From mountain to sea

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

Community Impact Assessment Survey Analysis

Phase one: Interim findings
Marr November 2020

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Contents

1 Introduction

To understand the impact of the global (COVID-19) pandemic, Aberdeenshire Council surveyed residents to find out how the health crisis is impacting individuals and local communities.

The survey was open from 7th August to 31st August.

The Council communicated and invited responses through a range of channels. The survey was open to any interested party. Though the Council made specific efforts to raise awareness and reach out to individuals and organisations who may be interested in or impacted by the pandemic, those who responded were predominantly self-selecting. As a result, participants should not be considered representative of the population as a whole and open engagement activity should not be judged on its overall representativeness. Instead, engagement activity should be assessed on the extent to which a broad diversity of relevant individuals were able to express themselves in the process.

To complement this survey and support the community impact assessment process a number of ward meetings were held to allow groups and individuals other opportunities to share their experience of the pandemic and find out specifically from groups who had been active in supporting local people. Furthermore, several targeted focused groups were undertaken to listen to experiences of groups and individuals who may be excluded.

The overall social media campaign which supported the community survey reached an audience on Facebook of 54, 682 people. This is the cumulative total of three posts. In comparison to other campaigns this is a high level of engagement. The campaign had 5,359 Facebook engagements (comments, shares, likes etc.).

Subsequently 4299 responses were received to the survey and included responses from one hundred and sixty two residents who were members of community groups.

For the area identified as Marr 446 full responses were submitted. Several partial responses were also identified from the Marr area and included in the following analysis.

From respondents who provided demographic and equality information; 83% of all participants were female, while 17% were male. 6% of participants described themselves as having a long-term illness or disability.

85% of respondents owned their house either outright or with a mortgage, 8% were social housing tenants, and 6% rented from a private landlord. Around 1% were other including living with parents, accommodation comes with job.

18% of respondents are responsible for caring for an adult, 11% have pre-school age children, and 53% have school age children.

25% of respondents had a household income over £60,000, 16% had a household income of between £40,000 and £60,000, 20% had a household income of between £20,000 and £40,000 and 13% had a combined household income of under £20,000. 26% preferred not to say.

53% of all respondents were currently employed, 15% were self-employed, 3% were unemployed and looking for work, less than 1 % were students, 2% were unable to work, 13% were retired and 10% looked after the home/family, 3% were other/prefer not to say.

10% of respondents had been furloughed by their employer during the pandemic (albeit 6% had at the time of the responding returned to work.)

12% of all respondents were over 65, 22% were between 55 and 64, 33% were aged between 45 and 54, 26% were aged 35-44, 6% were aged between 25 and 34 and less than 1% were under the age of 25.

Less than 1% of all respondents reported that they have tested positive for COVID 19, but 12% think they have had COVID 19 in the last six months but had not been tested (21% did not know) and 14% of respondents had shield during the outbreak.

2 Executive summary

This report provides a summary of key findings from participation in the Council's Community Impact Assessment Survey conducted between the 7th and 31st August 2020. High level trends identified at an Aberdeenshire level include:

Impact on individuals:

- People have enjoyed spending more time with their families
- Residents have been more active during lockdown compared to normal
- A high percentage of people report making positive changes to their lifestyle
- People have found ways to relax and take part in different activities
- A significant amount of people are drinking more units of alcohol
- A high number of people report to be more stressed and anxious than before
- A substantial amount of people are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on other people's mental health and wellbeing
- Education appears to be people's biggest priority for the short and long term as well as a concern around the future transmission of the virus and keeping their family/community safe

Impact on community groups:

- Member of community groups feel there has been improved communication (between members and the wider community)
- There is greater awareness amongst individuals around activities and services the community and voluntary sector deliver
- There has been a positive uptake an increase in the use of digital technology to facilitate community groups and deliver services (for example the use of zoom, teams, etc to hold meetings/deliver counselling sessions for services users)
- The community and voluntary sector reacted and adapted to the situation well (for example change of focus from community café to foodbank)
- There has been an increase in demand in service due to more people needing support and greater awareness of community services
- Many groups feel they have missed standard income generation opportunities
- Groups have had to deal with issues in procuring supplies and essential items
- There is unknown impacts around the closure of facilities (for example village halls)
- There has been an increase in pressure on volunteers
- Groups have faced barriers and bureaucracy dealing with some "statutory services"
- There is general concern about capacity and sustainability on maintaining and delivering services to meet current and future demand

Impact on communities:

- Residents are confident that their neighbours would look out for them and other people living nearby

- Nearly everyone is certain they would help out people living nearby if they were asked to
- More people think there had been improvement in their local area because of lockdown compared to those who disagree
- A significant number of people have volunteered in their local area and nearly all of them will continue to do so
- A third of people agreed that they have felt lonely or isolated in the last three months
- 1 in 3 people feel less safe in their home or local area than before
- A minority of people have kept in touch with friends and family less
- Residents are concerned that there are gaps in the support available for certain groups for example single parents, vulnerable groups, and young people

3 Survey Analysis

This report presents frequency results for each survey question. In some cases, the analysis has excluded 'don't know' responses from the percentage base to give a more accurate indication of views amongst residents with experience of specific issues or services.

All survey questions have been cross tabulated to assess the extent of any variation in views across key respondent groups for an Aberdeenshire area. In some cases, percentages have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number; for some questions this means that percentages may not sum to 100%.

It should be noted that this report contains the analysis of individuals comments, this analysis of the feedback is intrinsically subjective as it involves the interpretation of people's comments. This analysis should be treated with care, as the question did not specifically ask for people to comment on each of the specific categories, therefore it cannot to be said respondents do not to have views on key themes identified because they have left no comment.

It is important to consider the mechanism for engagement and the respondent group when interpreting the responses received. Even though interested participants were offered other methods to participate (through phone interviews, or paper copies), most of the engagement exercise took place online, and therefore the response should be interpreted to take this into account.

For the Marr area (and Aberdeenshire as a whole) it is true to say that several groups could are underrepresented in the profile of responses. Even though specific effort was made in the design of the survey to ask respondents about impacts on themselves, their families, and the wider community the results to this survey should be interpreted with this is mind.

It should also be noted that survey fieldwork several new restrictions were implemented (including the introduction of wearing of face coverings and local restrictions in Aberdeen city). It is unclear to the extent to which the changes influenced responses to the survey.

4 Key Findings Marr

The following section presents results for the Marr area. Key differences between Marr and Aberdeenshire results include:

- Residents in Marr appear have a strong feeling of community connectedness with high levels of volunteering
- Education appears to be a key priority for residents
- Spending time with family has been a key benefit of the pandemic
- Residents in Marr are more concerned about employment opportunities, personal finances, and education opportunities compared to some other areas
- Residents in Marr appear to feel more safe than other areas of Aberdeenshire
- Residents are positive about their local area, enjoyed accessing outdoor space but are concerned around others traveling into the community and enabling a transmission of the virus and damaging the local environment (for example through leaving rubbish)
- People in Marr have supported local business throughout the pandemic, are keen to continue to do so and feel that supporting local business and the local economy should be a priority for Aberdeenshire Council.

A summary of Aberdeenshire results is available under a separate cover.

4.1 Impact on individuals

Positive impacts

When asked about positive changes that have happened respondents noted that they had spent less money (60%), spent more time with family/children (59%), spent more time outdoors (48%), worked from home (30%), exercised more (30%), tried different things (21%). Other positive impacts included:

- Working more hours
- Ate better food
- More time for gardening
- Got to know neighbours better
- Were able to spend more time to do home improvement projects
- Had more time to focus on individual wellbeing
- Got to know others in the local community
- Developed new interests

12% disagreed that there had been any positive impacts due to the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

Negative impacts

When asked specifically about the negative impacts; 7 in 10 of all respondents agreed that they missed seeing relatives and friends. Other negatives included; being worried about relatives (43% although considerably higher in South Marr 76%), more stress (43%), worry about jobs (34%, 43% in South Marr) finances (23%), dealing with home schooling (26%), entertaining children (18%), family arguments (13%) and illness/self-isolation (10%). Other negative impacts included:

- Online learning for children

- Concern for mental health
- Missed socialising
- Working longer hours
- Lack of quality internet connection
- Children missing family members
- Impacts of shielding
- Weigh gain
- Missed out on trips/travel

Impact on behaviours

Most respondents agreed that they had been more active during lockdown compared to 36% who disagreed. Nearly all of the respondents did enjoy certain activities during the lockdown, the most popular being walking. Other activities that respondents enjoyed in order of importance included gardening (2), cooking/baking (3) spending time with children (4), reading (5), resting/relaxing (6), exercising (7), cycling (8), arts and crafts (9), getting to know neighbours (10), and supporting the local community (11).

To further understand what activities individuals had missed. Respondents were asked to list the things they were most looking forward to doing once restrictions allowed. The most popular activities included eating out (51%), Getting hair done/other beauty treatment (46%, gym/swimming/leisure activities (39%), cinema/theatre (29%), shopping for clothes/other high street retail (17%) visiting a play centre/activity with the children (15%), visiting a pub/socialising (17% considerably more a priority in North Marr), supporting local interest group/community group (7%) and attending sporting event (12%).

Impact on wellbeing

A quarter of respondents noted that the lockdown had negatively affected their mental wellbeing. 12% respondent saying they are much more anxious or stressed (less that Aberdeenshire as a whole), 16% said they were slightly more anxious or stressed. Just under half of respondents (40%) noted that they have mixed (good and bad days. More positively; 14% had not experienced any impact on their mental wellbeing and around 14% were feeling happier or less anxious and stressed.

27% of respondents believed that the covid-19 pandemic has affected how safe they feel in their home or local area. This is a slightly lower return than Aberdeenshire as a whole. Respondents in North Marr were more concerned about safety when compared to those respondents in South Marr. The comments listed below illustrate the most mentioned issues.

"

I worry about how my family would be if one of us contracted the virus

I feel anxious going out in the community now. I am still limiting how much I go out, only when it's essential

Concerned about transmission of the virus, risk of catching it while doing essential shopping, and risk of spreading it to elderly relatives and other family members.

Not enough information given on what areas were/are effected by the virus or if still effected by the virus …. more localised information is needed

Reflective quotes: North Marr

"

People not adhering to social distancing in shops

Nervous about the possibility of catching covid and passing on to vulnerable family members

Far more youngsters hanging around and people don't seem to care about other people

I work in the care sector and have worked throughout the lockdown, scary going to work and coming home to family members ,concerned that I would get virus and pass to loved ones

The media give a sense of fear about germs being everywhere

Reflective quotes: South Marr

"

In the period March to August just over one fifth of respondents reported to be drinking more units of alcohol than before. This is less than other parts of Aberdeenshire. Most people responding to the survey (45%) thought it was about the same as before. Just under 14% thought they were drinking less alcohol. About 1 in 5 noted that the question didn't apply to them as they didn't drink any alcohol.

Of those respondents who indicated they had been consuming more alcohol, the impact they felt this had on them included: energy levels, quality of sleep and mental and physical health. Results from Aberdeenshire show that people on a higher income were more likely to have indicated that they had increased alcohol consumption.

When asked about contact with friends and family during the lockdown; 43% of respondents thought they were in contact more than before, 10% thought they were in contact less and 47% thought they were in contact about the same.

Over three quarters of respondents (82%) said they had used technology to keep in contact with friends and family compared to 18% who said they hadn't. People in north Marr are slightly less likely to have used technology to keep in contact with friends and family compared to South Marr but broadly consistent with Aberdeenshire as a whole.

Emerging impacts

Just under half of respondents (48%) agreed that they were concerned about future employment for themselves or a member of their household, 31% were not concerned, 9% were unsure and 11% did not think the question applied to them.

Less respondents were concerned about how the pandemic will affect their financial situation (34%) than employment opportunities. Around half of all respondents were not concerned about any finical impacts which is slightly more than Aberdeenshire as a whole. A higher number of respondents were concerned about the impact on future training or education (42%).

4.2 Impact on the local communities

Community groups

Fourteen out of the one hundred and sixty two respondents who indicated that they were responding to the survey as a member of a community group were from the North Marr area (a much higher number of respondents indicated that they had volunteered or helped out in the community in recent months) . All those respondents noted that they supported others in the local community during the pandemic.

Impact on community group activities that groups reported included:

- Poor internet access made the "shift" to online difficult
- Not being able to operate because the lack of clarity in guidance
- An improvement in awareness of group activities and increase in community spirit
- Increase in community workload, especially for volunteers
- Made Face to Face meetings difficult
- Increased time taken to co-ordinate activity
- Reduced community transport
- Made decision making more difficult.

Impact on community connections

To understand the strength of social networks within communities, respondents were asked a number of questions to understand the quality of friendships, relationships and contacts, the help that people provide and receive from neighbours and how connected and supported people perceive themselves to be. Generally in South Marr the strength of social networks within the local community was stronger than the one reported in Aberdeenshire as a whole.

68% of respondents agreed (27% strongly agree, 41% agree) that they **can rely on neighbours for help if needed** compared to 23% who neither agreed nor disagreed and 6% who disagreed and 3% who strongly disagreed.

17% of respondents strongly agreed and 36% agreed that their **neighbours would look out for them** compared to 35% who neither agreed nor disagreed and only 7% who disagreed and 4% who strongly disagreed

17% of respondents strongly agreed and 37% agreed that they **could turn to their neighbours for advice** compare to 30% who neither agreed nor disagreed and 11% who disagreed and 5% who strongly disagreed

55% of people who took the survey strongly agreed and 40% agreed they **would help out neighbours if needed** compared to just 4% who neither agreed nor disagreed and less than 1% who disagreed or strongly disagreed

10% of respondents strongly agreed that they have felt lonely or isolated and 19% agreed. 24% were not sure and 46% disagreed.

Around one third of respondents agreed that they meet their neighbours or people in their local community socially, around one third were not sure if they meet their neighbours social and one third disagreed.

When asked about giving up time to help any groups, clubs, or organisations in an unpaid capacity 28% of people surveyed noted that they had volunteered (25% Aberdeenshire), 7-% said they hadn't and 2% were unsure.

For the respondents who had not volunteered, the key things that could be done to encourage them to volunteer included:

- Expenses
- Information about volunteer opportunities
- Childcare

For the respondents who had volunteered 73% said they would continue to do so.:

Community activity

Respondents were asked to list community/neighbourhood activity that they had participated in during the last few months. More three quarters of respondents said that they had been buying from local shops/business, 39% said they had been helping out neighbours, 24% noted neighbours had helped them, 19% had used local street or neighbourhood social media to keep in touch with others, 13% had helped out or volunteered in their local area and around 4% had taken part in a socially distanced street party.

Several respondents noted that they had not taken part in any community or neighbourhood activity.

To understand what (if anything) had made things easier for individuals during the first phase of the COVID 19 pandemic respondents were asked to list areas of support. 35% listed support from family, 41% national information (such as letter from First Minister, daily briefings), 35% local social media, 22% support from friends/neighbours, 23% support from employer, 16% local importation from newspapers/radio, 13% information from the Council website, 7% support from local community group, 3% NHS appointments, 6% Council Services such as the Grampian Assistance Hub.

Improvement in local communities

When asked about improvements in their local community; 62% of respondents thought there had been positive changes compared to 27% who disagreed and 11% who were unsure.

Specific improvements that they had experienced included:

- More wildlife and time to explore local countryside
- More birds
- Less cars on road
- More Peaceful
- Cleaner air / less traffic noise
- Increased appreciation for the local community and environment
- Community coming together more
- Fewer visitors/tourists
- Less rubbish
- Slower pace of life
- More bees and other insects enjoying the unmown grass
- Very little aircraft noise
- Hardship fund set up and funded locally
- Clear quiet skies
- More squirrels
- Fewer youths hanging about
- More cohesion and cooperation between different community groups/community council.
- Donation of flowers for village hanging baskets, etc
- Local shop, Post Office and Pharmacy going above and beyond

Respondents were asked to list any changes they would make in the future. The top changes noted by respondents included: support local business more (69% compared to 63% for Aberdeenshire), spend more time at home (46%), spend more time with children (35%), working from home more (31%), travel less by car (30%), keep in touch with neighbours (25%), go on more holidays (18%),go on less holidays (21%), travel on public transport less (17%), and volunteer in the community more often (10%).

Impact on future behaviour

When asked about visiting public places such as shops or town centres; 12% of respondents said the pandemic will have no impact, 47% said they will go less often, 8% were unsure and 33% said they will try to avoid visiting these places.

The main reasons respondents listed for wanting to avoid these places in the future included:

- Overcrowding
- Behaviours of other people
- Concerns about wearing a mask
- Risk to health
- The convenience of online shopping
- Being less enjoyable with restrictions

- Concern over the lack of vaccine/appropriate treatment
- Wanting to save money (due to financial concerns)
- Being classed as vulnerable (and concern over safety)

4.3 Impact on Council services

The survey asked respondents several questions around the Councils response to the pandemic. The extent to which residents feel informed and engaged by the council, and the trust that they place in them, directly affects their views about the council and the services they receive

When asked about how the Council responded to the COVID 19 pandemic and if they thought that the Council is doing a good job overall in its response; 12% strongly agreed, 44% agreed, 30% were unsure, 8% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed.

When asked what worked well and what could be improved the key things people thought worked well included:

- Education
- Communication via social media
- Grant schemes
- Waste collections
- The assistance hub
- Ranger services (online events)
- Pavement widening (although several respondents also highlighted this as an areas which needs to be improved)
- Home learning
- Recycling centres (and the booking system)

Areas for improvement identified included:

- Grass cutting
- Online transactions
- Education hub
- Access to leisure facilities
- Support for vulnerable residents
- management of public conveniences
- Enforcement/monitoring of restrictions

Respondents were also asked if they thought that the decisions that the Council had taken during the pandemic **were in the best interest for the people living in Aberdeenshire**: 11% strongly agreed, 38% agreed, 38% neither agreed nor disagreed, 10% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed.

The survey also asked if respondents thought that **Aberdeenshire Council have treated people with dignity and respect**. 9% strongly agreed, 40% agreed that the Council have treated residents with dignity and respect and 44% neither agreed nor disagreed and only 5% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

When asked about **how well Council has communicated** during the pandemic most respondents were positive. 7% of respondents thought communication was

excellent, 29% thought it was good, 39% thought it was ok and just under one quarter (24%) thought it was poor.

When asked to think about the future and their experience through the pandemic the main things that were identified for the Council to focus on in the short term included:

- Development of greenspaces
- Education, schools and learning
- Support for communities, local business and the local economy
- Support for vulnerable members of the community
- Improved digital links
- Returning to old services levels
- Support for small business
- Refuse collection
- Social work and social care services
- Mental health support

Similarly, respondents noted the most important things and services the Council should focus on over the next few years were:

- Education and schools
- Communication
- Mental health services
- Support for the local economy
- Road maintenance
- Supporting community activity
- Looking after elderly and vulnerable residents
- Biodiversity and local environment
- Sustainable travel methods and routes