

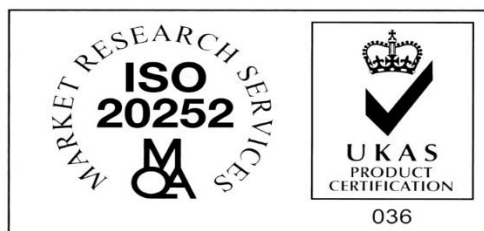


# Ards and North Down Borough Council

## Executive Summary

### Ards and North Down Borough Council: Residents' Survey (2023)

22 February 2024



**SMR**

3 Wellington Park

Belfast BT9 6DJ

T: 02890 923362

W: [www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk](http://www.socialmarketresearch.co.uk)

E: [info@socialmarketresearch.co.uk](mailto:info@socialmarketresearch.co.uk)

## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a survey of Ards and North Down Borough Council residents. As well as providing a measure of resident satisfaction with the Council, the survey also focused on awareness and use of Council services and contact with the Council. Other areas covered in the survey included: recycling; use of the Council's website; support for making more Council services available online; engagement; value for money; and resident perceived priorities. The survey was undertaken in October and November 2023 and is based on a representative sample of 1004 residents covering all areas of the Borough. The survey was conducted by telephone and in accordance with the ISO20252:2019 Standard.

### Overall Satisfaction

- 83% of residents were satisfied with the Council overall, 11% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 5% were dissatisfied and 1% were undecided (*the overall satisfaction level is consistent with that recorded in the Council's 2021 survey, 82%. The comparative figure for all GB Councils in June 2023 was 60%*);
- Hollywood and Clondeboyne (97%) residents recorded the highest level of satisfaction with the Council, with Newtownards residents least likely to be satisfied (64%);
- The most common suggestions for Council improvement included: keeping areas clean and tidy, reducing litter, reducing fly tipping, street cleaning and keeping grassed areas weed free. Reducing or freezing domestic and business rates, was also commonly suggested;

### Awareness and Use of Council Services

- Residents were more likely to be aware of the Council's waste collection service (98%) and less likely to be aware of its business support service (56%);
- The most commonly used Council services in the last 12 months included: waste management services (73%); car parks (67%); parks and open spaces (51%); household recycling centres (42%); and, leisure and community centres (38%);
- 97% of residents had used at least one Council service in the previous 12 months [*73% in 2021*];

### Satisfaction with Council Services

- Residents using Council services reported relatively high levels of satisfaction, with the highest level of satisfaction recorded for registration of births, deaths and marriages and civil partnerships (99%), with a relatively lower level of satisfaction recorded for business support (73%)<sup>1</sup>;

### Recycling

- 58% rated their commitment to recycling as high, 32% as medium and 9% as low [*67% in 2021*];
- Those less committed to recycling included: men; residents aged under 35; those in lower social grades; residents with a disability; economically inactive residents; and residents living in Newtownards;
- 87% of residents said they are confident that they put different waste materials in the right bins, with 14% saying they are not confident [*84% in 2021*];

### Contact with the Council

- 38% of residents had contacted or made an enquiry to the Council in the last 12 months, with phone contact ]accounting for 67% of all recent contacts [*40% had contacted the Council in 2021*];

<sup>1</sup> Please note that satisfaction levels for some services such as business support are based on small sample sizes and as such caution should be exercised in extrapolating these findings to all service users

- 82% rated their most recent contact as either excellent or good, 12% fair and 6% poor *[72% in 2021]*;

### Council Website

- 49% had visited the Council website in the last 12 months, with the most common reasons for doing so including: getting information on a Council service (50%) and to find out about opening times (33%) *[28% had visited the Council's website in 2021]*;
- Residents using the website to get information on a Council service were most likely to be seeking information on household recycling centres (31%);
- 99% were able to find the service-related information they were looking for *[97% in 2021]*, with 92% of visitors to the website satisfied with it *[88% in 2021]*;

### Support for More Council Services being Available Online

- 82% are supportive of the Council making more of its services available online *[74% in 2021]*;

### Broadband and Online Activity

- 94% said their household is connected to broadband, with 77% of those with a broadband connection rating their connection as either excellent or good *[72% in 2021]*;
- Bangor Central (98%) residents were more likely to rate the quality of broadband coverage where they live as excellent or good whereas residents in Bangor East and Donaghadee were least likely to do so (62%);
- 77% use the internet / go online on a daily basis with 73% using social media platforms such as Facebook (67%), Instagram (39%); and Twitter (38%) *[in 2021, 51% used the internet / went online on a daily basis]*;

### Consultations, Communication, Perception and Engagement

- 85% said they find it easy to get information on Council services or initiatives *[71% in 2021]*;
- The Council's website was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in terms of the best way for the Council to communicate with residents, followed by email (2<sup>nd</sup>) and a Council magazine posted to all households (3<sup>rd</sup>);
- 86% are supportive of a Council magazine being sent to all households in the Borough *(6% are unsupportive and 8% were undecided)*;
- 2% had taken part in a Council engagement / information exercise in the last 12 months with 11% doing so more than 12 months ago;
- 87% of those who had engaged in a Council engagement / information exercise rated their experience as excellent or good;
- Among those who had never participated in a Council engagement / information exercise, lack of interest (42%), and being unaware of Council consultations (35%), were the most common reasons for not doing so;
- 64% would like the Council to consult with them in the future using online methods, with 14% preferring a letter and 9% preferring a Council newsletter / Borough Magazine *(in 2021, 33% preferred online methods and 33% preferred a Council newsletter)*;
- 78% believe the Council keeps residents well informed about the services and benefits it provides *(the figure was 72% in 2021. The comparative figure for all GB Councils in June 2023 was 55%)*;
- 65% are satisfied with the level of engagement the Council offers local residents *(the figure was 68% in 2021)*;
- Thinking of the Council as a person, residents most commonly used the following terms to describe its personality: 'helpful'; 'friendly'; 'professional'; 'responsive'; and 'nice'.

### Value for Money

- 68% believe that 'given the range of services provided to residents, Ards and North Down Borough Council provides good value for money' (the comparative figure in 2021 was 49%. The comparative figure for all GB Councils in June 2023 was 42%);

### Council Priorities

- In rank order, residents identified the top 3 Council priorities as: attracting jobs and investment into the local economy (1st); ensuring annual rate increases are kept at or below inflation (2nd) and supporting residents and businesses' health and wellbeing (3rd);

### Local Area as a Place to Live

- 93% said they are satisfied with their local area as a place to live [90% in 2021. The comparative figure for all GB Councils in June 2023 was 73%];
- All residents in Bangor East and Donaghadee, and Bangor West, were satisfied with their local area as a place to live, with Newtownards residents least likely to be satisfied (80%);

## Key Conclusions

### Resident Satisfaction

Overall, residents report a high level of satisfaction with Ards and North Down Borough Council with more than 8 out of 10 satisfied. This level of satisfaction is consistent with previous resident satisfaction surveys conducted by the Council in 2018 and 2021.

### Awareness, Use and Satisfaction with Council Services

Awareness of specific Council services was found to be relatively high, with the most commonly used services including waste management, car parks, parks and open spaces, household recycling centres (HRCs) and leisure and community centres.

Although most residents using individual services reported to be satisfied with each service, services reporting proportionately higher levels of *dissatisfaction* included planning and / or building control and HRCs. In relation to planning and / or building control, dissatisfaction related to users finding the process difficult as well as speed of response by the Council. In relation to HRCs, dissatisfaction primarily related to having to book an appointment to use a HRC.

### Recycling

Residents being fully committed to recycling is key to the Council delivering on its waste management strategy. Although the current survey found that most residents say their commitment to recycling is high (58%), this level of commitment has fallen significantly from the figure of 67% recorded in 2021, with those less likely to say their commitment is high representing particular resident groups such as younger residents, those in lower social grades, and those living in Newtownards.

### Resident Contact with the Council

The current survey shows that approximately four out of ten residents had contacted the Council in the last 12 months, with this level of contact similar to that recorded in 2021. In terms of contact experience, and on a positive note for the Council, the contact experience of residents has improved with a significantly greater number of residents in the current survey reporting their contact experience as either excellent or good (up from 72% to 82% compared with 2021).

### Council's Website

As in previous surveys, the importance of the Council's website to residents is borne out in the current survey, with visits to the website almost doubling compared with 2021 (*up from 28% to 49%*). In almost all cases, residents were able to find the service related information they were looking for, with the overwhelming majority of visitors to the site satisfied with it. Indeed residents say that the Council website is the best way for the Council to communicate with them.

### Broadband Connectivity

Resident perception of the quality of broadband in their local area has remained unchanged since 2021, with most residents continuing to use the internet daily, most use social media platforms, and most use Facebook.

### Communication with Residents

Effective communication by the Council is critical to ensuring that residents are informed about what is going on across the Borough. As with previous surveys, this current survey shows that the Council is performing well on this measure, with most residents of the view that it is easy to get information on Council services or initiatives (*up significantly from 71% in 2021 to 85% in the current survey*). Residents are also highly supportive of a Council magazine being sent to all households in the Borough. Although participation in Council engagement and information exercises is low, the overwhelming majority of those who have taken part in these consultations found it a positive experience. Among the vast majority of residents who have never taken part in a Council consultation exercise, lack of interest and being unaware of consultations are the most common reasons for not doing so. Looking to the future, residents believe that online methods are the best way for the Council to engage with them. Overall, most residents are satisfied with the level of engagement the Council offers residents, with this pattern of response consistent with the findings from previous surveys.

### Value for Money

In relation to value for money, the current survey found that almost 7 out of 10 residents believe that given the range of services provided to residents, Ards and North Down Borough Council provides good value for money. Compared with 2021, this represents a significant improvement for the Council (*up from 49% in 2021 to 69% in the current survey*);

### Council Priorities and Ards and North Down as a Place to Live

With regard to Council priorities, residents have prioritised attracting jobs and investment into the local economy, ensuring annual rate increases are kept at or below inflation and supporting residents and businesses' health and wellbeing. This marks a change in the top priority from 2021, when health and wellbeing was most important to residents. This is probably no surprise given that in 2021 survey was conducted during the pandemic.

Again, and as with previous surveys, residents have strongly endorsed Ards and North Down Borough as a place to live, with resident satisfaction with their local area very high, and significantly above the GB average.

## Overall Conclusions

Overall the survey findings suggest a high level of satisfaction with the Council overall, with the Council scoring well on specific measures such as providing value for money, satisfaction with Council provided services and Council consultation and engagement activities. In terms of priorities for the Council, residents believe that the focus should be on prioritising attracting jobs and investment, ensuring annual rate increases are kept at or below inflation, and the health and wellbeing of residents and businesses.