Sandwell Resident Wellbeing & Perception Survey
Sandwell Resident Budget Consultation
Key Findings

In May 2022 the Council commissioned Enventure, a market research agency, to conduct a borough-wide residents' survey to support evidence-based policy, service delivery and performance management. This was a large-scale quantitative survey covering several themes and particularly aligned to LGA Benchmarking resident satisfaction surveys (the latest one being in June 2022). The survey was undertaken by telephone, with an adult sample that was designed to be representative of the wider borough by gender, age, ethnicity, employment status and geography. Provision was made for communicating with typically under-represented, or 'hard-to-reach' groups and respondents whose first language is not English through community groups and networks and the use of translators and interpreters.

The residents' survey secured 1,062 responses, which is a sample large enough to provide statistically highly reliable findings at the borough level and sufficient responses to examine the results by sub-groups including at town level. These will be analysed in detail by the Research & Intelligence Team to inform a programme of dissemination within the Council and more widely.

The Council simultaneously commissioned Enventure do undertake a budget consultation survey with residents to inform the budget setting process. The representative resident survey was conducted via telephone and face-to-face with quotas set on age group, gender, disability, ethnic group and area of the borough. In addition, some interviews were undertaken face-to-face on-street and in local community groups to consult with hard to reach residents. Alongside the representative survey was an online survey open to all Sandwell residents. In total, 1,070 responses were received to the representative resident survey and 577 responses to the open online survey.

Key Findings: Resident Wellbeing and Perception Survey

Living in Sandwell
- 78% of respondents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, with Tipton was lowest on this measure, at 74%.
- Four in five (82%) say they feel strongly about belonging to their local area, ranging from 79% in Smethwick to 85% in Oldbury.
- 77% agree their local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together, with Rowley Regis highest (80%) and Wednesbury lowest (68%).
- Three in five (56%) agree that people in the local area pull together.
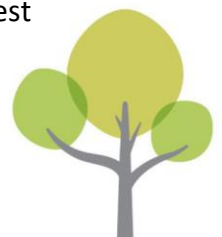
Satisfaction with Sandwell Council

- Satisfaction with the Council is slightly higher than the national average (66% compared to 62%) with Wednesbury lowest at 63%.
- Three in five (60%) think Sandwell Council acts on the concerns of local residents, compared with 52% nationally.
- Three in five (60%) think Sandwell Council keeps residents informed about services and benefits it provides, compared with 57% nationally
- Trust in the Council is higher amongst Sandwell residents than nationally (67% and 58% respectively).

Council interaction and communications

- Just over a quarter (27%) of respondents had been in contact with Sandwell Council recently.
- Housing, missed bin collections, reporting anti-social behaviour, and council tax queries are the most common reasons for contacting the Council.
- The most common ways of receiving news and information about Sandwell is via family and friends, Sandwell Herald Council newspaper, Sandwell Council Facebook page, and Sandwell Council's newsletter.

Satisfaction with Council services

Services where satisfaction is higher amongst Sandwell residents when compared nationally:

- Waste: 88% compared with 81% nationally.
- Street cleaning: 67% compared with 66% nationally.
- Road maintenance: 50% compared with 37% nationally.
- Pavement maintenance: 61% compared with 49% nationally.
- Sport and leisure services: 56% compared with 55% nationally.
- Services and support for children and young people: 41% compared with 39% nationally.

Services where satisfaction is lower amongst Sandwell residents when compared nationally:

- Library services: 49% compared with 60% nationally.
- Services and support for older people: 36% compared with 41% nationally.
- Parks and open spaces: 70% compared with 82% nationally.

Crime and Anti-social behaviour

- Half (50%) say they feel safe in their local area after dark, but this is lower than the national average of 76%.

- Almost nine in ten (87%) say they feel safe in their area during the day, which is slightly lower than the national average of 95%.
- Respondents believe the worst anti-social problem is people using or dealing drugs, identified by 45%, with Tipton having the most concerns.
- Rubbish or litter lying around was also seen as a particular problem.

Digital connectivity
- The majority have access to the internet (home broadband, cellular devices, at work).
- 9% do not have access to the internet (mainly those aged 65 and older) and a further 19% say their digital skills are limited, an issue particularly affecting people with health problems.

Climate emergency
- The majority of respondents already reduce waste/recycle at home although 17% do not.
- 31% have not reduced energy use at home.
- Half say they use public transport, walk or cycle where possible.

Resident concerns
- Respondents are most concerned about the cost of living increases and inflation (67%), NHS waiting lists (39%) and having a family that is healthy (35%). Issues spontaneously raised include community safety, street-based services and the local environment.

Loneliness and social isolation
- Thee in five (31%) say they have experienced loneliness at least on occasion, with 6% saying they experience it often or always.
- 11% say they have some social contact with people, but not enough, and a further 6% have little social contact and feel socially isolated.

Access to healthcare
- 28% indicated a long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses.
- Yet almost two-thirds (65%) said they did not have any barriers to accessing healthcare or social care.
- Not being able to get a doctor's appointment is the most common problem (23%).
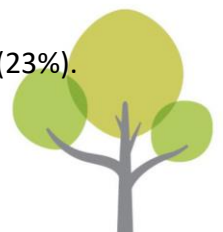
In most respects, the residents survey is encouraging for the Council and its partners. Neighbourhood satisfaction, commitment to the area and community cohesion is notably strong. Crime and anti-social behaviour emerge though as key concerns. The cost of living crisis is obviously topical, but the climate emergency seems less so, with a minority taking no steps to recycle, reduce waste or energy use.

Responsibility for public health was passed to local authorities in 2010 and wellbeing issues were explored in this survey. The level of illness and disability and reported loneliness and social isolation are concerning. Linked to this, is the degree of digital exclusion.

The Council emerges well from the residents' survey for service delivery and customer and public engagement, generally scoring above national (LGA) averages. This is a positive finding given austerity and the improvement journey the Council is on. It will be important to unpack these issues for key groups and at town level to understand differing experiences of Council activity.

Key Findings: Budget Consultation Survey

Note: For brevity, this summary covers the representative survey responses, not the online sample.

Closing the budget gap
- The option most supported by respondents was *sell/develop Council buildings (*34%).
- *Introduce more charging for non-essential services* and *stop or reduce non-essential services* were also frequently mentioned (29%).

Most valued services
Theme 1: The best start in life for children and young people
- *Preventative help for vulnerable children* was selected as the most important area of work, chosen by half (50%).
- *Early years education* (37%) and *children's social care* (35%) were next most frequently selected.

Theme 2: People live well and age well
- *Helping older people live independently for longer* was viewed as important by over half (55%).
- *Providing day centres for older people* (44%) and *encourage exercise and better health by maintaining parks and open spaces* (37%) were also selected by high proportions of respondents.

Theme 3: Strong resilient communities
- *Community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour* was chosen as important by 64%.
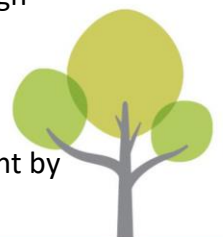
- Over half of respondents also selected *maintaining our parks and open spaces* (51%).
- A quarter (26%) said that *providing social hubs and community centres* was important.

Theme 4: Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
- The most frequently mentioned area was *accessible affordable housing*, mentioned by 58% of respondents.
- *Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping* was viewed as important by 47%.
- A minority said that *more energy efficient housing* was important (35%).
- One third (33%) suggested *working with private landlords to bring empty homes back into use.*

Theme 5: A connected and accessible Sandwell
- *Maintaining roads and pavements* was selected as important by high proportions of respondents (72%).
- Almost half mentioned *improving transport options and transport links* (47%) while 30% acknowledged *improved partnership working with local authorities and West Midlands Combined Authority.*

Theme 6: A strong and inclusive economy
- Over half (55%) said that *creating more jobs for local people* was important and half (51%) said the same about *creating apprenticeship opportunities for young people*.
- Around one third (31%) mentioned *improving Sandwell's town centres*.

Service provision
- *Adult social care services* were expected to be provided at no cost by the majority of representative (58%).
- Respondents were most willing to contribute financially towards *public shows and events* (74% representative) and *sports and leisure facilities* (71%).
- Over 50% indicated that they would be willing to contribute towards *pest control services*, *car parking*, *cultural services* and *bulky waste item collections.*

Accessing services online
- Over half indicated that they would be *happy to contact the Council/use MySandwell account for all services* (56%).
- However, over three in ten (31%) said that they would prefer to access *all council services* in-person or by telephone.
- Of those who preferred to contact the Council in-person or via telephone for any service, the majority said this was because they *simply prefer to speak to someone* (40%) and the next most frequent response was related to the *convenience of speaking to someone* (18%).
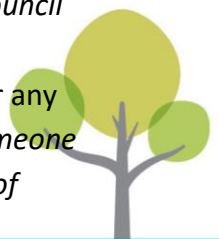
Doing things differently

- The most common suggestion for other things the Council could do to help with making the required savings was to *work more efficiently* (16%).
- *No unnecessary spending/cut back on non-essentials* was suggested by 13%.
- Other common responses included *reduce staff/managers/salaries* (11%) and *sort problems quickly/more prevention* (6%).