

# Northumberland People's Panel

## 2010-2013

### Northumberland Knowledge Research Report

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**Prepared by**

Shona Rowe

Northumberland County Council Policy and Research Team

e-mail. [shona.rowe@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:shona.rowe@northumberland.gov.uk)

telephone: (01670) 624746



web. [www.knowledge.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.knowledge.northumberland.gov.uk) | e-mail. [knowledge@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:knowledge@northumberland.gov.uk)

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## 1 Introduction

The Northumberland People's Panel, which has been running for the last three years, is a pool of 1,100 residents representative of the County's population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and geographical area. The panel is a consultative body of local residents, used to help identify local priorities and to consult service users and non-users on specific issues. It gives residents a chance to have their say about life in the county and about local public services. Using a People's Panel for co-ordinated consultation exercises can overcome issues such as duplication, response rates, cost, and time. The results of the consultation are used to inform decision-making and promote local democracy by encouraging residents to have a bigger say in matters of concern. Six surveys have been completed between 2010 and the end of 2013 focussed on three topic areas – lifestyle, access to services and cleaner, greener, safer & stronger.

This report aims to pull together the headline data from these surveys, highlight the impact the surveys have had on services and give an overview of the past 3 years. This final report will conclude the current People's Panel programme with a new panel being recruited over the coming months for the next three years.

## 2 Background & Methodology

In May 2010 Northumberland County Council commissioned SMSR (Social & Market Strategic Research) to recruit and manage a People's Panel for the county. The initial panel had 1,100 members representative of the county in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and geography, although this had reduced to 1,025 by the time of the last survey in September 2013. Response rates have varied across the period from a low of 38% to a high of 51% (see table 1).

**Table 1 - Response Rates by Survey**

	<b>Shaping our Services – Strategic Priorities (Oct 2010)</b>	<b>Access to Services (July 2011)</b>	<b>Cleaner, Greener, Safer, Stronger (Oct 2011)</b>	<b>Lifestyle (April 2012)</b>	<b>Access to Services (Feb 2013)</b>	<b>Lifestyle (Sept 2013)</b>
Response Rate	38%	48%	51%	51%	50%	46%
Total Responses	414	527	553	536	514	468
<b>Panel Size</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>1,084</b>	<b>1,070</b>	<b>1,025</b>	<b>1,025</b>

Source: SMSR Final Reports

Each consultation has followed the same methodology. The consultation was undertaken using a questionnaire designed by SMSR in conjunction with officers at Northumberland County Council. All panel members were sent a letter to explain the consultation subject, a copy of the questionnaire and the results of the previous consultation. A pre-paid envelope was also included so that residents could return their survey free of charge. Residents were initially given a three week period in which to complete and return the survey. Respondents who had not returned their questionnaire were then sent a reminder letter and questionnaire, which gave them a further two weeks to complete and return the questionnaire.

A report was then produced for each consultation by SMSR which included a set of top-line findings providing a quick reference to all the questions asked throughout the survey and analysis by location and demographic group highlighting any significant differences in opinion across the demographic variables. The reports for the six surveys can be accessed on the Northumberland County Council [website](#).

In general the questions asked in each topic are kept the same so comparison can be made over time. There are additional questions included if there is an issue for which residents views would be useful if it fits with the theme of the consultation. There are two sources of questions. Firstly a small number of questions which have previously been included in the residents perceptions surveys in 2009 and 2012 to track residents perceptions over time. The remainder of the questions have been included to monitor people's perceptions for a variety of services across the council to help shape these services.

### 3 Headline results, change over time and key actions

The following analysis provides headline figures and comparisons between surveys for a selection of questions included in the consultation. Full reports analysing each of the questions can be accessed via the County Council's [website](#). This section also gives detail of key actions implemented by the relevant services as a direct result of comments made via the People's Panel.

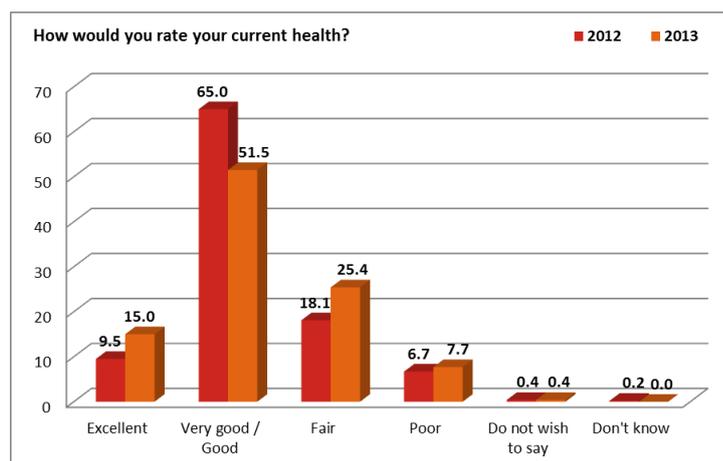
#### 3.1 Lifestyle Surveys

The objective of the lifestyle surveys was to gather information on health, the economic outlook and future development. The lifestyle surveys have been undertaken twice in April 2012 and September 2013.

##### 3.1.1 Health

The health questions aim to evaluate individuals' perception of their health and lifestyle.

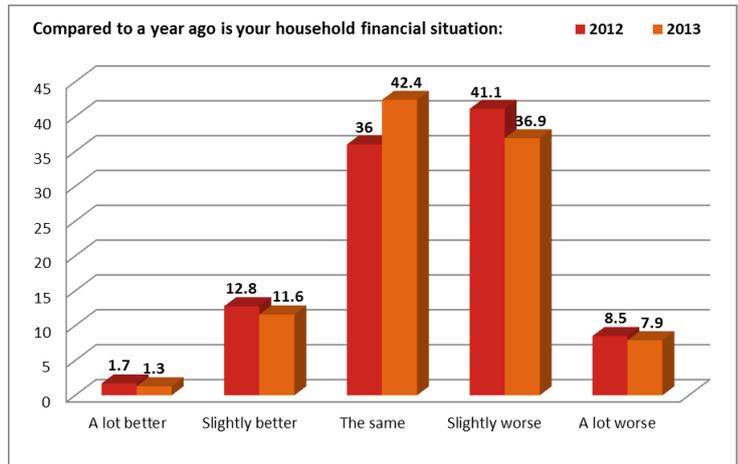
- In 2012 75% considered their current health to be at least good. This had fallen to 67% in 2013.
- Of those that considered their health to be poor, mobility issues were the primary cause in 2012 (61.1%) and poor sleep patterns in 2013 (50.6%).
- 46% felt they were overweight or obese in 2012 compared to 44% in 2013.
- 84% of respondents in 2012 felt they had a healthy, well balanced diet compared to 82% in 2013.
- 72% of respondents in 2012 had consumed alcohol on at least one occasion in the last seven days compared to 71% in 2013.
- Whilst a high proportion of respondents had consumed alcohol, the majority had consumed a number within the government's recommended guidelines.
- 74.8% of respondents felt good about themselves either all or most of the time compared to 76.7% when the question was repeated in 2013.



##### 3.1.2 Economic Outlook

These questions aim to understand residents' perception of the economic outlook of the local area and the major issues with regards to the economy.

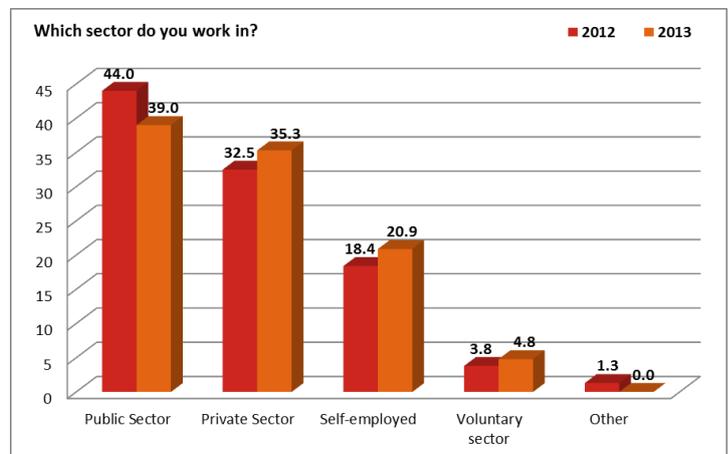
- 49% of households in 2012 and 46.1% in 2013 have a household income that was £30,000 or lower.
- 66% of respondents in 2012 felt that the economic situation of the town they most often frequented had become worse since the previous year. This had fallen to 53% in 2013 indicating an improvement.
- 70% of respondents in 2012 were expecting the economic situation in Northumberland to worsen over the coming year. This had fallen to 45% in 2013 again implying people's perceptions of the current economic situation may be improving.
- 69% reported a reduction in household spend on local attractions and cultural activities in 2012 compared to 61% in 2013.
- 57% of respondents in 2012 reported a reduction in household spend on recreation, leisure and sport compared to 59% in 2013.
- 69% of respondents who were in paid employment in 2012 worked in Northumberland compared to 68% in 2013. The majority of respondents who worked outside of Northumberland worked in Tyne & Wear.
- In 2012 respondents perceived the lack of jobs and rising petrol prices as the biggest economic issue affecting the whole of Northumberland. In 2013 increased household bills were seen as the biggest economic threat.



### 3.1.3 Employment

These questions aim to assess current employment and the employability of individuals (including the skills possessed and employment preferences).

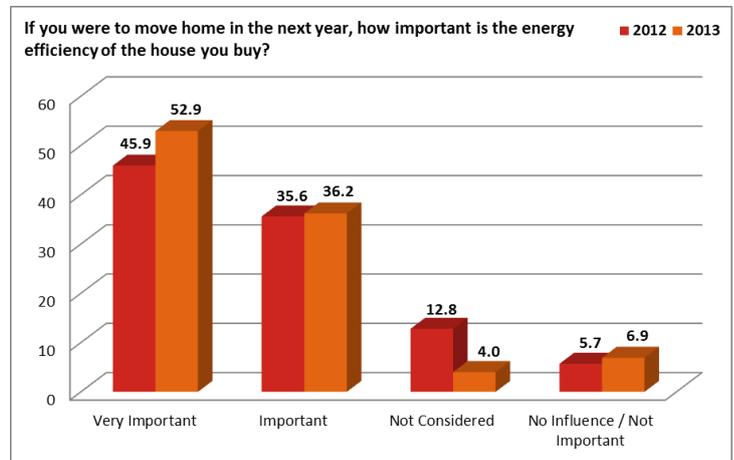
- 66% of respondents in 2012 felt that if they needed to find employment in the next six months their chances of being successful would be either poor or very poor. This decreased to 55% in 2013.
- The percentage of respondents employed in the public sector fell from 44% in 2012 to 39% in 2013.



### 3.1.4 Transport & Sustainable Development

These questions aim to evaluate use of various forms of transport, as well as obstacles which prevent respondents from using more sustainable transportation. They assess views on future housing development and planned energy efficiency improvements.

- When choosing where to live good transport links, access to healthcare and food shops were seen as most important in both surveys.
- When accessing services the most popular mode of transport was using a car/motorcycle.
- Poor weather conditions were cited as the main barrier preventing respondents from increasing their use of sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling.
- Respondents also reported that reliability and cost were the main barriers to using the bus.
- In relation to sustainable development 82% of respondents in 2012 and 89% in 2013 said that if they were to buy a new house, energy efficiency is something that would be important.



### 3.1.5 Key Actions

A number of key actions in terms of lifestyle have been implemented as a result of the comments made via the People's Panel. These have included:

<p><u>Health</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional analysis to determine targeted support required from public health for disadvantaged priority groups.</li> <li>• As only 23% of respondents obtained Health and Social Care information from the Council the way in which health information is advertised has been reviewed.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Employment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's Employability Team will compare the People's Panel results against existing evidence to ensure that employability services are targeted appropriately.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Economic Outlook</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The People's Panel survey will be used as an annual 'economic barometer' to build longer term analysis of residents views which will contribute to the Council's statutory economic assessment.</li> <li>• When planning future support to the business community skills and employment opportunities and requirements will be included.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Transport &amp; Sustainable Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted marketing and communication campaign to encourage residents to use alternative modes of transport.</li> <li>• Promotion of the actual costs of using a car compared to the bus and development of a pre-paid smart card for use on buses.</li> <li>• Development of targets relating to energy efficiency in the Code for Sustainable Housing.</li> </ul>

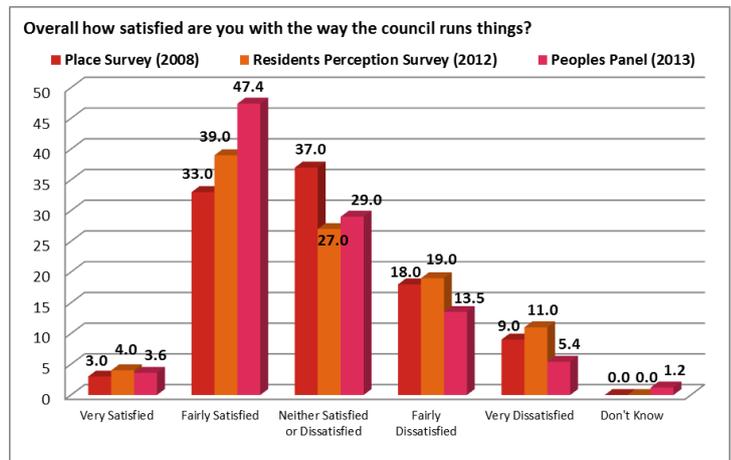
### 3.2 Access to Services

The objective of the access to services surveys was to gather information on local services, communication and broadband. This topic has been covered three times, twice based around similar questions in July 2011 and February 2013 which are analysed here. The first survey considered the councils budget in 2010 so has not been included in this analysis.

#### 3.2.1 Access to Services

These questions aim to evaluate opinion of local services, including the frequency of use.

- In 2013 51% of respondents were satisfied with the way the council runs things, and less than 19% were dissatisfied. This is an increase in satisfaction on both the 2008 Place Survey (36%) and 2012 Residents Perception Survey (43%)<sup>1</sup>.
- Around 61% of respondents felt either very or fairly well informed about the Council and its services, although this does represent a



reduction of 9% when compared with 2011 results. Both results are higher than the 2008 Place Survey (39%) and the 2012 Residents Perception Survey (49%) although this in part could be due to the difference in methodology between the two surveys (see footnote 1 below).

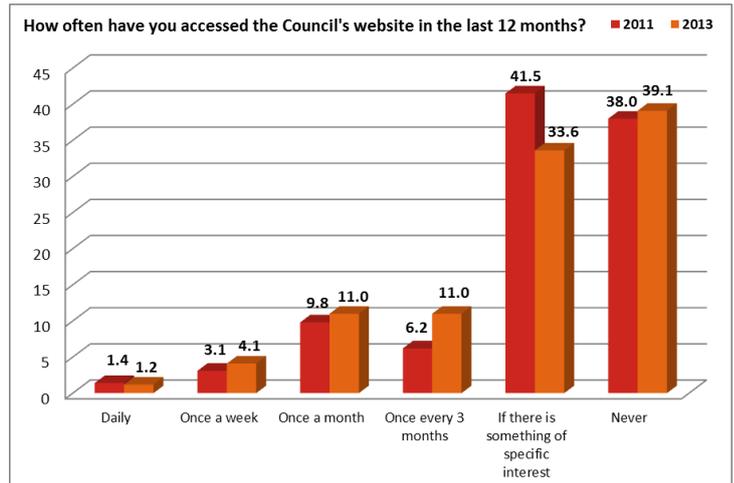
- Respondents in 2013 were most satisfied with local tips and recycling centres (89.6%), household refuse and recycling collections (83.4%) and street lighting (72%). The services respondents were most dissatisfied with were road maintenance (75%), pavement maintenance (59.3%) and winter maintenance (38.8%).
- 40% of respondents in 2013 report that they had never accessed a library which is an increase of 8% on 2011 results.

#### 3.2.2 Communication

These questions aim to understand preferred methods of communication and gather information on previous experiences of contacting the council.

<sup>1</sup> The Place Survey (2008) and Residents Perception Survey (2012) cannot be reliably measured against the results of the Peoples Panel as the methodology and data collection of the three surveys are not comparable. The results do however give an **indication** of the change in perception of residents to a particular topic.

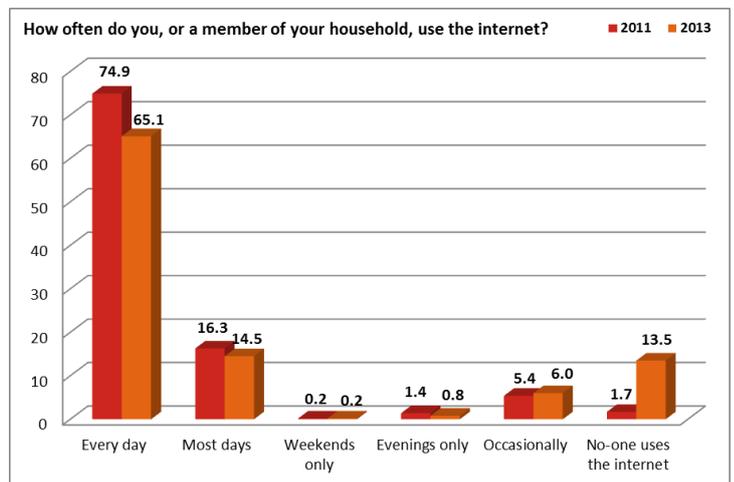
- 61% of respondents in 2013 had contacted the council in the last 12 months compared to 58% in 2011.
- The majority of respondents stated a preference for **contacting** the council by either phone or through the website and to **receive** information via the website and by post.
- 61% of respondents had accessed the Council's website in the previous 12 months, which is a reduction of 1% on 2011 results. 39.1% of respondents in 2013 had never used the website and of the 61% who had 33.6% only accessed the website if there was something of specific interest.
- 66% of respondents rated the range of information available on the website as either excellent or good which is an increase of 5% on 2011.



### 3.2.3 Broadband / Connectivity

These questions aim to assess opinion and use of the internet, including specific pages such as the council's website and to understand perceptions of the internet both now and in the future.

- 65% of respondents said either themselves or a member of the household used the internet on a daily basis in 2013, which was a reduction of 10 percentage points on 2011 figures (75%).
- The percentage of respondents saying they do not use the internet increased from 1.7% in 2011 to 13.5% in 2013.
- 78% of respondents in 2013 believed that the internet would become more important to them in the future.
- The highest percentage of respondents in the 2013 survey felt that the internet could help them keep in contact with family / friends (89%) and improve their education (86%).



### 3.2.4 Key Actions

A number of key actions in terms of access to services have been implemented as a result of the comments made via the People's Panel. These have included:

<u>Access to Services</u>	<u>Communication</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A total of 34,000 potholes were repaired during 2012/13 and the Council has invested in two new 'JetPatcher' machines to speed up the repair of potholes.</li><li>• The council is looking to move from flagstones to tarmac footpaths, which provides a less labour intensive and tidier environment. Mechanical sweepers are now being deployed using heavy duty brushes to weed rip and remove all soil deposits on pavements.</li><li>• A county-wide programme to deliver multi-use facilities, which offer local people access to a range of services under one roof, including library services, is currently being developed. During 2012/2013, this type of facility was delivered at Cramlington and Seaton Delaval.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Northumberland is now nationally recognised as a leader in online engagement through social media. There is a thriving community using sites like Facebook and Twitter to stay in touch with the Council with more than 50,000 people now signed up.</li><li>• The Council's website will be further developed to improve the customer experience. Content, design and navigation of the webpages will be reviewed as part of this programme. Activities to equip people with the skills and information they need to use them will take place.</li><li>• A recently developed 'Save time, do it online' feature has been developed which allows customers to report, book and pay for services using the website.</li><li>• Redesign of the website has made it more user friendly on a range of devices such as smartphones and tablets.</li></ul>

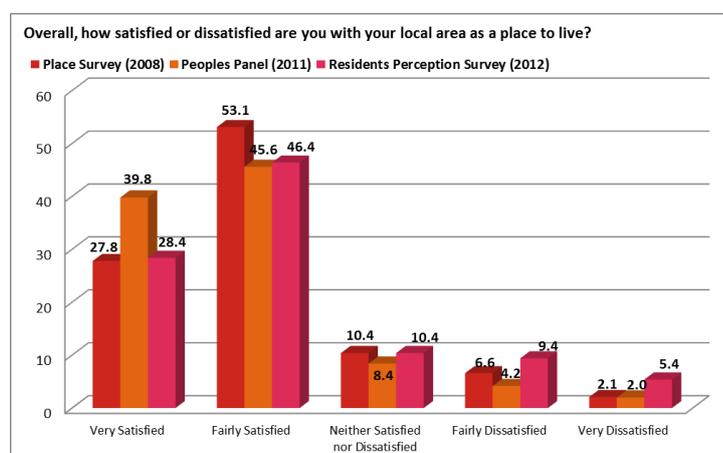
### 3.3 Cleaner, Greener, Safer & Stronger

Only one survey has been carried out for this topic (Autumn 2011) although some questions can be compared to data collected in the Place Survey (2008) and Residents Perception Survey (2012). The objective of the cleaner, greener, safer & stronger survey was to give residents the opportunity to provide their views on the local area and how well they are served by local services which will then be used to improve the services provided in future.

#### 3.3.1 Local Area & Local Services

These questions aim to gain resident's views of their local area and assess satisfaction with and use of local public services.

- 85.4% of respondents to the survey in 2011 were very or fairly satisfied with their local area as a place to live. This was higher than both the 2008 Place Survey (81%) and the 2012 Residents Perception Survey (75%)<sup>2</sup>.
- 76% of respondents in 2011 felt local public services were easy to access locally, 67% thought they were making the area safer and 66% considered believed they were making the area cleaner and greener.
- 65% of respondents in 2011 felt local public services treated all types of people fairly, 54% that they act on the concerns of local residents, 51% felt that they promote the interests of local residents and 49% that they are in touch with the local needs of residents.
- High levels of satisfaction were expressed with tips / household waste recycling centres (87%), the recycling bin collection (85%), the services provided by the Fire and Rescue Service (85%) and refuse collection (84%).
- Lower levels of satisfaction were expressed with road repairs and maintenance (28% were satisfied) and footpath repairs and maintenance (27% were satisfied).



#### 3.3.2 Service Standards

These questions aim to gather resident's opinion of the standards for cleaner, greener, safer and stronger communities.

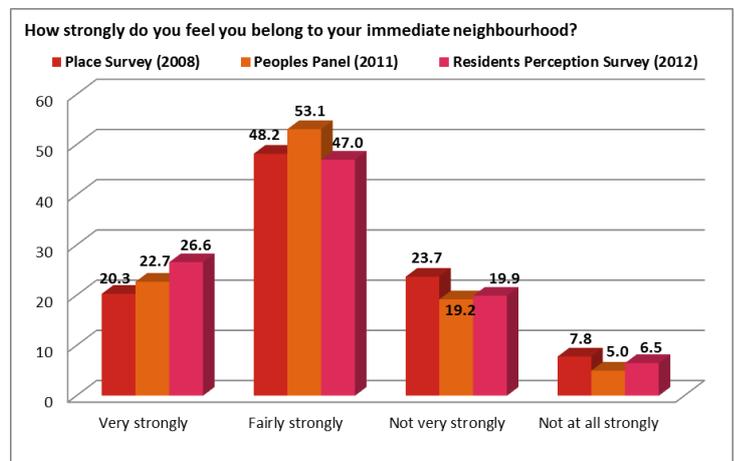
<sup>2</sup> The Place Survey (2008) and Residents Perception Survey (2012) cannot be reliably measured against the results of the Peoples Panel as the methodology and data collection of the three surveys are not comparable. The results do however give an **indication** of the change in perception of residents to a particular topic.

- Draft standards for waste management (94%); street lighting and signs (96%); public rights of way (91%) and neighbourhood enforcement (94%) were considered adequate by most, with significant proportions considering them to be excellent or very good.
- Draft standards for highway maintenance and repair, winter gritting and dog fouling require further consideration as around a fifth of respondents considered these standards to be either inadequate or poor.

### 3.3.3 Local Involvement & Local Influence

These questions aim to assess how informed and involved resident's feel.

- 76% of respondents in 2011 felt very / fairly strongly that they belonged to their immediate neighbourhood.
- 60% of respondents in 2011 disagreed that they could influence decisions in their local area which is lower than the 2008 Place Survey (72%) and 2012 Residents Survey (73%).
- In 2011 24% responded that they would like



- to be more involved with decisions which affect their local area and 64% stated they may want to be more involved depending on the issue.
- 54% of respondents in 2011 agreed that by working together people in their neighbourhood could influence decisions which affect their area which was higher than those responding to the 2008 Place Survey (49%).
- 36% would raise a long standing issue or concern about their local area through their town / parish council (36%); a further 25% said they would raise the issue with a Northumberland county councillor.

### 3.3.4 Influencing Local Development

These questions aim to advise on the preferred method of providing various types of feedback.

- More than three fifths (62%) said a postal survey was the most effective method of consultation and seeking residents views about local development, and a further 26% said it would be the second most effective method.

### 3.3.5 Key Actions

<p><u>Local Area &amp; Local Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has a programme of engagement with local councils through dedicated Area Committee meetings, regular meetings between Northumberland Association of Local Councils. Future plans involve continuing to meet with local councils either individually or as a small group. In addition many members attend all parish council meetings in their area so are informed about local issues and are often active in bringing about solutions.</li> <li>• The Council also uses Area Committees to engage with residents and community organisations at an area level. Each year, a State of the Area review is carried out by each Area Committee so members of the public can raise local issues.</li> <li>• To address concerns about roads and pavements, customer-centric improvement activity is underway. Any complaints received are actively scrutinised so that issues relating to repairs are dealt with quickly and effectively within the budget available.</li> <li>• The Council is developing new ways of working in partnership with communities to ensure roads and open spaces are maintained, safe and welcoming for those living in or visiting the area. This includes Neighbourhood Agreements. Currently there are schemes operating in Blyth, Ashington and Berwick. The learning from these schemes will be used to inform future delivery.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Local Involvement &amp; Local Influence</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council provides in excess of £1 million pounds in grant funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Northumberland.</li> <li>• The Council provides a Community Chest of £300,000 to support grassroots organisations. This fund supports a wide range of activity that includes cultural events and festivals, help for vulnerable groups, environmental activity and support for grassroots sport.</li> <li>• The Council has also implemented a new approach to funding support for voluntary and community groups. An "Assembly" has been developed to bring all voluntary and community groups together across Northumberland, as well as a "Civic Alliance". The Alliance encourages cross sector working across the voluntary and community sector in Northumberland.</li> <li>• The Council also funds a wide range of services which are delivered by the VCS which includes provision of leisure, sport and cultural services.</li> <li>• The Parish Council Charter outlines how the County Council and parish councils can work together for the benefit of local residents. This is currently being revised and has been widely consulted on with the Northumberland Association of Local Councils and all local councils. The revised Charter outlines the County Council's commitment to working in partnership and to communicate and consult effectively with all local councils.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Service Standards</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The final content of the service standards relating to greener, cleaner, safer, stronger, are available on the Council's website so that residents know what standards of service delivery they can expect to receive given the available budget. Performance against standards will be actively monitored.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Influencing Local Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An engagement programme for the Local Development Framework (LDF) is underway. The Council will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this programme and ensure it feeds into future consultation planning.</li> </ul>

## 5 Conclusion & the Future of the People's Panel

Over the past three years the views of members of the People's Panel in Northumberland have been invaluable in assisting with planning and prioritising services more effectively and helping make informed decisions about the facilities provided across the county.

Over the next few months membership of the People's Panel will be renewed and expanded to around 2,500 members. The People's Panel will be managed and maintained by an in-house team with the aim being to continue the cycle of consultation two to three times a year. The aim is to carry out future surveys by either e-mail or via the internet to provide better value for money and improve efficiency of the consultation. Feedback on all future surveys will continue to be provided via the County Council's [website](#).

For more information on the People's Panel contact:

Kirsten Francis

Principal Policy Officer

(01670)624741

[kirsten.francis@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:kirsten.francis@northumberland.gov.uk)