

SUBJECT: National Survey for Wales

MEETING: Democratic Services Committee

DATE: 19th October 2015

DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide members with information on the National Survey for Wales relating to perceptions of the local authority and people's ability to influence democratic services.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following the Improvement Objective and Outcome Agreement report that was received at the special meeting of Economy & Development Select Committee on July 29th, it was suggested that the Democratic Services Committee receive further information on the National Survey for Wales, in particular the decrease in the percentage of residents who feel they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area.
- 2.2 The National Survey for Wales is a survey of adults in Wales conducted on behalf of Welsh Government. It covers a range of topics such as wellbeing and people's views on public services. Most recent results are published for the year April 2014 to March 2015.

3 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The percentage of Monmouthshire residents who agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area has fallen in absolute terms and relative to other local authorities. The highpoint of 26% in 2013-14 coincided with the first round of Monmouthshire Engages events which attracted a lot of media attention. The figure is now 21% approximately one in every five respondents.
- 3.2 The National Survey for Wales asks a range of far reaching questions. For the local authority it provides a lens to understand people's perception of the local authority, the services it provides and local democracy. Monmouthshire's results mirror the picture for Wales as a whole with a reduction in satisfaction with issues at a local level. The survey does not explore the reasons for this.
- 3.3 In all but one of the questions included in this report, Monmouthshire ranks in the top half of the authorities in Wales. The exception is "Have you contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months?" where Monmouthshire ranks 17th. This could be for a range of reasons and this report does not attempt to speculate further on this issue.
- 3.4 A more detailed overview the issues that are pertinent to the Democratic Services Committee have been summarised in appendix one of the report.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Members use the report to inform their understanding of how Monmouthshire residents feel about a range of issues related to the democratic role of the council and consider whether any further action is required as a result.

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The performance report on Improvement Objectives and Outcome Agreement progress received at Economy & Development Select Committee on July 29th identified a reduction in the percentage of people who feel they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area. It was suggested this might be a relevant item for the Democratic Services Committee to consider.

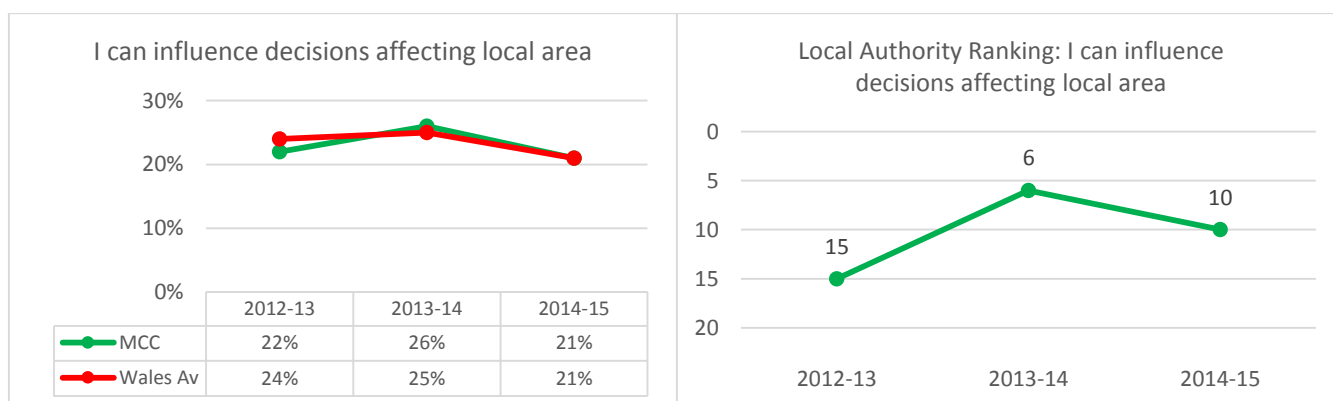
The National Survey for Wales is a survey of people aged 16 and over across Wales and is conducted on behalf of Welsh Government. Respondents are selected at random and each year over 14,000 people are asked to contribute their opinions. 2014-15 is the third full year of the survey and while some new questions have been introduced, three years trend data is available for a number of key questions.

The survey covers a range of issues affecting Welsh people and their local area such as health, well-being and local government. The results published by Welsh Government are available on their website at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-survey/?lang=en>

This report concentrates on the subject areas considered most pertinent to this committee with particular focus on the percentage of residents who feel they are able to influence decisions affecting their local area.

“I can influence decisions affecting local area”

The percentage of Monmouthshire residents who agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area has fallen from 26% in 2013-14 to 21% in 2014-15. In the same period the Wales average also dropped from 25% to 21%. 20 of the 22 Welsh authorities saw a decrease in the percentage of people who agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area. However, when comparing how the Welsh authorities rank, Monmouthshire’s position fell from 6th to 10th.



Monmouthshire residents appeared to feel more able to influence local decisions in 2013-14. This coincided with our first round of Monmouthshire Engages events which drew large numbers of participants and were widely publicised within the media.

The all Wales data suggests a correlation between the age of respondent and whether they feel able to influence decisions. The 75 and over age group appear to feel less able to influence, with just 17% agreeing with the question across Wales. While this data is not available on an authority level, we know 10.4% of Monmouthshire’s population is aged over 75, higher than the average across Wales of 8.9% (source: ONS mid-year population estimates 2014). However, three authorities with a larger proportion of residents aged 75 and over have an overall higher percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions.

Responses across Wales also suggest a correlation between household deprivation and whether people feel able to influence decisions. Across Wales 17% of people in households in material deprivation feel able to influence decisions compared to 22% of people living in households not in material deprivation. 16% of people in Wales were materially deprived (that is, unable to afford certain things such as keeping the house warm enough, make regular savings, or have a holiday once a year), compared to 11% in Monmouthshire which has the lowest proportion of respondents from households in material deprivation of any of the Welsh authorities.

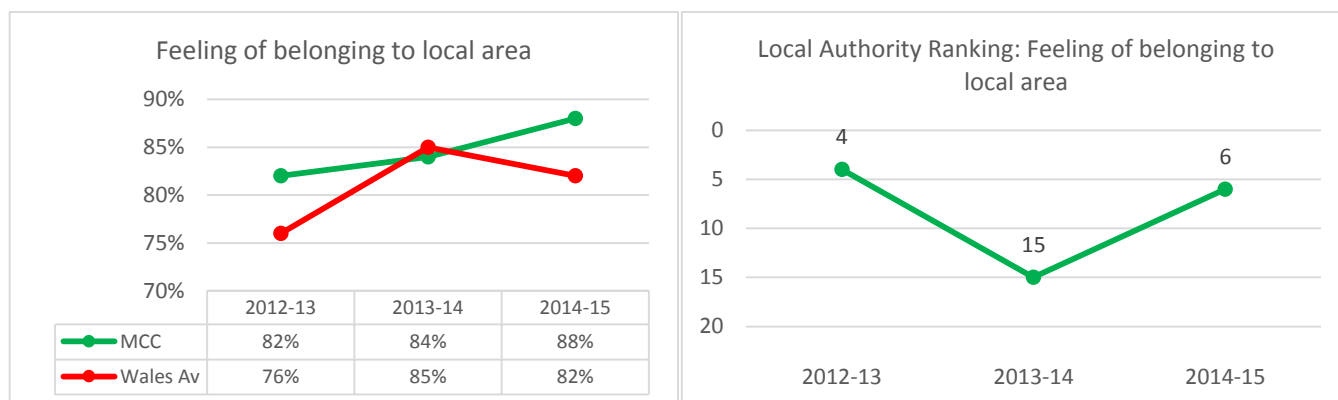
The combination of these two factors – a higher proportion of the population aged 75 and over and the lowest levels of deprivation - would suggest a mixed response to this question. The identification of these factors are useful, however, in understanding sections of our population less likely to feel able to influence local decision making.

Other questions relating to local authority services

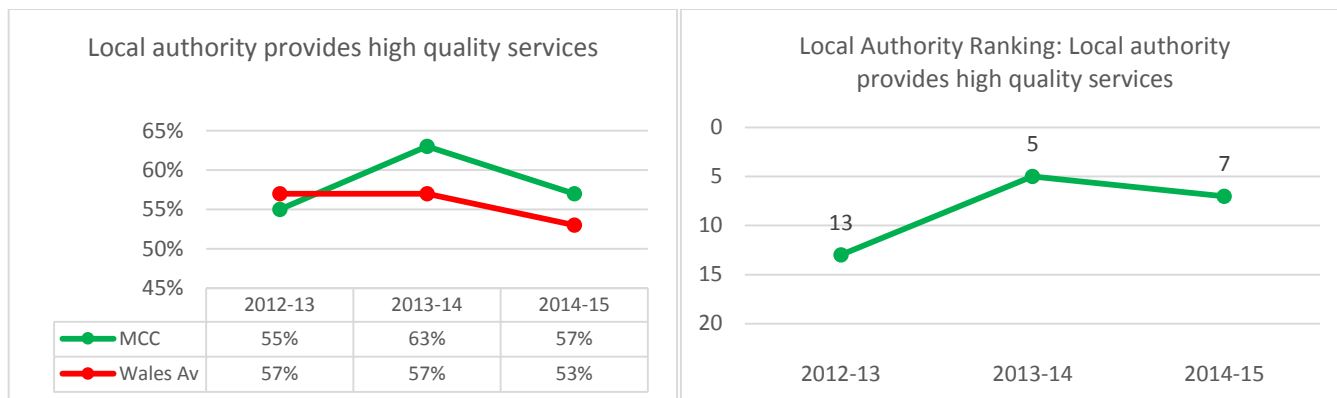
Monmouthshire’s Improvement Plan has drawn on the following questions from the National Survey for Wales to help measure progress against the key objective “We want to be an efficient, effective and sustainable organisation”. Included within this report are these and other items that might be relevant to this committee, Appendix 2 shows comparison against the Welsh authorities.

	MCC 2012-13	Wales 2012-13	MCC 2013-14	Wales 2013-14	MCC 2014-15	Wales 2014-15	Ranking 2014-15
I can influence decisions affecting local area	22%	24%	26%	25%	21%	21%	10 th
Feeling of belonging to local area	82%	76%	84%	85%	88%	82%	6 th
Local authority provides high quality services	55%	57%	63%	57%	57%	53%	7 th
Local authority is good at letting people know how it is performing	41%	41%	47%	41%	39%	37%	9 th

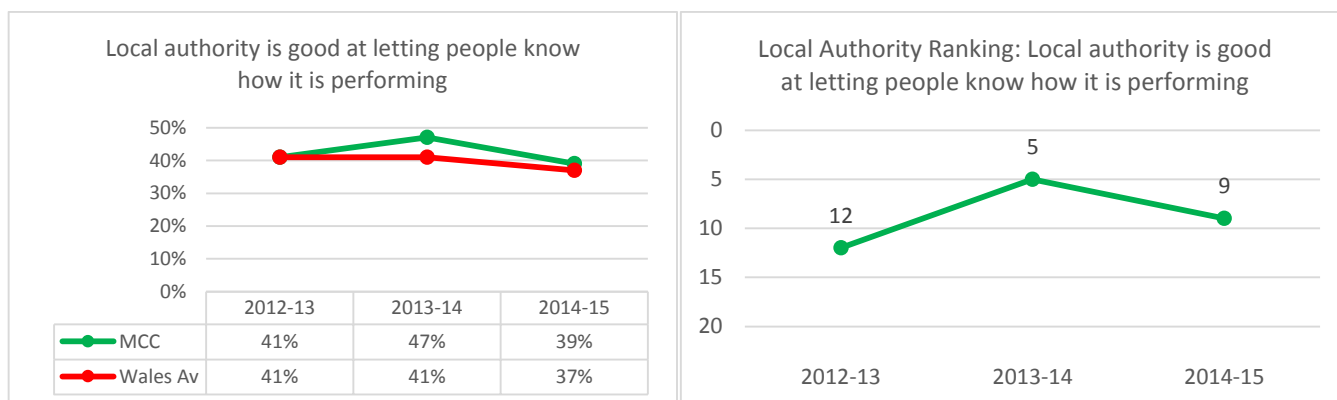
88% of people in Monmouthshire have a feeling of belonging to local area, compared to 82% in Wales. This is an increase from 84% in Monmouthshire last year and differs from the National trend where fewer people felt a sense of belonging. Monmouthshire ranks 6th of the 22 authorities in Wales for this particular measure, an improvement from 15th in 2013-14.



Across Wales 53% of respondents agreed that their council provides high quality services, a lower proportion than in 2012-13 and 2013-14 when in both years, 57% agreed with the statement. In Monmouthshire 57% agreed this year, which is lower than the 63% last year.



39% of people in Monmouthshire agreed the local authority is good at letting people know how it is performing, compared to 37% across Wales. This is a lower proportion than last year where 47% agreed in Monmouthshire and 41% in Wales.



One of the new questions added to the survey in 2014-15 asked if the local authority does all it can to improve my local area. 38% of Monmouthshire respondents agreed compared to 37% in Wales, ranking Monmouthshire 8th in Wales.

Democracy and understanding

A new set of questions concerning democracy and understanding were introduced to the survey in 2014-15, they are shown below:

	MCC 2014-15	Wales 2014-15	Ranking 2014-15
Contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months	10%	12%	17 th
Understanding of what local councillor does for local community	67%	61%	6 th
Whether local councillor works closely with local community	61%	55%	9 th

In Monmouthshire 10% of people reported that they had contacted their local councillor in the previous 12 months. This compares to 12% across Wales where variations by age were noted, from 5% of young people aged 16-24 to 18% of people aged 65 to 74. Analysis of the all Wales data also concludes respondents with higher levels of qualifications and those who had a greater awareness of the work of the Welsh Government were more likely to have contacted their local councillor.

Of those who had contacted their local councillor, 67% of people in Monmouthshire agreed (34% strongly, 33% tending to agree) that they had a good understanding of what their local councillor does for their local

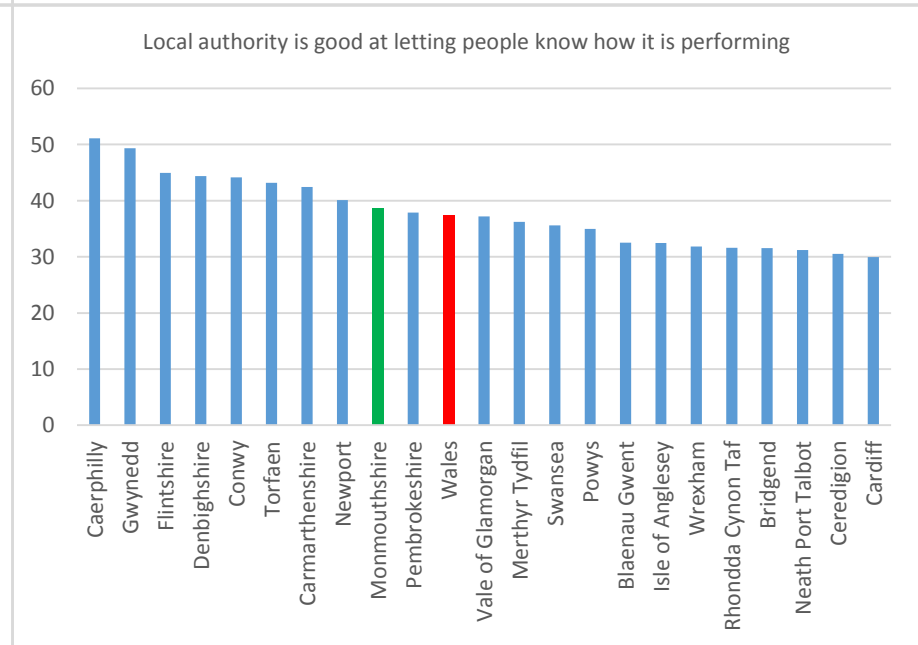
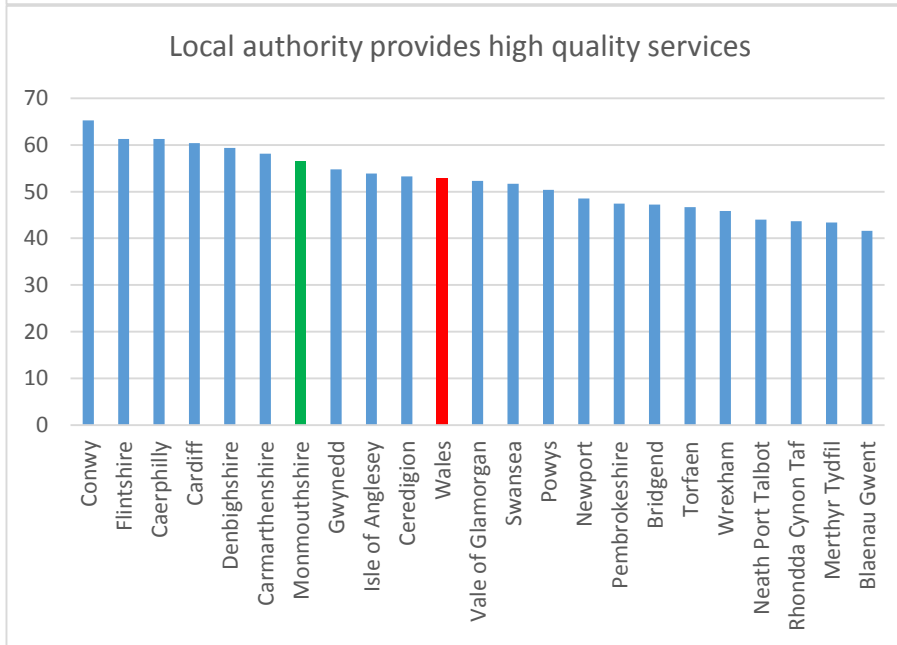
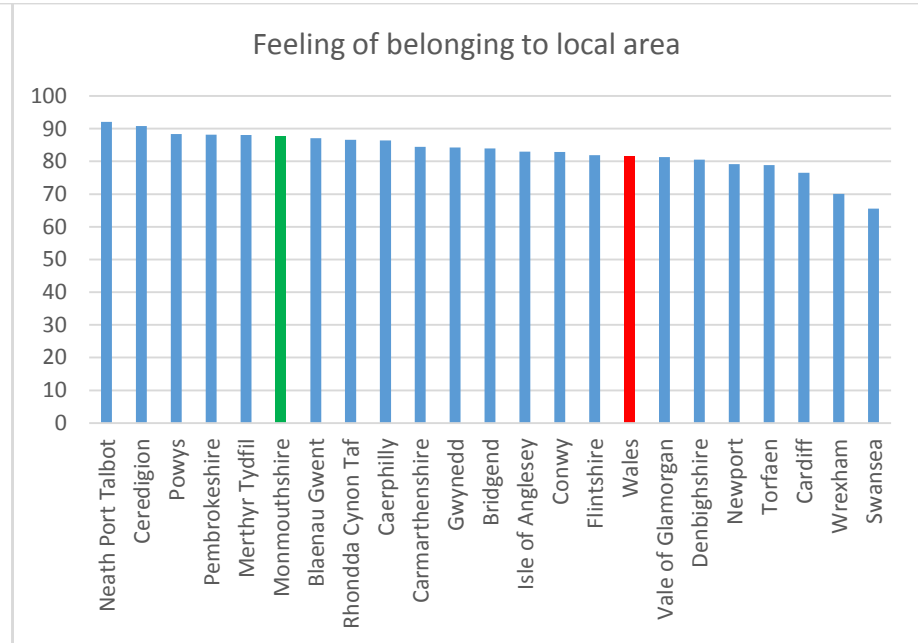
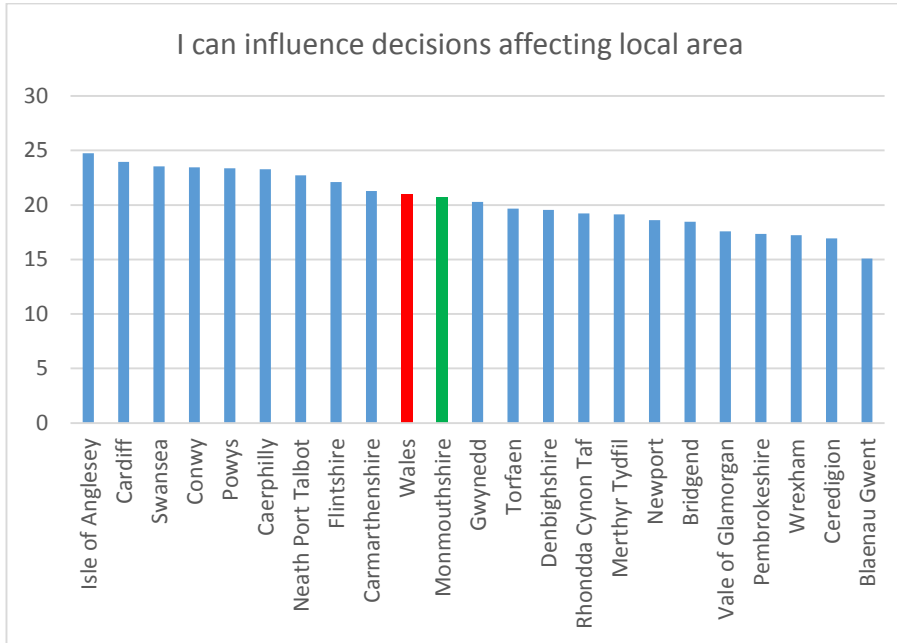
community and 61% agreed (32% strongly, 29% tending to agree) that their local councillor works closely with their local community. In both cases these are above the percentage of people agreeing with these statements overall in Wales. Strong agreement with these statements about local councillors varies by area deprivation where, for example, in the least deprived areas 36% of people strongly agree with the statement “My local councillor works closely with my local community”, compared to 23% in the most deprived areas.

Conclusion

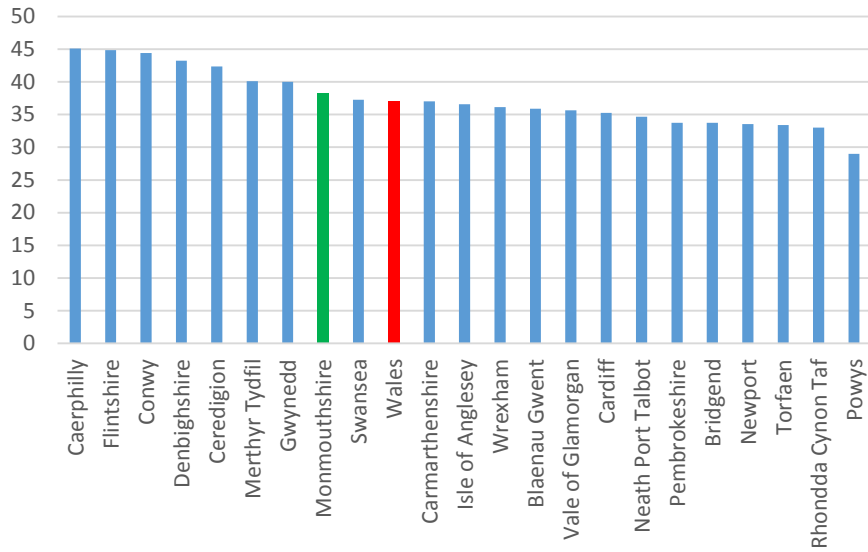
The percentage of people in Monmouthshire who agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area has fallen from 26% in 2013-14 to 21% in 2014-15. It has decreased in all but two local authorities in Wales with an average decrease of 4%. In the remaining key measures of local authority services where trend data exists, all have seen a decrease across Wales between 2013-14 and 2014-15. In Monmouthshire, while the percentage of people with a feeling of belonging to their local area has increased, the remaining measures have decreased.

	MCC 2013-14	MCC 2014-15	MCC Change	Wales 2013-14	Wales 2014-15	Wales Change
I can influence decisions affecting local area	26%	21%	-5%	25%	21%	-4%
Feeling of belonging to local area	84%	88%	4%	85%	82%	-3%
Local authority provides high quality services	63%	57%	-6%	57%	53%	-4%
Local authority is good at letting people know how it is performing	47%	39%	-8%	41%	37%	-4%

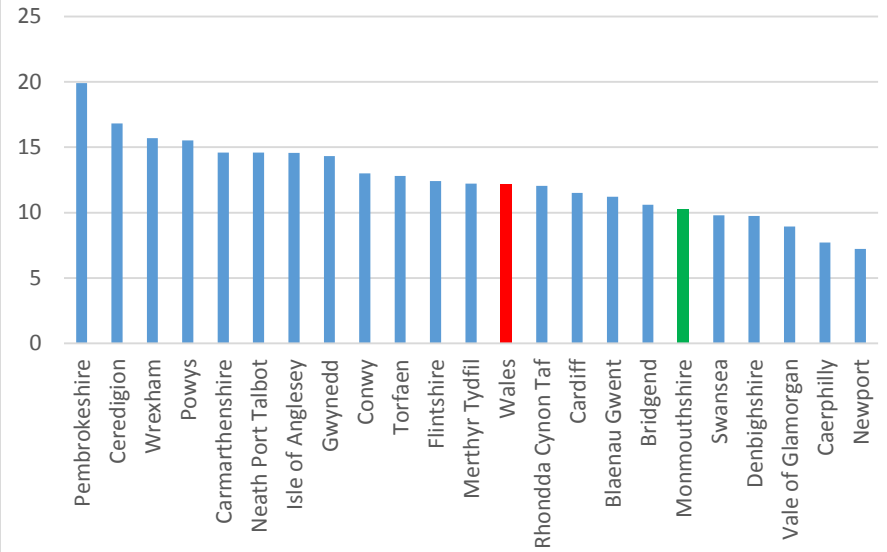
Appendix 2: How do we compare



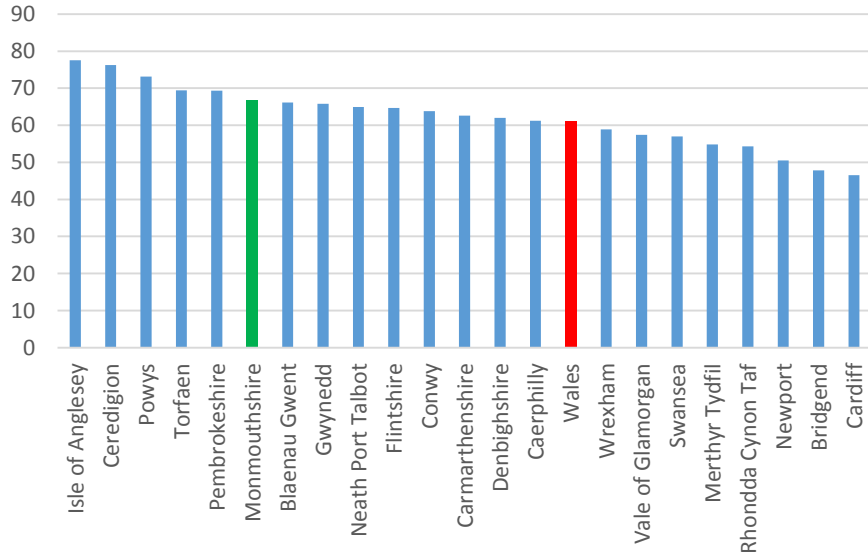
Local authority does all it can to improve my local area



Contacted your local councillor in the past 12 months



Understanding of what local councillor does for local community



Whether local councillor works closely with local community

