

Theme Report 1: Involvement and Influence

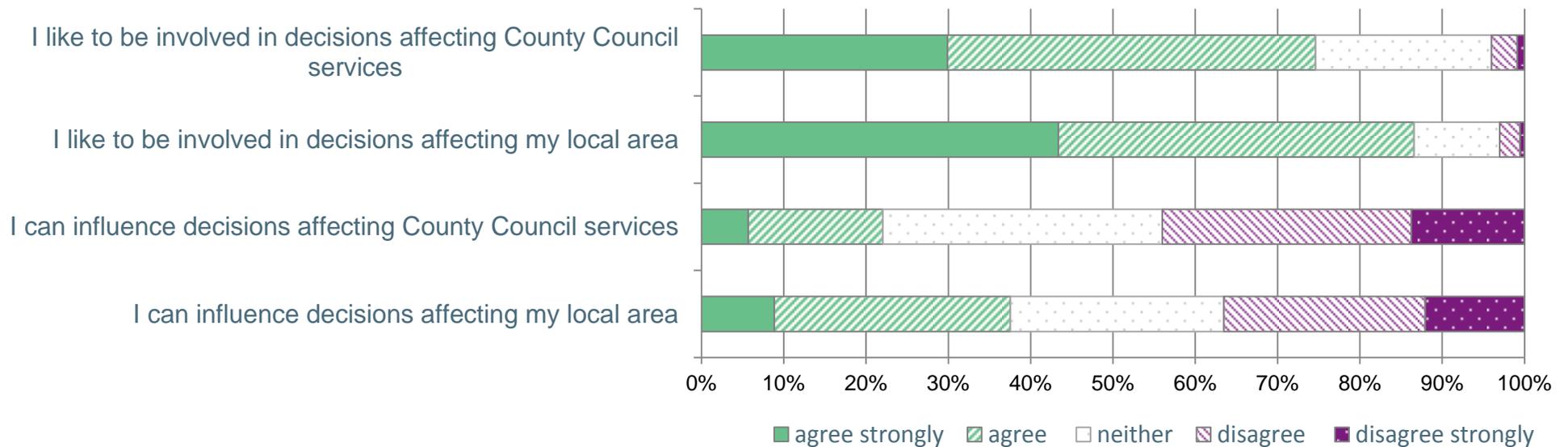
August 2016

Links to Better Together outcome - Resilient: Communities will have greater influence and control.

Performance Result:

I can influence decisions affecting County Council services	22% agree	
I can influence decisions affecting my local area	37% agree	

This is one of the lowest areas of satisfaction.

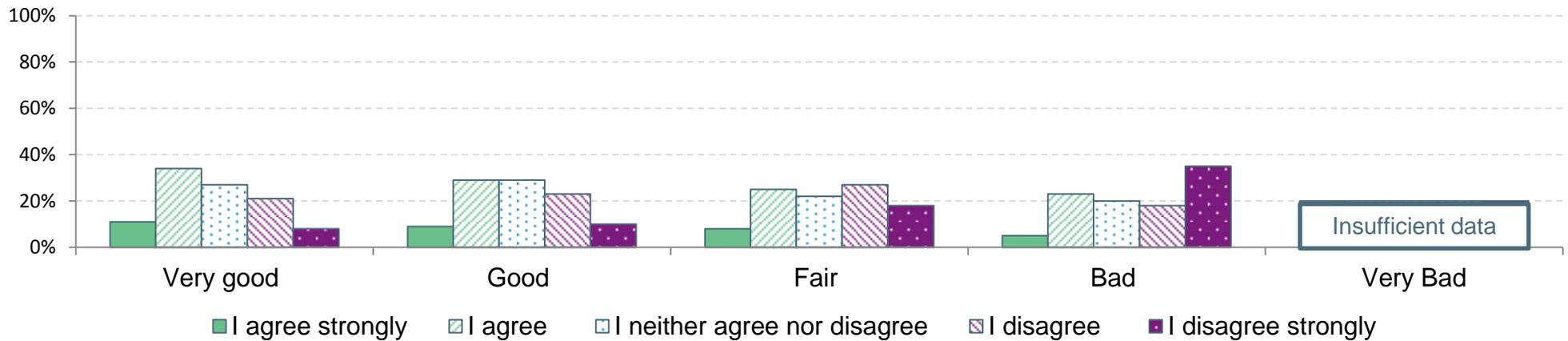


Overall, respondents said they liked to be involved in decisions affecting County Council services and their local area, whilst most did not agree that they could influence these.

Identifying inequalities

When asked whether they could influence decisions, people saying their mental health was bad disagreed more in relation to being able to influence decisions in their local area. Respondents with children and those in the middle age bands disagreed slightly more that they could influence decisions, with the older age categories appearing to agree more. Those not indicating a religion also appeared to disagree slightly more.

I can influence decisions affecting my local area by mental health:

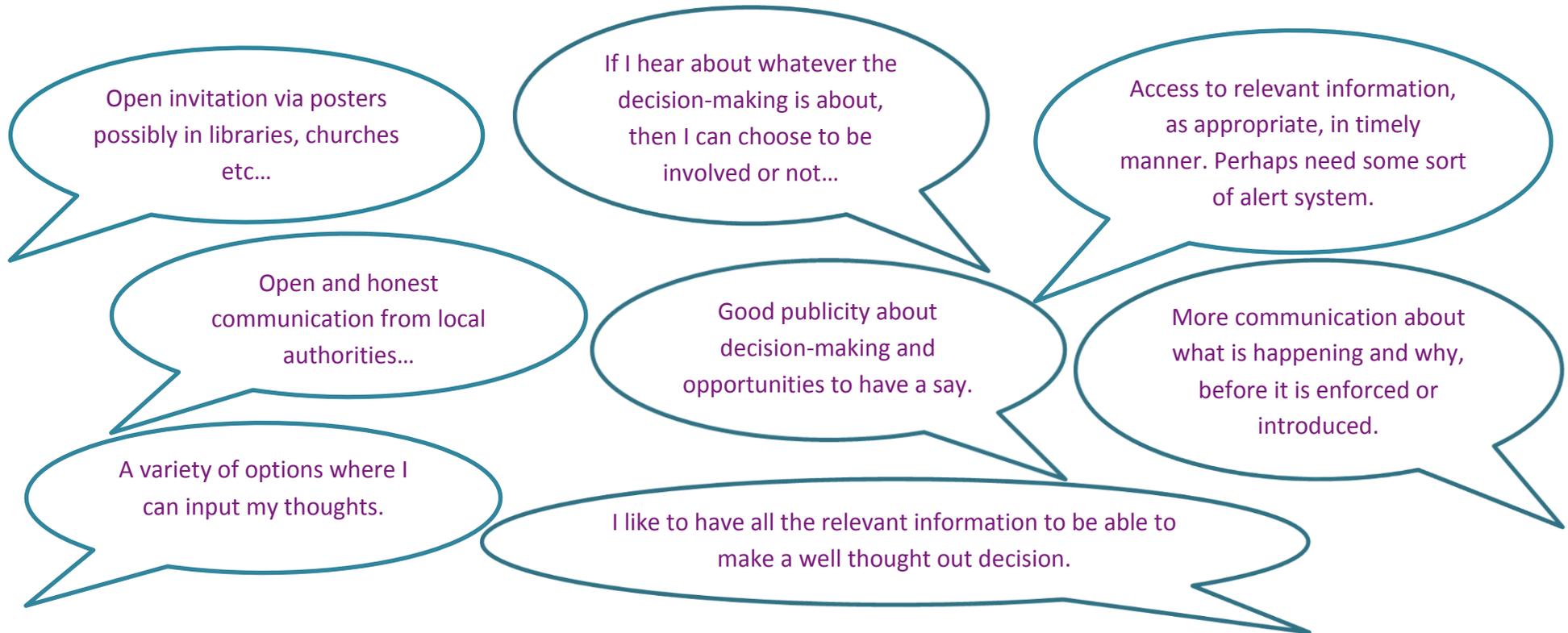


Comments

Respondents were then asked “what helps or encourages you to get involved in consultation or influencing decisions most of all?”.

Being informed

Good, timely, clear and inclusive information, available through a variety of channels was suggested in helping people take part. A number of people suggested that better transparency, publicity and public awareness would enable them to take part. Some said they did not think decisions being made were known about as much as they could be. In order to make a well thought out decision, or provide their opinion, all the relevant information needed to be available.



Questionnaires such as the Community Survey were seen as one good way of letting people have their say. Other suggestions included communicating through local press, community newsletters, community events, parish or town councils, Councillors, posters, local libraries, churches, voluntary organisations as well as online.

People said they needed to know what is happening and how to have their say. One person suggested some sort of alert system and another, “to be contacted when decisions or plans are made in the area I live”. Some said there was no easy way of knowing what was going on.

A number who were already involved with an organisation, a local group or parish council said being part of something was useful and that “finding out about various decisions can be a problem if you're not involved in a particular area”.

When a consultation takes place, this needs to be in accessible language. One suggested “straightforward language without political overtones”, another “clear and transparent information” and another “talking in language that makes it easy to understand technical areas and asking questions that it is possible to answer (i.e. don't require too much background knowledge)”. Having “plenty of time for response” was also mentioned.

Trust and confidence

People need to feel able to influence decisions, to give meaningful comment, to be listened to, and to be given evidence that they have been listened to. There appeared to be a strong feeling that people, in a democracy, should be able to influence decisions, tempered by an apparent belief by some that they cannot influence decisions.

A number of people expressed a lack of trust and confidence in decision making processes. Some said that decisions had already been made, that officers or Councillors didn't listen or treated consultation as a “tick box exercise” or paying “lip service” - that we “consult and then we will do it anyway”. One person said that they would be encouraged to get involved “when I see the consultation is genuinely listened to and that my voice can result in change/action”.

When there is no evidence that opinions have been listened to, this is a big disincentive - “mostly my views are ignored, so I don't bother”. One said the following encouraged them to get involved: “knowing that opinions are taken into account by people making decisions. Knowing that the people making decisions do not make decisions purely based on their own opinion, but try to balance the needs of everyone”.

If there is a real sense I can influence a decision.

The sense that I might be able to influence decisions...

I do it in the hope it will have an influence on decisions that will help my family and community, but I do not know if it really does or this is just a tick box exercise for DCC.

The thought that it may influence decisions, although I feel it is unlikely to.

Flagging up (or admitting) to problems, honestly seeking resolution with the public, rather than consulting when decisions have been made.

Feeling that taking the time to give my views will carry some weight and make a real difference to decisions that are made.

In my experience it is pointless to attempt to be involved because there are forgone decisions, and councils only pay lip service to their customers.

Ambition and interest

Having a personal interest and an ambition to make a change whether directly about yourself, family, friends, community or the area lived in, was seen as one 'encouragement' to get involved. Perhaps more so if there was a potential negative or detrimental impact. Additionally, some expressed the desire to see that those who may have less influence and those who were more vulnerable have their interests represented. Housing, planning permission, transport and getting around, environment, loss of services such as hospital beds, buses, or cuts in general were topics of interest. People's interest may not just be specific concerns, but that they have local knowledge or experience that they feel is valuable to informing the decisions, or that they felt it important to be part of a democratic process.

Love of this green and coastal area.

To make sure disabled people don't miss out, as I'm disabled.

If there is a direct negative impact on my family, personally or within my community.

Anything that will affect me is more likely to get me involved

A desire to see that any decisions are in the interest of local people, those with least influence who are generally most affected.

If my friends or neighbours are directly affected.

The wish to improve or at least maintain the quality of life for our community.

Caring about the area.