East Lothian Council

REPORT TO:	East Lothian Council
MEETING DATE:	29 October 2024
BY:	Executive Director for Council Resources
SUBJECT:	2024 East Lothian Residents Survey

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To present a summary of the main findings of the 2024 East Lothian Residents Survey.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

2.1 Note the main findings of the 2024 Residents Survey presented in this report.

2.2 Note that the findings of the survey will be used by the Council and Community Planning Partners to inform the development of future strategies and plans, including the development of budget proposals.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The overarching goal of the 2024 East Lothian Residents Survey was to gather feedback on a broad range of topics that affect the daily lives of East Lothian residents, providing a comprehensive view of local satisfaction. Research Resource were commissioned to conduct the survey, with the approach and methodology similar to that used in 2021.

3.2 The 2024 survey was distributed to a representative sample of 10,000 East Lothian residents through both paper and online formats. Each selected household received a paper questionnaire along with a pre-paid reply envelope, and respondents could alternatively complete the survey online via a QR code or a provided link. The survey collected 1,709 completed responses, 181 of which were submitted online.

3.3 To ensure a representative sample, addresses were selected randomly from East Lothian's multi-member wards and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) zones. This approach resulted in a higher proportion of older residents and, as a result, data was weighted by age and ward to correct for these demographic imbalances, leading to a final weighted sample of 1,636 respondents. The survey was open from 10 April to 31 May 2024.

3.4 The questions were designed to establish the public's views on general and specific aspects of life in East Lothian, and guide future Council strategies, plans and, indeed, Council budget decisions. In addition, the questions were also designed to 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. The key findings from the survey are set out below, with a full report available in Members' Library (Ref: 131/24, October 2024 Bulletin: Agendas, reports and minutes | East Lothian Council).

Perceptions of the Council and Public Services

3.5 When asked their opinions on East Lothian Council, respondents were most likely to agree that they would like to be more involved in the decisions the Council makes that affect the local area (49%), that the Council does the best it can with the money available (40%) and that the Council provides high quality services (40%).

3.6 Respondents were most likely to disagree that they can influence decisions affecting the local area (49%) and that the Council is good at listening to local people's views before it takes decisions (52%).

3.7 All respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with various public services provided in East Lothian. The majority of respondents were in general either very or fairly satisfied with the services provided, and satisfaction levels were highest regarding:

- Pharmacy (80% very or fairly satisfied)
- Parks, gardens and open spaces (73%)
- Local bus services (62%)
- Optometry/opticians (62%)

3.8 On the other hand, the proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied (either very or fairly dissatisfied) was highest with regards to:

- Roads maintenance (75% very or fairly dissatisfied)
- GP services (46%)
- Waste and recycling services (41%)
- Street cleaning (39%)

Council Priorities and Budget Options

3.9 The survey included a question which asked how acceptable various options for doing things differently or making savings would be on a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 was unacceptable to 6 was acceptable. Most highly rated as being acceptable were:

- Focus on early intervention and prevention – taking action as soon as possible to tackle social problems before they become more difficult to turn around (48% giving a rating of 6 – acceptable)
- Target resources to areas and people in greatest need (30%)
- Identify those services we should stop providing (29%)
- Asset rationalisation – reduce number of buildings/offices operated by the Council by rationalising services in fewer ‘service hubs’/transfer under-used buildings to communities to be used as venues run by the community (29%).

3.10 On the other hand, options which had the highest proportions stating they were unacceptable were:

- Increase charges for Council services which are currently charged for whilst continuing to provide discounts for certain disadvantaged groups (26% giving a rating 1 – unacceptable).
- Introduce charges for services that are currently free on the principle of ‘the user pays’, whilst providing discounts for certain disadvantaged groups (25%).

3.11 It was explained to respondents that the Council is having to make hard choices to balance its budget. Respondents were asked what should be reduced to make savings or should be protected from cuts. The services which the majority of respondents felt should be reduced to make savings were:

- Providing free instrumental music tuition (65%)
- Providing discounts for empty business premises (59%)

3.12 On the other hand, services with the highest proportion of respondents (over 9 in 10) stating they would like to see protected from cuts were:

- Maintaining roads and pavements (97%)
- Supporting older people, e.g. care at home and care homes (95%)
- Supporting young people to gain employment, training or access to further education (94%)
- Maintaining existing staffing levels within schools (93%)
- Supporting the provision of sports and leisure facilities (91%)
- Youth work to reduce anti-social behaviour (91%)

3.13 It was explained to respondents that Council Tax has been frozen for 2024/25. Respondents were asked whether they would support an increase to the Council Tax charge in April 2025 and subsequent years in order to protect Council services. Respondents were told that every 1% increase to the Council Tax charge equates to a weekly increase of £0.28 for an average property in East Lothian. The majority of respondents said they would support an increase in their Council Tax (61%), with respondents being most likely to support an increase of less than £3 per week (41%). Just over a third of respondents (35%) said they would be opposed to an increase on their Council Tax and 4% were unsure.

Use of the Internet and Contacting the Council

3.14 When asked about the activities that they do online, the most common responses were sending emails (87%), online banking (84%) and looking for information (83%).

3.15 Respondents were asked about the contact methods they use to get in touch with the Council in different circumstances:

- To get information about a service: 62% said they prefer to do this via the website (up from 37% in 2021), 50% would prefer to phone and 48% email.
- To request a service/report a repair or fault: 65% would prefer to do this by phone, 49% would prefer to use the Council website (up from 25% in 2021) and 49% would prefer to do this by email (up from 24% in 2021).
- To pay a bill or Council tax: 67% would prefer to do this via the Council's website (up from 55% in 2021).

3.16 In terms of usage of the Council's website, the most common uses were to look for contact numbers for the Council (56%), to pay a bill (47%) and to find out more about Council services (46%). On the other hand, 15% said they did not use the Council website. The use of the Council website has resulted in increases in areas such as paying a bill (increasing from 28% to 47%), reporting a problem/ repair (increasing from 14% to 33%) and to lodge a complaint/ compliment (increasing from 16% to 24%).

Neighbourhood and Quality of Life

3.17 The majority of residents (93%) rated their neighbourhood as a very or fairly good place to live. This has not changed significantly from 2021 (94%).

3.18 Just over half of respondents (51%) said their local neighbourhood had stayed the same over the last three years, compared to 12% who said it has got a little or much better and 33% who said it has got a little or much worse.

3.19 Almost all respondents (95%) rated East Lothian as a very good (52%) or fairly good place to live (43%). While the combined percentage of respondents stating East Lothian is a very or fairly good area has not changed significantly compared to previous years, the proportion who rated East Lothian as a very good place to live has decreased from 71% in 2019 to 60% in 2021 and again to 52% in 2024.

3.20 The top three priorities for neighbourhood improvement were road and pavement repairs (75%), health services (55%) and activities for teenagers (33%). The proportion of respondents stating road and pavement repairs as a priority for improvement has increased from 53% in 2021.

Community Safety

3.21 The majority of respondents (77%) said they did not feel threatened by crime at all (22%) or not very much (55%). 19% said they felt threatened by crime in their neighbourhood a fair amount and 3% said they felt threatened a great deal.

3.22 Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) said that they felt safe when walking alone in their local area after dark. When asked what makes them feel safer, the most common response was seeing police officers in the community (69%).

3.23 The vast majority of respondents (90%) have not visited their local police station in the last year.

3.24 It was explained to respondents that Courts can impose a requirement to complete unpaid work in their local community as part of a Community Payback Order. Respondents were then asked to select from a list of activities, which they believe people carrying out Community Payback should undertake. The top response was litter picking (88%), followed by cleaning up graffiti (76%) and paths maintenance or clearing snow (71%).

Health and Wellbeing

3.25 All respondents were asked how much time they spent doing physical activity which was enough to raise their breathing rate. Just 5% of respondents said they had not done any physical activity (5%), 34% said they had done this for less than one hour, 45% spent between 1 and 2.5 hours doing physical activity and 16% said they did more than 2.5 hours of physical activity in the previous seven days.

3.26 Almost two thirds of respondents (63%) rated their physical health as very good or good. 71% rated their mental health as either very good or good.

3.27 Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding support networks. Over 8 in 10 respondents (86%) agreed that in an emergency, such as a flood, they would offer to help people in their neighbourhood who might not be able to cope well. Slightly fewer respondents agreed that if they were alone and needed help they could rely on a friend or relatives in their neighbourhood (79%) or that they feel they could turn to friends or relatives in their neighbourhood for advice and support (78%).

Just under 6 in 10 respondents (58%) were aware that the Council has to ‘ensure period products are generally obtainable free of charge by all persons who need them’. The top three preferred locations for picking up free period products were libraries (36%), schools (33%) and community centres (33%).

Climate Change

3.28 Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about climate change. The greatest level of agreement was with the statement ‘I understand what actions people like myself should take to help tackle climate control’ with 77% of respondents either strongly agreeing or tending to agree with this statement. The lowest level of agreement was just 5% with the statement ‘Climate change will only have an impact on other countries, there is no need for me to worry’. 87% of respondents either tended to disagree or strongly disagreed with this statement.

3.29 When asked what actions would encourage them to do more to address their own impact on climate change, 61% of respondents said cheaper bus or train fares and 53% said more recycling facilities would definitely encourage them to address their own impact on climate change. On the other hand, only 25% said that more electric vehicle charging points would definitely encourage them to address their own impact on climate change.

Money Matters

3.30 Respondents were asked how well their household is currently managing financially, with 19% of respondents saying they are managing very well. This is marginally less than the 2021 survey where 22% were managing very well. The combined percentage of respondents managing either very or quite well has decreased from 54% in 2019 to 50% in 2021 and again to 45% in 2024.

3.31 Respondents were asked to think about their standard of living and whether it has got better, stayed the same or got worse over the last two years. Overall, 16% said they feel it has got much or a little better compared to 43% who said it has got much or a little worse. 39% said it has stayed the same.

3.32 Over half of respondents (60%) have had to make adjustments to deal with the rise in cost of living. The most common adjustment made has been made is reducing energy use, which has been done by 56% of respondents.

3.33 When asked about their standard of living in relation to what they may or may not have, the vast majority of respondents (90%) said they have home contents insurance.

3.34 20% of respondents said they don’t have and can’t afford to make regular payments into an occupational or private pension.

3.35 In addition, 18% said they don’t have and can’t afford all recommended dental work/treatment or that they don’t have access to £500 to cover an unexpected but necessary expense. The proportion of respondents saying that they have these things has decreased for all items since 2021.

3.36 Respondents were then asked about their standard of living in relation to items that their children may or may not have. Almost all respondents (97%) reported that their child has access to a computer or the internet to complete homework. On the other hand, 16% of respondents said they cannot afford to give their child day trips with family once a month and 14% said they could not afford for their child to have a holiday away from home at least one week a year.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The findings of the survey will be used by the Council and Community Planning Partners to inform the development of future strategies and plans, as well as the reviewing of performance indicators.

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, £20,000, was met from the Communities budget

6.2 Personnel - none

6.3 Other - none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Results of the East Lothian Resident Survey 2024: Members’ Library (Ref: 131/24, October 2024 Bulletin: Agendas, reports and minutes | East Lothian Council)

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