

A review of the emotional resilience of local council clerks, and the challenges to their resilience.

Linda Ranger

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Abstract

This abstract gives an overview of the review, touching on its aims, research methods, key findings, and significance.

The aim of this research is to define emotional resilience for local council clerks, review and understand how emotionally resilient local council clerks are, investigate the challenges they encounter to their emotional resilience, and learn if local council clerks need a high level of emotional resilience to carry out their role effectively.

This aim is important due to the increasing concerns that local council clerks are emotionally struggling or leaving the sector after being unable to “bounce back” and recover from the challenges and demands of their role.

This study includes an assessment of various literature and original mixed method research which included an online questionnaire being sent to local council clerks followed up by an interview with selected respondents to gain a deeper understanding into their emotional resilience.

The key findings highlight no previous research into the emotional resilience of local council clerks, meaning a bespoke definition for the role does not exist. Without a clear definition it is difficult to determine if local council clerks are emotionally resilient. There has been prior research into the challenges that local council clerks face and this review found these issues still exist.

The review concludes that local council clerks need an elevated level of resilience to carry out their role effectively, and there are indications that most local council clerks do display that higher level.

The main recommendation is that a clear definition of an emotionally resilient local council clerk is needed. Future research should focus on this definition allowing further investigation into the challenges that local council clerks face, exploring how these demands impact their emotional resilience and identifying ways to increase the resilience of those that struggle to bounce back and recover from adversity including challenge.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Stephen Kerrigan – the most emotionally resilient man I have ever met. I wish you could have finished this journey with me.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ALCC	Association of Local Council Clerks
CALC	Cornwall Association of Local Councils
CiLCA	Certificate in Local Council Administration
CG	Community Governance
Clerk	Local Council Clerk
DALC	Devon Association of Local Council Clerks
DMU	De Montford University
NHS	National Health Service
LGA	Local Government Association
LGA 1894	Local Government Act 1894
LGA 1972	Local Government Act 1972
Local Council	Town or Parish Council in England, Community Council in Wales
NALC	National Association of Local Councils
Pledge	Civility & Respect Pledge
RFO	Responsible Finance Officer
SLCC	Society of Local Council Clerks

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research project, outlines the aims and objectives, provides the authors reasoning behind the topic chosen, and explains the study structure.

1.2 Background

There are 10,000 local councils in England. These councils are the first tier of local government servicing their communities (National Association of Local Councils (NALC), 2020). Each council usually employs a clerk, often referred to as the Proper Officer, whose role is to carry out the management of the council's affairs. (Local Government Act 1972 s112 (1)).

The title "Clerk" derives from the Latin clericus and the role can be traced back to 1272 AD through the Corporation of Old London (now known as the City of London Corporation).

In 1439, Symkyn Birches was awarded the office of "Toun Clerk" of Coventry. The appointment of this role developed over the years through the Municipal Corporations Act 1835 and finally the Local Government Act 1894 which gave the newly created parish councils the power to appoint a "Clerk of the Council."

Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC) (2023) explain the clerk role as being a professional advisor to the council who delivers the decisions made by the council as a corporate body. It adds that every working day, through the framework of the council's policies or a scheme of delegation, a clerk will have to make decisions and *"Most of these decisions will be concerned with the day-to-day management of services to the public, but others will be concerned with more important and unusual matters."*

NALC and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) (2004) advise local councils that when appointing a clerk, the person selected should have several qualities including competence, initiative, energy, resilience and imagination.

The Local Government Association (LGA) (no date) agreed with this advice when they wrote that local councils are continually changing the way they work, and this means that the clerk must do the same. They further stated that resilience is one of the key qualities that enables the clerk to adapt to change.

Resilience which is often described as the ability to bounce back after a setback or to continue whilst facing difficulty or challenge. There are different types of resilience, and the various types can be applied to different aspects of life. Examples include physical resilience which is the individual's ability to recover from illness or injury and emotional resilience which this review will focus on.

Emotional resilience has previously been discussed in other sectors such as the National Health Service (NHS) and Military but appears to have become a hot topic

and buzz word in the local council sector especially since the introduction of the Civility & Respect Pledge.

The Civility & Respect Pledge was introduced in the United Kingdom in August 2021 by NALC and SLCC following concerns about the impact that challenging behaviour including bullying, harassment and intimidation was having on local councils and clerks. SLCC commissioned research in 2017 which showed the role of a clerk had an average turnover rate of between 25% – 30% which was significantly higher than the UK average of 12% – 15% at the time (Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, 2018).

Prior to the Pledge being introduced, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020 was introduced. This legislation allowed local council meetings to be held online and put the sector into the limelight following the Handforth Parish Council meeting going viral showing the challenging behaviour that a clerk can face.

The Handforth Parish Council video predominately showed the challenge to clerks of difficult behaviour from councillors but behind the scenes were other challenges which included adapting to legislation change and learning a new method of holding meetings whilst in a time of national crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic caused an increase in job changes and retirements (Lai et al: 2022) and this is relevant to the local council sector by the constant stream of clerk vacancies and the findings of the second survey commissioned by NALC and SLCC (Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, 2022).

On the surface, it appears that challenge is the main reason for clerks leaving their role. It has been previously suggested that emotional resilience acts as a buffer against challenge (Howard, 2008). Since the introduction of the Pledge, more training sessions on emotional resilience are being announced within the sector. (SLCC, no date). However, these tend to focus on coping mechanisms and improving resilience. Could high attendance at these sessions indicate this could be a development area within the role of a clerk? This led to the aims and objectives of this review.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of this research is to investigate, review and understand how emotionally resilient local council clerks are, the challenges to their resilience and learn the level of emotional resilience a clerk needs to effectively conduct their role.

The research objectives are to:

- Define emotional resilience;
- Determine if local council clerks are emotionally resilient;
- Investigate the challenges local council clerks face;
- Establish if a local council clerk needs an elevated level of resilience to carry out their role effectively.

1.4 Structure

This study consists of five chapters and is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 – Introduction. This chapter will introduce the review, why is it being carried out and how.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review. This chapter will examine, review and analyse secondary research literature documents, from academics, practitioners and professionals, which include academic literature, journals, reports, websites and other studies. It will highlight any gaps in existing research.

Chapter 3 – Methodology. This chapter will detail the research methods used, why those methods were used, explain how the data was collected and analysed plus consider any ethical considerations and limitations.

Chapter 4 – Results and Analysis. This chapter will examine the results from primary research conducted and analyse that data received along with the response rate.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations. This chapter will summarise the findings of all the research undertaken and make recommendations on any further research required.

1.5 Author's positionality

Positionality statements make it transparent to how the identities of the author relate to the research topic. This review author has worked for the same local council since 2006 and is currently the Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) to St Stephen in Brannel Parish Council in Cornwall. The author, who is also an SLCC mentor to new clerks, has personally experienced and observed that clerks face a range of different challenges on a regular basis and that each individual responds to those challenges in a different way.

By undertaking this research, the author hopes to learn if emotional resilience plays a part in managing and responding to the challenges faced and if an elevated level of emotional resilience is what keeps clerks carrying out their role effectively.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has explained the background to the clerk role, introduced the challenges that the role might face and explained how resilience fits into not only the role but dealing with challenge. The overarching aim has been explained along with the objectives to meet that aim. A structure of the chapters to the research project have been provided along with the authors positionality on the topic.

The next chapter will evaluate secondary research to analyse the literature available that meet the objectives stated.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The Institute for Academic Development at Edinburgh University (2022) describes a literature review as *“a piece of academic writing demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the academic literature on a specific topic”*.

This literature review will examine, review and analyse previous secondary research literature documents, from academics, practitioners and professionals, which include academic literature, journals, reports, websites and other studies. It will also identify theories from previous research whilst highlighting any gaps in that existing research that need filling (Ridley, 2012).

2.2 Local council clerks

It is difficult to put an exact number on how many clerks there currently are in the UK. SLCC (Online) represents clerks to over 5,000 councils, whilst the LGA (Online) reports there are 9,000 local councils. The most accurate figure comes from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2024) who estimate there are 9,265 clerks in England.

There is a higher proportion of women compared to men who carry out the role of a clerk with 74% being female in 2022, which had increased from 59% in 1991. However, the larger the size of the local council, the more likely that the role will be carried out by a male (SLCC, 2022).

The same research found that over half (60%) of clerks are aged between 41 and 60 with 60% of that figure being over 51 years of age, and that one third (34%) of clerks work full time, which has significantly increased since 1991 when 96% of clerks worked part time.

Over three quarters (76%) of clerks work for one council and the majority (89%) hold a role specific qualification with most (59%) holding the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA). A much smaller number (10%) have undertaken a sector specific higher education qualification (SLCC, 2022).

SLCC (Online) defines a clerk as *“the councils chief officer, working for a local council serving a local community”*. SLCC adds that the Clerk is a vital asset to the council, and this was supported in case law¹ when Lord Justice Caldecote observed-

“The office of town clerk is an important part of the machinery of local government. He may be said to stand between the local Council and the ratepayers. He is there to assist by his advice and action the conduct of public affairs in the borough and, if there is a disposition on the part of the council, still more on the part of any member of the council, to ride roughshod over his opinions, the question must at once arise as to whether it is not his duty forthwith to resign his office or, at any rate, to do what he thinks right and await the consequences.”

¹ Hurle-Hobbs ex parte Riley and another 1944

The role of a local council clerk is diverse. Political scientist, Professor William Bennett Munro, writing in one of the first textbooks on municipal administration (1934), stated:

“No other office in municipal service has so many contracts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager (when there is one), and all administrative departments without exception. All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular, but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience. The public does not realise how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together.”

These words, written more than 80 years ago, appear to be even more appropriate today as previous research by Clapham (2020) concluded that the role of a clerk is demanding, important to the work of the local council and needs a level of resilience to fulfil their responsibilities. Clapham’s findings are supported by SLCC (Online) who within the person specification template for a clerk, state that it is essential that a successful candidate must have the *“energy and resilience to lead and drive change.”*

2.3 Resilience

One online definition of resilience is *“the ability to bounce back after coming face-to-face with a challenging situation without letting misfortune affect your chances of future happiness or success”* (Resilience Institute, 2023). As the review is looking at the role of clerks, it’s important to also consider workplace resilience which is defined as the capacity of an individual to withstand, bounce back from, and work through challenging circumstances or events at work.

In an evidence review for the Government Office of Science, Bennett (2015) reported that such definitions are too vague. Her findings concluded that the term resilience can mean many different things however there is one trait in academic definitions, being that some challenge must be present for someone to demonstrate resilience. The evidence review focused on emotional and personal resilience which led to Bennett who used the following definition for academic purposes –

“The process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation or ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity.” (Windle, 2011).

Other previous research found that resilience is a critical fact in today’s workplaces with employees needing the ability to apply high levels of resilience in times of challenge (Amir, 2014). It also found that there are very few studies into workplace resilience and that most focus on coping mechanisms or stress. This is surprising when resilience has been deemed more important than other factors such as experience and education. (Coutu, 2002).

During this review, the author was unable to find any previous research that related specifically to the resilience of clerks. However, according to Masten (2001), there are two approaches for studying resilience. The first, which measures the level of

adversity that may protect individuals from negative consequences is known as the variable-focused approach. The second approach which examines different profiles to ascertain the differences between resilient and non-resilient individuals is known as a person-focused approach. The second approach is more commonly linked to emotional resilience.

2.3.1 Emotional resilience

Emotional resilience has been defined by Pahwa and Khan (2022) as *“the ability of an individual to cope with adversities and bounce back from failures.”*. Using Bennett’s conclusion, this definition is also vague. Further research stated that emotional resilience is the ability to recover an individual’s equilibrium following adversity (Walsh, no date) and this is supported by Buckingham (2020), an author, motivational speaker and self-proclaimed researcher, concluded that *“resilience is a reactive state of mind created by exposure to suffering”*.

It is said that emotional resilience includes three elements (McCraty and Childre, 2010) –

1. Physical Elements including physical strength, energy and good health.
2. Mental Elements including self-esteem, self-confidence, emotional awareness and regulation.
3. Social Elements including interpersonal relations, communication and co-operation.

Using these three elements, an emotionally resilient person can be defined as someone who is self-confident, aware of their thoughts and emotions, willing to be flexible and able to adapt, can create and sustain relationships, wants to resolve conflict, and is not ashamed to ask for help. (Siebert, 2005).

This can be linked to the workplace with Bartz (2017) writing that resilient managers are optimistic, have the ability to stay balanced, give a sense of safeness during challenge and have a strong social support system.

Walsh (No date), who describes herself as a personal development trainer and one-to-one coach with a comedy style, works closely with SLCC offering support to local councils, questions whether to be emotionally resilient, an individual must be able to regulate their emotions during times of challenge, experience positive emotions to create a buffer thus creating a quicker recovery and must have a level of emotional intelligence to recognise and adopt the individuals responses.

This question is answered by Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC) (2024) who reflect that clerks need to be emotionally intelligent and resilient more than ever. They argue that by being emotionally intelligent and resilient, clerks can make sound judgements, deal with the overwhelming demands of council duties, and build a stronger more resilient council that meets the needs of the local community effectively.

These findings support that emotional resilience is not just a reactive method of recovery, it is a proactive way to learn and grow from challenge (Pahwa and Khan, 2022). It is said that emotional resilience is a combination of trait and learned skills and whilst some may have a higher level due to those traits, it can be developed through learning and experience including previous challenges. (Green, 2017).

2.4 Challenges

Ahlschlager (2020) wrote that there are no shortages of challenge in today's world that include natural disasters, economic woes and political unrest. She added that challenging situations to personal lives, including stress and illness are constant and inevitable. Everyone experiences challenge at some point.

Factors like stress, burnout, lack of social support and negative thinking are enemies of emotional resilience (Pahwa & Khan, 2022). A theory supported by Fernandez (2016:2) who wrote *"The most resilient individuals and teams aren't the ones who don't fail, but rather the ones that fail, learn and thrive because of it. Being challenged – sometimes severely – is part of what activates resilience as a skill set"*.

DALC (2024) wrote that the clerk role is ever changing and often challenging. There are high demands on ensuring good governance by making complex legal decisions, whilst managing the expectations of the council and the community.

SLCC commissioned extensive pieces of research on standards and behaviour in the sector investigating the challenges that clerks face. Some of the common challenges found by Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd (2017) included –

- Power– local councils were given more power through the Localism Act 2011 which changed their position in the local government tier system by giving the right to create their own policy (Neighbourhood Planning) and challenge principal authority services (Right to Challenge)
- Change – with local council elections every four years and councillors resigning causing by-elections or casual vacancies, leadership is continually changing
- Politics – an increasing number of local councils have aligned with the political leadership at their principal authority
- Communication – whilst local councils have become pro-active in community engagement, they often don't have the resources, and many rely on less personal communication methods such as social media which can be interpreted
- Capacity – most clerks work part time
- Discrimination – most clerks are female but male elected members outnumber their female counterparts three in one at local council level
- Bullying and Harassment –that bullying and harassment in the local council sector is a challenge and supported the Trades Union Congress findings that three in five women have experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work

Fernandez (2016) discovered through his research that currently, a quarter of all employees view their work challenges as the number one stressor in their lives. The

World Health Organization (no date) supports this finding by describing stress as the “global health epidemic of the 21st century.”

The psychological view is that work stress is an individual's response to demands greater than their ability to cope with, which disrupts the individual's physical or mental equilibrium and poses a threat to the individual's general well-being (Chou et al, 2016). Those who can experience positive emotions when stressed are able to successfully regulate their negative emotional challenges therefore, positive emotions can help the individual to build resilience that reduces work stress.

The Local Government Association (LGA) (no date) contradicted the findings of the World Health Organization listing change as the number one challenge. They found that local councils are continually changing the way they work, and this means that the clerk must do the same. They further stated that resilience is one of the key qualities that enables the clerk to adapt to the challenge of change.

The LGA (no date) explained that the biggest source of change comes from local authorities including county councils, district councils, and unitary authorities facing increasing financial challenge and therefore cutting some of their services. These services are often taken on by local councils meaning that the role of the clerk has become more professionalised (Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, 2017), with the workload increasing and evolving. Changes in an organisation can be a major stress factor for employees (Wisse and Sleetbos, 2016) which indicates that often more than one challenge occurs at any one time.

2.5 Measuring Resilience

The Resilience Institute (2023, online) write “*Several assessments or scales have been created in the last 30 years to help researchers, employers, therapists, and even private individuals better understand how resilience functions and, more importantly, how it can be quantified.*” Ahern et al (2006) reviewed the six main assessments and found that two were not fit for purpose with the remaining four having acceptable credibility. One of these was the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale.

The Connor Davidson Resilience Scale, developed by two researchers, is a test that measures how someone who has experienced a stressful event can bounce back and within what time scale. The scale uses a series of statements which are scored and the higher the score the higher the resilience according to Scali et al (2012), measures several components which include the ability to:

- adapt to change.
- deal with what comes along.
- cope with stress.
- to stay focused.
- not get discouraged in times of failure.
- handle unpleasant feelings.

A series of up to 25 statements are scored. Each statement is rated on a five-point scale ranging from not true at all or zero to true nearly all the time or four. The total possible scores range from zero to one hundred.

The assessment has been criticised, and its limitations recognised especially the lack of validation - would an individual be considered resilient if they scored high in one area but not in another? The assessment is not designed for any sector but has been widely used to study the resilience of trauma patients and the resilience of serving military personnel.

There is no assessment specifically for clerks but this, along with the other three deemed credible, could be used to determine if a clerk is emotionally resilient and establish if they need an elevated level of resilience to carry out their role effectively.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has shown that whilst there is a lot of academic literature on emotional resilience, there is very little previous research on the emotional resilience of clerks, it is focused on the military or trauma patients. (Pahwa and Khan, 2022).

There are many definitions of emotional resilience, but many are vague and need further research to support them (Bennett, 2015). The concept of emotional resilience falls into two aspects of literature - the psychological aspects of coping and the physiological aspects of stress (Tusaie and Dyer, 2004).

The biggest workplace challenges to emotional resilience are stress and change (Wisse and Sleafos, 2016) with bullying and harassment being a challenge in the local council sector (Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, 2017).

The review found that people with higher levels of emotional resilience can improve effectiveness in the workplace whilst personally having a greater immunity from certain challenges (Amir, 2014).

The next chapter looks at primary research and outlines the methodology used to study the emotional resilience of local council clerks and the challenges to their resilience.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explain primary research methods and the purpose of the methodology approach used to provide clarity and structure, validity and reliability plus transparency for this review.

Primary research is described as “*a systematic search for answers to questions using a clearly specified process for gathering and analysing data*” (Johnson, 2014:8). Walliman (2018:7) expands on this process by writing “*If you use the right sort of methods for your particular type of research, then you should be able to convince other people that your conclusions have some validity, and that the new knowledge you have created is soundly based.*” meaning there is no point in carrying out research if the methods aren’t right as this brings the reliability into question, as the evidence needs to be trustworthy and be able to stand up to scrutiny.

MacDonald & Headlam (2009) give a definition of reliable research - ‘*the extent to which the same result will be repeated/achieved by using the same measure.*’ This means that if the research is carried out numerous times, the answers would always end up the same.

3.2 Research methods

Denscombe (2017) outlines two main types of research methods:

- Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data, using statistical techniques to identify patterns, relationships, and trends.
- Qualitative research focuses on understanding people's beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and experiences through the collection and interpretation of non-numerical data.

Combining the quantitative and qualitative methods enables researchers to gather reliable data and obtain meaningful insights, allowing a valid conclusion that supports the achievement of their aims and objectives.

Denscombe (2017:162) refers to this combination as the mixed methods approach, highlighting key advantages such as:

- Enhancing the accuracy of findings
- Offering a more comprehensive view
- Supporting more in-depth analysis

Walliman also advocates for this approach, stating, “*Why not use a variety of methods when doing a research project?*” (2018:167).

Research methods such as “*questionnaires, interviews, observation, and documents*” are essential tools for data collection (Denscombe, 2017:3). The author, who was the researcher, selected questionnaires and interviews as the primary research methods, covering both quantitative and qualitative data. These methods

were chosen for their suitability to the research, as their advantages outweighed any disadvantages, ensuring effective responses to the research aims and objectives.

3.3 Literature review

With secondary research gained from the literature review, primary research – *“the collation and analysis of original data that has not been gathered before”* (Gratton and Jones, 2010:8) needed to be collected. The secondary research through the literature review showed gaps and areas requiring further exploration. The secondary research also needed to be validated and supported as some was dated and there is no previous research on the emotional resilience of clerks.

3.4 Questionnaire

The first primary research method used was a questionnaire (Appendix 1) created via Survey Monkey, a popular online survey platform available in both free and payable versions. The paid version offers additional features that allow for more detailed data analysis and interpretation. This was the version used.

The advantages of using a questionnaire through Survey Monkey include:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Ease of setup
- Consistent question delivery
- Data processing capabilities
- Accessibility (Denscombe, 2017:199)

Survey Monkey created an online link to the questionnaire which was shared in a Facebook group for clerks with over 2,000 members, and it was emailed to all local county associations, including One Voice Wales, with a request for distribution. It was also sent to all SLCC branches via SLCC head office.

Before distributing the survey, a pilot was conducted with community governance students who are also clerks. Feedback from the pilot suggested using a drop-down list for two questions, which differed from a tutor's recommendation to use a comment box. After considering the research objectives, the author opted for the comment box format.

The questionnaire featured both quantitative and qualitative questions. The first section gathered statistical data to ascertain whether the data gathered previously, as detailed in chapter two, was still correct. The second section explored respondents' beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and experiences. Careful attention was paid to the wording of each question, as individuals can interpret questions differently.

However, questionnaires, particularly online ones, come with certain disadvantages, including:

- Pre-coded response limitations
- External factors like internet connectivity
- Risks of multiple responses or cyber attacks
- Inability to verify the truthfulness of responses (Denscombe, 2017:200)

Many of these challenges could be mitigated through the follow-up interviews.

3.5 Interviews

The final question of the questionnaire invited participants to provide their email addresses if they wished to take part in a follow-up interview (Appendix 2). These interviews were designed to explore research objectives not fully addressed by the questionnaire.

Interviews offer several advantages, including:

- In-depth information
- Gaining unique insights
- Ability to use recording equipment
- Focusing on the informant's priorities
- Flexibility in approach
- High response rate
- Data validity
- Therapeutic value (Denscombe, 2017:220)

The interviews were intended to be conducted individually online, aiming to gather more qualitative data. The qualitative questions were designed around the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale to measure emotional resilience, in line with the research objectives.

The goal was to interview 10% of the questionnaire respondents, selecting a diverse group: those who fit certain patterns, those who did not, and individuals known for facing challenges within the sector.

The interviews were structured with open-ended questions to allow participants to *"develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the interviewer"* (Denscombe, 1998:113). Some of the questions addressed emotional topics, which posed a challenge, as Denscombe (2014) notes that responses related to emotions are difficult to verify for truthfulness. Other drawbacks of interviews include:

- Validity concerns
- Potential interviewer influence

- Reliability issues
- Time-consuming nature
- Resource demands
- Participant inhibitions
- Possible invasion of privacy (Denscombe, 2017:221)

These disadvantages led to the consideration of ethics.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Denscombe (2017:4) emphasizes that *"no one should suffer harm as a result of participation in the research."*

Ethical considerations are a core set of principles that guide research, including:

- Voluntary participation
- Informed consent
- Anonymity
- Confidentiality
- Minimizing potential harm
- Transparent communication of results

Before commencing the research, ethical approval was required from De Montfort University (DMU). This approval was obtained through the submission of an ethics form. The research adhered to DMU's ethical standards and code of practice so was classified as low risk.

Participation in the questionnaire was entirely voluntary and mostly anonymous unless the participant opted to take part in the follow-up interviews. Consent was implicitly given by completing the questionnaire, with participants free to stop at any time. Notably, one participant chose not to give consent at the start, and therefore could not proceed with the questionnaire.

For those interested in participating in interviews, a "Research Participant Consent Form" was provided, complementing the "Research Participant Information Sheet" (Appendix 3) that accompanied the questionnaire. Participants were informed they could withdraw from the interview process at any time. Support agency information was available if needed, though the questions were considered low risk for both participants and the researcher.

Confidentiality was maintained, and no names would be disclosed when communicating the research results in the final report.

3.7 Limitations including research bias

The online questionnaire did not allow the researcher to verify the truthfulness of responses unless the respondent was selected for an interview. However, the success of the interviews depended on participants responding to the invitation. Although the interviews were initially scheduled for late July, they were postponed to August due to the researcher's personal time constraints. Further delays occurred as only one person responded to the interview invitation. Eventually, the interviews were conducted in early September. To meet the deadline, last-minute invitations were given to clerks, all of whom were past and present community governance students, and all of whom were known to the researcher.

The number of interviewees also had to be adjusted due to time constraints. In total, the researcher interviewed six individuals—three females and three males, representing different age groups.

The researcher was mindful of their own experiences and beliefs, which could have inadvertently influenced the research. This is known as research bias and can affect results in a similar way to other types of bias. The researcher had already assessed their own emotional resilience using the Connor-Davidson scale, scoring higher than anticipated, indicating a higher-than-average level of resilience with evidence that certain challenges had a greater impact than others.

3.8 Summary

This chapter outlines the methodology used to study the emotional resilience of clerks and the challenges to that resilience.

It considered the advantages and disadvantages to each research method used along with the limitations to the research being carried out, in particular research bias.

The next chapter will evaluate the primary research and provide an analysis of the data received from the questionnaire and the interviews

Chapter 4: Results and analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter evaluates the responses from the primary research data collected and analyses the results, linking them back to the objectives and comparing them with the data obtained from the literature review.

4.2 Questionnaire responses

The questionnaire received 422 responses from clerks across England and Wales, along with two deputy clerks and one proper officer. A data cleansing review was conducted, a minor process that involved removing three respondents—since the focus of the research was on clerks—and one respondent who did not provide consent, as detailed in Table 1. The lack of consent could have been due to various reasons, such as a lack of interest in the topic upon starting the questionnaire. The final number of valid responses was 418.

Although the response rate exceeded expectations, when compared to the overall number of clerks in the sector using the MHCLG (2024) figure from chapter two, this represents only 4.5% of the total sector.

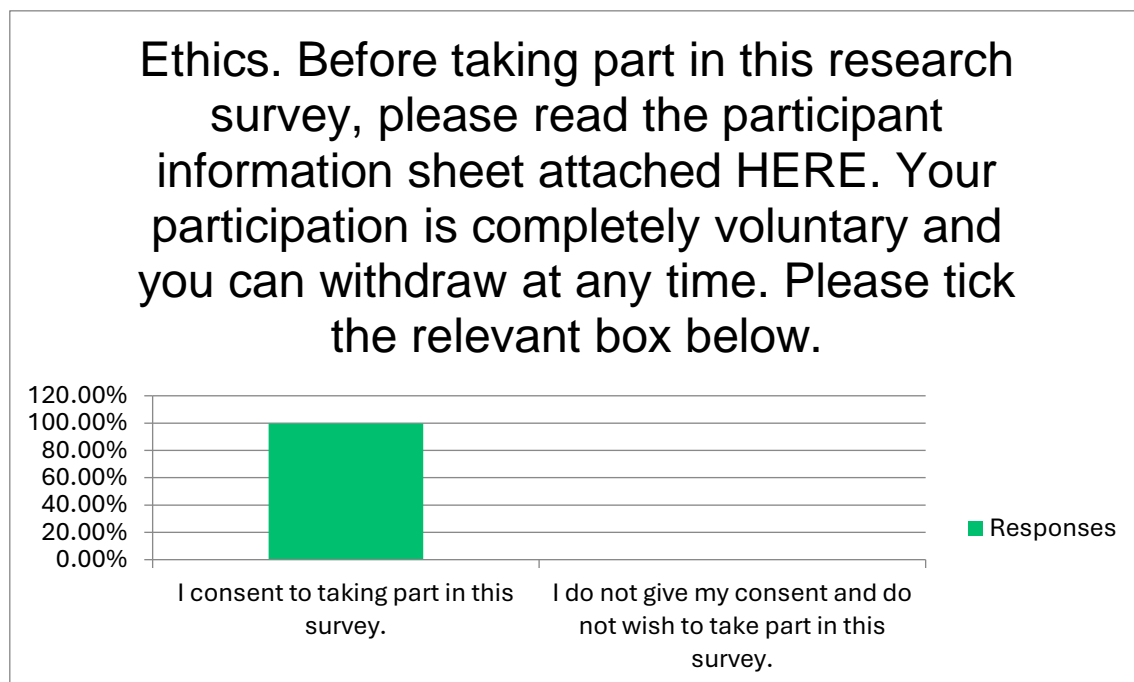


Table 1.

Most responses came from the clerks' Facebook page, with 114 submissions on the day of the survey's launch. This was expected, as the launch took place at 3.15pm on a Friday, a time when many people are active on social media.

The second-highest number of responses came on Monday afternoon, coinciding with the time when county associations began forwarding the email with the

questionnaire. It is unclear how many county associations or SLCC branches shared the email, as only five confirmed doing so.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the majority of respondents (84%) were female, with 41% in the 55-64 age bracket, followed closely by 28% in the 45-54 age group. These figures align with prior research conducted by the SLCC and Leo (2022), indicating that the survey results reflect the actual demographic composition of the clerk sector.

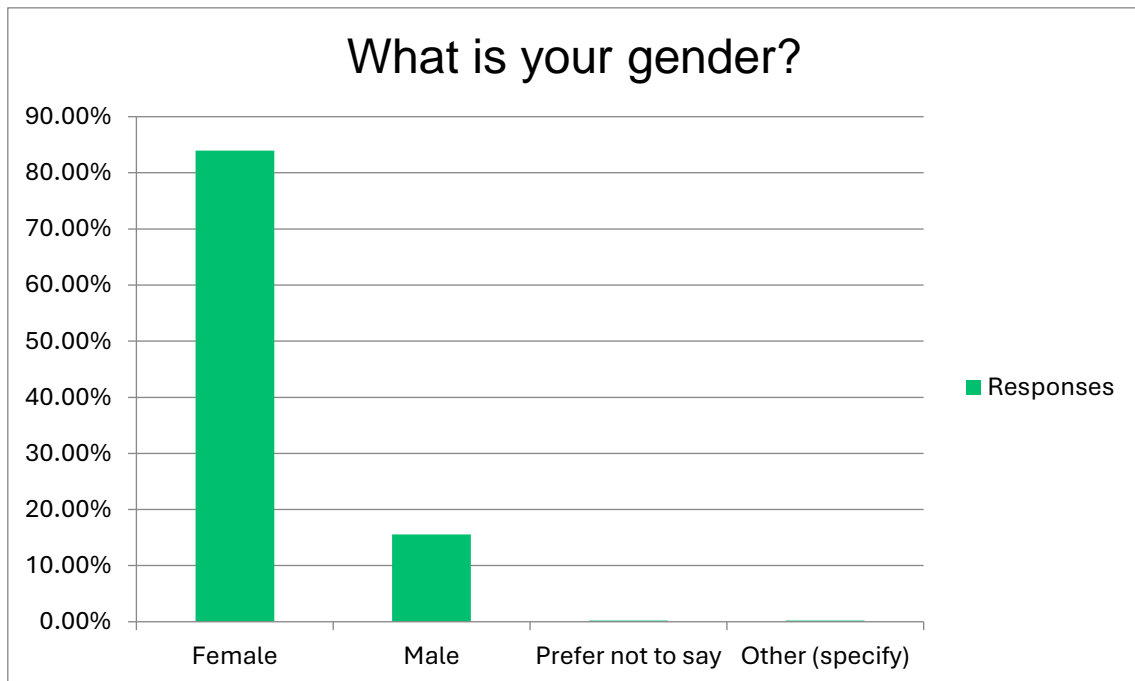


Table 2.

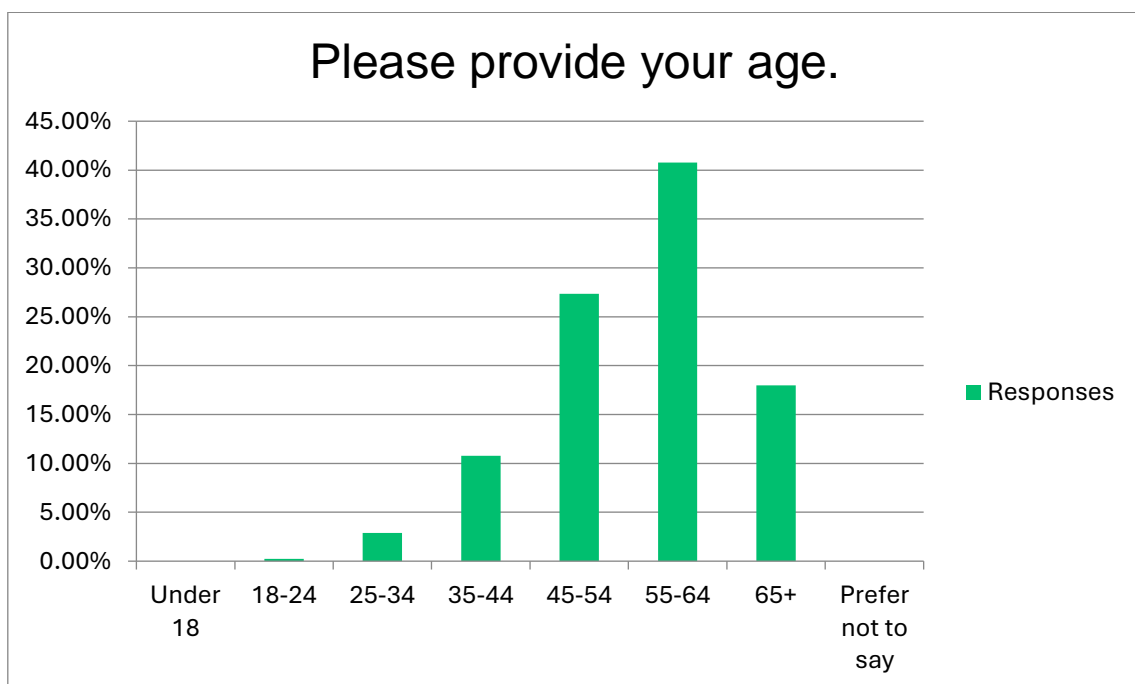


Table 3.

The majority (70%) of clerks work for a single council, with one respondent having served as a clerk for an impressive 50 years. Most respondents (38%) have been in the role for less than five years, with the length of service decreasing as the number of years increases. This aligns with findings from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2021), which reported that employees, on average, remain in their jobs for approximately five years. Alternatively, Table 2 suggests that the sector has an older age demographic, and the decrease in length of service may be attributed to factors such as retirement.

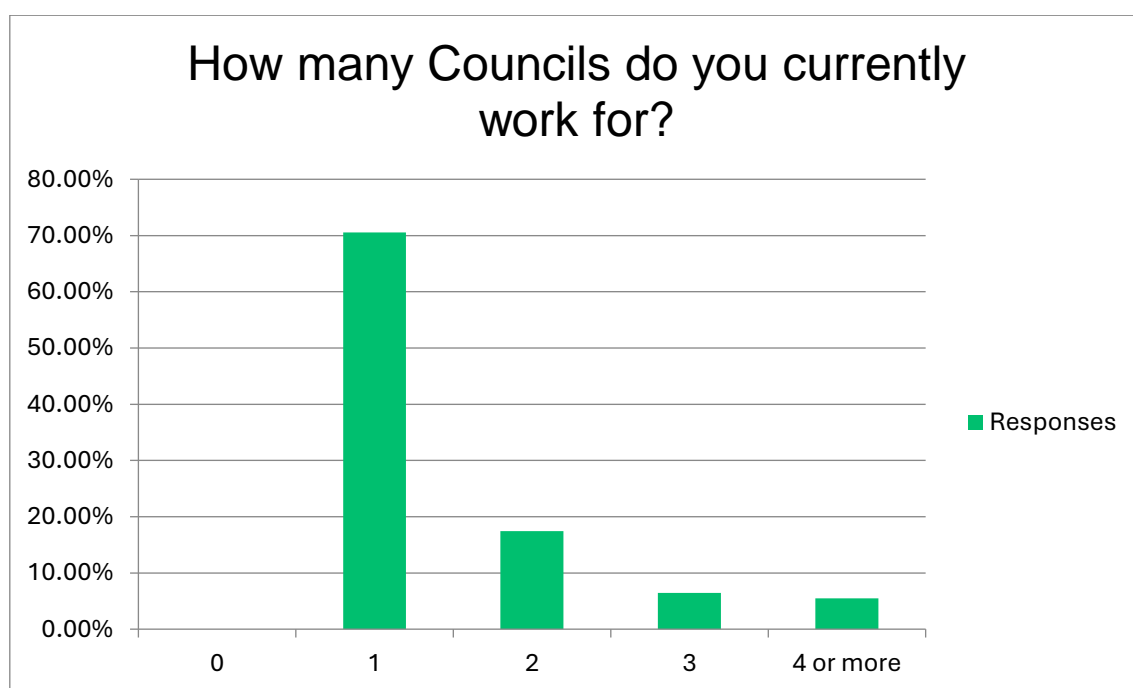


Table 4.

The majority (81%) of clerks who responded were members of the SLCC (Table 5), while a higher percentage (95%) of councils were members of their local County Association of Local Councils (Table 6). Twenty-two respondents indicated they had no membership or support from either the SLCC or CALC, representing 5% of the total responses. This lack of membership could suggest a potential challenge of loneliness within this group, as previously highlighted by Clapham (2020).

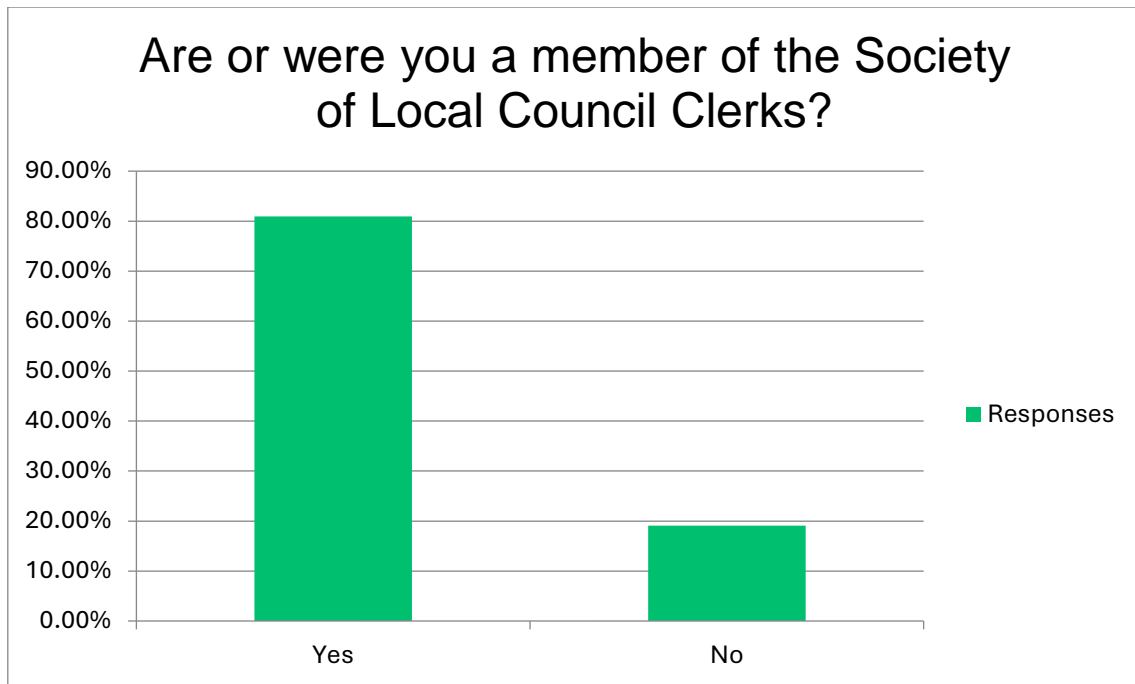


Table 5.

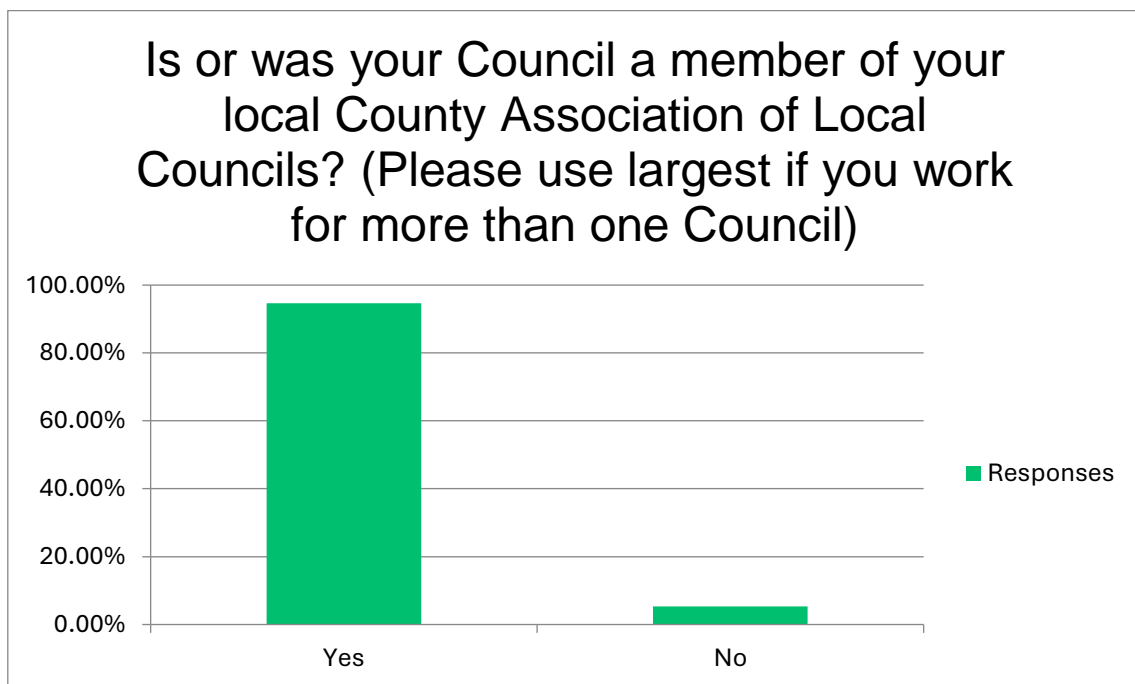


Table 6.

The responses regarding whether the Council had signed the Civility & Respect Pledge (Table 7) were neutral, with just over half (53%) indicating that they had signed the Pledge. Nearly 25 respondents (6%) were unsure, suggesting a lack of familiarity with the Pledge. This lack of awareness may be connected to the findings in Tables 5 and 6; if neither the respondent nor their council is a member of the SLCC or CALC, it is unlikely they would be informed about the Pledge.

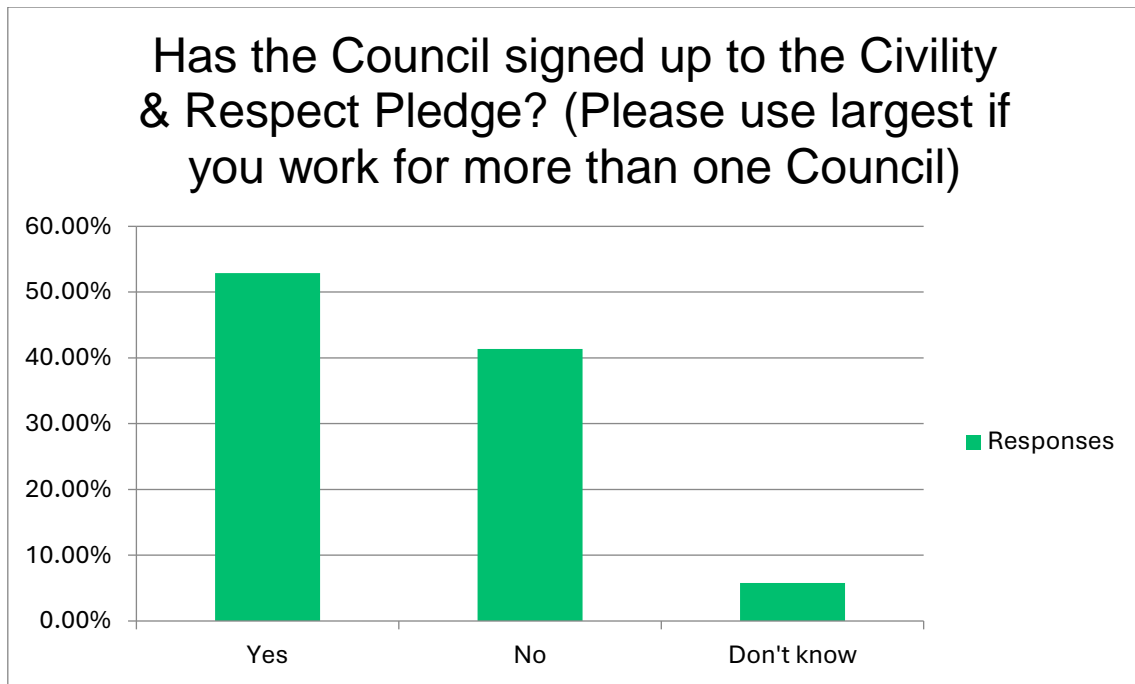


Table 7.

A significant percentage (81%) of clerks possess qualifications beyond those obtained during secondary school education (Table 8). The most common qualification, which qualifies a clerk under the Localism Act 2011, is the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA), with just under half (48%) having completed this qualification. Among those who obtained CILCA, 25% also completed the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA) qualification.

For respondents holding a Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) (11%), all had also completed the CILCA qualification. This was similarly true for those with a Foundation Degree (7%); all held a Cert HE. There was a noticeable increase in individuals with a BA Honours degree, and over half (50%) indicated that their qualification was unrelated to the local government sector.

Most (60%) responses categorized under “Other” indicated that the respondent held a bachelor's degree in fields such as science (BSc), education (BEd), engineering (BEng), or law (LLB). When combining these categories, it was found that approximately a quarter of respondents hold a bachelor's degree. Additional qualifications mentioned included Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration (FILCA), Working with Your Council (WWYC)—which has since been replaced by ILCA—and PhDs (Doctor of Philosophy). The responses indicated that the wording of this question could have been improved. Overall, these findings suggest that the role is becoming increasingly professionalized, as discussed in Chapter Two.

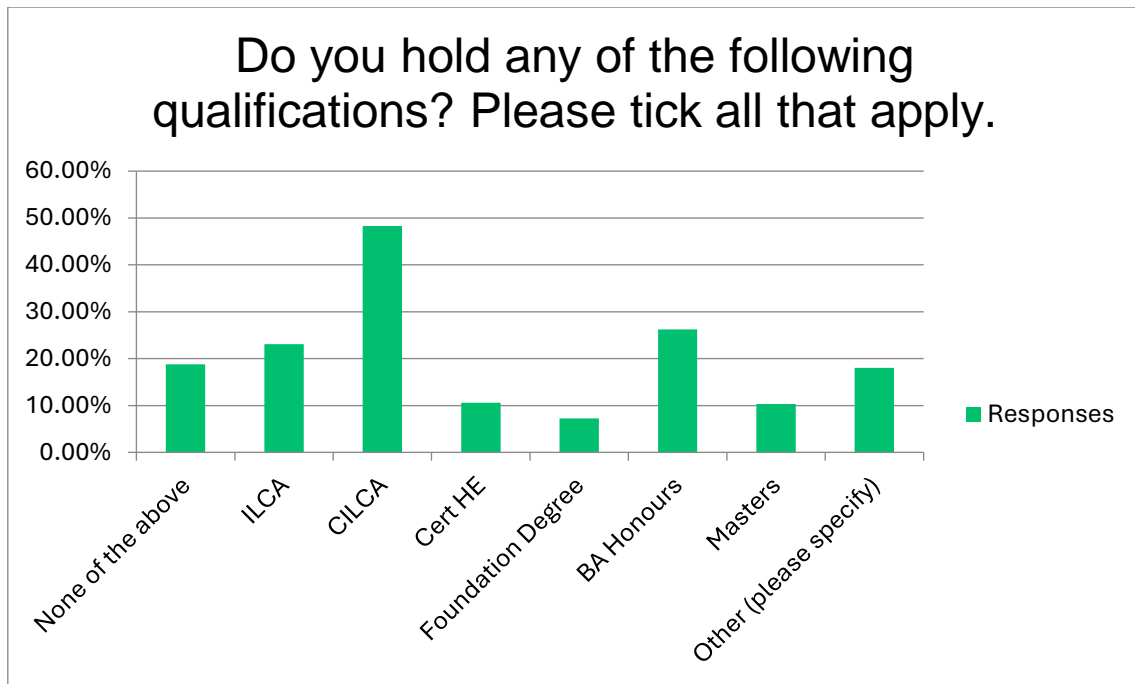


Table 8.

Questions ten and eleven were designed to assess the size of the council. In response to question ten, 76% of participants indicated that they work alone or in a small team of fewer than five, suggesting they are part of smaller councils. In contrast, 6% reported having more than 15 staff members, with seven respondents (1.7%) indicating they have over 30 staff members, pointing to larger councils. This aligns with data from Chapter Two, which showed that most local councils typically employ only the clerk, while larger councils continue to expand.

The analysis further indicated that a higher staff count often leads to increased responsibilities and demands on the clerk, highlighting the potential to address capacity issues as discussed in Chapter Two.

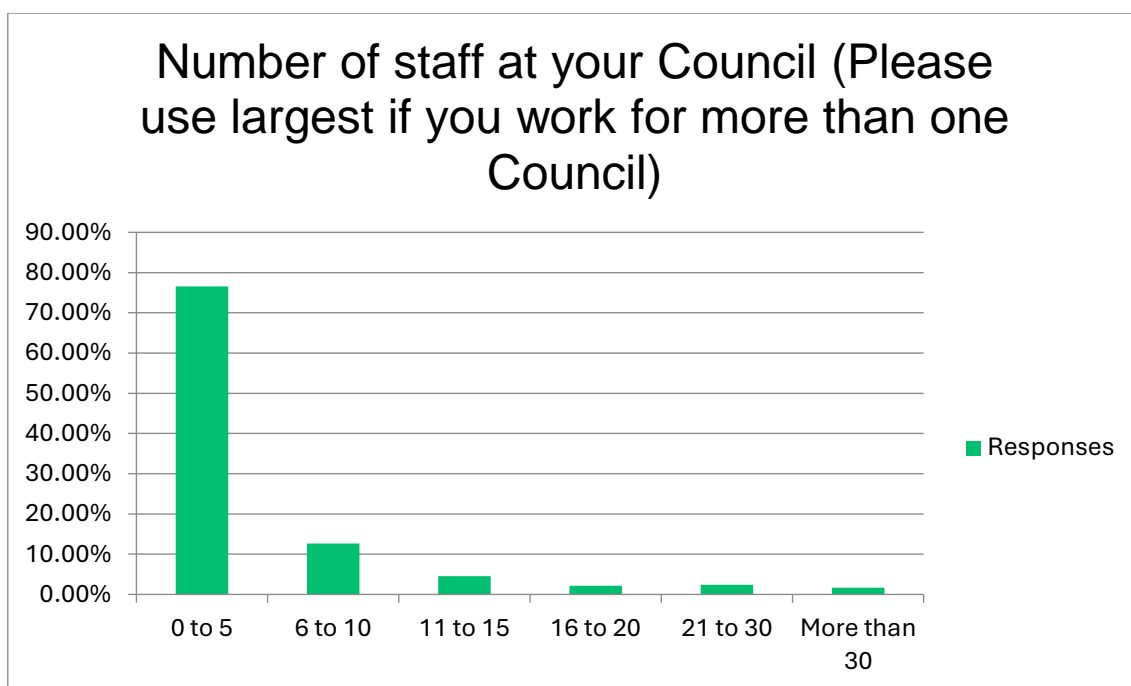


Table 9.

The number of councillors is another indicator of council size, and question eleven revealed that most respondents work for smaller councils, with the most common councillor counts being seven (15%) and nine (15%). Table 10 provides a detailed breakdown of all the responses.

No of Councillors	No of responses
3	1
4	1
5	16
6	8
7	64
8	22
9	64
10	27
11	43
12	39
13	28
14	15
15	36
16	18
17	10
18	7
19	2
20	5
21	6
22	1
25	1
29	2

Table 10

The majority (89%) of councils were non-political; however, cross-referencing indicated that larger councils were more likely to operate along political lines. This finding relates to Chapter Two, where one of the challenges identified was related to politics.

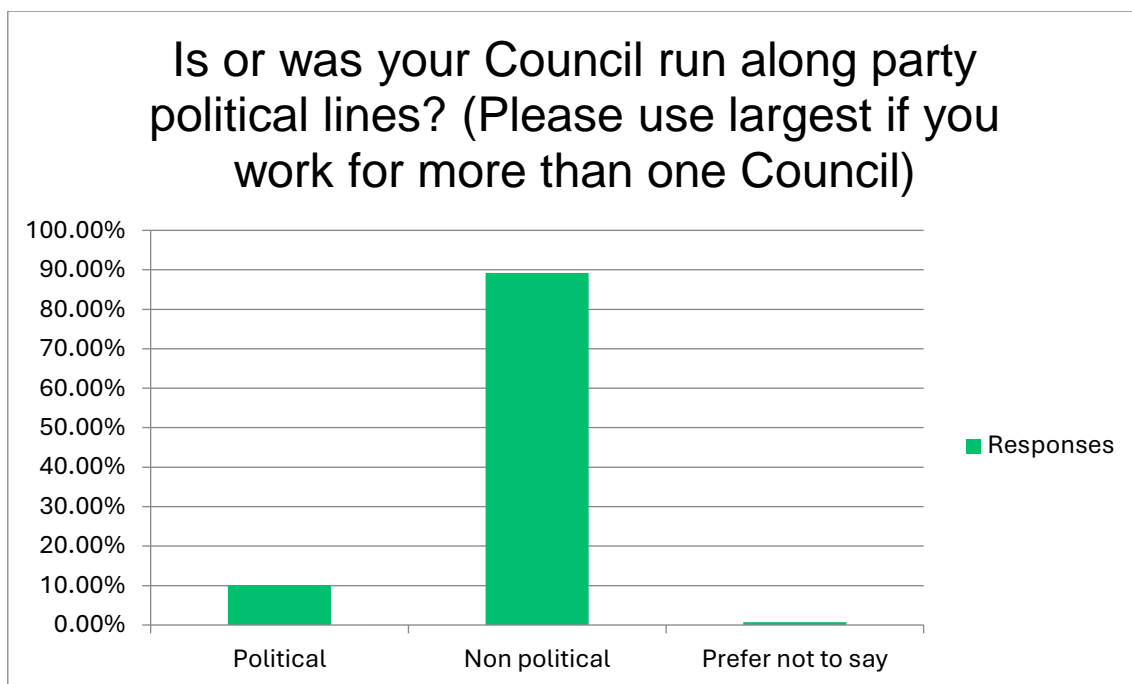


Table 11.

Smaller councils typically do not have dedicated offices, with 56% of clerks working from home. Interestingly, the number of clerks working from home or in an office (21%) was just four votes behind those who reported working in an office (22%). This observation connects to Clapham’s (2022) recommendations regarding loneliness as a challenge faced by clerks.

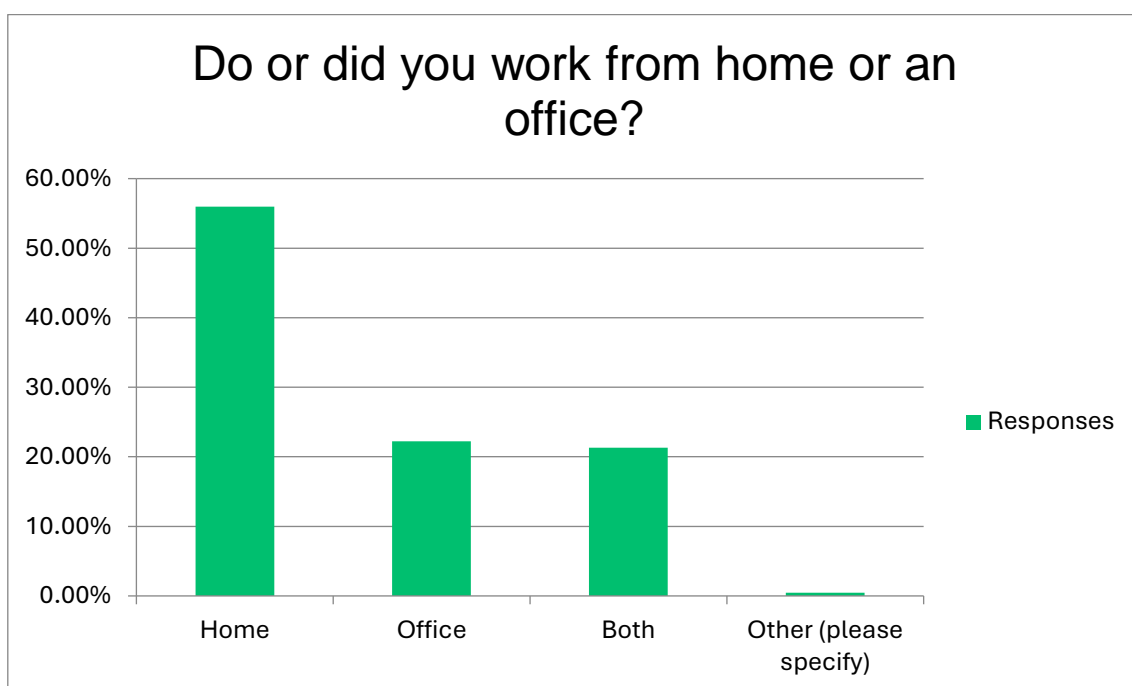


Table 12.

Table thirteen presents a word cloud reflecting responses to question fourteen, which utilized a comment box instead of a drop-down selection. Some data cleansing was

necessary, as certain responses conveyed similar meanings, such as "satisfaction" and "job satisfaction." The most common positive responses included:

- Satisfaction: 37%
- Pride: 22%
- Joy: 19%
- Happiness: 19%

The term "joy" was provided as an example, which may explain its high frequency in responses. Similarly, the negative responses also reflected the influence of examples provided; "anxiety" was the top answer. The most common negative responses were:

- Anxiety: 45%
- Frustration: 28%
- Stress: 17%

The mention of "stress" was anticipated, as it aligned with data uncovered in Chapter Two.

Q14 Whilst carrying out your role, what positive and negative emotions have you experienced? E.g. Anxiety, joy? Please indicate below.



Table 13

Table fourteen displays the responses to the question aimed at identifying the main challenges faced by clerks. To promote balanced and candid feedback while

encouraging engagement, respondents were invited to provide both positive and negative responses. After further data cleansing, which addressed similar responses, the top positive responses were:

- Project completion: 42%
- Praise: 19%
- Colleagues: 19%
- Community: 17%

Both "project completion" and "praise" were provided as examples.

The negative responses revealed a clear connection to bullying and harassment, as highlighted in Chapter Two and shown in Table fourteen. Over 50% of the responses identified this challenge, with more than half of those indicating that the bullying and harassment originated from councillors.

The next most common response was time constraints (15%), which again linked to capacity issues discussed in Chapter Two. Neither of these challenges had been mentioned as examples.

It was surprising that "change," which was discussed in Chapter Two, did not receive a higher response rate, especially given that the questionnaire was distributed shortly after a General Election and a change in national government. Other challenges mentioned in Chapter Two, such as power, communication, and discrimination—also noted as examples—received response rates of less than 2%.

Q15 What challenges or events made you feel as you did? E.g. discrimination, illness, praise, project completion? Please indicate below.



Table 14.

Table 15 illustrates the time it takes for clerks to bounce back from challenges, with a clear indication (over 50%, including comments categorized as "Other") that most clerks recover within days. Those who reported that they had not yet recovered were primarily linked to responses related to bullying and harassment or significant personal trauma. One comment in the "Other" category posed the question: if recovery does not occur within days, is recovery ever possible?

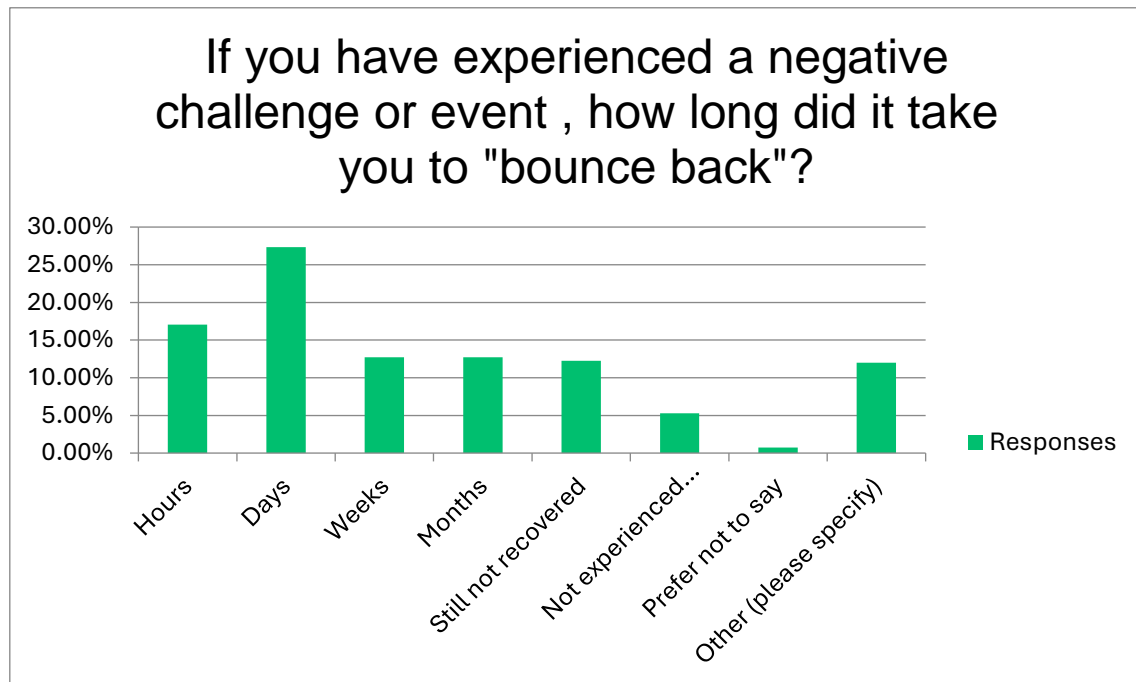


Table 15.

To explore deeper into one of the objectives, a question was posed regarding the ability to effectively carry out the role of a local council clerk while facing challenges. The overall response as shown in Table 16 indicated that clerks felt they could manage their responsibilities, suggesting a certain level of emotional resilience. However, those who chose not to respond likely recognized their inability to perform effectively, indicating a slightly higher rate of being affected by challenges.

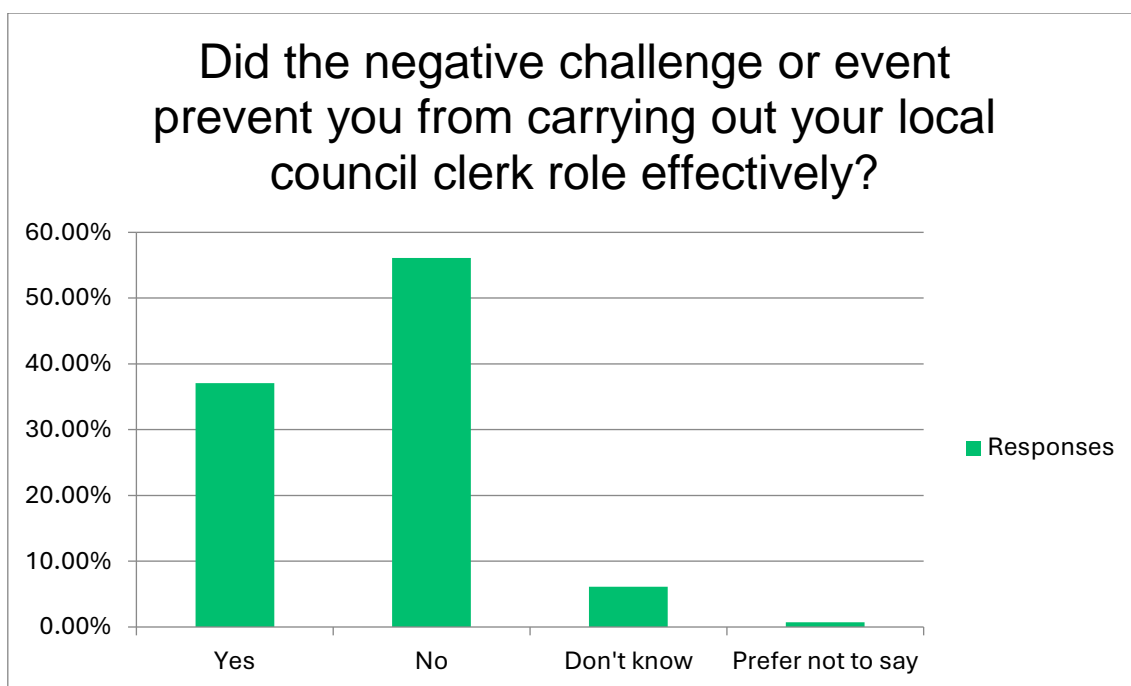


Table 16.

The question regarding addressing challenges highlights the need for support or learning from experiences as detailed in the definitions from Chapter Two. Table 17 shows that most respondents raised the challenge with their council, suggesting a degree of emotional resilience.

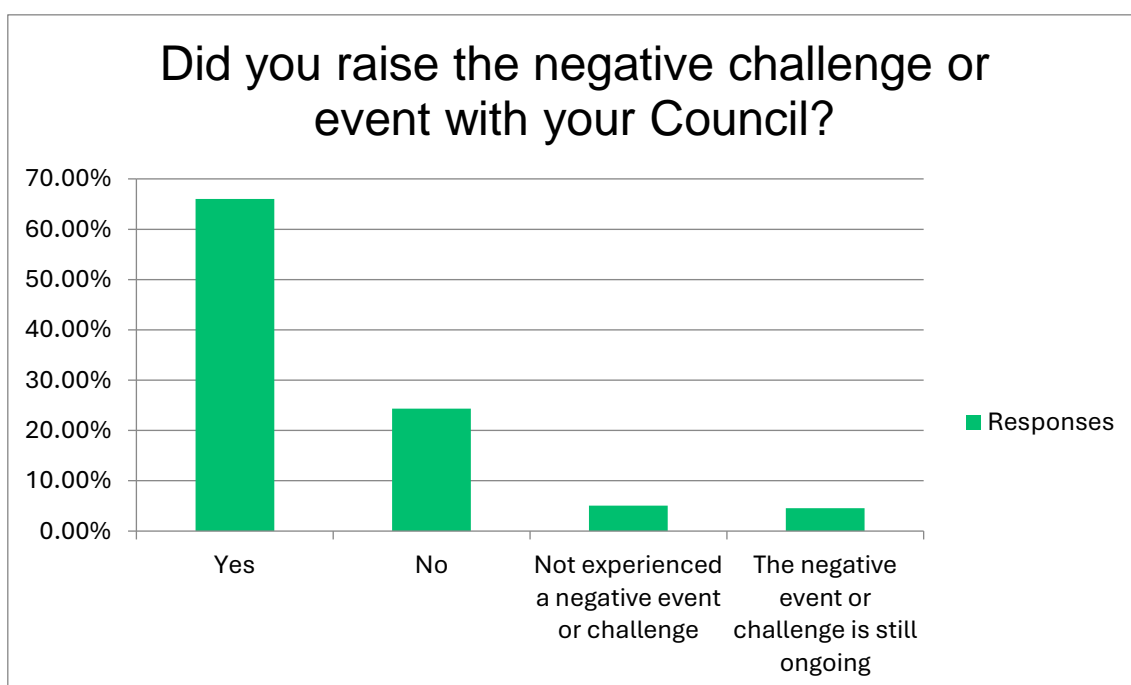


Table 17.

Table 18 shows half the councils supported their clerk which indicates if the challenge is bullying or harassment the Civility and Respect Pledge is being adhered to.

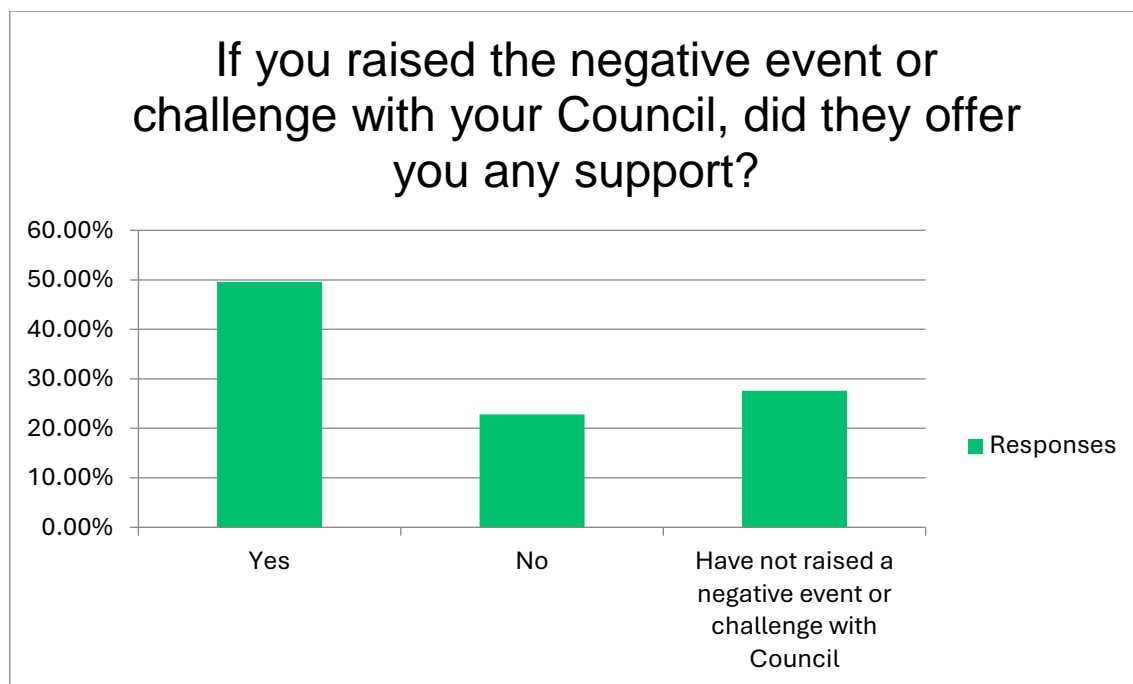


Table 18.

Over one third of the respondents expressed willingness to be interviewed in the final question. Respondents also used the final free text comment box to put further explanation of their answers which again had to be data cleansed.

4.3 Interview responses

The interviews were originally planned to be conducted online. However, as outlined in Chapter Three, only one clerk responded to the invitation, stating that they were unable to participate due to work commitments. The researcher then reconsidered the necessity of conducting the interview process and concluded that additional qualitative data was needed. The change to holding in-person interviews allowed the researcher to observe body language and non-verbal communication.

The six individuals selected for the interviews had all served as clerks for over five years and came from various regions of the UK. Each held at least a Foundation Degree qualification in Community Governance.

The first question focused on objective one and asked the clerks to define emotional intelligence, which would be compared to the definition provided in Chapter Two by Pahwa and Khan (2022). Responses varied but included key phrases such as “coping,” “my ability,” “bouncing back,” “surviving,” and “recovery,” all of which aligned with that definition. This demonstrated that the clerks were knowledgeable about the concept of emotional resilience.

The second question, focusing on objective three, inquired about the triggers for emotional resilience. Responses would be compared to the challenges identified in prior research discussed in Chapter Two and the questionnaire, a process known as cross-verification triangulation, which involves utilising different research methods to check for consistency. Notably, none of the challenges identified in the literature

review were mentioned. Instead, all respondents cited personal emotional triggers, using phrases like “self-doubt,” “making it personal,” “past experiences,” “tiredness,” and “potential loss.” When probed further about self-doubt, all but one clerk expressed anxiety over job security and the financial impact it would have on their home life.

Question three, linking to objective two, asked respondents to agree or disagree with statements taken from the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale. All participants agreed that they were treated fairly and with respect, although opinions varied based on who they interacted with. They commonly referenced “that one councillor” who tended to push boundaries, with comments suggesting that women were often more respectful than men.

While all agreed that they enjoyed taking risks, their comfort levels varied depending on the context. Most indicated that they took more calculated risks at work, often involving creative problem-solving with minimal personal loss, whereas risks in their personal lives carried the potential for significant emotional consequences. All but one respondent stated they felt safe in their role, interpreting safety in a physical sense related to their work environment rather than in an emotional context.

When discussing spending habits, all mentioned that they only purchase items out of necessity rather than desire. They also recognized that their behaviour varied in different social situations, noting that they adapted their demeanour based on their company. A common theme emerged where respondents altered their behaviour around different councillors, often as a means of protection or to manipulate situations to achieve desired outcomes.

When asked whether others enjoyed their company, responses were divided. Half agreed that people did, while others expressed self-doubt and were critical of themselves, assuming that others merely tolerated their presence. All acknowledged that their employer was supportive but pointed out specific individuals, such as the Chairman or certain committees, rather than the entire council. This observation aligned with earlier comments about fairness and respect—no one felt they could speak positively about the entire council due to the presence of “that one councillor.”

Respondents were all aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but the focus was predominantly on their perceived weaknesses rather than their strengths. Question four, to assist with objective four, was interpreted by all as asking, “Do local council clerks need to be emotionally resilient?” and all agreed that they did. They felt that the potential for change with a new council each year, along with the influence of a single councillor who could undermine the council's efforts, created a need of emotional resilience for clerks to thrive.

Key phrases associated with emotional resilience included “networking,” “peer support,” and “training.” However, other significant terms emerged, such as “lack of sanctions,” “loneliness,” “no other job like it,” and “highly demanding.”

4.4 Summary

The demographics of clerks identified in Chapter Two were confirmed by the primary research carried out. Clerks encounter challenges regularly, with bullying behaviour emerging as the primary issue, leading to anxiety—a challenge closely associated with stress.

In Chapter Two, politics was identified as a challenge; however, the primary research revealed a contradiction, showing that most councils are non-political.

The questionnaire results suggested that clerks possess emotional resilience, as they tend to recover quickly from difficulties. Since 81% of clerks, including all of those interviewed, possess a higher level of qualification, this may suggest that further education and training contribute to enhancing emotional resilience. Using statements from the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale indicated that all interviewed clerks displayed emotional resilience but at varying levels. Those who scored lower primarily attributed their results to two challenges - self-doubt and the influence of *“that one councillor”*. Like the author, emotional resilience was found to be stronger in some areas than others.

The next chapter will summarize the findings from all the research conducted and conclude this review.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will summarise the findings of all the research undertaken to respond to the objections and overarching aim, it will review the effectiveness of the primary research and provide conclusions drawn from all the data.

The chapter will conclude by making recommendations on any further research required and who needs to undertake that research.

5.2 Conclusions

Chapter One outlined the overarching aim of this research as examining, reviewing, and understanding the emotional resilience of local council clerks, the challenges they face to maintain that resilience, and determining the level of emotional resilience required for them to perform their roles effectively. This review was to be accomplished through specific objectives:

Objective 1 – Define emotional resilience

This review indicated that, although emotional resilience has been studied in other areas, there is a notable lack of focus on the clerk sector. Existing emotional resilience definitions are often vague even for other sectors and entirely absent for local council clerks. The definition provided by Pahwa and Khan (2022) can be associated with clerks, although it is not tailored specifically to their role. Clerks provided personal and different definitions and understandings of emotional resilience, but all could be linked back to *“the ability of an individual to cope with adversities and bounce back from failures.”*

Objective 2 – Determine if local council clerks are emotionally resilient

This review suggested that clerks do possess emotional resilience due to the regular high demands of and challenges to their role. If faced with challenge, clerks report they recover and/or adapt quickly. Other findings, particularly from the interviews when using questions focused on the Connor Davidson measuring scale, confirmed that clerks display emotional resilience at varying levels. These levels tended to be higher in their professional lives where they adjust their behaviour according to the situation.

Objective 3 – Investigate the challenges local council clerks face

Every workplace presents challenges to emotional resilience, with stress and change being the most significant in many sectors. However, for clerks, bullying and harassment remain the primary challenges, despite the implementation of the Civility and Respect Pledge. Over 50% of respondents identified these issues as significant challenges, and these negative experiences, particularly from councillors, have led to increased levels of anxiety.

Objective 4 – Establish if a local council clerk needs an elevated level of emotional resilience to carry out their role effectively

The unique challenges faced by clerks on a regular basis and the reported need for the ability to “bounce back” quickly demonstrate the need for an elevated level of emotional resilience to effectively carry out the role.

All the objectives were met, some more than others which leads to the need for some recommendations.

5.3 Recommendations

Recommendations are an important final part of a research paper as they “*offer specific, actionable insights that can guide future research, inform policy decisions and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.*” (Wojcik, 2024)

Based on the research undertaken and analysis of the data. The following recommendations are proposed –

Recommendation: Conduct Further Research

Although the response rate to the questionnaires was higher than expected, it is still low with approximately 9,265 local council clerks in England. It is impossible to know if every clerk received the questionnaire however a question on geographical location would have indicated how much and where the questionnaire was circulated. This means the findings are only illustrative not representative.

The method of delivery also meant that it is highly unlikely that clerks who have left the sector would have been aware of the research project. This meant data on the reasons, including lack of emotional resilience, for leaving the sector could not be explored.

This review has highlighted the importance of emotional resilience in the clerk role. To support clerks, the SLCC should conduct regular surveys to assess emotional resilience levels. This proactive approach will help identify emerging issues and help enable early interventions to address workplace challenges.

Recommendation: Define emotional resilience for local council clerks

A clear definition promotes understanding. Establishing a definition would demonstrate the importance of emotional resilience for clerks and to the councils they serve. It is recommended that the SLCC and NALC work together to create a definition that covers the unique stresses and challenges clerks encounter using the Pahwa and Khan (2022) definition as a starting point.

Recommendation: Investigate and offer specific training

Training focused on understanding and building emotional resilience should be offered more widely through SLCC. These should address the specific challenges clerks face, including dealing with councillors and managing self-doubt. Such bespoke training could help clerks to manage workplace stress and interpersonal conflicts such as bullying and harassment more effectively.

Recommendation: Continue the work of the Civility and Respect Pledge to highlight the challenges faced

The responses regarding the Civility & Respect Pledge highlight that just over half of councils have signed the pledge, with a small but significant percentage of respondents being unaware of it, suggesting that more awareness and education are needed on this issue. Encouraging environments during times of challenge where clerks feel safe to express their concerns and seek support without fear of repercussions should be further explored.

Recommendation: Create policies

NALC should advise councils on the importance of emotional resilience within the working environment and introduce policy templates which meet the needs of both clerks and councils whilst providing them with adequate support.

5.4 Summary

The review found that emotional resilience is crucial for local council clerks, who frequently encounter challenges in their roles, including stress from bullying and harassment. The ability to cope with these challenges is not just beneficial but necessary for maintaining job performance and overall well-being.

The recommendations aim to address the gaps identified in the research and challenges indicated whilst highlighting the importance of emotional resilience in the clerk role. It is essential that SLCC and NALC consider these suggestions, to expand on and continue with the work already carried out, such as the Civility and Respect Pledge, to support the emotional resilience of clerks by ensuring a supportive and efficient working environment.

In conclusion, this research has convinced the author that local council clerks are and need to be emotionally resilient, just like Tigger, the beloved character from *Winnie the Pooh*, who stays optimistic and prepared to face new adventures, regardless of the challenges encountered.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

A review of the emotional resilience of local council clerks, and the challenges to their resilience.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research survey. The purpose of this research is to review and understand how emotionally resilient local council clerks are, and the challenges to their resilience.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential and your data will be anonymised.

The survey should take 5 to 10 minutes to complete and must be completed by **31st May 2024**.

If you agree to complete a more in-depth questionnaire, the interviews will take place online during June at time convenient to you.

Survey Questions:

1. Your age
[Put in range boxes]
2. Your gender
Male/Female/Prefer not to say
3. How long have you been a local council clerk?
[Put in range boxes]
4. How many Councils do you currently work for?
1,2,3,4+
5. Are you a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks?
Yes/No
6. Is your Council a member of your local County Association of Local Councils?
Yes/No
7. Do you hold any of the following qualifications –
ILCA
CILCA
Cert HE
Foundation Degree
BA Honours
Masters
Other (If so, please provide details)
8. Number of staff at your Council (*Please use largest if you work for more than one Council*)
[Put in range boxes]
9. Number of Councillors at your Council (*Please use largest if you work for more than one Council*)
[Put in range boxes]

10. Is your Council run along party political lines? *(Please use largest if you work for more than one Council)*
Political/non-political
11. Do you work from home or an office?
Home/Office/Both/Other
12. Whilst carrying out your role what positive and negative emotions have you experienced? e.g anxiety, joy? Please indicate below.
Positive emotions -
[Free text box]
Negative emotions -
[Free text box]
13. Which of the following challenges made you feel as you did? e.g discrimination, illness, praise, project completion? Please indicate below.
[Free text box]
14. How long did it take you to “bounce back” after a negative challenge?
Hours
Days
Weeks
Months
Still not recovered
Other (If so, please provide details)
15. Did the negative challenges experienced stop you carrying out your role effectively?
Yes/No/Don't know
16. If so, for how long?
Hours
Days
Weeks
Months
Still not carrying out role effectively
17. Did you raise these challenges with your Council?
Yes/No
If yes, did they offer you any support?
Yes/No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have been affected by any of these issues, are you willing to complete a more in-depth questionnaire? If so, please provide your name and email address.

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions

Q1. How would you describe emotional resilience?

Q2. Do you have any triggers that may affect your resilience, if so what are they?

Q3. Do you agree with the following statements?

- I am treated fairly and with respect
- I like taking risks
- I feel safe when carrying out my role
- If I see something I like, I buy it
- Different social situations require different behaviour
- Other people enjoy my company
- My employer is supportive
- I am aware of my own strengths and weaknesses

Q4. Is there anything else you would like to add related to being a clerk, regarding emotional resilience?

Appendix 3 – Research Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: A review of the emotional resilience of local council clerks, and the challenges to their resilience.

Name of Researcher: Linda Ranger

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish to. Do ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information - Take time to decide whether you wish to take part or not.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the research about?

The purpose of this research is to review and understand how emotionally resilient local council clerks are, and the challenges to their resilience.

This research is part of an assignment to be submitted in partial completion of a BA Honours degree in Community Governance awarded by De Montford University.

What does the study / participation involve?

Participants may be asked to take part in one or more of the following:

- a) Respond to an online questionnaire
- b) A short on-line interview

Participation is on a voluntary basis and consent can be withdrawn at any time.

Data will be anonymised, and a consent form will be provided separately.

The questionnaire will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete whilst the interview will last up to 30 minutes.

The questionnaire must be completed by 19th July 2024 and interviews will take place after this date at time convenient to the participant.

Who is doing the research?

Linda Ranger PSLCC, FdA (Comm Gov)

Clerk & RFO / Community Governance Student

St Stephen in Brannel Parish Council / De Montford University

If you have any concerns about this research, for any reason and at any time, you may contact the SLCC advisor – Johnathan Bourne. His contact details are provided at the end of this information sheet.

Who is funding the research?

The research is being funded by the researcher - there is no external funding.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate as a local council clerk.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to give your consent. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What if I agree to take part and then change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. As the data is anonymous, withdrawal of data will not be possible.

What happens to the information I provide?

The research data will be used as part of a dissertation that will be submitted to De Montford University.

All data will be stored securely.

No names will be used in the dissertation.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept on a password protected database and is strictly confidential. You will be given an ID code which will be used instead of your name. Any identifiable information you may give will be removed and anonymised.

De Montford University policy is that raw data is normally kept for 5 years after a study has been completed.

The university supervisor will also have access to the data and members of the faculty human research ethics committee may require access to check that the study has been conducted in accordance with the University approval.

You should also be aware that I may be duty bound to pass on information that you provide that reveals harm has occurred to a child or other vulnerable individual.

Will anyone know that I am taking part?

If you tell me that, for example, a criminal offence has, or may have been, committed I have a duty to pass that information onto the police/ other agency. Only in those circumstances would I have to reveal your identity.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

While I hope that your experience will be pleasant, some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. If at any point during the study, you feel distressed you can choose to remove yourself and the session will end.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will have an input into an understanding of how emotionally resilient local council clerks are, and the challenges to their resilience.

What if something goes wrong?

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for a legal action, but you may have to pay for it. Regardless of this, if you wish to complain, or have any concerns about any aspect of the way

you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, the normal University complaints mechanisms should be available to you.

Who can I complain to?

If you have a complaint regarding anything to do with this study, you can initially approach the researcher. If this achieves no satisfactory outcome, you should then contact the Administrator for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation Office, Faculty of Business and Law, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH or BALResearchEthics@dmu.ac.uk

You can also complain to the SLCC advisor:

Johnathan Bourne

Johnathan.Bourne@slcc.co.uk

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by De Montfort University, Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics Committee

Contact for Further Information

Linda Ranger PSLCC, FdA (Comm Gov)

Email: clerk@ststepheninbrannel-pc.gov.uk

Thank you for taking part in this study.

1 April 2024 V1

10 April 2024 V2

18 April 2024 V3

28 June 2024 V4