



Research Report



Council Tax Precept Survey 2019/20

Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

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Prepared for: Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

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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 2019/20	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 2019/20	5
2.3.1	Businesses	5
2.3.2	Residents	6
2.4	Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money.....	7
2.5	Reasons for disagreeing that DSFRS provides value for money	8
2.5.1	Businesses	8
2.5.2	Residents	9
2.6	Services used	10
2.7	Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS	11
3	Appendix 1: Profile Information.....	13
3.1	Businesses	13
3.2	Residents.....	15
4	Appendix 2: Call outcomes	16
4.1	Businesses	16
4.2	Residents.....	16

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and method

In October 2018, 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 2019/20 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 400 interviews with residents were completed during November and December 2018. 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 2019/20

Respondents were provided with the following contextual information regarding DSFRS:

“Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to its plans to end preventable fire and rescue emergencies across the two counties while addressing the funding cuts passed down by the Government. The service provides 85 local fire stations across Devon and Somerset and employs about 2,000 staff, helping to keep safe a population of 1.7 million. On average, we attend about 17,500 incidents each year, which includes flooding, road traffic collisions, fires and other emergencies. The Authority is seeking feedback about the 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 2019/20. The current charge is £84.01 a year for a Band ‘D’ property. Over the last few years the Government has reduced the funding provided for the fire and rescue service and this will continue. By 2022, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service need to reduce costs by £7.7 million. The service will need to plan a balanced budget that accommodates this while continuing to support communities.”

Respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2019/20.

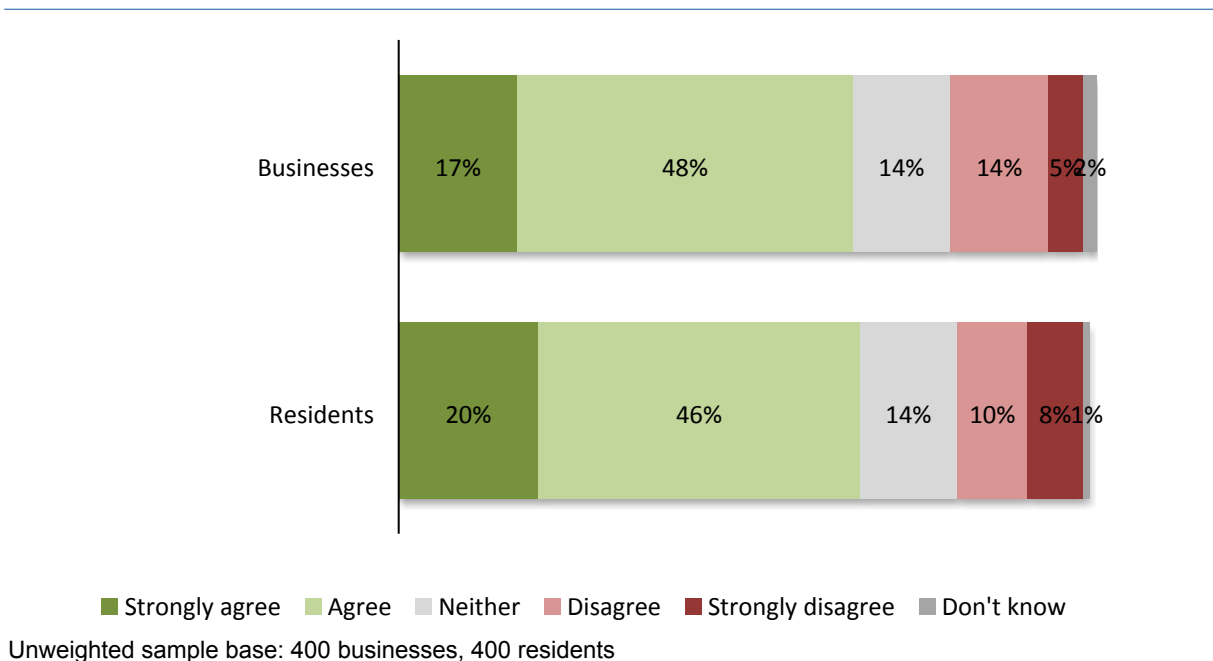
Over three in five (65%) of businesses agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2019/20, while a fifth (19%) disagreed that it is reasonable for them to do so, resulting in a net agreement¹ of +46%.

Agreement was consistent by LAD, industry sector and gender. Respondents aged 55 or above were somewhat more positive (71% agreed it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge). Perhaps unsurprisingly those respondents who had used a DSFRS service were significantly more likely to agree (70% cf. 60% who have not used a DSFRS service).

Over three in five (67%) of residents agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2019/20, while close to a fifth (18%) disagreed, giving a net agreement of +49%.

Agreement was consistent by LAD and age. However, male residents were significantly more likely to agree (73% cf. 61% females). Those respondents who had used a DSFRS service were more likely to agree than those who had not (77% cf. 60% who have not used a DSFRS service).

Figure 1: Agreement or disagreement that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax charge for 2019/20 (All respondents)



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

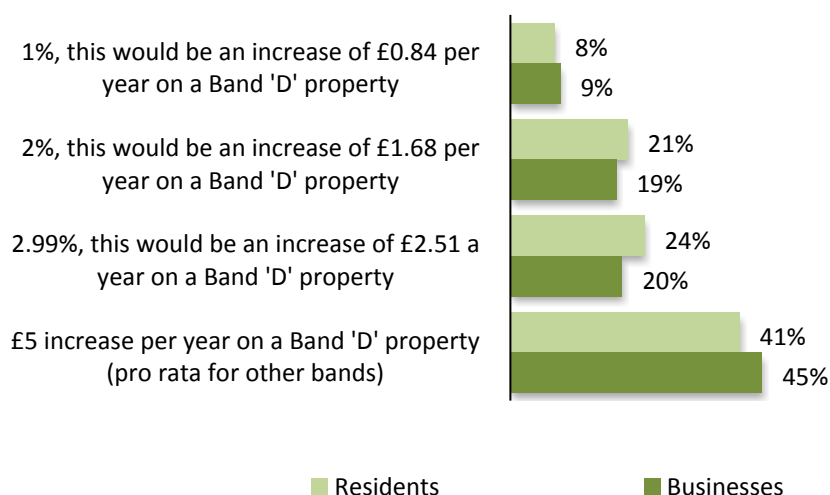
Those respondents who agreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its Council Tax Charge for 2019/20 were asked at what level the increase should be;

- 1%, this would be an increase of £0.84 per year on a Band 'D' property
This will raise an additional £511,000 for the fire and rescue service
- 2%, this would be an increase of £1.68 per year on a Band 'D' property
This will raise an additional £1,021,000 for the fire and rescue service
- 2.99%, this would be an increase of £2.51 a year on a Band 'D' property
This will raise an additional £1,526,000 for the fire and rescue service
- £5 increase per year on a Band 'D' property (pro rata for other bands)
This will raise an additional £3,040,000 for the fire and rescue service
- Some other level of increase

The largest proportion of businesses opted for a £5 increase (45%) followed by either a 2.99% increase or a 2% increase (20% and 19% respectively). Younger respondents (aged 16 to 34) were less likely to state an increase of £5 was reasonable (28%).

Consistent with businesses the largest proportion of residents opted for a £5 increase (41%) followed by a 2.99% increase (24%) and a 2% increase (21%) which was relatively consistent by LAD, gender and age.

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 2019/20)



Unweighted sample base: 259 businesses, 271 residents

2.3 Reasons for disagreeing that it is reasonable for DSFRS to increase its element of the Council Tax charge for 2019/20

Those respondents who disagreed that it is reasonable for DSFRS to consider increasing its element of the Council Tax charge for 2019/20 (19% of businesses and 18% of residents) were asked why they disagreed. Typical comments made by respondents are highlighted below.

2.3.1 Businesses

"We pay enough council tax."

"Economic climate and no one can afford it."

"We already pay enough for bills. We struggle to carry on with business. These days everything goes up and nothing comes down."

"I am not able to pay myself any more money either. The introduction of minimum wage has not helped either. I don't see why the government wants more payment because they have created a rod for their own back, and the issues for funding with the minimum wages, while public sector wages haven't gone up in the same manner."

"The funding should come from the government. I feel the fire service will come like the lifeboat service. Also it will become good or as good as it could be by how much you donate to it. It is scary to think there is not enough resources."

"They have wasted billions of pounds on a building in Taunton that they have never used or moved into. We are all disgusted by this building - it is a complete waste of money."

"They can improve systems and service and efficiency."

"We pay an enormous amount of council tax already, why can't they cut some of their own bureaucracy instead of the fire department."

"The challenges of protecting rural communities like Devon are complex and need more funding. It's a dispersed area as a part of the rural population and I should not be penalised. I do not undervalue the service and I disagree the local community should make up the shortfall which is on par with a populated area."

"With the amount of money the government wastes they can save it elsewhere instead of here."

"There is lots of people that don't pay business rates because of the size of their company. Everyone should be paying a percentage of the business rate whether they are a small company or not. It is just that medium sized businesses are paying it all and they need to charge the businesses that aren't paying anything. All the online companies don't pay anything either, so they need to pay to ensure there isn't a short fall of money."

2.3.2 Residents

"The can surely can get the money from somewhere else or get it from the government."

"The services is getting less so they should not be charging us more."

"I already pay enough and I have never had to use the service in the 20 years living here."

"I have no problem with it going to the fire service and ambulance, but the dustbins only get collected twice a week. It should be taken away from them and given to the fire service. They can't just keep putting up the council tax it should be given to the fire service as we pay enough."

"Should increase charge for people with lower bands as we are all getting the same service."

"They have wasted 9 millions on a call centre and its sitting empty. We shouldn't be paying for their mistakes."

"At the moment people like me can't afford the council tax as it is. Its about affordability, unfortunately."

"It could be budgeted better rather than increasing it."

"It keeps going up every year. I know we need them but I have never needed them and are fed up with paying through the nose. We should have something like an insurance."

"My council tax is very high and I haven't had a pay rise in ten years. The fire brigade does a great service but the money needs to be spent more wisely."

"It won't go to them, it will go to other things."

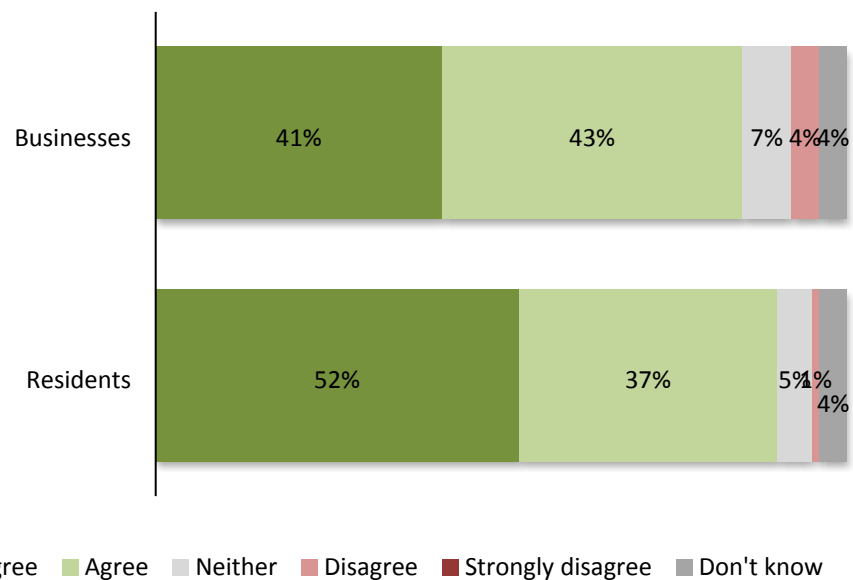
2.4 Agreement or disagreement that DSFRS provides value for money

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

Over four in five (84%) businesses agreed that DSFRS does provide value for money, with only 4% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +80%. Views were consistent by industry sector, gender and age. Respondents from Devon were more likely to disagree than the average overall (6% cf. 4%).

Views were even more positive among residents, with 89% agreeing that DSFRS does provide value for money and only 2% disagreeing, resulting in a net agreement of +87%. Consistent with businesses, residents in Devon were more likely to disagree (3%) and less likely to agree (84%) than the average overall. Residents in Somerset were the most positive and more likely to agree (96%) as were those that had used a DSFRS service (93% cf. 86% who had not used a DSFRS service).

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



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents

2.5 Reasons for disagreeing that DSFRS provides value for money

The 15 businesses and 7 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

"It is too much money."

"Any large organisation is a waste of money."

"Any government direct workforce never provides value for money except private companies."

"If money wasn't to be taken off them then not enough staff will come to my hotel if it was on fire."

"They only do home visits."

"Would like it to be cheaper."

"When we had a fire we were unaware the fire service couldn't put it out because we didn't have a local water source. Our water is sourced from another source and they let it burn and we weren't informed which is why the fire service should go out and inform people that if they had a fire they couldn't put it out. They ought to have informed all the outlying places who don't have water and should tell you."

"£42 a head seems a lot of money"

"In my area there aren't that many major fires, so obviously the value for money element is different to what it would be in the main city."

"Money is not used wisely. I have never used them."

"It is too high."

"They never come on time."

"They have sufficient funds and waste so much money - they do a great/fantastic job but they need to cut out dead wood higher up. The pension schemes are way above than most peoples, they do a good job but everything has to be taken into consideration. It's disgraceful."

"If you ever need them, you have to wait forever. Costs are swallowed up in management."

2.5.2 Residents

"They are tied to stupid Health and safety regulations."

"Can't afford council tax."

"They waste sometimes. They moan about cut backs but there is room for cut back."

"The staff are overpaid."

"They are still paying rent for the empty building."

"They keep doing all things like relaying things and new management signing on trucks - it's rubbish. Just get on with the job and stop keep changing things."

"Maybe because I cannot see any positive outcome regarding my needs."

2.6 Services used

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

Overall, two in five (45%) of businesses reported using at least one of the services, most commonly a fire safety audit (28%) at a business, and 40% of residents did so, most commonly via a community event (21%).

Although consistent by LAD, male residents and older residents (aged 55+) were more likely than the average overall to say they had not used a Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (66% males and 67% aged 55+).

Table 1 Services used

	Businesses	Residents
Fire safety audit / check in a business	28%	5%
Home fire safety visit / smoke alarm fitting	13%	12%
Community event	13%	21%
Emergency response - house fire	6%	9%
Community use of fire stations	6%	5%
Youth education	5%	12%
Emergency response - road traffic collision	3%	4%
Emergency response - rescue	2%	3%
Emergency response - flooding	1%	1%
Other service	1%	2%
I have not used a Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue service	55%	60%
Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents		

2.7 Satisfaction with the service provided by DSFRS

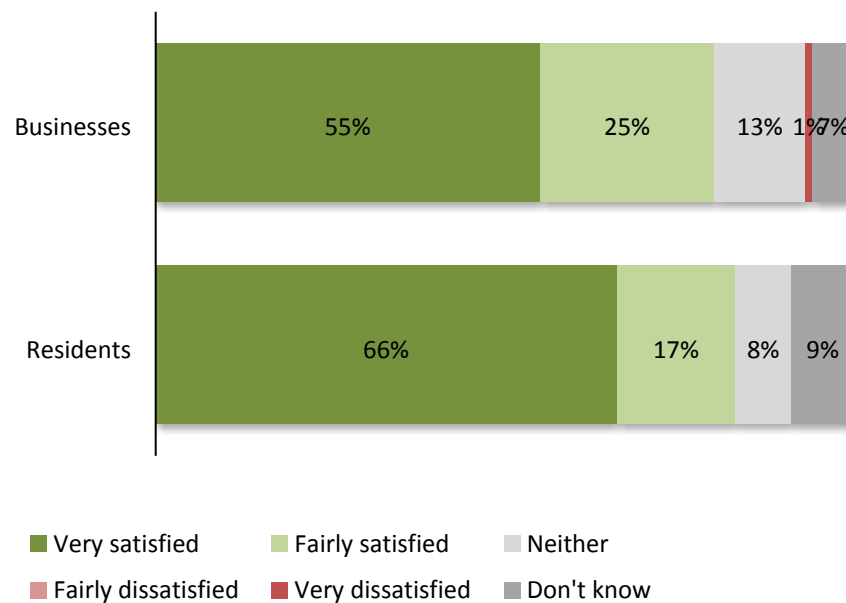
All respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the service provided by DSFRS.

Four fifths (80%) of businesses were satisfied with the service provided, and only 1% expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +79%. Levels of satisfaction significantly increased amongst those who had used a DSFRS service from 70% amongst those who have not used a service to 92%.

Over four fifths (83%) of residents were satisfied with the service provided, and only 1% expressed dissatisfaction, yielding a net level of satisfaction of +82%.

Levels of satisfaction significantly increased amongst those who had used a DSFRS service from 74% amongst those who have not used a service to 95%.

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



Unweighted sample base: 400 businesses, 400 residents

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

"It's expensive."

"That's my personal opinion."

"Personal experience."

Only 4 residents expressed dissatisfaction, and their reason for doing so were as follows:

"We have to do everything ourselves. Clearing the roads, clearing floodwater, road and drains, vegetation on pavements and leaves because nobody does it."

"Their politics and the way they handle business."

"The lack of volunteer fire staff."

"We all have to cut back and they are not doing it. It's not fair on us."

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	6	22
Plymouth	13	52	8	32
Devon	45	180	53	210
Somerset	30	120	34	136

Table 3 – Industry sector

Industry Sector	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
A to F	25	100	26	105
G to N, R + S	75	300	74	295

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	43	171	43	172
Director	16	63	15	62
Manager/assistant manager	22	88	22	87
Partner	2	9	2	9
Company Secretary	1	4	1	5
Other	15	59	15	60
Prefer not to say	2	6	1	5

Table 5 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	63	250	62	248
Female	38	150	38	152

Table 6 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	3	12	3	12
25 – 34 years	11	42	9	38
35 – 44 years	18	70	18	72
45 – 54 years	28	112	27	110
55– 64 years	25	99	25	101
65+	14	56	15	58
Prefer not to say	2	9	2	9

Table 7 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	93	372	93	372
Asian/Asian British	1	6	1	5
Mixed/Other	1	3	1	3
Prefer not to say	5	19	5	19

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	100	8	31
Plymouth	25	100	15	60
Devon	25	100	46	182
Somerset	25	100	32	127

Table 9 – Age

Age	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
16 – 24 years	1	5	1	4
25 – 34 years	8	30	11	42
35 – 44 years	20	78	26	105
45 – 54 years	16	62	14	58
55– 64 years	17	69	18	72
65+	39	154	29	115
Prefer not to say	1	2	1	4

Table 10 – Gender

Gender	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
Male	52	206	48	194
Female	49	194	52	206

Table 11 – Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	Unweighted		Weighted	
	%	Number	%	Number
White	98	390	97	389
Asian/Asian British	<0.5%	1	1	2
Mixed	1	4	1	3
Prefer not to say	1	5	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	6%	15%
	Refusal	439	6%	17%
	Respondent busy	1759	26%	68%
	Sub-total	2598	38%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	480	7%	11%
	Ineligible	263	4%	6%
	No contact made	3517	51%	83%
	Sub-total	4260	62%	100%
	Total	6,858		

4.2 Residents

	Outcome	Contacts	% of total	% of in scope
In scope	Complete	400	3%	21%
	Refusal	1017	8%	53%
	Respondent busy	518	4%	27%
	Sub-total	1935	16%	100%
Out of scope	Unobtainable (modem, fax etc)	2001	17%	20%
	Ineligible	609	5%	6%
	No contact made	7452	62%	74%
	Sub-total	10062	84%	100%
	Total	11,997		

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.

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

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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.

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