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# Research Matters

Dorset County Council research bulletins

SERIES



## Ask Dorset Public Engagement Results

Ask Dorset was the biggest community engagement exercise undertaken by Dorset County Council. Over the summer of 2014 almost 12,000 residents participated either at one of our roadshows, by completing a paper survey in a library or Your Dorset, online or as a member of our Citizens' Panel.

The campaign was successful in both demonstrating a new approach to consultation and engagement and by being highly visible and open. It also successfully captured the views of a large number and a diverse range of Dorset's residents.

The key part was asking our residents to tell us which of our service areas matter most to them and their families. We had a list of 20 services and people had to choose their top five. For many this was a difficult choice as people thought that all 20 services were very important. This highlighted the difficult decisions the county council will have to make as budgets are reduced further.



The **top five** priorities identified were:

- 1 Roads and highways are in a good condition
- 2 Helping older people to live at home for as long as possible
- 3 Having bins emptied and recycling collected
- 4 Dorset's exceptional natural and historical environment
- 5 Rural buses and transport

Over half of all those who took part (6,800) saw us at one of our roadshows around the county. At these events residents were also given the opportunity to leave comments about our services or specific issues they experience. 560 comment cards were posted which have been passed to relevant teams to address.



The remaining 5,100 participants took part in a number of ways. Almost 1,200 surveys were completed online, this was promoted using Facebook advertising targeting those aged 16-44 years. We had 500 hard copy responses from libraries, 600 from Your Dorset and almost 2,800 responses from our Citizens' Panel.



## Results of the survey by town

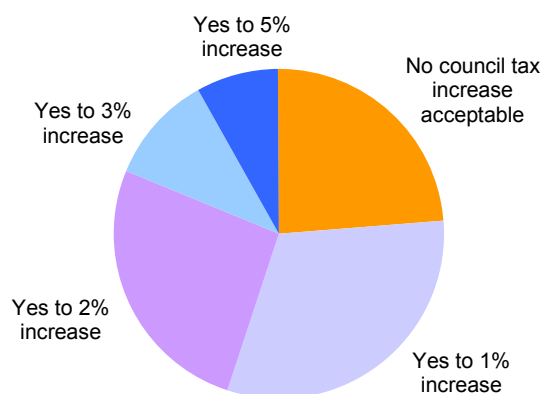
All the responses from each event have been collated according to which town the event was held in. You can see the results by town at [www.dorsetforyou.com/have-your-say](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/have-your-say)

## Other questions

The online and paper surveys gave us the opportunity to ask residents a few more questions including whether they were prepared to pay more in council tax, if they volunteered within their community or would be willing to in the future.

## Public views on council tax increases

Over three quarters of those who completed a paper or online survey (4,900) told us that they were happy to pay more council tax in order to protect services, with some prepared to pay an additional 5%. The majority of respondents said they were happy to pay an additional one or two per cent.



## Public views on contacting the council

A range of questions were asked about how residents contact the council and why. We need to understand how people want to communicate with us, but also need to change the way we do things in order to be more efficient. For example if residents are able to self serve where possible this is more cost effective. At present the most common way people contact us is by telephone (35%), however not far behind is people using our website (29%). Residents told us that they would be happy to do more for themselves, although they also said that it is sometimes important to talk to someone. We need to do further work to ensure our resources are targeted in the right areas, where that personal contact is needed the most.



## Public views on volunteering



Residents were asked if they are involved in volunteering or would be prepared to do so. We need to understand what capacity exists within communities as we support our communities to become more independent and sustainable.

A third of those who responded are already active volunteers within their community. Overall almost 84% who responded said they do or would be prepared to volunteer in the future. This clearly demonstrates that we have great potential in our communities.

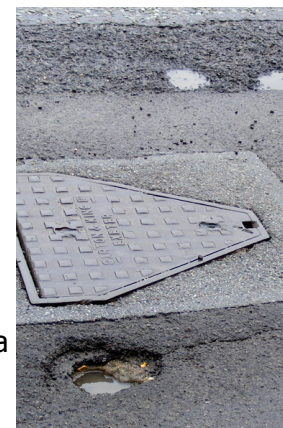




## Overall results from the whole Ask Dorset engagement

Rank	Service area	Number	Percentage
1	Roads are in a good condition	5,727	48.7%
2	Helping older people live at home for as long as possible	4,946	42.1%
3	Having your bins emptied and recycling collected	4,812	40.9%
4	Dorset's exceptional natural and historic environment	4,562	38.8%
5	Rural buses and transport	4,202	35.7%
6	Dignity, choice and control in care and health	3,676	31.3%
7	Affordable housing	3,220	27.4%
8	Keeping vulnerable people safe from harm and enjoying a full life	3,216	27.4%
9	Thriving local businesses, good quality jobs and a skilled workforce	3,133	26.6%
10	Helping people into work and apprenticeships	3,133	26.6%
11	Libraries, museums, arts and culture	2,638	22.4%
12	Supporting schools so children get good exam results	2,171	18.5%
13	Support for local childcare and youth activities	2,154	18.3%
14	Access to Superfast Broadband	1,966	16.7%
15	Enough available school places	1,949	16.6%
16	Helping people have healthy lifestyles	1,930	16.4%
17	Keeping roads open during snow and floods	1,648	14.0%
18	Reduced flood risks	1,328	11.3%
19	Being protected from untrustworthy goods, services or unsafe food	1,261	10.7%
20	Fighting climate change	1,091	9.3%

The above table shows the 20 service areas ranked by the number of "votes" they were given. Residents were asked to select five areas most important to them. 48.7% of residents taking part included "keeping roads in good condition" in their top five. This was followed by 42.1% choosing "helping older people live at home as long as possible", and then 40.9% selecting "having your bins emptied and recycling collected". Whilst 70% of the votes went to the items in the top ten, most areas received significant support. It was understandable that some received lesser support as something like "reduced flood risks" might be a top priority for people living in an area of high flood risk but considered much less important elsewhere.





Whilst the main part of the engagement involved road shows across the whole county, in public locations during the daytime and the evenings, further work was done to engage with as wide range of residents as possible. The survey also went out to the Dorset Citizens' Panel, a group of over 5,000 residents who have agreed to take part in surveys with the county council. The survey also went online and to every household via the county council's newspaper, Your Dorset. Work was undertaken with special groups such as older people, younger people and the Dorset business community. From a survey point of view the road shows randomly selected people in the street, at shows and at supermarkets taking in a very broad cross section of the Dorset population. Other survey groups, such as the Citizens' Panel tend to be residents who "self select" to take part and this can reflect slightly different priorities.

### Citizens' Panel Responses:

2,714 panel members responded to the Ask Dorset Survey. Their top five issues were:



- waste and recycling
- road maintenance
- older people
- choice in health and care
- exceptional environment

The Citizens' Panel choices were more focused than the overall feedback with waste and recycling (their top item) receiving twice as many votes as the sixth choice. The panel's choices showed keeping the roads open in snow and floods up from 17th place to 12th place in the overall results. At the same time support for local childcare and facilities featured in 13th place overall but received less support from the panel leaving it in 19th place in their specific results.

### Your Dorset and Paper Survey Responses:

Paper surveys went out through Dorset libraries with 480 being returned. The results tended to mirror the overall results with the exception of Libraries, museums and arts which unsurprisingly lifted to top spot from 11th in the overall results. The results from the Your Dorset newspaper survey were similar to the overall results with the same five topics making the top five. However, waste and recycling topped their list just pipping maintaining roads. 581 people completed the survey in the newspaper.



### Online Survey

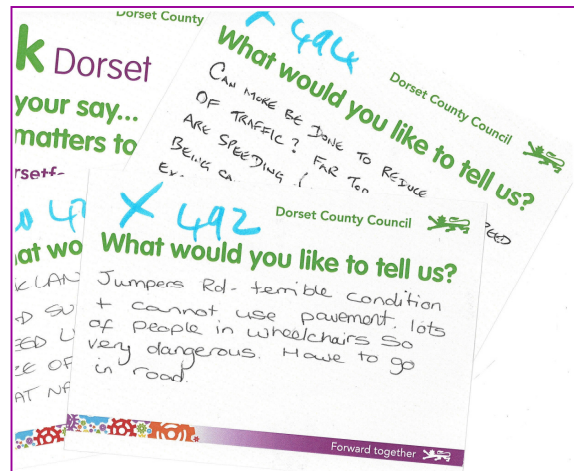
Online surveys were completed by 1,166 respondents between June and August 2014. One might have expected slightly different priorities selected by those doing the survey online as the method could be more attractive to younger people and this was the case to a certain extent. Thriving local businesses, good quality jobs and a skilled workforce lifted into the top 5 for the first time, behind maintaining roads, protecting the natural environment, waste collection and choice in health and care.



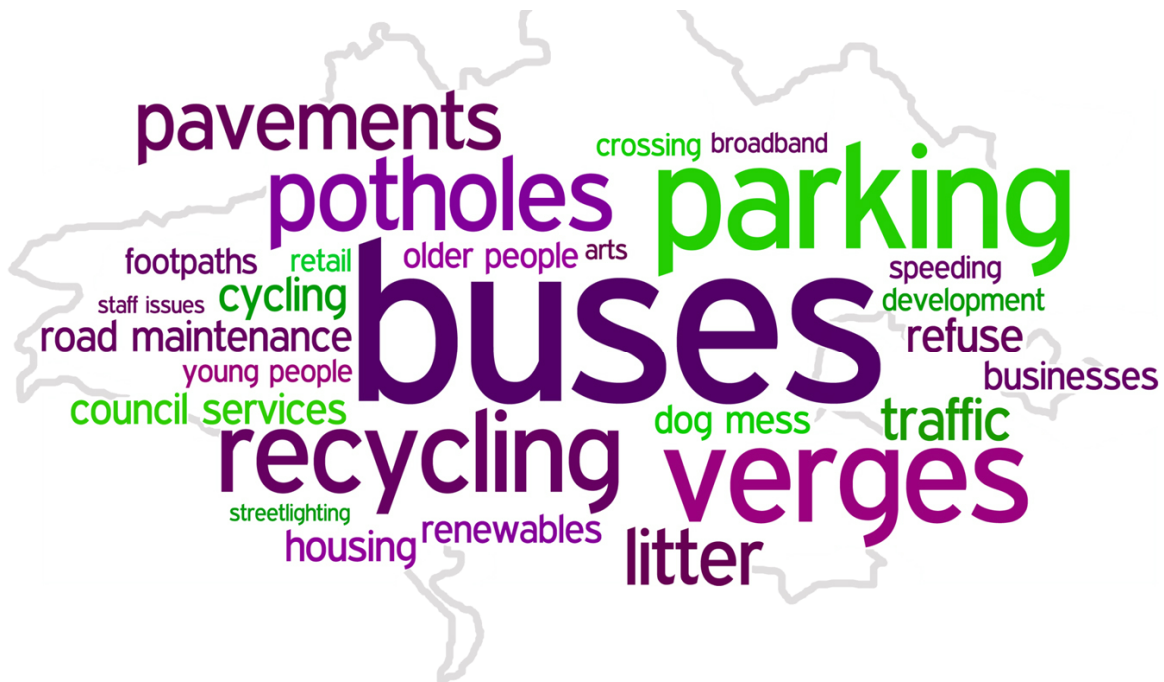


## Roadshow Comments

Ask Dorset wasn't just about selecting priorities. The most important thing has been engaging with members of the public, listening to and noting their comments and the county council is acting on these wherever we can. 560 comments were posted on cards at the roadshows and, as far as possible, these are being followed up.



The word cloud below shows the **most common concerns** raised on the comment cards, with the size of the text representing the number of times these particular issues were raised. The concerns raised on the cards brought out more specific issues not necessarily listed in the 20 main services. The biggest issue from the cards was buses and this was reflected as the fifth highest priority in the main survey. Many of the individual concerns revolve around highway issues with parking, potholes, verges and pavements all featuring significantly. These combined highway issues mirror the dominant choice in the "button" survey of maintaining roads. Recycling, litter and refuse also featured on the feedback cards.



At each of the roadshow events both local councillors and senior officers including directors and the Chief Executive were in attendance. This meant that they could hear first hand the issues that are of most concern to the public. The public were also able to have their voice heard and meet their local councillor.





## What happens next?

Identifying priorities for our corporate plan and setting appropriate budgets rely on a broad range of evidence. The Ask Dorset results are a key part of this, alongside a wide range of data including budgets and statistics about our communities.

An important part of the analysis has been identifying the links between many of our services and how they are dependant or impact on one another. We cannot simply focus our resources on those areas which the public told us were their top priorities. In many cases those which came much further down the list affect things that are nearer to the top of the list. We must ensure that in making decisions about our priorities and rationalising services, there are not unintended consequences on other services that we or others provide to Dorset's residents.



There are some common themes which cut across many of our services which help to shape how we prioritise in the future:

- **Early help and enabling.** The public felt that 'helping older people to live at home for as long as possible' was one of the top priorities. We therefore need to ensure that older people are supported so they can remain in their homes, keeping them well, safe and connected and reducing their likely need for more intensive support and care, which it may not be possible to deliver at home. Early interventions are essential across all of our service areas, being proactive and trying to reduce things hitting a crisis point, whether that be with an individual's health and care or a road.
- **Access and connectivity.** In a large rural county it is important that people are able to get around to go to work, school and to access goods and services. This may be physically getting around, therefore relying on our road network and for some on public transport, both of which were regarded as high priorities by the public. There is also a need for people to be digitally connected, which helps residents and businesses to access what they need. Finally we need social connectivity: in supporting older people to live at home, we must also try and avoid social isolation.
- **Quality of life.** Our quality of life is influenced by many factors including a number of services we provide and support. The public place great value on our environment and being able to access this has health benefits. Being connected and able to access employment and the services we need also contributes to improving quality of life which in turn reduces the likelihood of people reaching crisis situations in terms of their health and wellbeing.

## How we work in the future

A key message of Ask Dorset was about our changing financial situation and the need to work differently in the future. Our corporate plan will be clear in setting out how we will focus on enabling and supporting people to do more for themselves and how we will work in partnership where possible in order to achieve the best outcomes for our residents, the economy and the environment in the most efficient way we can.

