

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 MARCH 2018**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

9

TITLE OF REPORT: DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY 2017 – KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR LYNDA NEEDHAM, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise Cabinet of the key findings and action points arising from the 2017 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 how the results will be used by Senior Management Team in conjunction with Executive Members, to inform the service planning process and to update relevant performance measures.

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.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 14 September 2017.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The 2017 District Wide Survey was carried out in line with the Council's agreed Consultation Strategy. 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 BMG Research, an independent research agency, was commissioned by the Council to carry out the research on our behalf. They conducted 1001 telephone interviews of North Hertfordshire residents between October and November 2017. The results were weighted by area, age, gender, working status and ethnicity to ensure they were 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.
- 7.4 The results of the survey will be used by the Senior Management Team in conjunction with Executive Members to inform the Council's service delivery plan and service action plans and to update relevant performance measures.
- 7.5 The figures and tables in the report are extracted directly from the full research report prepared by BMG Research. 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 Overall satisfaction and perceptions of the Council

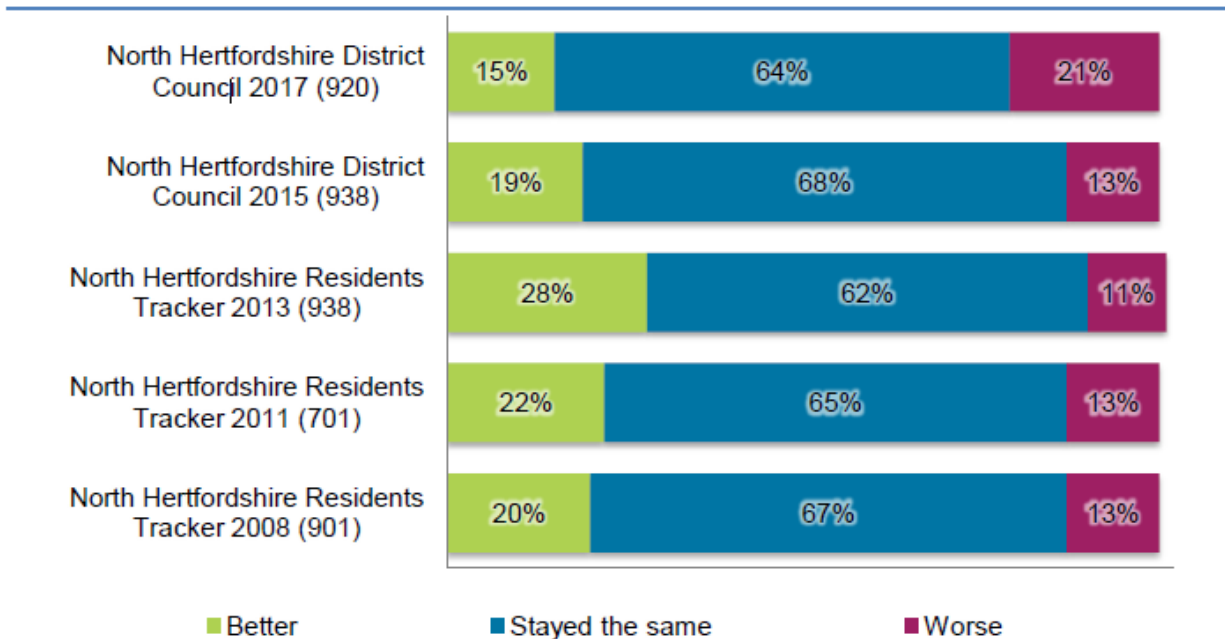
- 8.1.1 The vast majority of residents (95%) are satisfied with their area as a place to live, including 63% who are very satisfied. This compares favourably to the latest national telephone polling carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) in October 2017, where the proportion expressing satisfaction with their local area was 82%, 13 percentage points lower than North Hertfordshire residents. There is limited variation in satisfaction with the areas as a place to live by area, although Royston residents are more likely than Southern Rural residents to state they are dissatisfied (5% cf. 1%).
- 8.1.2 When considering the performance of the Council, 75% of residents express satisfaction with the way the Council runs things. There has been a 7% drop in satisfaction since 2015 (82%). However this satisfaction level is still well above the latest LGA benchmark figure which is 65%. As also found in 2015, those who have seen a copy of the Council's Outlook magazine are more likely than those who have not, to be satisfied with the Council overall (77% cf. 69%). Southern Rural residents are most likely to state they are dissatisfied with the way the Council runs things, more so than those in Hitchin and Letchworth (20% cf. 12% and 11% respectively).

8.1.3 Those residents who expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Council runs things were invited to say 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:

- Listen / consult more (19%)
- Reduce planning permissions / stop building houses (18%)
- Improve refuse / recycling (incl timings / tip and recycle centre opening times) (16%)
- Improve communication (16%).

8.1.4 Residents were asked whether they think the way North Hertfordshire District Council runs things has got better, stayed the same, or got worse over the last two years. The proportion of residents who feel that the way the Council runs things has worsened in the last 2 years has increased significantly (21% cf. 13%). Residents in Hitchin are significantly more likely to say the way the Council runs things has got better than the total average (20% cf. 15%).

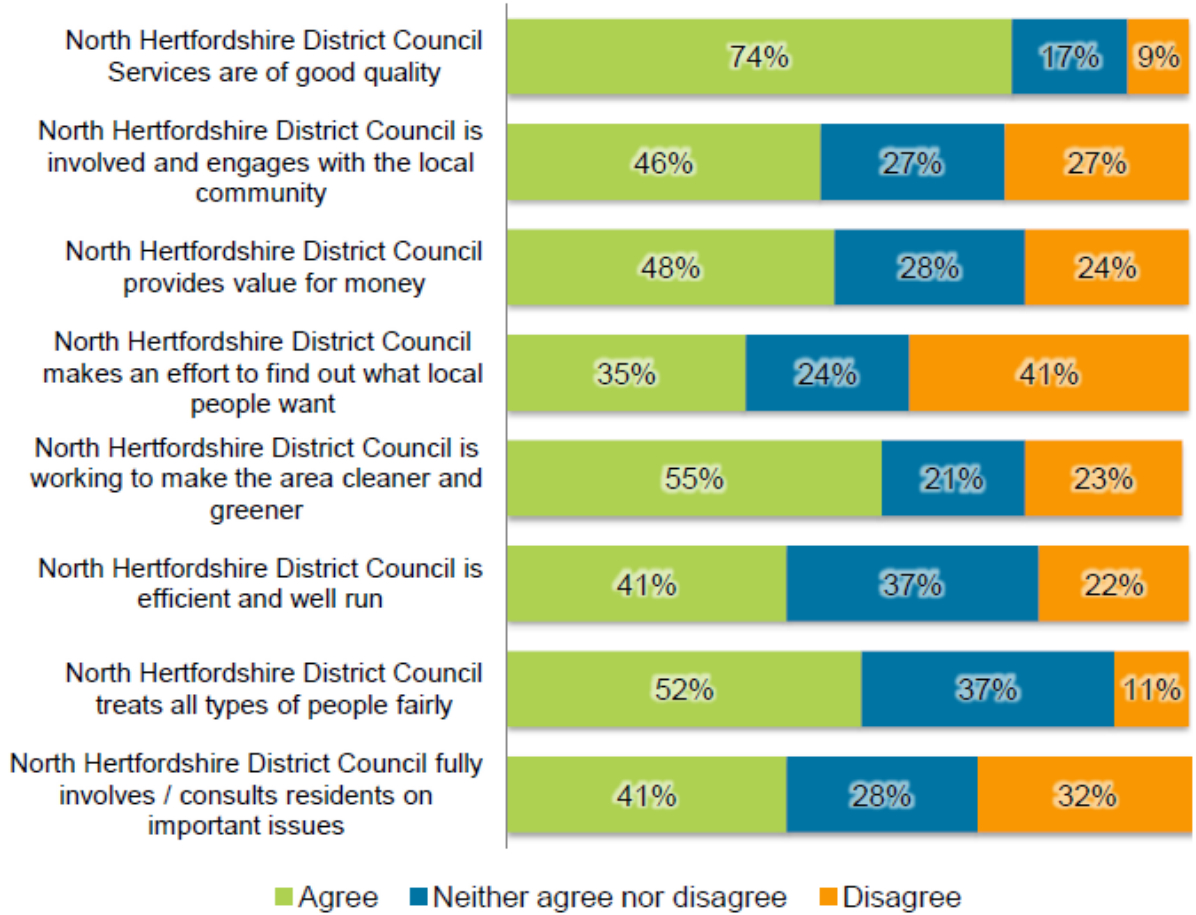
Figure 4: Thinking about the way North Hertfordshire District Council runs things, do you think it has got better, stayed the same or got worse over the last two years? (All valid responses)



Unweighted sample bases shown in parentheses

8.1.5 Residents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with various perceptions of the Council. The highest proportion of residents agree that NHDC services are of good quality (74%). The lowest level of agreement is in relation to the statement NHDC makes an effort to find out what local people want (35%), and 41% disagree with this statement. Agreement that North Hertfordshire Council provides value for money at 48% is 2 percentage points below the October 2017 LGA Benchmark of 50%. There has been a significant decrease in agreement with every measure since 2015, with the biggest being a 13-point decrease in those who agreed that NHDC makes an effort to find out what local people want.

Figure 5: Agreement with key statements about North Hertfordshire District Council (All valid responses)



Unweighted sample base: 1001

8.1.6 Table 4 below shows residents living in Baldock and District are significantly more likely to agree that NHDC provides value for money. Those in Southern Rural share the lowest level of agreement in every measure compared to the other areas.

Table 4: Agreement with key statements about North Hertfordshire District Council by area (All valid responses)

	Baldock & District (118)	Hitchin (264)	Letchworth (259)	Royston (150)	Southern Rural (210)
Services are of good quality	73%	75%	74%	74%	72%
Is involved and engages with the local community	51%	45%	49%	49%	<u>38%</u>
Provides value for money	57%	50%	52%	42%	<u>41%</u>
Makes an effort to find out what local people want	37%	34%	37%	34%	34%
Is working to make the area cleaner and greener	54%	56%	61%	57%	<u>46%</u>
Is efficient and well run	45%	37%	47%	39%	37%
Treats all types of people fairly	56%	50%	53%	54%	50%
Fully involves / consults residents on important issues	45%	42%	43%	38%	35%

*For tables, figures significantly higher than the total are displayed in bold, whilst those significantly lower than the total are displayed underlined.

8.1.7 Observations on overall satisfaction: Overall satisfaction with the Council and with North Hertfordshire as a place to live remains very high and well above the national LGA Benchmark. However, there has been a significant drop in satisfaction with the way the Council runs things and a significant increase in those people who think that the way the Council runs things has worsened in the last two years. There are a number of factors which are likely to have contributed to the drop in satisfaction. The key ones are the impact of the Council having had to make ongoing savings of £6.6 million in the last seven years, meaning some unpopular and difficult decisions have had to be made. The survey was also carried out in October / November 2017, following a consultation on charging for green waste and a subsequent decision to introduce the charge on 16 October. While there is no direct evidence that this decision has impacted on satisfaction levels, there has been a sustained period of negative feedback both during and after the consultation period, particularly on social media, which may have adversely affected people's views of the Council. Similarly, other high profile projects such as the Local Plan and Hitchin Town Hall and Museum have generated sustained negative press interest. Despite this, it is worth putting the result into context, as the 75% of residents who are satisfied with the Council is well above the LGA national benchmark of 65%.

8.1.8 Observations on perceptions of the Council: With 41% of people disagreeing that the Council makes an effort to find out what local people want and 32% of people disagreeing that the Council fully involves or consults residents on important issues, this has the potential to have a serious impact on the Council's reputation and on resident satisfaction with services. However, the results do not necessarily mean the Council needs to increase the volume of consultation undertaken. The Council's agreed Consultation Strategy 2015-2020 emphasises the need to ensure that consultation opportunities are widely publicised and available via accessible means. As an example, the recent waste contract consultation was widely publicised via social media, website, press release and a flyer to all households. The survey was available online, but also paper copies were made available where people did not have access to the internet. One area of improvement also identified in the Consultation Strategy is around the need to publicise how we have utilised the feedback from consultations, including any suggestions or comments which are not adopted in the final policy or service change (you said we did approach), so that residents understand how they

have played a role in the process. It is worth pointing out that two of the most high profile recent consultations are around the Local Plan and introducing charging for green waste. Both consultations are sensitive or contentious and we are aware that some residents were not happy with the outcome of the consultations. This in itself could mean that while we have carried out adequate and appropriate consultation, people are unhappy with the ultimate decision taken, which could influence their views on consultation activity.

8.1.9 Agreement levels on all statements have dropped and Senior Management Team will need to consider how to address these issues, as part of the service planning process. Specifically on the low levels of agreement from Southern Rural residents, this could be explained in part by the timing of the survey in relation to local campaigns around proposed sites for development in the Local Plan.

8.2 Council services

8.2.1 Universal services: Satisfaction with the administration of Council Tax (82%) and the general waste and recycling collection (79%) is high. Satisfaction with street cleaning is slightly lower at 72%, however this is above the LGA benchmark of 70%. There are no significant variations in satisfaction with street cleansing or waste and recycling by geographical area. However, satisfaction with general waste and recycling collection at 79% is significantly lower than in 2015 (86%), and satisfaction with street cleaning has also dropped from 78% in 2015 to 72% in 2017.

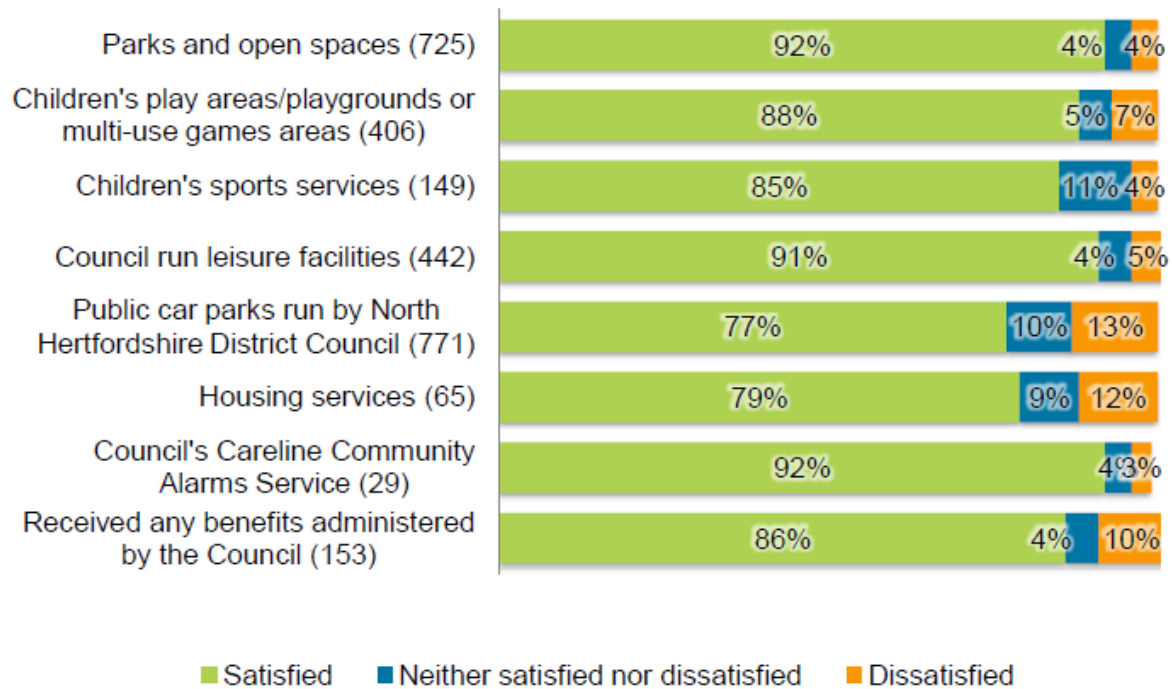
8.2.2 Usage of services: Residents were asked if they have used various services within the last year – see Figure 8 below. As per previous surveys, the most used services are public car parks (78%) and parks and open spaces (73%).

Table 6: Service use 2011-2017 (All valid responses)

Service/facility	% users 2011	% users 2013	% users 2015	% users 2017	% point change 2015-17
Parks and open spaces	78%	79%	75%	73%	-2%
Public car parks run by North Hertfordshire District Council	77%	78%	78%	78%	0%
Council run leisure facilities	55%	48%	46%	44%	-2%
Children's Play Areas/ playgrounds or multi-use games areas	41%	46%	41%	40%	-1%
Children's sports services	22%	21%	12%	16%	+4%
Housing services	6%	4%	5%	7%	+2%

8.2.3 Those people who indicated they had used a service were then asked to indicate how satisfied they were with that service. See Figure 9 below. Satisfaction is generally very high, with satisfaction levels being fairly consistent with 2015. In particular over 90% of users are satisfied with parks and open spaces, Council run leisure facilities and Careline's Community Alarms service.

Figure 9: Service satisfaction among users (Where used in the last year)



Unweighted sample bases in parenthesis

- 8.2.4 The majority of residents (57%) feel that waste and recycling collection is the most important service the Council provides. 15% said that housing services were the most important, followed by 10% who said parks and open spaces. These were also the three services cited (in the same order of importance) in 2015 and 2013.
- 8.2.5 **Observations on satisfaction with Council services:** Satisfaction with the waste and recycling service remains high at 79%, although this is 7 percentage points lower than in 2015. Satisfaction with street cleaning has also dropped from 78% in 2015 to 72% in 2017. With a new Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing contract coming into force in May 2018, it is hoped the use of in-cab technology and real time reporting will introduce significant improvements for customers. It is also worth noting that as a percentage of waste collections, the level of complaints is very low, at 0.01% for April 2016 to March 2017.
- 8.2.6 Although 12% of residents are dissatisfied with the Council's housing services, this could be partly anticipated. Due to the nature of the service, some residents may not be satisfied with the advice given or options available, rather than the quality of the service itself. It should also be noted that the sample size was only 65 respondents. Dissatisfaction with public car parks run by NHDC was at 13% of users, but this could be expected in part due to the enforcement activity associated with this service.

8.3 Information and Communication

8.3.1 Respondents were asked how they normally obtain information about NHDC. The highest proportion of residents obtain information from the NHDC website (59%), followed by local newspapers (22%) and Outlook magazine (16%). The top three sources have consistently made up the top three since 2011, however for the first time local newspapers have become a more common choice for people to obtain information about NHDC than the Outlook magazine. Use of Outlook as an information source increases with age and local newspapers are mentioned more commonly by residents aged 55 and over. Using the Council website to obtain information is most commonly done by residents aged 25-34 (74%) and 35-44 (70%).

8.3.2 Residents were asked how well informed they feel about a range of issues. Approximately four in ten residents feel informed about how to get involved in local decision making (39%), what the Council spends its money on (39%) and being informed of how well NHDC is performing (41%). There have been significant drops in how well informed residents feel about these measures since 2015, see Table 13 below.

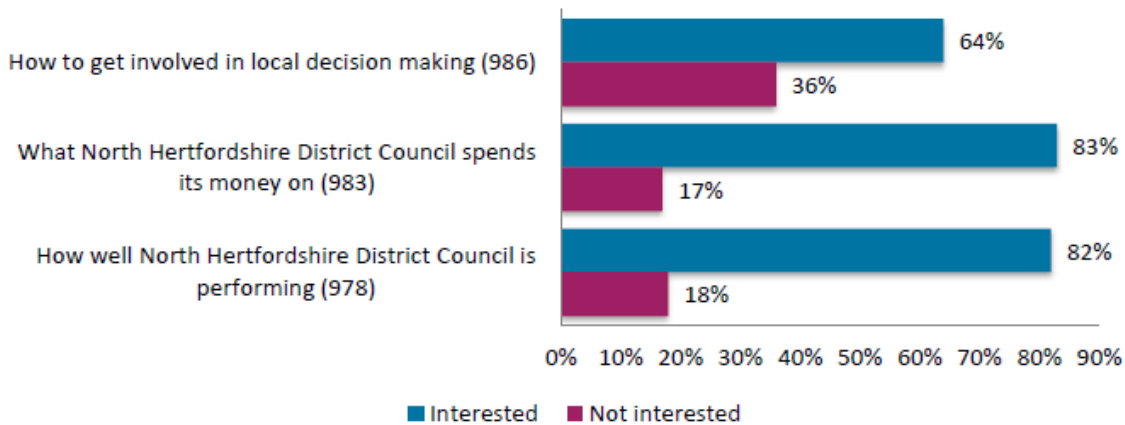
Table 13: Residents feeling informed 2008-2017 (All valid responses)

	Informed 2008	Informed 2011	Informed 2013	Informed 2015	Informed 2017	% point change 2015-17
How well NHDC is performing	78%	51%	57%	54%	41%	-13%
What NHDC spends its money on	79%	52%	54%	55%	39%	-16%
How to get involved in local decision making	81%	37%	40%	44%	39%	-5%

Those aged 75+ are significantly more likely to feel informed about how well NHDC is performing and how to get involved in local decision making, whilst those aged 16-24 are significantly more likely to feel uninformed about all three measures.

8.3.3 Residents were also asked how interested they were in being informed about the three measures. Over eight in ten residents were interested in being informed about how NHDC spends its money (83%) and how well they were performing (82%). Around two-thirds (64%) were interested about getting involved in local decision making. Those living in Hitchin are significantly more likely to want to be informed about what NHDC spends its money on compared to Letchworth residents (89% cf. 77%). Hitchin residents are also the most likely to want to feel informed about how well the Council is performing, with a higher result than the total average (86% cf. 82%).

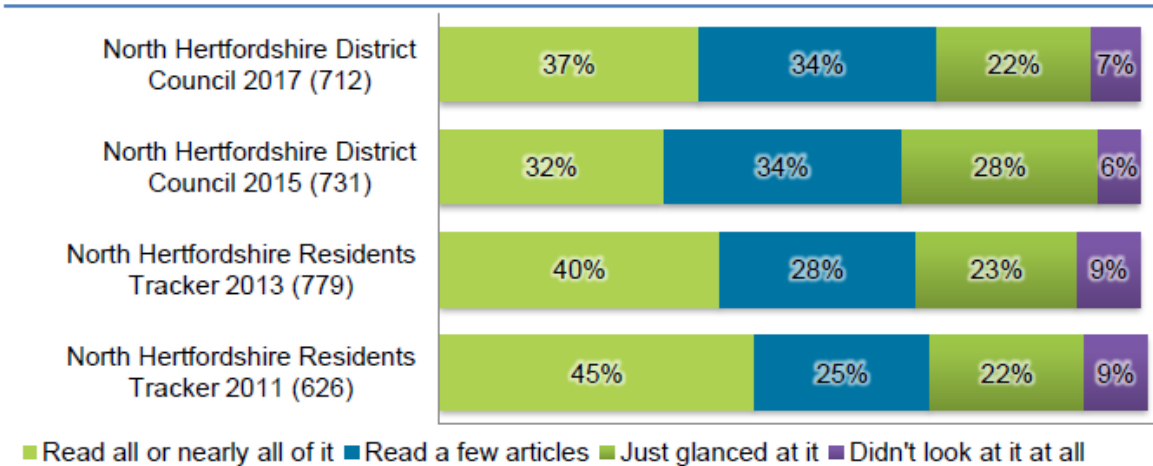
Figure 12: How interested are you in being informed of the following...?



8.3.4 Residents were asked about their opinions of Outlook magazine. Outlook is delivered to all households in the area three times a year. When asked whether they have seen or had a copy of Outlook delivered to their door, 72% of residents said yes. This has dropped from 78% in 2013 and 74% in 2015. Residents in Royston are significantly more likely to say that they have not received or seen a copy of Outlook (41%). This has increased by 7 percentage points since 2015. Those in Southern Rural are more likely than the total average to say they do receive Outlook (78% cf. 72%).

8.3.5 Among those who have seen or received a copy of Outlook significantly more residents said that they read all or nearly all of it than the previous year's finding (37% cf. 32%). Only 7% said they didn't look at it at all.

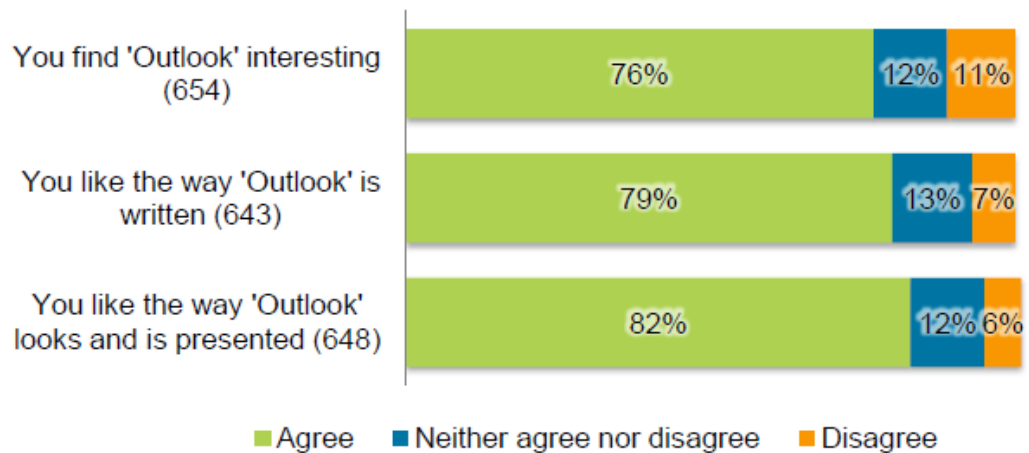
Figure 14: Interaction with Outlook among recipients (Where seen a copy of Outlook or had a copy delivered)



Unweighted sample bases in parenthesis

8.3.6 Feedback on the content and format of Outlook is positive. See Figure 15 below. The agreement level that Outlook is interesting at 76% is marginally higher than the 73% observed in 2015. Agreement that residents like the way Outlook is written is around the same (79% in 2017 and 80% in 2015), while agreement with liking the way Outlook is presented falls by 3 percentage points, however this isn't significant. By age group, 25-34 and 45-54 year olds are significantly less likely to find the magazine interesting (62% and 68%), while those 75 years and over are significantly more likely to agree in this regard (91%). 91% of 75 and overs and 88% of 65-74 year olds are in agreement that they like the way the magazine is written. This is compared to 59% of 25-34 year olds.

Figure 15: Views on Outlook content and formatting (Valid responses, those who have read some of Outlook)



8.3.7 **Observations on Information and Communication:** As highlighted in paragraph 8.3.1, the Council's website has become an increasingly important communications tool in the past few years. To reflect this, the Council completely redeveloped the old website in 2015 to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets customers' expectations. Further improvements are planned, including a Find My Nearest facility whereby residents will be able to look up essential services by using their postcode.

8.3.8 As stated in paragraph 8.3.2, only around four in ten residents feel informed about how to get involved in local decision making (39%), what the Council spends its money on (39%) and being informed of how well NHDC is performing (41%). There have been significant drops in how well informed residents feel about these measures since 2015. For the first time, residents were also asked how interested they were about receiving information and over 80% were interested in being informed about what the Council spends its money and how well it is performing. The Council does regularly publish information in Outlook magazine, the website, press releases, committee reports etc. on how it is performing, however Senior Management Team will need to consider whether there are any further ways of communicating this information effectively.

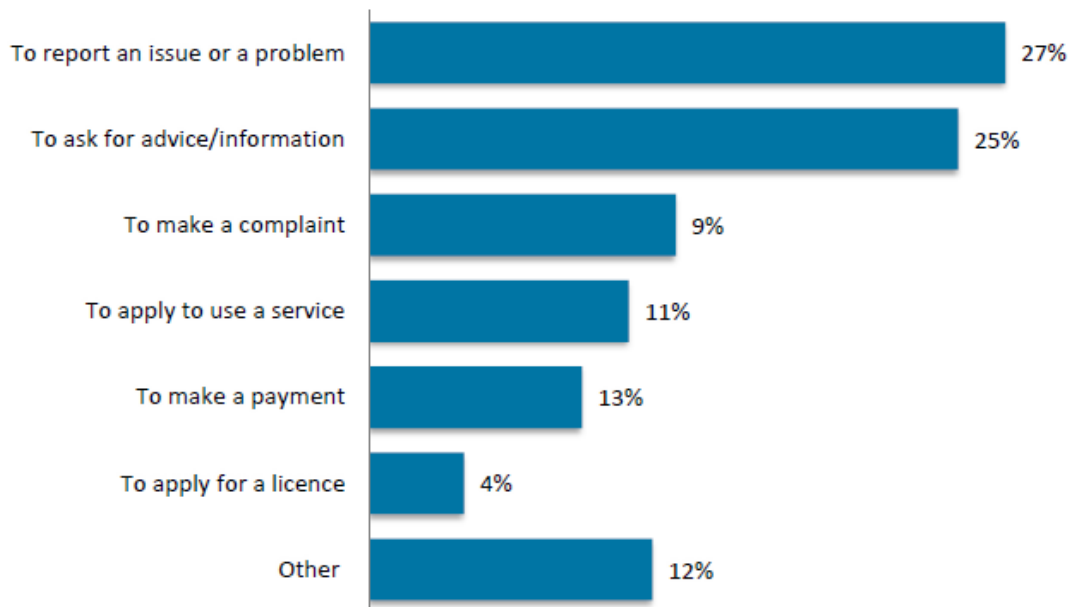
8.3.9 **Observations on Outlook magazine:** Although recall rates of residents who had seen Outlook magazine have dropped slightly, they are still high and above industry standards. Recall rates also vary according to how frequently a magazine is distributed, for example a survey in a London Borough where the magazine was issued fortnightly achieved an 83% recall rate, compared to a recall rate for Outlook of 72% which is distributed three times a year (at the time of the 2015 survey this was four times a year). In recent years the Council has altered its method of distributing Outlook

– from Royal Mail to door to door distribution. Unfortunately our suppliers advise this does usually have a small impact on distribution recall rates, however door to door distribution is significantly cheaper than Royal Mail. There are certain areas of the district, particularly Royston, with lower distribution recall than others and therefore this will be investigated with our distributors. However, it is worth noting that distributors all wear GPS tracking devices which show the roads they have been down, copies of which are made available to the Council. To date in the contract there have been no significant issues with non-delivery to streets in Royston.

8.4 Contact with the Council

- 8.4.1 In the last 12 months, 56% of residents have contacted NHDC – slightly higher than the 53% observed in 2015. Just over one in ten residents (11%) have contacted the Council five or more times in the past 12 months. Residents age 16-24 are the least likely to say they have contacted the Council in the last 2 months, with 72% saying they haven't done so.
- 8.4.2 Reporting an issue or problem is the most common reason for Council contact (27%), followed by to ask for advice / information (25%). These were also the most common reasons for contact in 2015. Figure 18 shows the reasons for contact.

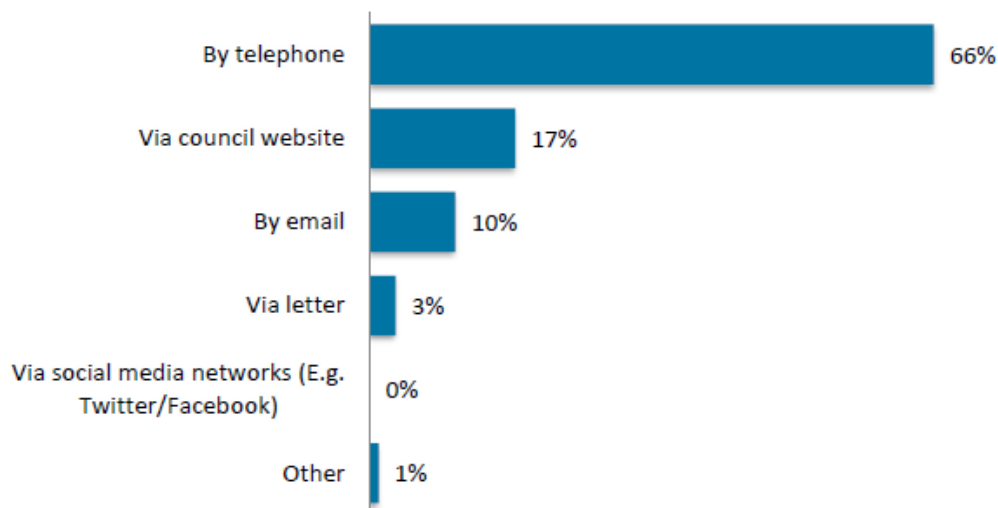
Figure 18: Which of these describes the reason why you made your most recent contact with the Council? (Where contacted the Council in the last 12 months)



Unweighted sample base: 549

- 8.4.3 The majority of residents contacted the Council by telephone (66%), similarly to the 2015 level (67%). While this has gone down since the 74% seen in 2013, this cannot by itself be seen as evidence of channel shift, as the question asked in 2015 was a single response one, whereas more than one response was possible in previous years. Figure 19 shows methods of contact.

Figure 19: How did you contact the Council? (Where contacted the Council in the last 12 months)



Unweighted sample base: 551

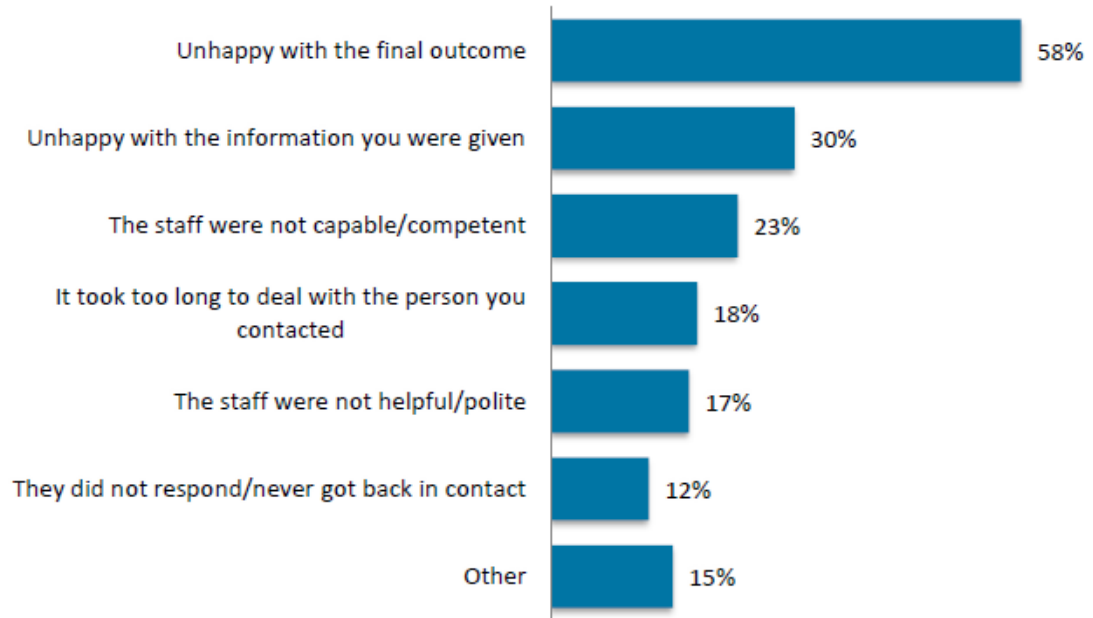
8.4.4 Table 16 shows the reason for contact by channel used. This shows that contact via the NHDC website is more commonly used for transactional activities such as making payments (14%), or applying to use a service (17%). Telephone contact is most commonly used for reporting an issue or problem (31%).

Table 16: Reason for Council contact by channel used (where contact made in the last 12 months)

	In person	Telephone	Email	Council website
To make a payment	9%	9%	4%	14%
To ask for advice/information	24%	25%	25%	27%
To report an issue or a problem	14%	31%	17%	22%
To make a complaint	4%	15%	18%	3%
To apply to use a service	11%	10%	13%	17%
To apply for a licence	3%	2%	2%	10%
Other	34%	9%	22%	8%
Unweighted Bases	21	352	55	93

8.4.5 Residents were asked how satisfied they were with the level of service they received the last time they contacted the Council. 74% of residents indicated they were satisfied (75% in 2015) with 40% saying they were very satisfied (46% in 2015). Of the 22% of residents who said they were dissatisfied, 58% were unhappy with the final outcome while 30% said they were unhappy with the information given. See Figure 21 below for the full responses (please note the small sample size of 120 residents). Residents in Letchworth are significantly more likely to feel that the staff were not helpful/polite towards them when contacting the Council (32% cf. 17%). Southern Rural residents were significantly less likely to feel that the staff were not helpful or polite (4% cf. 17%).

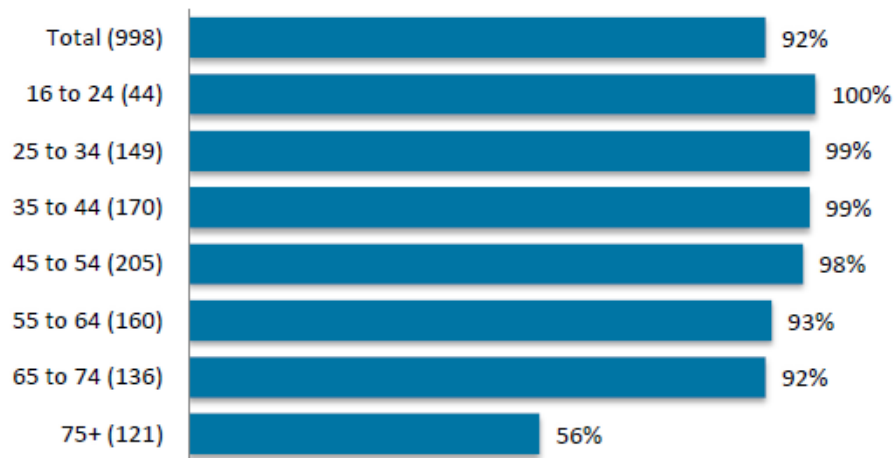
Figure 21: Why were you dissatisfied with the service you received the last time you were in contact with the Council? (Where dissatisfied with the service they received)



Unweighted sample base: 120

8.4.6 92% of residents indicated they have access to the internet. Analysis by age group shows that for all but one age group at least nine in ten have access, the exceptions being those aged 75+ (56%), although this proportion has seen a 10 percentage point increase since 2015.

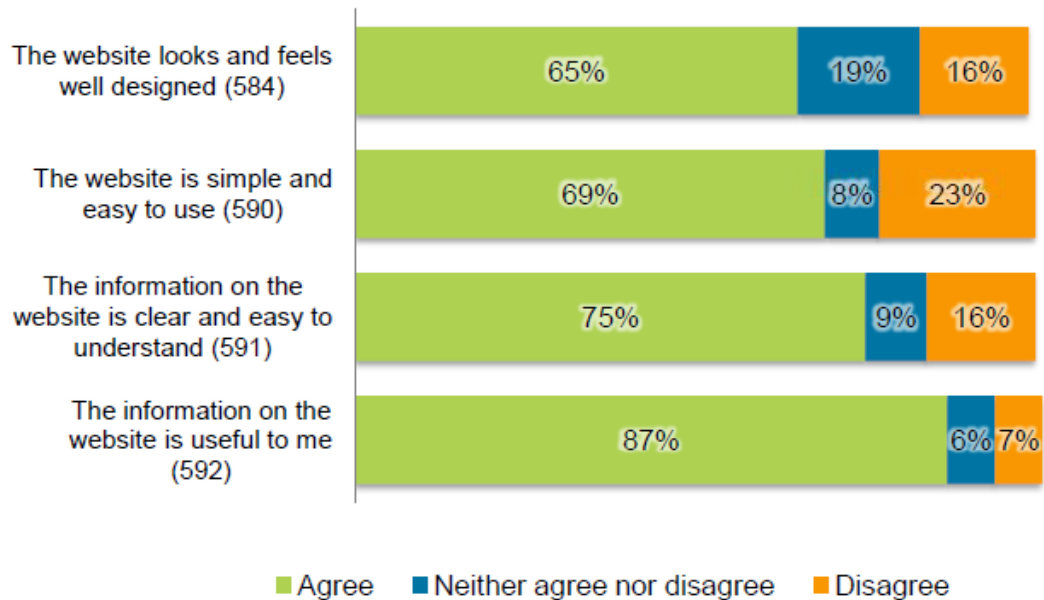
Figure 22: Do you have access to the Internet? (All valid responses)



Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

8.4.7 Six in ten (61%) of all respondents have visited NHDC's website over the last 12 months. Around three-quarters (73%) of residents aged 35-44 have visited the website in the last 12 months. The lowest proportion is those aged 75+ with just 30% visiting the website. Visitors to the website were then asked a series of questions about how they felt about different aspects of the site. Just under nine in ten visitors (87%) suggest that the information on the website is useful to them; 75% agree that it is clear and easy to understand, while 69% feel it is simple and easy to use. Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) disagreed that the website was easy to use. See Figure 24.

Figure 24: Visitor views on Council website (Where visited North Hertfordshire District Council's website)



Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

8.4.8 **Observations on contact with the Council:** Para 8.5.3 shows that telephone is by far the most popular form of contact with the Council, with 66% of people choosing to contact the Council in this way. As telephone contact is costly and often not the quickest and most convenient solution for residents, a Channel Shift project has been set up with the aim of driving people to use digital channels wherever possible. Initiatives being considered under the project include improving e-forms, introducing telephone automation and web chat facilities.

8.4.9 **Observations on Council website:** The results for the website are largely positive. The main area for attention is the 23% of respondents who disagreed that the website is simple and easy to use. There are some areas of the site which are maintained by third part providers, however both the committee and council meetings section of the site and the planning portal are due to be or have already been recently upgraded (or changed suppliers) and it is hoped that this may address previous issues with these parts of the site. A project is also underway to look at all of the e-forms on the site to check they are easy to use. Also to be implemented in 2018/19 is a new Find My Nearest facility which will allow residents to view key information about Council services relevant to them and their area on one page.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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. It oversees the provision of all the Council's services other than those reserved to the Council, and therefore can consider the outcome of the District Wide Service report.
- 9.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report. If actions are identified as a result of the findings of the District Wide Survey then 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 The District Wide Survey is important for shaping the Council's Objectives. There is a risk however, that should this survey not be acted upon, that public satisfaction with the Council will reduce and this would have a negative impact on the Council's reputation. In order to reduce this risk, Heads of Service/Corporate Managers are prompted to address the outcome from the survey in their service planning.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its 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 usefully highlights a few areas where satisfaction levels could be improved. Broadly though, the services that NHDC provides to residents are well received. Any mitigating actions may be incorporated into the formulation of the relevant Service Plans to improve service provision. These will be proportionate and reflect the authority's duty under the public Sector Duty. Identified service improvements may require an analysis of equality impact prior to the point of implementation.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this report.

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.

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17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 The full report from BMG Research can be found under the 'publications and consultations' section of the NHDC website: www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/customer-services/publications-and-consultations/district-wide-survey
- 17.2 NHDC Consultation Strategy 2016-2020: www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/customer-services/publications-and-consultations/consultation-strategy-2016-2020