Staffordshire COVID-19 Resident Survey

Summary report

October 2020

1. Background

In order to build an understanding of the impact that COVID-19 has had on people's lives, and how residents feel about how the County can recover from the pandemic, Staffordshire County Council undertook a survey of our residents.

This report provides an analysis of the survey findings, setting out key results and themes.

The online survey took place between 10th August to the 13th September 2020, and was aimed at the Staffordshire adult (18+) population.

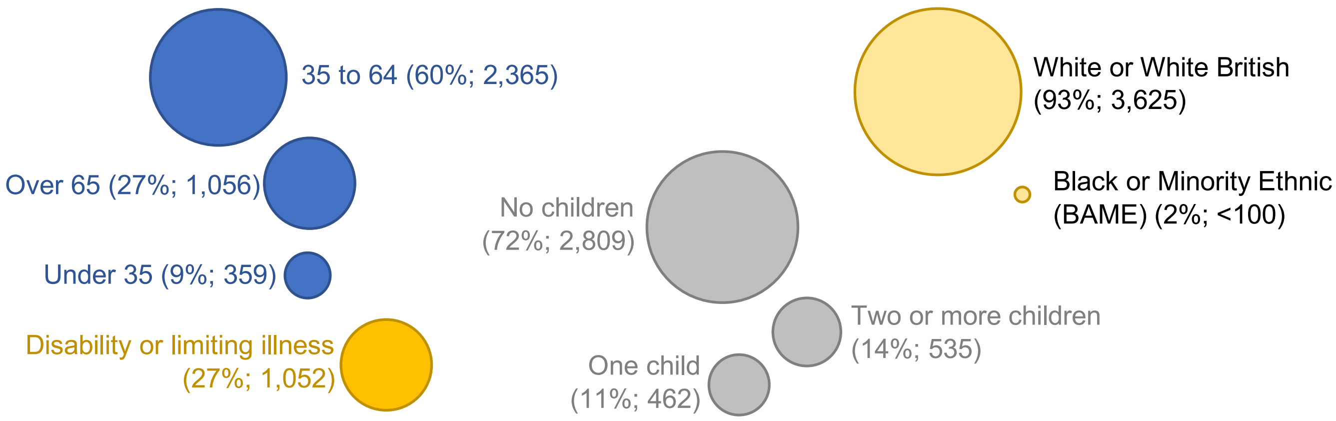
To ensure we reached a broad cross section of communities, the survey was well promoted by partners, in particular District/Borough Councils, key voluntary and community sector partners such as Support Staffordshire. In addition, a wide range of existing County Council networks and community assets were used, including Staffordshire libraries and children centres, Elected Members/Parish Councils, as well, as targeted community groups and press/social media.

A total of 3,921 completed responses were received – the largest response to a County Council cross cutting survey for some time.

Results are statistically robust[1] at a District/Borough level, and at a County level a good response was achieved across age ranges and disability.

2. Respondent Characteristics

Fig 1. Characteristics of respondents



- Female respondents slightly over-representative (66% female, 31% male, 3% other).
- More likely to be middle working age (35-64; 60% of respondents) or aged 65+ (27%).
- Majority were White or White British, accounting for 93% of all responses.
- 27% (1,052) indicated they had a disability or limiting long term illness (LLTI).
- A large proportion (71%) had no dependent children living in their household.

Compared to the Staffordshire population overall, survey respondents were slightly over-representative of female residents, those aged 35 to 64, White or White-British residents and those with disabilities or liming illness. In contrast, despite targeted efforts, respondents from BAME backgrounds and those aged under 35 were under-represented whencompared to the Staffordshire population overall.

[1] At a 95% confidence level, margins of error are as follows:
All respondents/County +/- 2%; Single district or borough +/- 5%; Age under 35 +/- 5%; Age 35-64 +/- 3%; Aged 65 or over +/- 2%

This indicates that should the survey be repeated 100 times, in 95 instances, results would fall within the cited margins of error.

3. Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an **overall negative impact** on day-to-day life for the majority (63%) of respondents, particularly for a number of key groups.

- People furloughed during the pandemic (70%);
- People who have taken a break from work to look after family and/or children (68%); and
- People who have a disability or limiting long-term medical condition (67%).

Key common negative impacts include not seeing wider family and friends (80%), feeling concerned about vulnerable family and friends (55%), as well as loneliness and isolation (35%).

Many (59%) have **embraced new and different opportunities, such as digital technology** to stay connected with loved ones, as well as to help with day to day life. Most plan to keep doing more online. Parents with dependent children (41%) and younger age groups (45%) have spent more time discovering what their local area has to offer, and plan to do this more in the future.

The local environment is considered important to many, 55% of respondents are concerned about it and 10% of free text responses highlighted it as a key opportunity in the recovery of Staffordshire. Respondents particularly recognised the **value of Staffordshire's green spaces** and how important access to and the upkeep of these are.

The majority (over 74%) of those with children have seen the chance to spend more time with immediate family as a positive, but very **few (14%) have found home-schooling to be a positive** experience.

Staffordshire's economy and protecting local jobs was a key theme throughout, in terms of people's greatest concerns (79% worried about local economy) and biggest opportunity (22% see opportunity to develop local businesses). Job creation, regeneration of High Streets and incentives to attract new businesses are all key to recovery.

Fostering community spirit, experienced during the pandemic, is important to many. A large number commented on the **rise in social action** and believe capitalising on the momentum is key a part of Staffordshire's recovery. Reinforcing this is a desire for better engagement with communities, who are keen to be **directly involved in decision-making**.

Access to **healthcare services is a key concern (51%) and identified as a challenge for Staffordshire,** particularly the potential impact of reduced services on longer term health outcomes. The ability to maintain **healthy lifestyles has been mixed overall** – with increases in exercise reported by some (31%), balanced against decreases amongst others (29%). The same is also true for healthy eating, however many are keen to exercise more and eat healthier going forward.

Concerns about COVID-19 guidance and restrictions continue to cause concern and provide local challenges for Staffordshire's recovery. There is a **need for effective enforcement of restrictions** (e.g. social distancing, wearing of face coverings) both in public and in local businesses, with many drawing a link between this and having the **confidence to return to public spaces**. In contrast, there are a number who feel that some guidance (particularly face coverings) makes them feel less confident about returning to public places.

4. Resident Impact

- Nearly two thirds (63%) feel COVID-19 has had an overall negative impact on their life
- Not being able to see friends and family has been the worst aspect for many (80%)
- Just over half were able to benefit from being able to save money during lockdown
- Furloughed individuals and those with disabilities/limiting illness have had the worst experience

Overall Impact

The majority (63%) of respondents felt that COVID-19 had an overall negative impact on their life, with the minority (12%) feeling that the impact had been positive overall.

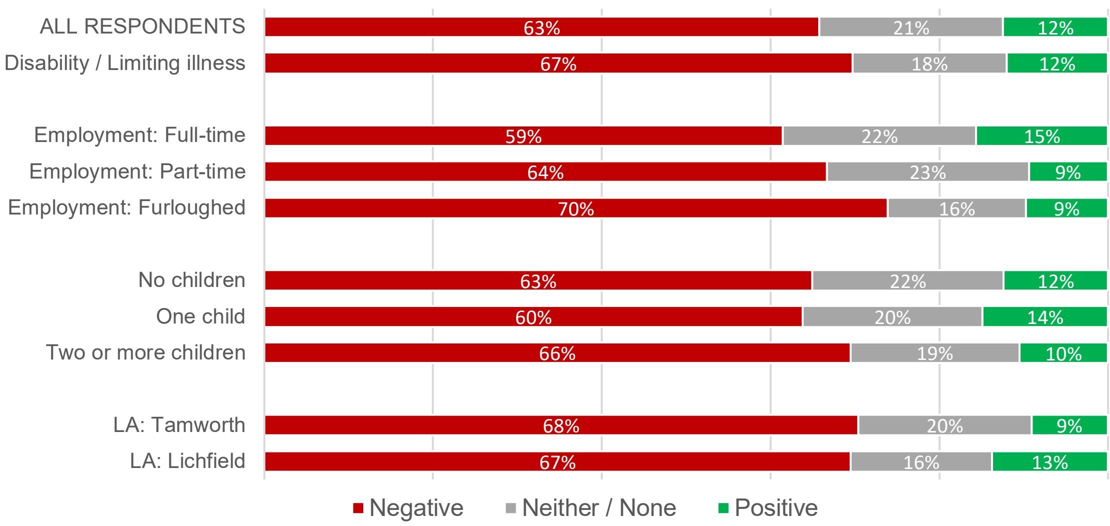
There is little variation in overall impact by age or gender, however, the experience has been more negative for the following respondent groups:

- Those placed on furlough during the pandemic (70% negatively impacted)
- Those who stopped working so they could care for children or family members (68%)
- Individuals with a disability or limiting illness (67%)

No single district or borough appear to have had an overall ‘better’ experience than average, although some reported a greater negative experience. Respondents from Lichfield (67%) and Tamworth (68%) experienced a slightly more negative impact than others, with the lowest level of negative impact (61%) reported in East Staffordshire – although allowing for margin of error, this is statistically similar to the 63% reported countywide.

Those who remained in full-time employment throughout were more likely to report a positive impact overall (16%), however more than half (55%) of this group still felt the overall impact had been negative.

Fig 2. Overall COVID-19 Impact by key group



Negative Impacts

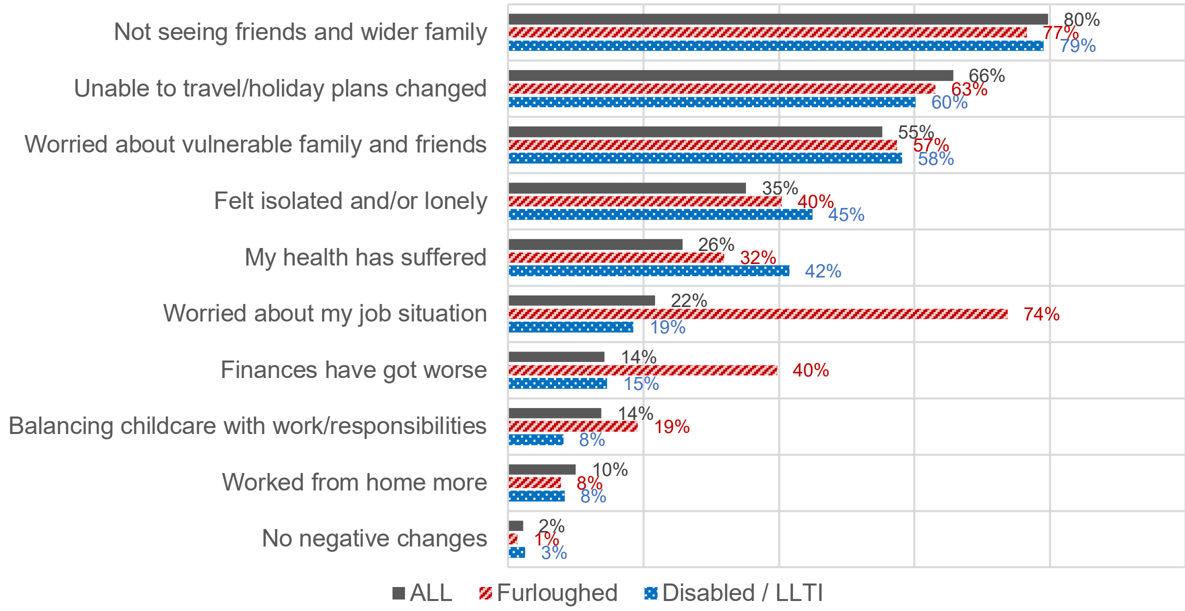
A large majority reported not seeing friends and family (80%) or being concerned about vulnerable friends and family (55%) as key negative impacts. For those placed on furlough, the increase in negative impact may be driven by *worries about their employment* situation (74%, compared to 22% overall) and a *worsening of their financial situation* (40% of this group, compared to 14% overall).

Younger people (under 35’s) are also more concerned about their employment situation (39% compared to 24% across all ages) and about their financial situation (43% compared to 31%). Those aged 65 and over were considerably less likely to be worried about household finances

(13% worried). Taking into account the margin of error, those aged 65+ reported similar levels of isolation and impact on health compared to respondents overall.

Those with disabilities or limiting illnesses were considerably more likely than others to have stated that their *own health had suffered* (42% of this group, compared to 26% overall) and were also more likely to have *felt isolated or lonely* (45%, compared to 35% overall).

Fig 3. Negative factors experienced

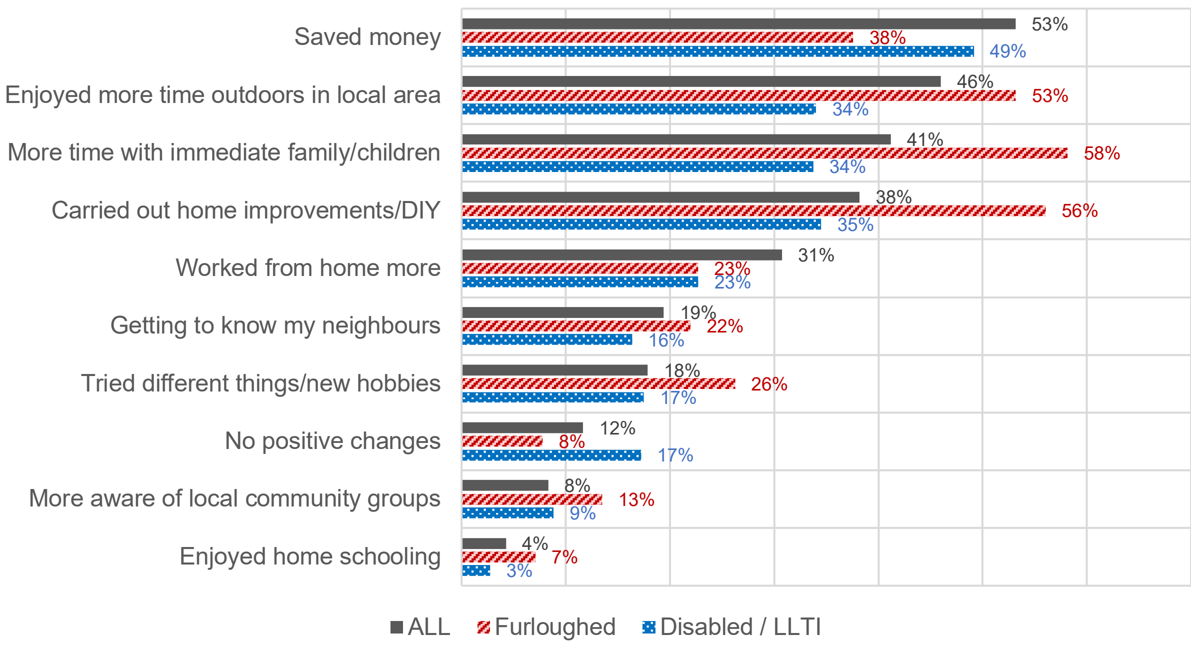


Positive Impacts

Although a much smaller proportion experienced an overall positive impact, many were able identify some positive impacts, such as *being able to save money* (53%) and *enjoying more time outdoors/their local area* (46%).

Whilst almost half of respondents have reported *enjoying more time outdoors* as a positive (46%), this has only been the case for around a third (34%) of those with disabilities or limiting illness. Those furloughed were more likely to enjoy time outdoors and with immediate family.

Fig. 4 Positive factors experienced



Families with Children

There is some variation among parent respondents - those with one child report the pandemic having less of a negative impact (60%), compared to those with two or more (66%). Although both groups report average positive impact.

Those with two or more children at home have also found it more difficult to *balance childcare with work and other responsibilities* (40% of those with one child, 58% of those with more than one). Home-schooling is generally not perceived as a positive, with very few (14%) parents indicating *home-schooling* to have been a positive outcome.

Employment status

Respondents whose employment status has remained consistent throughout consider themselves to be the least negatively impacted. In contrast, 70% of those who were placed on furlough during the pandemic and 68% of those who were previously working but now looking after family or dependents, consider COVID-19 to have had a greater negative impact. This is also true for those who became unemployed or unable to work.

This survey suggests that the pandemic has had an impact on employment for almost 1-in-5 respondents - 18% (691 out of 3,921) saw their level of employment reduce in some way compared to before the pandemic.

Those who worked part-time were more likely to see a change in their employment than those working full time, with 13% of part-time workers having to look after family or dependents, and 8% being furloughed. Overall, 78% of those working full time prior to the pandemic were still working full-time, compared to just 60% of part-time employees.

5. Changing Behaviours

- Big increase in online activity/use of digital across all age groups, including the over 65s
- Increases in people exploring and making use of their local area (32%) and high street (29%)
- Almost half intend to focus on healthier personal lifestyles going forwards

To better understand how the pandemic has affected people's behaviours and habits, respondents were asked whether they had spent more, less, or the same amount of time doing specific activities. For those doing more of an activity, they were also asked which of these they planned to continue doing in the future.

Fig 5. Proportion with increase in specific behaviours or activities (% of all respondents)

Activity/Behaviour	Did more of	No change	Did less of	Plan to keep doing
Online shopping	59%	31%	4%	47%
Online chat / calling	58%	35%	3%	45%
Discover local area	32%	48%	14%	43%
Exercise	31%	39%	29%	46%
Buy locally / visit high street	29%	33%	35%	43%
Alcohol consumption	27%	46%	10%	9%
Online banking	22%	70%	1%	40%
Eating healthy	21%	56%	23%	48%
New hobbies	18%	66%	7%	20%
Learn a new skill	17%	67%	4%	18%
Time with wider family / friends	6%	26%	63%	46%

Digital
Increased digital adoption to both connect with family members and friends and go about their daily lives (e.g. online shopping). Just under half also plan to maintain this moving forwards. This was true across all age groups, including over 65's where more than half (58-60%) had increased the use of online services for both staying in touch with others and for shopping.

Healthy Behaviours
This presents a more mixed picture. A similar proportion stated they eat *more* and *less healthily* since the start of the outbreak, which is also true for amount of exercise - the larger proportion report no change to these habits. When asked how frequently they are physical active, a similar proportion reported at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week before the pandemic (44%), compared to 43% during the outbreak. Slightly more stated they did fewer than 30 minutes (14%), compared to 21% during. A similar trend can be seen with alcohol consumption, with 46% stating no change, however the greatest increase in alcohol consumption has been among parents with 40% stating they were consuming more alcohol since the start of the pandemic.

Shop Local
Those aged under 35 were more likely than average to have visited their local high street or bought locally (45%, compared to 35% overall). However, parents were considerably more likely to have done less of this, with almost two-thirds (64%) stating that they had done this less often.

Local Area
The environment and local area has been important for both younger age groups and those with children - 45% of under 35s and 41% of parents have spent more time in their local area (compared to 32% overall) and both groups plan to spend more time doing this in the future.

6. Help and Support

- 29% received help and support, primarily to access essential supplies
- Over half (52%) provided support to others during the first wave of the pandemic Almost all (91%) of those who provided support, would be willing to do so again ifrequired

Receiving Support
29% (1,128) of respondents received help or support during the pandemic, with common support networks being:

Those with disabilities or limiting illness and those in older age groups, were most likely to have received support during the pandemic; 45% (473) of those with disabilities and 43% (457) of those aged 65 and older. This reflects Government guidance for older and clinically extremely vulnerable groups to self-isolate during lockdown. This is broadly supported by the most popular support need being *getting essential supplies*.

Levels of support varied, with Lichfield and Staffordshire Moorlands both slightly above average, with 32% and 31% receiving support respectively. Respondents from Newcastle-under-Lyme appear to have needed less support than average, with around 24% receiving help.

The range of support needs are set out below:

Fig 6. Individuals supported with specific needs (n=774)

Type of Need	Number and %
Getting essential supplies	427 (38%)
Getting prescriptions	387 (34%)
Mental health (incl. bereavement support)	137 (12%)
Loneliness / befriending	85 (8%)
Food parcels	80 (7%)
Advice about work / employment	68 (6%)
Support with technology (i.e. online shopping)	62 (5%)
Help with own business (e.g. PPE, grants)	49 (4%)
Advice on staying active / healthy	43 (4%)
Financial advice	35 (3%)
Transport	35 (3%)
Childcare	32 (3%)
Support with free food	23 (2%)

Unmet Need

Of those who didn't receive any help or support (2,785), a small proportion (496) stated *they needed help but didn't receive any*. Reasons given were:

- Ineligible for support (219; 44%)
- Didn't feel confident in asking for support (150; 30%), particularly for those under 35s.
- Did not know where to go to ask for support (127; 26%), higher for those aged 65 and over.

Providing Support

Over half of respondents (52%; 2,044) provided help or support to others during the pandemic. Those living in both East Staffordshire and Staffordshire Moorlands (55% from each) were slightly more likely to have provided help and support to others.

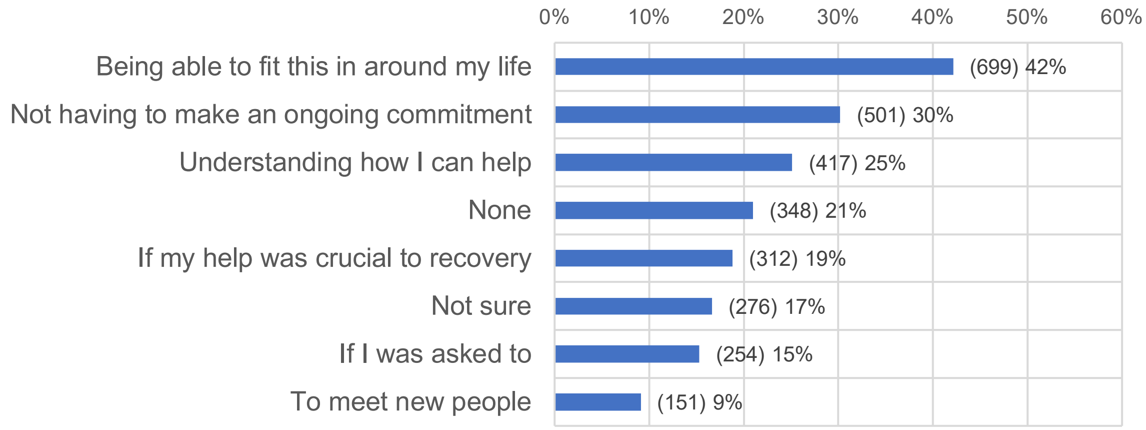
Although those aged under 35 were less likely to have provided help and support, many indicated they would like to know how they can help (14% of under 35s, compared to 4% of other age groups).

There is a strong willingness among this group to continue their support within the community - 91% of respondents who provided help or support would be willing to continue in the future.

Overcoming Barriers

Of the 48% (1,659) who did not provide any help or support to others, the following were viewed as potential opportunities to encourage greater social action.

Fig 7. What would encourage you to provide help and support to others in your community?



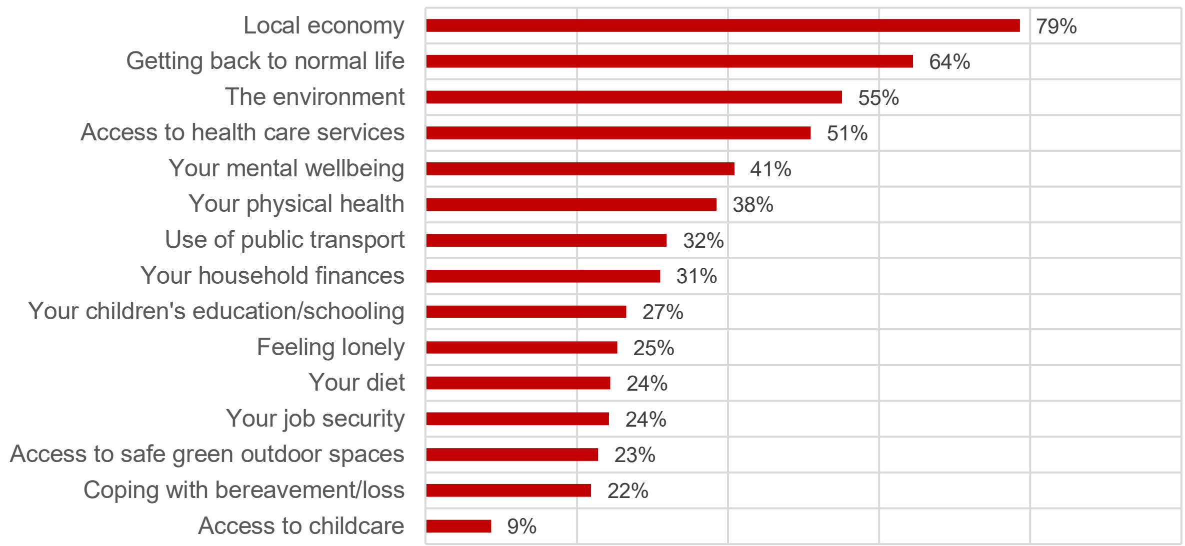
7. COVID-19 Recovery

- Key concerns about the local economy, environment, and access to health care services
- Opportunities to build on community action and further strengthen and empower communities
- Communities keen for more engagement and involvement in decision-making

Greatest Concerns

Respondents were asked what they were most worried about in the next three months, with many expanding on their response.

Fig. 8 Thinking about the next 3 months, how worried are you about…?



The greatest level of concern was the local economy. Free text responses indicate survival of local businesses and high streets, as well as concerns about employment and jobs are key to future recovery. Many respondents also indicated that more needs to be done to "*regenerate the high street and town centres*".

That said, many indicated that COVID-19 had made them more likely to support local businesses (63%) and around half are more likely to support their local high street (48%). More than half of respondents in all districts reported being more likely to support local businesses, ranging from 59% in South Staffordshire to 68% in Cannock Chase.

Comments also highlighted a key concern in returning to normal life, specifically "*building public confidence and feelings of safety so people feel safe and comfortable in public spaces again".*

Many provided comments about their concerns regarding the environment, specifically the challenge of maintaining the *"significant reduction in road traffic seen at the start of lockdown."*

There were some interesting variations in opinion.

- Around 25% of over 65s were worried about their *mental wellbeing*, compared to 61% of under 35s and 50% of those with disabilities or limiting illness.
- Those aged under 35 were also more likely to be worried about how *lonely* they feel (42%, compared to 18% of over 65s), possibly linked to restrictions on social activity. This was also true for those with disabilities (33%, compared to 25% overall).
- Concerns about *household finances* were also above average for under 35s (43% worried, compared to 31% overall).
- *Access to health services* and *physical health* were more of a concern to those with disabilities or a limiting illness.

Challenges and Opportunities

Survey respondents were asked to provide free text comments regarding the challenges and opportunities in helping Staffordshire recover from the impact of the pandemic. These are summarised below.

Challenges (2,643 responses)

- **Economy and employment (1,038; 39%) –** Grow the economy, create jobs and town centre regeneration
- **Confidence and trust (952; 36%) –** Communicate and enforce guidance, control outbreaks.
- **Access to healthcare services (206; 8%) –** Support the vulnerable, and greater focus on mental health impact for children and adults.
- **Leadership and resources (170; 6%) –** Secure government funding and effective local leadership
- **Education and skills (140; 5%) -** Impact of school closures on learning and attainment on life chances
- **Maintaining social action (86; 3%) -** Continue to foster community spirit and provide vital support to help groups sustain.

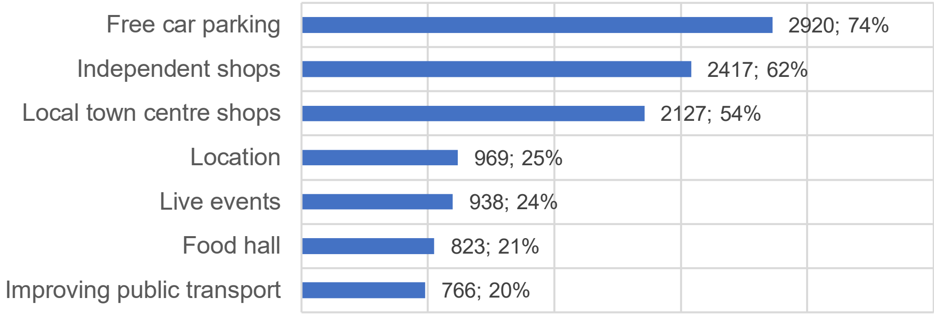
Opportunities (1,953 responses)

- **Developing local economy (448; 23%) -** Support businesses, create 'future proof' jobs and incentivise businesses to locate here.
- **Strong sense of community (332; 17%) -** Build on renewed sense of community, help grow and coordinate community groups.
- **Environment / climate change (193; 10%) -** Maintain and promote access to green spaces and develop low emission travel options.
- **Local regeneration (175; 9%) -** Regeneration of local high streets / town centres, in terms of retail offer and appearance.
- **Digital adoption (152; 8%) -** Consider digital service offer, as well as solutions to tackle loneliness and isolation.

NB: Percentages are shown as a proportion of those respondents who provided a response to the question

Staffordshire's local economy was by far considered the greatest challenge and opportunity for its recovery. Respondents gave further views on what might encourage them to support local businesses, with a large majority stating free car parking (74%) and more independent shops (62%).

Fig 9. What would encourage you to support local businesses more?



Improving your Local Community

Over 1,700 free text responses were provided on how Staffordshire County Council and local partners can work with local people to improve communities. Many of the views were consistent with previous comments and have been summarised below. The top three were:

1. Better engagement with communities / involvement in decision making (14%)
2. Crime reduction / Community Safety / Visible policing (11%)
3. Maintenance / improvement of highways / footpaths / cycle-routes (11%)

8. Conclusions

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on day-to-day life for the majority (63%) of respondents, especially for a number of key groups, such as those furloughed and individuals with a disability/limiting illness. Key negative impacts were linked to limited social interaction and impact on people's wellbeing.

Responses represent a positive shift in behaviour as a result of the pandemic, with the acceleration of digital change being most evident. Many have embraced digital opportunities to connect with and support others, as well as help with day to day life. Embedding the County Council's Digital Programme is a key element of recovery, with opportunities to transform future operations whilst also minimising COVID-19 impact

The local environment and sense of place has become increasingly important to people during the pandemic, particularly access to green spaces and a greater awareness of climate change challenges. The development of a new Climate Change Strategy and Community Fund will help to advance this agenda further, ensuring it is embedded across key recovery activity.

There are concerns regarding how Staffordshire recovers, particularly Staffordshire's economy and protecting local jobs. Delivering Staffordshire's 5 year Economic Recovery Strategy is key to ensuring our economy recovers, by supporting businesses to adapt and continue to operate. The work to develop a Staffordshire Place Brand will also be key to attracting new businesses to the county.

Many also recognised the growth of social action during the pandemic, seeing this as a key opportunity to maintain and build on existing opportunities to help grow community capacity and enhance community spirit. Leading the Communities Delivery Plan work is critical to this, through the implementation of a community led offer, increased volunteering and building capacity.

Linked to this there is a desire from communities for further engagement and involvement in decision making. This reinforces the importance of reviewing the County Council's engagement approach, including the delivery of a new Citizen Survey as a regular mechanism for hearing the views of our communities.