

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER: 18/2020

PUBLICATION DATE: 24/03/2020

# Valleys Taskforce Citizen Survey: Executive Summary

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## Executive summary

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This summary report presents findings from a Welsh Government commissioned survey undertaken with those living the Valleys Taskforce (VTF) area<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 The sample frame used for this survey was provided by the National Survey for Wales (2017-2018)<sup>2</sup>. The Welsh Government provided useable contact details for 1,301 residents of the Taskforce area who had agreed to be re-contacted for research purposes.

1.3 Interviews were undertaken via telephone between 26 March and 10 May 2019. All respondents were given the choice of taking part in English or Welsh. A total of 609 interviews were completed and this represented a response rate of 47%.

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<sup>1</sup> Area defined on page 5 of [Our Valleys, Our Future: An introduction](#)

<sup>2</sup> [National Survey for Wales](#): Background information

1.4 The final sample of interviews was weighted on key demographic factors to be representative of those living in the Valleys Taskforce area. These factors were:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Economic status;
- Tenure; and
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) quintile<sup>3</sup>

1.5 The questionnaire for the survey was structured around the three main Delivery Plan themes of the Taskforce<sup>4</sup>: Good quality jobs and the skills to do them, better public services and my local community.

1.6 To avoid duplication with information already available the survey was preceded by desk research which identified sources of information that could contribute to the evidence on the three main themes. Principally, this included reviewing findings from the National Survey for Wales (2017-2018 and 2016-2017) for the VTF area but also included alternative sources such as Census, Annual Population Survey / Labour Force Survey, Lifelong Learning Record Wales, Office for National Statistics (ONS) annual survey of hours and earnings (ASHE), and Working Futures 2014-2024.

Main findings

## **2. Good quality jobs and the skills to do them**

2.1 The vast majority of workers agreed (93%) that they were treated with respect in the workplace and this was relatively consistent across different age groups, gender, whether work was in the public or private sectors or full or part-time.

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<sup>3</sup> WIMD is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It ranks all Lower Super Output Areas from 1 (most deprived) to 1909 (least deprived). Splitting these result into quintiles separate these Lower Super Output Areas into five equal sized groups (numbers of LSOAs) based on their ranking in the 2014 version of the index.

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government. 2019. [Our Valleys Our Future](#)

2.2 However there were other aspects of the working environment that were not viewed quite as positively. Approaching half (46%) of workers felt they worked under a great deal of tension and this was more prominent among those aged over 45 and those working full-time.

2.3 Furthermore, a third (32%) agreed that their employer could change their hours at short notice and 14% agreed that changes in the number of hours I work week to week cause me difficulties.

2.4 In terms of flexibility of working arrangements, three quarters (76%) of workers report that it wouldn't be too difficult to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of a personal or family matter. However, far fewer workers have more extensive control over their working hours with a minority (around two fifths) agreeing with the statement '*I can decide the time I start and finish work*'. This was consistent by age and gender of worker and also by whether they worked in the public or private sector.

2.5 Findings on employee voice and representation in the workplace were mixed. Excluding those who are self-employed, 43% of workers thought that they personally would have some say if there was a decision at their place of work which changed the way they did their job. A total of 35% did not think that they would have a say with the remainder reporting it depends (21%) or not knowing (1%). Whilst this did not vary by age and gender of worker, those working full-time were more likely to believe they would have some influence than those working part-time.

2.6 Around 1 in 4 workers (23%) fear losing their job and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months.

2.7 Around 8 in 10 workers had received some form of training in the past 12 months and this did not vary by age, gender or whether a person worked in the public or private sector.

2.8 Nearly all (95%) of those who had received training in the last 12 months felt that what they had received was adequate for keeping up to date with the skills required to perform their job.

2.9 Just over a third of current workers (36%) reported that their employer offered the opportunity to learn Welsh and this was much more prevalent for those working in the public sector (58%) than those working in private sector (10%).

2.10 Around 7 in 10 workers, live and work in the VTF area. This leaves 3 in 10 (31%) workers who travel outside of the VTF area to get to their main workplace, with the most popular destination being Cardiff.

2.11 Satisfaction with journey time and cost is linked to how far workers need to travel to their workplace. Around a third of workers are at their limit in terms of the distance they are prepared to travel to work and the costs they are prepared to pay.

2.12 Those currently working were slightly more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with the amount and quality of employment opportunities available to them. For those not working (but would like a job in the future) opinion on this was more clear-cut – around half of this group were dissatisfied with the amount and quality of employment opportunities compared with less than a fifth who were satisfied with this.

2.13 Whilst those who want employment appear willing to spend time travelling to find work, there is also evidence that there may be practical difficulties in securing appropriate transport and a perception that employment opportunities may be limited even if they do travel. These transport and travel issues along with availability of suitable opportunities were regarded as greater barriers to employment than accessing support or training to provide the necessary skills.

2.14 When questioned directly on whether they think they will find employment that matches their experience, skills or abilities, opinion among those looking for

work is mixed – just over half think it's very or fairly likely (52%) but a similar proportion thinks it's unlikely or are unsure (48%).

### **3. Better public services**

3.1 Around three-quarters of all respondents to the survey feel that they can find out and access information about local authority services. However, only a small minority feel that they can influence the decision-making process for these services.

3.2 In terms of the access they have to public services, opinion varied by type of service. For access to leisure activities such as parks and open spaces, public libraries and leisure and sport facilities, satisfaction was high (8 in 10 or more were *very* or *fairly satisfied*). Being able to physically access (ease of travel) health services such as GPs and hospitals also attracts a similar level of satisfaction.

3.3 However, opinion on accessing appointments within a reasonable timeframe at hospitals and, particularly, accessing convenient appointments at GPs was less favourable. For the latter (GP appointments), 50% of respondents were dissatisfied, slightly more than were satisfied - 44%.

3.4 These mixed views in terms of opinion of access were also found for other services, albeit to a lesser extent. A majority (56%) were satisfied with being able to access social care services but a significant minority (26%) expressed dissatisfaction with this access. Similarly, 56% were satisfied with being able to speak to someone about social housing needs but 25% were dissatisfied.

3.5 Opinion on being able to access a place in a good school for their child / children was more positive (8 in 10 were satisfied).

3.6 Whilst satisfaction with access to services may have drawn mixed opinion, satisfaction with actually using public services was more consistent and generally

favourable. Satisfaction with the service received at three key health services – GPs, hospitals and ambulances – was 86%, 87% and 89% respectively.

3.7 Satisfaction with a child's school was at similar levels, but respondents appeared happier with primary schools – 88% were satisfied including 61% who were *very satisfied* compared with equivalent figures of 82% and 35% for secondary schools.

3.8 Satisfaction with use of leisure services such as museums, libraries and historic places was even higher than other services with more than 9 in 10 satisfied with their last visit.

#### **4. My local community**

4.1 The majority (83%) of those living in the VTF area were satisfied with the area that they live in with this group being fairly evenly split between those who are *very satisfied* (40%) and *fairly satisfied* (43%).

4.2 Whilst only just over 1 in 10 (11%) report dissatisfaction with their local area, a greater number, a quarter of residents (25%), state that they would move out of their area if they had the chance. This desire was more prominent among younger residents (16-44s) and those living in the most deprived areas. Among those who wanted to move *improved job prospects and opportunities* and *being better for their children* were the main motivations.

4.3 Among the satisfied and 'staying put' majority, the natural environment, the community spirit / people in the area and the good transport links were viewed as the most positive aspects of the area.

4.4 When questioned specifically on community cohesion, 8 in 10, agreed that they *belong to their area*, but slightly fewer, although still a majority, felt that *people in the local area treated each other with respect* (7 in 10) and that the area *is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together* (around

two-thirds). Attitudes towards community cohesion were linked to age with older respondents being more positive about the situation in their area.

4.5 In terms of national well-being indicators such as general life satisfaction, overall happiness and whether feel things done in life are worthwhile, around three quarters of those living in VTF area rate themselves highly on these scales (7 out of 10 or higher).

4.6 Those in the middle age group (45-64s) tend to be least positive on these well-being indicators. However, this pattern is not specific to the VTF area or Wales and is observed in many different countries<sup>5</sup>. Those who have limiting illnesses or disabilities or were from more deprived areas were also less likely to be positive about these well-being indicators.

4.7 National well-being indicators around health focus on the number of healthy lifestyle behaviours that apply to individuals (not smoking, healthy weight, eating 5 fruit or veg a day, not drinking above guidelines, being physically active). In the VTF area, individuals are most likely to report that 2 or 3 of these healthy lifestyle behaviours (63%) apply to them. Around 1 in 6 (17%) report that 4 or 5 of these behaviours apply to them and at the other end of the scale around 1 in 10 (11%) only report 0 or 1 of these behaviours.

4.8 As with other well-being indicators, those aged 45-64 were least likely to report positive behaviour – only 10% report that 4 or 5 behaviours apply to them. There was also a difference on this measure by WIMD quintile – those who lived in the most deprived areas were much less likely to report 4 or 5 healthy lifestyle behaviours applied to them – 10% compared with 39% in the least deprived areas.

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<sup>5</sup> Blanchflower D.G., Oswald A.J. (2019) [Do Humans Suffer a Psychological Low in Midlife? Two Approaches \(With and Without Controls\) in Seven Data Sets](#). In: Rojas M. (eds) The Economics of Happiness

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 Encouragingly, the vast majority of workers in the VTF area believe they are treated with dignity and respect at their workplace. However, this does not make them immune to feeling pressure with almost half of workers reporting that they work under a great deal of tension.

5.2 Most feel that there is sufficient flexibility in their job for them to take an hour or two off to deal with a personal issue, but more extensive control of start and finish times is beyond most workers. Furthermore, less than half appear certain they would have any say if a decision was made to change the way they did their job.

5.3 Analysis of information on occupational profile and future demand highlights some potential sustainability issues for the workforce in the VTF area. Manufacturing roles and mid and lower-level occupations are expected to decline and these are currently over-represented in the VTF area. Opportunities do exist in the Foundational Economy<sup>6</sup> which is expected to grow and where VTF currently has above average representation in such roles (education, health and social work) relative to Wales. In terms of current workers own perceptions of the sustainability of their role, 1 in 4 feared unemployment within the next 12 months.

5.4 Training has been received in the last 12 months for 4 in 5 of the workforce and nearly all of these feel that this has been adequate for keeping up to date with the skills required to do their job. Furthermore, those who are currently looking for work do not identify access to training as one on the major barriers to employment. Those looking were more likely to cite a lack of opportunities in general and, whilst being willing to spend time travelling, that transport difficulties could exacerbate this.

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<sup>6</sup> [The Foundational Economy](#) is a name for those business activities that we use every day. Care and health services, food, housing, energy, construction, tourism and retailers on the high street are all examples of the Foundational Economy.



5.5 In terms of satisfaction with public services in the VTF area, accessing some of them appears to be more of a concern than the service experience itself. In particular, the service received when using the three main health services (GPs, hospitals, ambulances) was generally favourable but accessing these services in the first place attracted more criticism, particularly getting a convenient appointment time at a GP and one within a reasonable timeframe at a hospital. Those living in the Cwm Taf Health Board area reported greater dissatisfaction with GP appointment times, whereas as for hospital appointments age was the most discriminating factor, with younger respondents (16-44) more likely to report dissatisfaction.

5.6 To a lesser extent, being able to speak to someone about social housing or social care needs was also seen as problematic for a significant minority of those in need of this.

5.7 On the whole VTF residents are generally happy with the area they live in – 83% said they were satisfied overall and 73% want to stay in the area they are in rather than move out. Younger residents, however, were more likely than average to want to move out and job prospects was one of the main motivations for this.

5.8 Reaction to a number of well-being indicators uncover patterns of response in the VTF area that are found in other research studies - namely that those in middle age and those in the most deprived areas tend to fare worse on these self-reported measures<sup>7,8</sup>.

5.9 There are two further research exercises which we feel would build on the insight gained from Citizens Survey and add value in terms of both guiding the work of the taskforce and assessing its impact. These are:

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<sup>7</sup> Blanchflower D.G., Oswald A.J. (2019) [Do Humans Suffer a Psychological Low in Midlife? Two Approaches \(With and Without Controls\) in Seven Data Sets](#). In: Rojas M. (eds) The Economics of Happiness

<sup>8</sup> Health Survey for England 2016 [Well-being and mental health](#)

- Comparing findings in the VTF area on the three key themes with the national picture – this could either take the form of a bespoke national survey and / or using information from the National Survey for Wales or the Skills and Employment Survey.
- Repeating the Citizens Survey in late 2021 / early 2022, to help measure the impact of the current Delivery Plan (2019-2021) on the lives of those living and working in the VTF area.

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Full Research Report: Timmins, C and Clifton N., Valleys Taskforce Citizen Survey: Welsh Government, GSR report number 18/2020

Available at: <https://gov.wales/valleys-taskforce-citizen-survey>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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