

Research Report



Council Tax Precept Survey 2017/18

Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Council Tax Precept Survey 2017/18

Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

Prepared by: Lys Coleman, Research Director

Date: January 2017



Produced by BMG Research

© Bostock Marketing Group Ltd, 2017

www.bmgresearch.co.uk

Project: 1156

Registered in England No. 2841970

Registered office:

BMG Research
Beech House
Greenfield Crescent
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 3BE
UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 3336006

UK VAT Registration No. 580 6606 32

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Member No. B4626

Market Research Society Company Partner

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 20252:2012

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 9001:2008

The International Standard for Information Security Management ISO 27001:2013

Investors in People Standard - Certificate No. WMQC 0614

Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) Member Company

Registered under the Data Protection Act - Registration No. Z5081943

A Fair Data organisation

Cyber Essentials certification

The BMG Research logo is a trade mark of BMG Research Ltd.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background and method.....	1
2	Survey Findings.....	2
2.1	Whether it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2017/18.....	2
2.2	Level of increase that would be reasonable.....	4
2.3	Reasons for disagreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to increase its element of the Council Tax charge for 2017/18.....	5
2.3.1	Businesses.....	5
2.3.2	Residents.....	5
2.4	Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money.....	6
2.5	Reasons for disagreeing that DSFRS provides value for money.....	7
2.5.1	Businesses.....	7
2.5.2	Residents.....	7
2.6	Services used.....	8
2.7	Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS.....	9
3	Appendix 1: Profile Information.....	11
3.1	Businesses.....	11
3.2	Residents.....	13
4	Appendix 2: Call outcomes.....	14
4.1	Businesses.....	14
4.2	Residents.....	14

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and method

In November 2016, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) commissioned BMG Research to undertake a survey amongst 400 businesses and 400 residents. The purpose of the surveys was to assess the opinions of business decision makers and residents on how DSFRS should approach setting its budget for 2017/18 and on whether the Service is currently deemed to be providing value for money.

The questionnaire for the survey was provided by DSFRS. The contacts for the survey were purchased by BMG Research from a commercial database provider. To ensure the survey was broadly representative, quotas were set by local authority district (LAD), number of employees and broad industry sector for the business survey and local authority district, age and gender for the resident survey. The data has been weighted (adjusted) by these characteristics to correct for any under or over-representation in the final data set.

In total, 400 interviews with businesses and 401 interviews with residents were completed during December 2016 and January 2017. Details of the profile of the sample can be found in appendix 1.

On a sample of 400 the confidence interval at the 95% level is +/- 4.3%. This means that if a statistic of 50% was observed, we can be 95% confident that the true response among the total population lies between 45.7% and 54.3%.

This report summarises the main findings from both surveys.

2 Survey Findings

2.1 Whether it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2017/18

Respondents were provided with the following contextual information regarding DSFRS:

“Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to maintaining a professional service across the two counties whilst addressing the funding cuts passed down by the Government. The Service provides 85 local fire stations across Devon and Somerset and employs approximately 2050 staff, helping to keep safe a population of 1.7 million. On average the Service attends around 18,000 incidents each year, which includes flooding, road traffic collisions, fires and other emergencies. The Authority is seeking feedback about its level of Council Tax precept for the coming year and how satisfied you are with the service it provides.”

They were then informed of the following:

“Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority is considering its Council Tax charges for 2017/18. The current charge is £79.98 a year for a Band ‘D’ property. Over the last few years the Government has been reducing the funding provided for the fire and rescue service and this means that by 1 April 2017 the funding for Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service will have been reduced by approximately £11million in the last four years. A further £4.8million reduction will be made by 2019/20.”

Respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2017/18 in order to lessen the impact of the funding cuts.

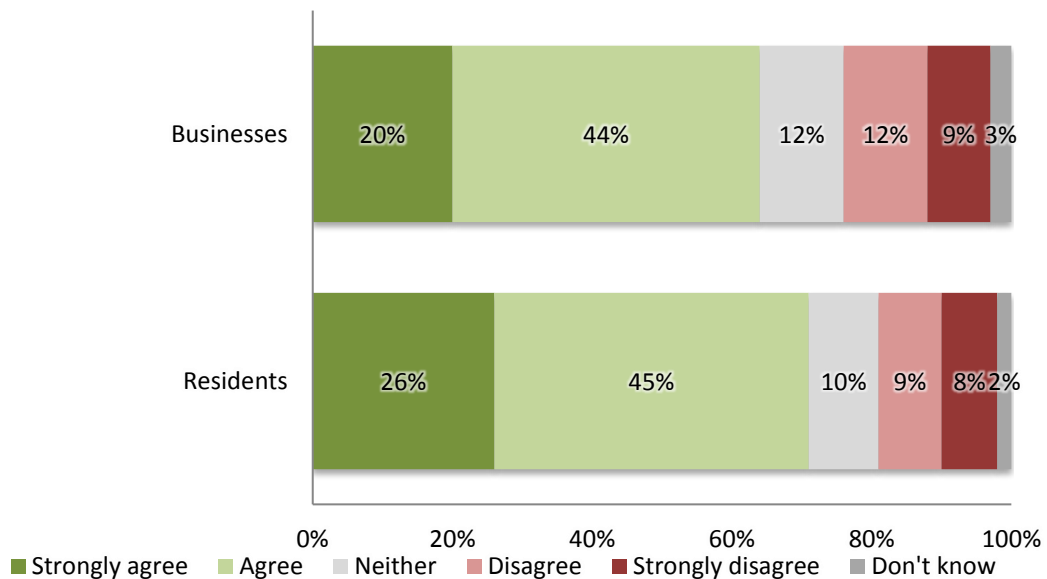
Over three in five (64%) of businesses agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2017/18, while a fifth (21%) disagreed that it is reasonable for them to do so, resulting in a net agreement¹ of +43%.

Agreement was consistent by industry sector, gender and age, although respondents in Devon were somewhat more positive (68% agreed it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge) and respondents in Plymouth somewhat less so (52% agreed).

Agreement was higher amongst residents than businesses (71% compared to 64%), and disagreement correspondingly lower (17% compared to 21%), giving a net agreement of +54%.

Those aged over 55 were significantly more likely to agree (78%) than younger residents.

Figure 1: Agreement or disagreement that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2017/18 (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 401 residents

¹ Net agreement = the proportion who strongly agree/agree minus the proportion who disagree/strongly disagree.

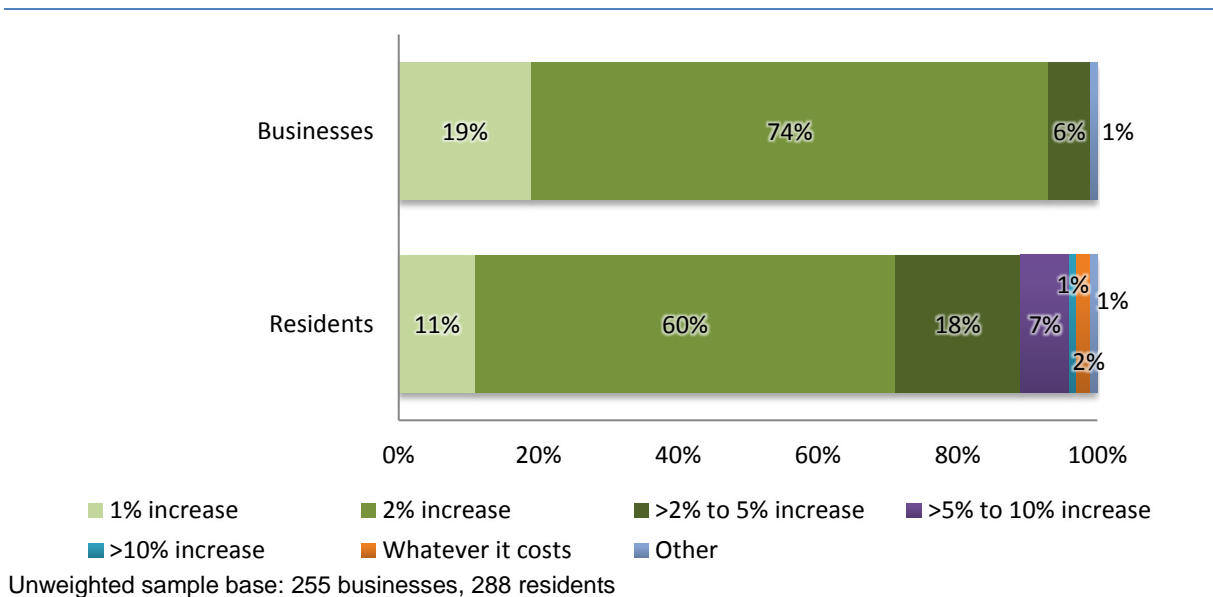
2.2 Level of increase that would be reasonable

Those respondents who agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax Charge for 2017/18 were asked at what level the increase should be;

- 1%, this would be an increase of 80 pence per year
This will raise an additional £466,800 for the fire and rescue service
- 2%, this would be an increase of £1.60 per year
This will raise an additional £933,600 for the fire and rescue service
- 3 Some other level of increase

The largest proportion of businesses and residents opted for a 2% increase (74% and 60% respectively). However, while one in twenty (6%) businesses suggested a greater increase of between 2% and 5%, this proportion rose to a fifth (18%) of residents, with a further one in ten (10%) of this group suggesting an even greater increase, or whatever it takes to address requirements.

Figure 2: Level of increase that would be reasonable (Those respondents agreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2017/18)



2.3 Reasons for disagreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to increase its element of the Council Tax charge for 2017/18

Those respondents who disagreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2017/18 (21% of businesses and 17% of residents) were asked why they disagreed. Typical comments made by respondents are highlighted below.

2.3.1 Businesses

'We pay enough tax to the government and it should not increase any further.'

'The government should sort out something else, people should not provide the charges, it should come out of government profits, such as speeding fines or parking fines.'

'I don't think they make the best use of the money they get. I don't like how they deal with roads. They send a man to check potholes but no one ever comes.'

'Because they should run their business more efficiently and they should use their money wisely.'

'We cannot afford it. Small businesses are crippled. Bigger businesses can but we cannot.'

'It may need to require more funding, but I don't agree as the business can't put its rates up. Non-domestic rates have gone up a lot.'

'Because they are over-staffed. They should look at the council itself before the services.'

'Because, most of it is going on pension schemes for the fire service where they go on pension at the age of 50.'

'Because the service is not getting any better, so it should not be increased.'

2.3.2 Residents

'I do not think the fire and rescue, police and other separate services' funding should come out of local council tax. For instance the fire and rescue service should be making charges to some of the calls as the police take their own fines to support themselves and not the government. On a personal note I have noticed a reduction in free service from Somerset fire authority in that when I wanted technical support and advice regarding number of exits related to a church premises that it was no longer available due to lack of funding where as before, I could call upon the fire officer who could give advice on a domestic basis.'

'I am now at the age where I just work part time, and most of the money I earn goes on council tax. So if I was earning a lot in the year, then I wouldn't worry about it, but we don't have enough incoming money and they keep raising the cost of the council tax and it's too difficult to keep up with. They can only take so much from everyone.'

'I think that they shouldn't have their funds cut by the government because that's wrong. I think that the government should make cuts from other sectors.'

'I think that the council needs to look at how other services are funded. I think that other services should be reduced so that the fire service get more funding from the government. I think that there's too much waste from the council and the priority should go to services like the fire and police service which it does not.'

'Firstly this should not be a local government issue but rather a central government issue. Secondly the fire & rescue service along with the police are getting special treatment compared to social care service in regards to funding.'

'Because for the first time in 8 years they're recruiting. They're cutting back on full time fire fighters and keeping people on retainers that do it voluntarily and they get paid a certain amount. So I don't see why we should pay more when they're cutting the service back.'

'Because the service is over-tiered in management and if they were to cut some of the layers of management and leave those people that were productive than just administrative it would therefore be more efficient.'

2.4 Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money

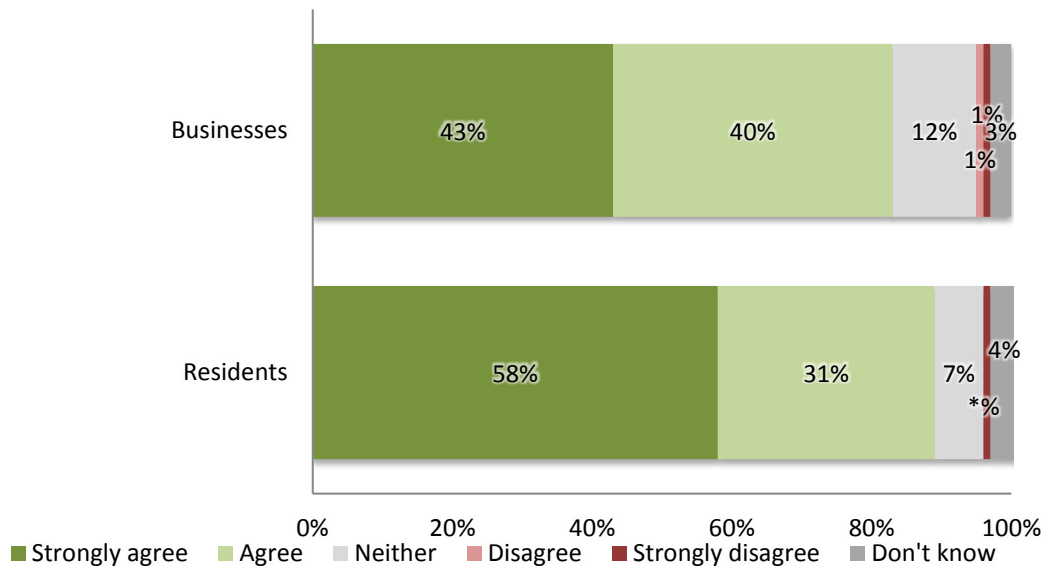
All respondents were asked if they agree or disagree that DSFRS provides value for money.

Four in five (83%) businesses agreed that DSFRS does provide value for money, with only 1% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +82%. Views were consistent by LAD and industry sector.

Views were even more positive among residents, with 89% agreeing that DSFRS does provide value for money and 1% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +88%.

Women were more likely than men to agree that this is the case (92% compared to 85%).

Figure 3: Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 401 residents

2.5 Reasons for disagreeing that DSFRS provides value for money

The 7 businesses and 3 residents who disagreed that DSFRS provides value for money were asked why they disagreed, and, where provided, their reasons for this are listed below.

2.5.1 Businesses

'Levels of management.'

'They don't operate like a commercial business would do.'

'Because they have to start changing the way they do things, and we cannot afford to give people a pension from 50 years.'

'Because they waste a lot of money.'

2.5.2 Residents

'Because they cut back on the amount of firemen/women. They take a certain amount of fire engines out of the company and it's putting more pressure on the fire brigade.'

'I think the level of service in the fire and rescue service across the country is too militant and too powerful and the level of spending is too much.'

'I believe Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service do not provide value for money as the money is wasted in areas that are not going to affect how they do their jobs. They have to also stop the pension funds as other people working in the same sector do not receive them.'

2.6 Services used

To contextualise the findings reported above, all respondents were asked if they had used any of ten specific services provided across Devon and Somerset.

Overall, over three in five (59%) businesses reported using at least one of the services, most commonly a fire safety audit (27%) at a business, and 46% of residents did so, most commonly via a community event (17%).

Businesses in Somerset were least likely to report having used any of the services (49%, compared to 62% in Torbay, 64% in Plymouth and 63% in Devon).

Table 1 Services used

	Businesses	Residents
Fire safety audit / check in a business	27%	7%
Community event	18%	17%
Home fire safety visit / smoke alarm fitting	18%	15%
Emergency response – house fire	10%	8%
Youth education	8%	14%
Community use of fire stations	9%	8%
Other fire safety advice	9%	8%
Emergency response – other rescue	6%	6%
Emergency response – co-responder	6%	5%
Emergency response – road traffic collision	5%	6%
Emergency response – flooding	3%	1%
Other service (please specify)	6%	3%
Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 401 residents		

2.7 Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS

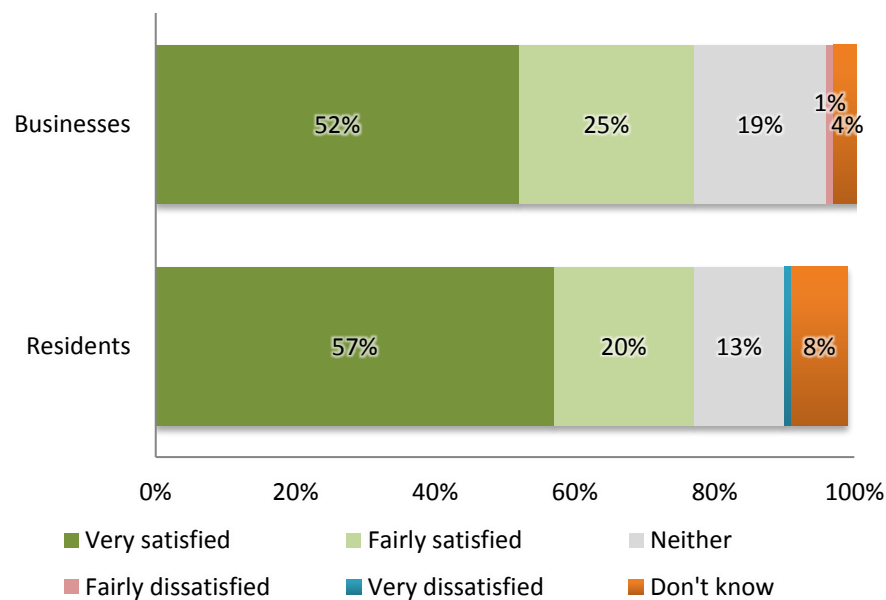
All respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the service provided by DSFRS.

Three quarters (76%) of businesses were satisfied with the service provided, and only four respondents expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +75%. Again views were consistent by LAD and industry sector.

Three quarters (78%) of residents were satisfied with the service provided, and only six respondents expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +77%.

Levels of satisfaction increased with age, from 67% of those aged 16 to 34, to 75% of those aged 35 to 54, up to 85% of those aged 55 or older.

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 401 residents

Only 3 businesses expressed dissatisfaction, and their reasons for doing so were as follows:

'They don't have enough people to come, too many cuts.'

'I have never used the services that you mentioned.'

'No contact.'

Only 2 residents expressed dissatisfaction, and their reasons for doing so were as follows:

'I was involved in an RT accident as per normal every tom dick and harry (all the emergency services plus city council) got called out. I felt that the only one required was the ambulance service. Subsequently I had to finance a sizable bill for attendance which as far as I was concerned was not warranted. I didn't see the requirement for all of these services to come out or for the bill when there was no need. The accident was admittedly nasty but

there was no possibility of people having to be extracted or removed out of the vehicle prior to the arrival of emergency services.'

'I think we are paying for a capability which is not essential in the modern era. This money could be spent on other things.'

3 Appendix 1: Profile Information

3.1 Businesses

The following tables outline the unweighted and weighted demographic profiles of the sample.

Table 2 – Local authority district

Local authority district	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Torbay	12%	48	7%	26
Plymouth	13%	50	9%	35
Devon	46%	182	53%	211
Somerset	30%	120	32%	128

Table 3 – Industry sector

Industry Sector	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
A to F	27%	106	28%	113
G to N, R + S	74%	294	72%	287

NB: **A to F** includes the following sectors: A: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; B Mining and Quarrying; C Manufacturing; D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; E Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; F Construction.

G to N, R and S includes the following sectors: G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; H Transportation and storage; I Accommodation and food service activities; J Information and communication; K Financial and insurance activities; L Real estate activities; M Professional, scientific and technical activities; N Administrative and support service activities; R Arts, entertainment and recreation; S Other service activities

Table 4 – Job title

Industry Sector	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Owner/proprietor/managing director	50%	199	52%	209
Director	14%	57	14%	55
Manager/assistant manager	14%	57	13%	51
Partner	4%	15	4%	15
Tradesperson	3%	12	3%	12
Landlord/landlady	2%	9	2%	9
Accountant/book keeper	2%	8	2%	8
Administrator	1%	4	1%	4
Other	10%	39	9%	37

Table 5 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	63%	251	63%	250
Female	37%	149	37%	150

Table 6 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	2%	6	1%	5
25 – 34 years	10%	39	10%	39
35 – 44 years	16%	63	16%	62
45 – 54 years	25%	100	24%	98
55– 64 years	26%	103	26%	105
65+	22%	86	22%	88
Prefer not to say	1%	3	1%	3

Table 7 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	94%	376	95%	379
Black/Black British	<0.5%	1	<0.5%	1
Asian/Asian British	2%	8	2%	7
Mixed/Other	1%	4	1%	3
Prefer not to say	3%	11	3%	11

3.2 Residents

The following tables outline the unweighted demographic profile of the sample of residents.

Table 8 – Local authority district

Local authority district	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Torbay	25%	99	8%	32
Plymouth	25%	100	15%	61
Devon	25%	100	45%	181
Somerset	25%	102	32%	127

Table 9 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	1%	5	2%	8
25 – 34 years	9%	35	19%	76
35 – 44 years	11%	44	20%	82
45 – 54 years	15%	59	15%	58
55– 64 years	19%	76	19%	74
65+	45%	181	25%	101
Prefer not to say	<0.5%	1	<0.5%	2

Table 10 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	53%	212	48%	193
Female	47%	189	52%	208

Table 11 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	96%	386	95%	381
Asian/Asian British	1%	3	2%	6
Mixed	1%	6	2%	8
Prefer not to say	1%	6	2%	6

4 Appendix 2: Call outcomes

The following tables show a breakdown of call outcomes.

4.1 Businesses

	Outcome	Contacts	% of total	% of in scope
In scope	Complete	400	10%	18%
	Refusal	903	22%	41%
	Respondent busy	918	22%	41%
	Sub-total	2,221	54%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	308	8%	16%
	Ineligible	162	4%	9%
	No contact made	1,402	34%	75%
	Sub-total	1,872	46%	100%
	Total	4,093		

4.2 Residents

	Outcome	Contacts	% of total	% of in scope
In scope	Complete	401	8%	33%
	Refusal	298	6%	25%
	Respondent busy	500	10%	42%
	Sub-total	1,199	23%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	1,295	25%	33%
	Ineligible	212	4%	5%
	No contact made	2,404	47%	61%
	Sub-total	3,911	77%	100%
	Total	5,110		

Appendix: Statement of Terms

Compliance with International Standards

BMG complies with the International Standard for Quality Management Systems requirements (ISO 9001:2008) and the International Standard for Market, opinion and social research service requirements (ISO 20252:2012) and The International Standard for Information Security Management ISO 27001:2013.

Interpretation and publication of results

The interpretation of the results as reported in this document pertain to the research problem and are supported by the empirical findings of this research project and, where applicable, by other data. These interpretations and recommendations are based on empirical findings and are distinguishable from personal views and opinions.

BMG will not be publish any part of these results without the written and informed consent of the client.

Ethical practice

BMG promotes ethical practice in research: We conduct our work responsibly and in light of the legal and moral codes of society.

We have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and dissemination of data, in the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings and in the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity.

We recognise we have a duty of care to all those undertaking and participating in research and strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects' participation should be as fully informed as possible and no group should be disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration. All adequate steps shall be taken by both agency and client to ensure that the identity of each respondent participating in the research is protected.

With more than 25 years' experience, BMG Research has established a strong reputation for delivering high quality research and consultancy.

BMG serves both the public and the private sector, providing market and customer insight which is vital in the development of plans, the support of campaigns and the evaluation of performance.

Innovation and development is very much at the heart of our business, and considerable attention is paid to the utilisation of the most up to date technologies and information systems to ensure that market and customer intelligence is widely shared.

