Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

Community Impact Assessment Survey Analysis

Phase two: Aberdeenshire Overview

August 2021

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1 Introduction

To understand the impact of the global (COVID-19) pandemic, Aberdeenshire Council surveyed local residents on behalf of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership for a second time in June and July 2021 to find out how the COVID- 19 crisis is impacting individuals and local communities.

The survey was hosted on an Engagement Hub on the Council's engagement and consultation portal Engage Aberdeenshire. The hub contained contextual information, opening video, links to the online survey, links to surveys in six alternative languages, and information on how to request more information and contact details to request support for accessing or responding to the survey.

A shorter "Rapid Community Impact Assessment Survey" was also hosted on the engagement hub and circulated to all Schools in Aberdeenshire to target younger people. The survey has received a low response rate but is currently still open for submissions. Further work will be undertaken at in the coming months to engage more broadly with younger people and results will be published under separate cover.

Printed copies of the survey and pre-paid return envelopes were available along with an information leaflet. All printed material was available in English, Polish, Arabic, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Russian, and Latvian

The Council and Community Planning Partners communicated and invited responses through a range of channels, established networks and directly to key stakeholders. The survey was open to all Aberdeenshire residents. A series of meetings were held to allow groups and individuals alternative opportunities to share their experiences of the pandemic.

The survey was promoted by news release to local weekly, daily and broadcast media serving Aberdeenshire. The release contained a link to the dedicated engagement hub and details of how to obtain copies of the survey in different formats.

There was promotion on Community Planning Partners' and Aberdeenshire Council's corporate social media channels throughout the engagement, linking through to the engagement hub page where the survey could be accessed and completed.

The initial posts remained 'pinned' to the top of Aberdeenshire Council's profiles for the duration of the survey. Insight from Council channels indicates that the survey received good engagement (reaching **24,537** people on Facebook, and a further **6,179** on Twitter). A number of reminders were shared as the period progressed, with some paid promotion of the information on Facebook and Instagram towards the end of the process, reaching a further **13,418** people. A short video was also created to promote the survey. The social media activity led to a total of **1,029** people clicking through to the survey *(647 via Facebook, 197 via Twitter, 49 via YouTube, 137 via Instagram)*. The reach of the survey is likely to be greater than indicated from statistics from Council social media as partner channels would also have had significant engagement.

Subsequently 1,418 responses were received to the surveys - 1,350 online and 68 paper returns. One response was received in Arabic, five in Polish, two in Lithuanian, and one in Latvian. Despite efforts to reach previously under-represented groups, the number of respondents was significantly lower than the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) carried out in 2020. The response equates to 1.26% of households in Aberdeenshire, if we assume that respondents have replied on behalf of their household. The average response rate for UK public consultations is around 0.7% and a 1% response rate is considered ‘good’ by the Consultation Institute.

Importantly only 20% of the respondents indicated that they had responded to the 2020 survey, meaning the combined data from both surveys gives a good snapshot of feeling and sentiment in Aberdeenshire.

Though the Council and Community Planning Partners made specific efforts to raise awareness and reach out to individuals and organisations, those who responded were predominantly self-selecting. As a result, respondents should not be considered representative of the population as a whole and open engagement activity should not be judged on its overall representativeness. Instead, engagement activity should be assessed on the extent to which a broad diversity of relevant individuals was able to express themselves in the process. It is important to consider the mechanism for engagement and the respondent group when interpreting the responses received. Even though residents were offered other methods to participate, most of the engagement took place online, and therefore the response should be interpreted to take this into account.

From respondents who provided demographic and equality information 73% of participants were female, while 26% were male. 5% of respondents described themselves as having a long-term illness or disability. 84% of respondents owned their house either outright or with a mortgage, 7% were social housing tenants, and 6% rented from a private landlord, 3% chose not to say or had other arrangements. 17% of respondents are responsible for caring for an adult, 8% have pre-school age children, and 33% have school age children. 25% of respondents had a household income of over £60,000, 19% had a household income of between £40,000 and £60,000, 22% had a household income of between £20,000 and £40,000 and 12% had a combined household income of under £20,000. 73% of all respondents were currently employed, 3% were self-employed, 1% were unemployed and looking for work, 1% were students, 2% were unable to work, 13% were retired and 3% looked after the home/family. 13% of all respondents were over 65, 26% were between 55 and 64, 32% were aged between 45 and 54, 18% were aged 35-44, 8% were aged between 25 and 34 and 1% were under the age of 25.

15% of respondents lived in the Buchan area, 11% in Banff and Buchan, 20% in Formartine, 22% in Garioch, 14% in Kincardine and Mearns and 18% in Marr.

6% of respondents had been furloughed by their employer during the pandemic (albeit 5% had at the time of responding, returned to work.).

Less than 4% of all respondents reported that they had tested positive for COVID 19, and 3% think they have had COVID-19 between December 2020 and June 2021 but had not been tested. 15% of respondents had been shielding.

2 Executive summary

This report provides a summary of the participation in the Aberdeenshire Community Impact Assessment survey.

Impact on individuals:

- A significant number of people are drinking more alcohol than before the pandemic, and some feel it is having an impact on their physical/mental wellbeing
- A high number of people report that COVID-19 is causing increased anxiety/stress for one or more family member
- More people are worried about future employment for themselves, or a member of their household compared to a similar time last year
- COVID-19 continues to have an impact on peoples' personal finances. Concerns are greatest around paying for fuel/heating and general bills
- Around one third of people are experiencing negative physical wellbeing outcomes because of the pandemic. A similar number have experienced negative mental health outcomes
- A quarter of people feel less safe outside of their homes mainly due to concerns around the spread or transmission of COVID-19 (the majority of whom have had two vaccinations)

Impact for Communities:

- Social capital has appeared to have decreased over the last year (albeit by a small amount)
- People are keen to have a flexible approach to work and appreciate the improvement in work life balance that has resulted because of COVID-19
- People remain connected to their local area and are supportive of local business and the physical environment
- There is a high number of people claiming they are less connected to friends and family compared to this time last year and before the pandemic
- People are positive about volunteering, but work may need to be done to ensure volunteers are supported and that the high levels of volunteering experienced during the pandemic are sustainable

Impact for Public Services:

- There is uncertainty around future transport requirements
- People want to be more involved in how public services are planned/managed
- Satisfaction and trust for public services is positive
- Many changes made due to the pandemic have been welcome
- There are concerns within the community for people who experience inequality of opportunity or outcome or who could be classified as vulnerable
- There is notable concern around access to public services including sport and leisure, and health and social care services

3 Survey Analysis

This report presents frequency results for each survey question. In some cases, the analysis has excluded ‘Not applicable’ responses from the percentage base to give a more accurate indication of views amongst residents with experience of specific issues or services. Tabular results will be provided under separate cover, including base numbers for all questions presented in the main body of the report to assess the extent of any variation in views across key respondent groups/areas.

In some cases, percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number; for some questions this means that percentages may not sum to 100%.

It should be noted this analysis is intrinsically subjective as it involves the interpretation of people’s comments. This analysis should be treated with care, as the question did not specifically ask for people to comment on each of the specific categories, therefore it cannot be concluded that respondents do not have views on key themes identified because they have left no comment.

While qualitative analysis of open-ended responses does not permit the quantification of results, we signify the weight of a particular view using the following framework. Where there are several themes, we have indicated which are the most common or prevalent across responses:

- The most common theme / the most prevalent theme in responses (and second most common) i.e., the most frequently identified.
- ‘Several' or 'many' respondents (more than 20) i.e., a recurring theme but not most common.
- 'Some' respondents (10-19) i.e., another theme. ‘
- A few' or 'a small number' of respondents (under 10); a minor theme.

4 Key Findings

Positive changes

When asked about positive changes that have happened respondents noted that they had spent less money (53%), worked from home more (47%), spent more time outdoors (45%), and spent more time with family/children (42%). These results are reflective of the first survey in Phase 1 but interestingly the amount of people indicating that they had spent more time with family/children has significantly reduced (-13%). A number of respondents noted that they had not experienced any positive impacts (17%).

Home and family life

When asked about the negative impacts around day to day living and family life three quarters of respondents agreed that they missed seeing relatives/friends. This result is consistent with the previous survey undertaken in August 2020.

Other negatives consistent with the previous survey included “One or more family members is more anxious/stressed than previously” (51%), Worried about older relatives (47%), “struggling with home schooling (22%) and family arguments (14%)

Areas which appear to still be having a negative impact but less so than in August 2020 include: “worried about job(s)” (37% in 2020 and 23% in 2021), “worried about finances” (28% in 2020 and 18% in 2021). A number of respondents noted that they had not experienced any negative changes (7%).

When asked about contact with friends and family half of all respondents indicated that they were keeping in touch about the same as before the pandemic. 20% believed they were keeping in touch with friends and family more than before but around one third (32%) thought they were keeping in touch with family less. When compared with results from 2020 a significant number of people are keeping in touch with friends and family less than this time last year and before the COVID-19 pandemic. Three quarters of respondents used digital technology such as Portal, Face Time or Zoom to keep in touch with family and friends.

Future employment

More respondents indicated that they are concerned about future employment for themselves or a member of their household in 2021 compared with 2020 (57% in 2021 and 51% in 2020). 27% were not at all concerned and 15% were not very concerned.

Education and training

About the same percentage of respondents were concerned about access to training or education opportunities for themselves or a member of their household in 2021 compared with 2020 (41% in 2021 and 39% in 2020), in 2021 36% were not at all concerned and 22% were not very concerned.

Personal finances

When asked about personal finances:

26% of respondents were in some way concerned about paying for food. 4% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying for food, 6% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 16% noted that they were a little concerned, 30% agreed they were not very concerned and just under half of respondents (45%) indicated that they were not at all concerned about paying for food because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

29% of respondents were in some way concerned about paying for fuel/heating. 5% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying for fuel/heating, 8% indicated that are they fairly concerned, 16% noted that they were a little concerned, 29% agreed they were not very concerned and 43% indicated that they were not at all concerned about paying for fuel/heating because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

23% of respondents were in some way concerned about paying for a funeral. 6% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying for a funeral, 5% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 12% noted that they were a little concerned, 28% agreed they were not very concerned and 49% indicated that they were not at all concerned about paying for a funeral because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

24% of respondents were in some way concerned about paying their mortgage or rent. 4% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying for mortgage/rent, 6% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 14% noted that they were a little concerned, 24% agreed they were not very concerned and 52% indicated that they were not at all concerned about paying for mortgage/rent because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

29% of respondents were in some way concerned about paying for general bills. 5% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying for general bills. 5% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned around paying general bills, 7% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 18% noted that they were a little concerned, 27% agreed they were not very concerned and 43% indicated that they were not at all concerned about paying general bills because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

21% of respondents were in some way concerned about debt repayment. 5% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned about debt repayment, 5% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 11% noted that they were a little concerned, 20% agreed they were not very concerned and 59% indicated that they were not at all concerned about debt repayment because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Physical wellbeing

Around one third (35%) of all respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their physical wellbeing in a negative way. 41% of respondents did not believe the pandemic had impacted their physical wellbeing, 12% stated that it had a positive impact, and 12% were unsure.

When asked about access to leisure and recreation activities 9% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned about access to leisure and recreation activities, 16% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 28% noted that they were a little concerned, 20% agreed they were not very concerned and 27% indicated that they were not at all concerned about access to leisure and recreation activities because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about physical activity and exercise 27% of respondents thought they were doing neither more nor less when compared to before the pandemic, 38% thought they were doing more and 35% thought they were doing less (1 in 5 indicating they were doing a lot less).

Where respondents indicated that they thought they were doing less exercise they were asked to provide more detail. The most common theme identified was putting on weight due to a variety of factors such as no access to sports facilities, not having a good life/work balance, not being able to get around. Many respondents also noted an impact on their mental health due to a decline in physical wellbeing with respondents noting an increase in anxiety and depression. Some respondents noted the impact of being social isolated, having less motivation to be active, and a few respondents noted an impact of having COVID-19 on their physical wellbeing.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Suffered from anxiety in a way I have never experienced

I couldn't get to the gym for my daily workout until quite recently.

Difficult to get out and about.

Gained a lot of weight

Less socialisation

Less motivated to exercise

Weight gain, too easy to work long hours working from home

The three most popular activities respondents indicated that they were doing included: walking (80%), exercising at home (28%) and cycling (19%.)

Respondents were asked to note any reasons why they felt they have improved physical wellbeing. The most common theme identified was around having more time to undertake exercise with either working from home or being on furlough. Many respondents made positive comments about having a better life work balance and having more time and opportunities to fit exercise into their daily routine. Some respondents noted that they are less stressed, and many respondents noted they had lost weight and had improved their diet.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Didn't exercise at all pre COVID.

More regular exercise and planning meals more efficiently to reduce shopping trips.

More time outside

More opportunity for regular exercise due to remote working

I've been working from home, getting more done so not so stressed. I've been getting more exercise and getting out and about

Working from home has made me feel less stressed. No commute and long days have been a positive thing. Less tired so therefore able to enjoy walks in the evening

Mental wellbeing

Over one third of respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their mental wellbeing. This is slightly more compared to results from August 2020 (+5%). 6% thought they were happier or less stressed (-4% compared with 2020) and 16% hadn't noticed a change and 38% indicated that they had mixed – good/bad days. 11% of respondents indicated that they had accessed support services for mental wellbeing in the last six months.

Alcohol consumption

When asked about alcohol consumption results from 2021 are comparable to 2020. 39% of respondents noted that they are consuming about the same, 20% stated they were drinking more, 19% thought they were drinking less, and around 21% noted that they did not drink alcohol.

For those respondents who indicated that they were consuming more alcohol; 39% noted it had affected their quality of sleep, 24% have experienced changes to their energy levels, 23% noticed negative impacts on their physical health, and 18% noticed an impact on their mental health.

From these respondents 21% agreed that they were worried about their increase in consumption of alcohol. 17% of those who were worried noted that they will seek help with most of them indicating that they know where support is available. 20% of those who indicated that they were worried about their alcohol consumption and agreed that they will seek help, don’t know what support is available.

COVID-19 Testing

Around half of respondents indicated that they had taken a lateral flow COVID-19 test. The majority of these respondents (88%) had used home testing kits, around 5% had used a community testing facility. From the respondents who had not yet undertaken any tests 47% of them stated they would consider undertaking regular testing, around 33% stated they would not undertake regular testing and 19% did not know. For those respondents who had not taken any lateral flow COVID-19 tests and indicated that they would be willing to take regular tests; 87% indicated that they would like to take the tests at home, 11% noted they would like to take tests at a local community facility and 3% at work.

From respondents who had not taken a lateral flow COVID-19 test and stated they did not know or did not want to take regular tests the main reasons for not wanting to were; unsure about the accuracy of the tests (65%), feel the testing process would be unpleasant (29%), Lateral flow testing feels like too much of a commitment (15%), Not wanting to self-isolate if positive result returned (14%), Inconvenient location of test centre (11%), Do not believe in the threat of COVID-19 (11%), Unwilling to share data with government bodies (8%), financial impact of positive test (8%), religious or personal beliefs (3%).

COVID-19 Vaccinations

Nearly all the respondents (94%) had at least one COVID-19 vaccination. 69% had received both vaccinations and 25% had received one. 4% of respondents indicated that they have chosen not to be vaccinated and the remaining respondents indicated that they will be vaccinated when permitted.

Community safety

Around one in four respondents indicated that they felt unsafe when outside their home due to COVID-19. When compared with 2020 results more people feel safe in 2021 than they did previously 37% of respondents indicated that they felt safe and around 23% were unsure. When asked specifically about anti-social behaviour around 5% of respondents noted that they had seen an increase in the last six months.

Respondents were asked to explain why the pandemic has changed how safe they feel. The most common theme identified was around fear of catching the virus. Many respondents noted that they were worried about the actions of others and a number of respondents highlighted that other people were not adhering to the regulations. Many respondents noted that this was causing increased anxiety and causing stress. Some respondents noted that they specifically had concerns when shopping, going on public transport or visiting town centres. Some respondents noted that the guidelines were confusing and open to interpretation. A few noted concerns with some members of the community not wanting to get vaccinated and the impact that this would have long term. Respondents also noted that they had changed behaviour or were thoughtful before going to areas they thought of as high risk as they had concerns about passing on to others. A number of respondents also noted concerns about how many people were travelling into their local area when restrictions were in place which they felt increased the risk of transmission. A few respondents also noted that the media and coverage of the pandemic had led to increased anxiety of catching COVID-19.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Confusion on restrictions

People ignoring guidance on keeping distance, mixing with other households, numbers allowed i houses and outside. No one paying attention when walking along streets or in shopping centres or in shops.

In shops there's been widespread ignoring of the rules (e.g., masks worn under noses or under chins, no-one's bothering to distance). With so few places open, my usual areas to walk are much more crowded than usual

Media has only made my anxiety worse

Too many people not adhering to the laws.

People disregarding the guidelines.

Transport and Travel

The survey asked respondents to think about the main type of transport that they had used for essential journeys. For when respondents needed to use transport the main type for: traveling to work included by car or van (86%), on foot (11%), by bus, minibus or coach (2%), and by bicycle (1%), to shop for groceries and essential items by car or van (89%), on foot (9%), by bus, minibus or coach (1%), and by bicycle (1%), to shop for non-essential items by car or van (91%), on foot (6%), and by bus, minibus or coach (2%), medical or dentist appointments by car or van (83%), on foot (14%), by bus, minibus or coach (1%), and by bicycle (2%), to volunteer by car or van (64%), on foot (33%), by bus, minibus or coach (1%), and by bicycle (2%), to go to someone else’s house as a carer by car or van (82%), on foot (14%), by bus, minibus or coach (1%), and by bicycle (2%), to run errands for someone else by car or van (90%), on foot (8%), by bus, minibus or coach (1%), and by bicycle (1%), to drop off children at school or nursery by car or van (64%), on foot (31%), by bus, minibus or coach (3%), and by bicycle (2%), to undertake outdoor exercise by car or van (28%), on foot (64%), by bus, minibus or coach (3%), and by bicycle (2%),

To understand the use of public transport respondents were also asked if they had stopped using public transport during the COVID-19 pandemic. For respondents who regularly used public transport 68% noted that they had totally stopped, 14% noted they had partially stopped, and 18% noted that they continued to use public transport during recent months. Out of the respondents who indicated that they had stopped using public transport in recent months; 49% of respondents thought they would increase their use of public transport as restrictions are eased and things start to return to normal. 51% thought they would not increase their use of public transport.

To understand how circumstances have changed the survey asked about requirements to travel; 27% of respondents noted that they are working/learning from their usual location as normal, 52% noted that they are working/learning from home and no longer have to travel currently, and 21% stated that they are working/learning from home flexibly between home and place of work/education.

To understand future needs for transport respondents were asked if they expect their circumstances to change as restrictions are eased and things start to return to normal. 25% of respondents thought they expect to continue to work/learn from their normal location, 13% expect to continue to work/learn from home and no longer have to travel, 38% expect to work flexibly and 24% did not know.

Community Connections

To understand the strength of social networks within communities, respondents were asked a number of questions to understand the quality of friendships, relationships and contacts, the help that people provide and receive from neighbours and how connected and supported people perceive themselves to be. Table 1 below shows the percentage of respondents agreeing with the following social capital statements.

Table 1. Community Connections

Social capital indicator	2020 CIA	2021 CIA	Change
I can rely on my neighbours for help if needed	63%	61%	-3%
My neighbours look out for me	51%	46%	-5%
I could turn to neighbours for advice	51%	48%	-3%
I would help my neighbours out if they needed	94%	93%	-1%
I meet my neighbours or people in my local community socially	33%	30%	-3%

Table 1 shows 61% of respondents agreed (21% strongly agree, 41% agree) that they can rely on neighbours for help if needed compared to 63% in 2020. 46% of respondents believe that their neighbours would look out for them compared to 51% in 2021. 48% agreed that they could turn to their neighbours for advice compared to 51% in 2020. 93% agreed they would help neighbours if needed compared to 94% in 2020. And 30% agreed that they meet their neighbours or people in their local community socially compared to 33% in 2020.

26% of respondents noted that they had taken part in social distanced gatherings in their local community, 28% had experienced neighbours helping them out, 29% felt that there is an increase in community spirit, and 7% felt there has been an increase in community focused activities. 15% of respondents had used street/neighbourhood social media to keep in touch with others in their local community.

Community participation

It was found through the CIA undertaken in 2020 that community participation has been essential in the collective response to the emergency caused by COVID-19 and the ongoing crisis. To help understand to what degree communities want to continue to be engaged around matters that are important to them, a number of questions were asked around community participation.

Nearly all the respondents (87%) thought that it was a good idea for communities to be more involved in local decision making, 85% thought local communities should be more involved in helping to plan how services are delivered, 75% agreed that communities getting more involved in the practical delivery of services was a good idea, and 82% thought it was a good idea for communities taking on and managing local assets (buildings, open spaces, etc).

Where respondents indicated that they would be interested in increased community participation the areas that were of most interested were; Landscaping and Green Spaces (36%), Sport and Recreation (28%), Adult Health and Social Care Services (27%), Infrastructure - Roads, Footpaths and Street lights (25%), Local Transportation matters (16%), Place Planning (16%), Waste (16%), and Housing (14%).

Volunteering

When asked about giving up time to help any groups, clubs or organisations in an unpaid capacity or undertaken any other activity to help other people or to improve their local area 32% (25% in 2020) of people surveyed noted that they had volunteered, 68% (73% in 2020) said they hadn’t. From the respondents who indicated that they had volunteered 74% noted that they will continue to volunteer in the future, 26% do not intend to continue.

Support during the pandemic

To understand what (if anything) had made things easier for individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic respondents were asked to list areas of support. Similar to the 2020 survey the most common form of support that has made things easier for individuals is support from family (40%), followed by support from employers (29%), national information (e.g. daily briefings) (29%), support from friends/neighbours, local social media (21%), Council website (21%), newspaper/radio (9%), NHS “Near me” appointments (6%), support from local community group/volunteers (3%), support from the Assistance Hub (2%), and other Public Sector Service (2%).

Local area

Respondents were asked about their behaviours in recent months to understand how COVID-19 has impacted how they behave locally. 65% of respondents note that they are buying more from local shops/business, 69% agreed that they had used online shopping more often, 20% thought that local shops and business were busier, and 21% thought local shops and towns were quieter.

When asked about changes in their local area 28% of respondents had noticed environmental improvements such as better air quality and reduction in noise, 28% of respondents noted that there were less environmental issues such as litter and dog fouling, 9% felt there was less traffic, but 21% felt more people were travelling to their local area which was increasing traffic.

Satisfaction with Public Services

The survey asked respondents a number of questions around the Council’s response to the pandemic. The extent to which residents feel informed and engaged by the Council, and the trust that they place in them, directly affects their views about the Council and the services they receive. Table 2 below shows results from the 2020 and 2021 CIA survey and any changes in overall satisfaction.

Table 2. Satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council

Satisfaction	% Agree **2020 CIA**	% Agree **2021 CIA**	Change
Aberdeenshire Council is doing a good job overall in its ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic	48%	53%	+5%
Aberdeenshire Council have treated our residents with dignity and respect	46%	49%	+3%
Trust that the decisions made by Aberdeenshire Council Services were in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire	45%	53%	+8%

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents believe Aberdeenshire Council is doing a good job overall in its ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in recent months people's satisfaction with the Council's response has increased, it shows that just under half of respondents think the Council treat residents with dignity and respect and 53% believe that the decisions the Council has made have been in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire. This trend is consistent (albeit less positive) with resident research that has been conducted to monitor satisfaction with Council Services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents were asked to think about what had worked well and what could be improved by Aberdeenshire Council. From the comments received 38% are classified as negative, 5% mixed, 24% neutral, and 33% positive. The most common themes identified around what had worked well was around continuing to deliver some key services, examples given included waste collection, click and collect library services, distributing information about COVID-19, free car parking, recycling centre booking system, the assistance hub, and teaching and learning for young people.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

First-hand saw how the hub helped this community

I think giving car parking free was a good idea, helped elderly, vulnerable etc

Recycling centre booking system is good.

The schools as well have done well to adapt to providing work online for kids to complete.

Really appreciated the library Click and Collect service

Great information about Covid-19

Waste collections, roads winter maintenance worked well

The most common themes identified around what could be improved included the feeling that some services could have continued to be delivered. Services highlighted included recycling centres, grounds and roads maintenance, street cleaning and leisure facilities. Some respondents also noted that they felt some measures such as spaces for people were excessive. Several respondents commented that they felt communication could be improved and a few respondents noted that contacting the Council in recent months has been challenging. Several respondents noted opportunities to improve home schooling, and communication around learning from home. Several respondents also commented that more should have been done for vulnerable people such as disabled adults, older people, those on low income and those with learning disabilities. A few respondents also noted concern around the treatment of residents in care/sheltered homes.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Getting through to Council call centre / reaching some services by telephone very poor

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Excessive "Spaces for People" measures

Recycling centre booking system is good.

More should have been done for low-income families who aren't entitled to income based free school meals and clothing grant.

Street cleaning and road / footpath maintenance poor. Opportunities were wasted to do repairs when traffic / pedestrian levels were down.

Services for elderly and disabled adults with learning disabilities should have been prioritised

Treatment of Sheltered Housing tenants has been appalling

The 2021 survey also asked respondents about opinions on other public sector partners. 61% of respondents trust the decisions NHS Grampian made were in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire, 45% of respondents trust the decisions Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership made were in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire, 54% of respondents trust the decisions Scottish Fire and Rescue Service made were in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire, and 54% of respondents trust the decisions Police Scotland made were in the best interest for people living in Aberdeenshire.

When asked about access to Adult Health and Social Care Services, many respondents (35%) indicated they were not at all concerned about access to Adult Health and Social Care Services.   14% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned about access to Adult Health and Social Care Services, 13% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 18% noted that they were a little concerned, 20% agreed they were not very concerned because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, when asked about access to Health and Social Care Services specifically for children 49% indicated that they were not at all concerned about access to children’s services, 11% of respondents indicated that they were very concerned about access to services, 8% indicated that they are fairly concerned, 14% noted that they were a little concerned, 18% agreed they were not very concerned and Services for children because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking to the future

Respondents were asked to list any changes they would make in the future. The percentage agreeing with the changes in 2021 is comparable with the survey undertaken in 2020. Results show that there is less enthusiasm to support local business than there was previously, and more people are keen to work from home more often. The top changes noted by respondents included: support local business more (53% in 2021 but 63% in 2020), work from home more (46% in 2021 compared to 32% in 2020), spend more time at home (42% in 2021 and 43% in 2020), spend more time with children (31% in 2021 and 32% in 2020), travel less by car (21% in 2021 compared to 26% in 2020), keep in touch with neighbours (20% in 2021 compared to 24% in 2020), go on more holidays (27% in 2021 compared to 21% in 2020),go on less holidays (18% 2021, 19% in 2020), travel on public transport less (16% in 2021 and 19% in 2020), and volunteer in the community more often (13% in 2021 compared to 10% in 2020).

The survey asked respondents about how they felt about going to public places such as shops or town centres because of COVID-19. Table 3 shows the change in opinion from 2020 to 2021.

Table 3. Visiting Public Places

Visiting Public Places	% Agree 2020 CIA	% Agree 2021 CIA	Change
No impact - go as frequently as pre COVID-19	13%	31%	+18%
Go less often	50%	49%	-1%
Avoid public places	30%	13%	-17%
Unsure	7%	7%	-

Table 3 shows that respondents are more comfortable visiting public places than previously. When asked about visiting public places such as shops or town centres; 31% of respondents said the pandemic will have no impact, 49% said they will go less often, 7% were unsure and 13% said they will try to avoid visiting these places.

Respondents were asked if there was any way Council services and/or communities can work together to better deliver new Council priorities. The most common theme identified was around improvements in communication between the Council and members of the public. Many respondents felt that the Council should listen, consult, or engage with the public more often, several respondents noted that more transparency and trust is needed, and work should be undertaken to support partnership working. Some respondents noted that there needed to be a willingness to work together, support for people to get involved in local issues, and better signposting to opportunities and training. A few respondents highlighted more needed to be done to involve those least likely to be involved and there had to be investment in community services and projects where people could be meaningfully involved.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

More local discussion/online meetings

Communications and better engagement with the public

Meet, speak to each other without prejudice and hold the statutory services accountable for their part of the work

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Communities having more say in decisions that affect them.

More respect to be shown to those who work hard for their communities on a voluntary basis by those who work in the offices, etc who are in paid positions.

Council needs to be a lot more transparent and community involvement and decisions encouraged

More local discussion/online meetings

The survey asked respondents to note any other concerns they have about staying safe as Aberdeenshire moves into different levels of restrictions. The most common theme identified was around concerns that people will not follow the restrictions which will enable further spread of the virus. Many respondents noted concerns around the impact future variants will have, some noted concern and caution around international travel. Several respondents highlight concern with the increase in visitors to the local area as people are likely to be visiting the local area on holiday, and the risk of introducing the virus into the community and the strain on local services that increased visitor numbers will result in. A few respondents noted that they were worried about the mis-information in the community around rules and regulations, vaccinations, and COVID-19. A number of respondents noted concern around decision making around the transition to a new normal, and some felt worried about the support that would be available through public services.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Concerns of mental health declining as services pulled back.

Danger from future variants hitting the community

People relaxing too soon

I'm very cautious about travelling

I have concerns about the misinformation I am hearing in the community

The challenge we will face in the next year or two will be due to the disproportionate numbers of visitors to various UK destinations [as a result of fewer overseas holidays] that will cause all

sorts of pressures on local services and in certain communities and age groups it will increase anxiety.
Understanding the changing restriction
Decisions are increasingly around the economy and not public health
The attitudes of members of the public who aren't following the rules

Finally, respondents were asked to think about the future and the changes they have experienced in their community and note what they think should or could be done differently (by the Council, its Partners, or local communities). Common themes identified included reintroducing services that have been reduced, keeping elements of services which have been developed e.g., booking systems, building on the relationships which have been created by people working together, continuing to support volunteering and community groups, better engagement and communication, investment in active travel to build on peoples changing behaviours, and more ground and open space maintenance.

The comments listed below illustrate the commonly mentioned issues:

Continue with online booking for some services - e.g., household waste centres, click and collect library services.
Promoting community involvement and opportunities to keep the community spirit going
Council to support out of school clubs better as a vital part of the community and a wraparound childcare service that allows parents to work, knowing their children are safe
More pedestrian crossings in the smaller towns to promote walking…. slower speed limits in town again to promote walking. Purpose built cycle lanes connecting towns and villages in Aberdeenshire, removing cyclists form the roads, enhancing their safety and promoting cycling as a viable option.
Opening back up local services libraries, swimming pools, providing kids clubs during holidays
There needs to be the ability to pay cash to the Council. Not everyone can access the internet especially when libraries were closed
Encourage the amazing voluntary groups who do so much by helping