Unpicking residents' perceptions
Findings from focus groups with Buckinghamshire residents
03 August 2012
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Executive summary
Executive summary

Overview

Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct five focus groups with members of the general public to understand their views about a variety of local issues and local public services. In particular, the Council wanted to 'unpick' some of the findings from the 2011 Residents' Survey, notably, dissatisfaction with roads, concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), access to employment and levels of community engagement. In addition, the Council wanted to use the groups to inform the design of its communications strategy by (where possible) analysing findings across audience groups and identifying preferences for how the Council communicates.

The groups took place in four locations across the different district council areas within Buckinghamshire, specifically: Gerrards Cross, High Wycombe, Great Missenden/Chesham, and Aylesbury. They were designed to ensure the views of a cross-section of residents were heard including young and older residents. The groups took place between the 18 and 21 June 2012.

Detailed findings and recommendations are contained in the main report. Key highlights are summarised in this rest of this Executive Summary.

Overall perceptions of Buckinghamshire and the Council

Overall views of the local area and the Council varied quite markedly between younger and older participants, and according to where people lived. Older participants were positive about living in Buckinghamshire; they valued the countryside, the good rail and road transport links and the quality of local schools. Broadly speaking, they felt the Council was doing a good job, with the exception of some specific issues (covered later).

In marked contrast, younger people (those aged 29 or below) were far less enthusiastic about living in Buckinghamshire, a feeling which appeared to be driven by a perceived lack of activities for their age group and few work or career development opportunities. They appeared to have less interest in the Council, and felt that it had little interest in hearing what they had to say. Despite some of these participants arguably having greater need for help from the Council than others (they cited difficulties they faced getting support to find employment and housing, and paying for transport and activities), they did not see the benefit of proactively engaging with the organisation.

Road maintenance and repairs

In line with the findings from the Residents' Survey\(^1\), dissatisfaction with roads was a key issue for participants, and it was their experiences of potholes that seemed to be the key driver of this. Potholes were seen to be widespread, with many seen as an actual danger to the safety of drivers. More specifically, participants were concerned about the quality of repairs, and the knock-on impact in terms of traffic and congestion.

Participants did not feel there was enough information from the Council about road maintenance. They wanted more notice about road works and information about which

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\(^1\) Seven in 10 residents across the county overall (70%) are dissatisfied with the management and maintenance of roads in Buckinghamshire
roads or potholes were being **prioritised**. **Road markings** were also reported as an issue; they are difficult to see on some roads, and this had a potential impact on road safety. Overwhelmingly, participants only tended to **report road maintenance problems** if they were personally affected by them. The discussions suggested that residents would be more likely to report problems if they were able to do so at the time of seeing them, as opposed to after the event. They also want to be assured that the Council will **address issues when they are reported** and/or to keep residents informed of when action will be taken. Awareness of how to report problems was limited, but participants seemed to prefer the idea of **speaking to someone directly**, and some liked the idea of having an iPhone app (although they were unaware such a service already existed).

Participants welcomed the increase in spending committed to by the Council for dealing with road maintenance issues. They also seemed to appreciate that the Council could not deal with all the problems. However, they remained concerned that BCC was not getting **value from this spend**, for example, in terms of using the **right materials** for securing long-term impact.

Participants conceded that they would still have to suffer with the pothole problem for some years to come, given the increased spending still fell short of what was required to fix all the road problems in the county. This said, the discussions suggest that **better communication** with residents about which potholes will be fixed, where road works are likely to take effect, and the rationale for prioritising maintenance the way it does may go some way to easing residents’ negative perceptions about road maintenance.

**Crime and anti-social behaviour**

Although Buckinghamshire overall remains one of the safest parts of the country, tackling crime and ASB is still seen as the top priority for the Council for residents according to the 2011 Residents’ Survey. This **‘perceptions gap’** is not unusual to Buckinghamshire, but suggests that there may be a role for better communication in reassuring residents about the reality of the situation.

Perceptions of crime and ASB **manifested differently according to where group participants lived**. For example, participants from Gerrards Cross were particularly concerned about burglary and theft. Older residents living in Great Missenden acknowledged crime was low, but were concerned about ASB including ‘boy racing’, spitting, burnt out cars, litter dropping, graffiti and youths drinking in public. Younger participants in High Wycombe were concerned about the number of young people joining gangs and the relationship between rival groups.

For **younger participants in High Wycombe**, the need to prioritise crime and ASB was driven by them feeling vulnerable and not very well protected by the police. For others, it was because they saw **feeling safe as a basic right**, and a fundamental part of enjoying somewhere as a place to live. Some participants were worried that reducing the resources given over to tackling crime and ASB could mean Buckinghamshire becoming less of an attractive place to live; and they do not want to see the positive image of the county jeopardised.

The groups suggest that addressing the perceptions gap is not necessarily about telling residents about the low crime rates and presenting them with crime statistics. Nor does it seem likely that residents will proactively look for information about crime and ASB (although they did like the look of *I:on Bucks* in principle). Instead, reassurances need to come from
information that is sent to them, for example, through email alerts that residents can sign up for.

Participants had a mixed levels of awareness of the specific services offered by BCC in relation to tackling crime and ASB; participants mostly referred to the police when discussing their concerns about crime and safety. But, there may be value in the Council promoting some of its more preventative work (for example, in relation to protecting vulnerable children). The groups did suggest that better communication about how the Council and police are successfully tackling crime (for example, “naming and shaming” the perpetrators) and helpful hints and tips about the actions residents can take to prevent themselves becoming a victim of crime would be helpful. At the same time, it will be important not to overwhelm residents with information, which was thought could have an adverse impact on perceptions of safety.

Employment and skills

Like the rest of the nation, Buckinghamshire is feeling the pinch from the economic downturn. The proportion of residents seeking Job Seekers Allowance has increased and the Residents’ Survey suggests that there is an appetite for BCC to help residents with finding work.

The focus groups reinforced the challenges some residents face in finding suitable work - those participants who were out of work or looking to start work believed that competition for jobs had increased in recent years meaning it was even harder for those with few qualifications or little experience to find work. Motivation was a big issue, because many simply did not think they would be considered for a job in the current market. Motivation was also affected when participants did not hear back from prospective employers after applying for a job.

Other challenges residents face in finding work included difficulty completing long-term training (having started a course, some found it difficult to secure support from employers or work at the end of the training); unengaging and narrowly focused newspaper adverts for vacancies; not knowing where to look for job vacancies; and, a lack of financial assistance when trying to find full-time work (participants reported that financial assistance stops as soon as you have found over 16 hours of work).

Participants felt that the service they received from organisations set up to help them find work could be improved. School leavers felt that the service they received through school or Connexions was unhelpful and lacked expert knowledge. Others using the JobCentre, Connexions or A4E were left feeling de-motivated because staff appeared uninterested in their personal situation. They were also frustrated that information about jobs and training was out-of-date, or was not relevant to them.

Participants had some good ideas for how services could be improved to support them in their endeavours, including a forum for sharing experiences, a Council website or 'one-stop-shop' with tips and links for young people, and a sign-up service which would send job seekers alerts about positions for their specified industry or area of interest. Certainly, the feedback suggests that there could be a convening role for BCC to encourage key stakeholders to work better together.
Volunteering

BCC is keen to both to champion personal responsibility and encourage more volunteering and the focus group which covered this topic (older residents in Great Missenden/ Chesham) helped to shed light on motivations and barriers to getting involved. Given the age profile of this group, it was not surprising to hear that many were already volunteering – including, helping neighbours, helping to keep the local area clean, assisting people with travel, helping with coffee mornings and doing work for the church.

Much of the debate focused on what actually constituted ‘volunteering’ – many residents do their bit for the local community, but without necessarily considering themselves a formal ‘volunteer’. Participants did not consider more informal forms of help as volunteering, yet these still present valuable contributions to society all the same.

For these participants, being motivated to do their bit in the community was the result of a number of factors: the ‘thank you’ they receive from the people they are helping or the organisations they are supporting; being able to identify a need in a particular area; or being able to offer a useful set of skills. Many participants also expressed a preference for volunteering for people they know or their peers - the vast majority of volunteering done by participants in this group seemed to be focused on helping other older people.

One of the key barriers to volunteering was time – even amongst those who were retired. More specifically, was the perception that people needed to make a regular time commitment. A clear factor in agreeing to volunteer for this group was being able to take things on that they could fit in around their own lives, as and when, rather than fitting around a fixed volunteering slot.

Engaging with the Council

When asked about the level of engagement they would be interested in having with the Council in the future, participants opted towards the middle ground. They were certainly interested in what the Council is doing - they would like to know more about what is happening, or to have more of a say. But, they do not necessarily want to be actively involved beyond that.

Importantly, their levels of interest were dependent on the issue and whether it meant they were going to be directly affected by a change. Further to this, they specifically wanted to hear about what was or has been done, or decisions that have been made – as discussion relating to roads and crime and ASB demonstrate.

Some participants were put off having more of a say because of a perception that their views would not be listened to. This was a particular issue in the younger group, and suggests that it will be important for the Council to demonstrate that it can and does listen and that getting involved and giving their opinion can make a difference.

Realistically, the groups suggest that residents are only likely to engage with the Council on a reactive basis; most have little interest in proactively going out to find information about the Council or issues they are interested in. The Council will need to target its efforts if it wants to engage people more readily. Participants also reported that they struggled to know how or when to get directly involved in Council matters so more information about the options available would be welcomed.
Communications

Information and communication is a priority for the Council. Findings from the Residents’ Survey suggest that residents are just as likely not to feel well informed (51%) as they are to feel well informed (49%) about the services and benefits provided by BCC; yet we know that feeling informed has an important influence on how satisfied residents can feel about the Council overall.

Participants seemed interested in hearing about a range of Council related services and issues, but these were driven by personal interest or concern for the immediate local area. Some had a particular interest in receiving more information about an activity or service that was relevant to their hobbies or personal interests and about issues or changes to services that directly affected them.

General information is of less interest; participants wanted to hear about crime and ASB issues in their area; young people wanted to hear about improvements to the local skate park; and road users about maintenance work on their route. Thus, it will be important to target communications as participants also report being actively “put-off” by material that is irrelevant to them. Communications material also needs to give readers the opportunity to comment or contribute to the debate and be confident that their views will be heard.

Participants across the different audience groups site a range of preferences for modes of communication – there was certainly no one ‘silver bullet’. For example, older participants seemed more positive about a Council newsletter and information that came through their door. Others preferred to get information online, although this was not necessarily the ‘go to’ mode for all young people, with many struggling to obtain access to the internet (particularly for the ‘young unemployed’ group who felt restricted to the free 30 minute slots available at the library). More information by text, screens in local public service offices, better utilisation of village notice boards and local councillor surgeries were also ideas suggested by the groups.

Linked to the idea of having information that is relevant to them, participants liked the idea of receiving tailored content (for example, through an e-newsletter where they could determine their preferences) that is snappy and focused.

Participants noted that they tend to react to messages when received, rather than actively seeking out information about council issues and services without any prior contact; communications campaigns will therefore need to use modes that actively reach residents.

Participants were also asked about the new ‘enterprising’ strapline for the Council. They were positive about the phrase, but felt that it was a bold statement to be making in the current economic climate. Participants commented that they would not necessarily use the word ‘enterprising’ to describe the place or people of Buckinghamshire.

They were also asked to consider two communications campaigns. Participants found both the ‘Adult abuse speak up’ campaign and the ‘Five ways to wellbeing’ campaign eye-catching and fairly well presented. Yet few participants said they would do anything differently having engaged with the campaign materials. However, the groups provided some useful insight into the sorts of messages that might help to promote more ‘calls to action’.
1. Introduction and methodology
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1.1 Background and objectives

Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct five focus groups with members of the general public to understand their views about a variety of local issues and local public services. BCC wanted to unpick some of the findings from the Buckinghamshire Resident’s Survey – a quantitative postal self-completion survey conducted with c.5,000 residents in late 2011 – to better understand why some residents hold the views they do. The objectives for this latest research were developed through discussions with Strategic Directors and Members at the BCC leadership conference and resulting working action group.

This qualitative project sought to explore the views of key groups of Buckinghamshire residents in more detail, particularly issues relating to roads, crime, employment, community engagement and communication. These were the issues highlighted as particularly important to residents by the survey, and which are key priorities for the Council going forward.2

The specific objectives of the focus group study were as follows:

- To identify the reasons for dissatification with road maintenance and explore how expectations can be managed to match the available spend.
- To explore perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and how these relate to council services; and furthermore to identify how Council communications can help redress the gap between perceptions and reality of crime and ASB (ultimately crime rates in Buckinghamshire are low yet it is seen as a top priority for residents).
- To explore what BCC can do to support residents reach their employment aspirations, with a particular focus on those currently out of work and young people.
- To understand how the Council can better engage and involve young people based on their attitudes, values and motivations towards Council activities.
- To understand how the Council can champion personal responsibility (for example, promoting volunteering in the community) by better understanding people’s attitudes and motivations.
- To help inform the design of the Council’s communications strategy by (where possible) analysing findings across audience groups and identifying preferences for how the Council communicates (i.e. modes) and what it communicates with residents about (i.e. subject matter and tone).

1.2 Methodology

As agreed on commission of the research, the five focus groups took place in four locations across Buckinghamshire (meaning at least one in each district council area): Gerrards Cross, High Wycombe, Great Missenden/Chesham, and Aylesbury.

These locations offered a rough geographic spread across the county and were chosen with the topics of the research in mind. For example, it was known that the south of the county has a lower proportion of people in work; that residents in Great Missenden and Chesham identified themselves in the 2011 Residents’ Survey as being particularly concerned about

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2 A report, including a marked up questionnaire, of the 2011 Residents’ Survey can be searched for via this link: http://bucksconsultation.buckscc.gov.uk/bucksccp/kms/dmart.aspx?strTab=PublicDMartComplete&NoIP=1. Fieldwork took place between 26 September and 12 December 2011 and consisted of analysis of 5,035 postal self-completion questionnaires.
roads; and, that those in High Wycombe were especially concerned about feeling safe and saw tackling crime and ASB as a priority.

Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes and covered no more than three topics to ensure issues were discussed in sufficient depth. Ten participants were recruited face-to-face for each group in anticipation that eight per group would attend. Each participant received £35 as a thank you for their time.

Participants were recruited in-street by trained Ipsos MORI recruiters. The groups were recruited to comprise a broad range demographic attributes, whilst ensuring that participants remained comfortable by discussing their views amongst peers. It was agreed that two groups would be conducted with young people (one of which was with young people out of work); two groups conducted among the general population; and, one group with residents aged 60+. Within these groups, a number of quotas were set to ensure they were broadly representative of residents in Buckinghamshire, as shown in the grid below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Screeners</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
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| 1 - Aylesbury General population | Quota on: Age, gender and Employment status  
Monitor: Satisfaction with council, feeling informed, Ethnicity | Communications  
Roads  
Employment & Skills |
| 2 – High Wycombe 18-29 and out of work | Quota on: Age, gender and Employment status  
Monitor: Satisfaction with council, feeling informed, Ethnicity | Communications  
Crime & ASB  
Employment & Skills |
| 3 - Gerrards Cross General population | Quota on: Age, gender and Employment status  
Monitor: Satisfaction with council, feeling informed, Ethnicity | Roads  
Crime & ASB  
Engaging personal responsibility |
| 4 - Great Missenden / Chesham 60+ | Quota on: Age, gender and a range of social grade  
Monitor: Satisfaction with council, feeling informed, Ethnicity | Communications  
Crime & ASB  
Engaging personal responsibility |
| 5 - Great Missenden / Chesham 18-29 & a mix of work status | Quota on: Age, gender and Employment status  
Monitor: Satisfaction with council, feeling informed, Ethnicity | Roads  
Employment & Skills  
Engaging personal responsibility |

The groups took place between the 18 and 21 June 2012. There were between five and nine attendees per group.

A topic guide was produced for each group in consultation with BCC to ensure all areas of interest were covered in the discussions. These are attached as an appendix.

The groups were moderated by Steven Ginnis and Victoria Harkness of Ipsos MORI, with Lewis Hill and Sarah Jin acting as note takers. A member(s) of the BCC research team was also present at each group, but purely as an observer.

All of the groups were audio-recorded, strictly for use by Ipsos MORI in the reporting of the groups. The groups were also video recorded to enable Council officers and members to see firsthand what residents had to say about life in Buckinghamshire and the Council’s services.
This was done in accordance with data protection policy and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. **Video recordings are available for internal use by the council only.**

### 1.3 Interpretation of qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what residents as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable, and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the **extent** to which something is happening. Qualitative research is intended to shed light on **why** people have particular views and **how** these views relate to demographic characteristics and the experiences of residents concerned.

A focus group enables a cross-section of local residents to participate in an informal and interactive discussion and to allow time for the often complex issues to be addressed in some detail. It also enables researchers to test the strength of people’s opinions. This approach, in other words, facilitates deeper insight into attitudes underlying the ‘top of the mind’ responses to quantitative studies. It is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with **perceptions** rather than **facts**, although to participants these perceptions are facts. Verbatim comments from the focus groups have been included within this report. These should not be interpreted as defining the views of the entire discussion as a whole, but have been selected to provide an insight into a particular body of opinion.

### 1.4 Publication of the results

As BCC has engaged Ipsos MORI to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect the Council's interests by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of the findings. As part of our standard terms and conditions, the publication of the findings of this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

### 1.5 Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI would like to thank Marcus Grupp and Ed Gurney at BCC for their help and input throughout this project, and of course to the 34 Buckinghamshire residents who gave up their time to participate in the discussions.
2. Overall perceptions of Buckinghamshire and the Council
2. Overall perceptions of Buckinghamshire and the Council

This chapter considers participants’ perceptions and overall attitudes towards their local area and Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC), which was discussed across all five focus groups.

2.1 Views of the local area and Buckinghamshire County Council

Participants’ views of their local area and of BCC differed quite dramatically by age and geography.

Views of residents aged 30 and over

Participants aged 30 and above, and especially those aged 60 and above, were unanimously positive about living in Buckinghamshire. Most said that they had lived in the county for most of their lives and had chosen to settle here or start a family. In short, they felt lucky to live in Buckinghamshire.

These participants were particularly positive about the countryside and landscape of the county, alongside more functional attributes such as good rail and road transport links as well as the good quality of schools in the county.

They did have some concerns, but these referred mainly to maintenance services – such as the condition and congestion of roads, drainage, and litter – with the intention of ensuring the up-keep of the local area as a nice place to live. They also had a wider concern about prospects in the county for younger people with regards to job creation and things for them to do.

With regards to BCC, the general consensus among these participants was that it is, broadly speaking, doing a good job. With the exception of some specific individual issues (including experiences with occupational health and potholes not being dealt with), most participants said they felt well represented and were happy with how the Council operates.

Views of younger residents

In marked contrast, younger people (those aged 29 or below) were far less enthusiastic about living in Buckinghamshire, a feeling which appeared to be driven by the lack of activities for their age group and the lack of opportunities for those looking for work or career development.

There was a general sense among this group that there is little for young people to do in Buckinghamshire. Younger people talked about the difficulties of living in a rural area with limited access to shops and leisure facilities; with those out of work struggling to find activities that they could afford.

Younger unemployed participants also felt victimised and hassled, for example, through excessive use of CCTV, being stopped by the police, or being told to remove their hoodies or turn down music in public places when they are trying to stay out of trouble.
When asked about the Council, responses were typified by a distinct lack of interest and engagement with what the Council does. These participants felt that the Council has little to do with them, and that it has little interest in hearing what they have to say.

2.2 Scale of need and engagement with the council

Those taking part in the research were often surprised by the amount of services offered by BCC once these services were presented by the moderators. There was some confusion over the different responsibilities of county, district and parish councils, especially with regards to shared maintenance services.

Participants were broadly positive about the work of BCC. They were keen to know more about its work in those service areas where they were less aware of its role – particularly in helping to improve job creation, tackling crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and protecting vulnerable people.

However, for some participants the Council did not seem that relevant, even though these residents had a number of likely needs. In particular, the young unemployed participants had an ambivalent view towards the Council, characterised by a lack of interest in any engagement with it at all. They were very vocal about the difficulties they faced getting support in finding employment and housing, and paying for transport and activities which they could not really afford. Yet they did not seem to make the link between these needs and the benefits greater engagement with the Council might have. Nor was there any sense in which they felt they should proactively contact the Council to help them with these difficulties.

"To be honest if they [BCC] do make changes, it won't affect none of us in this room. So it doesn't really matter, it's irrelevant. What are they gonna change that's gonna affect us? Nothing.”

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Conversely, participants aged 60+ in the Great Missenden/ Chesham area reported less of a need for direct personal help from the Council, yet they were much more inclined to feel engaged with it. Their concerns related to things like street lighting and maintaining a clean environment. They considered it their personal responsibility to engage with the Council to tackle issues here, for example, reporting local environmental issues.

“The cleaning of the high street and Church St and the surrounding area I think is so low down the line of anybody thinking about it. Every time the High St and Church St are cleaned, it’s normally, and I'm not blowing my own trumpet here, but it's usually because I've been onto the Council several times. These are streets that should be cleaned, apparently, once a week.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group
3. Road maintenance and repairs
3. Road maintenance and repairs

This chapter explores residents’ attitudes towards the maintenance of roads in Buckinghamshire and considers how Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) can better communicate with road users. The topic of roads was covered in depth with three groups:
- Group 1, Aylesbury, general population
- Group 3, Gerrards Cross, general population
- Group 5, Great Missenden/Chesham, aged 18-29

3.1 Context

The condition of Buckinghamshire’s roads was something residents raised in the Buckinghamshire Residents’ Survey 2011. Though it varies by local area, seven in 10 residents across the county overall (70%) are dissatisfied with the management and maintenance of roads in Buckinghamshire. Similarly residents think it is the top priority service for BCC to support or deliver (70% cite it as the most important) and the second least acceptable area in which to reduce funding (64%).

BCC has doubled the road maintenance budget this year from £8 million to £15 million in response to residents’ concerns. However, given that the overall cost of repairing all of the roads in Buckinghamshire is estimated to be £250 million, a key challenge for BCC is communicating with residents to help manage expectations about what the Council can realistically deliver when it comes to road and maintenance services.

Consequently, a key objective of this research was to identify reasons for residents’ dissatisfaction with roads and explore ways in which expectations might be managed. In addition, the focus groups also sought to explore the key motivations for reporting road maintenance problems and how more reporting might be encouraged.

3.2 Understanding dissatisfaction with roads in Buckinghamshire

In line with the findings from the Residents’ Survey, dissatisfaction with roads was a key issue for participants in these groups. Problems with the roads were raised spontaneously by participants at the beginning of all three groups without any prompting. It was clearly a key topic of interest for participants, and one they felt strongly about.

Participants’ dissatisfaction with roads appeared to come predominantly from personal experience and from the experiences of friends and family. Potholes were the standout issue when looking at reasons why people were dissatisfied with the condition of roads in Buckinghamshire. The issue had a number of dimensions.

Firstly, the potholes themselves were perceived as fairly widespread, with many seen as an actual danger to the safety of drivers. Some participants had either put in a claim for damages themselves, or had heard of others doing so as a result of damage when driving over a pothole.

“It's actually dangerous to an extent, because you drive to avoid the potholes, and I find myself on the other side of the road sometimes.”

Male, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group
Secondly, the **quality of repairs** was a consistent theme across all three groups. Participants placed a clear question mark over whether BCC was spending money wisely with regard to the choice of contractors and the materials being used to fix potholes. They felt that BCC might be using cheaper contractors in order to make cost savings, or that contractors were perceived to be using cheap materials that would increase their profit. This resulted in a 'patch-up' approach which meant potholes would reappear (particularly in winter) rather than completing full sections properly which would reduce the frustration caused by further roadworks in the future.

In addition, participants reported materials coming out of recently repaired roads and sticking to their car tyres, which reinforced participants’ perceptions about the poor quality of repair work.

> “They employ contractors, and so the job is only going to be as good as they are... they employ contractors who charge thousands, well millions, of pounds, [and] you never know whether they've been done properly or just a botched job.”
> Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Thirdly, participants suggested that the constant need for repairs had a **knock-on impact in terms of traffic and congestion**. Whilst the focus of the discussion guide was on the condition of the roads rather than traffic and congestion (which were not probed upon), many saw a link between the two, with roads becoming busier as a result of so many road works in the area. This seemed to be a particular issue for Aylesbury participants.

> “Because they're doing pieces [of road], they’re always doing something.”
> Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Overall, there was a clear feeling that the Council did not provide enough information on the subject of road maintenance. In particular, the lack of notice given about road works and when they would happen was seen as an issue. Participants believed that, whilst residents in the immediate vicinity of road works were given information about contractors and expected delays, those from further afield were not, and would often only discover road works whilst on their route.

Participants in Aylesbury and Great Missenden, more generally, were dissatisfied with the level of traffic going into and out of the town.

Participants in the groups also felt they had no idea which roads or potholes were being prioritised and how the Council arrived at these decisions, or even which potholes BCC were aware of.

> “You come upon a sign and you think ‘how did that happen? Oh, it’s for the next ten weeks, oh dear... [it’s] not being able to plan effectively, but that comes back to information, doesn’t it?”
> Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

**Road markings** were also reported spontaneously as issues on roads in Buckinghamshire. Participants in more than one group alluded to the fact that road markings are very difficult to see on some roads, and this had a potential impact on road safety.
It is important to note that the issue of congestion, road works and road markings were raised spontaneously and were not part of the discussion guide designed to explore reasons for dissatisfaction with the condition and maintenance of the roads. However, they appeared to be a factor in determining the fairly negative view participants had of Buckinghamshire’s roads.

It should be mentioned that there were examples of good work cited in the groups, and participants were appreciative of this. However, the inconsistency of such work coupled with a lack of understanding of why some problems were fixed over others added to participants’ frustration at the maintenance problems that remained.

3.3 Reporting of maintenance issues and ways to encourage this

Overwhelmingly, participants only tended to report road maintenance problems if they were personally affected by them. This was either through damage to their car, or if there was a maintenance problem on their road or route to work which they perceived as a danger to them while driving.

“I don’t know [that you’d report a problem] if you were just walking along. You’d have to experience it yourself in your car [to report it]”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Participants admitted that they would not report an issue if they walked past or saw it from afar; instead they would only consider reporting something if they had had to directly combat avoiding it on their driving route. Similarly, participants said they would struggle to report issues outside of when they actually saw or experienced them as it would be difficult to recall the nature and the exact location of the problem.

Therefore, encouraging residents to report road maintenance issues needs to take these issues into account, suggesting that perhaps it should be made easier for residents and road users to report an issue when they see it. The challenge is therefore to facilitate reporting when people come across issues and minimise the risk of them forgetting the location or not getting round to it afterwards.

Those who had previously reported potholes had mixed experiences. Some of those who had gone through the process of reporting an issue or making a claim for damage to their car were satisfied; they were happy with the way in which their query was handled and the action that was taken.
“I’ve reported a pothole, and I find that when you do phone up they’re [the Council] pretty much immediately sorted. They circle them, and then within a week to two weeks they’re covered... I was pleased to see something was done after I made a phone call.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

However, others were less positive. One participant spoke about an instance in which a friend had reported a maintenance issue and made a claim for damage to his bike, but the issue did not get addressed. This made participants question whether it was worth the effort of reporting incidents in the future, and why the Council was willing to pay the cost of compensation, but not the cost of fixing the pothole. Participants stressed that it is important for the Council to address issues when they are reported and/or to keep residents informed of when action will be taken.

“My friend actually came off his bike because of a pothole. It was on a blind corner and he phoned the Council to try and get compensation for his bike. I don’t think they’ve even filled the pothole in yet, and that was last year.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

Participants were generally unaware of the different ways in which you could report a problem to BCC, with most assuming that they would just call BCC directly if they needed to. Speaking directly to someone was seen as a key benefit to reporting an incident by phone; unlike possible alternatives such as email or through the website – ultimately, participants preferred to know for certain that someone at the Council was aware of the issue. The possibility of an iPhone application was raised in the other groups not covering the roads topic directly, and publicising this could be one possible solution. Participants were extremely positive about the prospect of an iPhone application, despite the fact that a form of iPhone service is offered by BCC. Younger participants were similarly positive about an iPhone app, but also seemed unaware of its existence. The key benefit from such an app was seen to be the ease and speed of reporting, so it could well be that this is something BCC wants to promote going forward.

3.4 Perceptions and expectations of road maintenance

Participants’ initial reactions to road maintenance were simply that the condition of the roads was not good enough. Few had considered or were aware of the financing of BCC’s road maintenance service, the challenge and cost to the Council in fixing the roads and therefore whether their expectations were realistic or fair. Some participants did have an appreciation that this was an area the Council might be struggling to fund, and though these participants assumed - due to the scale of the problem – that BCC must be prioritising repairs somehow, few knew how they were going about this.

“I realise they probably don't have enough money, but there are always road works.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group
During the discussions, the moderator informed residents that BCC had to prioritize the potholes they fixed, and that their focus was on fixing large and dangerous potholes. Though they may not have previously considered it, participants were not surprised that there was a process of prioritisation, and broadly accepted the rationale for emphasising the large and dangerous potholes. This is in line with the findings from the Residents’ Survey where 61% reported that they would prefer the Council to focus on fixing fewer potholes but with longer lasting, more expensive resurfacing repairs, compared to 31% who preferred the Council to concentrate on delivering a larger number of less expensive but more short term pothole repairs.

However, they remained concerned about the quality of repairs and being kept informed of which potholes would be fixed and when.

“I suppose there must be a prioritisation, huge problems have to be dealt quicker than a minor one, but I suppose it could be done with a bit more speed.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Participants were then informed of the amount of money BCC is spending on road maintenance. The moderator confirmed that road maintenance was a priority for the Leader of BCC and that the budget had increased from £6m to £15m. Ultimately though, this still presented a shortfall in spending, and participants were told that the overall cost of completing all the repair works in Buckinghamshire was estimated to be £250m.

There was a general expectation amongst participants that the Council should do more to improve the condition of roads in the county, and therefore this increase in spending was welcomed. Participants appreciated that BCC had taken on the views of residents from the survey and taken action. However, there was some scepticism in the Aylesbury group about where this additional money for repair works had come from, and if it had been at the expense of other important services.

“Where has the extra money come from? Obviously they’re holding council tax, but where does [the money] come from?”

Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Participants were also concerned that BCC was not getting value for money and therefore mitigating the impact of doubling the budget. The perception of poor value for money was driven by a concern that BCC was not using the right materials for long-term solutions and a sense that the coordination of contractors could be improved so that roads were not dug up again where work had recently taken place.

“I hear that they fill the potholes but they don't fill them properly and that's the problem.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Though they were pleased with the renewed focus from BCC, participants were less enthusiastic about the increase in funds within the context of the wider £250m needed to fix everything. Having realised the scale of the problem, participants were concerned that, despite the new emphasis on road maintenance by BCC, they would still have to suffer potholes, repairs and road works for some years to come.
“It’s definitely more positive, but the fact that it sounds like it’s going to stay the same despite double budget. It’s a priority but we’re still having the situation of ‘part of road getting fixed and part not’.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Furthermore, the group of young people in Great Missenden showed a strong scepticism about the amount of money BCC suggests is needed to cover the cost of repairing all of the county’s roads. They were sceptical that the Council should need to spend so much money and were concerned the Council might be getting ‘ripped off’ by contractors.

“I think they get ripped off a lot. Realistically it won’t cost that much [£250 million] to fix.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

“In Prestwood there’s a particularly bad road. It still hasn’t been done, yet it’s been bad for two years. If they’re putting all the money in, why aren’t the really bad roads being prioritised?”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

3.5 Managing perceptions and expectations

Satisfaction with the road maintenance service

As noted above, the impact of the messages on prioritisation and budget were limited because participants were concerned about current value for money and the sheer scale of the problem. BCC will therefore need to be careful about how it sends out this message - simply informing residents about the increase in spending and scale of the problem may not necessarily have the desired effect.

The solution may lie in distinguishing between the problem itself and the way the council is dealing with it. It is likely that participants can still expect to be affected by potholes and other road maintenance issues, given the Council is not able to fix everything. However, by better communicating with residents about which potholes will be fixed, where road works are likely to take effect, and the rationale for prioritising maintenance the way it does may help to ease negative perceptions.

“If a letter came through saying ‘we know your road is terrible but we’re trying to get it sorted’, I’d be like ‘fair enough’.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

Participants across the groups said they want information in advance about what is happening with the roads both in an immediate sense (for example, which particular roads are going to be affected and when) and in a wider sense in terms of what can be expected of the roads in the coming winter.
Other participants requested more information to clarify which potholes the Council was already aware of (and, thus know which had yet to be reported). Further clarification on when the Council is planning to fix specific problems would also go some way to reassure residents that the problem has been spotted and that action will be taken. However, the positive impact of providing the clarification may be lost if residents perceive the timeframe for fixing the problem to be too long.

“When you have a circle around a pothole, I’ve always wondered, do they know about it and when are they doing to do something about it? It’d be great to put up a sign saying “this will be fixed in June 2020”.”

Male, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

There is also an issue with regards to the handling of complaints. Participants said they wanted to know that the problem roads which they were complaining about were being addressed by the Council. This potentially affects the mode of contact (to be discussed shortly), with participants in more than one group saying they would be more inclined to report complaints by telephone to ensure that their concerns can be relayed directly. Ultimately, they want to know that any issues they report are being understood and dealt with.

“I think most people will always want to speak to someone. I always think that someone is going to look at [your email] and say ‘no I’m going to do that tomorrow’, or ‘no, we didn’t get your email’. You want to talk to someone to know that something is going to be done.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

There was also a concern in one group that there is more focus on complaint handling than on addressing the complaint itself. This seemed to be a source of frustration for some participants, particularly because they are only satisfied when the section of road in question has actually been repaired.

“It’s like ‘has your query been dealt with to your satisfaction?’ They’ve got all these tick-box things to fill in about how they handled your query, and actually they don’t resolve it… they seem to be more concerned with how they handled your query, but not what the actual result is.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Communicating on roads

Clearly, then, information could make a difference to perceptions and expectations, and one of the common themes from the groups was road signs. There was a perception that signs are not kept up-to-date and often appear just as road works are about to commence rather than in advance.

Crucially, though, it is the cumulative effect of road signs which have the biggest impact; participants admit to taking little notice of signs unless they have passed them on multiple
occasions. Ensuring signs appear in advance for people to be aware of upcoming repair works would be well received based on feedback from the discussion groups. Given the overwhelming use of roads, participants felt that wider messages about BCC’s approach should be communicated in newspapers and online. This was perceived to be the best method of getting the most exposure.

3.6 What does this mean for BCC?

The focus groups identified a number of challenges and considerations for BCC in relation to managing residents’ perceptions and expectations of road maintenance:

- **It is more complicated than simply saying you are spending more money:** Participants welcomed the increased spending on road repairs, but were more concerned with ensuring that BCC managed to get value for money from it. Participants also welcomed honest information about the size of the task ahead – the likelihood is that they will still have to tolerate potholes for some time to come, but they may at least feel more positive towards the Council about the way in which it is trying to deal with the issue.

- **Communicating on priorities:** Participants accepted the need to prioritise repairs, and would welcome more clarity and information on how priorities are decided as well as more obvious notification of when particular problems will be fixed.

- **Increasing awareness of tools to report problems:** Few participants were aware of the different options available for reporting a problem. Tools for reporting will need to help residents with recall of the location (suggesting instant reporting tools such as an iPhone app might become better utilised once residents know about them) and offer reassurance that their complaint has been taken on board.
4. Crime and anti-social behaviour
4. Crime and anti-social behaviour

This chapter explores residents’ perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and considers whether Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) communications can help redress the gap between perceptions and actual levels of crime and ASB in Buckinghamshire, which in reality are relatively low. Findings in the section are based on discussions with residents from:

- Group 2, High Wycombe, aged 18-29, unemployed
- Group 3, Gerrards Cross, general public
- Group 4, Great Missenden/Chesham, aged 60+

4.1 Context

Though there are differences within the county, Buckinghamshire overall remains one of the safest parts of the country. Crime rates have fallen in recent years, with 55 reported crimes per 1,000 people in 2011 compared to 62 in 2010. This compares favourably to the national average of 74, and to other nearby neighbours such as Thames Valley (70) and Northamptonshire (74).°

However, despite the relatively low levels of crime in the area, findings from the 2011 Residents’ Survey suggest that those living in Buckinghamshire are still concerned about crime and ASB. Though most (92%) residents say they feel safe when outside in their local area during the day, only two-thirds feel safe when alone outside at night (63%). Tackling crime and ASB is also seen by residents to be a top priority, with 67% citing it as the most important thing for BCC to help support or deliver for the local community.° Furthermore, residents feel crime and ASB is the least acceptable area in which to reduce public spending, with three-quarters of residents saying that money should be found from elsewhere in the budget to maintain the service (75%).°

As noted in Ipsos MORI’s national polling, this is not unique to Buckinghamshire; concern about crime and ASB has remained a key concern across Britain in recent years.

As outlined in the following table, the perceived importance of crime and ASB as a priority for delivery remains broadly consistent across local areas within the county, regardless of the number of reported crimes or residents’ sense of safety. The focus groups were therefore designed to: i) dig deeper into residents’ concerns about crime and ASB and identify what they base their perceptions on; ii) explore why crime and ASB is seen as a priority; and iii) consider what information may help reassure residents about the way crime and ASB is being tackled.

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4 Creating job opportunities and economic growth was a second most cited (57%), and the condition of roads the third (49%).
5 This compares to 64% citing management and maintenance of roads as an area in which not to reduce funding, and 56% citing primary, secondary and special schools.

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

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4.2 Perceptions of crime and ASB in Buckinghamshire

Concern about crime and ASB

Participants’ are concerned about different types of crime and ASB depending on geography and age. Those living in Gerrards Cross were particularly concerned about burglary and theft, and felt that people come in from outside the local area to commit crime. They were broadly happy with the service provided from the police and its partners, with several pointing to preventative tips they had been given by the police, or to local door knocking by officers to make them aware of specific spates of crime. However, although none had been a victim of crime themselves, their sense of safety was undermined by knowledge of others who had been, which caused concern that they may be next - they felt targeted as residents of a relatively wealthy area.

Older residents from Great Missenden felt that crime was less of an issue in their local area, but were still concerned about ASB. Participants were particularly worried about a range of behaviours such as ‘boy racing’, spitting, burnt out cars, litter dropping, graffiti and youths drinking in public. ASB was not a new concern, and participants accepted that it was likely to continue happening in the future.

Even though they may not report it to the police, such ASB still troubled several participants and made them feel intimidated and unsafe when out and about. They dare not say anything or confront those involved for fear that they may be the target of further ASB.

“I remember a boy driving at the top of Church Street, I was turning into the road, he wound down his window and he spat at my car and it was running down the window. His girlfriend was laughing her head off about that. That sort of thing that fills you with horror – not any point reporting it, but it’s typical of some of the youths coming into this village.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Concern about ASB was not unique to older participants. Younger participants also complained of underage drinking and smoking, which often left mess in public places and facilities such as parks. In contrast other younger participants – especially those who were...
unemployed - complained of having little to do and being hassled when they were simply trying to stay out of trouble (as noted above section 2).

Other residents were concerned about being harmed. This was particularly the case for young people in High Wycombe who felt safe in their immediate neighbourhoods – where they knew everyone – but, felt unsafe when out in other nearby parts of the town. They were concerned about the number of young people joining gangs and the relationship between rival groups.

“I don’t feel safe on the street; people ask me for a cigarette and that on the street, I don’t feel safe! If I walk around with a knife I’ll get pulled over and I’ll be done for that.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

For this younger group, their sense of vulnerability was compounded by a lack of faith that the police will protect them. These participants felt let down because they get stopped and ‘hassled’ in the street with very little reason for suspicion, yet when they do really need support from the police the perception is that they “don’t want to know” or take too long to respond to an incident.

“You ring the police, but they do a runner any time there’s trouble... it took them an hour for them to get there, when the police station's just 5 minutes down the road.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Similarly, younger unemployed participants felt that Council services were too focused on helping those who commit crimes, whilst those who behave well are left to “go it alone”. For some, their sense of safety was also influenced by their sense of vulnerability in certain situations. Such participants felt less safe when out and about in areas where there was a perceived lack of street lighting or recent visible police presence.

Perceptions of crime and ASB

Participants were generally unaware of any statistics relating to crime in their local area; instead, perceptions of crime and ASB were largely based on their personal experience (either as victims, or as bystanders) or hearsay amongst friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues. Some participants had heard or read of incidents in the media, but they generally felt that items reported in the news presented only part of the picture. This was particularly the case for young people in High Wycombe, whose sense of feeling unsafe was driven by details passed round in friendship circles, which were much more worrying than anything they had read in local newspapers.

“Well my neighbours have been robbed three times; it makes you wonder - are people watching you?”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group
“You only hear about half the crimes in papers. If you read just the paper and you believe just the paper, you’d believe there’s nothing going on that’s that bad.”

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Equally, knowledge of incidents that did not make it into the news or of crimes that were not reported to the police by the victim prompted a general assumption that the state of crime and ASB is often worse than presented publically. For some participants, this assumption led to mistrust in crime data presented to the group (which showed that the crime rates had fallen across Buckinghamshire).

“I work in Wycombe and I cannot believe crime has gone down. My colleagues tell me about things; there seems to be more and more reported on a monthly basis, I just don’t believe it.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Participants had not proactively sought out information about crime from sources of information such as the BCC website or I:on Bucks – which few knew was available.  

Prioritising crime and ASB

Findings from the focus groups echoed those from the Residents’ Survey, with the desire to prioritise tackling crime and ASB apparent across all areas of Buckinghamshire, regardless of crime statistics or residents’ sense of safety.

For some participants, the need to prioritise crime and ASB was driven by perceived poor performance of local public services. This was particularly the case for young people in High Wycombe who, as noted above, felt vulnerable and not very well protected by the police. However, most participants saw safety as a basic right and felt that feeling safe in a local area was a fundamental part of enjoying somewhere as a place to live. Efforts to tackle crime and ASB would therefore always be important, even if residents felt generally safe and it meant reducing funds from other areas.

“If you don’t feel safe in your area you’re not going to hang around and stay there... People want safety first of all, they don’t come here for the good libraries and education system: it’s all about safety. I wouldn’t put it further down the list at all.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Participants were also concerned that reducing resources for tackling crime and ASB could result in more crime; given the importance of crime and safety as an attribute of making somewhere a nice place to live, this was perceived to be a risk not worth taking. Even in areas where residents felt generally safe, resources for tackling crime and ASB were believed to be an important deterrent. Residents from low crime areas appreciated that there may be more of a demand for crime and ASB resources to be deployed elsewhere in the

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6 I:on Bucks is an online resource where viewers are able to see crime statistics for their local area.
county, but felt that efforts to maintain a low level of crime in their local area were also important.

“I think if you let it [resource for tackling crime and ASB] slip, crime only increases. If people know there’s a policeman walking down the street then they’ll be good…it does make you feel safer, police presence.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

The motivations behind prioritising crime and ASB were therefore dependent upon the local area, where the need to prevent ASB in a low crime area was equally important to local residents as was dealing with gangs for those living in a high crime area. For most participants (except the young unemployed), it was not driven by feeling unsafe or unhappy with the service provided by BCC and its partners.

It is also important to consider which geographical areas residents are thinking about when discussing safety, crime and ASB. Though participants were able to reference their immediate neighbourhood, they were also able to comment on the need to tackle crime and ASB in other nearby areas. For example, residents in Great Missenden and Gerrards Cross were concerned about circumstances in High Wycombe, Slough and Uxbridge. The emphasis residents place on BCC tackling crime and ASB may therefore be based on how safe they feel and what challenges they are aware of outside their immediate neighbourhood, regardless of whether or not the nearby areas actually fall within the county and the jurisdiction of BCC.

“Town areas like Uxbridge and Slough, it’s just a jungle isn’t it; you do get it [lots of crime] in high populated areas.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Finally, it will be important to consider which specific services residents refer to when they talk about the need for the Council to prioritise tackling crime and ASB. As noted below, participants had a mixed level of awareness of the specific services offered by BCC in relation to tackling crime and ASB; participants mostly referred to the police when discussing their concerns with crime, sense of safety or information needs.

4.3 Reassurance about the way crime and ASB is being dealt with

Participants identified several different types of information they would like to receive in relation to crime and ASB. However it is useful to clarify whether such information would help redress the perception gap of crime and safety, or simply help to reassure residents about the way crime and ASB is being tackled.

Attitudes to crime statistics

As part of the focus groups, participants were shown statistics for the number of reported crimes per 1,000 population for several areas across Buckinghamshire, the county overall, nearby county neighbours and England\(^7\). The figures demonstrated that crime had fallen across the county between 2010 and 2011, and that Buckinghamshire had a lower level of crime than nearby county neighbours and the England average overall. Though participants

\(^7\) Full details of the stimulus materials shown during the focus groups can be found in the appendix.
found the data interesting, it had a minimal impact on their sense of safety, nor did it reduce their desire for the Council to prioritise the tackling of crime and ASB.

Some participants questioned whether the figures presented a true picture of crime and ASB in Buckinghamshire, pointing that they only account for reported crimes. Others were more skeptical and did not trust the figures, which they felt could be easily massaged by changing definitions of what is included as a crime.

“You see I just do not believe it. I don’t believe that crime has gone down. I think they [the statistics] are massaged, I just don’t believe it I just don’t care.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Participants welcomed confirmation (it was not a surprise) that Buckinghamshire was ‘safer’ than other counties or the national average, but the crime rate figures did little to alleviate concerns about intimidating ASB and the chance of becoming a victim of crime. This was because participants acknowledged that some ASB may not get reported, and because fear of crime was based on an emotional response to things they had experienced, witnessed or heard through hearsay, rather than a rational response to statistics or formal communication. Similarly, the crime rate data did not alter participants’ views that crime and ASB should remain a priority; regardless of performance, many participants believe that Buckinghamshire would lose its status as a safe place to live if resources were not upheld.

Knowing outcomes and being aware of current risks

The focus groups suggest that there are two key ways the Council could reassure residents about crime and ASB. These are related to reporting successful outcomes and detailing the preventative work that is taking place.

Participants across all three groups suggested that they would be reassured by information that “named and shamed” those who had committed a crime. However, rather than just acting as a deterrent, participants were interested to find out that positive action had been taken and that a successful outcome had been achieved. An important part of any feedback on such outcomes would be to emphasise the role of BCC and its partners in closing the case. Such information may help offer reassurance that BCC and its partners are focusing on the right priorities.

“Name and shame would be a good idea... put them in the paper, ‘Fred blogs did whatever, he’s now been tried and doing two months. In the last four months we’ve intervened in XYZ cases’.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

“We need to know what the outcomes are each time, a lot of the times they [the Police] don’t do nothing.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Participants also suggested that information about outcomes would also help to keep them abreast of what types of crimes are happening in their local area and, therefore, what they need to be aware of. To this regard, any tips and hints on preventative actions residents could take were particularly welcome. Participants cited examples of when they had felt
more empowered due to information they had been given by the police; this ranged from tips on how to prevent burglary given out at village fetes, through to emails about increases in particular crimes and follow-up door knocking in local areas where a specific incident had occurred. Having received the “heads-up”, residents felt more confident that the police were on top of tackling crime and ASB and more empowered to prevent something from happening to them.

“I’ve had the police round and they’ve offered me some advice. They give you stickers to put on windows and the only reason I found that out was because I went to a village fete and the police had a stand there.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

However, participants noted that too much information about locally committed crimes may have an adverse affect on perceived safety. It will, therefore, be important to maintain a balance so that residents do not feel overwhelmed or unnecessarily alarmed by the amount of criminal activity in their local area. Participants noted that they are only interested in information about crimes that are relevant to them: either to their age group, life stage, or local area.

“You can go to town with that sort of stuff can’t you, with all sorts of stuff which isn’t even relevant to you…. You don’t want to be bogged down with information. I don’t care about this car registration identification stuff.”

Male, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Focusing on the right priorities

A further way to offer reassurance about the way the Council and its partners are tackling crime and ASB may be to communicate priorities clearly, including details on how and why these are decided.

This was most relevant to those groups who were unhappy with the performance of BCC and its partners in tackling crime and ASB. As noted above, young unemployed people from High Wycombe questioned whether BCC and the police had the right priorities; in particular, they were concerned about the number of times they were stopped in the street or watched through CCTV, compared to a sense that the police are too slow to respond in instances of real danger. Such residents may therefore benefit from understanding how decisions are made about responding to emergency situations and the benefits of certain policies (such as CCTV and street searches).

“I’d like to see the rating of blacks and Asians getting stopped over whites… I get stopped, constantly, even if I’m with my boy.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Participants had mixed awareness of the different services offered by BCC to tackle crime and ASB, particularly with regards to services which were more immediately hands-on such as protecting vulnerable children.
Some noted that the Council may not be getting credit for the work because they only tend to hear of things when they go wrong. This suggests there may be an opportunity for BCC to promote the (more preventative) work they are doing, and the value it has in helping to keep levels of crime and ASB down.

Some younger unemployed participants were concerned that BCC services are too focused on those who commit crimes. They felt their assumptions were confirmed when reviewing the list of services that BCC deliver to help tackle crime and ASB. They were discouraged by what they perceived to be a lack of opportunities for those who wanted to make an honest living compared to those who commit crimes being given help in training or housing. Aside from personal frustration, they felt it sent out the wrong message.

“The council only helps the people that do wrong... crack heads, etc.”

*Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group*

“All the young kids, youths, they just come out of school and go straight into making money on the roads [in gangs].”

*Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group*

**Ways of communicating about crime and ASB**

Participants felt that *I:on Bucks* was a nice tool for those who wanted to look at information in detail, but ultimately few were proactive in seeking out information relating to crime and ASB in their local area. Instead, they preferred information that was sent to them. Young people in particular were keen to ensure that the information should contain less detail and get straight to the point.

“I want to know what they’re doing that’s trying to cut crime; I don’t see much being done. Text me! Or adverts on telly, big posters somewhere, but something that gets straight to the point without little bits of writing. Something that tells you, this this and this!”

*Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group*

As noted in section 8, participants liked the idea of receiving email alerts, particularly in relation to crime and ASB. These could, for example, be used to warn residents of what crimes were happening in their local area or to let them know about key outcomes.

“When I was in London, locals gave email addresses and were contacted by police if someone was knocking on doors, these criminals had just gone in and removed a fireplace. We all got alerted as to what was happening.”

*Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group*

**4.4 What does this mean for BCC?**

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8 One of the prompts used in the focus groups was a list of services provided by BCC to tackle crime and ASB – a full copy of this can be found in the appendix.
Findings from the focus groups highlighted several considerations for BCC in relation to perceptions of crime and ASB:

- **Crime and ASB will always be a priority**: With the notable exception of young unemployed people, participants did not necessarily think that there was a massive need for improvement in the way BCC tackled crime and ASB; but it remained a priority because feeling safe is an important part of enjoying somewhere as a place to live – participants simply did not want BCC to let crime and ASB slip. It is not as simple as focusing on the crime statistics, given many concerns are driven by low level ASB that does not get reported.

- **Measuring satisfaction with how crime and ASB is being tackled**: Given that crime and ASB will remain a priority, a better measure of residents' satisfaction may be to ask whether residents feel BCC and its partners are doing a good job at tackling crime and ASB and how well informed they feel about what is being done to tackle problems.

- **It is not just about the local area**: The importance of tackling crime and ASB was a reflection of participants' perceptions of both their immediate neighbourhood and of other nearby places including those outside the county. It is more complex than simply looking at individual areas given participants' seem to consider a number of factors and geographical locations when making their assessments about crime and ASB.

- **Communication on outcomes is important**: Participants welcomed more information on outcomes because they show the police and Council are doing something. Raising residents' awareness of how favorable Buckinghamshire's crime rate is may be unlikely to alter perceptions of safety or the importance of tackling crime and ASB, and there may be a risk that it serves to unnecessarily alert residents to crime issues. That said, it may help in enabling residents to assess how well they think BCC and its partners are doing in preventing crime and ASB.

- **Information needs to be targeted and relevant**: Participants noted that being overwhelmed by information may have an adverse affect on their sense of safety and instead requested information that is relevant to their local area and targeted to their concerns. BCC may want to consider several ways of tailoring content, including on email, text and direct mail, but the general sense is that residents will not proactively set out to find this information themselves.
5. Employment and skills
5. Employment and skills

This chapter reviews the barriers to finding work and considers what Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) can do to help residents achieve their employment aspirations. Findings for this chapter are based on discussions with residents in:

- Group 1, Aylesbury, general population
- Group 2, High Wycombe, aged 18-29, unemployed
- Group 5, Great Missenden/Chesham, aged 18-29

5.1 Context

As is the case elsewhere in the UK, the recession has made it more difficult to find employment in Buckinghamshire. Since January 2008, the percentage of residents on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) has risen from 0.9% to 2% in October 2011, with the number of JSA claimants per Job Centre vacancy stable at 3.0; 50% higher than in 2008.9

Findings from the 2011 Residents' Survey suggest that there is an appetite for BCC to help residents with finding work: 13% would like support or advice finding a job; 14% would like support or advice about accessing the right skills to help them stay in employment; and, 14% would like support or advice about flexible working arrangements. Requests for help in finding work are higher amongst those out of work (23%) and those aged 18-29 (26%). In particular, residents report that additional support or training in gaining professional qualifications and computers skills would help them to get the job they would like or to progress their career.

Furthermore, the Residents’ Survey suggests that creating job opportunities and economic growth is seen as the second most important priority for BCC to help support or delivery for the community (57%).

With a focus on school leavers and those who are currently out of work, the focus groups sought to identify the key barriers to finding work or desirable employment and explore what services or kinds of help would be useful to help residents overcome the identified barriers.

5.2 Barriers to finding work

Participants felt that one of the key barriers to finding work was the availability of jobs the current market. Those out of work or looking to start work believed that competition for jobs had increased in recent years and that as a result it has become more difficult for those with fewer qualifications or less experience to find work. Participants felt that employers were now able to raise the bar of entry requirements purely due to the number of applicants they have, not because others will necessarily be unable to do the job.

“There’s opportunities, but people like us don’t get employed. Now for Sainsbury’s they’ve got hundreds of graduates; they’re never gonna choose us.”

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

9 http://www.bucksc.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000124/M00004554/AI00019669/$BucksProfileDataApp1.docA.ps.pdf

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

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“No-one wants teenager with no experience still in college.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

**Motivation** in looking for work therefore suffered because participants perceived it to be highly unlikely that employers would consider them for a post. They felt trapped as employers are increasingly asking for applicants to have several years experience, but there are very few opportunities available to gain the relevant experience needed. Those who had managed to find employment felt lucky, and many had relied on informal help through family and friend networks to secure a job.

“This want five years’ experience, but if you’re already 26 how are you gonna go get the experience? They say we don’t wanna train you, we want someone that can already do the job.”

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Moreover, participants talked of being frustrated at the difficulty of completing long term training. Having been able to start a course, they found it difficult to secure support from employers or to cover the funds of a licence that would secure work at the end of the training.

"I do the same course. You do a whole year, and in the second year you have to work with someone, and he has to take pictures [of your work]... so you're wasting your time if you can't get no-one and you've wasted the year. Then in the third year you have to pay £5,000, and you work in the second year he pays you nothing, basically. So you get done over every angle basically"

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

The advertisement of job vacancies was also seen to be a barrier. Adverts presented in the newspaper were perceived to be unengaging and often very narrow in the type of work they were offering. Younger participants also reported that they struggled to know where to look for job vacancies and therefore often resorted to speculatively handing out CVs in the hope that something would become available.

Having managed to apply for positions, some noted how de-motivated they felt when they did **not hear back from prospective employers**. Those looking for work reported a particularly low rate of response from employers when either handing out CVs or officially applying for a position, which had a serious affect on their motivation to continue looking for work.

Participants understood that it may be time consuming for employers due to the number of applicants for any one vacancy, but felt that even a standard response to say “thank you, but on this occasion you have been unsuccessful” would be relatively easy to administer and would go a long way to encourage those looking for work to carry on – at least they then know their efforts are being considered.
“Motivation is a big thing. CVs – you put loads out and don’t get anything back, your motivation just drops. You think ‘why am I even bothering?’ – 100 CVs and two responses. Too many applicants and no responses.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Participants who had been unemployed for a while also cited a lack of financial assistance as a barrier to finding employment. They welcomed help with transport and childcare, but noted that financial assistance stops as soon as you have found over 16 hours of work and therefore does not support you in making the transition to permanent employment. Some also felt they were denied access to certain funds because they had been stereotyped as someone who may abuse the help received.

For the young unemployed people in High Wycombe, a further barrier to employment was a perceived lack of willingness of employers to consider those with a criminal record. They cited several instances where people they knew had been unable to find work because of a small mistake they had made in a past, with little opportunity available to prove that their record was now irrelevant and that they could be trusted.

“People who’ve done silly little petty things whilst at school, but now they can’t get jobs because you have these little things on your criminal record. They’re a different person now but that’s holding them back.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Some of those who had been unemployed for a number of years reported that after a while of trying, they started to feel that looking for work was simply not worthwhile financially. They felt that the relatively low wages they were expected to earn initially were not much better than the money they received when claiming JobSeekers Allowance.

“Sometimes you work and you get £500 a month, you do **** all at the job centre and you get £200.”

Male, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Finally, participants felt that a further barrier to finding work was the performance of the organisations set up to help people find employment. This is discussed below.

5.3 Helping residents find employment

Experience of services

Participants felt that the service they received from organisations set up to help them find work could be improved.

In relation to careers advice, school leavers felt that the service they received through school or Connexions was unhelpful and lacked expert knowledge. Others who had recently sought help by visiting a careers fare were surprised by the lack of breadth of options presented at the fare, and disappointed that there was no stall for independent advice about careers in general.
Those who had used services such as the JobCentre, Connexions or A4E were also dissatisfied with the help they received. Some had been left feeling de-motivated having dealt with **staff that appeared uninterested in their personal situation** and more interested in completing the paperwork or winning a contract. Participants’ also felt that these services were targeted at very general jobs and only to a certain level of skills or qualifications; those who had a specialist skills set found them less helpful.

Users also reported that the **information these organisations have is out of date**, including their job database and the availability of courses for training and development (which suppliers provided). This meant that they had wasted time unnecessarily either applying for positions that had already been taken or visiting training providers only to be turned away. There was little awareness of where else to go for help and support beyond these mainstream services.

Moreover, participants were concerned that the help offered by Connexions stops at a certain age and felt there was a gap between the support received through Connexions and that received at the JobCentre.

> “I think the JobCentre could do far more. There are a lot of people there who are time servers and aren’t interested in you as an individual. Also if you’re at a certain level of employment then that’s difficult.”  
> Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

> “I’ve been [to the JobCentre] enough times, I think they’re useless. Lists are all out of date, you phone up and 300 people have gone for that job.”  
> Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

**Improvement to services**

As a result of their experiences, participants offered several ways in which services for those looking for work could be improved or developed.

Some participants suggested that they would find it helpful to have a **forum where others looking for work could share their experiences**. This would help build motivation and potentially share best practice, ideas and solutions for those struggling to navigate the job market. Similarly, recent or soon to be school and college leavers suggested a Council website/forum or ‘one-stop-shop’ with tips and links for young people.

Participants were also keen to improve the way in which **vacancies were advertised**, for example, through more engaging adverts or a sign-up service which would send job seekers alerts about positions for their specified industry or area of interest. Furthermore, it was suggested that more could be done to give advice about where to look for work in specific/specialised sectors.

Given the emphasis on the need for experience when applying for jobs, participants felt that more could be done to **build work experience links** for those about to enter the job market. Some suggested that more could be arranged through schools, where work experience that was relevant to the subject was organised as part of the course.
“if you're really desperate, you'll do a week placement... I had that experience. They offered me an NVQ, just took it, now I'm on the road to success if I pass my level 3. Got qualifications...”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

5.4 The role of BCC in helping residents to find work

Findings from the focus groups suggest several ways in which BCC might be able to help those looking for work, these include:

- **Encouraging enterprise and opportunities for work**: Participants were keen to know what BCC was doing to encourage business into the area - for example, by offering low rental rates for empty office space – and to encourage businesses to offer apprenticeships or internship. This would help those with little experience and would ideally have the possibility of contracted employment at the end of the placement.

- **BCC as a convener**: In addition, BCC could consider taking a convening role upon itself to help key stakeholders work better together. This could include encouraging businesses to provide better feedback to applicants, a more connected approach to careers advice and work experience and better and more timely information and communications around job vacancies.

- **Help with the transition into work**: Some participants found the transition from unemployment to work particularly beneficial and felt more could be done to promote awareness of the benefits of returning to employment and make more funds available to cover the cost of returning to work, such as subsidised childcare transport.
6. Volunteering
6. Volunteering

This chapter considers residents’ views on volunteering, exploring present attitudes to volunteering among older residents in the county, barriers and incentives to volunteering and ways in which the Council might encourage more people to volunteer in the future. The topic was covered mainly among participants in Group 4 - people aged 60 or over in Great Missenden/Chesham, with a short discussion in Group 3 (Gerrards Cross, general population).

It should be noted therefore that the views represented in this chapter only represent a small number of the population of Buckinghamshire, and that they are focused on older people, which the Residents’ Survey demonstrates is already the group more likely to say they volunteer. However, with Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) keen to champion personal responsibility, a key objective of the research was to explore attitudes towards volunteering and understand motivations for doing so.

6.1 Context

National data suggest that the proportion of people who are volunteering is falling; the most recent Citizenship Survey data shows that less than one in three (29%) volunteered regularly at least once a month in 2009/10 compared to 37% in 2003. Furthermore, as is the case in other areas, last year’s Residents’ Survey in Buckinghamshire found that the types of things that people are likely to want to do in the future are more short-term, non-committal tasks like doing a quick favour or chore for an elderly neighbour or keeping in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about.10

Residents in Buckinghamshire say that they would be encouraged to volunteer more if hours were flexible and if it did not involve a big time commitment. However, not everyone is as likely to get involved in volunteering, with data suggesting that it is those who are more actively involved already who are more likely to volunteer in the future.11

Consequently, the challenge for BCC is both to champion personal responsibility and encourage more volunteering in light of this information. The focus group set out with this in mind, and sought to understand attitudes towards volunteering in more detail, as well as explore some of the barriers and motivations to volunteering.

In order to focus participants’ minds on what was meant by volunteering, they were provided with a broad definition of volunteering12, and asked initially if volunteering was something they were interested in, would like to know more about, or something they already do.13

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10 60% of residents in Buckinghamshire would do a quick favour or chore for an elderly neighbour and 46% would keep in touch with somebody who has difficulty getting out and about; compared to 14% who would help run or manage a youth group or 16% who would help to run a local library.

11 45% say they would be encouraged to volunteer if the hours were flexible; 45% also if it did not involve a big time commitment.

12 Participants were given the following definition of volunteering: “the different ways in which people could get more involved in their local community by helping others. These activities are unpaid and can include helping a friend, neighbour or someone else, or a family member who does not live with you, but exclude helping a member of your household.”

13 Participants were asked to identify themselves with one of the following four statements: 1) Volunteering isn’t for me, I’m not interested; 2) I am unsure about volunteering, I don’t know much about it or whether it is something I’d be interested in; 3) I know I would like to volunteer, but I can’t find the time/don’t know how to get involved; 4) I already volunteer.
6.2 What motivates people to volunteer?

Most of the participants in the 60+ Great Missenden/Chesham group already volunteered and were quite active in their local community. Types of volunteering undertaken by participants ranged from helping neighbours and helping to keep the local area clean, to assisting people with travel, helping with coffee mornings and doing work for the church.

However, having been given a broad definition of volunteering at the start of the discussion, participants were quick to question whether everything they did should be classed as ‘volunteering’. Participants had a very positive attitude towards helping other residents with one-off tasks. This was not seen as something participants ‘elected’ or ‘volunteered’ to do though; rather it was simply seen as something which is part of being a good neighbour and taking pride in one’s local area. Informal volunteering such as helping a neighbour or friend that does not live with you was perceived to be something that comes without thinking, rather than a proactive decision to ‘volunteer’.

“I have helped my neighbours, but I don’t think I volunteer to do it, I just get on with it… I like to think I’m a good neighbour and look after friends around me.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Participants pointed to several obvious motivations for taking part in more formal types of volunteering. Firstly, some suggested that the ‘thank you’ they receive from people they are helping or the organisations they are supporting is a strong motivation.

“The ‘thank you’ and the support of people who are helped and who are organising it. That makes you feel good and makes you more inclined to do it again.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Participants agreed that they had been able to identify a need in a particular area that they were able to fulfil which encouraged them to volunteer and, in a sense, to take ownership of the issue, particularly if no-one else wanted to do it.

“You recognise a need. Someone asks you perhaps and you’d like to help in that area.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Additionally, having a set of skills which can help seems to encourage people to put themselves forward. This seemed particularly relevant amongst this older group, many of whom had recently retired. They perceived that the skills they had developed in their career could be used to help someone or some cause through volunteering.

“A feeling you’ve something to offer as well, that’s an important thing. If you’ve got a particular skill… and you feel that the situation would be poorer without that thing that you’ve got to offer, well I’ll just dive in there and do it.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group
6.3 Encouraging volunteering

In line with the findings from the Residents’ Survey, one of the key barriers to volunteering was **time**. There was consensus amongst working participants in the Gerrards Cross group that they did not have enough time to volunteer, particularly when in full-time work. They also expressed a desire to be paid for their time rather than help others without earning anything.

Despite the fact that participants in the 60+ Great Missenden/Chesham group were predominantly retired and had more time available to volunteer, one of the main barriers to formal volunteering was still perceived to be the time commitment needed; or more specifically the requirement to make a **regular time commitment**. These participants felt that making a regular time commitment meant an absence of flexibility and were worried that this would mean they were committed to a fixed routine, and that it would be difficult to go back on this once they had agreed to help.

> “Well I don’t think regular can be flexible... if you’re going to volunteer to do something, you’re not going to say at 6pm ‘I’m off, I’m going, this doesn't involve a big time commitment’. You’re not going to, you're going to finish the job... volunteering to me is to do something to help when you see it and where you see it.”

*Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group*

Yet many of the things formal volunteers in the Great Missenden/Chesham group were doing were irregular, such as giving driving lessons, making products in their spare time to give to older people, adhoc coffee mornings and so on. Though this was still formal volunteering, a clear motivation for taking these things on was that they could fit it in around their own time, as and when, rather than fitting around a fixed volunteering slot.

Many participants expressed a preference for **volunteering for people they know**; which is supported by findings in the Resident’s Survey showing that one in five would be encouraged to get involved in their local community if they were helping someone they knew. Thus for older people who believe that volunteering is part of their everyday life, the difficulty could be in persuading people to commit to volunteering for a particular organisation and making the step into formal volunteering.

> “If someone needs help I shall be totally committed. But I’m not going to volunteer with a particular organisation to help look after other people. I’d rather look after a person I know, and I think I have done and will continue to do so.”

*Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group*

Related to this, it also seemed that those who volunteer, either formally or informally, appeared to be doing things which helped their peers, or **helping people with whom they were able to identify**. The vast majority of volunteering done by participants in the older group seemed to be focused on helping other older people. This suggests that one way of
encouraging people to volunteer in the future could be to target people in a way that allows them to help their peers rather than in a more general way.14

When asked about how the Council could encourage residents to volunteer, participants suggested that recruitment should be done on a one-to-one basis. It was suggested that mass-recruitment approaches are much less effective than speaking with people individually.

“It always works best if you approach somebody on a one-to-one basis. If you make an announcement in a body of people and say ‘we need help with such and such, please see so and so afterwards’ they’ll sneak off. If you actually go up to a person, you tend to go up to someone who will say yes. One-to-one is, I think, the most effective.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

6.4 What does this mean for BCC?

Discussions with older residents in Great Missenden/ Chesham point to several key considerations for BCC:

- Understanding what is meant by ‘volunteering’: Participants did not consider more informal forms of help as volunteering. This may have implications for the way in which residents self-report when asked if they volunteer through things like the Residents’ Survey. It suggests that BCC could refine its communications to encourage those more informal forms of help that residents do not necessarily distinguish as ‘volunteering’, but which are valuable contributions to society all the same.

- Communicating the key benefits, hooks, motivations: As identified by participants, residents are more likely to take part in something in which they feel appreciated, that uses their skills, that addresses a gap or need that offers some flexibility and that will help people they know or can identify with.

14 Data from the 2011 Residents’ Survey seems to support this. Where helping to run or manage a youth group was particularly popular with younger (42% aged 18-29) compared to older (4%, aged 60-74) residents; in contrast the difference in desire to help run a library was much smaller (28% to compared to 17%).
7. Engaging with the Council
7. Engaging with the Council

This chapter discusses residents' views about present and future involvement with the Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) and considers ways to foster greater engagement from residents. The topic was covered amongst the following groups:

- Group 3, Gerrards Cross, general population
- Group 5, Great Missenden/ Chesham, aged 18-29

7.1 Context

National polling data on involvement with local services suggest that people have different attitudes to engagement. Almost half (47%) just want more information, while around one quarter (24%) would like more of a say. Five per cent want active involvement, with 16% of respondents saying they are not interested in any involvement whatsoever. The data also suggest that involvement is heavily influenced by topic: when asked about involvement in decisions around spending cuts specifically, far more would like more of a say (29%) and to be actively involved (11%) than in a general sense.

A key challenge for BCC is the low levels of engagement of young people, which can also affect overall levels of satisfaction. The groups, therefore, looked to explore ways in which residents can engage more with the Council and thus have more positive attitudes towards it. Additionally, it was important to explore ways in which the Council can communicate with and encourage greater involvement from residents who would like more information, have more of a say or become actively involved.

7.2 What are people’s attitudes towards engagement with the Council?

To aid discussion, participants were asked to consider how much engagement they would like to have with the Council by identifying themselves with one of five statements, from minimal engagement to being much more actively involved\(^\text{15}\).

Attitudes towards greater engagement were mixed. As we find nationally, the broad consensus was towards the middle ground. Most participants said they would either like to know more about what the Council is doing, or would like more of a say in what the Council is doing as opposed to being actively involved or having no involvement whatsoever.

However, participants’ enthusiasm to have more information or have more of a say was conditional and issue led. Participants were only interested in being informed or involved with issues or services that were relevant to or directly affected them - most of the time they would be happy to let the Council get on with the job.

In contrast, those who did not want any involvement whatsoever would be difficult to engage, regardless of the issue at hand. On the proviso that they perceive BCC to be doing a good

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\(^\text{15}\) Participants were asked to identify themselves with one of the following four statements: 1) I’m not interested in what the Council is doing as long as it does its job; 2) I would like to know what the Council is doing but I don’t want to be involved beyond that; 3) I would like to have more of a say in what the Council is doing; 4) I would like to become actively involved in helping the Council in what it is doing; 5) I am already actively involved in helping deliver Council services.
job, they are happy to let the Council make decisions for them and are uninterested in finding out more detail or having a say even in topics that directly affect them.

“If [the Council] is doing its job well, I don’t really have anything to say.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

"I probably wouldn’t be interested at all, but if something I cared about... if I’m interested... but otherwise I wouldn’t really care at all"

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

7.3 Engaging with residents who just want ‘more information’

As noted above, the desire for more information is issue led. Those who only want to know what the Council is doing without being further involved are only interested in information about things which affect them directly or which they are interested in finding out about.

“I’d like to know what they are doing, stuff that will affect me locally, like if they’re going to re-tarmac the road outside... to be honest, they are reasonably good at notifying you, but I don’t think I’d like to have that much more of a say unless they were building something which would obstruct the view from my house or whatever.”

Male, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

Within any specific topic of interest, participants were particularly interested in hearing about outcomes (i.e. what has been done) and decisions that have been made. As seen in the discussions around roads and crime and ASB, there is a desire to see that the Council is doing something, particularly in response to residents’ feedback, and engagement with the Council seems to follow a similar pattern.

There was little interest amongst younger participants to know more about the working of the Council itself, but the general population group did express a degree of interest in the Council as an organisation. At a general level, some said they would like to know more about how the Council works and what was said at Council meetings, and in particular about the decision-making process.

“When they do something like build a bridge, I’d like to be able to read somewhere who has taken that decision, what research they’ve done into what effect it will have on the traffic... they should say to motorists ‘is this going to affect you?’”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group
7.4 Encouraging residents to have ‘more of a say’

For those who would like more of a say, again participants were focusing in on aspects of the Council’s services which affected them personally or which they had an interest in. Participants in the general population group spoke about their interest in taking part in surveys about specific local issues as well as the Council getting groups of people together in communities to discuss issues. However, the motivation for having more of a say was clearly driven by the issue affecting them, a desire to have their point of view heard by the Council and knowing that something would be done. A good example of this was HS2, where some participants in Great Missenden/Chesham had started to campaign against its development.

“I probably wouldn’t be interested in [getting involved] at all, but if it was something I actually cared about, I’d like to be involved. If I’m interested in it, I’d like to be involved, but otherwise I wouldn’t really care at all.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

However, some participants were put off having more of a say because of a perception that their views would not necessarily be listened to. This was a particular issue in the younger group, where participants did not feel that their views were influential and that the Council often made decisions without consulting those who will be impacted. Overall, it seems that people are only going to have a say if they think the Council will listen and act accordingly.

“Sometimes it’s like applying for a job. Have they actually read my email? Have they heard what I’ve said? I think sometimes people are put off because they think ‘oh, [the Council] won’t even listen to me’... I think maybe that’s what people don’t like; the fact that maybe they won’t be heard.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group

“We had two rails taken away from us [in the skate park]. The Council told us that they’d be put back. Someone fell over it [so] they took them away, they said they’d be replaced but in a different place, but they haven’t done that. It’s been about two years now, it’s just really annoying.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

As seen in the discussion about volunteering, those who would like to have more of a say were encouraged to do so if they felt they were able to represent their peers, rather than just their own individual opinion. This was mainly reflected by a keenness to stand up for your local area or age group.

“Because I’m quite young, I’m more likely to know what people around our age will want.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group
Those who wanted a say are ultimately getting more involved because they want to make sure something is done and to ensure that there is an outcome. If younger people are able to see their actions leading to tangible outcomes, then this could lead to greater engagement amongst this group in particular.

However, ultimately the groups demonstrate that residents are only likely to engage with the Council on a reactive basis. For those who just want information and those who want more of a say, participants seem to have little interest in going out proactively to find out more about the Council or issues they are interested in. Ultimately, they expect the Council to come to them, and any communication approach will need to take this into account.

7.5 Fostering greater engagement and encouraging more active involvement

Comparatively few participants were interested in having a larger role and being actively involved with the Council. However, even amongst those who were interested, there was a feeling that they would not be particularly influential, and that their role would be restricted to some form of volunteering. It will therefore be important for BCC to emphasise how getting involved directly with the Council will make a difference.

Younger participants were also concerned about not being taken seriously; and thus it will be important to reassure residents who are keen to become more engaged that their views will be taken in to account and given careful consideration.

“We’d never get high enough up. People wouldn’t take us seriously because we’re so young.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

When asked directly about what the Council could do to encourage them to be more engaged, responses were mixed. Some participants were keen to engage with the Council through social media; though few knew about BCC’s online presence, they felt it would be used by others and could provide a valuable tool for helping to broaden the scope of residents who engage with the Council.

Participants also reported that they struggled to know how or when to get directly involved in Council matters. They wanted more information from BCC about the options available.

To aid discussion, participants were given a handout on the different ways in which they could be more involved in the Council. Some participants commented that they would be most comfortable in offering customer feedback as a service user, rather than being directly involved in making decisions. It therefore will be important to communicate with residents that getting more involved does not necessarily mean being responsible for decisions.

“When I say actively involved, I mean if there’s a vote or something, I wouldn’t mind counting the votes. It’s those voluntary-type things I’m happy to be involved in, but I don’t think I’d be any good at changing the way things work. I’m quite interested, but not in an official sort of way.”

Female, Gerrards Cross, Mixed Age Group
However, most were reluctant to commit to any particular mechanism for engagement; instead, they preferred to engage on a topic by topic basis. Wider information about the more general channels for engaging was welcome through the media, direct mail or online. But, participants often wanted to engage with the Council only on specific issues, suggesting there may be a role for BCC staff on the ground in creating opportunities for people to be involved in decisions around the specific services and issues that affect them.

“They could let us know when they're making decisions [emphasis added]. Then it's up to us if we want to get involved. We just don’t know when they’re doing stuff [at the moment].”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 18-29 Group

There is an appetite for communication when it is relevant, but not necessarily on a generic, regular basis, with participants looking to get involved in specific instances when they choose to do so.

7.6 What does this mean for BCC?

Findings from the focus groups point to several challenges and considerations for BCC in relation to engaging with residents:

- Identifying those who want to be more involved: Some participants are simply not interested in having greater involvement with the Council as long as they think it is doing a good job. BCC should therefore consider focusing their attention and resources on those who want to be more involved. And activity with this group needs to be restricted to issues that specifically affect them.

- Enthusiasm for greater engagement is issue led: Desire to know more information or have more of a say was conditional and driven by interest in a particular issue or being directly affected by a change. It will therefore be important for teams across the Council to have a good understanding of who their stakeholders are and therefore who is likely to want to be engaged on a case by case basis.

- Reassure residents that their giving their opinions will be worthwhile: Participants were more likely to want more of a say or greater direct involvement if they felt their say would be valued and considered.
8. Communications
8. Communications

This chapter considers the way in which Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) communicates with residents. It explores residents’ preferences for messages and modes of communication and provides feedback on the success of some specific Council campaigns – including attitudes towards a proposed new strapline for the Council. Findings in this section are based on discussions with residents across three focus groups:

- Group 1, Aylesbury, general population
- Group 2, High Wycombe, aged 18-29, unemployed
- Group 4, Great Missenden/Chesham, aged 60+

8.1 Context

There remains room for improvement in the way BCC communicates with its residents. Findings from the 2011 Residents’ Survey suggest that residents are just as likely not to feel well informed (51%) as they are to feel well informed (49%) about the services and benefits provided by BCC; with young residents, those in work, and those in private rented accommodation the most likely to feel uninformed (66%, 54% and 60% respectively).

With a view to increasing the number who feel informed, BCC has recently developed a new communications strategy to help target communications with local residents. The strategy seeks to offer guidance on how the Council should communicate with six different audience groups: road users, families, young people, vulnerable people, influencers and council tax payers.

The focus groups were therefore designed to help identify which messages residents were most interested in and to identify preference for the format and tone in which these messages should be communicated. Participants were also asked to consider the impact of campaign materials and review a new strapline being considered by the Council.

8.2 What are residents interested in?

Participants were interested in a range of topics, issues and services in Buckinghamshire, and for a variety of reasons.

Some had a particular interest in receiving more information about an activity or service that was relevant to their hobbies or personal interests. Mainly in relation to sports and leisure services, participants were keen to know of new opportunities to take up or develop their interest – such as newly opened walking paths, free facilities for young unemployed people, or ideas for inexpensive family days out.

“More activities. I’m a sporty person, I like basketball, but when it gets dark there’s no floodlights. In London there are places where you can carry on through the night.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Participants were also interested in issues or changes to services that directly affected them. This may include immediate local issues such as the rationale for enforcing a speed limit on their street or a nearby main road, a type of crime to be aware of in their local area, job opportunities for the unemployed, bus fare increases for those who use public transport,
and changes to housing benefit for those needing help with accommodation. Moreover, young people in Great Missenden were keen to learn about the developments of a skate park and road users were particularly interested in maintenance work that was on their route or in their local area.

This suggests information and communication needs to be targeted. Several young unemployed people noted that they had received a Council newsletter once, but had decided not to read it because they did not think it was relevant to them – the main story was an article on a school reaching the top 25 of the country in recent results.

Other participants were interested in the appearance of their local area, and wanted to find out more information about Council plans to improve or maintain key services such as grass cutting, rubbish and litter, street lighting, flower beds, and potholes in roads. Such information was especially welcomed by older residents in more rural areas.

“Care of grass cutting I’d like to know more about. Weeds growing a metre high in areas which could be made to look far more attractive. Disgrace that all they do is mow 2.6 ft into pavement.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Similarly, participants also wanted more information about issues in their local area that worried them. Although they may not personally benefit from the service, participants cited several examples of issues that interested them either because they were concerned about the impact on other residents (including friends or family) or the impact on the local area as a place to live. Examples included concern about the availability of jobs in the local area, the number of school places available in new housing developments or activities for teenagers.

“I just wondered what there was for young people these days... it might stop young people going to pubs, places that they possibly shouldn’t go to because there nowhere else to go.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Participants were therefore most interested in topics or issues that had a direct impact on the activities or services they use, or an indirect impact on the way they feel about living in the area.

There was less interest in finding out more about the inner workings of the Council, although participants thought that it was important for this information to be available for those who wanted to view it. However, some older participants were interested in holding the Council to account, especially with regards to perceived levels of pay.

“Top dogs seem to get 100k for their yearly salary or more, and we’re all paying for that, and when they’re made redundant their packages can be huge. Don’t know about that, I’d like to know more about that please.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Participants also welcomed further information on the distinction between county council, district and parish council services. Most were confused about where responsibility lay for key joint services such as street lighting, maintenance, rubbish collections, parks and
other facilities; others were unaware that the County Council had a key role in services such as those aimed at tackling crime and ASB.

Finally, some participants were put off engaging with Council material if they felt it was a topic that they could do nothing to influence - this was particularly the case for young unemployed people who felt largely un-empowered and distant from the Council. The material presented by the Council therefore needs to be relevant, but also give readers the opportunity to comment or contribute to the debate and be confident that their views will be heard.

“I get the newsletter, but I don’t read it. Stuff doesn’t really matter to me cos there’s not a lot I can do to change that, for example rents going up.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

8.3 Preferred channels of communication

Findings from the 2011 Residents’ Survey suggest that residents receive their information about the Council from a wide variety of sources, including newspapers (57%), leaflets (32%), the Council website (27%), news websites (25%), and direct mailing (21%). On further investigation, it was clear from the focus groups that there is no one clear preference for the method or format in which the Council communicates, whether that is according to the target audience group or the issue or service being discussed. However, participants did offer a useful insight in to why and where they would prefer certain types of communication.

Participants liked reading information about their local area in newspapers. These were seen to be quite accessible – particularly free press delivered through the door. One suggestion from several of the groups was to have a regular section or page in the local newspaper which pulled together information about local events and key issues or notices relevant to the local area.

Awareness of previous Council newsletters was mixed. Most were aware that there used to be a newsletter, but not everyone was able to comment on its content as they had thrown it away without reading it. Older participants were particularly positive about the newsletter and liked that it was delivered through the door, whereas others had chosen not to read it because they did not think it was relevant to them or because they preferred to get their information online. Those who liked the idea of a newsletter were keen to ensure it contained articles on progress against key concerns and included points of contact for key services and issues.

“Wouldn’t read it [the newsletter], would personally use the internet, easy for me, would go and find things on the internet rather than magazine. I may be guilty of throwing it out again.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group
“[A newsletter should include...] feedback from complaints! Something that says ‘This is a concern; this is what we’re doing about it’.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

Awareness of the BCCs online presence was also mixed. Most assumed that BCC would have a website and social media accounts, but few had used these. Awareness of the website was particularly low amongst the young unemployed group who struggled with obtaining access to the internet – mostly restricted to the free 30 minute slots available at the library.

Several participants had gone online to visit the website before the focus group and were pleased with the range of information and its accessibility. Others thought the wealth of material meant the website was quite difficult to navigate if you were looking for specific information. Participants tended not to visit the website proactively, but did believe it was a useful reference point and would be used extensively by some. For example, as noted previously, few had heard of I-on Bucks, or were aware that you could report road problems online.

“Website is very good. Accountability of seeing Cabinet meetings, little videos about the councillors and what they do, I think that’s very good. I think that’s the way the local politics is going. People want to know what’s going on... what their motivation is.”

Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Communication by email was identified in the focus groups as being a useful tool for keeping up to date with Council information. Participants suggested that they would welcome the opportunity to sign up to an e-newsletter which would contain short headlines with links to further information online if so desired. They felt that information could be tailored to individuals by selecting which topics they were interested in when they signed up. This was particularly welcome for finding out information about crime and ASB.

“Email newsletter flash almost makes you read it immediately, even if you didn’t want to read the whole thing. Big snappy headlines... You’d take that in, maybe a way to get younger people interested.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Other suggestions from the focus groups included:

- Information by text. This was particularly welcomed by young unemployed people who struggled to get online. They assumed that some Council services (e.g. housing) already had their mobile number. Some were also happy to sign up to alerts that were relevant to them.

- Office screens. Young unemployed residents had also picked up on information they had seen on screens in local public service offices.
Village notice boards. Participants in Great Missenden were particularly positive about their local notice board which had been re-done and placed securely behind glass. They felt it could be utilised more by adding a weekly/fortnightly Council newsletter about Council work in the local area.

Regular councillor surgeries. Older participants were also fond of face-to-face contact and spoke positively about surgeries run by the district councillor. They felt that this was something either the County Council could attend or run on their own.

It was a challenging environment for residents to explore preference for tone of message during the focus groups. However, some noted that information about the work of the Council needed to be clear and in layman’s terms. More generally, participants wanted shorter and snappier information that cut straight to the point and was focused, but also contained links to more detailed articles if the viewer wanted to find out more.

8.4 Review of preferences by audience group

A review of findings from across the five focus groups offers an insight into the communication needs of several of the audience groups the Council is interested in targeting.

Young people

- They are particularly interested in knowing more about facilities and activities for their age group in their local area; they want activities that they can afford, and help in finding work or starting a career.

- They have little awareness of BCC’s online presence at the moment, but may be more willing to communicate this way in the future – for example, they expressed interest in the Council developing an online one-stop-shop to help support them finding a job.

- They are reluctant to have more of a say or become more involved with the Council for fear that they will not be taken seriously or that no action will be taken as a result of their views. But, they are interested in hearing about the things that matter to them (for example, fixing potholes and activities for young people).

Vulnerable young people

- They are interested in many of the same issues as young people, but are additionally interested in support services such as housing and access to financial assistance.

- They have difficulty accessing the internet, but would welcome information by SMS text.

- Leaflets were mentioned (particularly relating to crime and ASB) where key messages were needed in large bold type, without detailed text that detracts from the message.
Road users

- They are particularly interested in knowing more about how the Council is getting **value for money** from the contractors and materials it uses to repair roads, and on how BCC makes decisions about prioritising repairs. It is not just a case of knowing that the Council is spending more money on the service.

- They are also interested in knowing which potholes BCC is aware of and when they are likely to be fixed. **Advanced warning** about future road works using **road signs** would also be helpful.

- Few are aware of the different ways in which residents can report problems. Moreover, an important part of encouraging road users to use other modes of reporting (such as by email, text, iPhone app or through the website) will be to **reassure them that their issue will be considered and auctioned** (and if it is not going to be auctioned then why), even if they do not speak directly to a member of staff over the phone.

Older residents

- In addition to the services they use (such as Home Help or Occupational Therapy), older residents are particularly interested in finding out more about **maintenance services** that help with the upkeep of their local area.

- Most enjoy receiving **direct mail** such as newsletters, but they also welcome more face-to-face communication such as Council surgeries and a well-kept village notice board, which they feel could be utilised more.

Council tax payers

- They are interested in information that either has a **direct impact on them** or their hobbies or that has an impact on the local area (such as the local economy and availability of jobs). It will be important to target communications as participants also reported being proactively put-off by material that they feel is not relevant to them.

- Awareness and use of online information and modes are mixed, and newspapers remain a popular source of information. That said, council tax payers would welcome the opportunity to receive **more tailored information** such as signing up to an e-newsletter that had information about their preferences and then linked through to further information elsewhere (such as the website) if they wanted it.

8.5 Attitudes towards proposed BCC strapline

The focus groups also presented an opportunity to test reactions to a new strapline which is being considered by BCC:

“**Buckinghamshire, the enterprise county: enterprising place, enterprising people, enterprising council.**”

This strapline was tested with the general public group from Aylesbury. Although participants were positive about the phrase, they felt that it was a bold statement and one that did not necessarily match their perceptions of the area.
The word ‘enterprising’ created lots of positive reaction among participants; it was seen to be encouraging, forward thinking and suggested an area which offered lots of opportunities for all. However, participants questioned whether the strapline was realistic, suggesting that it was a strong statement to be making in the current economic climate. ‘Enterprising’ was seen to suggest that opportunities for business and jobs are a guarantee in the local area, and participants felt it may be difficult to live up to such expectations.

“I’d look into it and prepare to be very disappointed. Looks a bit too good.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

“Quite flashy, a lot to live up to. I’m not saying Bucks can’t deliver a lot, but for the economics of the country at this time in our economic history it’s a dangerous one to use. Enterprising in one sense, but as a place for families to come and live, but you can’t promise that without something to back it up.”

Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Though there was some agreement that the Council could be described as enterprising, participants commented that they would not use the word ‘enterprising’ to describe the place or people of Buckinghamshire. Some participants were conscious of how much the strapline promised, suggesting that those who read it might expect even higher standards of facilities and services than there currently are.

“If you didn’t live here you might think [having read the strapline] the place is a lot better than it actually is. Though [the Council] are doing very well, I think it gives you more hope than I think exists.”

Female, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

Though they enjoy living in Buckinghamshire and felt it was a great place to live, others felt ‘enterprising’ did not match how they viewed the area. ‘Enterprising’ suggests a youthful, progressive, developing area to live, which participants felt was in contrast to their perception of Buckinghamshire as a place where people come to settle into a more established lifestyle and as a place with tradition.

“Bucks is an old established county. People come to settle here.... Bucks has old style values, but it’s got to embrace the modern age and economy that we’re in. I’d use that word for Milton Keynes, more the youthful dynamic and environment.”

Male, Aylesbury, Mixed Age Group

8.6 Lessons for BCC campaigns

In addition to the strapline, the focus groups also presented an opportunity to gain feedback on recent BCC communication campaigns to assess whether residents would be likely to take up the relevant actions that were being promoted. Two campaigns were presented to
residents: i) the ‘Adult abuse speak up’ campaign, which aims to encourage people to contact Careline if they fear that someone may be at risk of being harmed; and ii) the ‘Five ways to wellbeing’ campaign, which aims to improve wellbeing amongst residents by encouraging them to take practical steps such as keep learning or be active. Full details of the campaigns presented to participants can be found in the appendix.

Reactions to campaign presentation

Participants found both of the campaigns eye-catching and thought that they were fairly well presented. The ‘Adult abuse speak up’ (Adult Abuse) campaign was to the point and appropriately shocking. The ‘Five ways to wellbeing’ (Wellbeing) campaign was perceived to be colourful, clean and concise.

“The picture’s very effective, quite shocking and it draws your attention.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

However, participants felt several improvements could be made to add clarity to the campaigns:

- **A more notable reference to the website.** Participants often missed the website address on the Adult Abuse campaign and a small number missed the call to the website on the Wellbeing campaign. These participants had therefore not noted that there was somewhere you could go for more information.

- **Use of representative images.** The choice of pictures for the Adult Abuse campaign caused some participants to question whether the campaign represented adult abuse. The image of an untidy room was seen to suggest a messy teenager rather than adult abuse, and older participants felt that the bruise on the elderly lady could have been caused innocently (for example, through a fall) and did not necessarily depict abuse.

- **Reference to well-known bodies.** Participants were unfamiliar with the BSVAB logo and had not heard of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Board, which led to some confusion about who was behind the campaign.

Participants also considered how residents would be likely to engage with the materials. Some were concerned with the recall of the Careline number in the Adult Abuse campaign which only used posters, suggesting that they would want the number readily accessible at the point at which they had the concern. In addition to advertising the number clearly on websites and in telephone books, a format such as a phone card sized poster that fits into a wallet could be more appropriate.

The most effective way of communicating the Wellbeing campaign was perceived to be in places where people had the time to consider such information carefully, for example, in queues or waiting rooms for other services. Participants felt the information would be least effective if it arrived in a leaflet through the door, as few people would consider the information in detail.

“I’m happy to look at small pieces of paper in chemists, or doctors’ surgeries (leaflets in holders) but when something comes into the door it goes into the recycling bin.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group
Would it change behaviour/encourage a call to action?

Participants were easily able to identify what action the campaigns were encouraging them to do, but few suggested that they would do anything differently having engaged with the campaign materials.

Though it was clear that the Adult Abuse campaign was asking viewers to report concerns, participants had already decided what they would do in such a circumstance and therefore the materials needed to do more to challenge those whose default reaction would be to not report an incident. These participants were worried that reporting an incident would be perceived as interfering, whilst others were worried about what would happen to them and the victim if an official report was made, especially if there was an innocent explanation. Some suggested that if they were to take action, they would either seek to resolve the incident (or clarify their concern) by talking directly to those involved.

“I think if I saw someone with arm like that, they bruise easily, might be on steroids and had minor fall. It isn’t something you’d report.”

Female, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

“I think you should talk to someone. Wouldn’t go to an authority firstly – talking it over with someone you can get a better feeling for it.”

Male, Great Missenden/Chesham, 60+ Group

The impact of the Adult Abuse campaign materials may therefore be improved by alleviating the concerns or challenging the behaviour of those who are unlikely to report an incident, such as reassuring residents of the benefit to the victim if they reported the abuse or helping them to understand the process after a report has been made. It will therefore be important to understand residents’ decision-making process behind any future ‘calls to action’ to know which messages should be promoted to encourage the desired behaviour.

Moreover, such participants also missed the soft call to action of visiting the website for more information; this would need emphasising in future campaigns. Though the website itself contains information that may help reassure those who are unsure of how to spot the signs or why reporting a concern may be beneficial, participants had not made the connection from the posters that this information was available, nor were they encouraged to consider viewing it.

For several participants, the Wellbeing campaign was unlikely to change their behaviour because they were already happy and fulfilled in their lives – they felt that embracing wellbeing was something that they were already doing.

Others – particularly younger unemployed participants – recognised that the actions proposed in the campaign were steps that would enhance their lives, but were unlikely to change their behaviour because they felt the campaign contained little that was tangible for them to action. They felt it was not telling them anything new, and instead, they wanted more insight and advice that would help them put the five steps in to practice. An example of requests for more assistance included financial help to take part in sport or access to free healthy cooking classes.
“Would it [the Wellbeing campaign] change my behaviour? Probably not. For stuff like this you want meetings. Leaflets – you’d just forget about it five mins later.”

Female, High Wycombe, 18-29 Group

Some participants would have also welcomed several different ways to find out more information about the campaign. Many in the younger unemployed group did not have regular access to the internet and therefore would find it difficult to visit the campaign website; instead, they requested a phone number or a face-to-face point of call that they could contact.

Participants in the younger unemployed group also raised the possibility of financial incentives to encourage changes in behaviour. Though this is something that could be explored further by BCC, it will be important to first ensure that viewers have spotted the non-financial incentives in the campaign. Participants were able to see the personal benefit of the Wellbeing campaign, but the benefit to themselves and to the adult at risk was less clear in the Adult Abuse campaign.

8.7 What does this mean for BCC?

Findings from the focus groups point to several challenges and considerations for BCC in relation to communicating with residents:

- **Messages have to be targeted and relevant:** Participants reported interest in a range of services and issues, but these were driven by personal interest or concern for the immediate local area. It will be important to target communications as participants also report being actively “put-off” by material that is irrelevant to them.

- **Audience groups are not homogenous in how they like to be communicated with:** Participants across the different audience groups cite a range of preferences for mode of communication. However, it is worth noting that direct mail was favoured most by older participants and that young unemployed participants were unable to get online (the assumption that younger people more generally prefer online methods is unsubstantiated by this focus group study).

- **Bullet-sized chunks of information are preferable:** Participants welcomed the idea of being able to view short headlines or introductory paragraphs that are then linked to articles that contain more information. It makes information easier to digest and navigate. This could be particularly relevant to an e-newsletter, SMS texts or social media.

- **The BCC strapline needs to better consider its audience:** Participants felt that though it would sound appealing to those looking to move to Buckinghamshire, the new proposed strapline was a bold statement that did not quite match their own perceptions of the area. A new strapline should strike the right balance between celebrating what residents like about the area whilst also attracting attention from new residents and businesses.

- **Campaigns need to challenge behaviour and offer tangible action points:** Participants reported that changes in behaviour would be more likely in future if a campaign alleviated their concerns about changing behaviour and offered clear examples and instructions of how they should go about this.
More specifically, when reflecting on the key issues covered elsewhere in this report (roads, crime and ASB, employment and volunteering and engagement), there are a number of areas in which communications can focus as well:

- **Better communication about how the Council prioritises road repairs is needed:** Participants welcomed the increase in the BCC budget for repairing roads, but want to feel confident that BCC is getting value out of the public money it spends. They also want honest information about the size of the task ahead – the likelihood is that they will still have to tolerate potholes for some time to come, but they may at least feel more positive towards the Council about the way in which it is trying to deal with the issue. More clarity and information on how potholes repairs are prioritised and better notification of when particular problems will be fixed will go some way to helping here.

- **Promoting awareness of outcomes and prevention is key for reassuring residents about crime and ASB:** Participants were clear that crime and ASB will always be a priority as they do not want to let standards slip. There is more demand for information about positive outcomes achieved by the police and the Council and for preventative tips and advice about how to stay safe than there is for detailed crime statistics – even if this information does help to demonstrate that Buckinghamshire is a relatively safe place to live.

- **Better and more coordinated communication and information would help residents to find work:** Although the Council does not have sole responsibility for supporting people into work, it may have a role to play in convening the key players (such as Job Centre Plus, Connexions, local businesses and schools) to better coordinate the information and advice that is given out to young people in the county about the employment and learning opportunities available to them. A ‘one-stop’ shop website or forum was of particular interest to younger participants in the groups.

- **Encouraging more engagement should be embedded in teams across the Council:** Enthusiasm for engaging with BCC was issue led; participants were more likely to want to get involved with the Council when it related to issues that directly affected them. Convincing residents that their views will be listened to and acted upon is also key.
Appendices
## Appendices
### Discussion Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Purpose/notes</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>To explain the research to the respondent and ensure that they are comfortable with the process</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **THANK PARTICIPANTS FOR TAKING PART IN THE RESEARCH**
- **INTRODUCE SELF, IPSOS MORI**
- **EXPLAIN PURPOSE OF RESEARCH REASSURE THAT THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS**
- **EXPLAIN THAT WE’VE BROUGHT SIMILAR TYPES OF PEOPLE TOGETHER TO AID ANALYSIS, BUT WE’LL BE SPEAKING TO A RANGE OF RESIDENTS ACROSS THE COUNTY.**
- **EXPLAIN THAT THE GROUP WILL LAST FOR AROUND 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES AND WILL BE AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDED (GAIN PERMISSION TO RECORD). NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THEM FROM THE WRITTEN RESEARCH FINDINGS, AND THE VIDEO WILL ONLY BE USED INTERNALLY BY BCC TO HELP DISSEMINATE THE RESULTS AND MAKE THE FINDINGS MORE TANGIBLE.**
- **REASSURE RE: CONFIDENTIALITY/MRS CODE OF CONDUCT. We are independent researchers and want to hear about your experiences and views.**
- **INTRODUCE CLIENTS IF IN ATTENDANCE – EXPLAIN THEY ARE ONLY THERE TO OBSERVE, OR TO CORRECT ON ANY POINTS OF INACCURACY**
- **OTHER HOUSEKEEPING: fire alarms, toilets, talk one at a time.**

- **Can I start by asking you to introduce yourself?**
  - Please say a bit about:
    - Name
    - Where you live
    - Who lives in your household
    - How long you have lived in the local area
    - What do you do for a living

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of BCC</th>
<th>15 mins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to start by asking you to think about your local area…</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MODERATOR TO RECORD ON FLIP CHART:</td>
<td>Introduce participants to BCC and help distinguish between County, District and Parish Council services and set expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do you think about your local area, is it a good place to live?</strong></td>
<td>Capture top of mind issues/ concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROBE:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Generally satisfied/dissatisfied?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does it compare to other areas?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Things that you particularly like/ dislike?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**And what do you think about Buckinghamshire County Council?**

CAPTURE TOP OF MIND THOUGHTS/ PROBE ON REASONS FOR SATISFACTION/ DISSATISFACTION

| What do you think the County Council does? | |
| PROBE: | |
| - Is it relevant to you? | |

DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT 1 ON SERVICES OFFERED BY BCC AND THE SERVICES OFFERED BY DISTRICT AND PARISH COUNCILS.

The handout shows all of the different services offered by BCC, and the services which are offered by your district and parish councils...

PROMPT:
- Are you surprised by anything in the handout: either anything you didn’t know was provided by BCC, or thought it was BCC and not your parish or district council?
- Which of these services have you experienced directly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communications</th>
<th>30 mins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’d now like to talk to you about how you find out about what is</td>
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</table>

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

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### BCC Resident focus group report - FINAL

**How do you currently hear about or find about what is going on in your local area?**

**How aware would you say you are about what BCC is doing in your local area/what services it provides?**

**MODERATOR LINK BACK TO PREVIOUS SESSION ON COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICE AWARENESS**

**How do you find out about County Council services or what the County Council is doing?**

**PROBE ON LIST**

- Advertising screens on library buildings
- Notice boards (parish/school/shop)
- Speaking to a local councillor
- Council website
- Local radio (Mix 96, BBC 3 counties)
- Local news websites (BBC, Bucks Herald, Bucks Free press)
- Local newspapers (Bucks Herald, Bucks Free Press)
- Local TV news channels
- Direct mailing
- Parish magazine
- Email
- Social media
- Leaflets at local health centres/GP, library, leisure centre etc...
- Contact from other services
- Through child’s school
- Bucks family information service
- Events (e.g. County Show, Armed Forces Day)

**What types of issues, activities and services are you PERSONALLY most interested in finding out about?**

**NB. CAN BE COUNCIL OR NON COUNCIL RELATED**

**BRAINSTORM ON FLIPCHART**

**PROBE** (for other suggestions, but not in too much detail):

- Local events/activities (which? for whom? Young people, families, older people)
- How the council is helping local people/how your Council Tax is spent/local democracy
- Performance of services (which?)
- , Health, Education, Transport (including Local Bus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help identify topics of interest – across the community in general, and specifically about the council</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To introduce the topic of communication. Briefly establish current levels of awareness about council and modes for this</td>
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<tr>
<td>and community transport), Recycling/waste, roads and Condition of pavements, social care (children or adults), volunteering, adult learning libraries</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Support for local business</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Crime prevention ASB and trading standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Parks and open spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Congestion management</td>
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</table>

**IF TIME ALLOWS, MODERATOR TO PROBE FULLY ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS RESIDENTS’ ARE INTERESTED IN, E.G. IS CRIME ABOUT KNOWING WHAT THE CRIME RATES ARE?**

**RECORD ON FLIPCHART – NB. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOSE WHICH ARE SPONTANEOUS MENTIONS AND THOSE WHICH FOLLOW PROMPTS**

Thinking about the council specific areas that we are most interested in (review top mentions only), how would you currently go about finding out more information about them?

And where would you like to find more information about them in future?

**PROMPT – TO BE GUIDED BASED ON SPONTANEOUS PREFERENCES, NOT TO COVER ALL POSSIBILITIES:**

- **Media:** Probe for local papers: what are they receptive too (e.g. headlines, articles, advertising, stories, position in paper); (Note that 63% get info from paper)
- **Media:** Probe for local tv channels (news? Radio? Adverts?)
- **Media:** Probe for media websites (which websites?)
- **Place:** Probe for leaflets: location (e.g GP’s libraries schools); test tone with examples?
- **Place:** Probe for noticeboards: location (parishes, schools, libraries)
- **Place:** Probe for events: Type of event (e.g. local, countywide, stall in market place); point of sale?
- **Mail:** Probe for post/mail (type: magazines, leaflets, letters)
- **Email:** Probe for email: for magazine or sign-posting or
letters)

Website: Probe for website: Which website (Parish, partner, District, BCC); what are the key pieces of information that people want to see (service information, newsletters)

AND why? Why do you prefer this mode over others?
PROBE ON ACCESSIBILITY/AVAILABILITY; TRUSTWORTHINESS OF SOURCES; mode most reliant to specific types of message?

CAMPAIGN TEST 1:

HANDOUT MATERIALS FROM TWO TWO COUNCIL CAMPAIGNS TO TEST…

I’d now like you to take 2-3 minutes to read the materials that I’ve handed out. The first of which is about abuse of vulnerable adults, and the second personal wellbeing. And in pairs, I’d like you to think about a) what is it that the material is encouraging you to do; b) whether or not you would do anything different, either now or in the future

REVIEW IN A PLENARY AND COMPARE ACROSS THE TWO CAMPAIGNS.

PROBES:

What do you think the materials asking/encouraging you to do?

Would you do anything differently now you have seen the materials?

PROMPT:
- (hard change) Would you be more likely report abuse?
- (hard) Would you be more proactive re: wellbeing?
- (soft) Would you look to get more information – eg visit the website; call the number?
- (soft) Would you pass on the information to anyone else?

Why would you take up the activity/behaviour, what encouraged you in particular?

PROBE:
- The message itself – eg obvious benefit, positive consequence, clear examples

8 mins

- The tone – was it relevant, urgent, serious, friendly, and appropriate, personable
- The layout of the campaign
- The options given to find out more information are easy – eg clear phone number, website
- The mode of the campaign, preference for poster/website etc..
- Anything else?

Why would you not take up the activity/behaviour?
PROBE:
- Message: unclear, not relevant to me
- Tone: too serious, not urgent, optional
- Layout: too little/too much info
- Mode: would prefer a leaflet, wouldn’t go online etc…

What else could have been added/done differently to help encourage you to take up the activity/behaviour?

Crime and ASB

I’d now like to talk about crime and anti-social behaviour in your local area…

Do you think Crime and ASB is a problem in your local area?
PROBE:
- What in particular makes you feel unsafe? Any crimes/ASB that concern you the most?
- Who makes you feel unsafe?
- What do you mean by Anti-social behaviour – what would you report / not report
- Where? How does your area compare to others in Bucks? Elsewhere?
- Has your sense of safety got better or worse over the last few years?

Have you had direct experience of crime and ASB?

To review what call to action are most successful

25 mins

Explore the extent to which participants feel crime is a problem and what in particular makes them feel safe or unsafe?
PROBE:
- What? When?
- What kinds of ASB?
- What about other friends, family, neighbours?
- How did it make you/them feel?
- Were you happy with how the problem was dealt with?

I'd now like you to read through a HANDOUT 2 that details some of the findings from a recent Residents' Survey alongside official crime statistics…

Do you agree with the findings from the resident survey?
PROBE:
- If yes, why do you think crime is still seen as a priority given that sense of safety is relatively high/more or less crime figures relatively low?
- If not, what makes you say this?
- INTERVIEWER PROBE ON ANY CONTRADICTION BETWEEN FEELING UNSAFE AND EXPERIENCE OF CRIME/ ASB CITED EARLIER IN DISCUSSION

- PROBE ON:
  - Local media/news reports?
  - National media/news reports?
  - Word of mouth from friends and family?
  - misinformation
  - Information from the council?
  - Information from the police?
  - Anything else?

Does seeing the comparison between national and local figures make you feel any different about crime and ASB or feeling safe in your local area?
Why/why not?

Can you give me an example of the last article you read, or thing you heard relating to crime and ASB in your local area/in Bucks?
PROBE:
- Where did you see it? Source?
- What did it say?
- How did it make you feel?

To explore what are perceptions based on

Introduce the perceptions gap and explore the impact of been shown the reality

What types of information, if any, would help reassure you about crime and ASB in your local area?
PROMPT:
- Would seeing more information help?
- What information/facts can be presented?
- What message? Eg, information about criminals being caught/cases solved
- What mode? Eg, local media, website, posters/leaflets, press release (newspaper/website), campaigns (targeted.seasonal eg fireworks), tie in with national campaigns (eg white ribbon day), events (eg county show),
- What tone?
- From whom? Police, Council or other “trusted” sources?
- I-on bucks: would having locally available crime stats make any difference?

Here is a list of some of the things that BCC do in helping tackle crime and ASB?
PRESENT HANDOUT 3 ON THE WORK OF BCC
- Trading standards; Community safety; Youth offending; Protection of vulnerable adults; Safeguarding children

PROMPT:
- Is there anything on this list that surprises you?
- Didn’t know what BCC did?
- Anything on the list that you thought should be on there that isn’t?
- Or is on there that you thought someone else was responsible for, e.g. Thames Valley Police
- Does knowing the role of the council make any difference to how you perceive the council, or crime and ASB?

Would you like to hear more about the role of BCC in relation to tackling crime and ASB? How?

Roads

I'd now like to talk to you about the condition of roads in your local area…

Can I just check, how often do you use the roads?
PROBE:
- Cyclists? Type of journey

Explore role of BCC and what can be done to help change perceptions

Awareness of what BCC do

Identify road users
### How much of a problem do you think the condition of roads is in your local area?

**Moderator:** Try to gauge by show of hands/ also get sense of who drives/ uses roads in the groups.

**Then probe:**
- Do they agree with the survey finding: top priority personally (70%), and 3rd top for the community (49%)?
- 70% said they were dissatisfied with road maintenance (17% satisfied).
- If not, why do they think other people may say this?
- What specifically are the problems (prioritise)?
  - Large potholes
  - Small potholes
  - Lots of smaller road defects
  - Timing of repairs/work
  - Utilities (note planned utility works can’t happen for 2 yrs after re-surfacing, only emergency can)
  - Visual appearance – lines, look of lots of repairs, etc.
- Are some areas in Bucks more of a problem than others? (NB, survey data suggests higher satisfaction in Aylesbury (35%) satisfied). H.Wycombe, Great Missenden and Chesham are particularly dissatisfied (c 80-89%).
- How does Bucks compare to other areas you have lived in?
- Has it got better or worse over the last couple of years?

### What is it that makes you say this?

**Prompt:**
- First-hand experience
- Local media/news reports?
- Word of mouth from friends and family?
- Information from the council?
- Anything else?

### Generally speaking, how well do you think BCC is delivering on roads/trying to tackle the problem?

**Probe on top of mind impressions/ any specific experiences**

### Understanding expectations

Unpick dissatisfaction – gap between expectations and current position

### Are you aware of how to report road problems to BCC?

**Prompt:**
- Test specific awareness of the different ways they can report problems...
- Call 0845 2302882 (used to be highways on call)
- E-mail (10 days)
- Website aka Service Information Centre
- I-phone application
- Fix my street?

### Has anyone reported a problem to BCC before?

**If yes:**
- What was the issue?
- What encouraged you to report the issue? (Why)
- How did you report it?
- Satisfied with the service/response from BCC?
- What could have been improved?

**If no:**
- What might drive someone to reporting a problem?

### What might stop you/ someone else reporting issues of road maintenance?

**Prompt:**
- Don’t know how to report the issue?
- Doesn’t think there is a need to report it, someone else will do it?
- Doesn’t think there is any point in reporting it, it won’t get fixed anyway?
- Does it matter where the issue is – eg, main high street, fast road, in a cycle lane?
- Not knowing council may not know about it (BCC road inspections only on a monthly basis)
- It takes too long to report

### What could BCC do to encourage people to report incidents?

- Understanding what repairs are prioritised
- Ease of reporting (new approaches for younger people)

I’d now like to read out some information which details the Council’s commitment to improving the condition of the roads in Bucks:
1st: Focus is on large (dangerous) potholes – we can’t fix all of them.

2nd:
- Priority for the leader
- Demonstrated in doubling the budget for roads this year from £6 to £15m (if asked: of £328m)
- But £250m would be needed if all issues were resolved.
- Extra budget used across whole county (prioritised by members) to re-surface roads, however, even with this budget not all road condition issues can be addressed.
- Potholes – focus is on repairing larger dangerous potholes, which are the only potholes that can be prioritised with the budget.

ADDITIONAL INFO TO BE USED BY MODERATOR IF REQUIRED:
- BCC inspect A-roads on a monthly basis, but rely on customers reporting issues if problems occur between inspections.
- Activity balanced between lengthening life of roads that are about to fall into disrepair and very bad roads – costs too much to bring all very bad roads up to condition.
- Pothole maintenance has had a stable budget – which won’t fill every pothole:
  o Large dangerous potholes (emergency) filled in 24 hours.
  o Small potholes not able to do in budget.
- IF NEEDED: comparison spend figures:
  o £5m for libraries.
  o £3.2m bus subsidies.
  o £2.5m trading standards and safer communities.
  o £20m waste management.
  o £20m client transport including home to school, adult social care, safeguarding transport.
  o £30m children safeguarding.

Were you aware that this was the case?

Does the information I’ve just given you make you feel any differently about the road issues we’ve just discussed…?

PROMPT:
- Towards how well BCC is delivering on roads?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>constraints and see if that changes attitudes towards road service</th>
<th>Look for differences by age, gender etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Have your expectations of what is achievable changed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If so, what are your new expectations/priorities? All potholes, or prioritise larger, more dangerous potholes? Short/long-term?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (if participants suggest budget should be increased) Where should the money come from (residents, other services)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would specific information/ more communication give you more confidence in the way in which road maintenance is being handled?

If yes, what type of information and how (mode)?

PROMPT: WHAT?
- Data on where activity/maintenance is taking place?
- More information about the process takes place, why decisions are made to prioritise some maintenance over others: transparency?
- More information on how to report problems?
- Where, how would you like to receive the information?
- Road signs, Twitter etc…
- How does this compare to how you currently find out about how the council handles road maintenance?
- Big signs
- Smaller signs before and after road works
- BCC Website
- Twitter
- Press releases for every work activity
- Local media website
- Notice of planned work to every home on road
- Survey to every home after work

If no, what else could/ should the council do?

Employment and skills

I’d now like to talk to you about employment and skills…

What do you think has been the impact of the current economic climate on people’s ability to find work?

PROMPT:
- Tough competition?
- Lack of jobs? (all types of jobs?) In certain areas?
- What has been the impact in your local area/Bucks specifically compared to other areas?

expectations – what works now and what isn’t working

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And what about you personally?

Thinking about yourself (most of us have been unemployed in the past), or friends and family you may know more generally do you think there are barriers to finding work in Buckinghamshire? If so, what are they? BRAINSTORM ON FLIPCHART – TO BE EXPLORED IN DEPTH IN CASE STUDIES

PROMPT:
- DEMAND SIDE:
  - Lack of the right jobs
  - Lack of support and information in how to find work? If so, where are the gaps?
  - Lack of help in training/skills support etc…
- SUPPLY SIDE:
  - Lack of enthusiasm, desire, willingness to work, motivation?
  - Unrealistic aspirations?
  - Family commitments which are difficult to overcome

WRITE UP BARRIERS ON A FLIPCHART AND IDENTIFY WHICH THE GROUP FEEL ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT/IMPORTANT BARRIERS.

What do you think are the main challenges/ issues these people have in…?
1) Deciding what they would like to do?
2) developing their skills or finding relevant experience?
3) Applying for work?

How might our characters overcome these challenges…?

PROBE FOR EACH STAGE: career/skills/applications
- What help/information do they need?
- Who might they go to for help?
- What other types of services would be helpful?
- What services would they be likely to use? Are they aware of them? Any other barriers to take up?

INTRODUCE CASE STUDIES IF NECESSARY. PROBES for reference/guidance:

PROBES for Sharon:
- Practical difficulty of having children at home

Explore barriers to work

- Cost of childcare
- Choosing a career, previous work had only been temporary
- Time out of work – anxious about starting? Does she have the right skills

PROBES for David:
- Struggle with motivation with work – unsure what he wants to do
- Not aware of job opportunities in local area
- Few qualifications

PROBES for Tim:
- Unsure how his qualifications relate to the job market?
- Might not have the right CV, covering letter, interview process/practice?
- Is the work experience relevant?
- How might he feel if he continues to be unsuccessful?

REVIEW HOW MUCH OF A ROLE THEY FELT BCC HAD IN EACH OF THE CASE STUDIES…

Reflecting on what we have discussed, where do you think BCC could do the most to help those looking for work/ improve their skills, if at all?

Is there a role for BCC in promoting services that these characters might want to use?
How?
Is there anyone in particular it should be targeted at?

Engaging personal responsibility

DEPENDING ON THE GROUP – ROTATE ORDER OF ASKING ABOUT VOLUNTEERING VS COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT.

I’d now like to talk to you about volunteering and being involved in your local community…

PROVIDE BRIEF DEFINITION OF WHAT WE MEAN BY VOLUNTEERING

“By volunteering, we mean the different ways in which people could get more involved in their local community by helping others. These activities are unpaid and can include helping a friend, neighbour or someone else, or a family member who does not live with you, but exclude helping a member of your household.”

Introduce definition of volunteering – taken from residents’ survey with clarification about family members

20 mins
**SET UP A FLIPCHART THAT HAS FOUR QUARTERS IN IT, ASK PARTICIPANTS TO COME AND WRITE THEIR NAME IN ONE OF THE FOUR QUARTERS:**

- 1) Volunteering isn't for me, I’m not interested
- 2) I am unsure about volunteering, I don’t know much about it or whether it is something I’d be interested in
- 3) I know I would like to volunteer, but I can’t find the time/don’t know how to get involved
- 4) I already volunteer

**MODOERATOR TO THEN GO ROUND ROOM AND ASK PEOPLE TO EXPLAIN WHY THEY HAVE PUT THEMSELVES IN EACH QUADRANT.**

**What do you do? How often? How did you get involved in it?**

**Why do you volunteer?**

**IF WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER IN FUTURE:**

- What would you like to do?
- Why are you interested in volunteering?

**IF NOT PRO VOLUNTEERING:**

- Why aren’t you interested?
- Probe on barriers to volunteering

**PROBE ON ATTITUDES TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF VOLUNTEERING**

- Type of volunteering? Small vs larger scale
- Level of commitment: regular? Long/short term?
  - What about other forms of personal responsibility…?
  - Eg neighbourhood watch, reporting road conditions, help neighbour with shopping

**HANDOUT FINDINGS FROM SURVEY – handout 4**

**Here is a list of things that residents said might encourage them to volunteer…**

**PROMPT:**

- Do you agree? Is there anything missing?
- What does ‘flexible hours’ and ‘big commitment’ mean? And why are these important in encouraging volunteering?
- What else might encourage people to volunteer more AND WHY?

**Having more information is 3rd on the handout; how might you go about finding out more about volunteering? What sources of information?**

**PROBE:**

- What would you like to need to know?
- From what source?

**I’d now like to ask you about getting more involved with the council…**

**SET UP A FLIPCHART THAT HAS FIVE STAGES IN IT, ASK PARTICIPANTS TO COME AND WRITE THEIR NAME IN ONE OF THE FOUR QUARTERS:**

1) I’m not interested in what the council is doing as long as it does its job
2) I would like to know what the council is doing but I don’t want to be involved beyond that
3) I would like to have more of a say in what the council is doing
4) I would like to become actively involved in helping the council in what it is doing
5) I am already actively involved in helping deliver council services

**FOR THOSE WHO SAID THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED:**

- Why would you like to be more involved or have more of a say?
- How would you like to be more involved/have more of a say?
- What motivates you to get involved?

**FOR ALL:**

- What other reasons may people want to get involved with the council?

**FOR THOSE WHO WERE NOT INTERESTED IN GETTING MORE INVOLVED WITH BCC…**

- Why would you rather not have more involvement with BCC?

**What can be done to encourage people to volunteer and why?**

**Explore willingness to get involved with BCC and why**

8 mins
**PROVIDE A LIST OF POSSIBLE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE COULD GET MORE INVOLVED WITH COUNCIL – HANDOUT 5**

**Were you aware of these opportunities?**

Which are more of interest, if any?

**PROBE THOSE WHO SAID THEY WEREN’T INTERESTED IN COUNCIL:**

**Does seeing this list make you feel any differently?**

- **Why?**
- **Which things in particular?**

**Would specific information from BCC help encourage you to be more engaged and feel positively about the council?**

**PROBE**

- **What would you like to/need to know?**
- **From what source?**

This section is particularly important where we do not cover comms in the groups

**Understand what creates more positive attitudes towards the Council**

**Conclusions**

| What one recommendation would you make for the Council on any of the specific topics discussed today? | 5 mins |
| What one thing will you do now after the discussion today? |
| Thanks and close INCENTIVES (AND CHECK WE HAVE BILL DETAILS) |

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HANDOUT 1 – List of services

The list below outlines the range of services that Buckinghamshire County Council provides:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Parish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary, Secondary, Special schools</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support and early years for 3-4 yr olds</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure services - swimming pools etc.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks, open spaces, rights of way</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the environment and improving air quality</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgrounds</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services - children and families</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social services – adults / older people</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing services</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste management (disposal of waste through landfill and recycling centres)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emptying bins/refuse collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport planning / management</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library services and Adult Learning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading standards (advice for consumers &amp; businesses)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth centres and other facilities for young people</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Thames Valley Police</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tackling drug and alcohol misuse / Anti-Social Behaviour</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of roads (not motorways)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of pavements</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street lighting</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congestion management (e.g. planning road work, traffic lights)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road safety</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>Bucks Primary Care Trust</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local planning permissions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Health</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Halls, Greens and Allotments</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging job creation and economic growth</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HANDOUT 2 – Crime statistics

Bucks County Council conducted a residents survey in 2011; here are some of the things residents said about living in Buckinghamshire.

- 92% say they feel safe in their area during the day
- 63% say they feel safe during the night

However...

- 67% say that tackling crime and ASB should be the no.1 priority for BCC to support/deliver (2nd to roads)
- Residents’ feel crime & ASB is the least acceptable area to reduce spending (75%, roads was 2nd with 64%)

And here are some local crime statistics about the number of reported incidents in your local area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Reported crimes per 1,000 people (2011)</th>
<th>Reported crimes per 1,000 people (2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerrards Cross</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylesbury</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Wycombe</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chesham</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Missenden</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckinghamshire</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thames Valley</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hertfordshire</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northamptonshire</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This handout outlines the various different ways in which Buckinghamshire County Council help to tackle crime and ASB.

Trading Standards
- Consumer advice and information on issues such as food labeling, high pressure selling, feeling ripped off, shopping/contract problems
- Advice for local traders, including Buy With Confidence service which checks for trustworthiness and compliance among those who sign up
- Trading scams – investigate, advise and give information on scams - eg counterfeit goods

Safety in the community:
- Police Community Support Officers – provide funding
- Reduce reoffending - by working with offenders
- Provide help and support for victims and perpetrators – eg victim support, help with domestic abuse
- Provide advice and information about crime (e.g. www.ionbucks.info)
- Promote personal safety and security
- Drug and Alcohol abuse - support for people with issues
- Provide support/training for community groups to tackle crime and ASB

Protection of vulnerable adults
- Reduce risk and increase safety of vulnerable adults
- Running of Careline – a freephone number to report abuse or receive advice

Protection of vulnerable children
- Ongoing support to children and families who may be at risk of harm.
- Running of emergency contact telephone if someone is suspected of being in immediate danger

HANDOUT 4 – encouraging volunteering
Q19 Listed below are some things other people have said might encourage them to volunteer and get involved more in their local community. Which, if any, of these would encourage you to get involved in the future?

- If the hours were flexible
- If it didn’t involve a big time commitment
- If more information about the things I could do was available
- If I could do it from home
- If someone who was already involved was there to help get me started
- If I knew it would benefit someone I know
- If I knew I could get my expenses paid
- If I knew it would help me improve my skills or get qualifications
- If I knew it would benefit me in my career or improve my job prospects
- If my friends or family got involved with me
- If someone could provide transport when I needed it
- If I had help with my caring responsibilities
- If I could get help with the relevant paperwork
- Nothing would encourage me

Base: All valid responses (4548), fieldwork dates 26 September – 12 December 2011

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HANDOUT 5 – ways of getting involved

There are several different ways in which you can get involved with Buckinghamshire County Council.

- Elections
- Consultations
- Petitions
- Observing council decision making e.g. Full Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny (webcasting/meetings)
- Giving your views in Council meetings e.g. regular 19 Local Area meetings with partners and public, Youth Cabinet, Health Link, Specific Public Scrutiny meetings
- Proactively influencing the council e.g. complaining, reporting issues, Contacting my Councillor
- Following the work of the council and council news e.g. social media, alerts, local media, website etc
- Volunteering (e.g. School Governor, helping out at local library/at a day care centre etc)
- Joining or lobbying local interest groups or public organisations (parishes, district, NHS etc)
- Working for the Council
- Customer Feedback as a service user
Communications materials – campaign one

“Jane didn’t have enough money for her shopping.
That’s strange, she only cashed her pension yesterday.”

“Well, Bob’s been round again.
Do you think he took it?”

“It wouldn’t be the first time.
Should we tell someone?”

Speak up
Don’t let someone vulnerable be abused.
Call the Careline today 0800 137 915
Visit www.bsvab.org

Safeguarding is everybody’s business

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Safeguarding is everybody’s business
This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

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Communications materials – campaign two

What is Wellbeing?
Wellbeing is when you feel good and enjoy your day to day life. The way we think and the things we do, affects our wellbeing:

Connect With the people around you. Have a conversation, pass the time of day, make time for a chat...
Be active Find a physical activity that you enjoy, step outside, go for a walk, gardening...
Take notice Take the time to stop and look at the world around you, the weather, the seasons...
Keep learning Try something new whether it’s a new recipe, fixing the bike or even signing up for a course...
Give Smile, do something nice for a friend or neighbour, make sometime for others...

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/wellbeing

What is wellbeing?
Wellbeing is when you feel good and enjoy your day to day life. The things we do and the way that we think, affects our wellbeing, there are two ways that can help boost our wellbeing.

Research shows that happier people are more likely to live longer than people who feel less well. In fact, the money you spend on wellbeing can make a big difference to how we feel. Being active, eating well and combining these will make a difference. You might find that there is something that will help you make changes to your life.

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/wellbeing

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What is Wellbeing?

Wellbeing is when you feel good and enjoy your day to day life. The way we think and the things we do, affects our wellbeing.

There are five ways that can help boost our wellbeing – Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning and Give

Connect...
Connect with the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/wellbeing

five ways to wellbeing

Connect
with your friends, family, neighbours or people at work. Pass the time of day, make time for a chat...

Be active...
Go for a walk or run, cycle a game, try gardening or dancing. Exercise makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/wellbeing

five ways to wellbeing

Be active
Find a physical activity that you enjoy, exercise, go for a walk, try gardening...

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Take notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, out at lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep Learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

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Give...

Do something nice for a friend or stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

www.buckinghamshire.nhs.uk/wellbeing

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