

Derbyshire Electoral Review - Member Consultation 2023

1. Introduction

The first phase of the Derbyshire Electoral Review is to inform the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) about the Council's proposals for future Council Size. During this Phase, the LGBCE looks to make a judgement on Council Size that will enable the Council to take its decision effectively, to discharge its business and responsibilities successfully and to provide for effective community leadership and representation. The LGBCE seeks to understand elected member requirements across three aspects:

- **Decision Making** – how many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority
- **Accountability and Scrutiny** - how many councillors are needed to provide scrutiny, to meet regulatory requirements and to manage partnerships between the local authority and other organisations
- **Effective Representation** - how the representational role of councillors in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework.

To support the Council's response to the LGBCE and to gain a greater understanding of the current role of Elected Members, the Council undertook a consultation between 9 December 2022 and 6 January 2023 for a period four weeks. The Survey considered the key aspects of Elected Member community leadership roles, in particular:

- Time spent on conducting Council business and related activity
- Impacts on conducting Council business
- Community engagement
- Council Size

A total of 14 anonymous responses to the consultation were received and details of the survey questions posed follow the summary report.

Responses received during the consultation have fed into, and strengthened the authority's Council Size submission .

2. Key findings

- Councillors spend a median of 29 hours on conducting council-related activity, and in a typical week Members spend (in median hours):
 - 13.5 hours per week on Council business
 - 10 hours per week on casework
 - 5.5 hours per week on community activities
 - 3.5 hours per week on other activities such as attending Parish or Other Outside Body meetings or in conducting desktop research
- Half of the respondents felt that the amount of time spent on Council business was 'about what was expected'
- Almost all the respondents, 93%, feel that their workload has increased over the last twelve months
- Over a third of respondents (36%) feel that the local geography of their area affects their workload 'a great deal'.
- Almost 4 out of 5 respondents work with council officers to resolve issues (79%).
- Half of respondents engage 'a fair amount' with young people and hard-to-reach groups.
- The extent of engagement with Parish Councils affects 64% of respondent's workload 'a great deal'.
- 64% of respondents feel that the Council Size should remain at 64.

3. Results

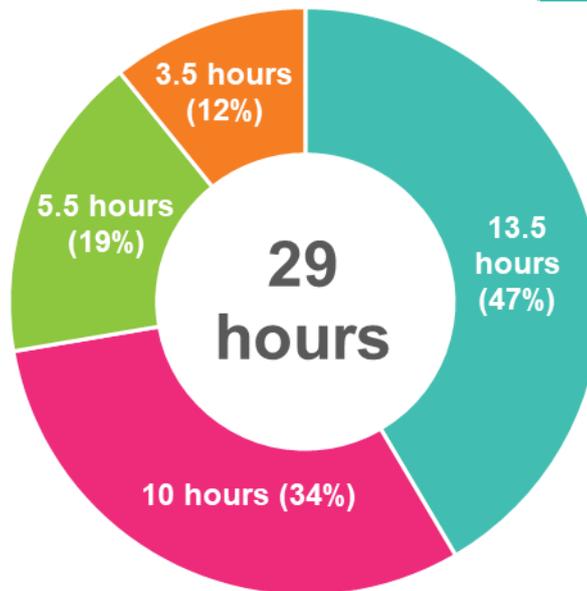
Time spent on conducting Council business and related activity

Members were asked questions on how much time they spent per week on conducting council business, casework, community activity or other activities. As can be seen in Fig 1 below, the total amount of time varies from 18 to 70 hours, with a median¹ time of 29 hours per week spent on Council related activity.

¹ Median hours have been used to analyse this question rather than the mean (average) due to the small number of responses received and to reduce the impact of outlier responses. The totals from the individual categories will not necessarily add up to the total overall as each category and the total have been analysed separately.

Fig 1: Estimated weekly time per week spent on conducting Council business and related activities (median hours)

- Council business
- Casework
- Community activity
- Other



Note: Individual category median hours do not sum to the total

Responses varied across the four categories, with the largest amount of time spent on council business such as attending meetings with a median of 13.5 hours (47%). Responses ranged from 4 to 25 hours within this category. Casework takes approximately 10 hours per week (34%), and answers varied between 2 to 20 hours.

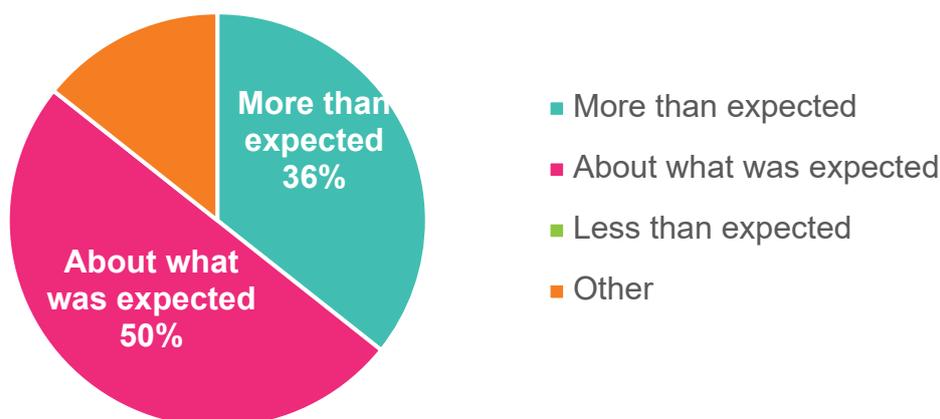
Community activity again varied between 2 and 20 hours per week but with a lower overall median of 5.5 hours (19%).

Time spent on other activities such as attending Parish or Other Outside Body meetings or in conducting desktop research resulted in responses ranging from 0 to 10 hours with a median of 3.5 hours (12%).

Respondents also had an opportunity to specify how their time was spent and out of the ten who responded to this question, six mentioned attending meetings at Outside Bodies, four attending community events, four mentioned reading, desktop research or preparatory work, three mentioned attending Parish meetings and two mentioned travel time.

A follow-on question asked respondents their opinion on whether time spent on Council business activities was about what they expected. Fig 2 below highlights that 50% said they felt it was 'about what was expected' and over a third felt it was 'more than expected'. No respondents felt that the duties were 'less than expected'.

Fig 2: Have you found that the amount of time you spend on Council business is what you expected?



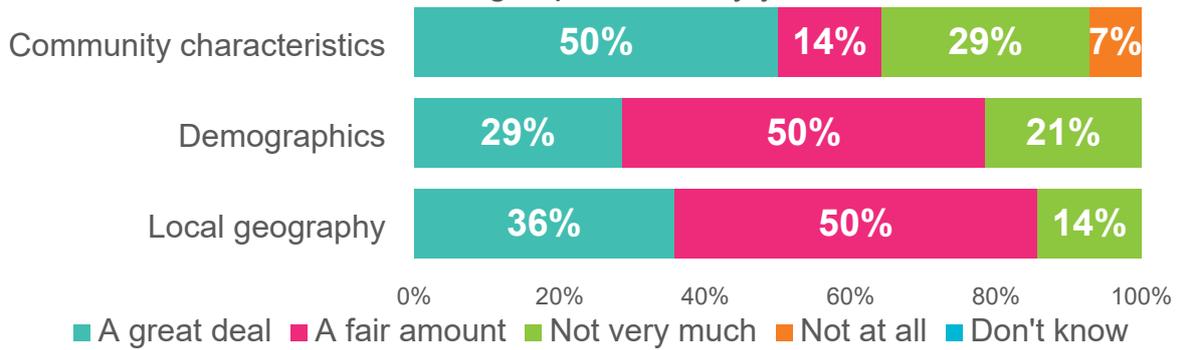
Respondents were further asked if they considered that their council business commitments had increased or decreased over the last twelve months with 93% (13) saying that their commitments had increased. No respondents said their commitments had decreased over the last twelve months.

Impacts on conducting Council business

Elected Members were asked what might influence or impact the way they work, including local characteristics within their division, support from council officers and use of technology.

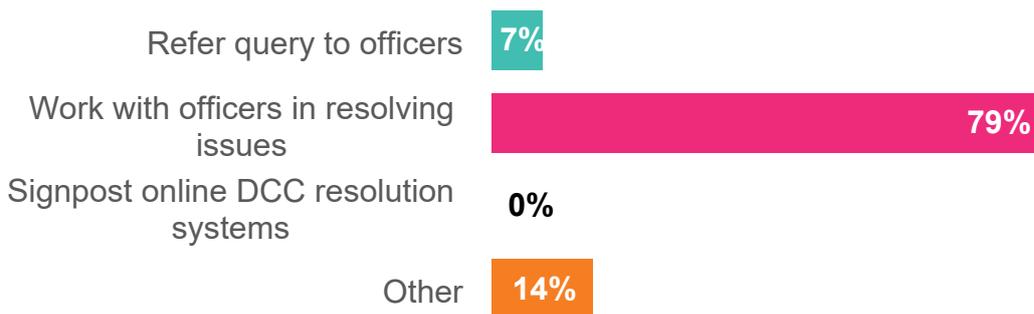
When asked how their local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on workloads and casework (see Fig 3 below), respondents reported that community characteristics have a high impact on Members' workload and casework with half of respondents indicating their work is affected 'a great deal'. Over a third of respondents (36%) feel that the local geography of their area affects their workload 'a great deal' and a further 50%, 'a fair amount' due to one of the following factors: the rural nature of their area; distance and frequency of attending Parish meetings and community groups; increasing numbers of housing development and lack of affordable homes; poor infrastructure in rural areas (i.e. roads, schools, GP appointments); pockets of deprivation being masked by wealthy areas; and increasing time spent on supporting the elderly with mobility and living support. Whilst it was felt that numbers in respect of casework may not vary, the length of time taken to respond to some of these more complex cases increased their workload.

Fig 3: Thinking about your workload/casework, to what extent do the following impact the way you work?



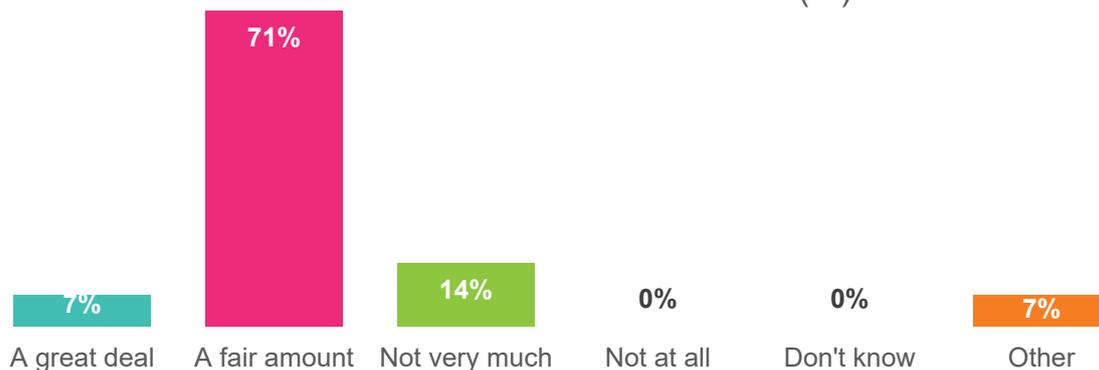
Members were asked how they dealt with, and progressed, their casework within the Council (Fig 4 below). The majority, 79% responded that they worked with officers to resolve issues, 7% would refer the casework to officers and 14% responded 'other', which when looking at the responses referred to using all three options or a combination thereof.

Fig 4: How Members deal with casework (%)



On being asked how well supported Members felt by council resources and networks in discharging their duties, as can be seen in Fig 5 below, 78% of Elected Members felt supported (7% 'a great deal' and 71% 'a fair amount'), 14% felt they received 'not very much' support, 7% responded 'other' and no responses were recorded for 'not at all' or 'don't know'.

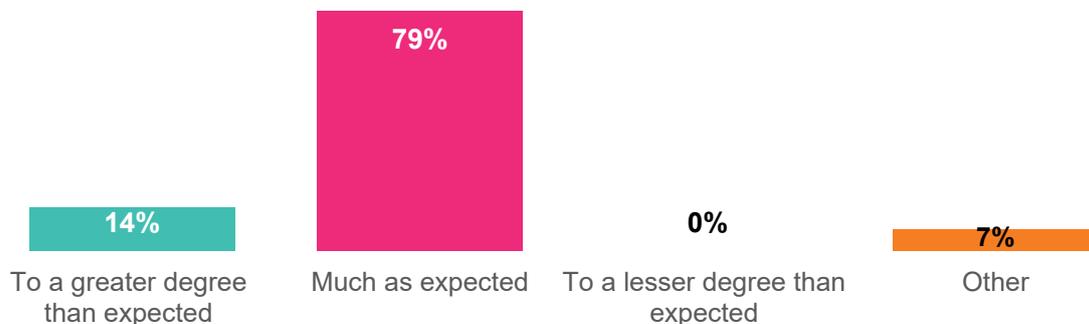
Fig 5: How well supported in discharging Council duties by council resources and networks (%)



Members were also given the opportunity to add supporting comments to their responses. Of the four Elected Members who answered this question, all reported that they do not receive the same level of support as in the past.

Elected Members were asked how they felt that technological advances have influenced the way in which they work and interact with their communities, 79% of respondents felt that the influence of technology was 'much as expected', 14% reported 'to a greater degree than expected' and 7% responded with 'other', which based on the comments provided was 'not at all'. Overall, the majority of respondents say technology has influenced the way they work to some degree, however, this is a subjective question and Members' experience and ease with technology will vary.

Fig 6: How have technological advances influenced the way you work and interact with your communities (%)

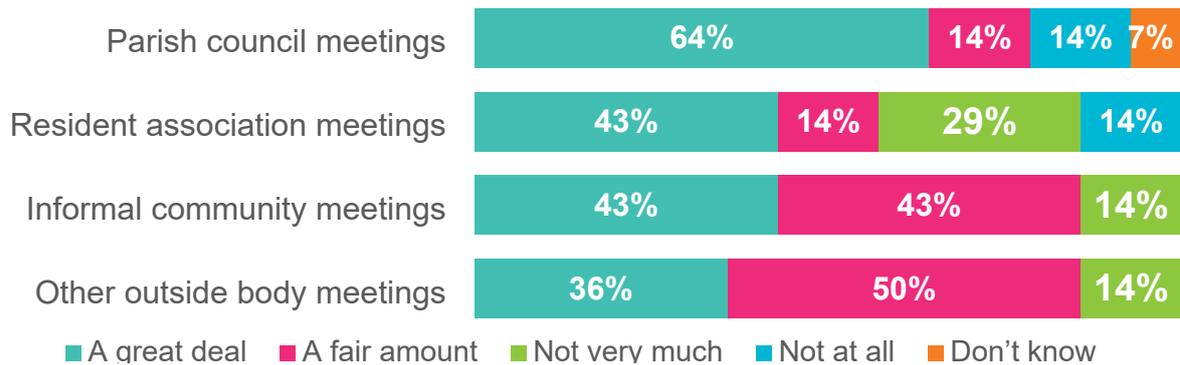


Community engagement

Community engagement is at the heart of the work of an Elected Member and as such, to understand what this means to a Councillor, the impacts and how effective engagement with their constituents can make a difference was examined.

Elected Members were asked to what extent they engage with communities and how this affects their workload. For those Councillors who have Parishes within their Electoral Divisions, the extent of engagement and effect on their workload is relatively high compared to the other categories with 64% affected 'a great deal' - see Fig 7 below. Attendance at resident association meetings varies the most across the categories with 43% affected 'a great deal', 14% 'a fair amount', 29% 'not very much' and 14% 'not at all' affected.

Fig 7: Extent Members believe they have to engage with their communities and how it affects their workload

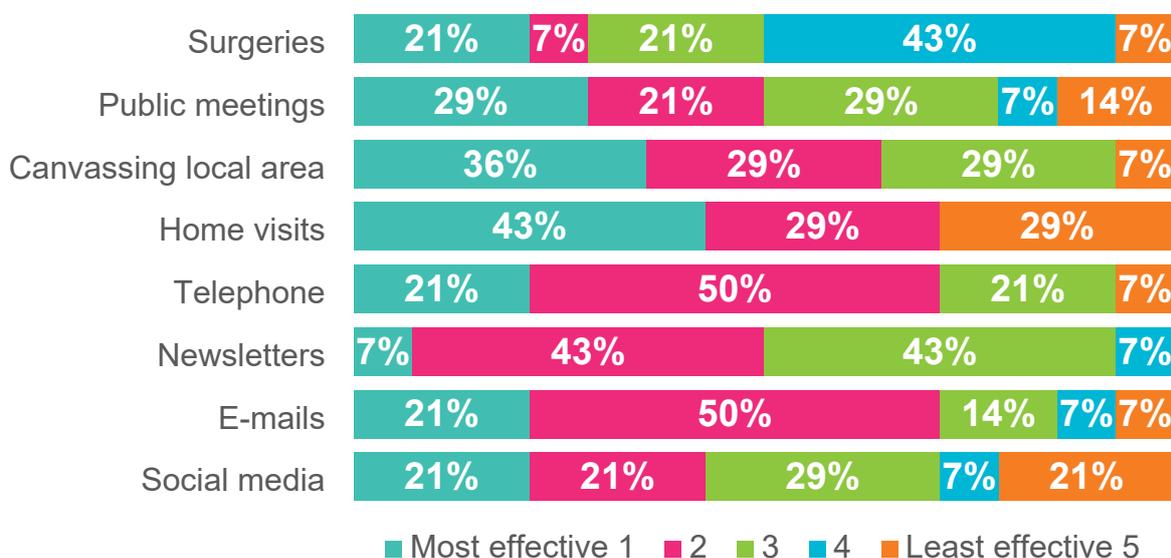


A number of additional comments were received for this question with responses ranging from not having Parishes within their Electoral Division to detailing community events and door knocking to better understand the needs and wants of the community.

The respondents who answered 'a great deal' to the above question on all outlined categories were further asked to explain their choice. The comments included the importance of being seen, present and accessible at local, community and Parish meetings, as these meetings are at the heart of communities and a way to engage with residents in unparished areas.

Councillors were questioned on the most effective methods of communicating with their communities and asked to rank each method from 1 being the most effective to 5, the least effective. Fig 8 below provides an overview of responses with 43% believing that home visits were the most effective method of representing their community, closely followed by canvassing the local area at 36%. Conversely home visits were also noted as the least effective method by 29% of respondents. Telephone, emails, social media and surgeries, were each thought to be most effective by 21% of all respondents, with social media being seen a least effective by 21% of respondents. This may be as a result of both the constituents and the members confidence, experience and use of social media as a forum for effective communication.

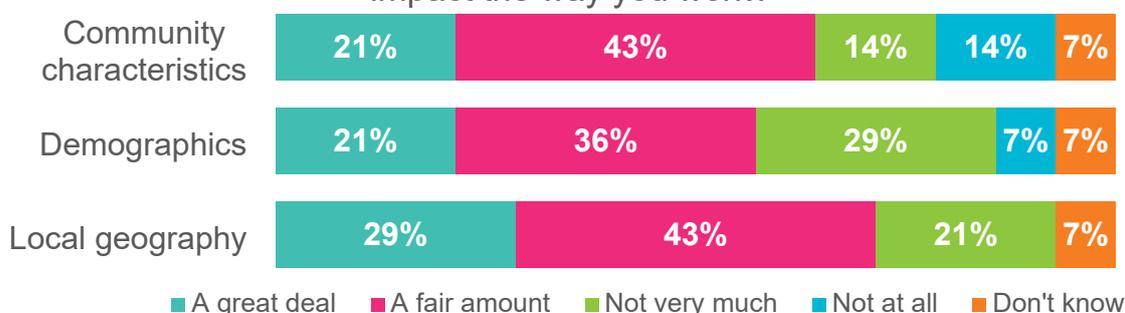
Fig 8: When representing your community, what do you believe are the most effective methods
(Rate from 1 = Most effective to 5 = Least effective)



Councillors were also given the opportunity to add supporting comments and additional methods of representation which included harvesting personal relationships with community leaders, word-of-mouth, using texts and WhatsApp, being out and about in the community and also being present at meetings and community events.

Local geography has the largest impact on how Elected Members engage with the community and community groups (see Fig 9 below) with 29% responding they are affected 'a great deal'. Elected Member comments to supplement this answer expressed rural Electoral Divisions with small, poorly connected communities with differing agendas and concerns and varying degrees of deprivation being a key factor.

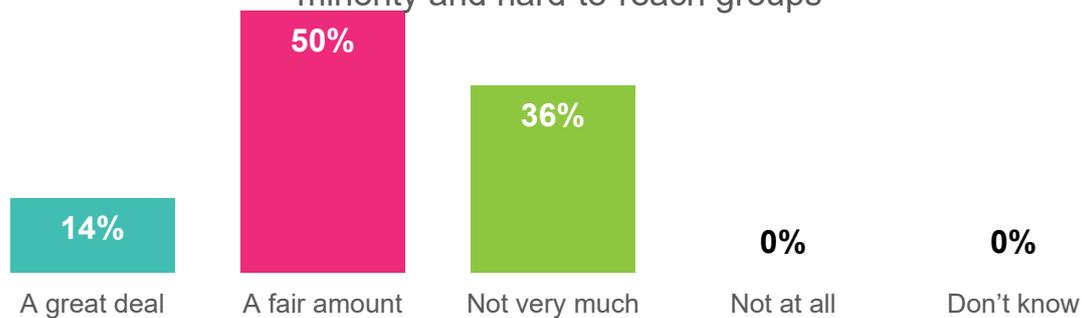
Fig 9: Thinking about how you engage with your community and community groups, to what extent do the following impact the way you work?



Engaging with young people, minority and hard-to-reach groups and those yet to become registered voters has always been slightly more problematic than when dealing with the majority of the public. Members were asked to what

extent do they engage with younger members of the community, those yet to become registered voters, minority groups, hard to reach groups and/or their representative bodies. Fig 10 below provides an overview of responses with half of the respondents saying they dealt 'a fair amount' with these groups, 36% answered 'not very much' and only 14% said 'a great deal'.

Fig 10: Extent Members engage with younger members of the community, those yet to become registered voters, minority and hard-to-reach groups



Councillors were asked a follow-on question to describe what methods were most effective and why when engaging with these communities. Fig 11 below shows that the majority, 79% responded that in person was the best way of engaging with these groups, being available and listening (29%) and making contact with your groups via other organisations and community groups such as school governor, girl guiding etc (29%).

It was also acknowledged that engaging with such groups and communities of interest can be hard to do (21%). It was also recognised by 21% of respondents that many local communities do not understand the structure of and roles within local government. A lack of willingness to engage or apathy amongst some groups to engage (7%) was also identified.

Fig 11: Most effective methods when engaging with younger members of the community, those yet to become registered voters, minority groups, hard to reach groups and/or their representative bodies

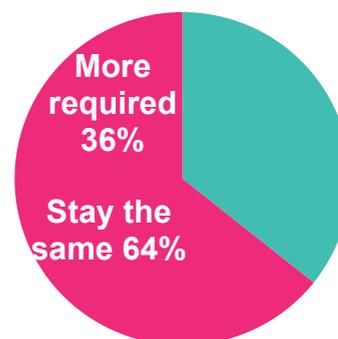


Key phrase	%
In person	79%
Listening	29%
Young People	29%
Connect via other groups	29%
Hard to do	21%
Lack knowledge of government	21%
Unsupported by DCC	7%
Apathay of groups to engage	7%
Social Media	7%
Youth Council	7%

Council Size

The final question asked Elected Members their views on how many Councillors are required to satisfactorily represent Derbyshire's residents and conduct the Council's business. To which, 64% responded that the Council Size of 64 should remain the same, 36% thought 'more required', with no respondents selecting a reduction in numbers.

Fig 12: Members view on how many Councillors are required to satisfactorily represent Derbyshire residents and conduct Council business



Supporting comments received during the consultation mentioned splitting the two-member led Electoral Divisions into single member divisions due to increased house building in some areas and the rural nature of others. The theme of increased housing developments, increasing population and the impact of rural areas were concerns raised by 21% of respondents.

4. Conclusions

The Survey found that Members found the most effective way to represent their communities was 'in person' interaction such as home visits, local canvassing and public meetings. Due to Derbyshire's rural nature and the desire for in person interaction with communities, a reduction in the number of councillors is not considered a good outcome for this review.

The Survey also found that along with face-to-face interactions with their communities, technology is increasingly relied upon by councillors to engage with communities. The use of social media, such as Facebook groups, has increased particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councillors have also reported that harder to reach groups, such as younger residents, are engaged with social media in a way that they wouldn't have been at the time of the last electoral boundary review.

Policy and Research, January 2023

5. Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Q1 to Q4. Please provide an estimate of the number of hours spent each week on:

Q1	Council business, e.g. meetings	
Q2	Casework	
Q3	Community activity	
Q4	Other Council Activity	

Q5. Please describe the other council activity (if required)

Q6. Have you found that the amount of time you spend on Council business is what you expected? (Use 'other' box to add any supporting comments)

Less than expected	
About what was expected	
More than expected	
Other	

Q7. During the last 12 months, would you say that your Council business commitments have increased or decreased? (Use 'other' box to add any supporting comments)

Increased	
Decreased	
About the same	
Other	

Q8. In dealing with casework, do you generally...?

Refer query to officers	
Work with officers in resolving issues	
Signpost online DCC resolution systems	
Other	

Q9. Thinking about your workload/casework, to what extent do the following impact the way you work? (Please select one for each category)

	A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know
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Local geography e.g. rural / urban					
Demographics e.g. age profiles, housing growth					
Community characteristics e.g. areas of deprivation					

Q10. If you chose 'a great deal' on Q9 above for any of the categories, please explain why.

Q11. In relation to discharging your Council duties, how well supported do you feel by council resources/networks? (Use the 'Other' box to add any supporting comments)

A great deal	
A fair amount	
Not very much	
Not at all	
Don't know	
Other supporting comments	

Q12. To what extent do you believe you are expected to engage with your communities and how this affects your workload? (Please select one for each category)

	A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know
Parish council meetings					
Resident association meetings					
Informal community meetings					
Other outside body meetings					
Other (please specify)					

Q13. If you chose 'Other' on Q12 please explain

Q14. If you chose 'a great deal' on Q12 for any of the options, please explain why

Q15. Thinking about how you represent your community, what do you believe are the most effective methods (please rate each method from most (1) to least effective (5)) (Please select one for each category)

	1 (most)	2	3	4	5 (least)
Surgeries					
Public meetings					
Canvassing local area					
Home visits					
Telephone					
Newsletters					
E-mails					
Social media					
Other					

Q16. If you answered 'Other' to Q15 above or have any additional comments on effective methods of representing your community then please add your supporting comments.

Q17. How do you feel that technology advances have influenced the way in which you work and interact with your communities? (Use 'other' box to add any supporting comments)

To a greater degree than expected	
Much as expected	
To a lesser degree than expected	
Other supporting comments	

Q18. Thinking about how you engage more widely with the community and community groups, to what extent do the following impact the way you work?

	A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Not at all	Don't know
Local geography e.g. rural / urban					
Demographics e.g. age profiles, housing growth					
Community characteristics e.g. areas of deprivation					

Q19. If you chose 'a great deal' for any of the previous three questions, please explain why

Q20. To what extent do you engage with younger members of the community, those yet to become registered voters, minority groups, hard to reach groups and/or their representative bodies? (Use 'other' box to add any supporting comments)

A great deal	
A fair amount	
Not very much	
Not at all	
Don't know	
Other supporting comments	

Q21. Thinking about opportunities for engaging with younger members of the community, those yet to become registered voters, minority groups, hard to reach groups and/or their representative bodies, please describe what you find to be effective and why.

Q22. What is your view on how many Councillors are required to satisfactorily represent Derbyshire's residents and conduct the Council's business? (Use 'other' box to add any supporting comments)

More required	
Stay the same	
Fewer required	
Other supporting comments	