East Lothian Council

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 23 August 2022

BY: Executive Director for Place

SUBJECT: 2021 East Lothian Residents' Survey

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To present a summary of the main findings of the 2021 East Lothian Residents Survey.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is asked to:

2.1 Note the main findings of the 2021 Residents' Survey presented in this report, as well as the availability of further data and analysis at both East Lothian-wide and ward level in the full report of the survey.

2.2 Note that the findings of the survey are being used by the Council and Community Planning Partners to inform the development of the Council Plan, East Lothian Plan and Service Plans.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 East Lothian Council, on behalf of East Lothian Partnership, commissioned Research Resource to carry out the 2021 Residents' Survey. The 2021 East Lothian Residents' Survey was undertaken using a self-completion methodology. The Residents' Survey has previously been undertaken using a face-to-face methodology, most recently in 2019. However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic it was decided that face-to-face interviews would not be possible; therefore, a different methodology was adopted for the 2021 survey, which means that the results from previous surveys are not directly comparable.

3.2 The survey was sent by post to a representative sample of 16,000 East Lothian residents who were asked to complete and return the questionnaire to Research Resource for processing using a reply paid envelope. Residents also were given the opportunity to complete the survey online using a QR code or via an html survey link. The survey was sent on 25 October 2021 and returns were accepted up until 13 January 2022.

3.3 A total of 3,158 responses to the survey were received, with 309 of these being online responses. In line with best practice in research, the survey data has been weighted to ensure that it is representative of the East Lothian population on the basis of ward and age. Only 2,416 respondents provided information about their age or postcode. Therefore, the percentages reported in this report are weighted percentages based on the 2,416 responses. At the East Lothian level, the survey has provided a robust and representative data set (+/-1.97% margin of error).

3.4 As in previous surveys, topics covered in the 2021 survey included: Neighbourhood and Quality of Life, Community Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Perceptions of the Council, satisfaction with Public Services, and Local Priorities. This latest survey also included questions on the Impact of COVID-19, Priorities for Recovery from COVID-19, and Travel and Transport.

3.5 The questions were designed to establish the public's views on general and specific aspects of life in East Lothian, but also to gather data to help inform the Council and Community Planning partners of public views and perceptions. The survey findings are of potential use to individual Council services and partner organisations. The ward-level data will be very useful to Area Partnerships as they review and revise their Area Plans.

3.6 A copy of the full report of the survey results and detailed summaries of the six ward level results have been lodged in the Members' Library (Reference 105/22 – August 2022 Bulletin). The report, and this cover report, include comparisons between the results of the 2021 survey and the results of the last survey that was undertaken in 2019. However, as is highlighted in paragraph 3.1, the comparison of results between the 2019 and 2021 surveys has to be treated with some caution. The methodology used for the surveys changed from face-to-face interviews in 2019 to a self-completion postal or web survey in 2021. Also the 2021 survey was carried out in the middle of the international COVID-19 pandemic which was having a significant impact on people, public services and communities in East Lothian.

3.7 It is not possible to determine whether differences between the 2021 and 2019 survey results are due to genuine changes in views and experiences, or are due to the different methodologies used or the profound impact of the pandemic. There is some evidence from research carried out by market research companies and academics that face to face or telephone based interviews surveys might provide different results to certain types of questions than self-completed postal or online surveys (see Appendix 1). Respondents might answer survey questions differently when completing a survey themselves in a postal or web-based survey, than when asked the same questions in a face-to-face survey. There may also be instances where respondents perhaps interpret things differently than they would have done if the survey had been carried out face-to-face, where respondents would have had the opportunity to seek clarification during the interview.

3.8 The 2021 Residents' Survey was undertaken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact on public services and perceptions of services after 20 months of lockdown and restrictions, along with the growing anxiety felt by residents as the Omicron variant took hold in late 2021, would have influenced the responses to many of the questions asked in the survey. The results to some of the questions about quality of life and satisfaction with services suggest that the impact of the pandemic might have contributed to a reduction in positive responses to questions by as much as 30%.

3.9 The full report of the survey results includes detailed analysis of the results based on certain characteristics of respondents – address (according to ward), sex and age. Further analysis is also provided for some questions based on comparison between respondents living in areas of highest levels of socio-economic deprivation (based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020) and all other areas. The following sections of this report provide a summary of the key findings with comparison with the results of the 2019 survey and examples of some of the differences based on age, sex, wards and areas of highest levels of socio-economic deprivation.

Neighbourhood and Quality of Life

3.10 A large majority of respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live, with 94% identifying their neighbourhood as either a 'very good' (51%) or 'fairly good' (43%) place to live. However, whilst the overall rating is comparable to the 2019 finding of 98%, in 2019, 74% of respondents rated their neighbourhood as a 'very good' place to live, compared to 51% in 2021.

3.11 Respondents also expressed very high levels of satisfaction with living in East Lothian, with 96% identifying that East Lothian was either a 'very good' (60%) or 'fairly good' (36%) place to live. Again whilst the overall 'Very Good' and 'Good' rating was similar to the 2019 result – 98%, there was a decline in the 'Very Good' response from 71% to 60%.

3.12 Respondents were asked to what extent their neighbourhood had changed over the last three years. Whilst 15% said that their neighbourhood has 'got a little/much better' and 48% said that it had 'stayed the same', 30% felt it had 'got a little/much worse'.

3.13 Respondents were asked for their views on what most needs improved in their local area. The issues that most respondents suggested need improving were:

- Health Services – 53% (12% in 2019 survey; 41% increase)
- Road and pavement repairs – 53% (26% in 2019; 27% increase)
- Traffic congestion – 38% (13% in 2019; 25% increase)

- Activities for Teenagers – 34% (9% in 2019; 25% increase)
- Affordable decent housing – 28% (12% in 2019; 16% increase)
- Care for older people – 27% (5% in 2019; 22% increase)

3.14 The results to this question suggest that the COVID-19 lockdown had a significant negative impact on people's quality of life and expectations from public services. For example, growing dissatisfaction with access to health services during lockdown will have contributed to the 41% increase in the percentage of respondents saying that health services need improving. Also, whereas only 5% of respondents in the 2019 survey suggested that care for older people was a service that needed improving, this figure increased to 27% in 2021. Growing concern about teenagers taking part in anti-social behaviour and being frustrated with lockdown will have contributed to the 25% increase in respondents saying that activities for teenagers need improving.

Perceptions of the Council and Public Services

3.15 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about the Council. Comparison with the 2019 survey shows falls of c.30% in positive responses in almost all of the questions. But, as highlighted above, this may be due to the different methodology used and to the impact of COVID-19. The 2019 figures are shown in brackets.

- 43% agreed that 'The Council does the best if can with the money available' (72%)
- 43% agreed 'The Council provides high quality services' (72%)
- 36% agreed 'The Council is good at letting people know how it is performing' (66%)
- 22% agreed 'The Council designs its services around the needs of the people who use them' (36%)
- 35% agreed 'The Council is good at letting people know about the services it provides' (66%)
- 13% agreed 'The Council is good at listening to local people's views before it takes decisions' (44%)
- 21% agreed 'The Council is addressing the key issues affecting the quality of life in my neighbourhood' (50%)
- 47% agreed that they would like to be more involved in decision affecting their local area (16%).

3.16 The proportion of respondents who agreed they can influence decisions affecting their local area fell from 27% in 2019 to 13%. This difference could be explained by the different methodologies used in the 2019 and 2021 surveys. It is in line with the findings of the Cabinet Office study[1] (summarised in Appendix 1) which found 34% of respondents in a face to face interview (the methodology used for the 2019 East Lothian survey) said they could influence decisions made about the local area, compared to only 26% in a web/postal survey (the methodology used for the 2021 East Lothian survey).

3.17 The 2021 Residents' Survey asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with a range of public services. Since there were a large number of don't know responses to this question the figures below show the percentages of those who expressed a view (i.e. excluding the 'don't knows') saying they were 'Very' or 'Fairly Satisfied'. The 2019 figures are shown in brackets.

Council services

- Parks, gardens and open spaces 71% (98%)
- Waste & recycling services 60% (94%)
- Libraries 64% (93%)
- Schools 58% (92%)
- Council House repairs service 34% (90%)
- Play areas 52% (89%)
- Support for frail/ older people 32% (87%)
- Street cleaning 45% (86%)
- Roads maintenance 26% (69%)

Other public services

- Fire Service 66% (97%)
- Dental services 52% (96%)
- Hospital outpatients 54% (95%)
- Hospital A&E 39% (95%)
- Police 41% (94%)
- Swimming pools / sports centres 63% (94%)
- GP services 38% (87%)
- Local bus service 60% (79%)

3.18 For most services satisfaction levels amongst respondents who use services was higher than the satisfaction levels expressed by all respondents. For example, only 34% of all respondents, but 54% of people who have actually used the service said they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the Council house repairs service; and whilst 66% of all respondents

[1] Investigating the viability of moving from a face-to-face to an online/postal mod: evidence from a series of methodological studies 2012-2015 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

said they were satisfied with the Fire Service, 86% of those who said they had used the Fire Service were satisfied.

3.19 As with the previous question, the results of this question show a reduction in satisfaction levels across all public services when compared to the 2019 survey. However, as well as the caveat about the different methodologies used, it should be noted also that the survey was undertaken when the Council had been operating in Business Continuity mode for 20 months. This meant that some services were not operating at full capacity, some Council facilities and buildings were not open or fully functioning and some Council staff had been diverted to provide new COVID-19 related services such as support for community resilience initiatives such as delivering food to people who were 'shielding' and allocating grants to businesses. In addition, in relation to waste and recycling services it should be noted that the new household waste collection service was introduced whilst the survey was being carried out and teething problems with the new service and 'hostile' social media commentary almost certainly have contributed to the decline in satisfaction levels with this service.

3.20 The significant reduction in satisfaction with health services, and in particular GP services and Hospital A&E, undoubtedly reflect the impact that the pandemic had on health services (e.g. significant reductions in face-to-face appointments with GPs and dentists and restrictions in accessing Hospital A&E services). The reduction in satisfaction with police services reflect concerns about levels of crime and reductions in confidence in the police shown in questions about Community safety (see paragraphs 3.30 – 3.32 below)

3.21 The decrease in satisfaction with public services generally, and increased anxiety and concern due to the pandemic, is evident in the reduction in satisfaction with the Fire Service recorded between the 2019 and 2021 surveys. Since there was only minimal disruption to the fire service as a result of COVID-19 lockdown and there was little diminution of fire services during this period, it is hard to explain the 30% reduction in satisfaction with Fire Services unless it is due to a general increase in negativity, anxiety and concern caused by COVID-19.

3.22 Analysis of the data from the council's customer feedback service does not show the kind of increase in customer complains that would be expected to have arisen from the significant reduction in council service satisfaction levels recorded between the 2019 and 2021 resident surveys. As can be seen from the data summarised below, the total number of complaints recorded through the Council's customer feedback system in 2021/22 was just below the level recorded in pre-pandemic year, 2019/20, after having fallen significantly in the first year of the pandemic, 2020/21, when interaction with services was severely curtailed due to lockdown.

	2019/20	**2020/21**	**2021/22**
Stage 1 complaints	840	570	767
Stage 2 complaints	59	52	94
Total complaints	**899**	**622**	**861**

3.23 The Council's library service undertakes an annual library users' survey which includes a question on satisfaction with the service. The 2021 survey, which received over 1,000 replies, found that 84.6% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with the library service and only 10.2% were fairly or very dissatisfied. This contrasts with the 2021 residents' survey that suggests satisfaction with the library service fell from 93% in 2019 to 64% in 2021.

Impact of COVID-19

3.24 The 2021 survey included questions about people's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with various statements about how they were dealing with the pandemic. Respondents agreed Very Strongly or Strongly mostly with the following statements:

- I am concerned about how society in general will cope with the impact of COVID (84%)
- I am concerned about close relatives getting COVID (82%)
- I am concerned about getting COVID (67%).

On the other hand, the majority of respondents disagreed Very Strongly or Strongly with the following statements:

- I am feeling lonely and isolated (84%)
- I am relaxed about COVID (66%)
- I am feeling anxious/ worried (63%)

3.25 Analysis of this question by respondents' age shows some interesting differences. For example, 72% of over 65 year olds, but only 52% of people aged 16-34 said they were concerned about getting COVID-19. Almost twice as many 16-34 year olds (25%), as over 65 year olds (14%) said they were feeling lonely and isolated.

Priorities for Recovery after COVID-19 and Doing Things Differently

3.26 The survey sought views on priorities for recovery after COVID-19. Respondents were asked to select from a list of actions, their top three priorities for recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. The top priorities for respondents (selecting the issue as their top, second or third priority) were:

- Support business, employment and grow the economy – 52%
- Reduce inequality and poverty – 39%
- Tackle climate change – 35%
- Help our children and young people achieve their educations and attainment aims – 33%
- Reduce health inequalities and support people to live healthier, more active and independent lives – 28%.

3.27 Views were also sought on various options for how the Council might do things differently or make budget savings; scoring options on a scale from 1, unacceptable to 6, acceptable. The most highly rated acceptable options with a rating of 6 were:

- Transfer under used buildings to communities to be used as venues run by the community (48%)
- Encourage people to use the internet to access/pay for Council services (31%)
- Reduce the number of buildings and offices operated by the Council by rationalising services in fewer 'service hubs' (23%)

On the other hand, the options which had the highest proportions of respondents stating they were unacceptable with a rating of 1 were:

- Introduce charges for services that are currently free on the principle of 'the user pays', whilst providing discounts for certain disadvantage groups (33%).
- Increase charges for Council services which are currently charged for whilst continuing to provide discounts for certain disadvantage groups (29%).

Climate Change

3.28 The survey included several questions to gain an understanding of people's views on actions that can be taken to mitigate against climate change. The actions that respondents said they are most likely to do very or fairly frequently to help address the impact of climate change were:

- Recycling plastic, glass and paper (96%)
- Shop local (87%)
- Buy local produce (64%).

On the other hand, climate change actions which respondents are least likely to do frequently were:

- Using public transport to go to work (27%)
- Eating less meat (38%)
- Walking/ cycling more (38%).

3.29 Respondents were also asked what actions would encourage them to do more to address their own impact on climate change.

- Over half of respondents said cheaper renewables (56%) and cheaper bus or train fares (58%) would definitely encourage them to address their own impact on climate change.

- Just under half (48%) said more neighbourhood facilities such as shops and just over 40% said more recycling facilities (44%), more paths and cycle ways (42%) and better bus services (41%) would definitely encourage them to address climate change.

- Only 34% said that more electric vehicle charging points would definitely encourage them to address their own impact on climate change.

Community Safety

3.30 The questions about community safety suggests that there has been an increase in fear of crime and a reduction in confidence in the police over the last two years. The proportion of respondents who said they do not feel threatened by crime in their neighbourhood (Not very much or Not at all) fell from 92% in 2019 to 75% in 2021; and the proportion who said they feel threatened by crime ‘a fair amount’ increased from 4% to 21%.

3.31 Respondents were asked how their confidence in the police being able to respond to crime being reported has changed in the last two years: 40% said they had about the same confidence (compared to 71% in 2019); 42% said they had less confidence (7% in 2019); only 3% said they had more confidence (6% in 2019); and 14% (17% in 2019) responded don’t know.

3.32 As with some of the other questions in the survey, the different methodologies used in the 2019 and 2021 surveys and the impact of COVID-19 may account for most, if not all, of the difference between the results of the 2019 and 2021 surveys. It should be noted that whilst people responding to the 2021 reported higher levels of concern about crime than was the case in 2019, there was a reduction in most crimes reported in 2020 and 2021. However, people’s fear of being threatened by crime could have been negatively impacted by a perception of an increase in anti-social behaviour and/or by reaction to the diversion of police to deal with COVID-19 related priorities such as dealing with infringements of lockdown restrictions.

Health and Wellbeing

3.33 The 2021 survey asked respondents about how their physical and mental health had changed since the start of the pandemic. More respondents said their physical heath had worsened a little or a lot since the start of the pandemic (38%), than had improved (23%). This was also the case regarding mental health, but to a larger extent, with 45% stating their mental health had worsened compared to only 8% who said it had improved.

3.34 Whilst there was virtually no difference in the proportion of people saying their physical health had worsened according to the age of respondents, many more younger respondents (31% of 16-34yr olds) than older ones (14% of those aged 65 and over) stated their physical health had improved since the start of the pandemic. Younger people were more likely to say their mental health had worsened with 54% of respondents aged 16-34 feeling this way compared to 46% of those aged 35-64 and 32% of respondents aged 65 and over.

3.35 The survey asked people about their exercising habits. Running or jogging (22%), walking activities (21%) and swimming (20%) were the most popular forms of vigorous exercise. There has been an increase in the amount of vigorous exercise respondents take part in since 2019, possibly as a consequence of pandemic lockdown. Notable increases in activity since 2019 were running or jogging (increased by 13%) and swimming (increased by 10%, even although swimming pools remained closed for most of 2020 and part of 2021). Around one in five respondents (21%) said they take exercise by dog walking/walking and just under one in 10 (9%) said they cycle. These options were not included in the 2019 survey.

3.36 Respondents were asked to think about healthy lifestyles and the things that would encourage them to increase their level of activity. The changes most likely to "definitely" increase levels of activity were safer paths and cycle ways (47%), followed by more paths (36%) and a better quality environment (34%). The changes which respondents said were least likely to increase their levels of activity were more play parks, more parks and better maintained parks or play parks.

Travel and Transport

3.37 The 2021 survey included a set of questions around Travel and Transport which were used as part of the Council's consultation on the future of Spaces for People initiatives such as reductions in speed limits.

3.38 Respondents were asked about the travel methods they use for different journeys. Travelling on foot was the most popular choice for travelling to local shops, chemist, public green space, public transport facilities, libraries, primary and secondary schools. On the other hand, travelling by car was most popular for travelling to shopping centres or supermarkets, GP surgeries and sports centres.

3.39 As would be expected there were significant differences in responses depending on where respondents live. For example, those who live in Musselburgh were most likely (77%) and Haddington and Lammermuir were least likely (54%) to walk to local shops. Respondents living in Haddington and Lammermuir and Dunbar and East Linton wards were most likely to travel to local shops by car (37% and 38% respectively).

3.40 The survey asked a series of questions to gather views on the lower 20mph speed limits introduced as part of the Spaces for People initiative during lockdown. A majority of respondents (54%) said that some, but not all of the 20mph speed limits should be kept; 16% said the new 20mph speed limits should be kept but don't add any more; and, 21% said that the new speed limits should be kept and should also be extended to add more areas. On the other hand, only 8% of respondents said that none of the 20mph limits should be kept.

Money Matters

3.41 The survey included a set of questions around money matters and standard of living. Respondents were asked how well their household is currently managing financially, with 22% of respondents saying they are managing very well. This is marginally more than the 2019 survey where

19% of respondents said they were managing very well. However, the combined percentage of respondents managing either very well, or quite well, decreased from 54% in 2019 to 50% in 2021. The combined percentage of respondents who were not managing very well, had some financial difficulties or were in deep financial trouble had not changed significantly since 2019, with 8% giving this response in 2021, compared to 6% in 2019.

3.42 Perhaps unsurprisingly, a lower proportion of respondents living in areas of highest levels of socio-economic deprivation (areas in the 20% highest levels of socio-economic deprivation according to the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) said they were managing very well (14%), than people from all other areas (23%). The proportion of respondents not managing very well or having financial difficulties was twice as high for respondents living in the most deprived areas (14%) than those living in other areas (7%).

Internet Access

3.43 The survey found that 96% of respondents have access to the internet and that there was little variation between wards; 93% of respondents living in Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry reported having access to the internet compared to 97% of those living in Haddington and Lammermuir, and Preston, Seton and Gosford wards.

3.44 Those who use the internet were asked about the activities that they do online. A large majority use the internet to look for information (95%), to send emails (92%) and for online banking (89%). Almost half (47%) of respondents use the internet to work from home.

3.45 However, 16% of respondents who have access to the internet said they do not use the Council's website, 56% said they use the website to find contact numbers for the Council and 47% use the website to find out more about Council services. Only 27% of respondents said they use the Council website to pay a bill, compared to 89% who use the internet for online banking and 79% who use it to to manage their accounts with utility companies.

Comparisons by Geography, Age, Sex and Areas of Deprivation

3.46 The full report provides extensive comparison of the survey responses based on the ward in which respondents live, their age and sex. A boosted sample allowed comparison to be made between areas of highest levels of socio-economic deprivation (areas in the 20% highest levels of socio-economic deprivation according to the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) and all other areas.

3.47 As reported above (paragraph 3.42), not surprisingly the questions about money matters showed significant differences in the responses between respondents living in areas of higher levels of socio-economic deprivation and those in other areas. There were some difference in other questions too. For example, the question about priorities for recovery after COVID-

19 shows some interesting, and perhaps surprising variations, when analysed by SIMD.

Top Priority for recovery	Most deprived SIMD areas	All other areas
Support for business and employment	29%	28%
Reduce inequality and poverty	11%	16%
Tackle climate change	11%	14%
Support children's wellbeing / mental health	14%	6%
Maintain/ develop resilient services	11%	5%

3.48 The analysis of responses by ward highlights some significant differences between the wards. For example, heath services were the top priority for improvement in the local area for respondents living in Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry (71%), Musselburgh (65%) and North Berwick Coastal (59%), whilst, roads and pavement repairs was the top priority for those living in Haddington and Lammermuir (57%), Dunbar and East Linton (56%) and in Preston, Seton and Gosford (52%).

3.49 The question on satisfaction with public services showed a significant variation depending on ward. Whilst 61% and 54% of respondents from the Haddington & Lammermuir and Dunbar & East Linton wards said they were satisfied with GP services only 19% in both Musselburgh and Tranent, Wallyford & Macmerry wards said they were satisfied with GP services. This significant variation between wards in the East and West of the county was mirrored in the result of the 2021 Public Health Scotland GP satisfaction survey, which found that whilst the satisfaction level across the whole of East Lothian averaged out at 65% there was a significant variation between practices in the East cluster (88%) and the West cluster (49%).

3.50 Analysis of responses by the age of respondents highlights issues where there are difference in views as well as areas where there is little variation. For example, responses to the questions about internet access and usage reveals significant variances in regular online activities. Whilst 94% of 16-34 year olds reported using the internet for social networking, only 77% of 35-64 year olds, and 53% of over 65 year olds use the internet for this activity; and 99% of 16-34 year olds use the internet for online banking, compared to 91% of 35-64 year olds and, only 72% of over 65 year olds.

3.51 On the other hand, the question about the extent to which respondents feel threatened by crime in their local area reveals little differentiation depending on age; 22% of respondents aged 65 and over and the same percentage of respondents aged 16-34 said they feel threatened by crime in their local area 'a great deal or fair amount'.

3.52 Analysis of responses by the sex of respondents showed little variation in responses between male and female respondents to most questions. For example, 23% of males and 24% of females said they feel threatened by crime 'a great deal or a fair amount'; and 15% of both female and male respondents said they felt lonely and isolated because of COVID-19. However, the question on feelings about the COVID-19 pandemic did show some differences between male and female respondents with 41% of female reporting they were anxious and concerned about the pandemic compared to only 31% of male respondents.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Data generated by the 2021 East Lothian Residents Survey will be used to help inform the Top 50 Council Plan Indicators and the East Lothian Plan indicators. The detailed results for each of the wards will be used by Areas Partnerships to inform the future review of their Local Plans. The responses to questions about priorities have been reflected and taken into account in the new Council Plan.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – The cost of the survey – £20,713.83 – was met by the East Lothian Partnership with a contribution from the Spaces for People consultation budget.

6.2 Personnel – none.

6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Results of the East Lothian Resident Survey 2021; Members Library

7.2 Six Ward summaries of East Lothian Residents Survey 2021; Members Library

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APPENDIX 1

Studies of differences in responses between face-to-face and web/postal surveys

A study carried out by the American Pew Research Centre[2] into the differences between responses to telephone interview based surveys and online/web surveys found that people expressed more negative views of politicians in online surveys than in telephone surveys. Also, it found that people were more likely to say they are happy with their family and social life when asked by a person over the phone than when answering questions in a web survey.

The study concluded: '*these findings were consistent with the theory that when people are interacting with an interviewer, they are more likely to give answers that paint themselves or their communities in a positive light, and less likely to portray themselves negatively.'*

Another study carried out on behalf of the UK Government Cabinet Office in 2015 to consider the viability of moving the Community Life Survey from a face-to-face to an online/postal mode[3] found significantly different results on key measures depending on which methodology was used.

For example, whereas 43% of respondents in the face to face survey said they were very satisfied with the area as a place to live, the positive response fell to 36% in the web/postal survey. In another question, 70% of respondents in the face-to-face survey said they either very or fairly strongly agreed that they felt they belong to their local neighbourhood compared to only 58% in the web/postal survey.

This study concluded that for certain types of questions: '*interviewer-administered surveys typically elicit more positive or 'socially desirable' responses than self-completion formats.'*

[2] Methods can matter: Where Web surveys produce different results than phone interviews | Pew Research Center

[3] Investigating the viability of moving from a face-to-face to an online/postal mod: evidence from a series of methodological studies 2012-2015 (publishing.service.gov.uk)