



Northumberland
County Council



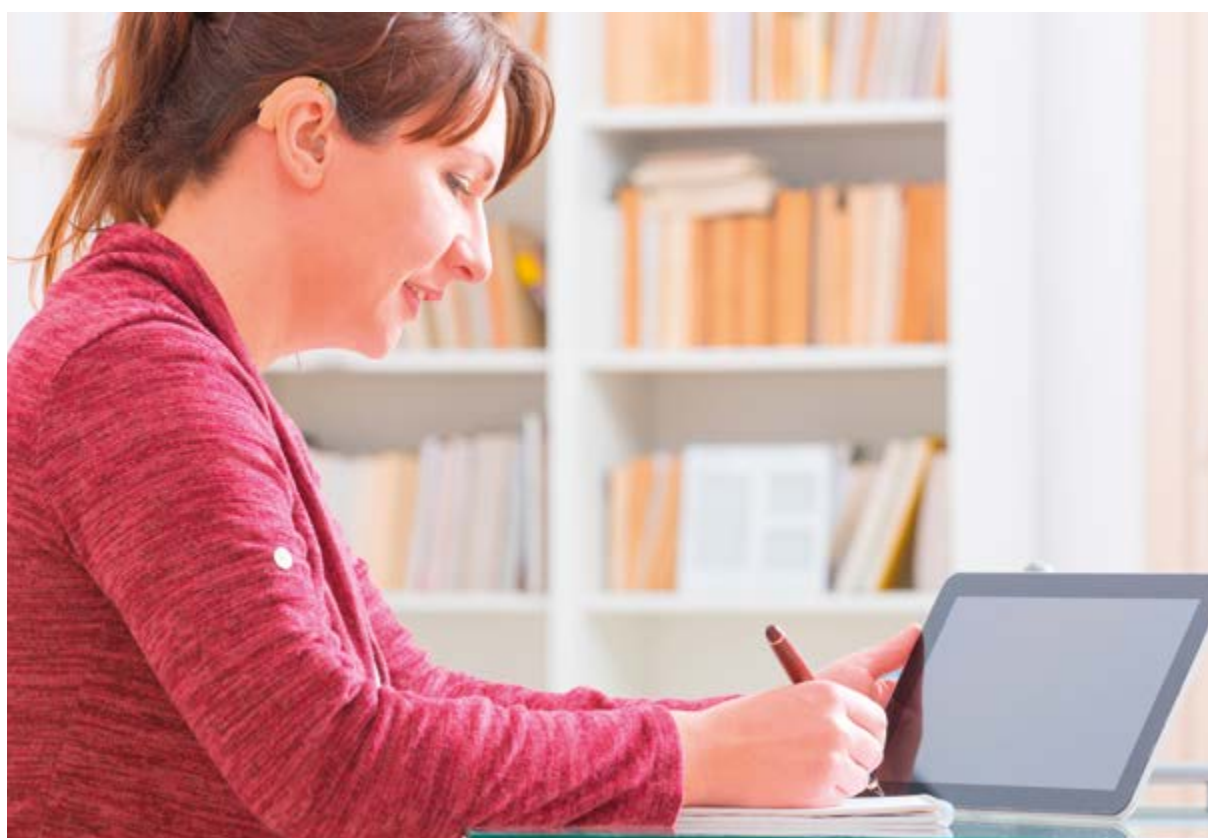
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Summary Report: Objectives Consultation

www.northumberland.gov.uk

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Introduction

For Northumberland County Council, the setting of equality objectives is more than a requirement under the Equality Act 2010. It allows us to reflect on all that we have achieved so far, and to identify what we still need to do to make Northumberland a great place to live and work.

The communities we serve are at the heart of everything we do, and our belief is that to deliver our values of Respect, Residents First, Excellence and Quality and Keeping Our Communities Safe and Well, we need to demonstrate that we are truly inclusive and equitable in our approach. Most importantly, however, we need to listen to the views of our communities and understand what they need from us as a local leader.

We really appreciate all the people and organisations that responded to the consultation and have tried to listen and learn from your comments and suggestions. We have amended our vision and objectives in response to this consultation.

Background

Northumberland County Council has a responsibility and commitment to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it (for example by meeting specific needs, minimising difficulties faced or encouraging participation in public life); and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010.

- Age
- Disability
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Sexual orientation

A photograph of two women sitting together, looking at a laptop screen. The woman on the left is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and is smiling. The woman on the right is wearing a yellow sweater and is looking down at the screen. In the top right corner, there are three decorative circles: a yellow one, a white one, and a small purple one. A large yellow quotation mark is on the left side of the text box.

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We really appreciate all the people and organisations that responded to the consultation and have tried to listen and learn from your comments and suggestions. We have amended our vision and objectives in response to this consultation.

Our draft equality objectives

For Northumberland County Council, the legal requirement to set Equality Objectives is only part of the story, and we believe that equality and diversity is much more than a legal requirement.

In Spring 2021, we published our Equality Strategy, setting out how we hoped to build upon work done to date to develop a culture of inclusion. The aim of our Equality Strategy is to ensure that as an organisation we go beyond compliance and demonstrate an absolute and clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion both within the organisation, our wider communities and with our partners.

Within our Equality Strategy, we set out our draft key equality objectives. These objectives will underpin our wider equality and inclusion strategy and guide our work over the next four years.

The draft objectives were:

- Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities
- Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively
- Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to help us embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff
- Create a positive culture with strong leadership and, a commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners.

Following our consultation, we have accepted amendments to these objectives and our new agreed Equality Objectives are to:

- Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities
- Listen to, Involve and Respond to our communities effectively
- Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to help us embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff
- Create a positive culture, with a clear leadership commitment to improving equality diversity and inclusion both within the council, with our partners and the wider community.

How we consulted

Under normal circumstances the council would attend public meetings to engage directly with local community groups across the county, however Covid 19 restrictions meant that we were unable to hold face to face meetings.

As an alternative rather than defer consultation until Covid restrictions were lifted, the council decided to consult with our communities virtually, following a successful consultation on the council budget process earlier in the year. We published the consultation on the county council website and encouraged participation by contacting local groups, organisations and networks who had a potential interest. Information was also given through local and social media. We provided information in alternative formats including paper, large print and easy read copies. We used social media and worked with locality officers, community and voluntary organisations to circulate information about the consultation as widely as we could.

Key findings



In broad terms, our draft equality objectives and vision were viewed positively by respondents; our survey asked whether respondents agreed with our vision and each individual objective; over 95% of respondents agreed that they did.

Responses suggest that while there is strong theoretical support for the sentiment behind our objectives, there is an element of doubt as to whether the council will be able to implement these objectives in practice. The council is committed to ensuring that our actions speak louder than our words.

Some incredibly positive comments were made about our customer services and these comments were shared with the team. A comment was made that mental health services are under-resourced. This has been shared with the Health and Wellbeing team and Northumbria Healthcare NHS (National Health Service) Foundation Trust commissioning service. As an employer we have developed a health and wellbeing strategy. We have plans in place to promote the support available from the new Access to Work mental health support service to help people remain in employment.

A few respondents raised concerns that our objectives may be skewed towards certain demographics and protected characteristics. While the council is absolutely committed to addressing and eradicating discrimination and inequality throughout Northumberland, this will not be to the detriment of other demographic groups. It is therefore important that the council takes steps to address any such scepticism and makes it explicitly clear that these objectives will benefit everyone, irrespective of their own unique characteristics.

There was a clear message that we need to consider all our residents. Northumberland is a geographically diverse county and one of the biggest local authorities in geographical size in England; from Berwick upon Tweed in the North, Haltwhistle in the West, and Blyth in the East.

Our residents and communities are varied, and we want to ensure that we dispel any fears that our attentions are focused on those living in the larger towns to the detriment of those in the more rural areas. All our communities are important, and we will listen to and act upon their feedback. Any actions taken will be based on evidence about needs with targeted action to address these needs.

We need to find ways to develop actions that include community networks and stakeholders and create ways for all voices and points of view to be considered. We also need to report on what we have done. During the consultation we received feedback from the community and staff groups requesting changes to our equality monitoring questions. These changes have been accepted and we will also change the questions we ask on our internal systems. It may take some time to achieve, as we will need to update our data collection systems.

Our objectives and vision were viewed by some as being safe, generic, and very 'public sector.' Our view is that our vision is bold and forward thinking. However, we value feedback and take these comments on board. We will act on them as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

The actions we develop to support delivery of these objectives will provide reassurance that they are targeted and specific. There was a comment that the vision did not mention Equality Impact assessments, however, this is included in the full Equality strategy. A comment about support for Trans people has been addressed in the response to the consultation below.

The council's commitment to inclusive design and improving access was valued by many people who responded. The council is investigating introducing a design supplementary planning document which will set out how developers of buildings and places design them to make them more accessible to all groups of people particularly, older, and disabled people.

Some suggestions were made to help improve our vision statement and it was suggested that we include the word 'welcoming' in our vision so diverse groups can feel part of their communities. This suggestion has been accepted and the Vision statement will be amended.

It was also suggested that we include safeguarding and protecting as part of the vision by aiming to make Northumberland a safe place to live. Some changes were also suggested to the objectives. We have amended the objectives in response to this feedback the new vision will now be:

We need to apply the principles of equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion in our decision making, in how we recruit and support our workforce and to the services we commission and deliver to our residents. We will work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sector, with local organisations who are supporting individuals and communities, and with organisations who are providing services on behalf of the council. We aim to help make Northumberland a safe, welcoming, accessible, and inclusive place.

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We believe that equality and diversity is much more than a legal requirement.





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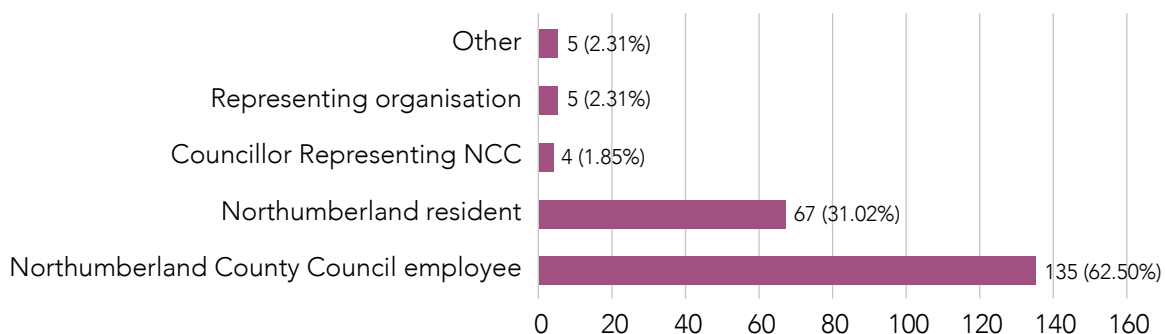
Who responded to the consultation?

The consultation ran from 12 March 2021 until 9 April 2021 and attracted a total of 216 responses; some respondents chose not to answer all questions within the consultation document. We would like to thank everyone who gave up their time to respond to this consultation and to provide such thoughtful and valued input. A breakdown of respondents is shown in Figures 1- 12 below:

Figure 1a

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Northumberland resident	67	31.02%
Northumberland County Council employee	135	62.50%
Councillor representing Northumberland County Council	4	1.85%
Representing an organisation	5	2.31%
Other	5	2.31%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 1b



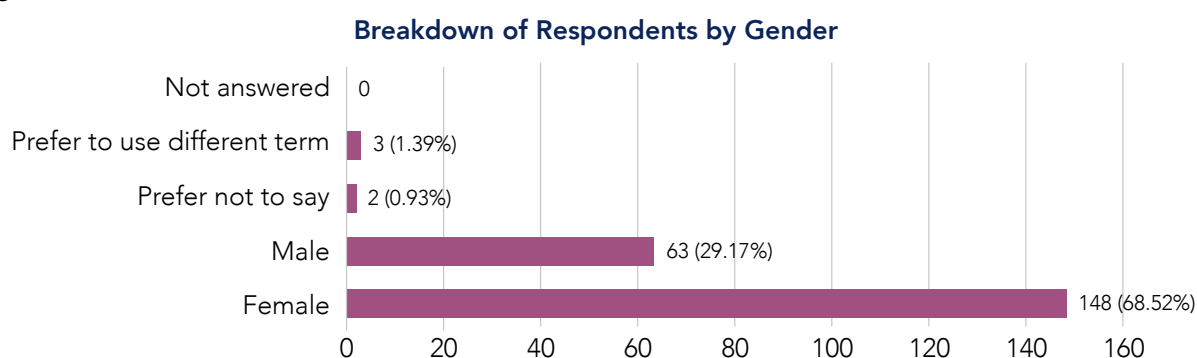
Comment: The majority of respondents were employees of the council, many of whom also live in Northumberland. We will look at ways of increasing promotion of future consultations. The number of Councillors responding to the consultation was low. We will work on increasing levels of engagement and participation with both employees and members.

Figure 2a

Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Female	148	68.52%
Male	63	29.17%
Prefer not to say	2	0.93%
Prefer to use a different term	3	1.39%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 2b



Comment: We know from the previous census that the population of Northumberland is split roughly evenly between males and females. The number of people who have transitioned or identify as a gender that is different from the sex identified at birth is not accurately known. The UK government estimate that there are approximately 200,000-500,000 trans people in the UK. Previous estimates were based on those who changed their passports or who were granted gender recognition certificates. A question on gender identity has been included for the first time in the 2021 census. An Equality and Human Rights Commission survey of 1,000 people found 1% of people identified as a gender other than male or female. 1.39% of people who completed our survey identified as a gender other than male or female.

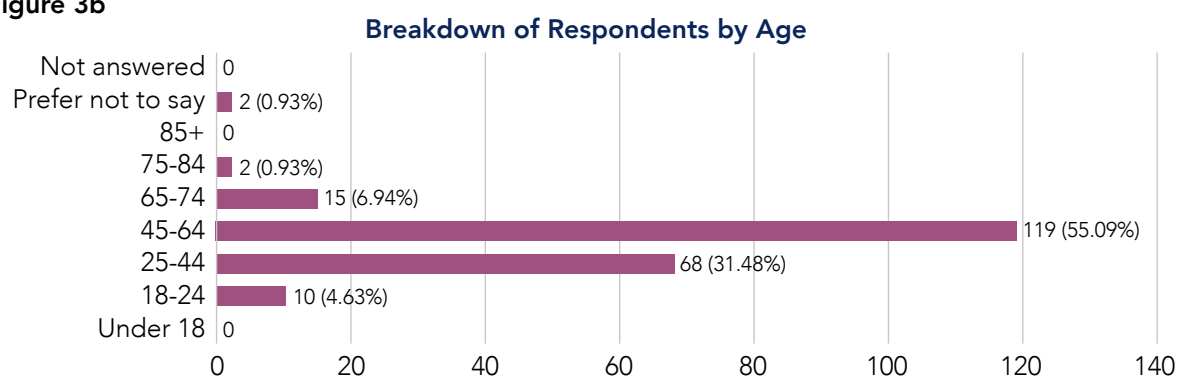
A significantly higher number of women completed our survey than men. Research shows that women tend to be more likely to self-select to participate in surveys (Smith 2009). However, it is important that we receive balanced feedback reflective of all our communities, and we will therefore look at ways in which we can encourage more males to respond to future consultations.

Figure 3a

Please indicate your age group

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Under 18	0	0.00%
18-24	10	4.63%
25-44	68	31.48%
45-64	119	55.09%
65-74	15	6.94%
75-84	2	0.93%
85+	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	2	0.93%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 3b



Comment: The number of younger people responding to our consultation was low, with people under the age of 25 amounting to less than 5% of all respondents. While not entirely unexpected, given that many young people were studying at home and not participating in youth groups or other venues we would usually engage with.

The views of the younger generation will be instrumental in shaping the future of Northumberland, and we need to look at ways of improving engagement levels with the under 25s. We will also look at alternative and innovative ways of raising the profile of future consultations amongst our younger population, by for example, further promotion across social media channels.

Figure 4a

Are you married or in a civil partnership?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Yes	128	59.26%
No	79	36.57%
Prefer not to say	9	4.17%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Northumberland County Council have a dedicated Ceremony Co-ordination team who support couples with weddings and civil partnerships. They can help with bookings, explain the legalities, and help personalise and deliver ceremonies.

Figure 4b

Breakdown of Respondents by Marital / Civil Partnership Status

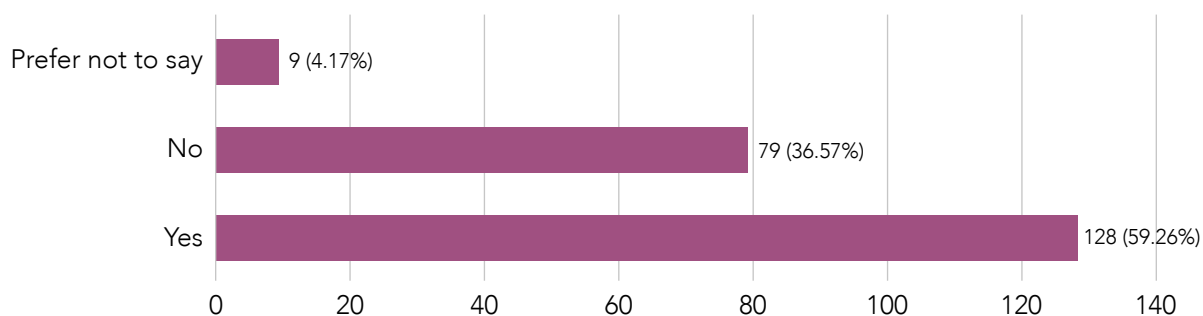


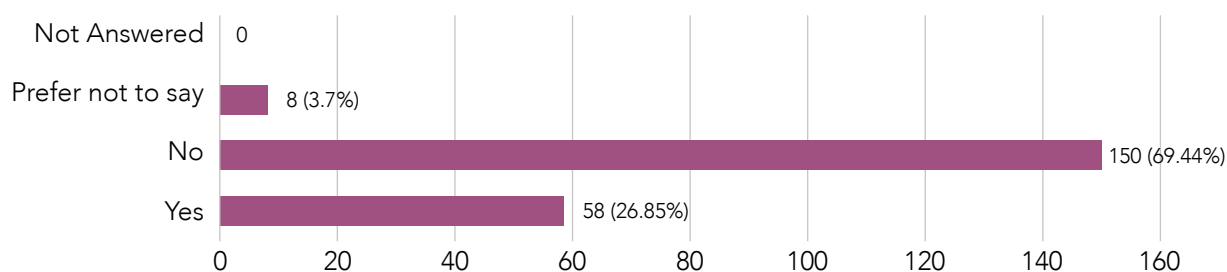
Figure 5a

Do you consider yourself to have a disability or a health condition?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Yes, if so, please indicate the type of disability or health condition you have. Please tick all those that apply.	58	26.85%
No	150	69.44%
Prefer not to say	8	3.70%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 5b

Breakdown of Respondents: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



Comment: It is noticeable that a substantial proportion (26.85%) of respondents considered themselves to have a disability. Across the UK, approximately 19% of working age adults are disabled. The fact that significant numbers of people who consider themselves to be disabled responded to our consultation tells us that there is a high level of engagement within that group, but also perhaps suggests that it is a group which still feels under-represented and lacking a voice or that this group is particularly affected by access and inclusion issues.

Figure 6a

If you have a disability or health condition, please indicate the type of disability or health condition you have

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Physical disability such as difficulty using your arms or mobility issues	12	5.56%
Sensory disability such as being blind or partially sighted or being Deaf or having hearing loss	4	1.85%
Mental health condition such as anxiety or depression	26	12.04%
Long-standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy	20	9.26%
Learning disability/difficulty (such as Down's syndrome or neurodiverse (such as ADHD, Autism or dyslexia)	12	5.56%
Other	6	2.78%
Prefer not to specify	7	3.24%
Not Answered	153	70.83%

Figure 6b

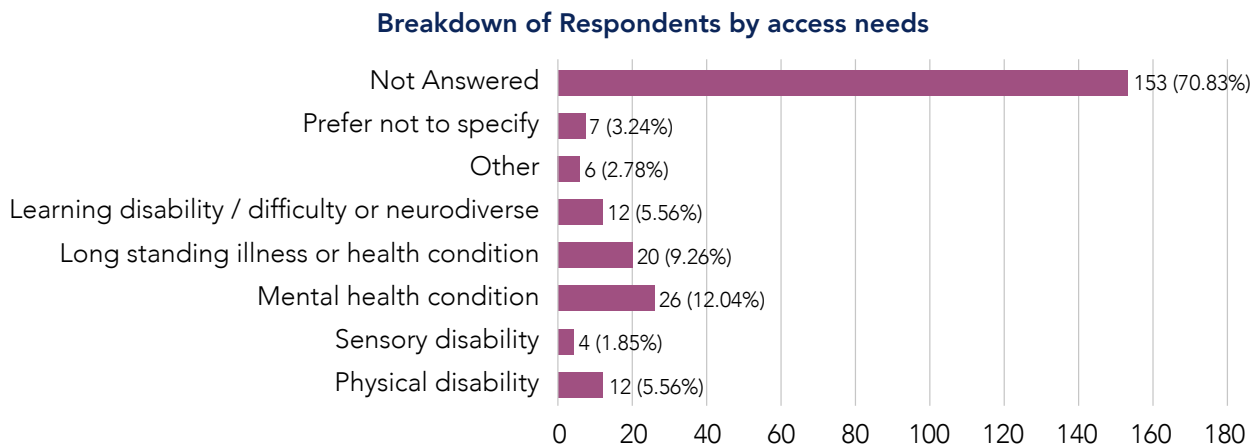


Figure 7a

Do you have any caring responsibilities?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Yes, if so please specify	92	42.59%
No	118	54.63%
Prefer not to say	6	2.78%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 7b

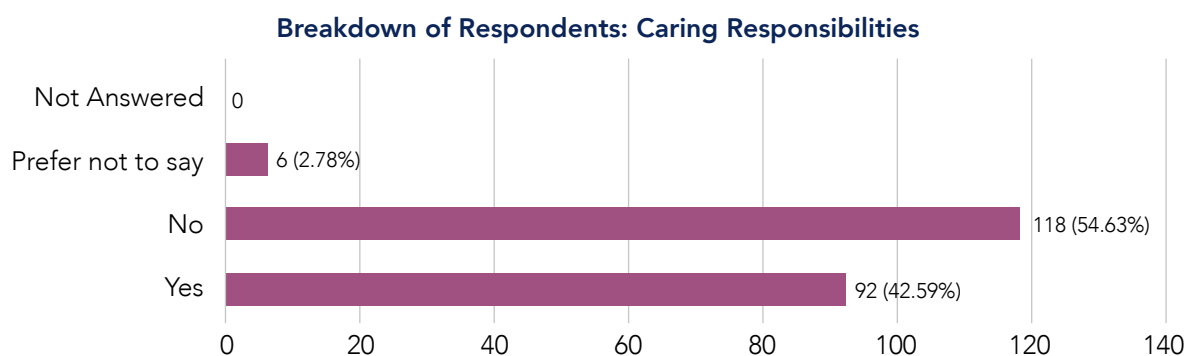


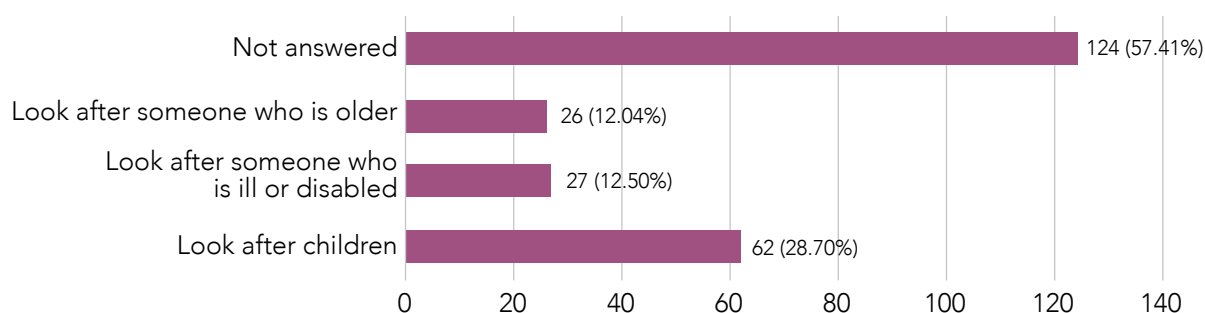
Figure 8a

If yes, please specify

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Look after children	62	28.70%
Look after someone who is ill or disabled	27	12.50%
Look after someone who is older	26	12.04%
Not Answered	124	57.41%

Figure 8b

Breakdown of Respondents - Detail of Caring Responsibilities



Comment: These figures reflect the national picture which suggests that growing numbers of people are taking on caring responsibilities and, in some cases, are juggling these responsibilities with employment. According to the 2011 Census, the number of people providing unpaid care in Northumberland has increased by 6% in the last ten years to almost 36,000.

We also know that the greatest increase has been among those providing over 20 hours of care, the point at which caring starts to significantly impact on the health and wellbeing of the carer. Over 8,800 people provide more than 50 hours unpaid care a week. Census data so far released reveals the number of five to seven year old carers in England has increased by around 80% over the last ten years to 9,371. The total number of children caring for parents, siblings and family members is up by 20% to 166,363 since the 2001 census with nearly 15,000 people providing more than 50 hours of care a week.

The council has put support in place for young carers who can ask a professional they know (for example, a teacher, youth worker or family support worker) to help them to complete a referral for support or for help to look after their health and wellbeing. We have also worked with partners to develop a Carers Strategy for Northumberland.

The council has recently adopted a 'Carers in Employment' policy to assist the county council in supporting employees and officers who have personal caring responsibilities, to ensure that they are able to perform their job to the best of their abilities whilst being supported to balance their day-to-day job role with their caring responsibilities. We need to recognise that many people in our wider population also have caring responsibilities and identify additional ways we can support carers in our communities.

Figure 9**Please indicate which of these groups you consider yourself to belong to**

White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	197
Irish	3
Gypsy / Roma	1
Irish Traveller	0
Any other white background	2
Mixed / multiple ethnic groups White and Black Caribbean	2
White and Black African	0
White and Asian	0
Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background	0
Black British	1
African	0
Caribbean	0
Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background	1
Asian British	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
Any other Asian Background	0
Arab	0
Any other ethnic group	0
Prefer not to say	6

Comment: The percentage of the population from ethnic minority groups within Northumberland is extremely low in comparison to the rest of the UK. However, while the breakdown by ethnicity of respondents is in some ways reflective of the demographics of the county, we are aware that engagement with our diverse ethnic minority population requires additional effort; we received no responses from some ethnic minority communities who live in Northumberland. We will work with our Race Equality Staff Network Group and local support services to identify ways in which we can increase engagement levels with individuals from diverse ethnic groups.

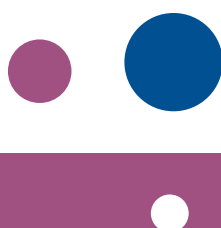
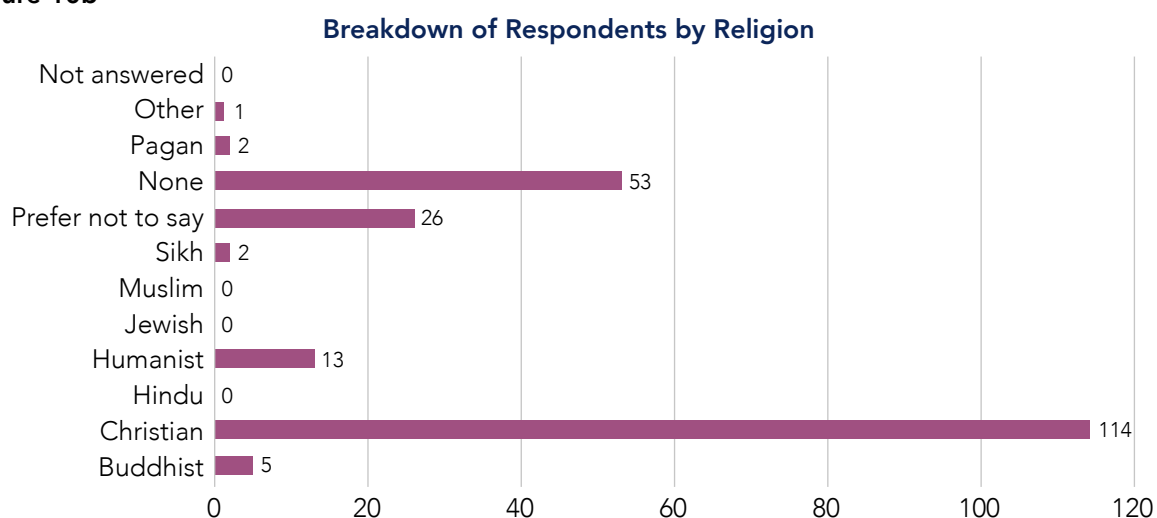


Figure 10a

What is your religion or belief?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Buddhist	5	2.31%
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	114	52.78%
Hindu	0	0.00%
Humanist	13	6.02%
Jewish	0	0.00%
Muslim	0	0.00%
Pagan	2	0.93%
Sikh	2	0.93%
Other	1	0.46%
Prefer not to say	26	12.04%
No religion	53	24.54%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 10b



The majority of residents in Northumberland (69%, 216,700) stated their religion was Christian which was a higher percentage than in the Northeast (68%) and England (59%). Christian was the largest group in the 2001 census but saw the largest decrease by 13% from 81% of residents in the 2011 census this is in line with the decrease in the Northeast and England).

Christianity is the only religion in the county that has seen a decrease in numbers (by 32,400) between 2001 and 2011 despite population growth. The group stating, they had no religious affiliation was the next largest response category increasing 12% to 24% (75,600) since 2001. None of the other listed religions accounted for more than 1% of the total population and Muslim was the only other listed religion selected by more than a thousand residents in Northumberland.

The 2011 census showed paganism was the seventh most popular religion in the UK. 0.93% of respondents to our survey identified as pagans. We had a high rate of declarations from people who preferred not to say for this option in our survey this may have been a consequence of an error on the original survey monitoring form where the no religion option was accidentally deleted from the form. This was later corrected but some respondent's used other or choose not to declare. Where respondents used the other option and wrote no religion they were later moved into this group.

There was a significant under-representation of Muslim respondents as statistically this is the largest group after Christian, or no religion based on previous census data. In the 2011 census 1.5 per cent of population); 423,000 people identified as Sikh (0.8 percent); 263,000 people as Jewish (0.5 percent) and 248,000 people as Buddhist (0.4 percent). The closure of places of worship made this consultation particularly difficult. We will need to ensure we improve consultation different religious and non-religious groups in future consultations.

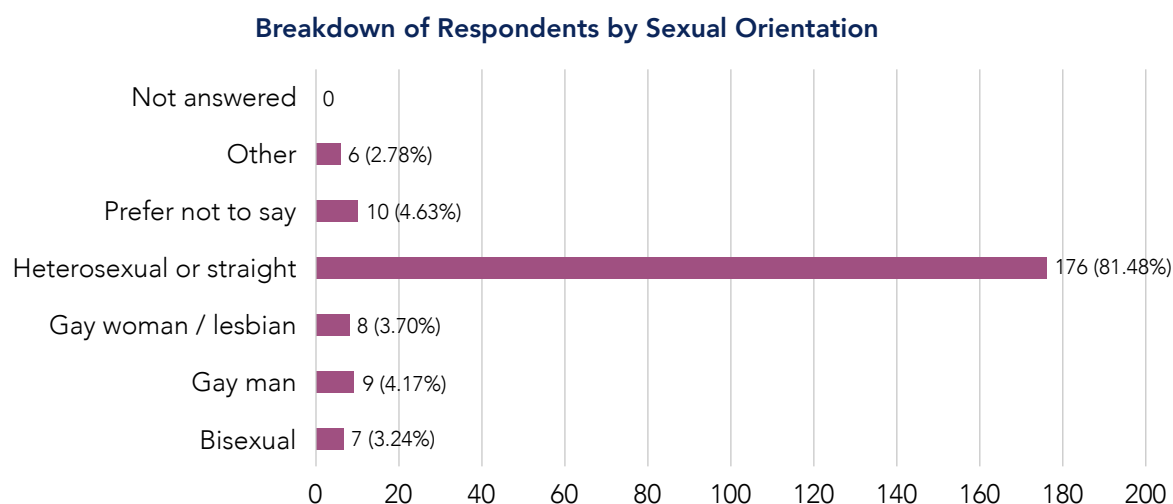


Figure 11a

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Bisexual	7	3.24%
Gay man	9	4.17%
Gay woman/lesbian	8	3.70%
Heterosexual or Straight	176	81.48%
Prefer not to say	10	4.63%
Prefer to use a different term, if so please tell us what this is	6	2.78%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 11b



Comment: We are pleased that our consultation drew many responses from people with varying sexual orientations. In our most recent staff survey, 90% of staff completing the survey reported that they identified as being heterosexual or straight. The figure for those responding to our survey was much lower at 81.48%, which shows that local LGBT+ people community is engaged and want to be heard (Lesbian, gay, Bi and Trans+ the plus sign is used to show this is inclusive of other ways to identify) As a Council we have shown strong support for the LGBT+ community through measures such as: establishing a LGBT+ employees' network, supporting our workplace LGBT+ Champions, supporting Northumberland Pride, and establishing a Trans Inclusion Policy and A manager's guide to support LGBT+ staff and a guide to coming out at work.

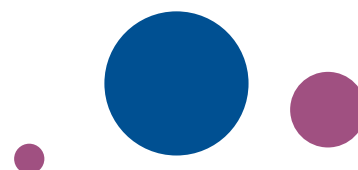
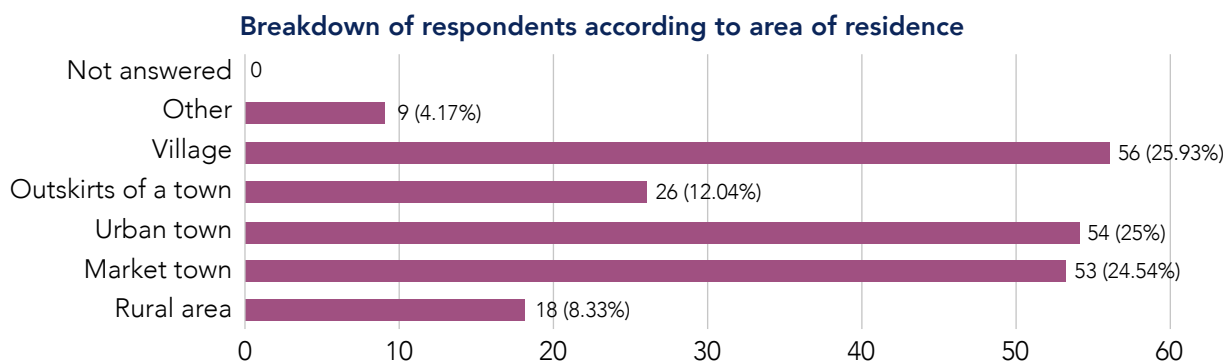


Figure 12a

What kind of area do you live in?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Rural area	18	8.33%
Market town	53	24.54%
Urban town	54	25.00%
Outskirts of a town	26	12.04%
Village	56	25.93%
Other, if so please tell us what this is	9	4.17%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Figure 12b



Comment: Northumberland County Council covers a large and geographical diverse area. The majority of the population live in the main urban conurbations, and to a substantial extent this is reflected in the breakdown of respondents. However, it is pleasing to see that we received a high level of interest in our consultation from those who live in more rural areas and our smaller villages. There was a strong sense that our rural residents often feel ignored, and we will work hard to ensure their voices are heard.

A young woman with dark hair and bangs, wearing a grey and black patterned scarf, is sitting next to an older man with white hair. They are both smiling and looking at a tablet computer that the man is holding. They are sitting on a wooden bench outdoors, with green foliage in the background.

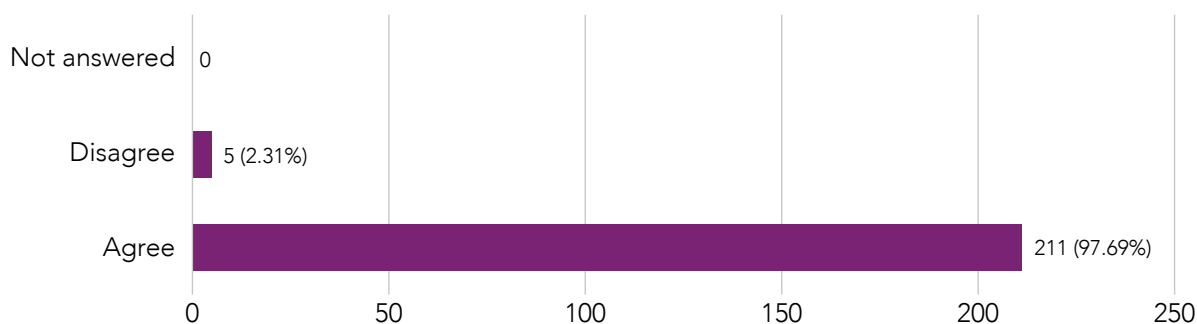
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**We understand that
we need to work hard
to put our vision
into practice.**

Analysis of Responses by Objective

Question 3. We need to apply the principles of equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion in our decision making, in how we recruit and support our workforce and to the services we commission and deliver to our residents. We will work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sector, with local organisations who are supporting individuals and communities, and with organisations who are providing services on behalf of the council. Do you agree or disagree with this vision?

OPTION	TOTAL	PERCENT
Agree	209	96.76%
Disagree	7	3.24%
Not Answered	0	0.00%



Do you have any comments on this vision (45 responses)

Comment Themes:

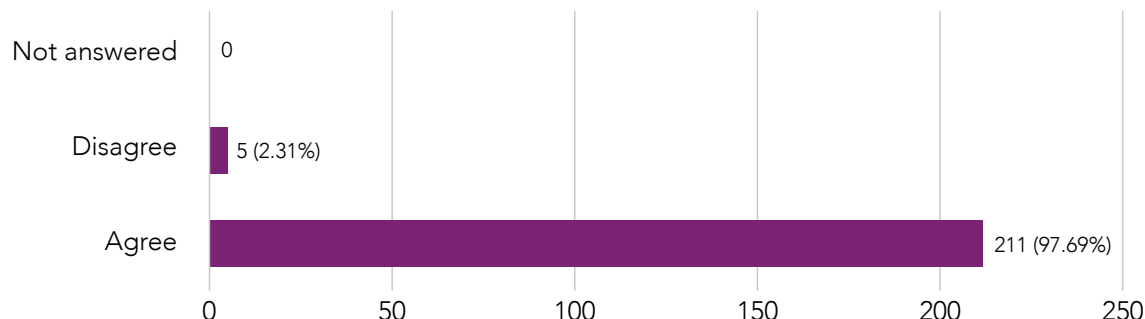
- Clear, concise, and easy to understand.
- Respondents agreed in principle, but a few respondents were sceptical as to whether the vision could be executed in practice.
- Concern that the vision was too bland and safe.
- Concern that all voices should be heard, and all sections of the population should be considered. General agreement with the vision.
- We should include the word welcoming and address safeguarding
- We have accepted suggested amendments to the vision. The vision will be changed to

It's really clear, and it's great that service users and residents are being asked for their views

We need to apply the principles of equality, diversity, fairness, and inclusion in our decision making, in how we recruit and support our workforce and to the services we commission and deliver to our residents. We will work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sector, with local organisations who are supporting individuals and communities, and with organisations who are providing services on behalf of the council. We aim to help make Northumberland a safe, welcoming, accessible, and inclusive place.

Comment: There was broad agreement for our vision amongst all respondents with an impressive 97.69% of respondents indicating approval, and we are pleased that they were so well received. However, many respondents did caveat their approval. We understand that we need to work hard to put our vision into practice. We will take all feedback on board and use it to form the basis of an action plan which will ensure that we deliver on the objectives set out.

Question 4. Do you agree or disagree with the following objective: Strengthening our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities?



Do you have any comments on this objective (45 responses)

Comment Themes:

- Very clear message that the council needs to consider the views of all communities, including those in rural areas. Clear belief that the council's focus remains on the larger towns.
- Frustration that the Equality Act 2010 has been in force for some time, but the council remains behind the curve in many respects.
- The council needs to work more closely with residents to deliver results rather than simply seeking views.

Great point. This should be continuous as communities are always evolving

We need to acknowledge the difference between rural and urban communities

The better the Council knows what people's needs are, the better able they will be to meet them

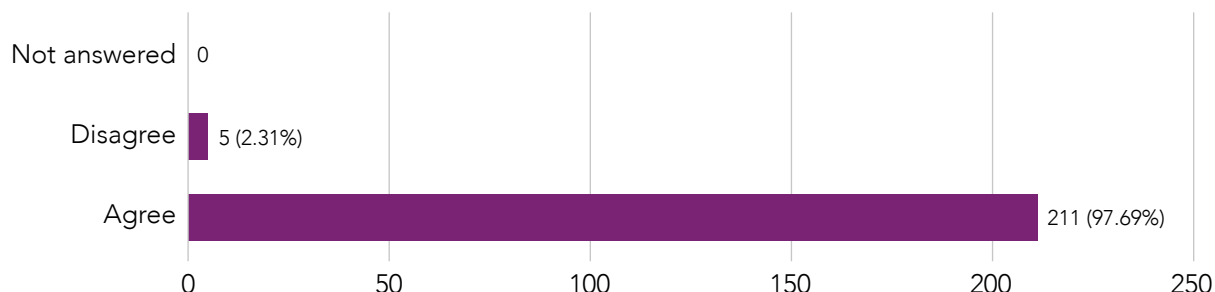
How is this going to be achieved? How will success be measured?

Comment: We are proud of the measures which we already have in place to promote equality and diversity both within the council itself, and within our communities. However, many respondents believe that there is still much to do. We will continue to place equality, diversity, and inclusivity at the top of our agenda.

We recognise that Northumberland is a geographically large and diverse county and as such our communities have unique needs. We want our rural communities to feel that they are as valued and listened to as those residents in our larger towns and cities. We already have a dedicated Rural Growth team which takes the lead on economic growth within rural areas, working across several themes such as natural capital, energy, culture, place, and business support. However, it is clear that some residents of rural areas continue to feel that their views are not taken into account. We will share the results of this consultation with our Rural growth Team and Senior Leadership Team.

It was suggested that more needs to be done in making changes, policy decisions and strategies to make them inclusive of disabled people who may require reasonable adjustments to be made. These needs should be considered at the design stage not adapted later.

Question 5. Do you agree or disagree with the following objective: Listening, Involving and Responding to our communities effectively



Do you have any comments on this objective (45 responses)

Comment Themes:

- Those in rural communities should receive an equal voice.
- Concern that those who shout loudest have their views taken into account to the detriment of those who are not so vocal and forthcoming.
- There were some comments that some groups, particularly disabled people, people from some ethnic minority backgrounds, and trans people should be heard.

Would like to see more emphasis on an equal relationship and partnership with our residents

I have noticed the majority of NCC's posters and infographics only show white people.

Don't only listen to the vocal people, as the quiet ones really have more to say about their communities

Disabled people aren't considered when making changes

Comment: Many responses indicated a concern that the most vocal and forthcoming residents of our communities are likely to be heard and have their views considered at the expense of others. As a council, we will listen to the views of all our residents. We can look at diverse ways of promoting our consultations (for example by greater use of social media channels) and look at new and innovative ways of listening to our communities and establishing their needs. We will work closely with our many staff network groups to increase engagement, and to understand how our decisions impact upon the groups they represent.

It was again clear from responses to this question that many residents in our rural communities feel marginalised. We will work to redress this imbalance. There are some diverse communities and groups that are hard to reach, and we need to do more work to ensure all communities in Northumberland can have their voices heard. We also must make sure that people who are economically disadvantaged and people from all national and ethnic groups feel included.

The voices of all protected groups need to be heard rather than cliques or usual suspects. Ways for the voices of quiet and under-represented groups need to be developed. Rural communities also need to be considered. It was felt that the council has not always listened in the past. It was suggested

the council engage with and give financial aid to organisations that work with local communities. We should hear and respond to what people are telling us.

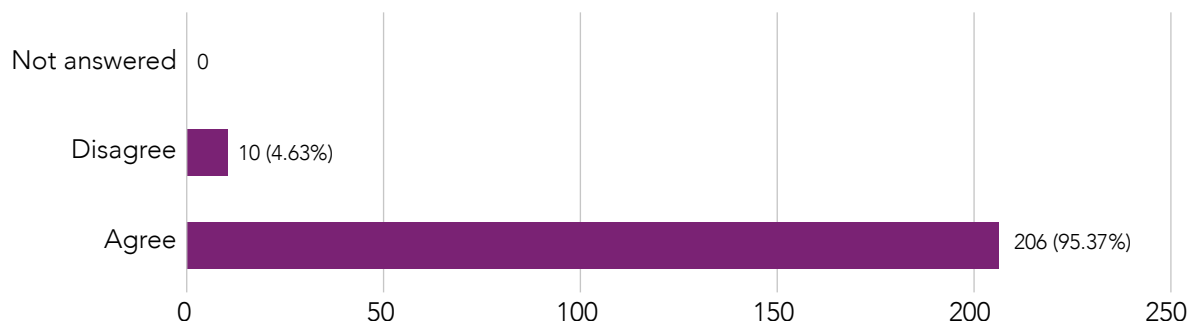
If the council listens and responds effectively this will be beneficial to all. We were asked to show more diversity in posters and communications, so all people feel represented. Measure whether we have responded effectively and measure the impact of consultation on decisions. There should be accountability. Where groups are under-represented use national and regional research and specialist knowledge to address gaps. Measures need to be put in place so structural barriers to engagement and participation are reduced for example consultation should not be only online or only at school pick up time. If we can better understand the needs of our communities then we can supply services appropriately and supply a positive outcome to all.

We will include the need to include diverse images that reflect all communities in Northumberland in our communications strategy. There was a suggestion that including the word in after listen in this objective would make this objective clearer this has been accepted. We will produce additional guidance for policy makers on accessibility and the need to make reasonable adjustments at the design stage. We are investigating introducing additional planning guidance for builders and developers to improve accessibility and inclusion in the built environment. We need to develop effective measures to ensure that:

- We develop guidance on making consultations inclusive for all services undertaking consultations
- All people affected can respond and all protected groups are considered
- Structural barriers to participation and engagement are tackled
- Where groups are under-represented, we should make additional effort to engage and use national and regional research and specialist knowledge to address gaps
- Engage with all communities including rural communities who may have unique needs
- Measure whether we have responded effectively and feedback on the impact of consultation on decisions
- Make decision makers accountable
- Review engagement, financial and other support to community and voluntary groups.



Question 6. Do you agree or disagree with the following objective: Improving the diversity and skills of our workforce to help us embed equality, diversity, and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff.



Do you have any comments on this objective (45 responses)

Comment Themes:

- Agreement with the caveat that the council should always recruit the best person for the job.
- The council should also focus on upskilling the current workforce rather than simply looking to strengthen externally.
- Recognition that the ethnic diversity of Northumberland is limited, but there is a much wider ethnicity pool in neighbouring local authority areas which can be tapped into.

Staff retention is just as important as recruitment when it comes to building a diverse and inclusive workforce

Good grief! Why are you only doing this now!!

Comment: There was a very positive response to this objective, but it was suggested that improving should be changed to improve and this has been accepted. There was a comment that 'the more we include equality and diversity the more our services will improve as we will have staff that will be knowledgeable and bring different perspectives to the table so we can really see how decisions will affect everyone in Northumberland.'

It was suggested that it is also important to develop the skills of the existing workforce with training and opportunities to upskill our staff. Staff retention was identified as being as important as recruitment when it comes to building a diverse and inclusive workforce. The council should ensure that its employees feel empowered to be themselves and express themselves in the workplace.

It was suggested that we celebrate our unsung hero's working in local communities and highlight examples of good practice. We should recognise all protected characteristics and ensure that actions taken do not disadvantage other protected groups. It was felt by some people that effective actions to increase diversity in the workplace are already in place and no further actions were needed. Others disagreed and felt that more action to employ people from a variety of backgrounds should be taken.

It was suggested there needs to be a deeper understanding by the workforce and management of why having a diverse workforce is imperative and of why this is the right thing to do not just something they have to be seen to be doing. It was suggested that we should devise effective measures which set out how we measure improvements in diversity and ensure that the best people for the job are being appointed.

We were asked what our diversity targets are and how these will be set, identify hard and soft skills our staff need and improve equality and diversity training. In addition to training, case study videos, lunch and learn sessions, presentations etc. would be useful to hear about others' perspectives and experiences of the workplace, council work/projects/policies, engagement, exclusion. We should provide support for people who are neurodiverse including an adjustments passport. It was suggested that the council should show it is committed to articulating anti-discriminatory messages that reflect a commitment to eliminating all forms of oppression and inequality.

We need to

- Review our equality and diversity training and expand our programme of drop-in sessions, lunch and learn sessions, case studies and positive examples.
- Review staff retention initiatives and upskilling of our existing staff.
- Ensure the business case for diversity and inclusion is understood at all levels of the organisation.
- Ensure that clear, evidence-based, measures and targets for promoting diversity are developed.
- Guidance and an adjustments passport to support staff who are neurodiverse and examples of adjustments and support in recruitment are being developed.
- Review and consult on communications strategy to support anti discriminatory messages and promote inclusion.
- Make it clear that the measures the council is taking aim to ensure the best candidates are chosen and all groups are given a fair chance.
- We are taking actions to support and promote our staff network groups.
- Improve the data we collect and publish about the diversity of our staff.

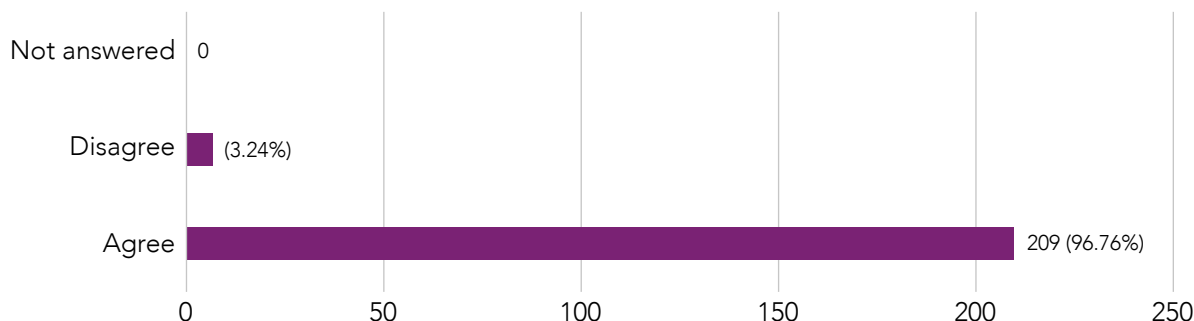
We already have several policies and procedures in place to ensure that wherever possible we remove barriers to recruitment. Our recruitment managers have received unconscious bias training, and we are a Disability Confident Employer which means that we will guarantee an interview to disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for a job. Equalities monitoring takes place at recruitment stage and the council's Recruitment Code of Practice provides advice and guidance on all aspects of the recruitment process, including how to draw up person specifications to remove barriers and encourage a diverse range of people to apply. We will treat all applicants to the council fairly, and that commitment equally applies to those who are not from a minority group.

We will retain a focus on upskilling our current workforce as part of our Corporate Development Programme, and through succession management planning and initiatives such as apprenticeships and vocational training.

The Covid 19 pandemic has taught us that we no longer need to be confined to office working. We have the capability to work well using innovative working practices including hybrid working using a mixture of office and other locations, home working, more flexible working patterns where this is possible and remote working. This will help us to recruit a more diverse workforce and people in different circumstances including carers.

Northumberland has a diverse ethnic minority population but the numbers of people from different ethnic minority backgrounds are exceptionally low. This is reflected in our workforce. However, by advertising vacancies in other regions and neighbouring authority catchment areas which have greater diversity, we can attract a wider range of applicants and ensure we recruit the best people with a wide range of skills and experience.

Question 7. Do you agree or disagree with the following objective: Creating a positive culture with strong leadership and, a commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners.



Do you have any comments on this objective (45 responses)

Comment Themes:

- The council needs to be a role model for equality and inclusivity, and this will filter down to the wider community.
- Education and awareness raising is critical to promoting a more positive and inclusive culture.
- Strong leadership is about listening and taking into account the views of all, and not dominance.

A strong Diversity and Inclusion Champion from the Leadership Team would support the delivery of this.

Be better, be braver, be bold!!

Needs improved by 100% - you have a long way to go

Love how many senior leadership roles in the council are done by more diverse women.

Comment: We recognise the importance of the role which the council plays as a local leader, and that it needs to act as a role model. Our belief is that in order to deliver our values of respect, residents first, excellence and quality and keeping our communities safe and well, we need to demonstrate that we are truly inclusive and equitable in our approach. We understand that this needs to be driven from within. We are proud of the level of diversity at a senior level within our organisation. We are also proud that the Gender Pay Gap within Northumberland County Council is one of the lowest compared to other northeast regional local authorities that published data for 2019. It is also considerably lower than the national average figure for all employees.

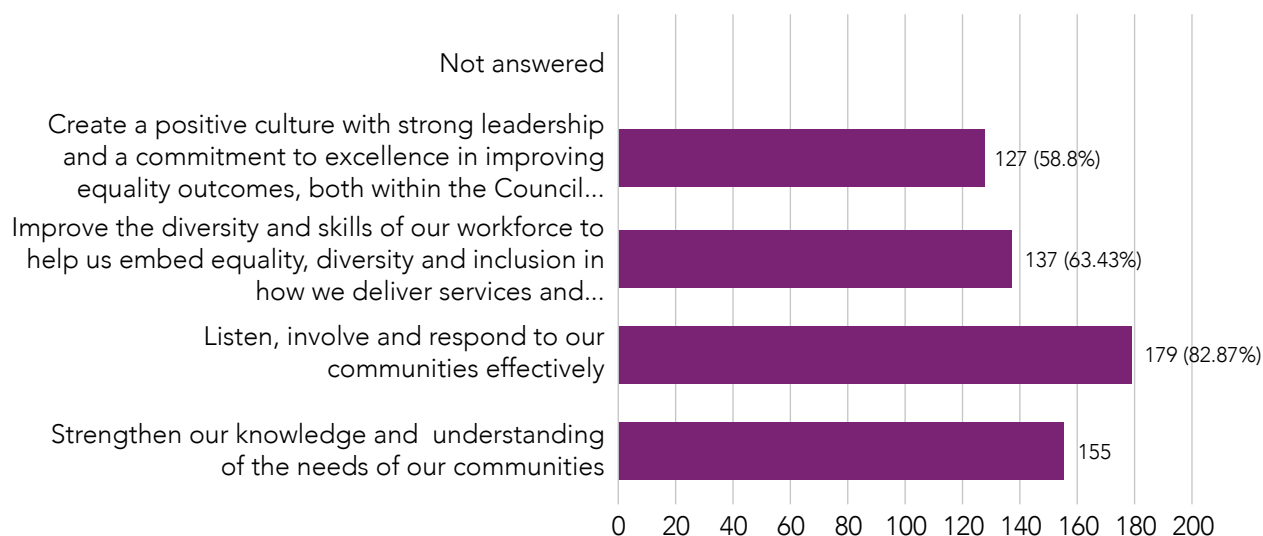


This is the objective that had the most comments suggesting it was not clear and questioning the word strong. We have accepted suggestions that this objective should be made clearer and simpler and replaced the word strong which some people had reservations about.

This objective will be amended to: *we will create a positive culture with a clear leadership commitment to improving equality diversity and inclusion both within the council, with our partners and the wider community.*

- We have shared information with councillors about the local government campaign to increase the diversity of councillors, including resources to encourage currently under-represented groups including women, parents, carers, ethnic minority, and disabled people to stand as Councillors.
- We will review commissioning to identify ways we can promote a commitment to Equality, diversity and inclusion in partnerships and with suppliers.
- We have updated our dignity at work and code of conduct to make all staff responsible for treating colleagues and customers fairly and with respect.
- All staff are responsible for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and council values.
- We currently have role models from diverse communities, and have a wide range of staff network groups, each network group has a senior executive champion from the council senior leadership team, but we will consider the suggestion that we should have identified leads for each of the protected groups.
- We will identify communication routes so senior leadership can be made aware of issues affecting protected groups and of need for accountability.
- We will consult with staff and community groups on clear and measurable targets to improve outcomes for protected groups, both within the council and wider community and establish how we will give feedback on progress with these objectives.

Question 8. From these objectives, which 3 would be your top priorities?



Comment: It is pleasing to see that our objectives were almost uniformly given leading priority by respondents, and this suggests that they are all of high value and importance. However, the greatest proportion of respondents indicated that our objective to "listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively" was of most importance. This aligns with one of our corporate values: 'Residents first,' and our primary function as a Local Authority to serve our residents and communities.



Next Steps

- We have already identified several 'quick wins,' and have fed back comments and suggestions to business areas and managers where we feel issues have been raised that can be addressed and improved quickly.
- We will make changes to our equality monitoring to respond to feedback from this consultation.
- We will share the results of the consultation with our various staff network groups: LGBT+, REN (Race Equality Network), Enable (Disability Staff Group), ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder), Menopause, Carers, Mental Health and Wellbeing. These groups act as a support network for our staff and contribute advice and guidance to the organisation on policy and practice as well as supporting campaigns and equality and diversity initiatives supported by the council including Northumberland Pride, Northeast MELA, Disability and Black History Months. These groups are run by staff and are open for all employees to attend. They make a significant contribution to our organisation and policy development, and we will work with them to take positive action to address issues raised in the survey.
- We will share the consultation report with Senior Management team and all staff.
- We will continue to review and update our existing employee policies to ensure that they remain relevant and inclusive. We have already adopted several policies which help to promote equality and inclusivity across the organisation and remove barriers to success. They include Agile Working, Carers in Work, Dignity at Work, Domestic Abuse, Equality and Diversity, Learning and Development, Psychological Wellbeing, and Trans-Inclusion. We will ensure that all our policies are assessed against Equality Impact Assessment criteria, and will work closely with all of our Staff Network Groups to develop existing and new policies.
- We have recently drafted our HR (Human Resources) / Organisational Development People Strategy for 2021 – 2025, which sets out as a key strategic aim; 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for everyone. As part of our commitment, we will:
 - o Work to be recognised both locally and nationally as a leading inclusive employer
 - o Develop an equality, diversity, and inclusion approach to all our policies
 - o Build on current campaigns to raise awareness
 - o Develop a comprehensive inclusive recruitment process
 - o Expand the work of our staff network groups
 - o Improve staff engagement experience with minority groups
 - o Demonstrate our commitment through transparent data publication
- We will continue our efforts to ensure that we have a more robust data set in place, so that we have a more informed understanding of our workforce composition and its needs. We will work closely with staff network groups and trade unions to increase understanding amongst employees about why we need their data, how it will be used and assurance that data collection remains confidential and will not adversely impact employees.
- We will ask all services to produce actions and report on progress to implement our equality objectives.
- We will look at new and innovative ways of engaging with those who feel that their voice is not being heard, including the youngest members of our communities, and those living in our remote, rural areas working closely with Northumberland Communities Together, local educational establishments and with our apprentice scheme.
- Above all, we will continue listening to our residents and develop initiatives that enable joint approaches to local issues.



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We aim to help make Northumberland a safe, welcoming, accessible, and inclusive place.

