

The purpose of local councils in England

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Abstract

This study seeks to understand how parish and town councils (local councils) in England define their own purpose. A study of the literature shows that the work of parish councils has varied extensively over its history, and that the purpose of local councils can be split into three roles: a voice for the community; a custodian of public assets; and a service deliverer. Using methodology taken from psychometric testing, a national survey of local council clerks was devised to ascertain how they believe their councils identify with each of the three roles. The findings revealed that local councils, regardless of their size or other characteristics, see their primary role as that of a voice for the community. However, the data also show that, when given the opportunity, local councils also see their role as providing services and as a custodian of public assets. The data show several factors that influence how active a council is in performing each of these roles, including the principal authority structure, the size of the parish, and whether they are in receipt of community infrastructure levy (CIL). The study concludes that, against the backdrop of pressures on principal authorities and the localism and levelling-up agendas, there is a willingness amongst local councils to take on more responsibilities.

About the author

Sheridan Jacklin-Edward has been a local council clerk since 2009. He has worked for five parish councils and is currently the Town Clerk for Henley-on-Thames Town Council in Oxfordshire. Prior to this, he also worked for Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, and Oxford University, as well as in the arts. Sheridan gained his bachelor and masters degrees from Oxford Brookes University, and is a Principal of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

CIL – Community Infrastructure Levy

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government

DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

DETR – Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

DLUHC – Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

JPAG – Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance

LGA – Local Government Association

MHCLG – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

NALC – National Association of Local Councils

ODPM – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

ONS – Office for National Statistics

SLCC – Society of Local Council Clerks

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction and background

Parish and town councils (local councils) have a long history in England, and the work that they have carried out has varied dramatically over time (Jones, 2020). Structural changes powered by shifting political principles have seen the roles of central and local government expand and contract over time and, as we will see, the effect on local councils is often a by-product of this change, rather than a planned outcome.

As a result, the purpose of local councils has largely been defined by external factors and circumstances out of local councils' control, and the localism and levelling-up agendas from central government (DCLG, 2011; HM Government, 2022) are recent examples of this. Against the backdrop of this ever-changing political landscape where others seek to influence or, increasingly, rely on the work of local councils, the councils themselves have few duties but a wide range of powers (LGA, 2021) and are therefore able to set their own agendas and priorities.

Whilst other stakeholders have, to a greater or lesser extent, voiced their opinion on what the work of local councils should be, the question remains: *how do local councils themselves perceive their purpose?*

1.2. Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to answer that question:

How do local councils in England perceive their purpose?

The study will focus on local councils in England, as whilst there are local councils in the other parts of the UK and commonality between them, there are also significant differences that have shaped their history and current structure and purpose.

The key objectives of the research are to:

- (a) **Define** 'purpose' within the setting of a local council and assess the historical context behind this;
- (b) **Identify** a method through which purpose can be measured, especially in the context of a corporate body, the local council;
- (c) **Quantify** a council's sense of purpose through tangible, measurable results;
- (d) **Analyse** the results to provide a meaningful answer as to how councils perceive their purpose and the implications of that for the sector; and
- (e) **Ascertain** what factors affect a council's sense of purpose and its level of engagement and leadership within the community.

1.3. Structure

The study will be structured as follows:

Chapter 2 – Literature review. An analysis of the historical and contemporary discourse around the purpose and role of a local council, looking in particular at both academic literature and the views of key actors in central and local government.

Chapter 3 – Methodology. Identifying the research methods to be used, and the rationale behind their design; how the data were collected and analysed, any ethical considerations, and the challenges and limitations associated with the methodology.

Chapter 4 – Results and analysis. Reporting on the response rate and the profile of the respondents; describing and analysing the findings of the research and assessing the success of the chosen methodology.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and recommendations. Summarising the findings and analysis of the research; assessing the impact and implications on the work of local councils; and making recommendations on future areas of study arising from the research.

1.4. Author's positionality

The author has been a local council clerk since 2009, working directly for five parish councils, and is currently the Town Clerk for Henley-on-Thames Town Council. The author's particular interest in the subject area arose from an observation that, within each local council, there was a consensus on what the work of a local council should be, but that these perceptions could vary significantly between local councils. By undertaking this research, it is hoped that more light can be shed on what factors inform these differences of opinion.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

Parish councils have long been established in English local government, dating back at least to the 15th century (Redlich and Hirst, 1970), and the work of the parish council has varied greatly throughout its history (Jones, 2020). With the recent re-focussing of attention upon communities and devolution of powers through the localism agenda (DCLG, 2011), it is necessary to review the purpose of local councils – not only the work that local councils do, but also what various stakeholders and local councils themselves believe they should be doing.

In defining ‘purpose’, it is necessary to dissect the work of an organisation into the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Sinek, 2011). The ‘what’ is the function, the individual tasks undertaken in order to fulfil a role; the ‘how’ is the role, separate elements of work that constitute a purpose; and the purpose is the ‘why’, the overarching identity and *raison d'être* of the organisation.

This review will evaluate the body of literature that describes or seeks to define the purpose of local councils and will chart the changes in the purpose, roles and functions of local councils over time, providing a context for the positioning of local councils within the current political landscape. The review will be structured chronologically in three sections that mark fundamental shifts in local government landscape: before the 1894 Local Government Act; 1894 to 2000, including the 1972 Local Government Act; and the 21st century, including the Localism Act 2011. In so doing, the review will identify the key themes and roles that underpin the work of local councils, thereby providing criteria upon which the study’s primary research will be based.

2.2. Before 1894

Jones (2020) provides a clear and concise outline of the historical foundation of parish councils, noting their role as far back as the 15th century, noting the presence of civil and Poor Law parishes, alongside ecclesiastical parishes. Jones goes further, to highlight the

historical evidence (Toulmin Smith, 1857; Redlich and Hirst, 1970) of the civil parish pre-dating the ecclesiastical parish, and the historical division of powers. This is of particular importance, as civil parishes are often mistakenly seen as having been established by the 1894 Local Government Act (Sandford, 2015), forming *from* ecclesiastical parishes, and this misconception affects our understanding of the historical role that parish councils played, and the context through which they were re-framed by the 1894 Act.

Jones, citing Toulmin Smith (1857), outlines some of the duties carried out by parish councils at that time, including the maintenance of highways and draining; public baths; public lighting; law and order, including Parish constables; public health; welfare of the poor; and water supplies. It is clear, therefore, that at this time the parish council had a role as the primary service deliverer for its area (Coulson, 1999).

Jones also highlights the role of parish councils in the mid-19th century regarding engaging the local community, primarily through meetings of the parish. However, whilst Jones equates this with the role of community engagement, there appears to be little evidence of parish councils being a voice for their community as it would be understood in a modern parish council, i.e. advocating on the behalf of their parish to other bodies, for example, on local or national consultations or campaigns. This could be understandable as, in rural areas, other than the judiciary there were no other units of local government (Toulmin Smith, 1857).

Jones goes on to note that by the mid-19th century, it was widely believed that parishes were too small to manage many local services, with Chandler (2007) stating that increasing industrialisation put more emphasis on larger units of government in order to achieve economies of scale. Chandler also describes how an impasse within central government regarding reform of local government led to the creation of other bodies that then bypassed local authorities altogether, disempowering parish councils. These factors were decisive in leading to the reforms of the Local Government Act 1894.

Chandler (2007) describes in detail the context behind 1894 Act, noting the fear by Conservatives regarding enshrining too much power with 'landless labourers who would

spend lavishly on poor relief' (p.106) as well as the concerns of modernists described above. As a result, the 1894 Act largely removed most executive powers, which were transferred to the newly-created rural and urban districts:

'At best the parish could act as a pressure group for the interests of its area, but any substantive powers that it was originally given to deal with insanitary or obstructive buildings and, later, to comment on building plans were subject to district or county approval.' (Chandler, 2007, p.107)

The 1894 Act which was therefore intended to reinvigorate parish councils led to their formalisation as a much less significant unit of local government than had previously been the case and, as Chandler has indicated above, we see their primary purpose of service delivery being replaced with that of being a voice of the community.

2.3. 1894 to 2000

Jones (2020) notes that following the 1894 Act the work of parish councils appears to stagnate. Furthermore, the perception of their role appears to fundamentally shift to align with the powers and duties that were enshrined in the 1894 Act. In his report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England (Redcliffe-Maud and Senior, 1969), Redcliffe-Maud illustrates this view of the parish council as predominantly a voice of the community:

'Meanwhile we had become increasingly convinced by those who emphasised the need for an organ of the community at grass roots level. Our conclusion was that any new pattern of democratic government must include elected local councils, not to provide main services, but to promote and watch over the particular interests of communities.' (p.12)

Redcliffe-Maud's proposals go further to enshrine this role:

'The only duty of the local council would be to represent local opinion... but would have the right to be consulted on matters of special interest to its inhabitants.' (p.2)

Whilst the parish council as a voice of the community is central to the prevailing perception and Redcliffe-Maud's proposals, he also suggests, in a proposal that is reminiscent of later debates on localism, that parish councils should also *'have the power to do for the local community a number of things best done locally'* (p.2). However, the report's co-author, Senior, warns against any power over local government statutory services, stating that it

would *'compromise what is most valuable in the concepts of the provincial and 'local' councils'* (p.20). However, generally, Redcliffe-Maud and Senior agree that the proper role of parish councils should predominantly be as a voice for their communities.

The Redcliffe-Maud report was to form the basis (albeit with amendments with the incoming Conservative government) of the Local Government Act 1972, and the preceding white paper (HM Government, 1971) reinforced the earlier observations:

'The general character of parishes should remain unchanged; they should remain bodies with powers rather than duties and as much a part of the social as the governmental scene.' (HM Government, 1972, para.39)

Chandler, (2007, p.204), notes that whilst there was contention over the future of parish councils, it was ultimately resolved to keep them essentially the same.¹

During the parliamentary debates on the bill, the then former Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, Antony Crosland MP, and Arthur Blenkinsop MP both highlighted the growing concern that the authorities, which had been introduced in the 1894 Act to provide economies of scale, had become too large, and that parish councils were needed to ensure local voices were heard:

'Experience has encouraged many people to argue that at a time when we are moving towards larger authorities... we should ensure that there is a lively base from which ideas can flow... There is today a tremendous ferment of grass roots activity of an ad hoc character throughout our towns and countryside. It is from that ferment that we are most likely to get new recruits into a real form of local democracy.' (HC Deb 19 May 1971, col.1322).

Whilst parish councils would continue to provide some services, little would change in the perception of the role of parish councils for three decades. In 1992, the Aston Report (Ellwood et al., 1992) would report that:

¹ One interesting development brought about by the 1972 Act though was the ability for towns that previously had borough or urban district status to petition to convert to being a parish or town council. This led to the creation of what would then go on to be some of the largest or richest town councils, including Leighton-Linslade, Bicester, Trowbridge, Bishop's Stortford, Sevenoaks, and the author's own council, Henley-on-Thames.

'The vast majority of local councils have scant financial resources and perceive themselves primarily as platforms for the expression of local opinion, rather than as service providers', (p.50).

It is important to note the national policy narratives emerging in the 20th century around local government and their influence on the role of local councils. Copus, Roberts and Wall (2017) note the three main narratives that prevailed throughout the 20th century – the sovereign council; new public management; and network governance. As each of these models grew or waned in prominence, so the role of principal authorities shifted. New public management saw the 'hollowing out' of local authorities with services shifted to other bodies *'from a system of local government into a system of governance involving complex sets of organizations drawn from the public and private sectors'* (Rhodes, 1996, p.658). The subsequent rise of the network governance model saw the role of principal authorities decrease further, putting more emphasis on local authorities as *enabling* rather than necessarily *delivering* services. Whilst the focus here is on principal authorities, these shifting policy narratives impact on other bodies, such as local councils, in the role they are expected to play in service provision.

As a result of these broader narratives, towards the end of the 1990s we see the debate shift back towards the potential of local councils as service providers (DETR, 1998; Coulson, 1999), and this was also highlighted through legislation extending new powers to local councils, such as the Local Government and Rating Act 1997², in the areas of transport, traffic calming, and public safety. However, the shift did not gain momentum until the start of the 21st century.

2.4. 21st Century

With the building momentum around devolution and decentralisation, in 2000 the government (DETR, 2000a; DETR, 2000b) published white papers on strengthening both rural and urban communities. In these, they propose an enhanced role for local councils

² This Act also introduced the ability for unparished areas (particularly in urban areas) to petition to create a parish council, with 107 developed in the first six year (Bevan, 2003).

(albeit those that can achieve 'Quality Status') in delivering services for local communities. However, there is still an assumption at this point on the services being devolved from or being run in partnership with principal authorities, rather than services being initiated independently at a parish level.

Following the 2005 general election, the re-elected Labour government published the paper, *Citizen engagement and public services: Why neighbourhoods matter* (ODPM, 2005). This further developed the concept of double-devolution: '*not just to the Town Hall, but beyond, to neighbourhoods and individual citizens*'³ (ODPM, 2006). The emphasis here was on the whole of the community sector, including charities and voluntary groups. Whilst there are a few central government references to building capacity within local councils (DCLG, 2006), these are still few and far between. In fact, in the speech of the then local government minister, David Miliband MP (ODPM, 2006) on double-devolution, local councils are not mentioned at all. This oversight is not exclusive to central government. For example, Lowndes and Sullivan (2007) make a strong case for increasing neighbourhood governance, and propose 'new' community structures that bear a striking similarity to local councils, without referencing local councils once.

However, Newman (2005, p.21) acknowledges that some local councils had already started to take on a larger remit:

'This central role [the example of Peterlee Town Council] is very different from the role envisaged from neighbourhood structures in the government's discussion paper on neighbourhoods. Peterlee's central focus on influence, regeneration and running community facilities does not align with a narrower focus on street services and anti-social behaviour.'

Whilst parish councils appear on the periphery of early discussions around double-devolution, we can see their prominence grow with the introduction of localism (DCLG, 2011), and in its *Open Public Services* white paper (HM Government, 2011) parish councils are referred to specifically regarding both increasing their power and taking more control of very local services. Most importantly, the resulting legislation (Localism Act 2011) brought in

³ Here, confusingly, the reference to the Town Hall is a synecdoche for principal authorities. Perhaps more evidence of parish councils being overlooked.

some transformative powers for parish and town councils, the greatest of these being the general power of competence, empowering qualifying councils ‘to do anything that an individual can do provided it is not prohibited by other legislation’ (LGA, 2013, p.4). In addition, provisions, such as the community right to challenge and community infrastructure levy, also highlighted a local council’s role as a potential service provider. The Localism Act 2011 provisions such as the introduction of the assets of community value and the community right to bid also highlight a rarely discussed third role for parish councils, that of a custodian of public assets – owning and managing assets such as land, property and finances on behalf of the public.

The resulting powers of the Localism Act along with the growing momentum of greater devolution of services has led to much wider consideration of the purpose of local councils over the past ten years, and these are illustrated in two recent local government sector guides, the LGA’s *Local service delivery and place-shaping* (2021) and NALC’s *National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils* (2017). Both suggest that the purpose of local councils can be defined in five categories:

Table 1: Five categories of local council purpose

Local Government Association (2021)	National Association of Local Councils (2017)
Influence and respond	Community leadership
Place-shaping	Place-shaper
Community activation	Builder of community resilience
Service / asset delivery	Service deliverer
Service / asset accountability	Culture creator

As we can see, there is significant commonality between the LGA and NALC categorisations – such as place-shaping and service delivery – and it is clear that both bodies see the current purpose of local councils as far more than just a voice for the community. However, there

are also some differences and the categories themselves are quite loosely defined as we will go on to discuss.

We started the literature review by outlining Jones' (2020) historical summary of local councils. Jones goes on to summarise their current position and concludes that the primary role of local councils continues to be as representatives of the needs and concerns of local communities. However, he also recognises a broad range of 'functional issues' that a local council may also be involved with, and states that the purpose of the local council is not fixed but ultimately should derive from public demand.

2.5. Conclusion

This review has highlighted how the definition of the purpose of a local council has been heavily shaped by external factors, such as the re-shaping of principal authority provision and central government legislation, which have often impacted greatly on local councils as a by-product rather than by design.

This review has charted the fluctuating role of local councils within this context, from that of being predominantly a service provider, to being little more than a pressure group for the local community, and then rising in prominence again in the 21st century with a broad range of powers and large potential to meet local service demands.

From the current discourse, there is no doubt that local councils can, and are expected, to take a much larger and proactive role within their communities. It is also clear from past qualitative research (LGA, 2021; NALC, 2017; Newman, 2005), that it is those larger town and parish councils that are expected to have a wider remit, and this is a hypothesis that will be tested through this research.

In addition, from the author's own experience, there is a clear absence of discussion of what is often an important role for local councils of all sizes – the management of public assets including buildings, land, and money – although this is suggested in the provisions of the Localism Act discussed above, and perhaps also in the LGA's category of 'service / asset

accountability' (Table 1 above). This role can often be one of the most time-consuming duties of a local authority, including functions such as providing grants; owning parks, playgrounds, and village greens; managing other areas of land that may or may not be available to the public; owning, or being a trustee for buildings such as village halls and community centres; dealing with legal issues such as wayleaves, easements, and encroachments; and managing leases and licences. Whilst some of these duties may also be involved in the role of being a 'service provider' e.g. providing community rooms for hire or leisure facilities, much of the role will be distinct from both that role and that of 'a voice of the community'.

Emerging from this review, we can therefore conclude the three roles that make up the purpose of a local council are:

1. Voice of the community;
2. Service deliverer; and
3. Custodian of public assets.

A question that would arise from this conclusion is how these roles encompass the categories highlighted by LGA (2021) and NALC (2017), such as 'place shaper', 'culture creator' and 'community activation'. Whilst these categories are vague and are likely to have significant overlap, they suggest an active role for the council in shaping their community. However, the functions carried out to achieve these aims are covered by the three roles proposed by this research. For example:

- (a) 'Place-shaping' may, in part, take the form of leading on a neighbourhood plan, which would form part of 'voice of the community' in the respect that it is listening to and advocating for the community through putting in place policies for development in its area; or
- (b) 'Culture creator' may include organising events, which would fall under 'service delivery' or providing a space for events which would be acting as a 'custodian of public assets'.

Rather than 'shaping the community' being a role or purpose in its own right, instead it is the extent to which council's embrace the three proposed roles – voice of the community; service deliver; and custodian of public assets – that defines how proactive or reactive a council is in shaping its community, and this will be central to the research undertaken.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter's purpose is to outline the research methods used in order to help answer the key question of this dissertation: *how do local councils in England perceive their purpose?* using the three roles identified in the literature review: *voice of the community; service deliverer; and custodian of public assets.*

The chapter will discuss the details and rationale of the research strategy; the design of the research tool used; ethical considerations of the chosen method; and how the data were collated and analysed. In doing so, it will also explore any problems encountered during the data gathering process, and any limitations of the chosen method.

3.2. Strategy

In order to provide a coherent strategy, the aim of the study needs to be divided into several objectives, discussed previously:

- (a) **Define** 'purpose' within the setting of a local council and assess the historical context behind this;
- (b) **Identify** a method through which purpose can be measured, especially in the context of a corporate body, the local council;
- (c) **Quantify** a council's sense of purpose through tangible, measurable results;
- (d) **Analyse** the results to provide a meaningful answer as to how councils perceive their purpose and the implications for the sector; and
- (e) **Ascertain** what factors affect a council's sense of purpose and its level of engagement and leadership within the community.

Define. The literature review has identified that the purpose of local councils can be seen as a combination of the following roles: *voice of the community; service deliverer; and*

custodian of public assets. The research method can therefore use these three categories as its key metrics.

Identify. However, as councils are corporate bodies they themselves cannot be asked directly how they see their purpose. Rather, a human research subject needs to be identified to be able to speak on behalf of the council. An option was to ask all members of a local council and then collate their responses. However, to do so, and to ensure all councillors of a council took part, would be very time-consuming. Instead, it was decided that a single research subject for each council should be chosen. The two clear candidates for this were the chair / mayor of the council, or the clerk. On balance, it was felt that the clerk was more likely to be able to provide a more objective response to the survey.

3.3. Design

Quantify. The next challenge was to devise a research tool that would deliver results that were representative of local councils throughout England; identify contributing factors; and enable comparison between councils. Whilst interviews would have provided an in-depth insight into the meaning of 'purpose', these had been carried out previously (e.g. LGA, 2021; Newman, 2005), and as it has been recognised that each parish council is very different (Jones, 2020), with the limited resources available, they would not have produced results that could claim to be definitive or representative.

Instead, it was felt that a quantitative approach was required, with the aim of capturing a large amount of data from local councils from across England, in order to take a more '*objective, detached approach*' (Denscombe, 2017, p.8) from previous studies. An online survey was the preferred option due to the wide geographical coverage and the speed at which data could be obtained, collated and analysed (Denscombe, 2017). In addition, it was hoped that being less burdensome on the respondents would yield a greater number of responses.

In order to create tangible and comparable results, it was also necessary to be able to quantify the data, but it is difficult to do this when the aim of the research is to evaluate the

beliefs of a corporate body. However, a parallel can be drawn between this scenario and the aim of psychometric testing carried out on individual subjects in order to assign personality traits. Questionnaire design from systems such as Social Styles (Merrill and Reid, 1981) and Myers Briggs (Bayne, 1997) ask respondents to consider statements and use a numerical scale to state how much they believe the statement is representative of them. A statement will apply to one of a number of metrics (e.g. introversion / extroversion) and adding up the total for all the statements applied to that metric will give a 'score', which is then used to ascertain to what extent the individual identifies with that personality trait.

In this case, the metrics to be applied were the three 'roles': *voice of the community*; *service deliverer*; and *custodian of public assets*. Ten statements would be given for each role. The statements would take scenarios illustrative of that 'role' (and a full list of these can be found in Appendix 2). The respondent, the clerk, would be asked to state how likely they believe their council would agree with the statements, using a scale of 1 to 10. This would therefore produce an overall score out of 100 for each of the three roles.

Presenting each role through a series of different scenarios would help to moderate the results and reduce the impact of any anomalous results. In addition, by comparing the scores of each individual response it would be possible to triangulate the data to ensure its validity (Denscombe, 2017).

As the survey would be asking councils of all sizes to respond, careful consideration needed to be given to the scenarios posed, as many of these may not apply to the council in question, and therefore it was necessary for the respondent to answer hypothetically. Examples were chosen from real-world scenarios that had applied to councils both large and small, chosen anecdotally from other local council clerks or from the author's own experience.

In order to be able to assess which factors may contribute to the how a local council perceives its purpose, it was necessary to capture factual information about each council:

Table 2: Survey variable data

Variable	Rationale
Size – by population	Councils serving larger populations may be more likely to have a broader role
Location – both within the UK and whether in an urban or rural setting	There may be regional cultural differences, or differing expectations depending on whether they are in a more rural or urban setting
Principal authority structure – unitary or two-tier	A unitary structure may make the principal authority more remote, and therefore increase the role of the local council
Finances – both level of reserves and total average expenditure	A greater amount of discretionary funding may increase the council’s sense of obligation to carry out additional services
Community infrastructure levy (CIL) – whether in receipt of or not	

3.4. Ethics

The research was carried out in accordance with De Montfort University’s *Research Ethics Code of Practice* (De Montfort University, 2021).

Respondents were informed of the purpose and the rationale of the study. The impact of the research on participants was also considered, and it was generally felt to be a low-risk study.

The online survey was accompanied by a participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix 1) that confirmed that:

- (i) Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that respondents could withdraw at any time;
- (ii) Any individual responses would be anonymised;
- (iii) The information gathered from the survey would only be used for the stated objectives; and
- (iv) Personal information or anything identifying individual councils would not be published, and only the researcher and supervising staff would have access to the data itself.

Information was gathered and stored electronically, password-protected, and retained in accordance with the Code of Practice.

3.5. Data collection

The survey was powered using the online *Google Forms* platform. This was chosen as it was free to use, secure, customisable, and is both accessible and relatively frictionless for respondents. The platform also allowed for the data to be easily exported as a .csv file, for ease of analysis.

In order to ensure the invitation to participate was distributed as widely as possible throughout English local councils, the researcher used (a) digital clerks' forums such as *Facebook* and *Whatsapp* groups; and (b) sent direct emails to councils. This was achieved by searching principal authority websites for parish council contact details. In particular, principal authorities using the *Civica / Modern.Gov* software had contact details for all local council clerks available as a downloadable .csv file, enabling the researcher to compile an email list of c.3,500 local councils. Whilst membership of the online forums tended to be weighted towards clerks from the South of England, use of *Civica* appeared broadly consistent throughout English regions, and therefore national coverage could be achieved.

3.6. Data analysis

Analyse. By exporting the data as a .csv file, it was possible to filter and sort responses by the different variables, and calculate the mean average for all councils, as well as each variable, and each individual council. The next chapter details further how the analysis was undertaken and the results presented.

3.7. Problems encountered and limitations

Whilst every effort was made to ensure that the responses received were representative of the sector as a whole, the nature of being invited to participate will always lead to a certain amount of self-selection (Denscombe, 2017). However, it is not believed that the self-

selection would impact on the results, as whilst the survey may potentially have attracted more proactive or involved clerks, the survey was about the culture of their councils rather than the respondent themselves.

The main limitation of the research is that it focuses solely on one stakeholder – the clerk. With more time and resources, it would have been beneficial to take a sample of responses and compare them against responses gathered from members of those councils, to check the validity of using the clerk as a proxy.

For many respondents, several of the statements posed would have been hypothetical situations, e.g. asked whether their council would want to take on the management of public toilets, when their parish may not have any. The questioning, therefore, often required two leaps of the imagination – not only asking them to answer on behalf of their council, but also answering a hypothetical situation.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter identifies that, in order to achieve the key objectives of the study through a large scale, quantitative survey, novel methodology was required, drawing from other academic fields such as psychology. As this is, to a large extent, experimental, not only will the next chapter look at the results of the survey, but it will also address the question of whether the methodological approach has succeeded.

Chapter 4: Results and analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will first report on the reaction to the survey, looking at both the response rate and the profile of its respondents. It will then go on to present and explain the results, according to the themes and variables captured by the data, and link these back to hypotheses, assumptions, and themes emerging from the literature review.

4.2. Response rate

The survey was intended to capture a nationally-representative selection of respondents, and therefore local council clerks were contacted directly via email using principal authority databases, and c.3,600 individual emails were successfully delivered. In addition, the Community Clerks' Network Facebook page, with c.1,700 members was also used to advertise the survey. Including word-of-mouth and other advertising, but allowing for duplications and unread email invitations, the total reach of the invitation was c.5,000 local council clerks, or roughly 54% of the 9,265 local clerks in England (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), 2021).

621 responses were received in total. However, some were excluded because either they were a duplicate; the response was on behalf of a parish meeting rather than a parish council; or the respondent was a member of the Council, rather than the clerk. The total verified responses used to calculate the final figures was 577, 6.2% of all local councils in England.

4.3. Respondent profile

Over 99% of respondents stated they were the clerk for their council. Whilst responses were excluded from members of councils, they were accepted from other officers acting on

behalf of the clerk (e.g. Assistant Clerk, Head of Corporate Support, Responsible Finance Officer, etc) in line with the methodological principles discussed in Chapter 3.

Responses were received from a diverse range of councils, and examples of some of the range of characteristics are given below (Figure 1 to 4). Regionally, all areas of the country were well represented, although there was a greater number of responses from the South East and South West. Different sizes of council – by both population and overall expenditure – were also well represented.

Figure 1: Respondents by region

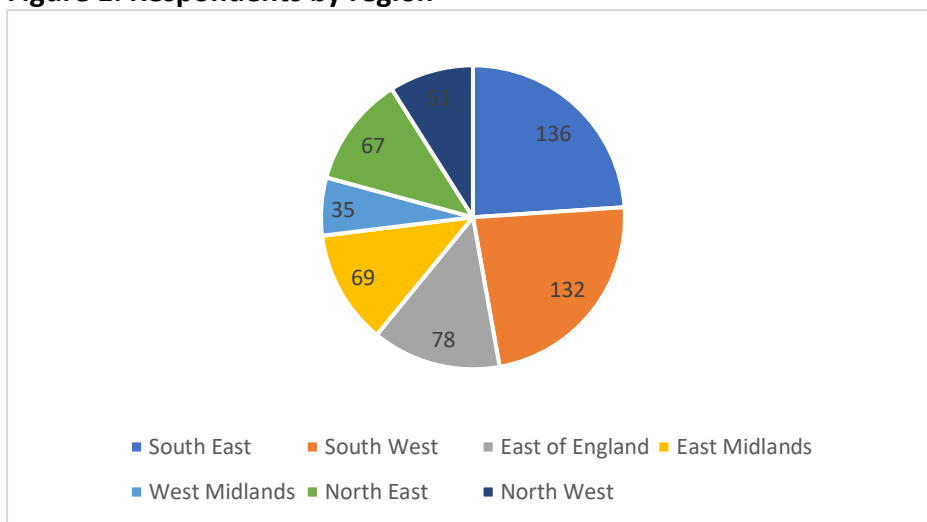


Figure 2: Respondents by principal authority structure

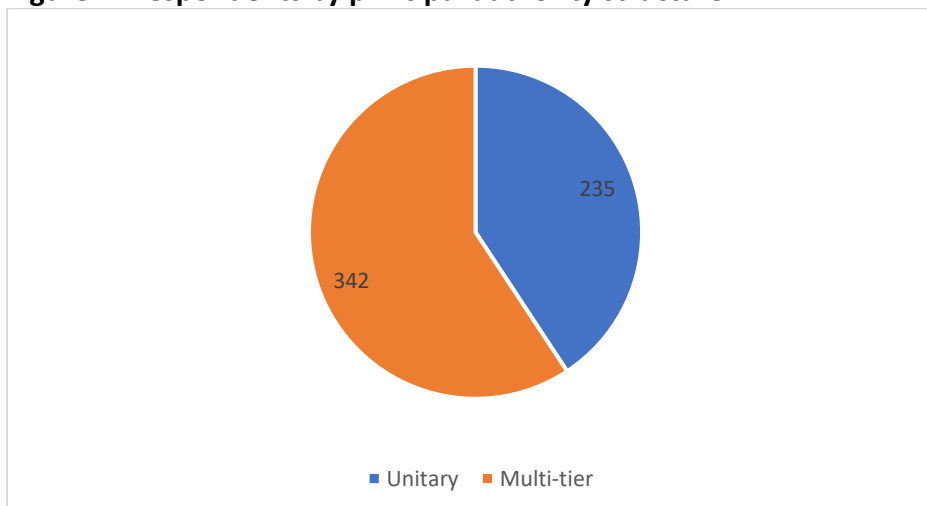


Figure 3: Respondents by population of parish area

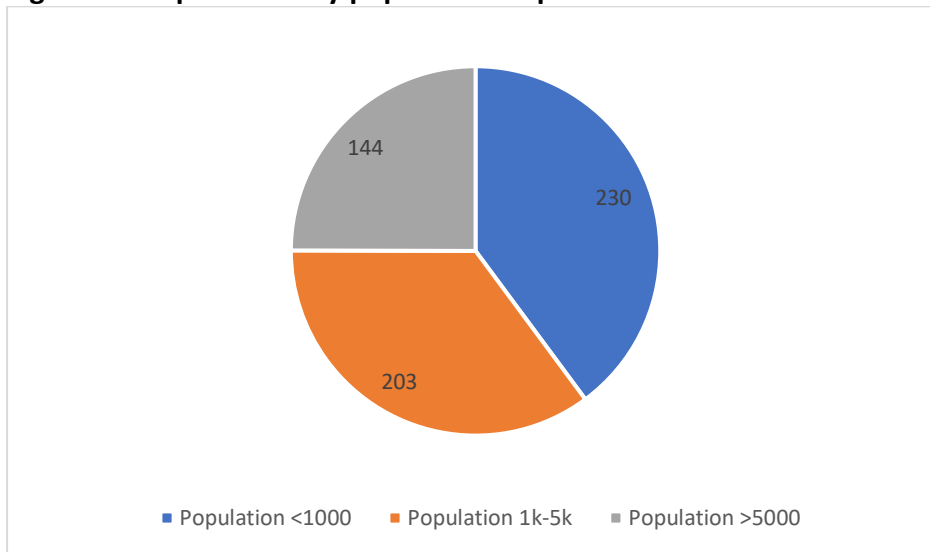
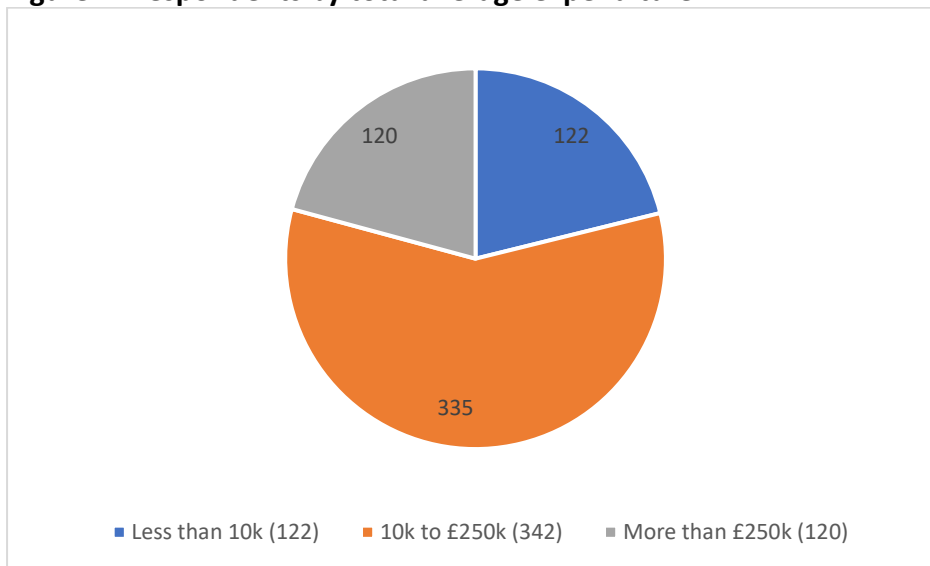


Figure 4: Respondents by total average expenditure



4.4. Research findings

Each respondent was asked to score each statement on a scale from 1 to 10 – with 1 being highly likely; 5 neither likely nor unlikely; and 10 highly unlikely. The ‘scores’ for each of the ten questions relating to the particular role are then divided by ten, to give each council a mean average score out of ten for that role. Those three scores were also combined to give an aggregated total (out of 30) of how active that council perceives its purpose.

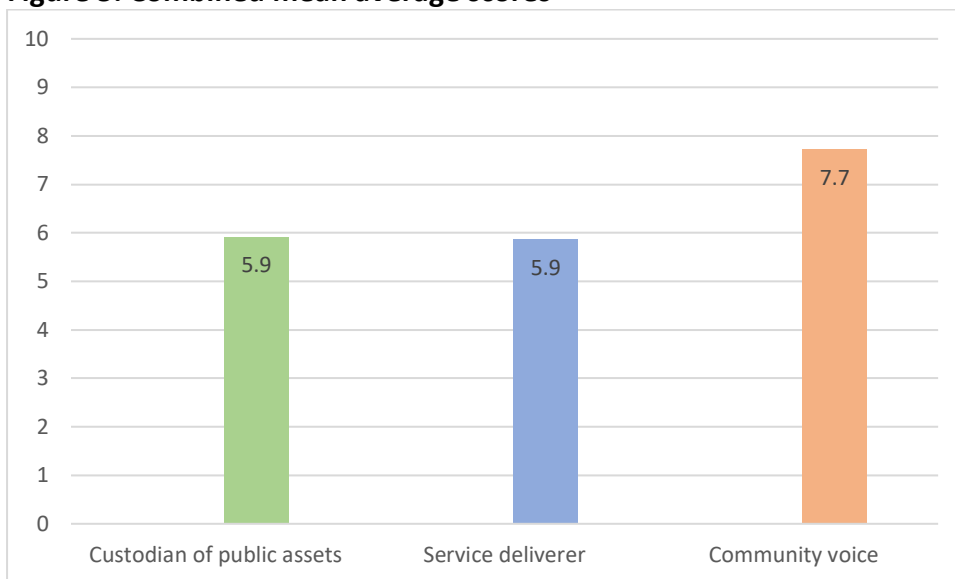
The responses were then analysed separately according to the variables captured in the first part of the survey, e.g. size, resources, location, principal authority structure, and totals the calculated for the councils in each grouping.

Averages were calculated to the nearest tenth to produce a scale of 100. Therefore, an 'X point' shift / increase / decrease is referring to the difference to the nearest tenth of the mean average, e.g. 5.9 to 6.2 would be a three point increase.

The full results summary data, which includes all data for the findings below can be found in Appendix 3.

4.4.1. Finding 1: Overall purpose

Figure 5: Combined mean average scores

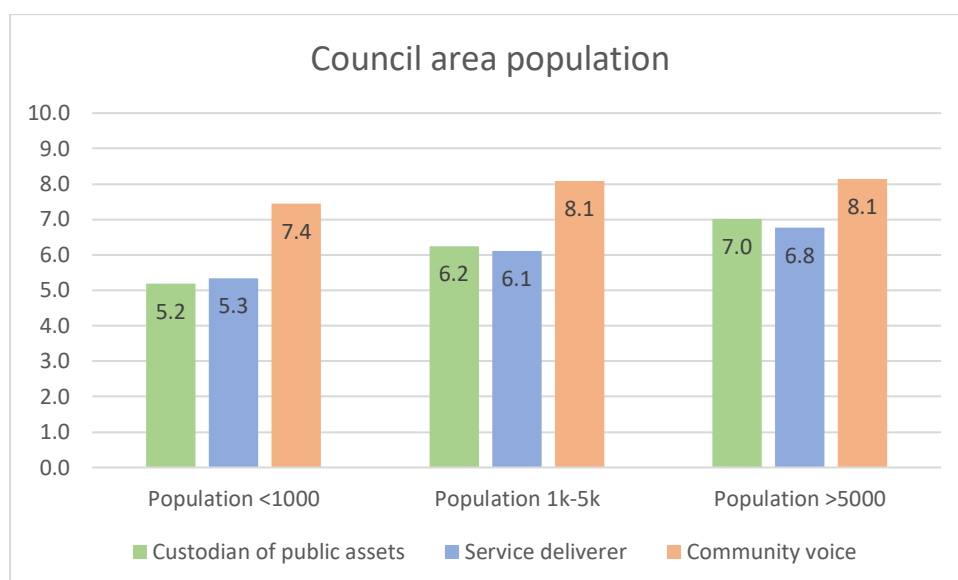


The mean average responses for all 577 councils show that a council is more likely than not to see its purpose as delivering all three of the proposed roles: custodian of public assets; service deliverer; and voice of the community. The roles of custodian and service deliverer are equally weighted (5.9 mean average) showing that whilst a council is more likely than not to engage in activities associated with that role, it will often not be a certainty and that an average local council may not be very active in these areas. In contrast, the mean average score for the role of voice of the community (7.7) shows that a council is very likely to engage with activities associated with that role.

This finding reflects much of the recent and historic debate around the purpose of the parish councils, discussed in Chapter 2. In particular, the emphasis on the primary purpose of parish councils being a representative for their communities, whilst also reflecting the growth in the argument of parish councils as being well-placed to deliver public services. The survey also reflects the researcher’s own experience of the overlooked role of the councils as a custodian of public assets.

4.4.2. Finding 2: Size of council

Figure 6: Results by population of local council area



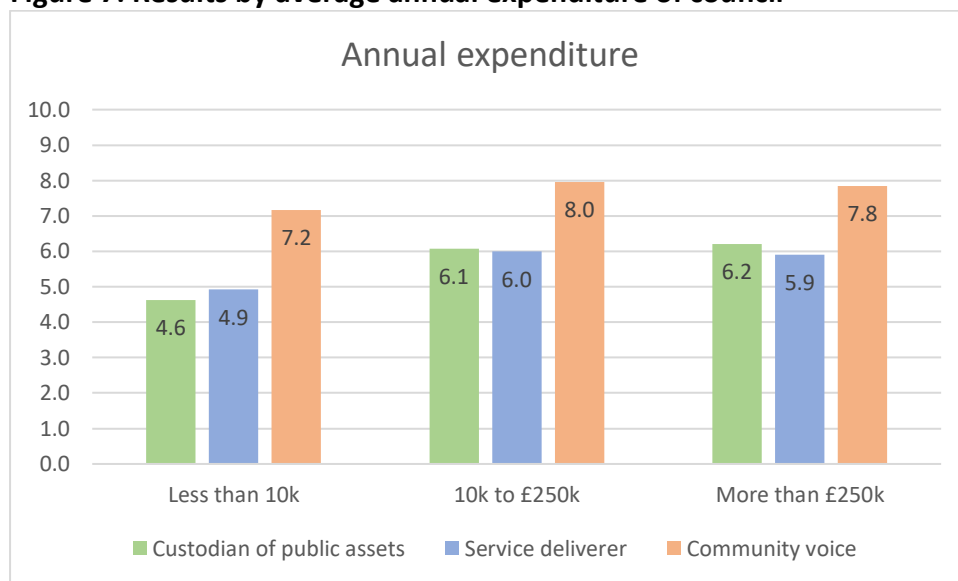
The ‘size’ of councils was measured using two different metrics – population and total average expenditure – in order to identify whether any difference was related to just the size of settlement or the size of the Council itself (in terms of staffing and resources), although there will undoubtedly be a correlation between the two.

The data clearly show that the larger a council by population of the settlement area, the greater its sense of purpose. This was not unexpected, as highlighted in the literature review above. It would be reasonable to assume that those with greater populations and therefore a greater precept or access to resources would feel a greater obligation to provide both services and look after community assets.

However, what was not expected is that the role of being a voice of the community would also be greater in larger councils, an assumption being that those with greater resources or landowner responsibilities would focus attention on those roles, whereas a small council unburdened from service provision and land ownership would devote their efforts more to advocating for the community. One possible explanation is that smaller councils may feel that their size means that their opinions will carry less weight with stakeholders such as principal authorities, and therefore they see less reason to engage.

However, whilst there is a correlation between the size of the council (by population) and the sense of purpose, it should be noted that even the average council with a population of less than 1,000 is still more likely than not to identify their role as a service deliverer and custodian, where given the opportunity, and that they still see themselves as strong advocates for their community.

Figure 7: Results by average annual expenditure of council

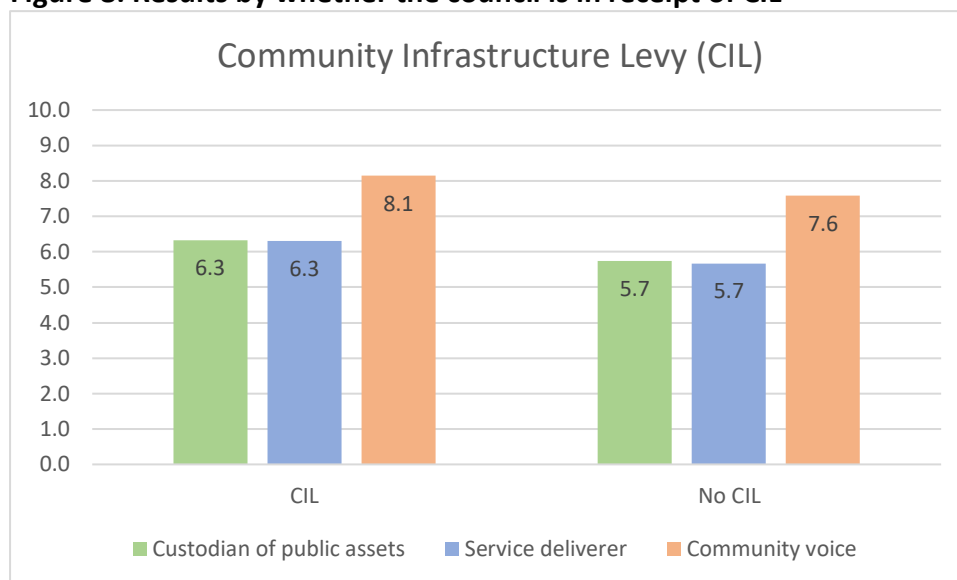


The second measure of size – average expenditure – was purposefully weighted differently from size by population metric, in order to identify differences at the farther ends of council size. Unlike the more evenly distributed responses for the population metric, the ratio of responses between the three expenditure bands was 20:60:20.

This showed that the smallest 20% by expenditure considered themselves to be less active than larger councils. This was expected, the assumption being that greater access to resources would increase the activity of a council. However, what was therefore unexpected was that there was very little difference in how councils identified between the 60% of councils in the medium expenditure band and the largest 20%, with both having similar scores, and the same overall average combined scores. Why this may be, and why this does not mirror the trend seen in the population size metric would require further investigation.

4.4.3. Finding 3: Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Figure 8: Results by whether the council is in receipt of CIL



Councils were asked whether they were in receipt of CIL, and there was a relatively even split between respondents (267 – yes, 310 – no). The results show, as expected, that those in receipt of funds to improve community infrastructure felt a greater sense of obligation as both a custodian and a service deliverer, and that the difference was noticeable (a six point increase for those in receipt of CIL).

What was more surprising was that there was a similar increase in the role of the council as a voice of the community. This role, and the tasks assigned to it in the questionnaire, in general should not directly relate directly to the spending of CIL, such as maintaining relationships with principal authority members to influence policy-making, and the importance of carrying out public consultations into service changes. We can see that there

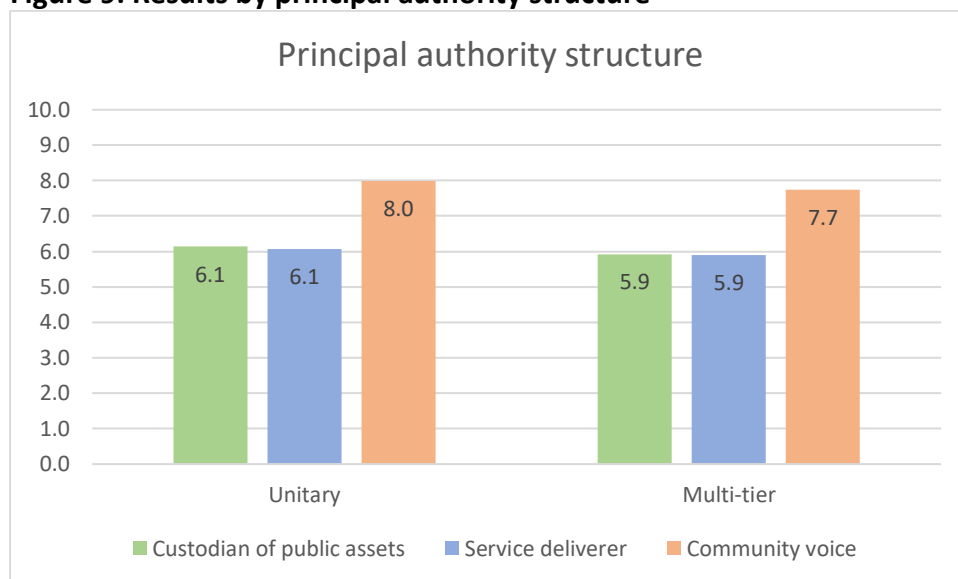
are indirect links, e.g. an authority in receipt of CIL may need to maintain better relationships with principal authorities in order to coordinate spending on, say, highways projects; however, this would not explain many of the differences.

It may be that the relationship between CIL and a local council’s sense of purpose is not causal, e.g. that the earlier adoption of CIL by principal authorities suggests a more proactive local authority culture in the area. Take up of CIL is more prevalent in southern regions of England (Planning Resource, 2022) and this would correlate with regional variations in the overall sense of purpose discussed later.

Another possible explanation is that the very fact that a council receives CIL creates a greater sense of obligation within the council. However, it is impossible to know for certain from data the true reason behind this finding, and further study would be needed.

4.4.4. Finding 4: Principal authority structure

Figure 9: Results by principal authority structure



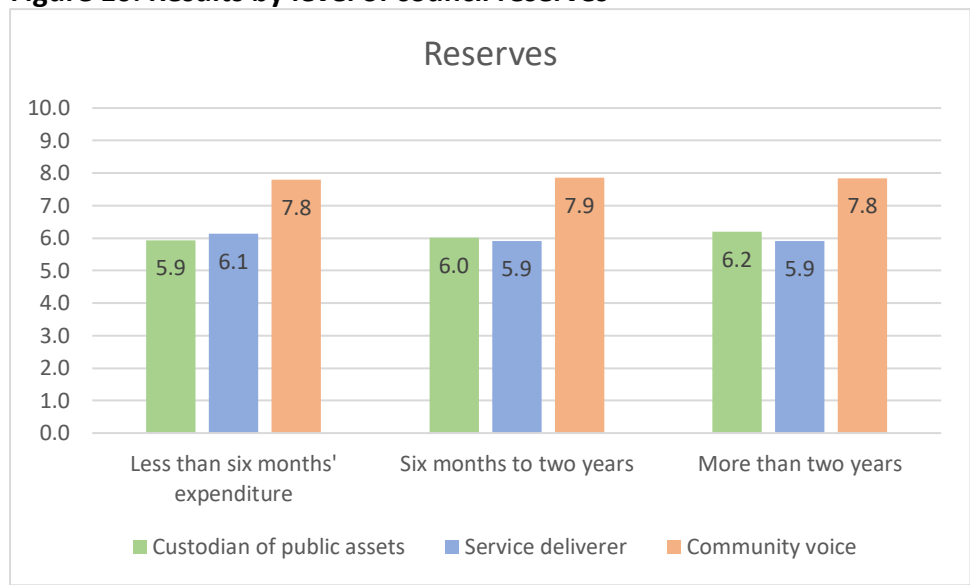
The survey asked respondents to state whether the principal authority structure in their area was unitary, two-tier, or other. For two-tier authorities, this was mainly in the form of a county / district council structure. A small number of respondents reported a three-tier structure, e.g. the inclusion of a national park authority, and these were combined with the two-tier category, which was then renamed as ‘multi-tier’. Some respondents – e.g. those in

North Yorkshire – stated that they were ‘other’ as they were currently two-tier but were in the process of moving to a unitary authority. These responses were categorised under two-tier, as this was the structure that most influenced their current culture.

The results show that those councils in unitary authority areas perceived themselves as having a slightly greater sense of purpose (2 to 3 point increase), across all three roles. There does not appear to be any correlation with other factors, e.g. if unitary authorities were more prevalent in areas which had also adopted CIL. The most likely explanation is that in a unitary authority area, the principal authority may be perceived as being more remote from the local community, therefore creating a vacuum which the local council is expected to fill. However, this would require further research to show with any certainty.

4.4.5. Finding 5: Reserves

Figure 10: Results by level of council reserves



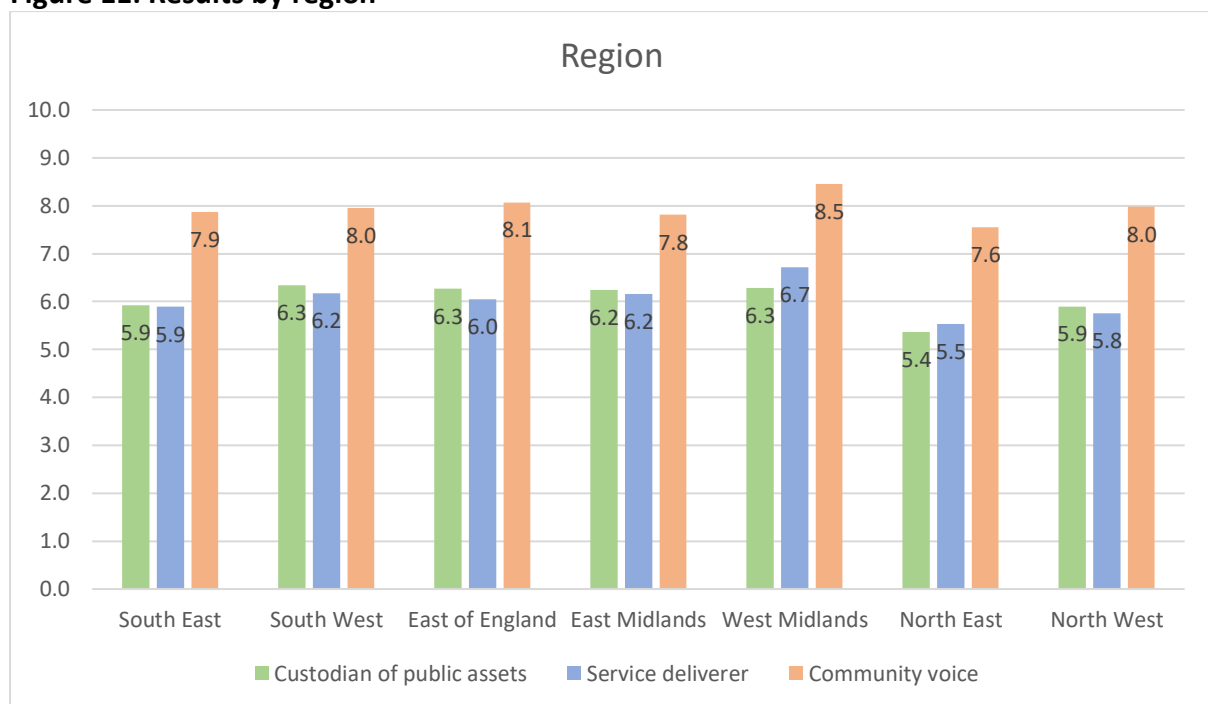
The survey asked respondents to state what level of reserves their council held, relative to the level of expenditure: less than 6 months' worth; 6 months to 2 years; or over 2 years. These levels were chosen as they correlate to best practice on appropriate levels of reserves (NALC, 2018 and JPAG, 2022). As such, it was intended to highlight any differences between councils at the farther ends of the financial stability scale.

The finding was that the level of reserves made no discernible difference to how a council perceived its sense of purpose. This was unexpected, as it could be assumed that a council with a greater level of available reserves would likely feel obligated to engage in more activities. It would also follow that the level of reserves relative to expenditure would therefore be spread relatively evenly throughout the overall expenditure distribution.

4.4.6. Inconclusive findings

(a) Region

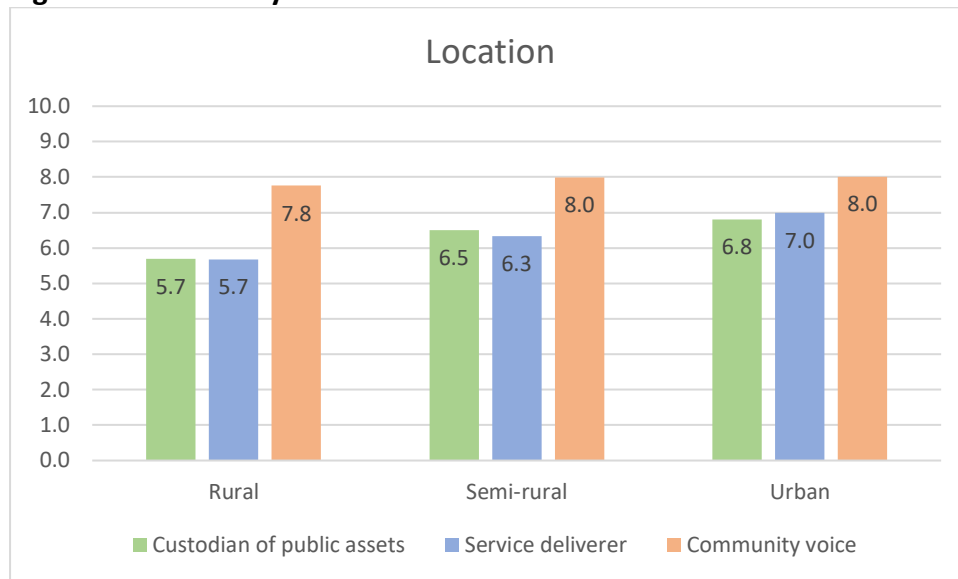
Figure 11: Results by region



Responses were separated by first county and then UK regions (ONS, 2021), to ascertain whether there were any regional differences in the sense of purpose. Whilst there was a greater concentration of responses from the South East (136 in total) and South West (132) with declining numbers the further north travelled, the number of responses was still sufficient to carry out a comparison. The findings showed that there are some large differences between regions, e.g. the North East aggregated average score of 18.4 compared with the West Midlands score of 21.5. One possibility may be political and cultural differences between regions, however, it is difficult to ascertain any definitive pattern in these differences without further research.

(b) Location

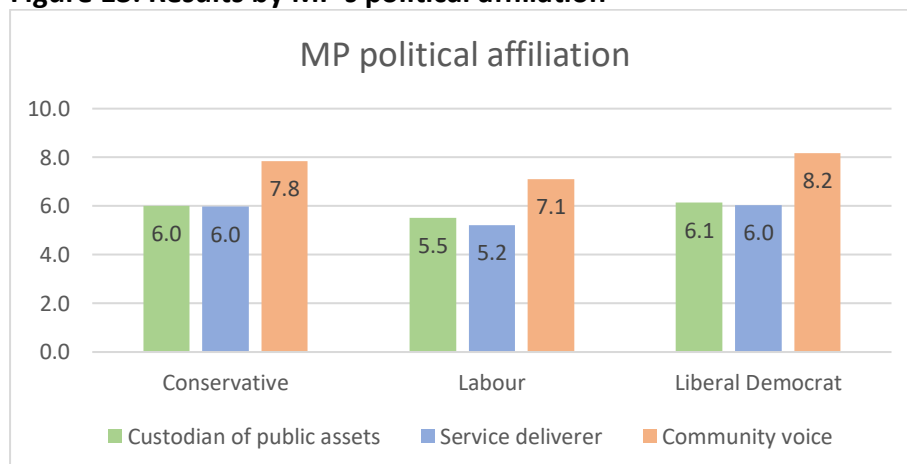
Figure 12: Results by location



Respondents were asked to state how they would best describe the area around their parish or town: rural, semi-rural, or urban. A cursory glance at the results would suggest that the more urban a setting, the more involved a council would consider itself across all three roles. However, an analysis of the individual responses would show that many respondents had misunderstood the question, leading to some larger parishes and towns classifying their surrounding location as 'urban' or 'semi-rural', when they were actually referring to the setting of the village / town itself. Therefore, it is felt that the results are too unreliable to make any clear conclusions.

(c) Political affiliation

Figure 13: Results by MP's political affiliation



From the data provided, the respondents were separated according to the political affiliation of their local MP. This was to try to identify how the different political cultures of an area may affect the council's sense of purpose. However, the vast majority of parished areas are in rural locations that tend to be within Conservative constituencies. In fact, 531 of the 577 responses received were from local councils within Conservative constituencies. The remaining responses were clustered in a small number of constituencies (such as the Liberal Democrat seat of Westmorland and Lonsdale), and, therefore, no meaningful results could be found.

A potentially more effective exercise would be to separate councils by the political affiliation either of the council themselves (where applicable) or, as a proxy, by that of the member(s) of the principal authority representing their area. This would provide a much more localised and accurate picture of the local political culture and could potentially lead to some more meaningful findings. However, this was too burdensome an exercise for this study.

4.4.7. Analysis of the methodology

As discussed in the previous chapter, a challenge of the study was achieving its aims through the use of a large-scale quantitative survey, and whether the method chosen can be shown to have succeeded.

Through looking at how individuals responded, and by comparing the responses to the questions relating to each role, we can see that patterns emerge that would show a consistency and veracity of the data gathered. For example, when given similar scenarios, respondents generally answered with a similar score; and responses given for each role were also relatively consistent, e.g. scores given by a respondent for the voice of the community role were generally consistently higher than those for the other roles.

However, more study would be needed to further investigate the legitimacy of this method, for example, through the presentation of the results to respondents to assess how the results align with their perception, or a comparison with actual council resolutions.

4.5. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to identify how local councils perceive their own purpose and what factors affected that view, and the results have provided some clear conclusions.

From the findings above we can conclude that councils see their primary role as being a voice for their community – listening to and championing the views of residents and other community stakeholders. However, when provided with the opportunity, they also see themselves as service deliverers and custodians of public assets. This view is the same for councils across England, regardless of size, location, finances, or other contributing factors.

However, there are some factors that are likely to lead to a small increase the council's activity and sense of purpose and, where this happens, it is likely to have a similar affect across all three roles:

- (a) Principal authority structure – local councils in unitary authority areas;
- (b) CIL – local councils in receipt of CIL;
- (c) Population – local councils with a population of over 1,000 residents; and
- (d) Finances – those with expenditure over £10,000 per year.

These findings support the evidence of the literature review where the emphasis is, and has for the past 130 years been, on local councils being a voice of the community. The findings also mirror the growing discussion around the increasing role of councils, taking on the challenges and opportunities presented by both recent legislative reform, most notably the Localism Act 2011, and the vacuum that has been created by the reduction in services by increasingly pressured and remote principal authorities.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Recommendations for further study

5.1.1. Councils as custodians of public assets

This study has highlighted that a key role for local councils is as the custodians of public assets – land, building, and finances – and yet this is an area that remains largely overlooked by the local council sector, central government and principal authorities, and academia. More research is needed on the impact of estate management on the work of councils, how this influences local councils' decision-making, and how it supports or hinders a local council's other roles.

5.1.2. Expanding the survey

This survey has focussed on feedback from one stakeholder – the local council clerk. Whilst this may be the best starting point for the survey, it's acknowledged that it has its limitations, and that expanding the survey to other stakeholders, especially councillors, would help confirm the accuracy of the results.

The survey could also be used to identify gaps in local service provision and representation by sampling specific local councils and surveying the clerk, councillors, principal authority members and staff, and community members of that parish. Doing so could show where there are gaps in expectations of the roles of the community organisations and different levels of local government, leading to inadequate provision or, in contrast, an overlap in expectations leading to duplication of services.

5.1.3. Changes over time

The survey has produced a summary of local council perception at one particular moment. The local government environment has changed significantly over the past ten to twenty years and will likely continue to do so. Therefore, re-running this study in future years could provide valuable data on how legislative or structural changes affect the culture of local councils.

With the frequent changes in principal authority structure, re-running the survey in areas that are undergoing change, such as areas changing principal authority structure (for example, North Yorkshire) or areas introducing CIL, could also provide further evidence for the impact of these variables on a local council's sense of purpose.

5.1.4. Qualitative evidence to support methodology

Chapter 3 acknowledges the novel methodological approach, and the need to further examine the accuracy of its use. The research would benefit from interviews with clerks to gain feedback on how their 'scores' align with their perceptions of the council's purpose, as well as comparing with the views of councillors and other stakeholders.

5.2. Research objectives: Summary of conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to answer the question:

How do local councils in England perceive their purpose?

This study has shown that the purpose of local councils can be divided into three roles: a voice of the community; a service deliverer; and a custodian of public assets. This study has also provided evidence that local councils, regardless of circumstances, view their primary role as being a voice for the community but that, when given the opportunity, they also see themselves as a deliverer of public services, and a custodian of public assets. However, there are factors that will affect this sense of purpose, and a growing population; more remote

principal authority; and access to greater funds, such as CIL, will likely increase the involvement of local councils in their community.

With growing demands on local councils from central government and principal authorities to increase their profile and fill the vacuum often left in local representation and service provision, this study shows that local councils are prepared to undertake these new challenges.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet and consent form

Appendix 2: Survey questions

Appendix 3: Summary data

APPENDIX 1(a)

An investigation into the purpose of parish and town councils

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

We would like to ask you to participate in the data collection for a study on the purpose of town and parish councils conducted by myself, an undergraduate student at De Montfort University.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It will involve completing an online survey of c.40 questions and should take no longer than 5-10 minutes to complete.

You may decide not to answer any of the non-mandatory questions should you wish. You may also decide to withdraw from this study at any time by not submitting your survey response.

We may ask for clarification of questions raised in the survey some time after it has taken place, but you will not be obliged in any way to clarify or participate further.

The information you provide is confidential, and any individual responses will be anonymised.

Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in any publications resulting from this study; neither will there be anything to identify your individual council.

The information gained from this survey will only be used for the stated objectives, will not be used for any other purpose and will not be recorded in excess of what is required for the research.

Even though the study findings may be published, only the researcher and supervising staff at De Montfort University will have access to the interview data itself. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information please contact me before, during, or after the survey.

Yours sincerely,



Sheridan Jacklin-Edward

07720 052572

P17034714@my365.dmu.ac.uk

APPENDIX 1(b)

Consent form

I have read the information about the study available at the start of the online survey, including the participant information sheet.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study and received satisfactory answers to any questions I may have asked, and any additional details I may have wanted.

I am also aware that my responses may be included in publications to come from this research, but that my name or any other personal identifying information will not; neither will there be anything to identify my individual council.

I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from De Montfort University, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my responses.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY: THE PURPOSE OF PARISH COUNCILS

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking part in the survey. Your time is much appreciated.

Why the survey?

Parish and town councils have wide-ranging powers but very few duties. They also vary greatly in size and character, and therefore the role a parish or town council plays in their community will also vary significantly.

This survey will help us understand how different town and parish councils perceive their purpose. In particular, it will measure how a council sees its role as:

- (a) A custodian of public assets
- (b) A service provider
- (c) A voice for their community

What is in the survey?

The survey is in two sections: The first section asks for factual information about your council – population, finances, etc. The second section asks you to consider statements – some may be real for your council and others hypothetical – and rate how likely you think *your council* would agree with those statements.

The survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete.

How will the information be used?

The responses received will be analysed to see how different characteristics of a council – amount of reserves, size of parish / town, type of principal authority structure – affect the council's perception of its purpose.

Each respondent will also receive an individual profile for their council which they can use to compare against the overall results.

For more information see the participant information sheet here [insert hyperlink].

By participating in the survey you give your consent in accordance with the consent statement available here [insert hyperlink].

SECTION 1 – COUNCIL INFORMATION

1. Name of Council:
2. Name of person completing:
3. Role of person completing:
4. Email address:
5. Population of parish / town: ***Give ranges***
6. Total average annual expenditure: ***Give ranges***
7. Annual precept: ***Give ranges***
8. Total reserves: ***Give ranges***
9. Does the Council receive CIL: **Yes / No**
10. Principal authority structure: **Unitary / two-tier**

SECTION 2 – COUNCIL PROFILE

Please consider the following statements and rate how likely you think ***your town or parish council*** would agree with those statements.

Some scenarios may not apply to your council, but please respond as though it did apply to your council.

[The 30 questions below will be presented in a random order and the subheadings will not be included. Each question will be scored by the participant on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being highly unlikely to 10 being highly likely.]

Custodian of assets – property and finance

1. When a local churchyard is closed, your council would want to take on the management, rather than pass it to the district / unitary authority.
2. Your district / unitary authority intends to close public toilets in your parish / town. Your council would want to take on the ownership and management of the toilets.
3. Your council would consider the main purpose of selling a council asset is to achieve the highest price.
4. Your council believes that it is best placed to manage grant funding to organisations in its area.
5. Your council believes that town and parish councils should manage public car parks in its area.
6. Your council believes that, where possible, a council's assets should be developed to generate additional income stream.

7. Your council would welcome a proposal from a principal authority to transfer ownership of a village / town green to your council.
8. Your council believes that any parks and playgrounds in its area should be managed by the town or parish council.
9. Your council believes it is best placed to manage any halls or community centres in its area.
10. Your council would be interested in taking on the ownership of an important community asset, such as a shop, pub, or leisure centre, were it at risk of closing permanently.

Service provider – services, events and projects

1. You receive complaints that your district / unitary authority has reduced the level of street cleaning to an unacceptable level. Your council would want to arrange at its own expense for additional street cleaning.
2. Your council believes that a town or parish council should actively support businesses and economic development in its area.
3. Your council believes it is best placed to organise community events in its area.
4. Your council believes it is best placed to coordinate any markets that might take place in its area.
5. Your council believes it should be actively involved in tackling issues of crime or antisocial behaviour in its area.
6. Your council receives complaints of an overgrown footpath. Your council would want to clear the footpath itself instead of / as well as reporting it to the local highways authority.
7. Your council is made aware that there is a lack of provision for young people in its area. Your council would want to undertake projects to improve this.
8. Your council would actively organise groups to undertake litter picking, gardening, befriending, or other volunteer schemes.
9. Your council would welcome a local highways authority scheme to provide part-funding for your council to undertake its own pothole repairs.

10. Your council would welcome a scheme from your principal authority to delegate responsibility to your council to manage on-street parking issues.

Community voice – community engagement, consultation and representation

1. Your council receives complaints about highways issues. Your council would report these directly to the local highways authority instead of / as well as telling complainants to contact the LHA.
2. Your council takes all reasonable measures to respond to principal authority and national consultations.
3. Your council would want to lead the community's response to emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
4. Your council believes it is important not only to respond to planning matters affecting its area but to take an active role in determining future housing development in its area.
5. Your council considers community engagement to be a high priority.
6. Your council believes it is important to attend local forums, groups and principal authority meetings in order to influence local policy and service delivery.
7. Your council considers it important to create and maintain a parish plan or strategic vision for its community.
8. Your council is made aware that a local school is due to close, against the wishes of the community. Your council would want to lead on the community response to the issue.
9. Your council would carry out a public consultation on any significant changes to one of its services or amenities.
10. Your council actively fosters good relationships with members of the principal council(s) to influence policy making across the wider area.

APPENDIX 3

	Number of responses	When a local churchyard is closed, your council would want to take on the management, rather than pass it to the district / unitary authority.	You receive complaints that your district / unitary authority has reduced the level of street cleaning to an unacceptable level. Your council would want to arrange at its own expense for additional street cleaning.	You council receives complaints about highways issues. Your council would report these directly to the local highways authority (LHA) instead of / as well as telling complainants to contact the LHA.	Your district / unitary authority intends to close public toilets in your parish / town. Your council would want to take on the ownership and management of the toilets.	Your council believes that a town or parish council should actively support businesses and economic development in its area.	Your council takes all reasonable measures to respond to principal authority and national consultations.	Your council would consider the main purpose of selling a council asset is to achieve the highest price.	Your council believes it is best placed to organise community events in its area.	Your council would want to lead the community's response to emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic.	Your council believes that it is best placed to manage grant funding to organisations in its area.	Your council believes it is best placed to coordinate any markets that might take place in its area.	Your council believes it is important not only to respond to planning matters affecting its area but to take an active role in determining future housing development in its area.	Your council believes that town and parish councils should manage public car parks in its area.	Your council believes it should be actively involved in tackling issues of crime or antisocial behaviour in its area.	Your council considers community engagement to be a high priority.	Your council believes that, where possible, a council's assets should be developed to generate additional income stream.	Your council receives complaints of an overgrown footpath. Your council would want to clear the footpath itself instead of / as well as reporting it to the local highways authority.	Your council believes it is important to attend local forums, groups and principal authority meetings in order to influence local policy and service delivery.	Your council would welcome a proposal from a principal authority to transfer ownership of a village / town green to your council.	Your council is made aware that there is a lack of activity provision for young people in its area. Your council would want to undertake projects to improve this.	Your council considers it important to create and maintain a parish plan or strategic vision for its community.	Your council believes that any parks and playgrounds in its area should be managed by the town or parish council.	Your council would actively organise groups to undertake litter picking, gardening, befriending, or other volunteer schemes.	Your council is made aware that a local school is due to close, against the wishes of the community. Your council would want to lead on the community response to the issue.	Your council believes it is best placed to manage any halls or community centres in its area.	Your council would welcome a local highways authority scheme to provide part-funding for your council to undertake its own pothole repairs.	Your council would carry out a public consultation on any significant changes to one of its services or amenities.	Your council would be interested in taking on the ownership of an important community asset, such as a shop, pub, or leisure centre, were it at risk of closing permanently.	Your council would welcome a scheme from your principal authority to delegate responsibility to your council to manage on-street parking issues.	Your council actively fosters good relationships with members of the principal council(s) to influence policy making across the wider area.					
Overall	577	5.3	5.2	8.9	5.2	6.9	7.8	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.0	4.3	8.7	5.1	6.1	8.2	6.1	6.6	7.2	7.3	6.7	7.0	7.3	7.4	7.5	5.4	5.0	8.0	5.5	4.4	7.8	5.9	5.9	7.7	19.5	
Principal authority structure																																				
Unitary	235	5.3	5.8	9.1	5.9	7.1	8.1	5.8	6.2	5.9	6.4	4.5	8.9	5.3	6.5	8.5	6.2	6.7	7.5	7.5	7.1	7.6	7.5	7.7	7.9	5.5	4.8	8.4	5.9	4.4	7.9	6.1	6.1	8.0	20.2	
Multi-tier	342	5.4	4.9	8.9	4.8	7.0	7.8	6.1	6.0	6.2	6.0	4.4	8.7	5.2	6.0	8.3	6.2	6.6	7.2	7.3	6.7	6.9	7.4	7.5	7.4	5.5	5.3	8.0	5.4	4.5	8.0	5.9	5.9	7.7	19.6	
Population																																				
Population <1000	230	5.1	4.2	9.1	3.8	6.2	7.4	5.9	5.7	5.9	5.3	3.3	8.5	4.3	5.7	8.1	5.3	6.7	6.6	6.7	5.9	6.1	6.6	7.4	7.2	4.2	4.7	7.9	4.6	3.6	7.6	5.2	5.3	7.4	18.0	
Population 1k-5k	203	5.5	5.8	9.2	5.6	7.3	8.1	6.3	5.9	6.1	6.3	4.5	9.0	5.5	6.3	8.6	6.4	6.5	7.6	7.5	7.1	7.7	7.9	7.5	8.1	5.7	5.2	8.3	5.9	4.9	8.0	6.2	6.1	8.1	20.4	
Population >5000	144	5.8	6.2	8.6	7.2	7.8	8.5	5.7	6.9	6.3	7.3	6.1	9.0	6.4	6.9	8.5	7.4	6.9	8.2	8.3	8.1	8.1	8.1	8.0	7.6	7.1	5.5	8.3	6.9	5.2	8.4	7.0	6.8	8.1	21.9	
Location																																				
Rural	366	5.5	4.9	9.2	4.8	6.8	7.8	6.0	5.7	6.1	5.8	4.0	8.7	4.9	5.9	8.3	5.8	6.7	7.1	7.1	6.3	6.9	7.1	7.4	7.6	4.7	5.0	8.1	5.2	4.1	7.8	5.7	5.7	7.8	19.1	
Semi-rural	169	5.3	5.8	8.6	5.9	7.4	8.1	6.1	6.5	6.2	6.6	5.0	9.0	5.9	6.7	8.5	6.7	6.5	7.7	7.8	7.7	7.5	8.0	7.8	7.8	6.7	5.0	8.4	6.1	5.0	8.1	6.5	6.3	8.0	20.8	
Urban	42	4.9	6.5	8.8	7.1	7.6	8.4	5.2	7.3	5.9	7.2	6.3	8.5	6.0	7.1	8.7	7.5	7.1	8.0	7.9	8.2	7.9	7.8	8.3	7.5	7.5	6.0	8.1	7.0	5.5	8.3	6.8	7.0	8.0	21.8	
Do you receive CIL																																				
CIL	267	5.6	5.7	9.1	6.0	7.4	8.3	5.8	6.2	6.2	6.5	4.9	9.1	5.6	6.5	8.6	6.3	6.9	7.6	7.8	7.4	8.0	7.8	7.9	8.0	5.8	5.4	8.5	6.1	4.8	8.2	6.3	6.3	8.1	20.8	
No CIL	310	5.2	4.9	8.9	4.6	6.6	7.6	6.1	6.0	6.0	5.9	4.1	8.5	4.9	5.9	8.2	6.1	6.5	7.1	7.1	6.4	6.5	7.2	7.3	7.3	5.2	4.8	7.9	5.2	4.2	7.7	5.7	5.7	7.6	19.0	
Reserves																																				
Less than six months' expenditure	135	4.8	5.3	8.7	5.2	7.2	8.0	5.9	6.4	6.4	6.2	4.7	8.9	5.1	6.5	8.3	6.1	6.8	7.3	7.3	6.8	7.1	7.5	7.5	7.6	5.6	5.6	7.9	5.7	4.6	7.8	5.9	6.1	7.8	19.9	
Six months to two years	375	5.6	5.3	9.1	5.3	6.9	8.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.1	4.3	8.8	5.2	6.1	8.4	6.2	6.7	7.3	7.4	6.8	7.1	7.3	7.6	7.6	5.3	4.9	8.2	5.5	4.4	8.0	6.0	5.9	7.9	19.8	
More than two years	67	5.4	5.3	9.2	5.3	7.0	7.6	5.7	5.7	6.1	6.3	4.6	8.7	5.6	6.2	8.4	6.4	6.4	7.3	7.3	7.1	7.5	8.1	7.4	7.6	6.1	4.8	8.3	5.8	4.6	8.0	6.2	5.9	7.8	20.0	
Total average expenditure																																				
Less than 10k	122	4.6	3.5	9.2	2.8	5.9	7.3	5.8	5.5	5.5	4.7	3.0	8.2	3.8	5.5	7.7	4.9	6.4	6.1	6.2	5.3	5.5	5.8	6.9	7.0	3.7	4.3	7.7	3.9	3.0	7.3	4.6	4.9	7.2	16.7	
10k to £250k	335	5.4	5.5	9.1	5.3	7.1	7.9	6.1	6.0	6.2	6.2	4.3	8.9	5.2	6.1	8.5	6.3	6.7	7.4	7.4	6.9	7.4	7.7	7.7	7.9	5.4	5.1	8.2	5.6	4.5	8.0	6.1	6.0	8.0	20.0	
More than £250k	120	5.4	5.3	9.2	5.3	7.0	7.6	5.7	5.7	6.1	6.3	4.6	8.7	5.6	6.2	8.4	6.4	6.4	7.3	7.3	7.1	7.5	8.1	7.4	7.6	6.1	4.8	8.3	5.8	4.6	8.0	6.2	5.9	7.8	20.0	
MP party affiliation																																				
Conservative	531	5.4	5.3	9.0	5.3	7.0	7.9	6.0	6.0	6.1	6.1	4.4	8.8	5.2	6.2	8.4	6.2	6.7	7.3	7.4	6.8	7.1	7.4	7.6	7.6	5.5	5.1	8.2	5.5	4.5	7.9	6.0	6.0	7.8	19.8	
Labour	20	4.1	5.4	8.3	4.7	5.6	7.5	5.7	5.5	5.4	5.2	3.6	7.6	4.1	5.6	7.4	5.5	5.4	6.4	7.0	6.3	6.6	7.1	6.5	7.3	5.0	4.3	7.6	6.8	3.9	6.9	5.5	5.2	7.1	17.8	
Lib Dem	26	5.2	5.2	8.3	5.0	7.5	8.4	6.1	6.7	6.7	6.8	5.3	9.1	5.5	6.6	8.3	6.0	6.2	8.3	7.9	7.3	7.9	7.8	7.3	7.9	5.3	4.4	8.2	5.8	4.0	8.6	6.1	6.0	8.2	20.4	
Regions																																				
South East	136	5.0	5.0	9.0	4.8	6.9	7.8	5.6	5.8	5.6	6.1	4.2	8.9	4.7	5.9	8.5	6.1	6.5	7.6	7.4	7.1	7.3	7.8	7.9	7.7	5.6	4.9	8.2	6.1	4.7	8.2	5.9	5.9	7.9	19.7	
South West	132	5.7	5.9	9.0	6.5	7.0	8.0	6.0	5.7	6.4	6.6	4.6	8.9	6.2	6.4	8.4	6.3	7.4	7.3	7.7	7.1	7.4	7.6	7.2	7.9	5.1	5.5	8.4	5.7	5.0	8.0	6.3	6.2	8.0	20.5	
East of England	78	6.2	4.8	9.1	5.0	7.6	8.2	6.4	6.6	6.8	6.5	4.7	9.4	5.4	6.4	8.7	6.7	6.1	7.5	7.3	6.7	7.1	7.7	7.9	7.5	5.9	5.2	8.3	5.6	4.5	8.1	6.3	6.0	8.1	20.4	
East Midlands	69	6.4	5.8	9.1	4.7	7.0	7.9	6.4	6.8	6.7	6.2	4.7	8.5	5.1	6.9	8.4	6.6	6.4	7.2	7.6	6.8	7.0	7.4	7.9	7.8	6.4	5.3	7.9	5.6	4.1	7.7	6.2	6.2	7.8	20.2	
West Midlands	35	4.8	5.7	9.5	4.7	8.1	8.8	6.2	6.8	6.9	6.4	4.8	9.3	5.5	7.2	8.8	6.9	7.7	8.1	8.0	7.7	8.0	8.1	8.6	8.2	6.2	6.4	8.7	6.1	4.4	8.5	6.3	6.7	8.5	21.5	
North East	67	4.8	4.8	9.1	4.8	6.8	7.8	5.8	6.2	5.6	5.5	3.9	8.5	4.1	5.8	8.1	5.5	6.4	7.0	7.2	6.4	6.7	6.6	7.5	7.4	4.5	4.1	7.8	5.0	3.5	7.5	5.4	5.5	7.6	18.4	
North West	51	4.5	5.0	9.2	6.0	6.5	8.4	6.4	5.5	5.3	5.6	4.6	9.0	5.7	5.7	8.4	6.2	6.6	7.4	7.2	7.0	7.4	7.0	6.9	7.6	5.4	5.0	8.8	5.0	4.9	8.4	5.9	5.8	8.0	19.6	