

JOIN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN'S
Big Conversation Panel

#myvoicemyAND
#thebigpanelAND

How has COVID-19 affected you and your family?

Survey ONE



Summary Report

Ards and North Down's Big Conversation Panel

Issue 1/ November 2020



ISSUE 1—NOVEMBER 2020

Survey Completed
14 September—31 October 2020

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We are pleased with the response to our invitation to join Ards and North Down’s first Big Conversation Panel.

To design services and programmes, Council and our Community Planning Partners need to understand the issues being experienced by people who live in this borough.

The purpose of the Big Conversation Panel, and its surveys, is not just about collecting data. It is about providing you with the opportunity to have your voice heard and to influence the decisions that are taken by Council and other public bodies such as health, education and economy.

The Big Conversation Panel is managed by Ards and North Down Borough Council as part of its commitment to a Community Planning Partnership that includes various public bodies working alongside the community,

voluntary and 3rd sector. In addition to informing the work of the Council, the Big Conversation Panel will also help our partners understand the needs and opinions of residents within the borough and improve the services that they provide to our residents.

The online surveys are only part of the Big Conversation Panel. We have adapted our approach to make it more accessible to everyone. We created an ‘easy read’ simplified version, ran focus groups, provided telephone support, and translated the survey

into Arabic, Kurdish and Polish. We also made available hard copies of the survey for people without internet access.

This report provides a summary of the responses received during survey ONE. Our aim for future surveys is also to provide Panel Members with information on how we have used that information collected from previous surveys.

Community Planning Manager
Ards and North Down Borough Council
November 2020

About Ards and North Down's Big Conversation Panel

The Big Conversation was used five years ago to gather information from residents of Ards and North Down about the things they liked, disliked and would change about the area. This was used to create the borough's first Community Plan—called the Big Plan for Ards and North Down.

The Big Plan sets out a long term vision for the area and the aspirations of what we want to achieve by the year 2032. As this is a long-term plan, it is important that we regularly check that we are continuing to prioritise the right issues and that our services have the greatest impact on the wellbeing and happiness of our residents.

Covid-19 has changed things significantly. The Council's Community Planning Service was already developing the Big Conversation Panel when lockdown happened (March—July 2020). It is now more important than ever to meaningfully

engage with residents and we hope this initiative is one of the ways that the Council, and our Community Planning Partners, can build sustained relationships with our residents.

Often people feel they don't know how to make their voice heard or they miss an important consultation opportunity. The idea behind the Big Conversation Panel is to have a body of people who want to be heard and are happy to receive an agreed number of surveys per year (in the format that has been agreed—online, hard copy, telephone or supported group).

Members of the Panel will then receive direct correspondence from the Council's Community Planning Service with the results of the survey. Panel Members will also receive information to explain how we have used the feedback provided.

The Big Conversation Panel is a pilot and if it shows good levels of engagement we may continue it beyond the initial time frame. If it does continue, we will ask your permission if you are willing to remain as a Panel Member. Of course, people can join, or opt out of, the Panel at any time.

If you have any questions about the Big Conversation Panel or would like to join the next survey please e-mail communityplanning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER The information and evidence within this report relates directly to the participating Panel Members. Care should be taken before reporting any figures as being representative of the borough. While efforts have been made to make membership of the Panel accessible to all, we are aware of demographic gaps in participation.

The Big Conversation Panel in numbers

333

people completed the first Big Conversation Panel survey

4

The number of languages the survey was translated into

76%

Of people completed survey ONE and agreed to join the Big Conversation Panel and participate in surveys TWO and THREE

36

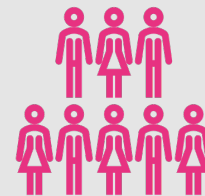
people completed an easy read version and took place in a focus group feedback session

266 out of 333

People provided written feedback on Covid-19 recovery priorities

SECTION 1

About You

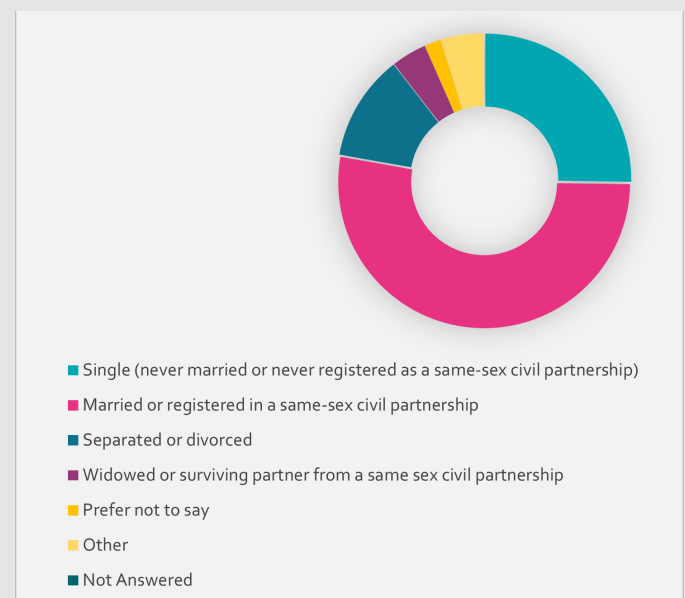
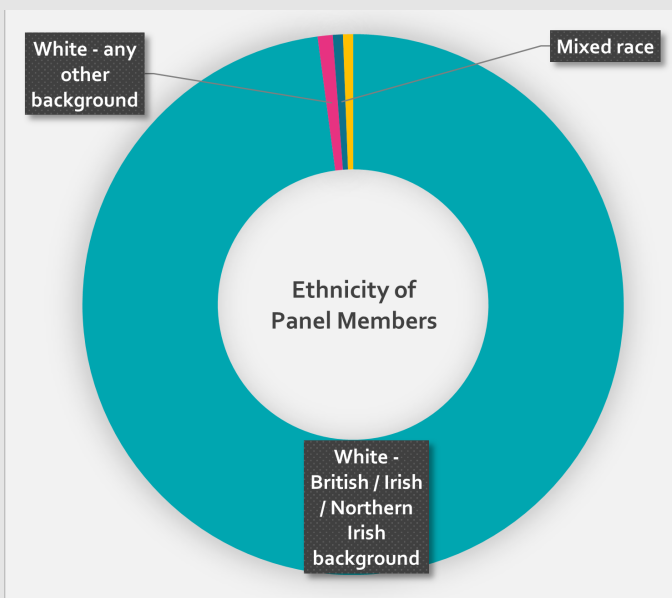
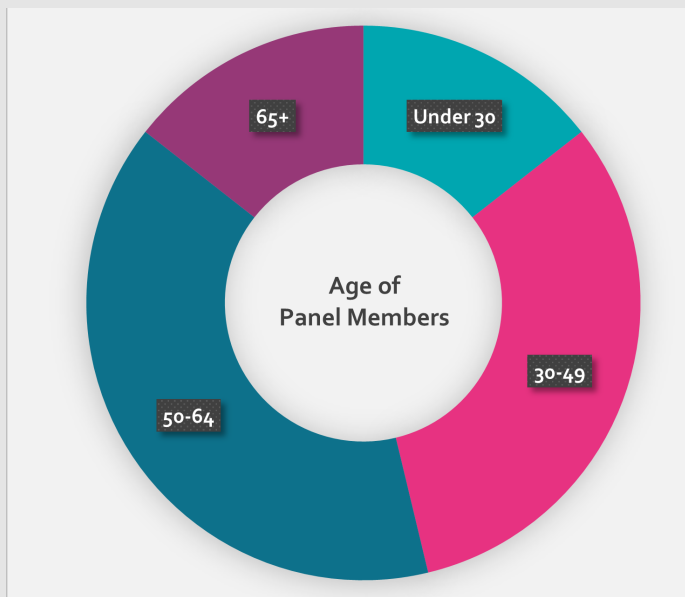
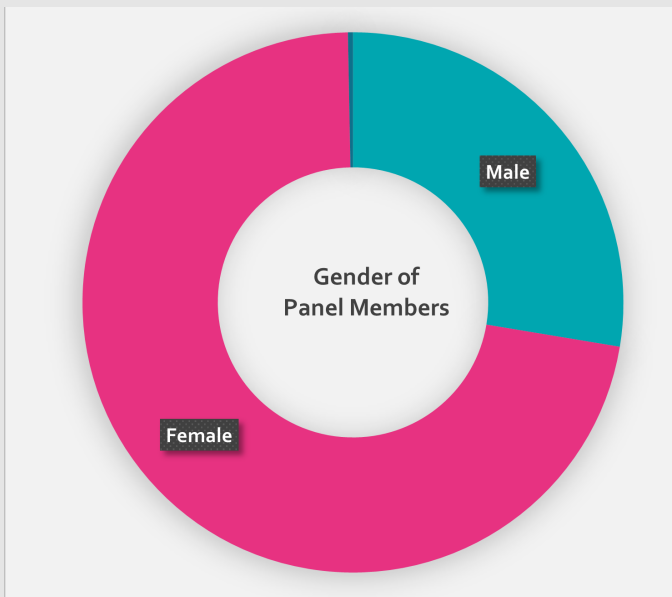


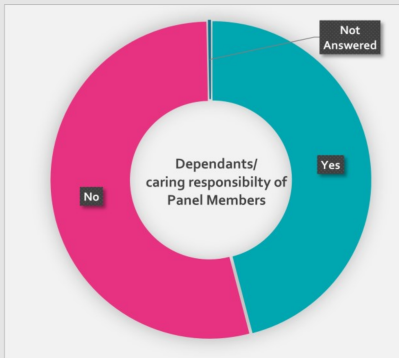
To help analyse the survey results we need to know a little bit about you. We will use this information to understand how answers to particular questions vary depending on age, location, caring responsibilities, ethnicity, employment status and gender. Knowing this information may help us, and our Community Planning Partners, tailor our services.

We kept any eye on this information as the survey was live. This meant we were able to target underrepresented groups and encourage them to participate.

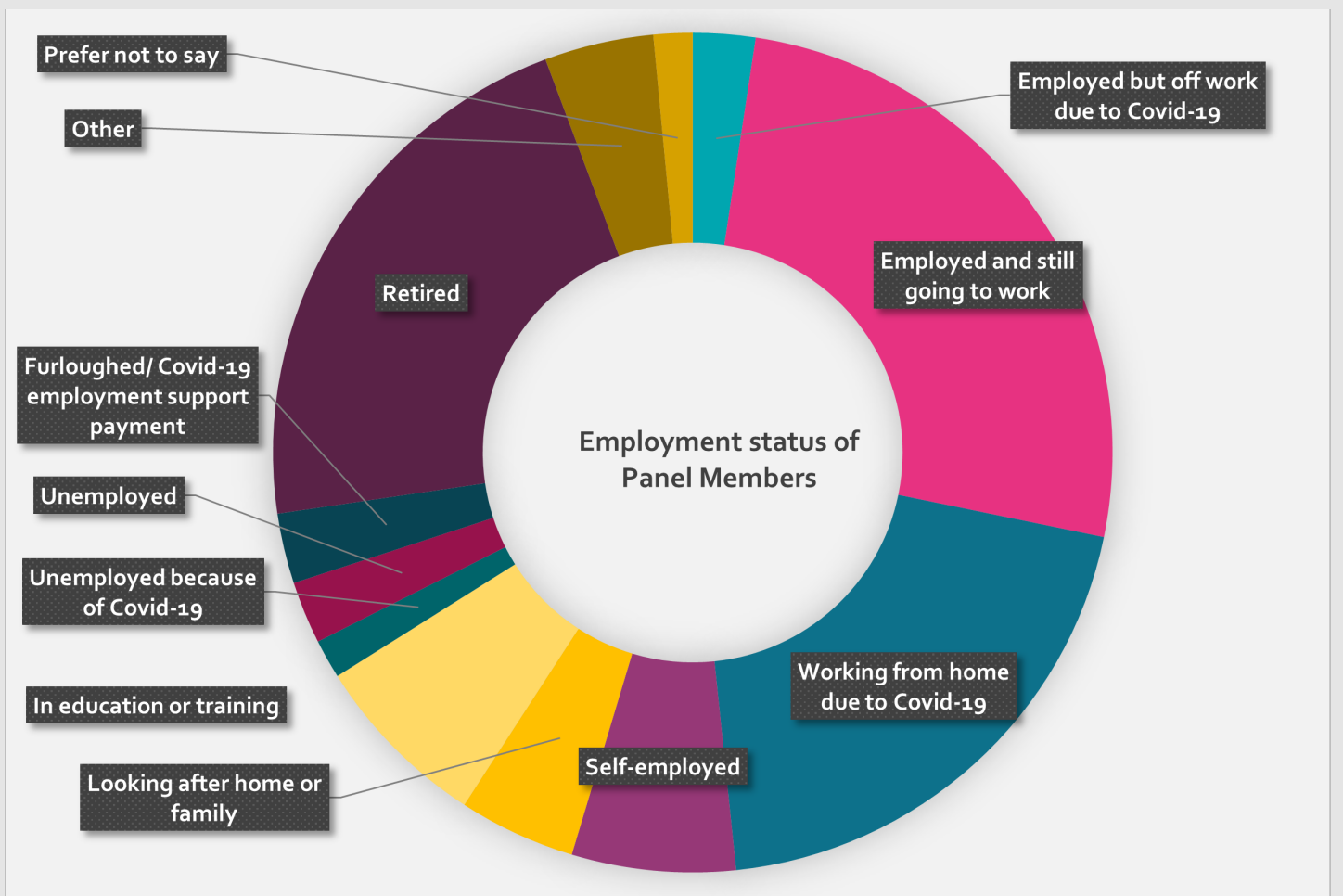
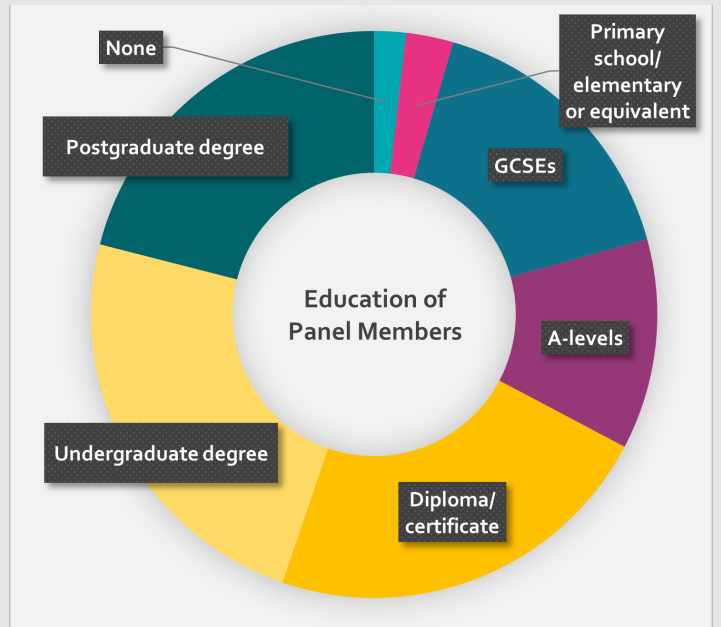
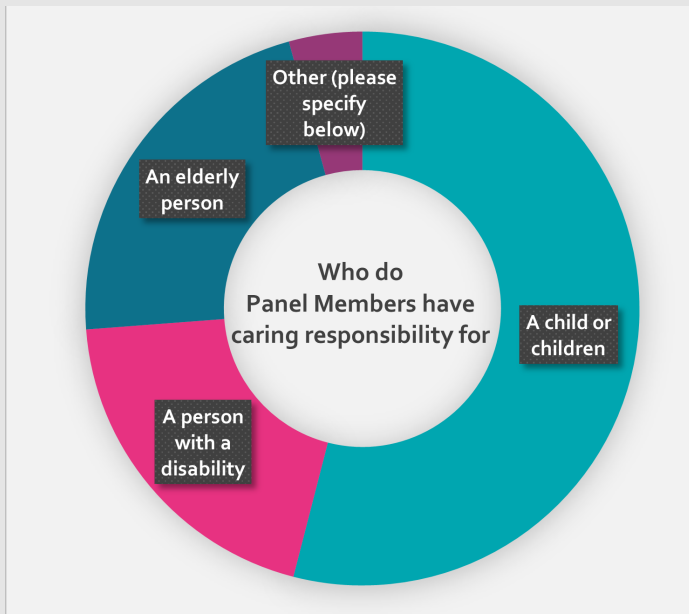
We reached out to all demographic groups within the borough, as it is important we receive feedback that is representative of the people of Ards and North Down. This is why structuring the

panel across three surveys will help us engage with more people as we hope the numbers increase for each survey. While we are happy that survey ONE is representative across different age groups, you can see from the charts on pages 4 and 5 that we need to target more men and minority groups to participate.



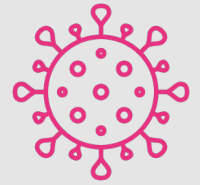


We will target more men and ethnic minorities to join the Big Conversation Panel survey TWO as these are currently under represented



SECTION 2

Your experience of Covid-19

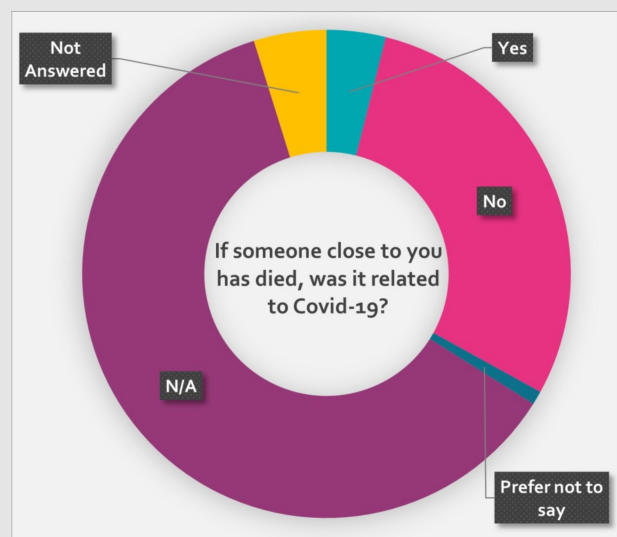
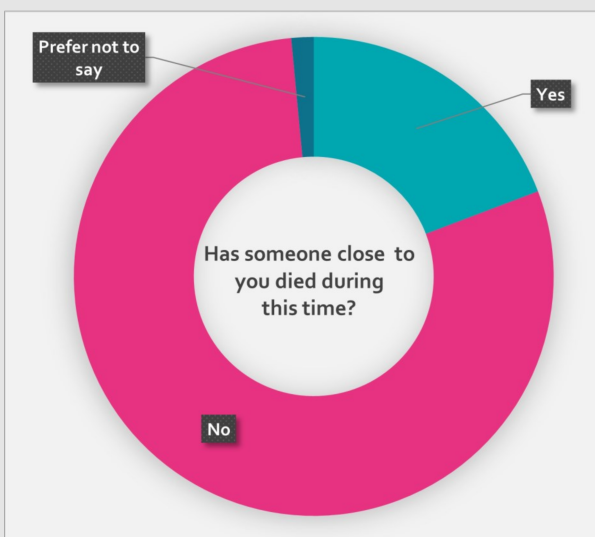
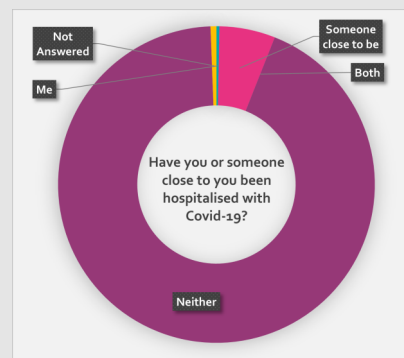
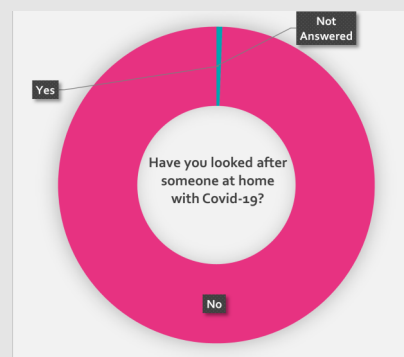
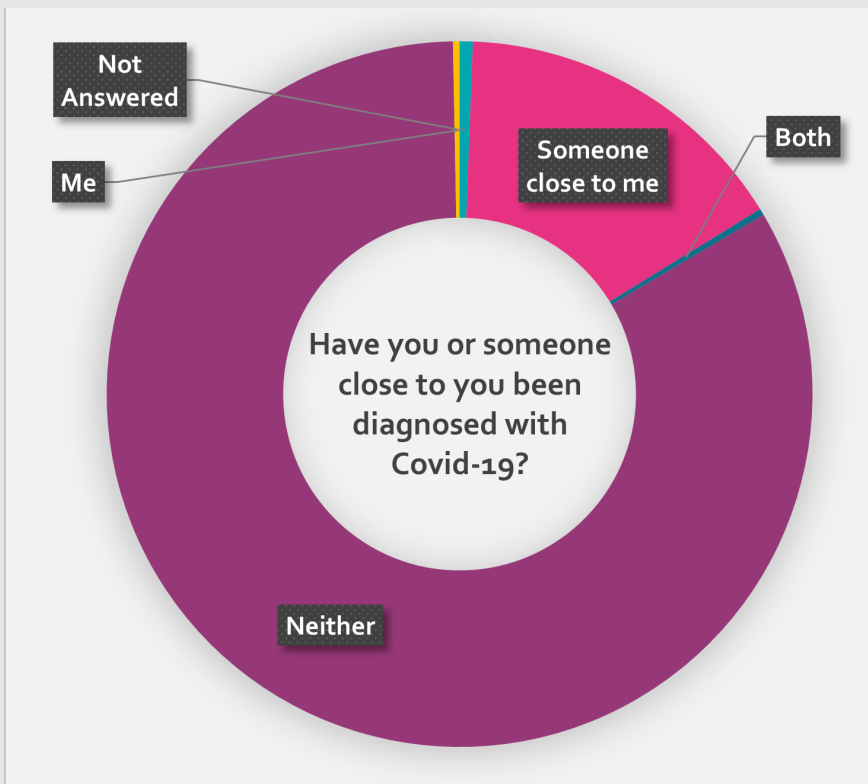


The Big Conversation Panel has not happened as a result of Covid-19. Over the past few years we have been exploring different ideas for how we can have sustained methods of getting feedback from our residents so we can use their knowledge and opinions to help shape better public services.

However, the Covid-19 Pandemic has altered how we operate and it is important that we understand how Covid-19 has affected our residents. This includes understanding our resident's personal experiences. Due to the sensitivities of these questions, it was made clear within the survey that these were optional and

could be skipped if a Panel Member felt uncomfortable answering them.

We understand that residents with personal experience of Covid-19, or who have lost loved ones for other reasons during this time, may have experienced additional trauma.



SECTION 3

Your general wellbeing during Covid-19 Lockdown



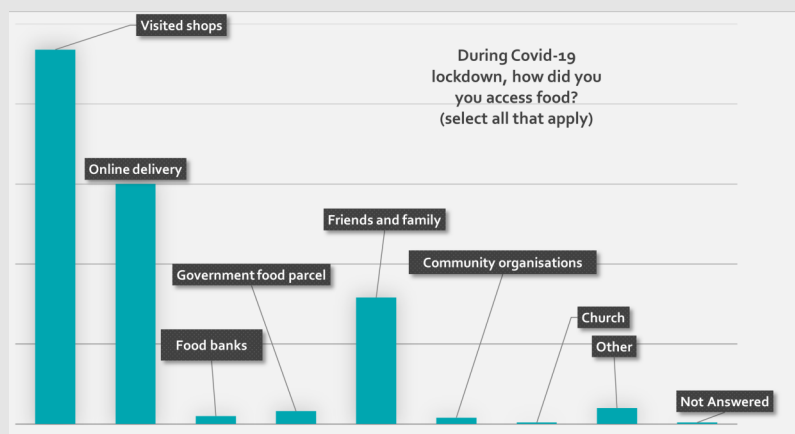
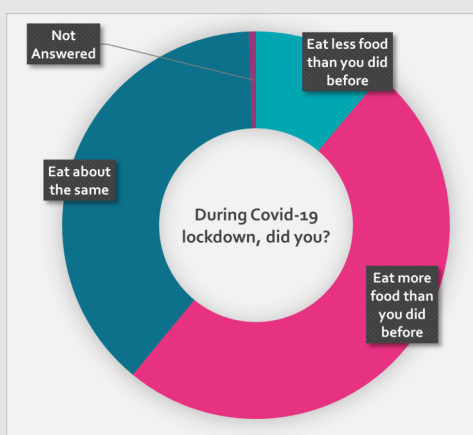
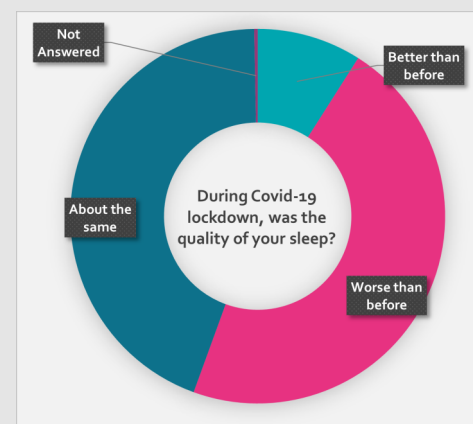
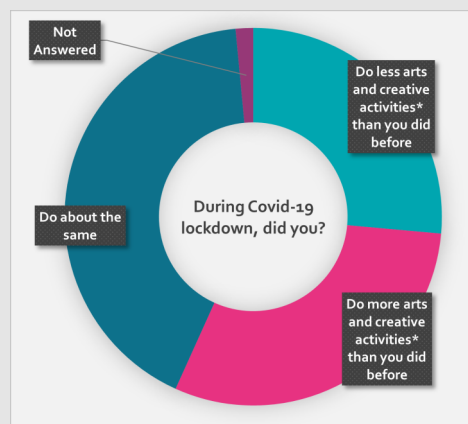
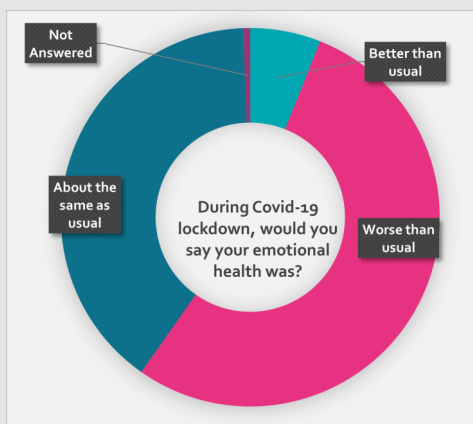
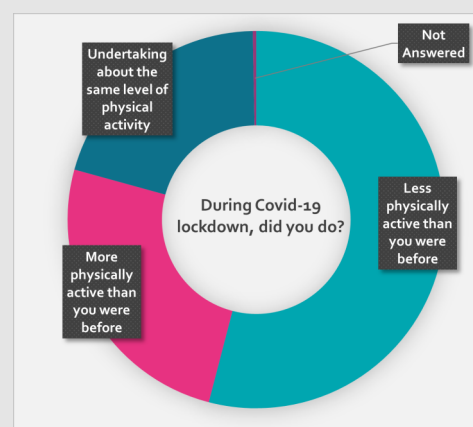
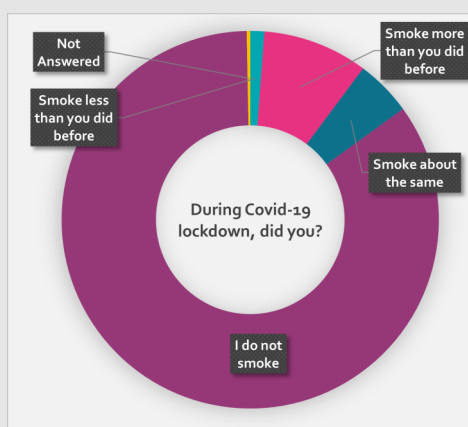
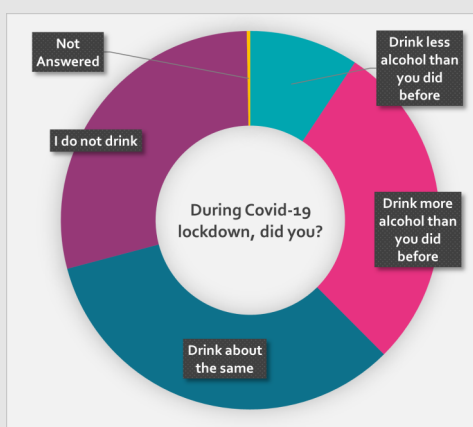
During the height of lockdown there was lots of talk about alcohol and food and whether people were over indulging as a way of coping. The data collected during this survey indicated that 28% of Panel Members drank more alcohol, 50% ate more food and 54% participated in less exercise. 46% and 53% of Panel Members

respectively experienced worse sleep and worse than usual emotional wellbeing. When the results were compared across the age bands, the most noticeable differences were with regard to emotional health and alcohol consumption.

70% of under 30s and 61% of 30-49 years

said their emotional health was worse than usual during lockdown compared to 51% of 50-64 year olds and 31% of over 65s.

Only 6% of over 65s said they drank more compared to between 27-30% of all other age groups.



SECTION 4

Your social wellbeing

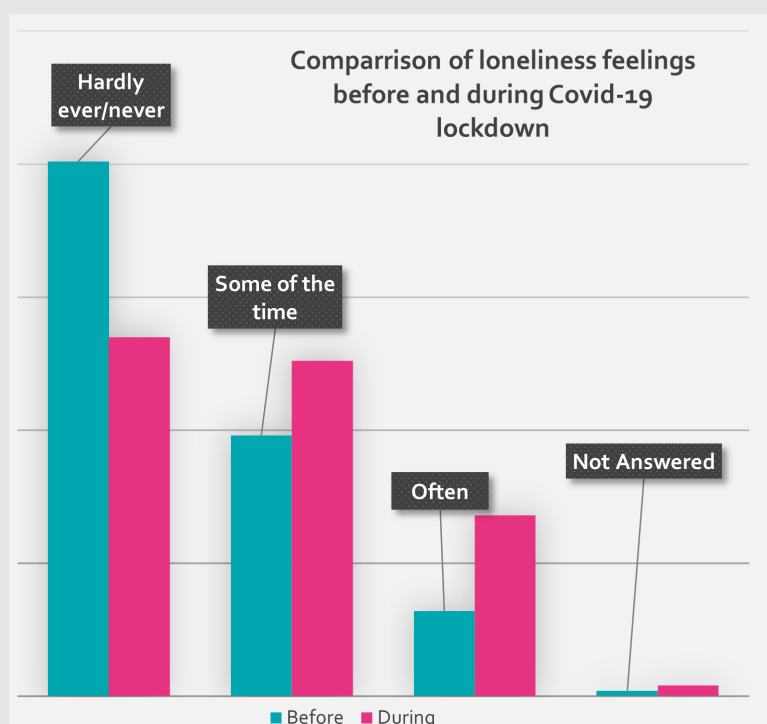
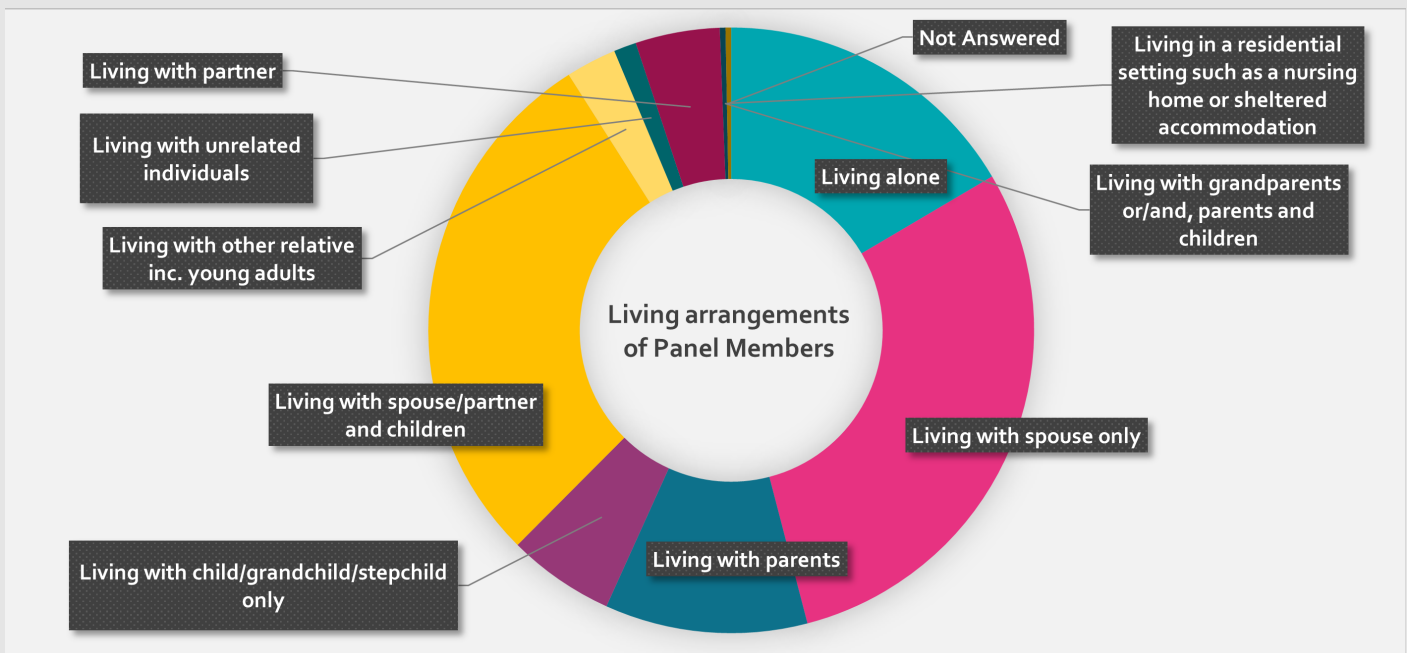


We asked Panel Members about their social interactions to help understand how much contact with other people they normally have. While sometimes discussed together, the definitions of social isolation and loneliness are different. To increase the understanding of the question, we included appropriate

definitions. Social isolation is about the number of contacts people have, while loneliness is a subjective feeling between a person's desired level of social contact and their actual level of social contact.

Covid-19 disrupted people's ability to boost their social contacts which may be

why an increased number of Panel Members reported that they felt lonely 'some of the time' or 'often' during Covid-19 lockdown more so than they previously would have. The results suggest that the social wellbeing of younger people has been most adversely affected by Covid-19.



Lockdown increased feelings of loneliness (some time and often) by almost 20 percentage points

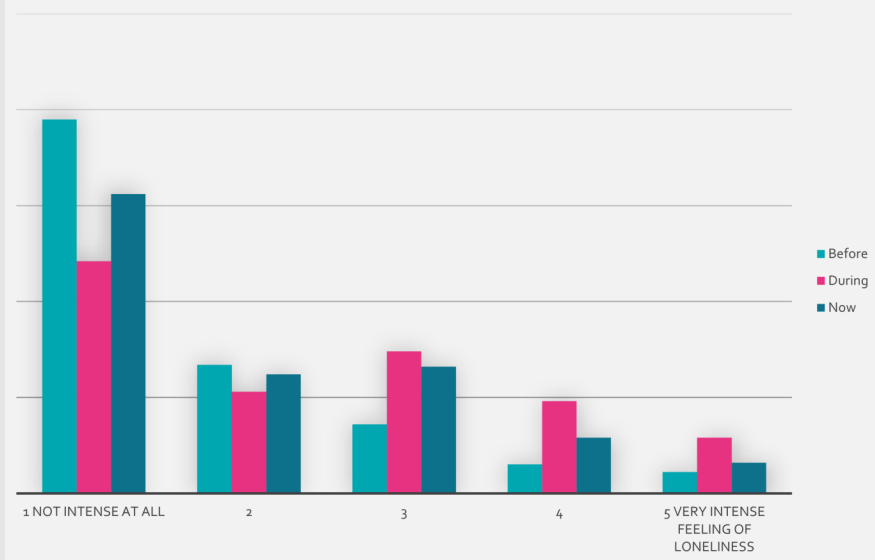
Before Covid-19 a higher percentage of under 50s were sometimes lonely compared to the 50 and over age group

During Covid-19 sometimes loneliness of 30s and under increased from 30% to 50%, over 65s increased from 19% to 40%

Both before and during Covid-19 33% and 34% respectively of under 30s said they are often lonely—the highest % of all age groups

(Charts depicting loneliness levels and intensities across age groups can be viewed on page 14)

Comparison of intensity of loneliness feelings



Panel members under 50 report more intense feelings of loneliness that those over 50

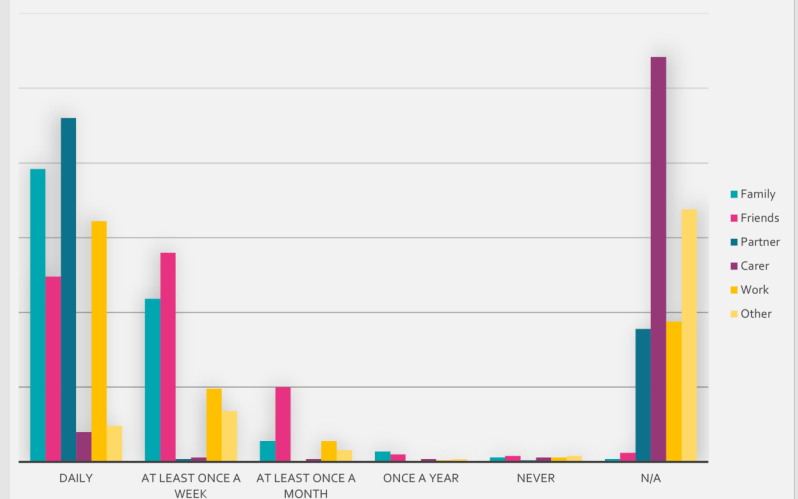
Intensity levels of loneliness increased across all age groups during Covid-19 and have not yet returned to pre-Covid-19 levels

The Office of National Statistics in England reports similar increases in levels of loneliness

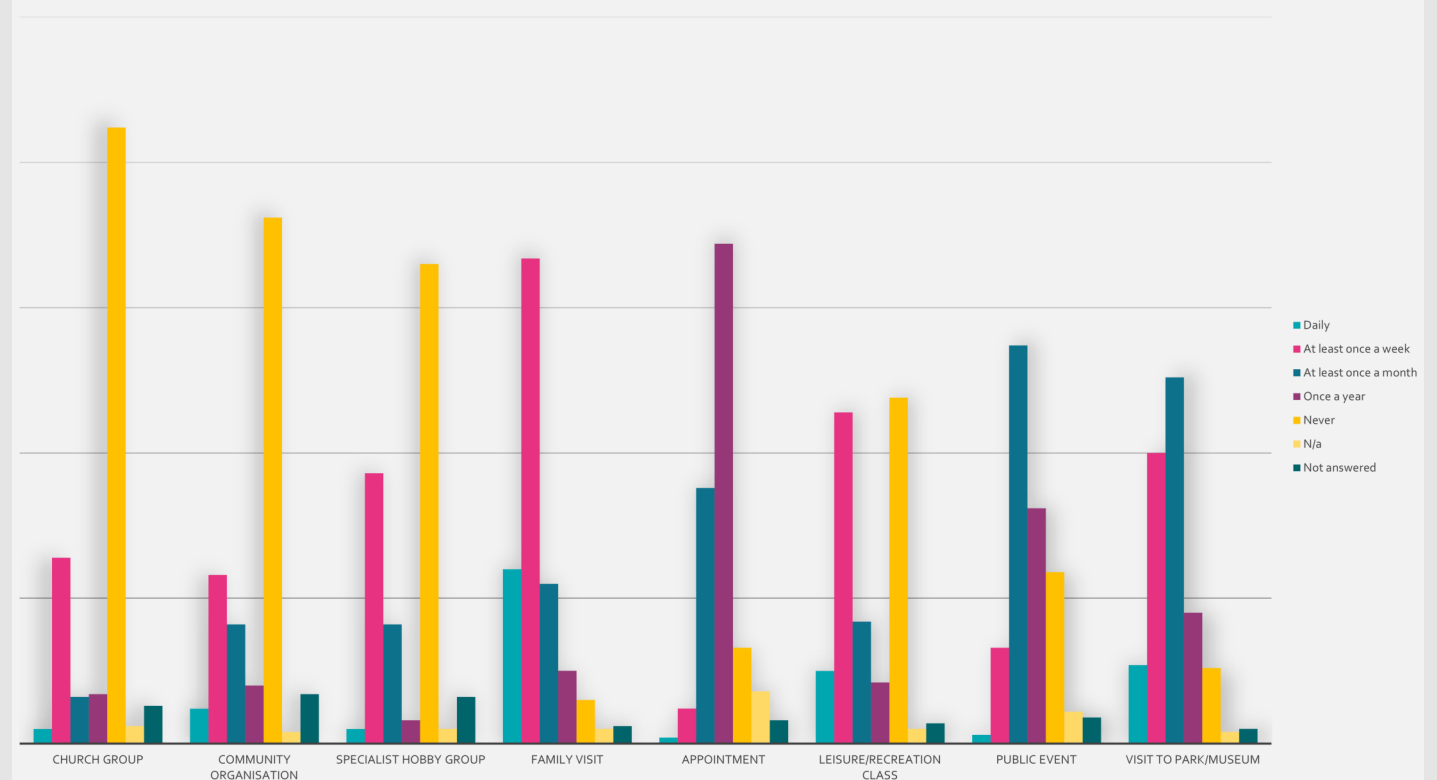
Prior to Covid-19, social isolation had already been identified as a priority issue within Ards and North Down by the Community Planning Partnership and the Age Friendly Alliance. To develop appropriate support services it is important to understand who is socially isolated and why.

We tend to focus on church groups and community based organisations to implement programmes to increase opportunities for social interactions. The information provided by Panel Members suggests many people never have any interactions with these organisations. We need to further examine the data collected to see if interactions vary across age groups and rural/urban locations.

Before Covid-19 lockdown, how often did you have contact with the following?



Before Covid-19 lockdown, how often did you take part in the following social activities?



SECTION 5

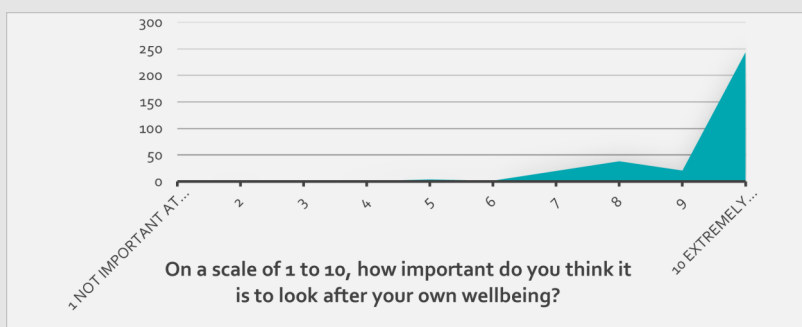
Your emotional wellbeing



Mental health and emotional wellbeing are frequently in the news. We have been concerned about our population's emotional wellbeing since we started community planning in 2015. It has always been challenging to express the extent of the issue due to statistics not always providing a full and accurate picture of

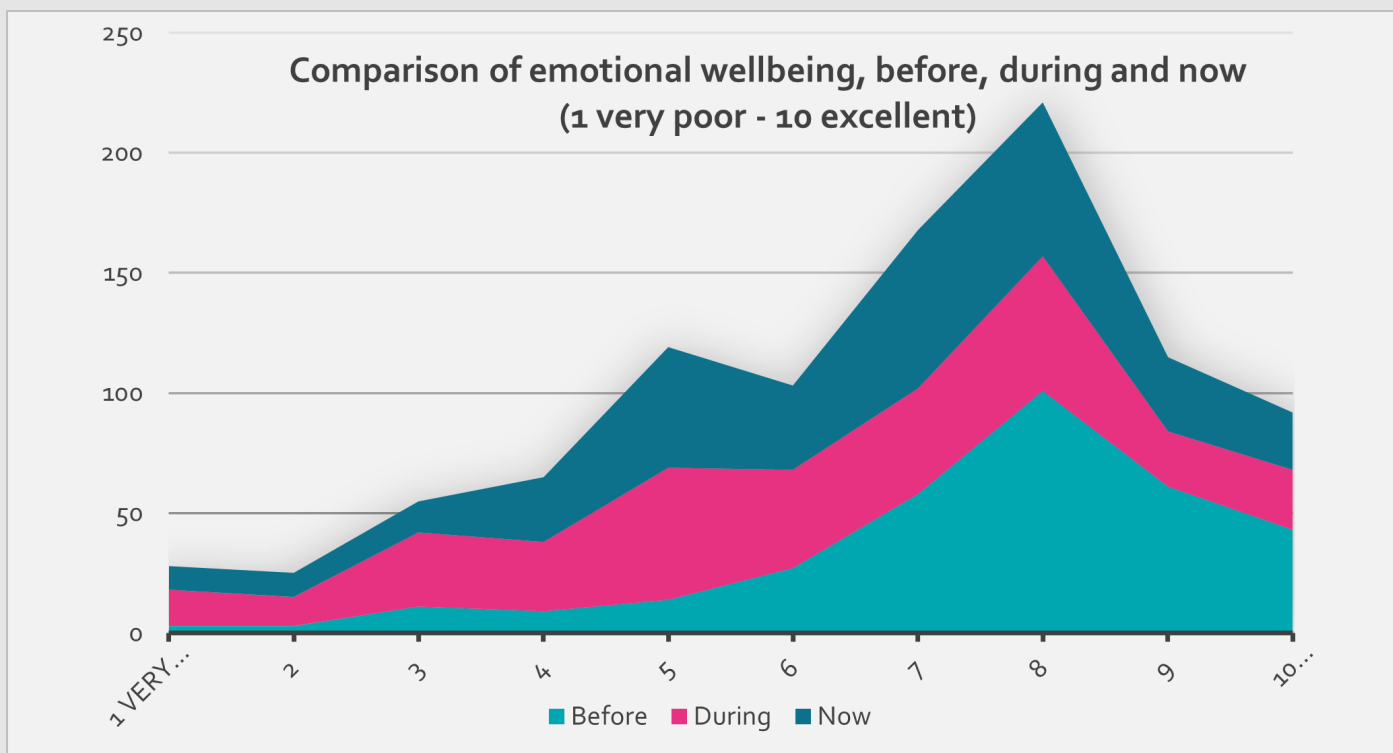
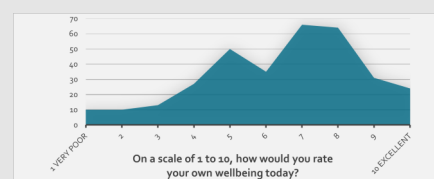
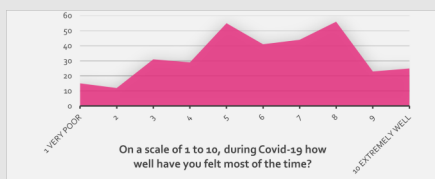
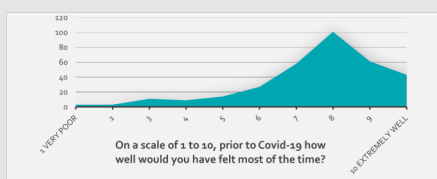
who is adversely affected. The Community Planning Partnership has an Emotional Health and Wellbeing Group that has worked together to agree a simple method of gauging emotional health within the borough. We use a temperature scale of 1-10 and asked residents to place themselves on it. While

this is not without its flaws, we can use a rolling score to indicate emotional health and wellbeing and we can use this method to assess the impact a programme or intervention is having on an individual's emotional wellbeing.



Panel Members who classed their employment status as looking after their home/family reported the poorest level of wellbeing today

Emotional wellbeing of retired Panel Members has changed the least, and tends to be the most positive.



SECTION 6

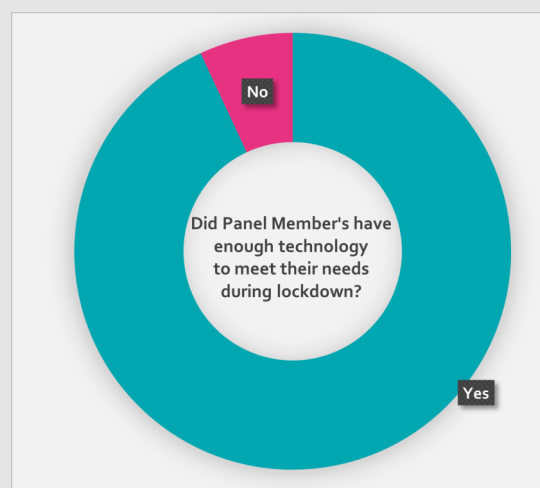
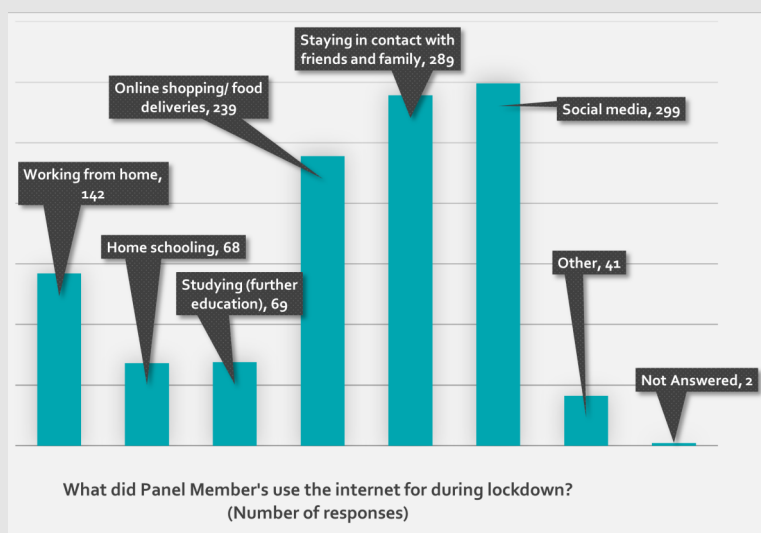
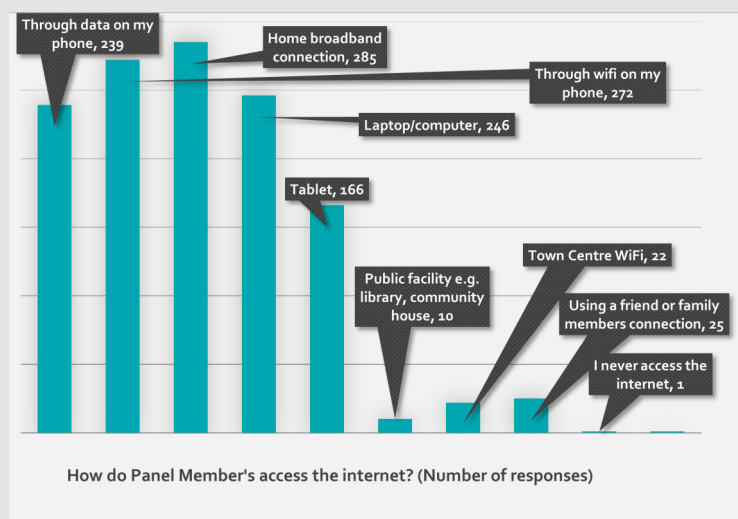
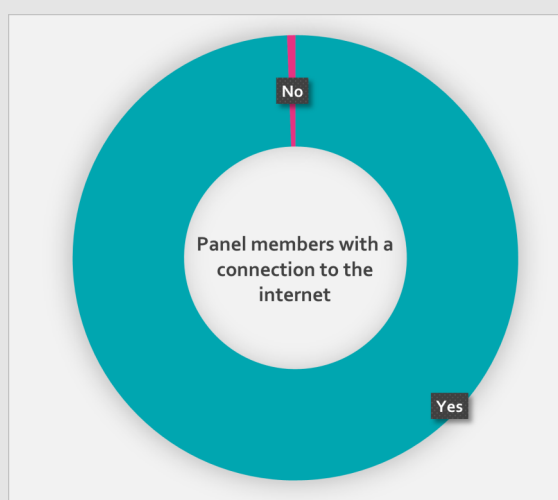
Your digital wellbeing



Whether we like it or not, the majority of communication now happens online. The use of digital platforms, particularly video conferencing, increased considerably during Covid-19 lockdown. While our results show that most people do have access to the internet (other surveys have reported similar statistics) it is essential

that we don't solely focus on digital methods at the expense of people who lack access. We were worried that shopping, home schooling and working from home meant households, who are not digitally poor, struggled to share resources. This only appears to have been the case in limited circumstances. We

need to look at the information we collected via the Big Conversation Panel and compare it to information gathered by SERC, Education Authority, Community Networks and Ards and North Down Community Advice to gain better insight into digital inclusion and poverty.

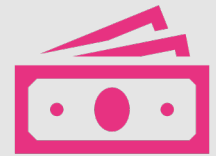


Most Big Conversation Panel Members have internet access. This is unsurprising, the most common way of completing the survey was online. What about families who don't have the internet or home computers?

125 students in SERC Bangor and Newtownards campuses have no home access to the internet. Many of the people supported with government food parcels had no means of accessing online shopping. Feedback from the Big Conversation Panel will be considered alongside other evidence to help assess need and to ensure everyone is supported in the event of further lockdowns.

SECTION 7

Your economic wellbeing

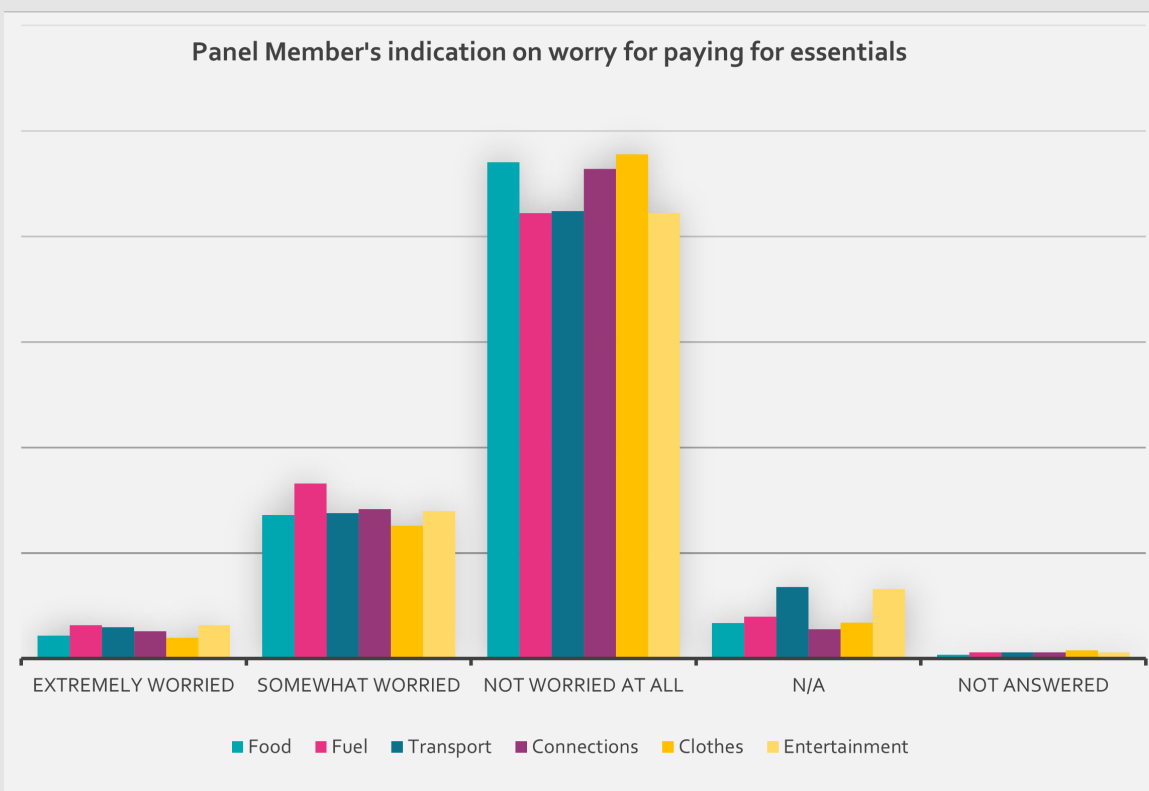
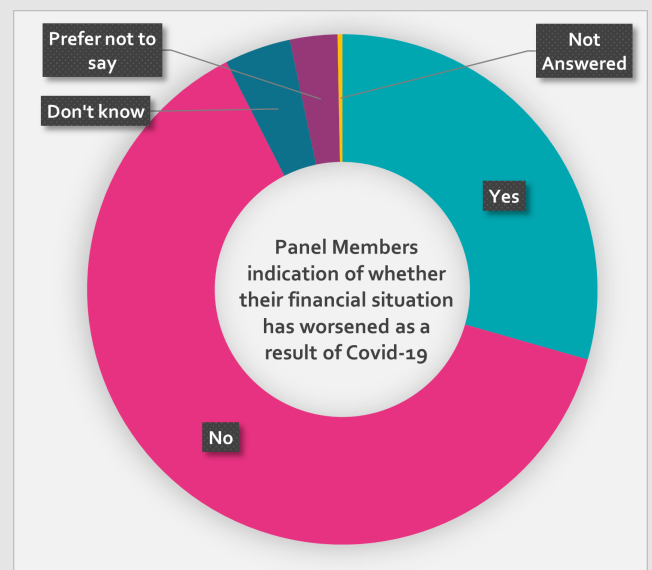
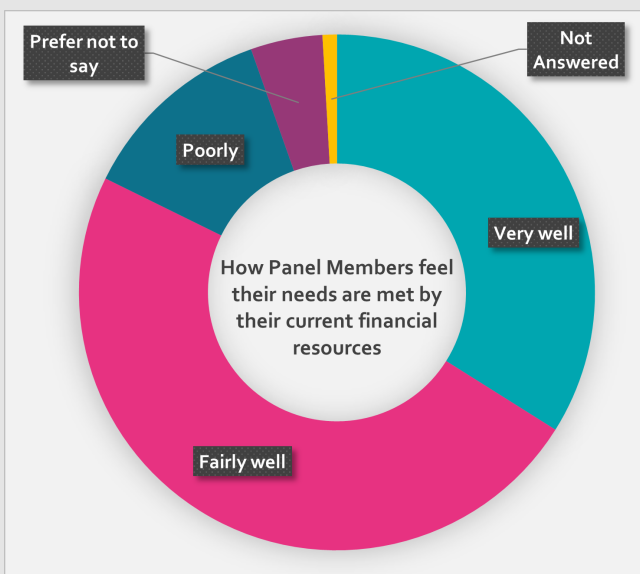


The Ards and North Down area suffers from hidden deprivation. There can be a noticeable difference in income across statistical boundaries' (i.e. the geographical area grouped together), with those at the top end of the economic scale masking the situation for those at the lower end. While lots of people in the

borough are economically comfortable and have the financial means to ensure their basic needs are met, we need to work to reduce income inequalities. We are interested to know how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected people's financial security.

No notable difference in worsening of financial situation across age groups. 65+ least affected

The financial situation of self employed and furloughed Panel Members appear to have been most adversely affected



We gave Panel Members the opportunity to tell us about other things they are worried about paying for.

They told us they are worried about having to pay for unexpected things such as emergency household repair bills. They are also concerned about the cost of Christmas and entertainment for their children.

SECTION 8

Covid-19 Recovery Priorities



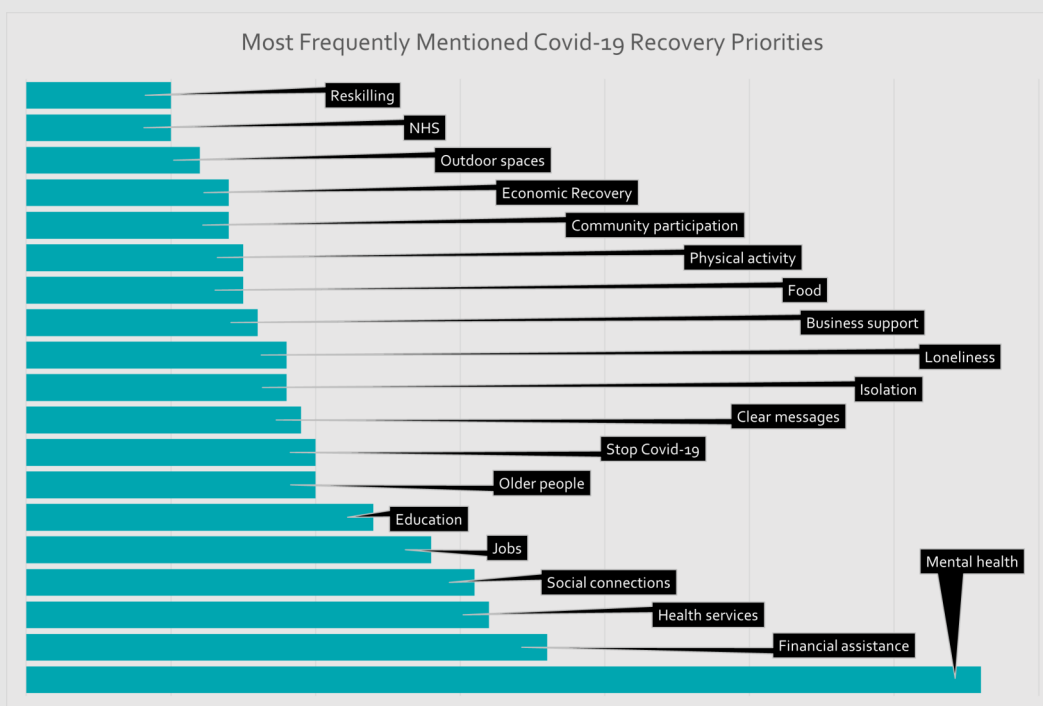
We need to make sure that the issues we think are priorities for recovery are also the issues that our Panel Members think Council, and our Community Planning Partners should concentrate on.

The feedback received provides us with meaningful challenges to the services and

support systems that Panel Members have asked us to prioritise. The graph below provides a snapshot of the most frequently requested priorities.

It is clear that we must prioritise services and programmes that address emotional (mental) health, loneliness and social

isolation. We need to support community participation and increase resilience. We need to look at how our physical (built and natural) infrastructure can help us to do this. We also need to deal with the serious concerns around poverty, financial hardship and supporting our businesses to survive.



MENTAL HEALTH

"Support for mental health and those who may suffer loneliness/isolation"
 "Access to family and friends—this has an impact on mental health"
 "Mental health ... it takes 8-10 weeks to see a councillor, this is totally unacceptable..."
 "Online and peer help groups..."
 "Help for older people"
 "Easier to access mental health services"

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

"A freeze on mortgages... and loan repayments"
 "Financial help for those in need and recently unemployed"
 "Covid highlighted how close people are living to the breadline"
 "Foodbanks for those who lost employment"
 "Introduce basic income pay"

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

"Support for self employed people...arts and entertainment...and small independent businesses"
 "Support long-term home working"

EDUCATION

"Education and keeping schools open"
 "Education should be made a priority ... some children will have suffered greatly..."

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

"Doctors surgeries open for appointments ... dentists open for treatments"
 "During the past 6 months my child has had no access to health care ... this is not acceptable..."

JOBS AND RESKILLING

"Get people back into jobs"
 "Re-employ furloughed staff"
 "Help unemployed back to work or retraining"
 "Attract employment"

OUTDOOR SPACES AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

"Keep leisure centres open..."
 "Physical wellbeing of the community"
 "Keep parks open"

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

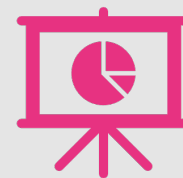
"Recreate a social link with local communities"
 "Create community support networks"
 "Support for online classes and hobby groups... community events"
 "Get people reconnected"

CLARITY OF INFORMATION

"Clear guidance and messaging on Covid restrictions or easement"
 "Consistent messaging should be across all sections of the public sector"

The Big Conversation Panel

Analysis of results



The first Big Conversation Panel survey has helped confirm issues we already suspected, such as the impact of Covid-19 on emotional wellbeing and social connectivity. However, it has also pointed towards some concerning differences across our population age demographics on who experiences poorest levels of emotional wellbeing and intensity of loneliness.

We need to understand why people under the age of 30 felt lonelier prior to Covid-19 when compared to those over 30, but in particular those over 50 who hardly ever felt lonely. Unsurprisingly Covid-19 lockdown did increase the feelings of loneliness across each age profile. But much less within our older population.

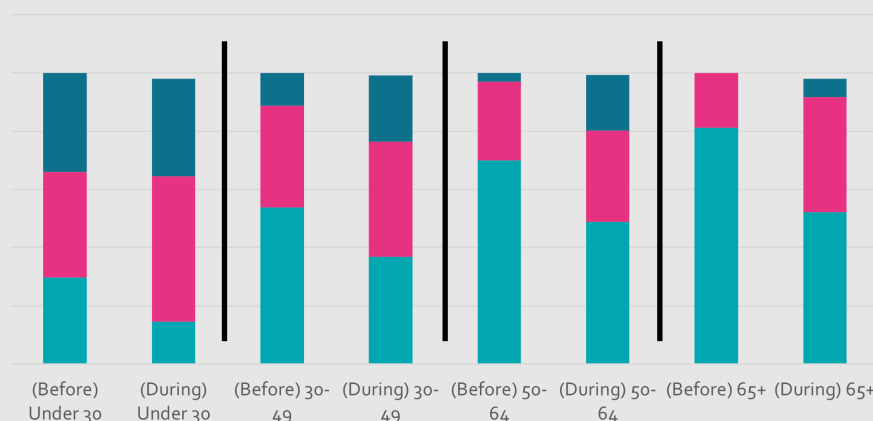
Are our younger residents less resilient to change? Is this the first major life disruption they have experienced? What impact does social media have on their ability to make connections? Why prior to Covid-19 do 70% of Big Conversation Panel Members under 30 say they often or sometimes felt lonely? This increased to 83% during Covid-19 lockdown.

Many public bodies, including the Council, focused our attention during Covid-19 lockdown on our older residents who we considered could be more vulnerable. Could we have done more to help our younger residents during the first lockdown? If lockdown happens again how will be better consider the needs of this age band?

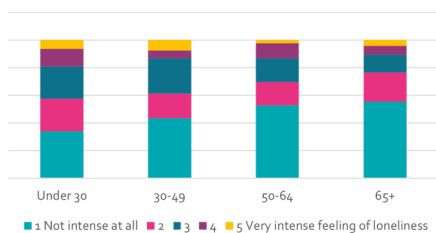
Easy Read Surveys Submitted

The easy read version of the survey, completed by older people show similar results to the online surveys. There is a general fear about socializing and getting too close to people resulting in some anxiety being displayed.

Comparison of age profiles before and during Covid-19 1st lockdown



Intensity of loneliness today



Other Recovery Priorities

The open ended question on recovery priorities has provided us with some important feedback on what our recovery priorities should be.

1. Mental Health

The stress of lockdown, the impact of furlough and job losses and the amount of misinformation on social media have impacted negatively on the emotional wellbeing of the population. Access to health services, and in particular those that provide emotional support to people, is important and Big Conversation Panel Members have provided examples of how some of these services being withdrawn during the first lockdown has negatively impacted on them. We need to look at alternative ways of providing services and giving people the tools they need to better look after their own wellbeing.

2. Social Isolation

Social connectivity has been negatively impacted by Covid-19. We need inclusive ways to reconnect people and to build community infrastructure. However, it is important to note that many Panel Members do not belong to church groups or community organisations and we need to consider other ways of connecting with them (if they need it). We need to make sure this can be done safely.

3. Poverty

Financial assistance, support to access benefits, debt management and freezing current financial obligations have all been highlighted by Panel Members.

4. Economic Recovery

The economy has been hit hard by Covid-19 and our local businesses and business owners need help. Panel Members expressed the opinion that businesses and employees need access to financial support and that lack of access is having a negative impact on mental health.

5. Jobs and Reskilling

Unemployment is high and Panel Members feel we should prioritise creating new jobs and helping people expand their skills for re-employment.

The Big Conversation Panel

Next steps

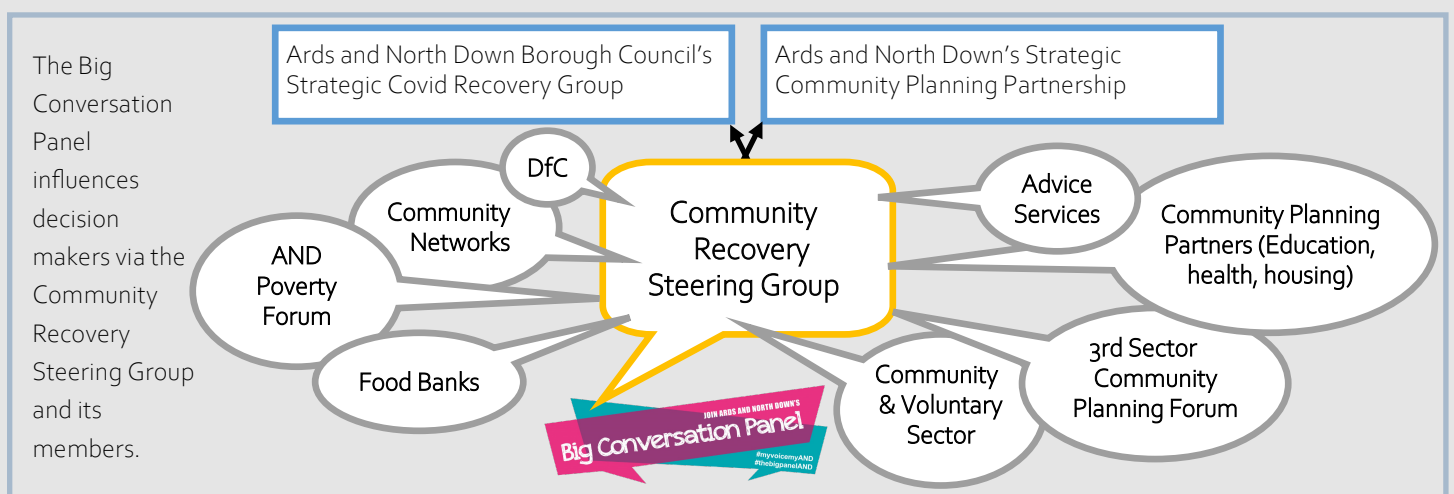


The results from the Big Conversation Panel Survey ONE will help a number of organisations and groups make decisions regarding the design and implementation of Covid-19 recovery priorities. The information you have provided will be reported to the Council's Strategic Covid Recovery Group (SCRG).

A Community Recovery Steering Group (CRSG) with membership from across the public and the community and voluntary sector has been established to develop a Community Recovery Action Plan. The CRSG Action Plan will focus on the community recovery priorities that have been discussed on page 14.

Economic Recovery Groups have also been established and these will prioritise town and village regeneration, employability and skills, business recovery and tourism.

Community recovery and economic recovery groups will work together to ensure that people are at the centre of everything that we do.



THE BIG CONVERSATION PANEL

Survey TWO

Opens
1 February 2021

Closes
28 February 2021

Results published
May 2021 (at the latest)

To receive notification of the Big Conversation Panel survey TWO please e-mail communityplanning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
To receive a hard copy please phone 0300 013 3333

If you need the survey in an alternative format or language please contact the Community Planning Service using the methods above.

Our next survey will probe deeper into some of the issues raised in survey ONE. We will continue to gather information on loneliness, emotional wellbeing and social interactions to consider how things have changed, or not changed, since survey ONE was completed.


Survey TWO will focus on some of the interventions that Council and the Community Recovery Steering Group think might help in the recovery process. Survey TWO will go beyond just considering the impacts of Covid-19 and gather feedback on some other issues that were priorities pre-Covid-19. We all want to return to life before Covid-19 was the main topic of conversation.

Feedback gathered during survey ONE indicates that many of our longer-term priorities remain relevant. However, it is the focus of our short to medium term actions that need to adapt so that recovery puts us on a better path, with better results, than we were on before.



If you would like to participate in further surveys, and are not already signed up to the Big Conversation Panel please register your interest by e-mailing communityplanning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk...

Or phone 0300 013 3333

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-  communityplanning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk
-  @myvoicemyAND

