can be seen in table 7.

Table 7: Do you agree, disagree or neither agree nor disagree with the following...North Hertfordshire District Council...?

Statements	Agreed % 2008	Agreed % 2011	Agreed % 2013	Agreed % 2015	Agreed % 2017	Agreed % 2019	% change 2017 to 2019
Involves, consults and engages with the local community (932)	n/a	55%	56%	53%	46%	48%	+2%
Makes an effort to find out what local people want (943)	n/a	49%	48%	48%	35%	42%	+7%*
Working to make the area cleaner and greener (943)	70%	69%	72%	67%	55%	61%	+6%*
Efficient and well run (907)	58%	52%	53%	51%	41%	50%	+9%*

Base: (Number of residents in 2019 is shown in brackets)

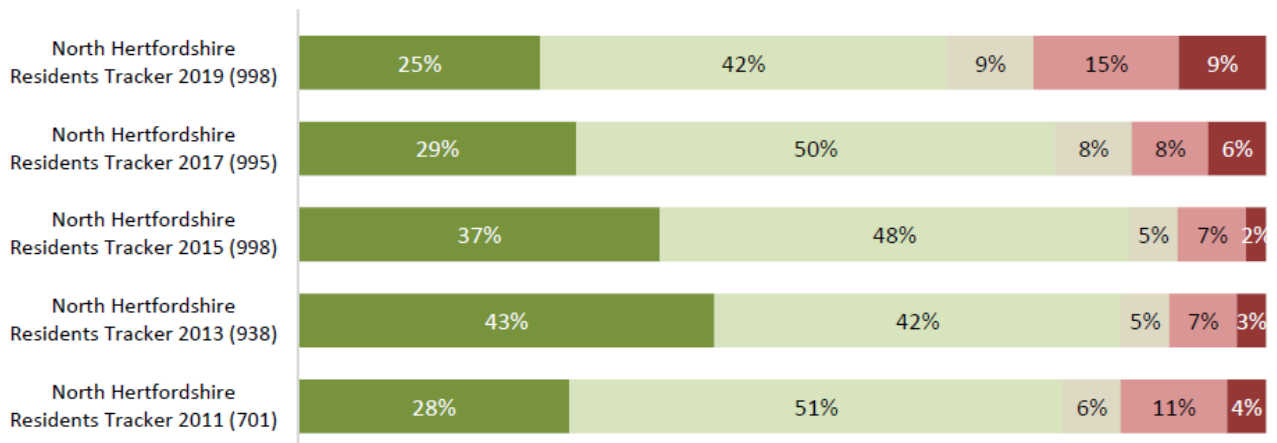
- 8.1.8 **Observations on Overall Satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction with North Hertfordshire as a place to live remains very high and well above the national LGA Benchmark. However, residents' satisfaction with the way the Council runs things has dropped by 3 percentage points and a significant increase in those who think things have got worse over the last 2 years, in terms of how the Council runs things. Issues with the Council's waste and recycling contract in 2018 and the knock on reputational impact are likely to have contributed to the drop in satisfaction, as well as on-going year on year budget savings having to be made. Despite this, satisfaction with the Council is 10 percentage points higher than the national average figure of 73%.
- 8.1.9 Table 7 shows that there has been an increase in agreement level in people who think NHDC makes an effort to find out what local people want and involves, consults and engages with the local community. This increase could be related to the joint administration's new objective of being a more welcoming and inclusive council. Table 7 also shows an increase in agreement that the Council is working to make the area cleaner and greener, in line with the joint administration's objective to respond to challenges to the environment.

## 8.2 Council Services

- 8.2.1 Over two-thirds (67%) of residents are satisfied with general waste and recycling collection, dropping from 79% in 2017, while around one quarter (24%) are dissatisfied. Satisfaction is below the national figure of 74%, although the LGA data is for waste collections (not recycling) only. Figure 12 shows satisfaction levels since 2011. Satisfaction peaked in 2013 at 85%. This was at a time when the Council introduced recycling of plastics at the kerbside, increasing residents' opportunity to recycle.

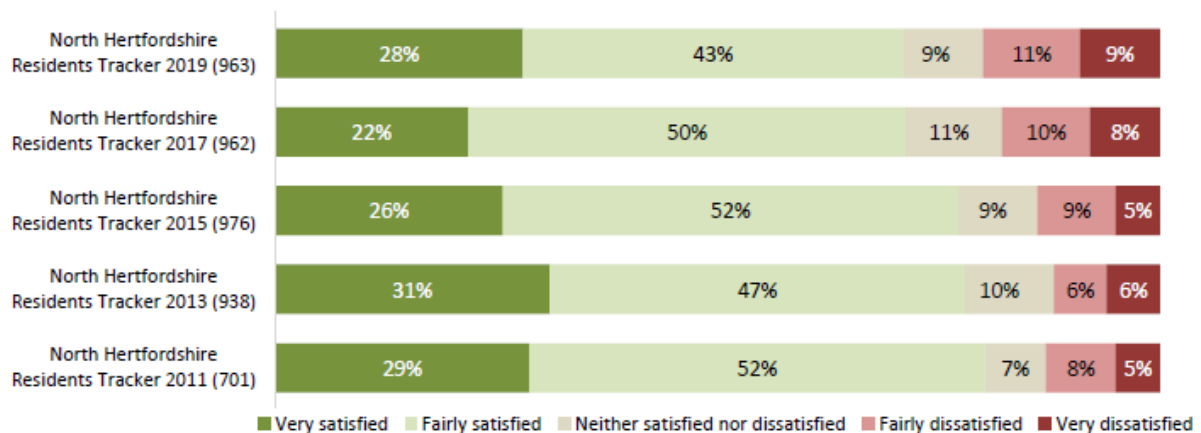
Figure 12: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the following...?

### General waste and recycling collection



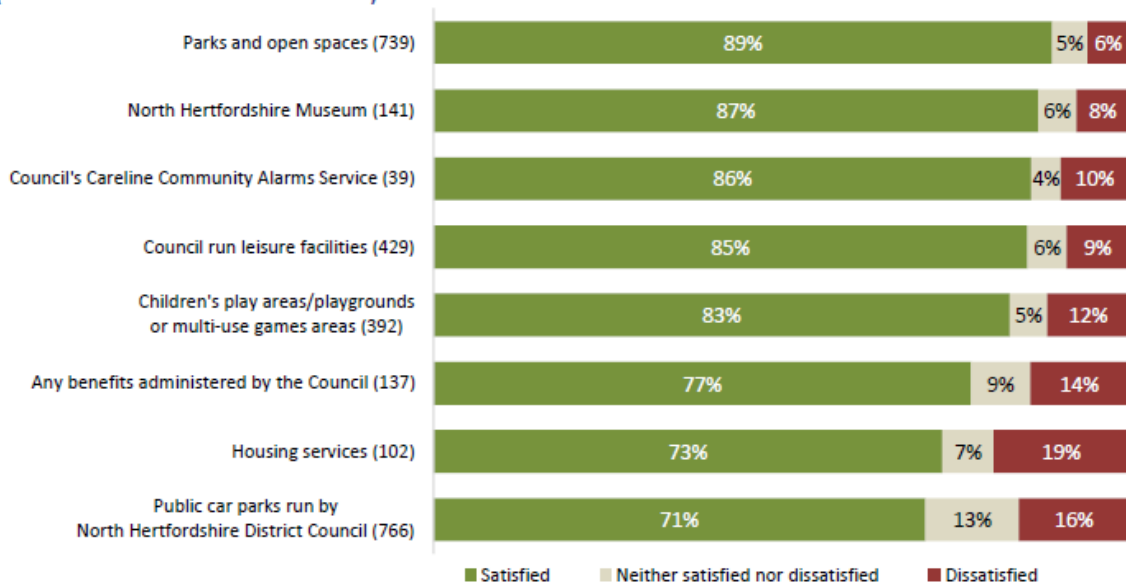
- 8.2.2 71% of residents are satisfied with the Council's street cleaning, which is in line with the national average of 70%, while one fifth (20%) are dissatisfied. Overall satisfaction with street cleaning has remained level since 2017, although it has seen a general decline since 2011. See figure 12 below:

### Street cleaning



- 8.2.3 Residents were asked if they had used a number of Council services in the last year. Figure 13 shows that 78% of residents have used public car parks run by NHDC in the last year, while 75% have used parks and open spaces. 44% had used council run leisure facilities, while 40% have used children's play areas / playgrounds, multi-use games areas.
- 8.2.4 The proportion of residents who have used housing services run by NHDC in the last year, has risen significantly from 7% in 2017 to 11% in 2019.
- 8.2.5 Residents who had used council services were subsequently asked about their satisfaction with those services. Satisfaction levels can be seen in Figure 14 below.

**Figure 14: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the following:**  
**Base: (Number of residents shown in brackets)**



- 8.2.6 While satisfaction with services such as parks and open spaces (89%), North Hertfordshire Museum (87%), Careline (86%), leisure facilities (85%) remains high, there has been a significant decrease in levels of satisfaction for all areas, as show in table 11.

Table 11: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the following:  
(satisfaction of services 2011 – 2019)

Service/facility	Satisfied % 2011	Satisfied % 2013	Satisfied % 2015	Satisfied % 2017	Satisfied % 2019	Percentage % Change 2017 to 2019
Parks and open spaces (739)	89%	93%	93%	92%	89%	-3%
Children's play areas / multi-use games areas (392)	87%	90%	90%	88%	83%	-5%
Council's Careline Community Alarms Service (39)	-	100%	100%	92%	86%	-6%
Council run leisure facilities (429)	92%	90%	91%	91%	85%	-6%
Public car parks run by North Hertfordshire District Council (766)	75%	76%	77%	77%	71%	-6%
Housing Services (102)	79%	76%	77%	79%	73%	-6%

Base: (Number of residents in 2019 is shown in brackets)

8.2.7 Waste and recycling collection was selected by 52% of residents as the most important service the Council provides, followed by housing services (19%) and parks and open spaces (10%). These were also the three services cited (in the same order of importance) in 2017, 2015 and 2013.

### Observations on Council Services

8.2.8 Due to issues at the start of the new waste contract in 2018 and also the introduction of a charge for garden waste collections, the decrease in satisfaction with waste and recycling collection was to a large extent to be anticipated. Given that performance levels are now at a business as usual level and that we are into the second year of charging for garden waste, it is hoped that satisfaction levels will improve when the survey is repeated in 2021. However, the reputational impact of previous performance issues may last longer than the actual issues themselves.

8.2.9 Although Table 11 shows a drop in satisfaction of six percentage points for Council run leisure facilities, the figure remains high and our own data shows excellent performance. Stevenage Leisure Ltd (SLL) undertake national quality schemes with the NBS and Quest and recent results show an increase in satisfaction at both Hitchin and Letchworth facilities. At Hitchin, the scores for overall customer satisfaction out of five with visit (4.82) and swimming experience (4.72) are well above the wet site averages (4.29 and 4.26 respectively). At North Herts Leisure Centre, the scores for overall customer satisfaction with visit (4.87) and swimming experience (4.53) are both above the mixed site averages (4.35 and 4.29 respectively). In February 2020, North Herts Leisure Centre also won the NBS Award for 'Overall High Score' and 'Customer Satisfaction'.



8.2.10 Table 11 shows satisfaction with Careline's Community Alarm's service has dropped from 92% in 2017 to 86% in 2019. However, the sample size is very small. Also Careline's own customer satisfaction data showed that 99.8% of customers would recommend Herts Careline to a friend or relative and 99.5% of customers say the help they receive from Herts Careline Control Room Operators is 'excellent' or 'good.'

8.2.11 Table 11 shows a decrease in satisfaction of five percentage points for children's play areas / multi use play areas from 88% in 2017 to 83% in 2019. One possible reason for this drop in satisfaction could be due to the Council's adopted Green Space Strategy (2018), where following consultation, the decision was made to rationalise the number of playgrounds which the Council maintains, opting to only maintain those which had higher use.

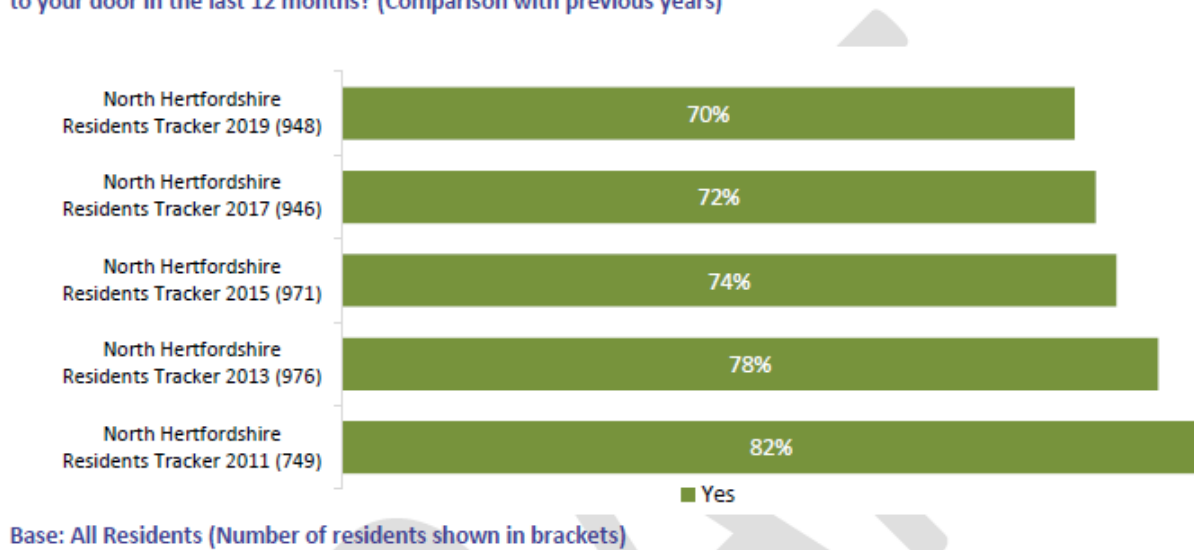
8.2.12 Paragraph 8.2.4 shows an increase in residents who had used the Council's housing services in the last year from 7% in 2017 to 11% in 2019. This increase could potentially be in large part because of the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April 2018 and which compels all local authorities to offer its housing service to everyone, not just those where an accommodation duty exists.

### 8.3 Information and Communication

8.3.1 Residents were asked where they normally obtain information about the Council. 74% of residents said the Council's website, followed by 16% who said local newspapers, leaflets etc, 15% said contact with Council staff, 12% said Outlook magazine and 9% said social media.

8.3.2 70% of residents had seen or had a copy of the Council's Outlook magazine in the last 12 months, this has decreased by 2% since 2017 and by 10 percentage points since 2011 (82%). See Figure 17.

Figure 17: Have you seen, or had a copy of 'Outlook', North Hertfordshire District Council's community news magazine to your door in the last 12 months? (Comparison with previous years)



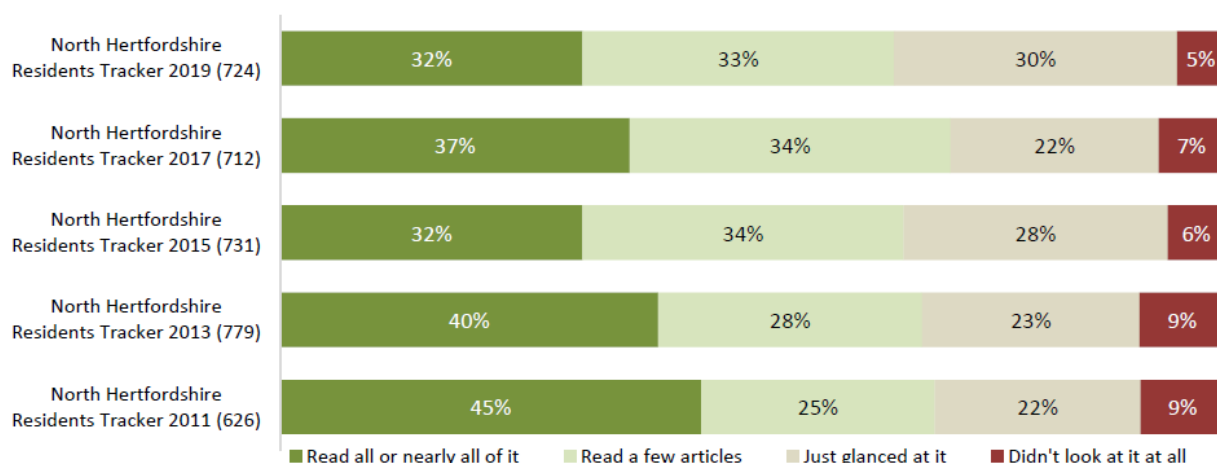
- 8.3.3 Table 13 shows that residents in Hitchin (78%) are significantly more likely to have seen or had a copy of Outlook magazine delivered to their door in the last 12 months, whereas Royston residents (58%) are significantly less likely to have seen or had a copy of Outlook.

Table 13: Residents who have seen, or had a copy of 'Outlook' by Ward area in the past 12 months:

	Total	Baldock and District	Hitchin	Southern Rural	Letchworth	Royston
Yes	70%	74%	78%	65%	71%	58%
Base	948	135	265	155	247	146

- 8.3.4 Figure 19 shows that the proportion of residents who have read all or nearly all of Outlook (32%) has decreased significantly since 2017 (37%).

Figure 19: Would you say you have...?



- 8.3.4 83% of residents like the way Outlook looks and is presented, 77% like the way it is written and 67% find Outlook interesting.
- 8.3.5 Since the last survey in 2017, we have introduced an email bulletin service @NorthHerts. 10% of residents said they were signed up to the e-bulletin service. Of those residents, 79% like the way the e-bulletins are written, and 81% find the information in them is useful to them. 74% agreed that the topics were of interest to them.
- 8.3.6 **Observations on Outlook magazine:** Although the proportion of residents who can recall seeing Outlook has declined, under the current Outlook distribution contract, the distributors all wear GPS trackers which show the roads which they have walked down, allowing the contractor to identify any gaps and rectify any missed delivery reports. We can therefore be confident that a much higher proportion of the district has been covered by distribution of Outlook than the results indicate. It also needs to be taken into account that it is industry best practice to check distribution recall within a couple

of days of delivery, whereas some residents, depending on when they answered the survey will not have seen an issue of Outlook for several months. The Communications Manager is not aware of any specific issues related to Outlook delivery in Royston, however the contractor has been made aware of the results and copies of the trails for Royston will be requested.

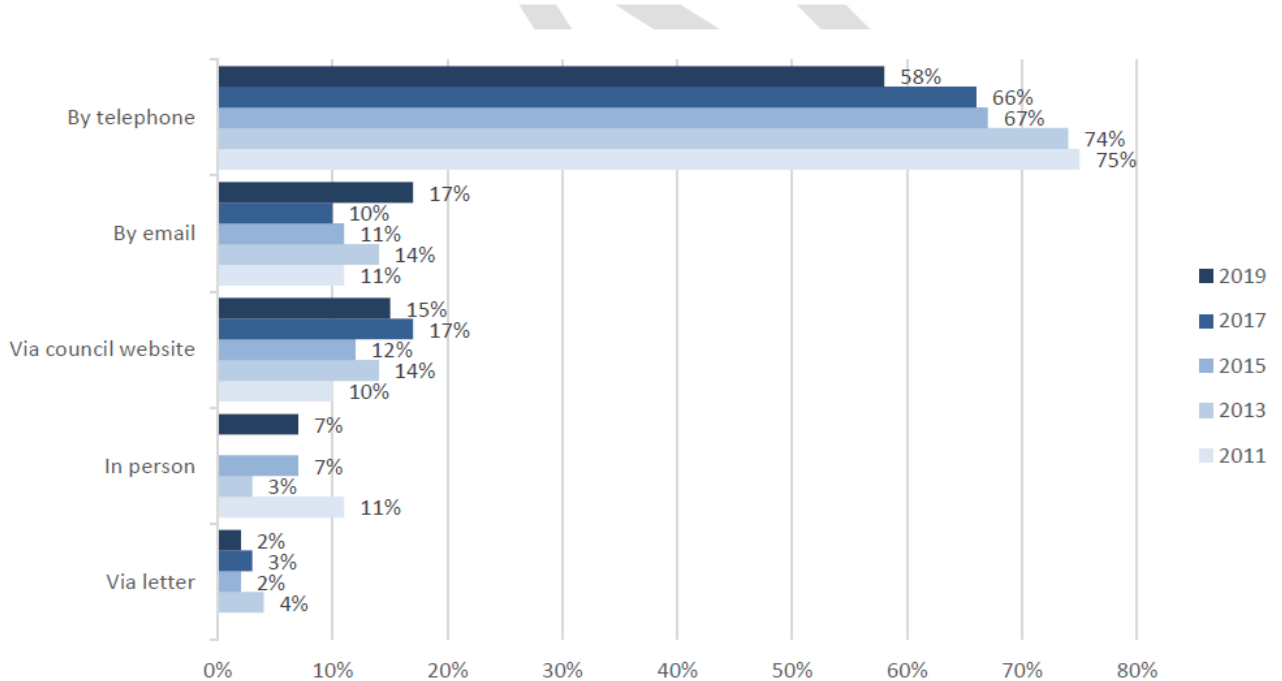
## 8.4 Contact with the Council

8.4.1 Over half of residents (52%) said they have contacted the Council in the last year. Of those, the main reasons for contact were:

- 34% to report an issue or problem
- 17% to ask for advice / information
- 13% to make a payment
- 12% to make a complaint
- 12% to apply to use a service

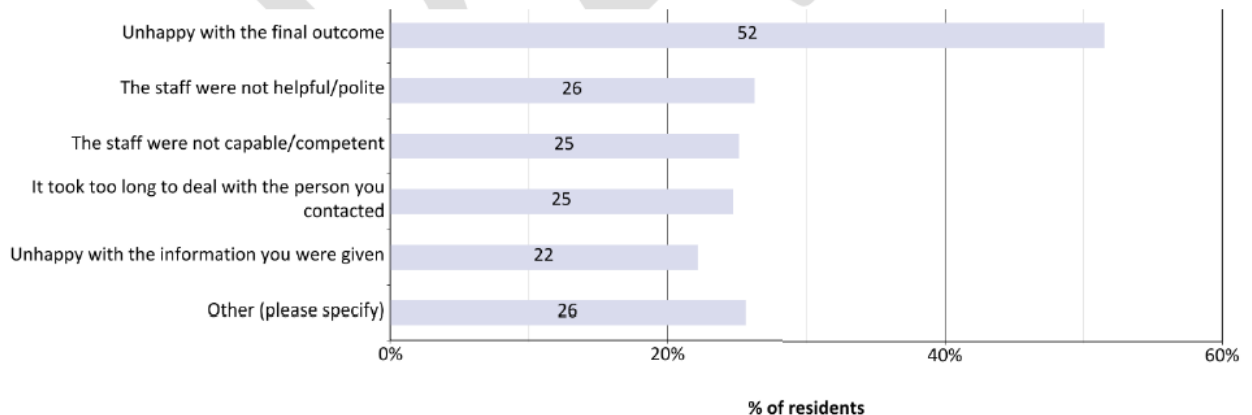
8.4.2 The most popular way to contact the Council was by telephone (58%), with email the second most popular method at 17% and 15% through the Council website. Figure 26 shows the changes in means of contact since 2011.

Figure 26: How did you contact the Council? (Comparison with previous years)



8.4.3 70% of residents said they were satisfied with the service they received last time they contacted the Council, with 38% saying they were very satisfied. 24% of residents were dissatisfied. Of the residents who were dissatisfied, more than half (52%) said they were unhappy with the final outcome. Figure 28 shows reasons for dissatisfaction.

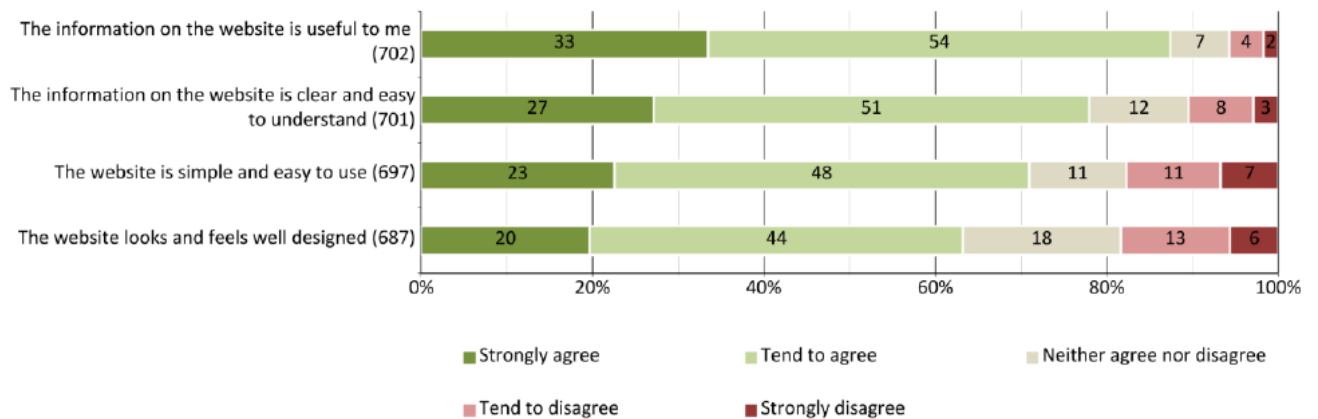
**Figure 28: Why were you dissatisfied with the service you received the last time you were in contact with the council?**



**Base: All Residents who have contacted the council and were dissatisfied with the contact they received (133)**

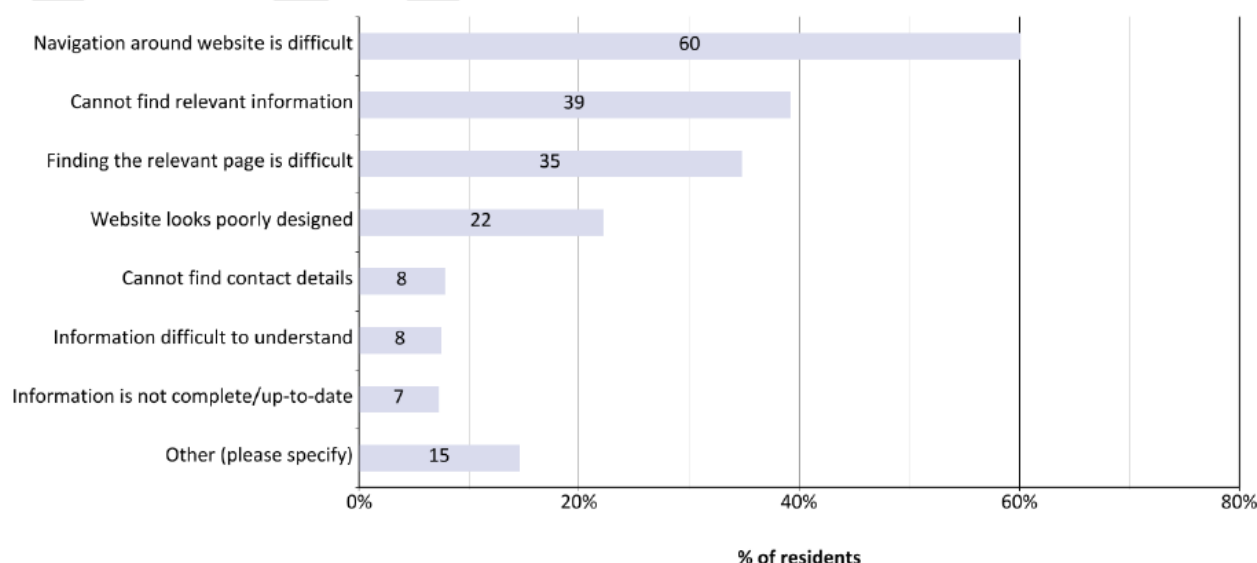
**8.4.5** 71% of residents said they had visited the Council's website within the last year. When asked about the website, 87% of residents think that the information on the website is useful to them, 78% think the information on the website is clear and easy to understand, while 71% think the website is simple and easy to use. 63% of residents think that the website looks and feels well designed. Figure 32 shows agreement levels with statements about the Council's website.

**Figure 32: Thinking about the council's website, do you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following?**



**8.4.6** Residents who disagreed with any of the statements in Figure 32, were subsequently asked if there were any specific issues which they had experienced with the website. The key issues were on navigating the site and finding the information they wanted. Figure 33 shows specific issues with the site.

**Figure 33: What specific issues did you have with the Council's website?**



**Base: All residents who have had issues with North Hertfordshire District Council's website (166)**

**8.4.7 Observations on Contact with the Council:** Paragraph 8.4.1 shows that of those residents who had contacted the Council in the last 12 months, 12% contacted us to make a complaint. However the number of complaints we received in 2018/19 only equates to 1% of the total contacts into the Customer Service Centre. The complaints figure includes complaints made directly to our contractors.

**8.4.8 Observations on Council website:** Overall opinions on the website are positive, however views on navigation and design will be taken into account during 2020/21 when a project to review the existing website, including design and content will be undertaken.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 The Cabinet has under 5.6.1 of its terms of reference, the function to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council.

9.2 The Cabinet under 5.6.15 of its terms of reference oversees the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council, therefore can consider the outcome of the District Wide Service report.

9.3 There are no legal implications arising from this report. If any actions are identified as a result of the findings of the District Wide Survey 2019, the legal implications of those will be considered at the time.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report. The cost of the research undertaken was funded from the existing budget provision for corporate consultation.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Conducting the District Wide Survey is an important tool for shaping the Council's Objectives. If the results of the survey are not acted upon, there is a risk that public satisfaction with the Council will reduce, leading to a negative impact on the Council's reputation. In order to mitigate this risk, Service Directors and Corporate Managers use the results as part of the Service Planning process, enabling the Council to address any areas of concern.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. The report highlights areas where satisfaction levels could be improved. Broadly though, the services that NHDC provides to residents are well received as noted at 8.1.7. Any mitigating actions may be incorporated into the formulation of the relevant Service Plans to improve service provision, where appropriate. These will be proportionate and reflect the authority's duty under the public Sector Duty. Any identified service improvements may require an analysis of equality impact prior to implementation.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. As the recommendations in the report relate to a contract below £50,000 the "go local" policy has not been applied due to the specialist nature of the contract and no suitable local providers being able to undertake the work.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 Where actions are agreed to be followed up, those will form part of the relevant department's service action plan and any employee resources and training will be considered as part of that planning.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1. None

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 16.1. Sarah Kingsley, Communications Manager [sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk); Ext 4552
- 16.2. Rachel Cooper, Controls, Performance and Risk Manager [rachel.cooper@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.cooper@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4606
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- 16.4. Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Community Engagement Manager [reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4212
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- 16.6. Shah Mohammed, Group Accountant [shah.mohammed@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:shah.mohammed@north-herts.gov.uk) Ext 4240

**17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 17.1. The full research report from Opinion Research Services can be found at [www.north-herts.gov.uk/districtwidesurvey](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/districtwidesurvey)