

# Executive Summary: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Government Reform Public Survey

## Survey Overview

This public survey on local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough achieved 3,174 responses during the four-week collection period (19 June - 20 July 2025), comprising 2,407 public responses and 767 council worker responses.

## Key Findings

### Trust and Satisfaction with Current Services

Public trust in council decision-making represents a fundamental challenge, with residents showing a net negative score (-4) compared to council workers' positive assessment (+31). This 35-point gap constitutes the largest divergence between public and professional perspectives across all measures.

Current service satisfaction reveals similar patterns, with the public recording a modest positive net score (+10) compared to council workers' substantially more optimistic view (+44). East Cambridgeshire consistently outperforms other districts across multiple measures, whilst Peterborough, despite already operating as a unitary authority, records the lowest satisfaction levels at 30%.

### Support for Change

Despite trust deficits, public support for structural change is overwhelmingly positive (net +77), conditional on service improvements. This strong endorsement crosses all demographic and geographic boundaries, with agreement ranging from 76% in Fenland to 88% in Cambridge and Peterborough. The conditional nature of this support emphasises that residents prioritise tangible service improvements over structural change for its own sake.

### Reorganisation Concerns

Concern about areas being overlooked during reorganisation is substantial across both public (net +56) and council workers (net +53). This convergence masks significant geographical variation: rural districts including East Cambridgeshire and Fenland show 81% agreement with this concern, compared to 54% in Cambridge. This 27-point difference highlights fundamental anxieties about representation and resource allocation in any new structure.

### Current Performance Assessments

Performance assessments reveal systematic patterns across service areas. Councils perform relatively well on digital service delivery (public net +44) and having councillors who know their area (public net +43). However, significant weaknesses emerge in accountability and

transparency (public net -45), service investment (public net -32), and reducing complexity (public net -46).

The assessment of single-point council contact reveals the current two-tier system's limitations, with negative perceptions across most districts except Peterborough, where 43% rate this positively compared to Cambridge's 9%. This demonstrates the practical advantages of unitary structures in simplifying citizen access to services.

### **Priorities for New Unitaries**

Residents identify three top priorities for new unitary councils: **investing in council services**, **improving response capabilities**, and **ensuring councillors possess local area knowledge**. For future development, residents prioritise investment in health infrastructure, transport networks, and community facilities. The emphasis on maintaining local knowledge whilst improving service delivery presents a key challenge for larger unitary structures.

### **Unitary Size Preferences**

Public preference centres on unitary authorities serving 400,000-500,000 residents, with 500,000 being the single most selected option. Council workers demonstrate stronger preference for the larger 500,000 population scale. Fenland shows 62% preference for authorities under 400,000, whilst South Cambridgeshire shows 48% support for authorities over 500,000. This 18-point difference reflects different perspectives on the balance between efficiency and local representation.

### **Community Belonging and Cultural Alignment**

Community belonging shows generally positive sentiment (public net +43), though Peterborough records significantly weaker belonging at 47% compared to East Cambridgeshire's 76%. Perceptions of whether council decisions reflect cultural values are more mixed (public net +9), with council workers more optimistic (net +29). Younger residents consistently report weaker community connections across all districts.

### **Demographic Variations**

Age-related patterns emerge consistently: younger residents (under 35) express lower satisfaction with services, weaker community belonging, and greater frustration with council complexity. Conversely, residents over 75 show higher trust in councils and stronger community connections. Gender differences appear primarily in reorganisation concerns, with women expressing greater anxiety about areas being overlooked.

### **Implications for Reorganisation**

The findings reveal several critical considerations for developing unitary proposals:

1. **The trust deficit between public and council perspectives requires attention during transition planning.**

2. **Geographic variations in satisfaction, community connection, and size preferences necessitate careful consideration of boundaries** to ensure new authorities can maintain local identity whilst achieving efficiency gains.
3. **Movement patterns demonstrate that functional economic and service geographies already transcend current boundaries**, with some districts showing stronger connections to neighbouring areas than internal cohesion.
4. **The emphasis on maintaining councillor local knowledge whilst creating larger authorities** presents a key challenge requiring innovative approaches to democratic representation.
5. **Rural districts' heightened concerns about being overlooked** require specific safeguards and communication strategies to maintain confidence during transition.
6. **The conditional nature of public support** demands that proposals clearly demonstrate how reorganisation will deliver tangible service improvements rather than merely promising efficiency savings.
7. **Voice of the customer** many of the challenges arise from the fragmentary nature of government in the region and the lack of a robust consultative mechanism to tap into public attitudes which will become doubly important in the new unitary set up and the transition to get there

The research provides robust evidence that whilst residents are open to change, success will depend on addressing fundamental concerns about democratic representation, service quality, and local identity within new structures. The significant variations between districts in satisfaction, trust, and preferences indicate that a differentiated approach may be necessary, recognising that one size may not fit all communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

# Introduction and Methodology: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Government Reform Public Survey

## Introduction

The Government has mandated that all county and district councils in England will be abolished in April 2028 and replaced with unitary authorities. This directive affects Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, where the current two-tier system of seven authorities comprising of:

- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cambridge City Council
- East Cambridgeshire District Council
- Fenland District Council
- Huntingdonshire District Council
- Peterborough City Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Peterborough City Council already operates as a unitary authority, the only authority to do so, but will be included in the reorganisation process. These councils will be restructured into one or more unitary authorities serving the area's residents. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority will remain unchanged. Town and parish councils are not currently required to change under the Government directive.

The Government has established key criteria that proposals for new unitary structures must address. These criteria require that:

- proposals should achieve better outcomes and local service delivery for the whole area
- ensure unitary local government is the right size to achieve efficiencies and improve capacity
- prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services
- demonstrate how councils have worked together to meet local needs informed by local views, support devolution arrangements
- enable stronger community engagement with genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment.

Additionally, this report considers issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

This reorganisation represents a fundamental shift in local governance arrangements that have served the area for decades. The current system provides different services through different

tiers, with residents accessing county council services for education, social care, and highways, while district and city councils provide housing, planning, environmental services, along with waste and recycling. The proposed unitary structure will consolidate these functions under single authorities, potentially simplifying access to services while creating larger administrative units.

The Government has indicated that financial savings are expected through the process of reducing the number of councils, while also supporting improvements in service delivery through bringing services together. This creates a complex challenge of achieving efficiency gains while maintaining or improving service quality and democratic representation across diverse communities ranging from the urban centres of Cambridge and Peterborough to extensive rural areas.

The area's population is projected to grow to over one million residents within the next fifteen years, adding demographic pressure to the reorganisation challenge. The Government's guiding principle, not a target, is that unitary authorities should serve populations of approximately 500,000; and smaller where appropriate, which would indicate the creation of at least two unitary authorities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, though the final structure remains to be determined through evidence supporting proposals, and central government will make the final decision.

## Methodology

The research employed an online survey methodology to gather public perspectives on local government reorganisation across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The survey was designed as an engagement exercise rather than a formal consultation, with the purpose of providing qualitative and quantitative data to inform the development of proposals for submission to Government by November 2025. The survey was also made available in paper versions to ensure that everyone could potentially take part and these were in libraries and various outlets across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

This public survey served as a companion piece to a parallel businesses and stakeholder survey that asked many of the same questions, enabling comparison between general public and stakeholder perspectives on reorganisation priorities and concerns. The dual survey approach recognised that members of the public who use local government services may have different insights and priorities compared to stakeholders who regularly engage with local government, while ensuring comprehensive coverage of community views across different levels of engagement with local government services. Council workers were also a key constituent group and their responses to the public survey have been extracted and presented separately in this report.

## Survey Design and Implementation

The survey instrument was developed collaboratively by the seven affected councils working with Archangel to ensure comprehensive coverage of the Government's criteria for unitary authority proposals. The survey design prioritised brevity and accessibility, limiting the questionnaire to a smaller number of core questions to maximise response rates while gathering essential data on public priorities and preferences regarding local government reorganisation.

While designed as an engagement exercise rather than formal consultation, the approach went above and beyond standard engagement requirements by voluntarily aligning with the Gunning principles for fair consultation. This demonstrated a commitment to best practice standards, ensuring that the public were consulted at a time when proposals were still at a formative stage, sufficient information was provided to enable informed responses, and time was allowed for consideration and response.

No maps or visual representations of potential boundary options were included in the survey design, in accordance with the engagement rather than consultation approach adopted for this research. This neutral approach was particularly important for the public survey to ensure that residents could express their views without being influenced by specific boundary proposals that had not yet been finalised.

## Public Engagement Strategy

The online survey was supported by comprehensive communications to residents across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough through established communication channels managed by the communications teams from the seven authorities. This multi-channel approach was designed to ensure broad public awareness and participation across the diverse communities within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This was further supported by digital marketing provided by CAN.

The communication strategy utilised existing council communication channels including websites, social media platforms, direct communication with residents but also offline channels such as newsletters, posters and flyers. Awareness was also raised through news articles, a video, and CAN boosted response through targeted programmatic online advertising reacting in real time to survey response levels. The heads of communications coordinated their efforts to ensure consistent messaging while leveraging the unique reach and audience characteristics of each authority's communication channels. This collaborative approach maximised the potential reach to residents across all areas while maintaining message consistency and professional standards.

The engagement strategy recognised the importance of reaching residents who might not typically participate in local government consultations but whose perspectives are essential for understanding community needs and priorities. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that communications reached residents across different demographic groups, geographical areas,

and levels of engagement with local government services. CAN's marketing strategy was designed to leverage these harder-to-reach groups.

Communications emphasised that the survey was open to all residents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, regardless of their current level of engagement with local government services. The messaging highlighted that local government reorganisation would affect all residents through changes to service delivery, democratic representation, and local identity, making broad public participation essential for informing the proposals process.

### Data Collection Period and Procedures

The survey was conducted from 19th June 2025 to 20th July 2025, providing a concentrated four-week period for public participation while meeting the tight timescales required for proposals development. The online survey platform maintained a hard stop at midnight on the final day of the survey period, ensuring clear closure for the data collection period and enabling timely analysis for proposals development.

While the online survey closed at midnight on 20th July 2025, paper survey responses continued to be processed for the following week to ensure accessibility for residents who preferred paper survey participation methods or who had obtained paper copies during the survey period but required additional time to complete and return them. This approach balanced the need for timely data collection with accessibility considerations for residents who might face barriers to online participation.

The timing was coordinated with broader communications and engagement activities around local government reorganisation to maximise awareness and participation. The four-week period provided sufficient time for residents to become aware of the survey, consider the information provided, and formulate their responses, while meeting the constraints imposed by Government timescales for proposals submission.

The data collection procedures incorporated robust quality assurance measures to ensure data integrity and prevent duplicate responses. The online platform included validation checks and security measures to maintain the reliability of the data while protecting respondent privacy and confidentiality.

## Response Profile and Participation

The survey achieved substantial participation from residents along with council workers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, representing diverse demographic groups, geographical areas, and levels of engagement with local government services. The response profile demonstrated broad public and council worker interest in local government reorganisation and willingness to participate in the engagement process. In just four weeks, there were 3,174 responses in total. This comprised of 2,407 responses from residents and 767 responses from council workers. These are healthy responses and mean that the public response, when weighted to the population, is in excess of 1000 which is the gold standard in market research. There is high engagement among council workers and so the survey results specifically include them in comparisons.

The public survey attracted participation from residents across all seven local authority areas, with representation from urban centres, market towns, and rural communities. This geographical distribution provided insights into how local government reorganisation might affect different types of communities and enabled analysis of potential variations in priorities and concerns across different areas. Further information on this can be found in the sample profile.

Demographic analysis of the response profile revealed participation across different age groups, gender categories, and other relevant characteristics, though as with all voluntary surveys, certain demographic groups were more likely to participate than others. This participation pattern necessitated the implementation of weighting procedures to ensure that the analysis appropriately reflected the demographic composition of the broader population.

The response profile included residents with varying levels of current engagement with local government services, from those who regularly interact with councils through to those who have minimal or no direct contact. This diversity of experience provided valuable insights into how reorganisation might affect different types of service users and enabled analysis of priorities across different levels of current engagement.



## Analytical Approach and Statistical Framework

The analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine public responses across the range of survey questions. Quantitative analysis focused on response distributions and patterns across different demographic groups and geographical areas, while qualitative analysis examined open-ended responses and comments to identify key themes and concerns expressed by residents.

Particular attention was paid to identifying differences in perspectives between different demographic groups and geographical areas, recognising that residents in different circumstances may have different priorities and concerns regarding reorganisation. Statistical analysis was conducted where sample sizes permitted reliable comparison between groups, with appropriate confidence intervals calculated to support interpretation of findings.

The methodology incorporated weighting procedures to adjust for demographic differences between the survey sample and the broader population of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This weighting approach ensured that the analysis appropriately reflected the demographic composition of the area while acknowledging the voluntary nature of survey participation.

The analytical framework recognised both the strengths and limitations of the public survey approach. The substantial sample size provided statistically robust insights with calculable margins of error and confidence intervals. The broad geographical and demographic representation enabled analysis of variations in perspectives across different communities and population groups.

However, several limitations were acknowledged in the analytical approach. As a self-selecting sample, the survey may over-represent more engaged residents who actively choose to participate in local government processes, potentially under-representing less engaged residents.

Despite these limitations, the substantial sample size, systematic sampling approach, and broad representation across demographic groups and geographical areas provided confidence that the findings offered statistically valid and representative insights into public perspectives on local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

## Weighting Methodology

To ensure that the survey findings accurately reflected the demographic composition of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, weighting procedures were applied to adjust for differences between the survey sample and the broader population. The weighting approach addressed three key demographic dimensions: gender, age, and geographical location. Population benchmarks for weighting were derived from the most recent Office for National Statistics census data and mid-year population estimates for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, providing reliable demographic profiles against which the survey sample could be calibrated.

The weighting procedures were implemented using iterative proportional fitting techniques to simultaneously balance the sample across all three demographic dimensions. This approach ensured that the weighted sample matched the population benchmarks for gender, age, and location while maintaining the integrity of individual response patterns. While weighting procedures enhanced the representativeness of the survey findings, certain limitations were acknowledged, including that weighting can only adjust for measured demographic characteristics and cannot correct for other potential sources of bias such as differences in political engagement or attitudes toward local government.

In addition, weighting reduces the effective sample size as we take primary research sample to match the population. The public, after weighting, have an effective sample size of 1,411. This gives a margin of error of  $\pm 3\%$  on the sample results at the 95% confidence level making the results highly accurate. This means that if a survey response is 50% the true population answer will lie between 47% and 53%.

For council workers, it is difficult to weight on demographic profile as this information is unknown so the only weighting adjustment was made for district location on the basis of population levels. This levelled out under and over representation of council workers by district. The effective sample size for council workers is 642. The consequent margin of error is  $\pm 3.9\%$  on the sample results at the 95% confidence level.

In comparing differences between the general public and council workers on any issue, then it is necessary to calculate the difference between the two samples. On this measure, to be significant, the critical threshold is five per cent difference (4.7%).

## Presentation of data

The following analysis presents findings from the survey data collected, with results presented both as individual response percentages and as net scores to provide a clear summary of overall opinion. The data has been weighted to ensure representativeness of the target population, and all percentages have been rounded to whole numbers for clarity of presentation.

Charts and tables throughout this section display the full distribution of responses to allow readers to understand the complete picture of opinion. Significant differences between demographic groups and other key variables are highlighted where they emerge from the data.

In survey, there were single code, single response questions and multicode, multiple response questions. For example, a multicode question would be a select up to three question and a single code question would be how much do you agree or disagree with something. Questions are classified as either single code (where respondents can select only one answer) or multicode (where respondents can select multiple answers). For multicode questions, percentages will not sum to 100% as respondents may give more than one response. Additionally, where figures do not sum to exactly 100%, this may be due to computer rounding of percentages, which can occasionally result in totals of 99% or 101%.

**All charts show weighted data but bases are given unweighted.**

## Net Score Calculation

Net scores are calculated to provide a single summary measure of the balance of opinion on each topic. The net score represents the difference between positive and negative responses, excluding neutral or undecided responses from the calculation.

The net score formula used throughout this analysis is:  $\text{Net Score} = (\text{Strongly Agree} + \text{Agree}) - (\text{Disagree} + \text{Strongly Disagree})$ . For satisfaction measures, the calculation follows the same principle:  $\text{Net Satisfaction} = (\text{Very Satisfied} + \text{Satisfied}) - (\text{Dissatisfied} + \text{Very Dissatisfied})$ .

A positive net score indicates that positive responses outweigh negative responses, whilst a negative net score indicates the reverse. A net score of zero suggests opinion is evenly balanced between positive and negative views. Net scores can range from +100 (where all respondents give positive responses) to -100 (where all respondents give negative responses).

Net scores are particularly useful for comparing performance across different areas, identifying areas of strength and concern, tracking changes in opinion over time, and providing a clear summary statistic. They offer a single figure that encapsulates the overall direction and strength of opinion on any given measure. All net scores presented in the charts are clearly labelled and the underlying data showing the full response distribution is provided to ensure transparency in the calculation method.

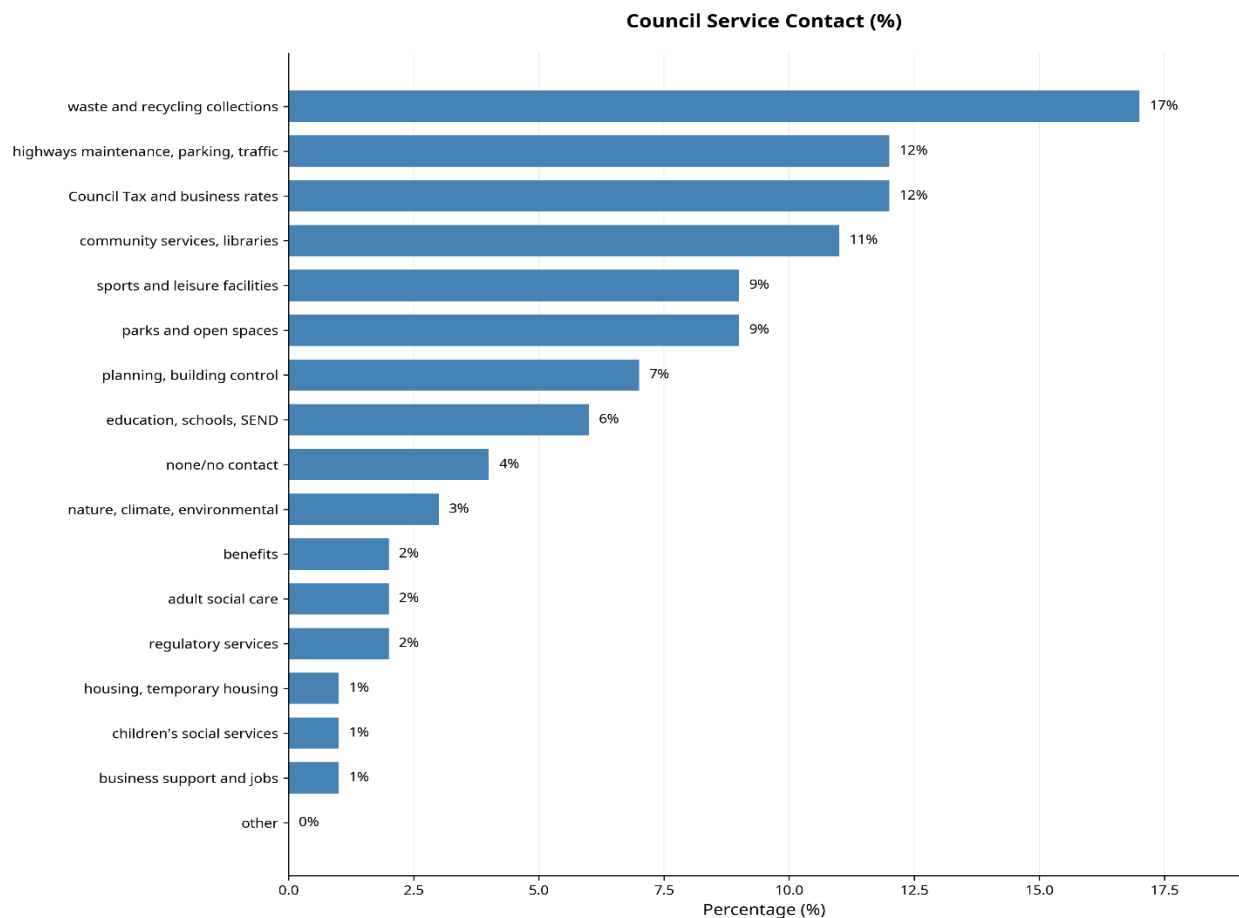


# Survey Findings

## Council Service Contact

In terms of public responses, the survey reveals that waste and recycling collections represent the most frequently contacted council service, with 17% of all service interactions across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This reflects the universal nature of waste services and their visibility to residents, as every household engages with these services on a regular basis. The prominence of waste services in contact patterns demonstrates their fundamental role in daily life and the importance residents place on reliable collection schedules and recycling facilities.

Highways maintenance, parking, traffic management and street lighting account for 12% of contacts, indicating significant public engagement with transport infrastructure issues. This substantial level of interaction reflects the critical importance of road networks and traffic systems to residents' daily mobility and economic activity. The frequency of contact in this area suggests ongoing concerns about road conditions, parking availability, potholes and traffic flow management across the region.

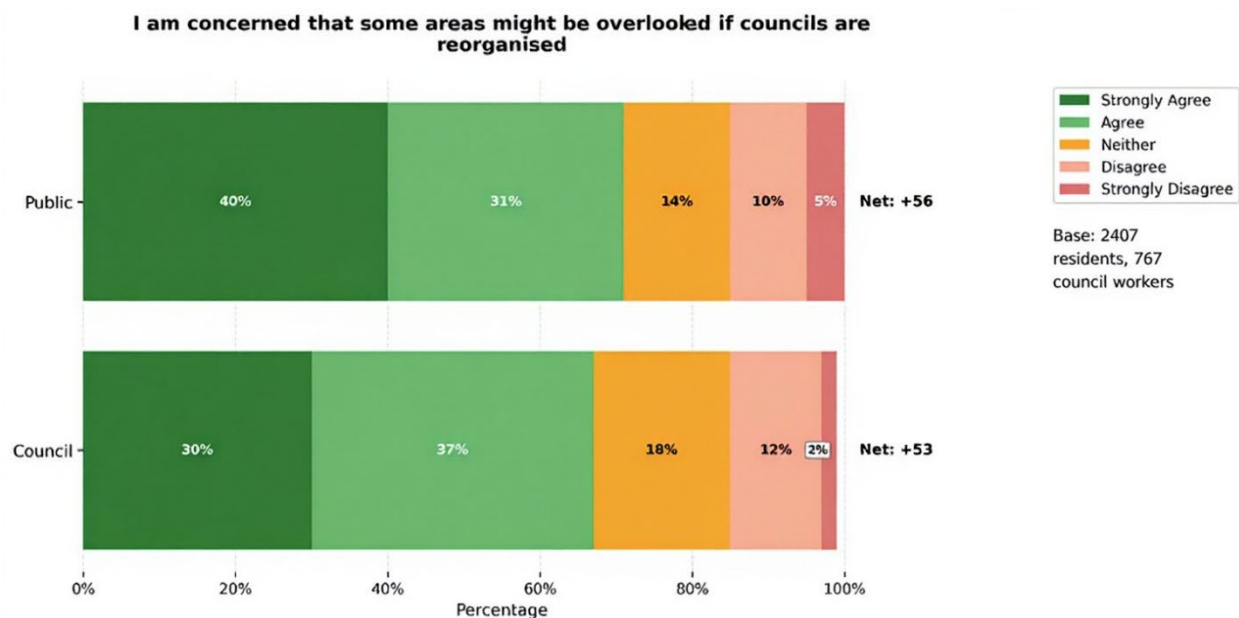


Council Tax and business rates generate 12% of service contacts, whilst community services such as libraries and community centres also account for 11%. These findings suggest that both administrative functions and community-facing services maintain substantial public interaction levels. The equal weighting between financial administration and community services indicates a balanced demand for both regulatory compliance support and access to cultural and social facilities.

Sports and leisure facilities attract 9% of contacts from the public. This uniformity suggests that recreational services maintain broad appeal regardless of employment sector, reflecting their role in community wellbeing and social cohesion. Parks and open spaces generate 9% of public contacts suggesting greater public utilisation of recreational spaces or potentially different awareness levels of available facilities.

## Concern about reorganisation: I am concerned that some areas might be overlooked if councils are reorganised

### The Professional Divide



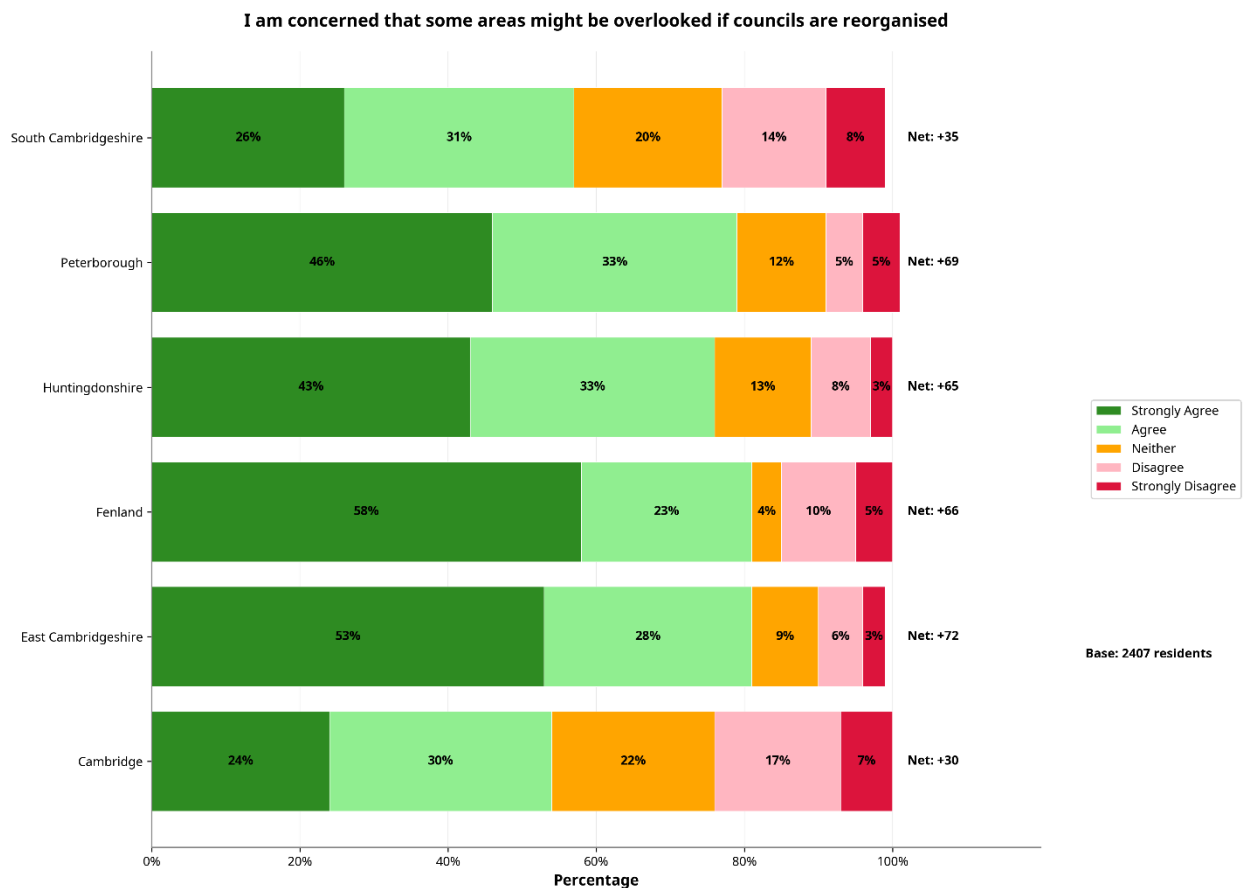
The analysis reveals remarkable convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +56 and council workers +53. Both the public and council workers' viewpoints are broadly aligned on their concern that some areas may get overlooked and there is substantial agreement with the statement.

Such convergence indicates that this concern about areas being overlooked indicates both groups sharing similar concerns and expectations about the proposed changes. This alignment provides a solid foundation for building consensus around reorganisation planning.

## Geographical Perspectives

Concerns about areas being overlooked in council reorganisation show significant district-level variation. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland express the strongest concerns, with 81% agreement in both districts, compared to Huntingdonshire's 76%, Peterborough's 79%, South Cambridgeshire's 57%, and Cambridge's 54%. The 27-point gap between East Cambridgeshire/Fenland and Cambridge exceeds statistical significance thresholds.

Disagreement remains minimal across all districts, ranging from 10% in Peterborough to 24% in Cambridge. The "neither" category varies from 4% in Fenland to 22% in Cambridge. These findings reveal anxiety in rural districts about potential marginalisation under reorganisation, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents expressing near-universal concern about being overlooked. The notably lower concern in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire suggests urban and peri-urban residents feel more confident about maintaining influence in any restructured arrangements.

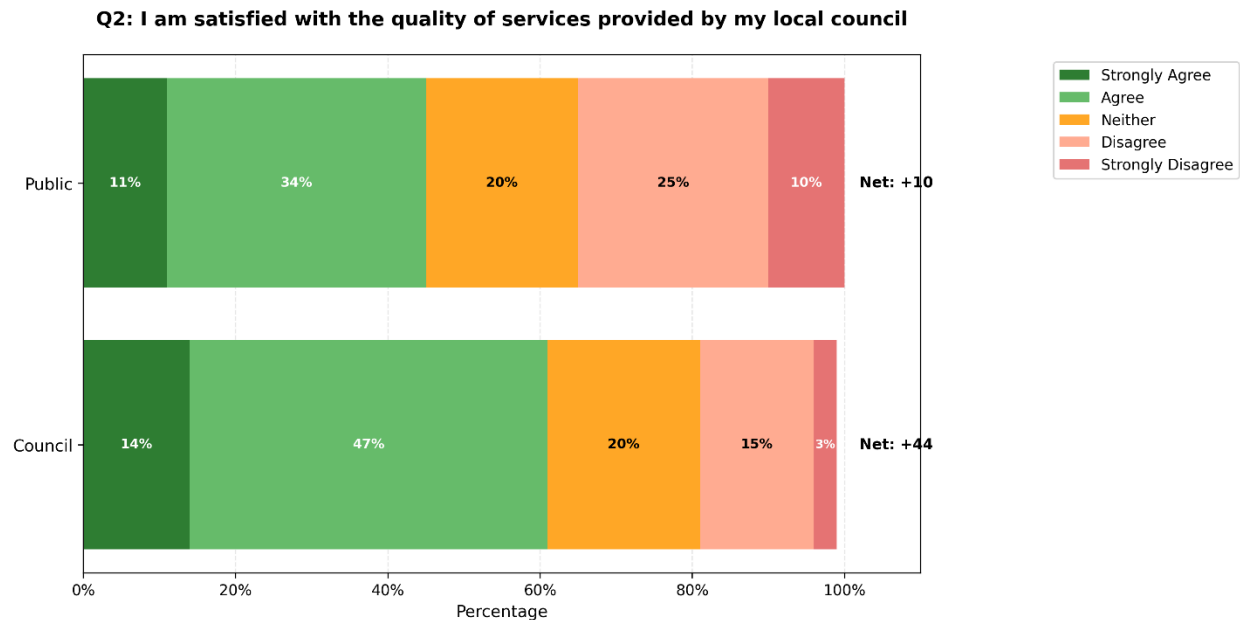


Those aged 75+ tend to be more concerned about areas being overlooked (Net +57). Females tend to show more concern than males (Net +51).



# Council satisfaction: I am satisfied with the quality of services provided by my local council

## The Professional Divide

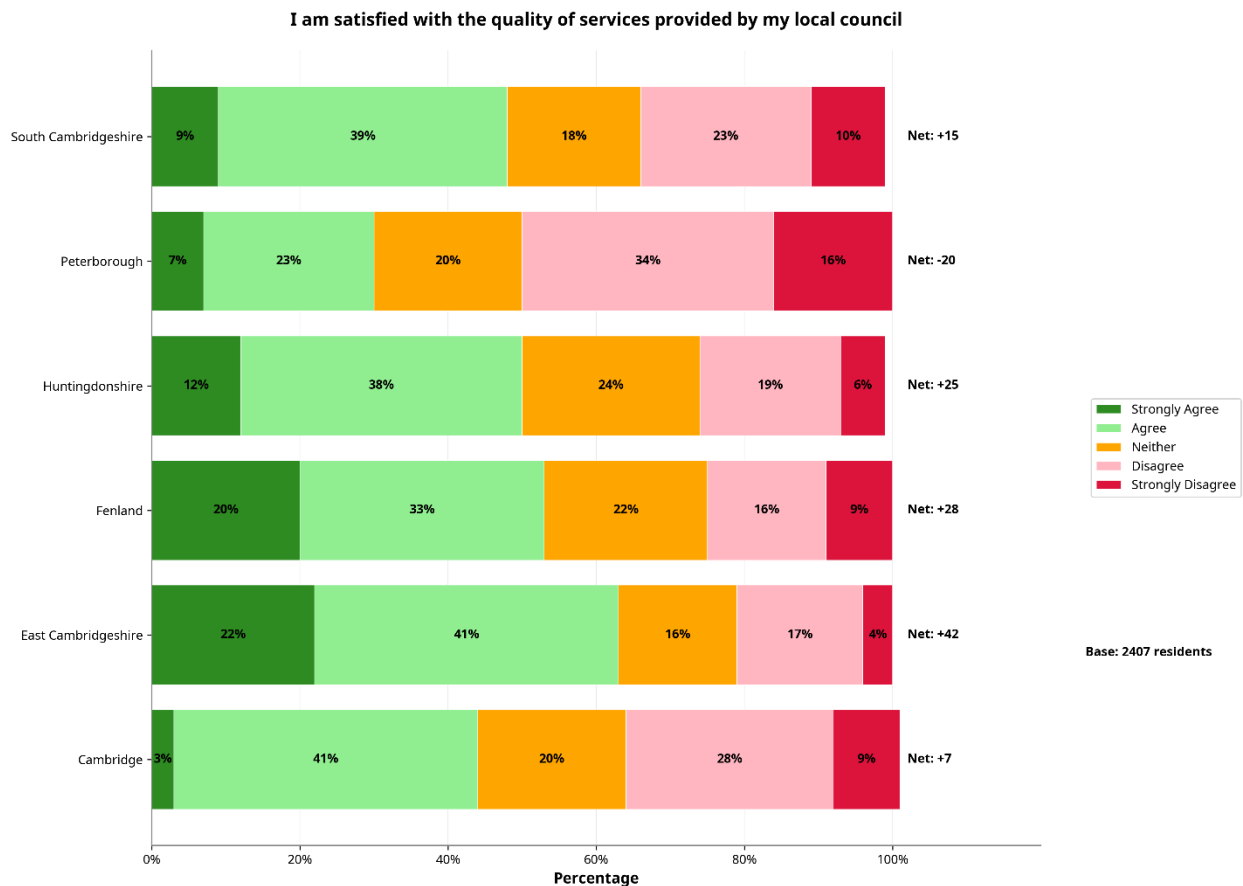


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +44) compared to public respondents (net score +10). This 34-point gap suggests that professional experience within local government shapes perspectives on reorganisation in meaningful ways.

Council workers' more optimistic outlook may reflect their direct experience with current governance structures and their professional understanding of potential improvements that reorganisation could bring. The public's more cautious stance reflects the natural uncertainty that accompanies significant institutional change, particularly when it affects services and representation that communities rely upon.

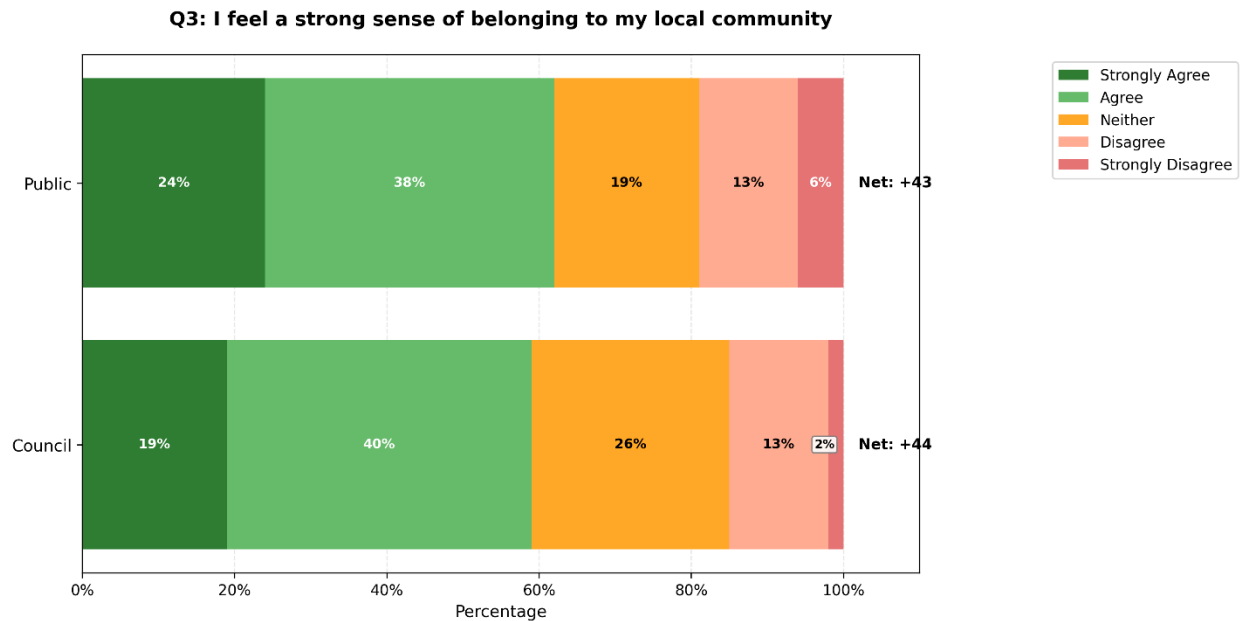
## Geographical Perspectives

Satisfaction with local council service quality shows significant district-level variation. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 63%, followed by Fenland at 53%, Huntingdonshire at 50%, Cambridge at 45%, South Cambridgeshire at 48%, and Peterborough at 30%. The 33-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Dissatisfaction shows Peterborough at 50%, Cambridge at 37%, South Cambridgeshire at 33%, Fenland and Huntingdonshire at 25%, and East Cambridgeshire at 21%. The 29-point difference between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire in dissatisfaction is statistically significant. These findings reveal a clear performance divide, with East Cambridgeshire residents consistently reporting higher satisfaction across multiple measures,...



## Community feeling: I feel a strong sense of belonging to my local community

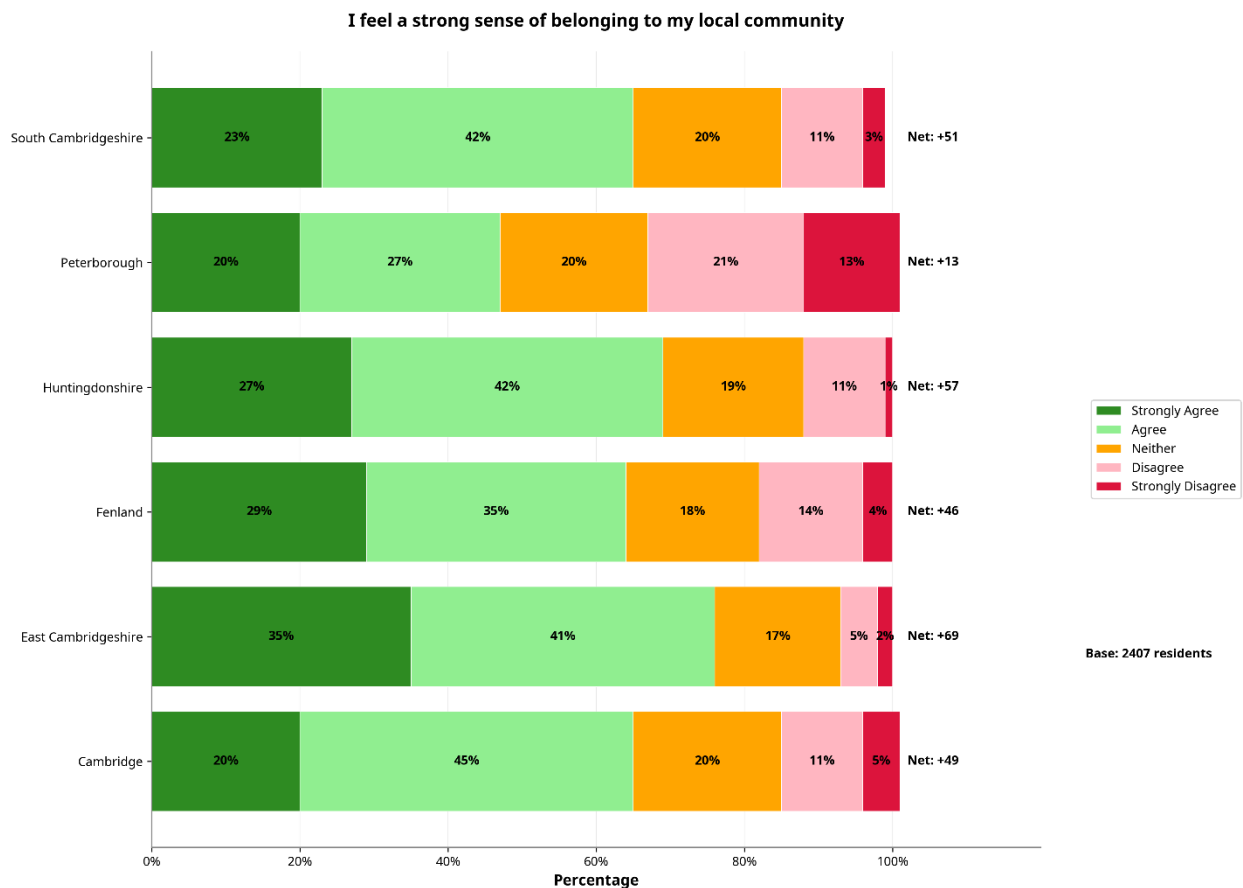
### The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals remarkable convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +43 and council workers +44. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner viewpoints are broadly aligned on this aspect of local government reorganisation.

## Geographical Perspectives

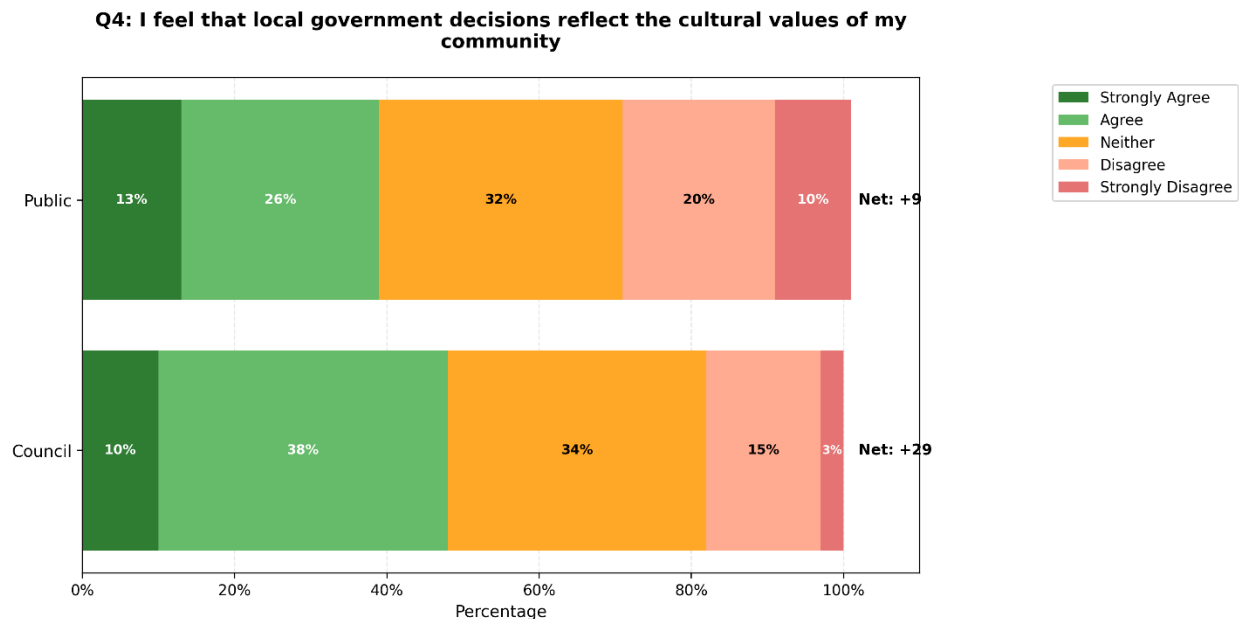
East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest belonging at 76%, followed by Huntingdonshire at 69%, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire at 65%, Fenland at 64%, and Peterborough at 47%. The 29-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Negative responses show Peterborough at 34%, Fenland at 18%, Cambridge at 16%, Huntingdonshire at 12%, South Cambridgeshire at 13%, and East Cambridgeshire at 10%. The 24-point difference between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire is statistically significant.



Younger people are less likely to agree with feeling a sense of belonging to the local community (net +25).

# Government reflecting values: I feel that local government decisions reflect the cultural values of my community

## The Professional Divide

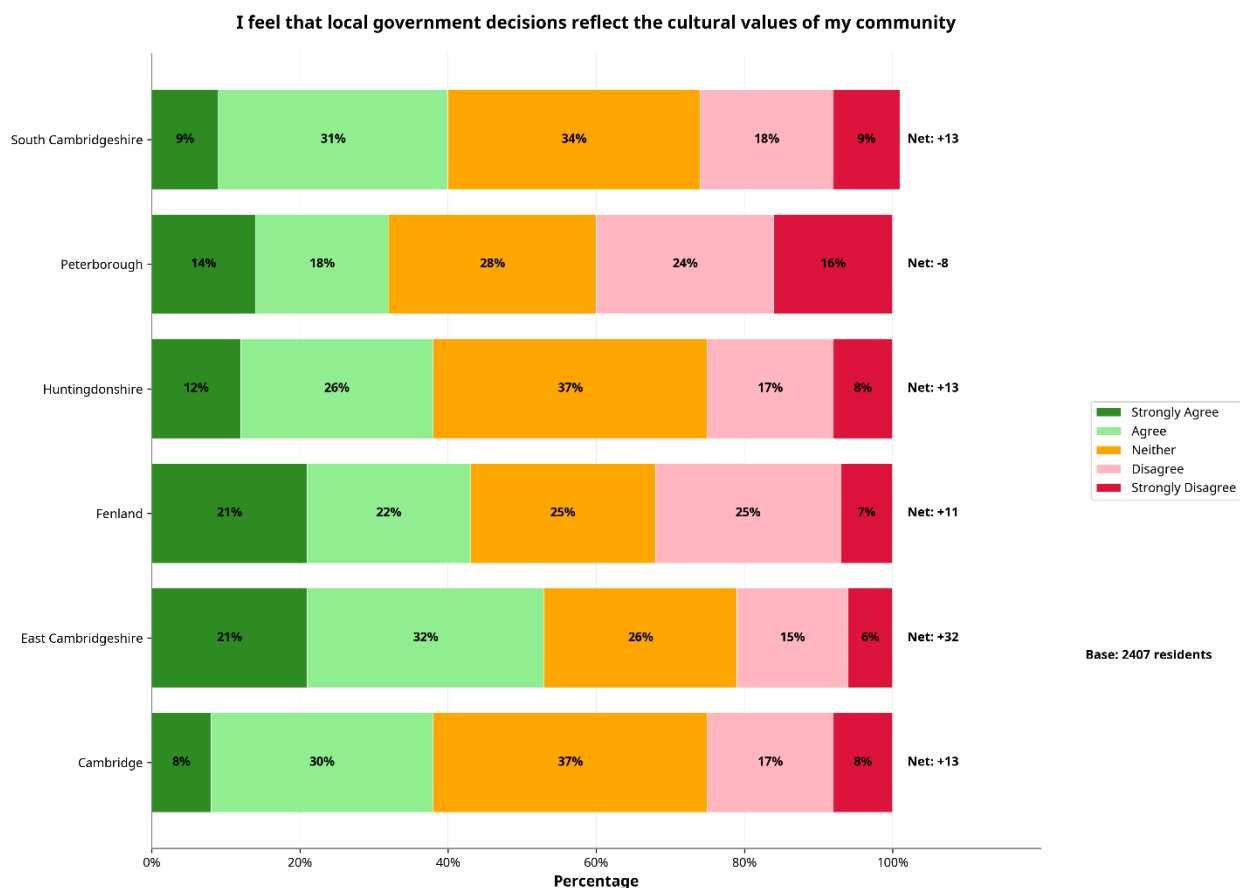


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +29) compared to public respondents (net score +9). This 20-point gap suggests that professional experience within local government shapes perspectives on reorganisation in meaningful ways.

Council workers' more optimistic outlook may reflect their direct experience with current governance structures and their professional understanding of potential improvements that reorganisation could bring. The public's more cautious stance reflects the natural uncertainty that accompanies significant institutional change, particularly when it affects services and representation that communities rely upon.

## Geographical Perspectives

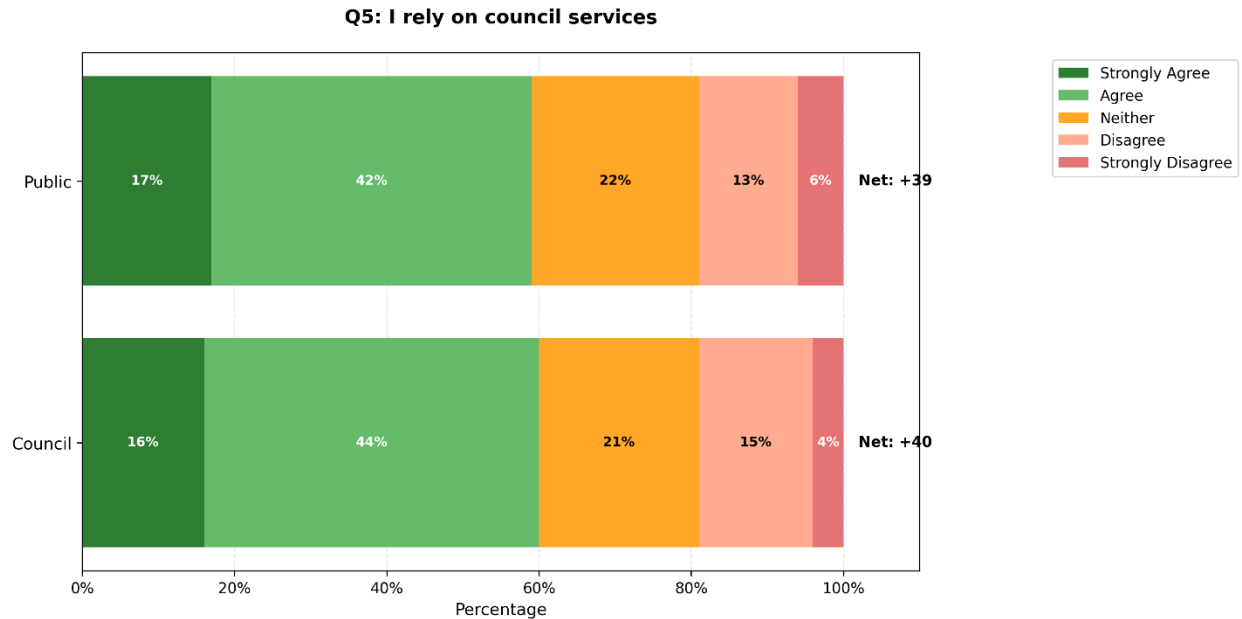
Perceptions of whether local government decisions reflect community cultural values show limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest agreement at 53%, followed by Fenland at 43%, South Cambridgeshire at 40%, Huntingdonshire and Cambridge at 38%, and Peterborough at 32%. The 21-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Disagreement ranges from 20% in East Cambridgeshire to 40% in Peterborough. The "neither" category shows considerable variation from 25% in Fenland to 37% in both Huntingdonshire and Cambridge. These patterns suggest moderate alignment between governance and cultural values across most districts, with no dramatic disparities.



Here, the under 35s and the 55-64s clearly feel a disconnect, though all the net figures are low (Net +4 and Net +4 respectively).

# Council reliance: I rely on council services

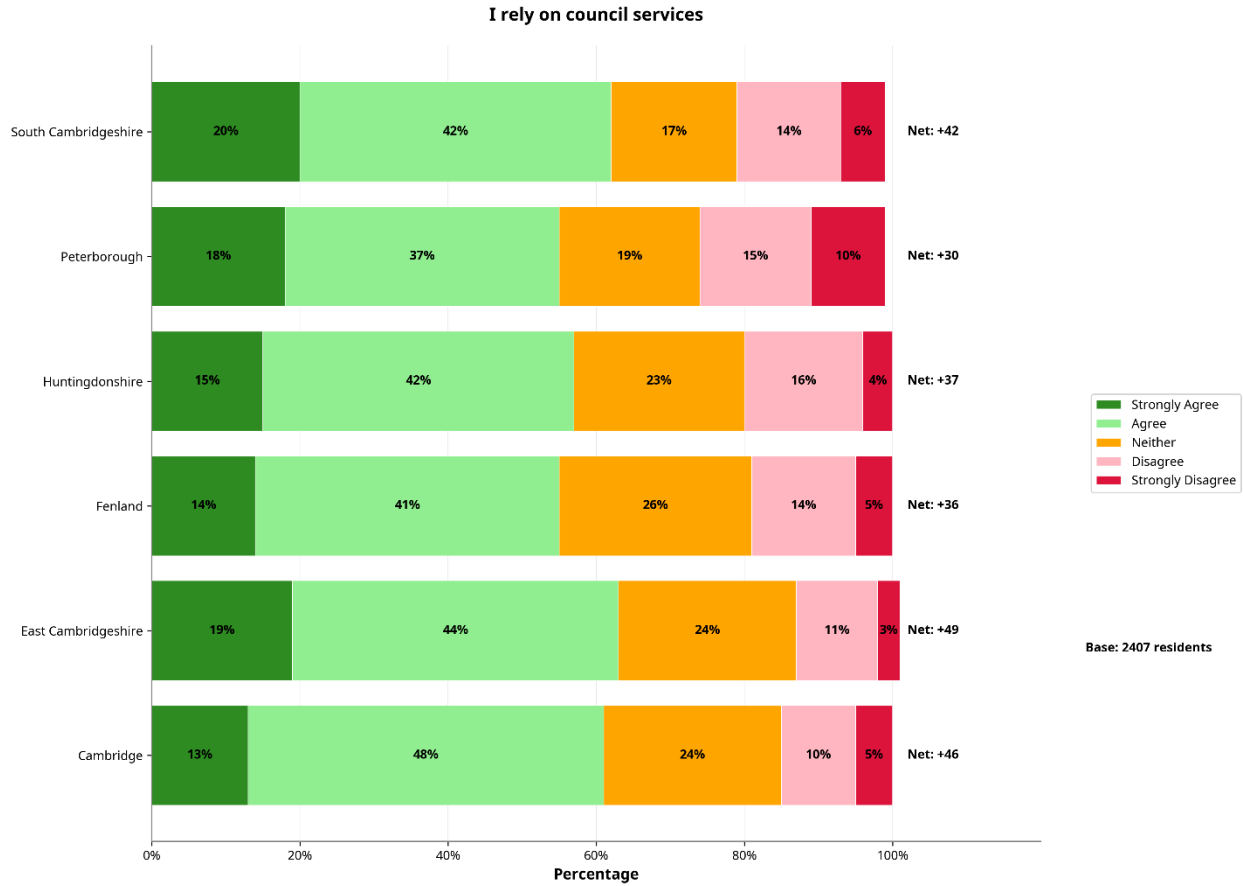
## The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals convergence between public and professional perspectives on this attitudinal dimension, with public respondents recording a net score of +39 and council workers +40.

## Geographical Perspectives

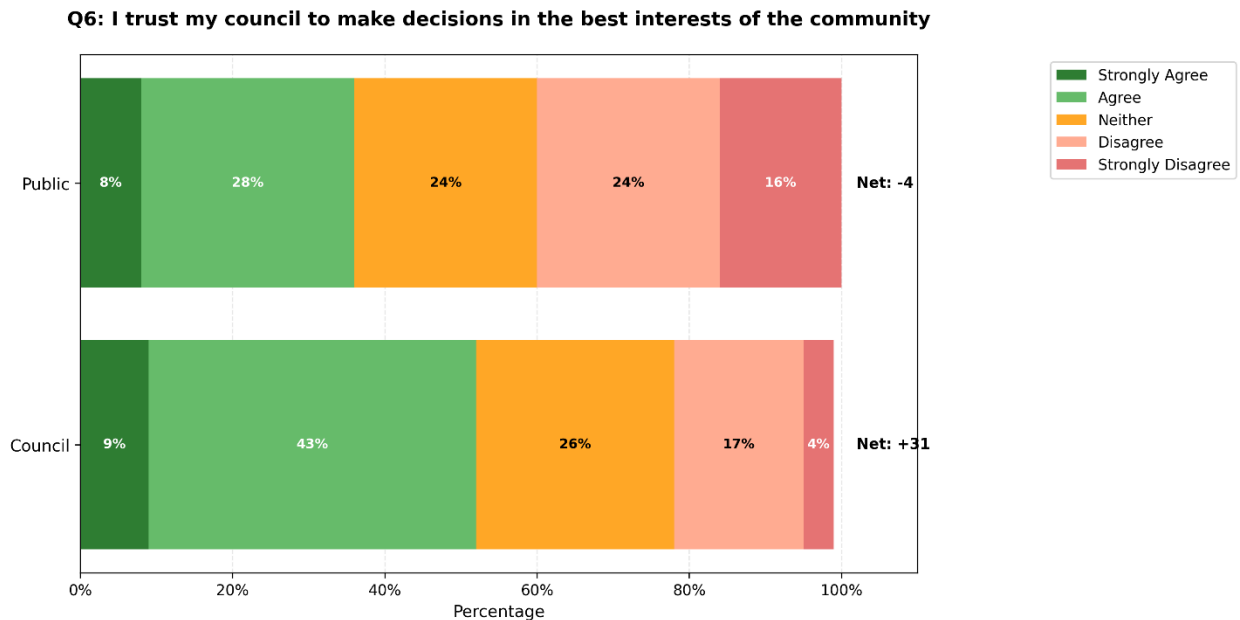
For the council services reliance question shown, there are no statistically significant differences between districts. All observed variations fall within the confidence intervals when properly accounting for sample sizes.





# Trust in councils: I trust my council to make decisions in the best interests of the community

## The Professional Divide

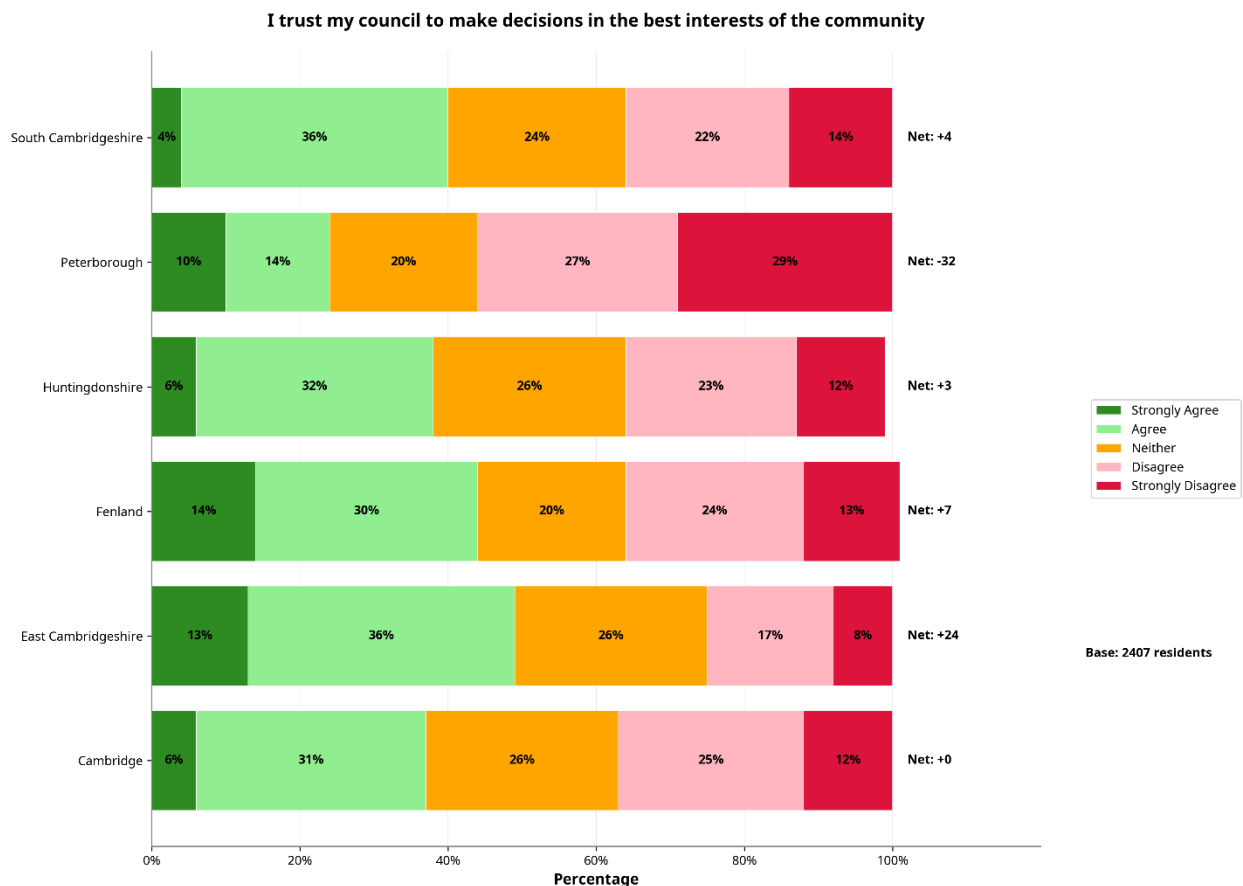


The analysis reveals a significant professional divide on this attitudinal dimension, with council workers expressing notably more positive sentiment (net score +31) compared to public respondents (net score -4). This 35-point gap suggests that professional experience a real disjunct on the issue of trust.

It is notably that on the matter of trust, a key factor for councils, the public are net negative.

## Geographical Perspectives

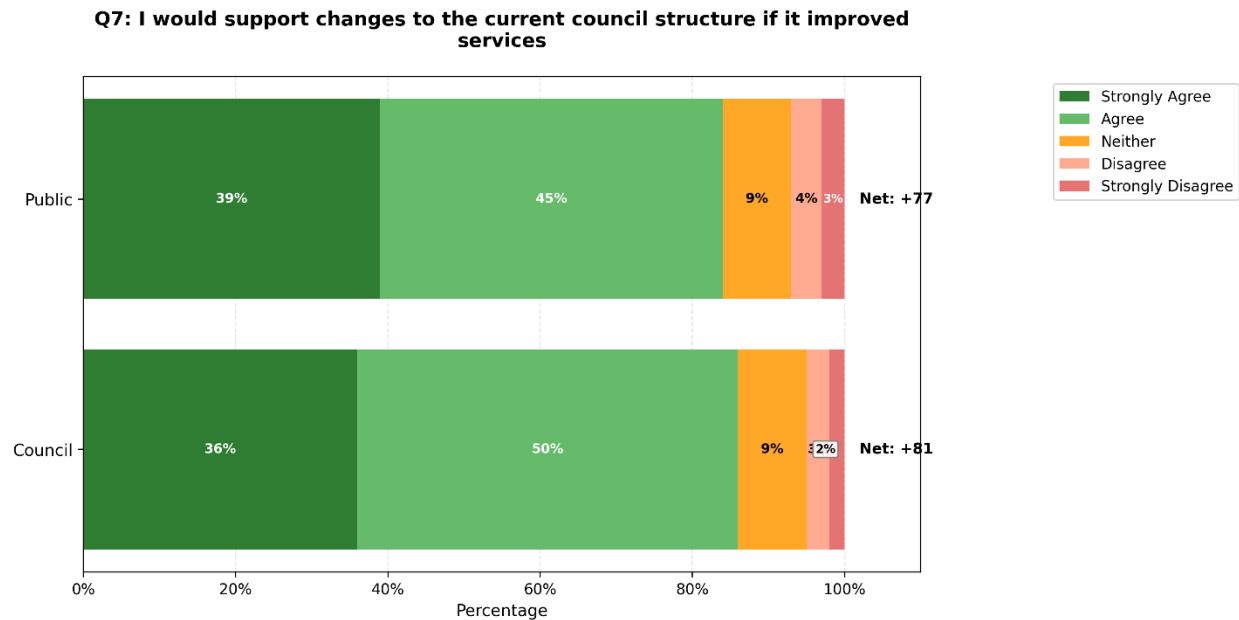
Trust in council decision-making varies significantly across the region. Peterborough shows 56% disagreement that their council acts in the community's best interests, compared to 37% in Cambridge and 35% in Huntingdonshire—differences of 19-21 percentage points that exceed statistical significance thresholds. At the other end, Fenland records 44% agreement versus Peterborough's 24%, a significant 20-point difference. The distinction appears most pronounced in the "strongly disagree" category, where Peterborough's 29% contrasts with South Cambridgeshire's 14%. These patterns indicate substantial geographic variation in council trust, with Peterborough residents expressing the lowest confidence levels whilst Fenland shows the highest agreement rates. Cambridge and Huntingdonshire occupy intermediate positions, though both still show more residents disagreeing than agreeing with the statement about council decision-making serving community interests.



Interestingly, it is 35-54s who are the most negative in terms of trust and the over 75s who are the most positive. Males show less trust in council decision making. The pattern for ethnicity is broadly similar.

## Positive change: I would support changes to the current council structure if it improved services

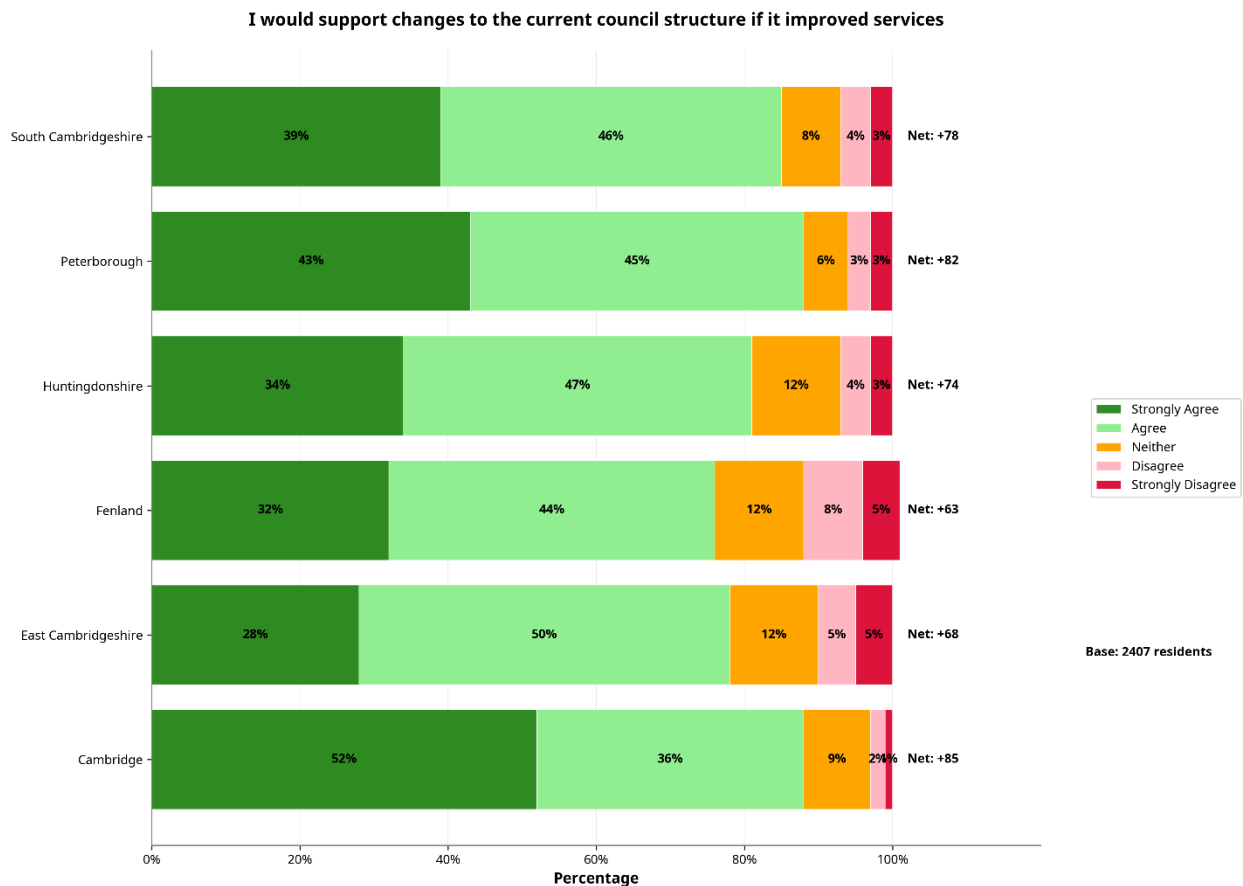
### The Professional Divide



The analysis reveals both the public and council workers are responsive to change if it will improve services, with public respondents recording a net score of +77 and council workers +81. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner viewpoints are broadly aligned on wanting change conditional on improved services.

## Geographical Perspectives

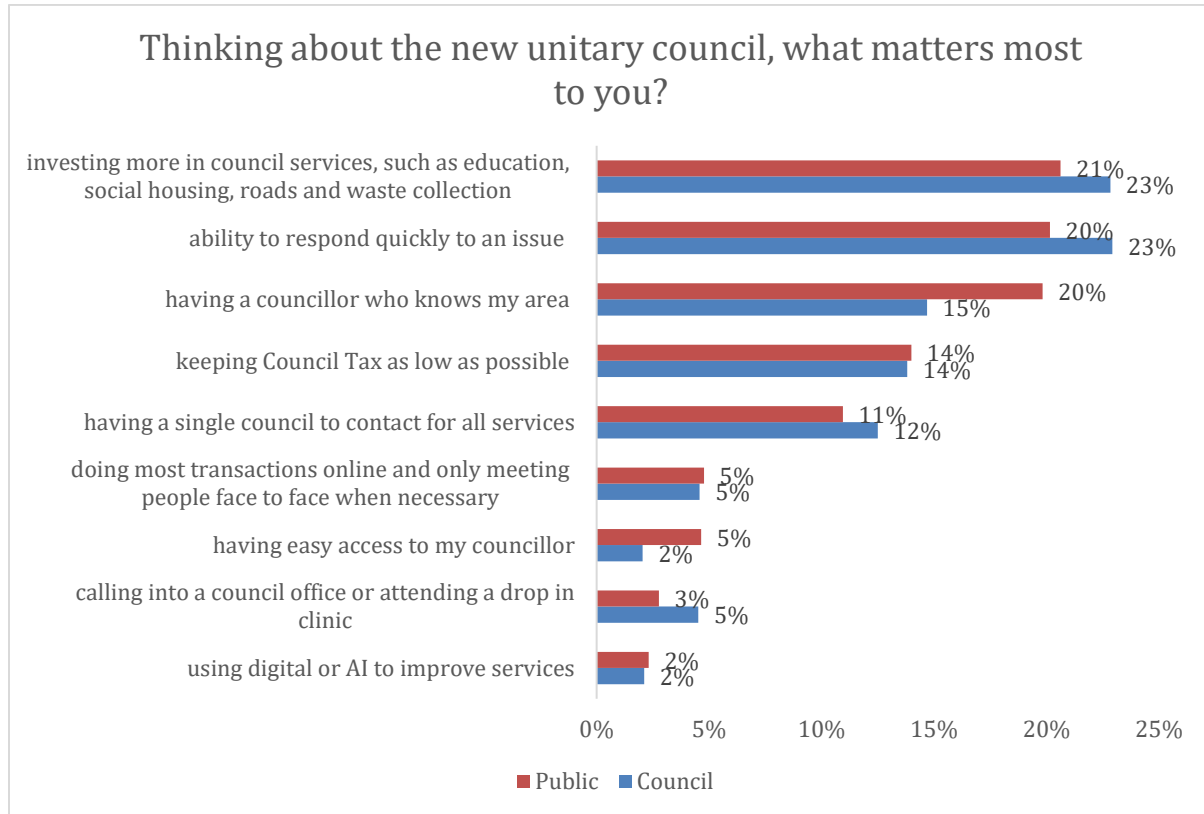
Support for council restructuring contingent on service improvement shows remarkable consensus across the region, with no statistically significant differences between districts. Combined agreement ranges from 76% in Fenland to 88% in Cambridge and Peterborough, whilst combined disagreement remains minimal at 3-7% across all areas. The "strongly agree" category varies from 28% in East Cambridgeshire to 52% in Cambridge, approaching but not exceeding significance thresholds given the sample sizes and confidence intervals. This uniformity suggests widespread openness to structural reform across all districts, provided it delivers tangible service improvements. The minimal disagreement and low neutral responses further emphasise this consensus, marking this as one of the few areas of genuine regional agreement in the survey.



The generational analysis shows broad positive agreement with 35-44s showing significantly less willingness to change. Ethnic minorities are more positive in terms of change.

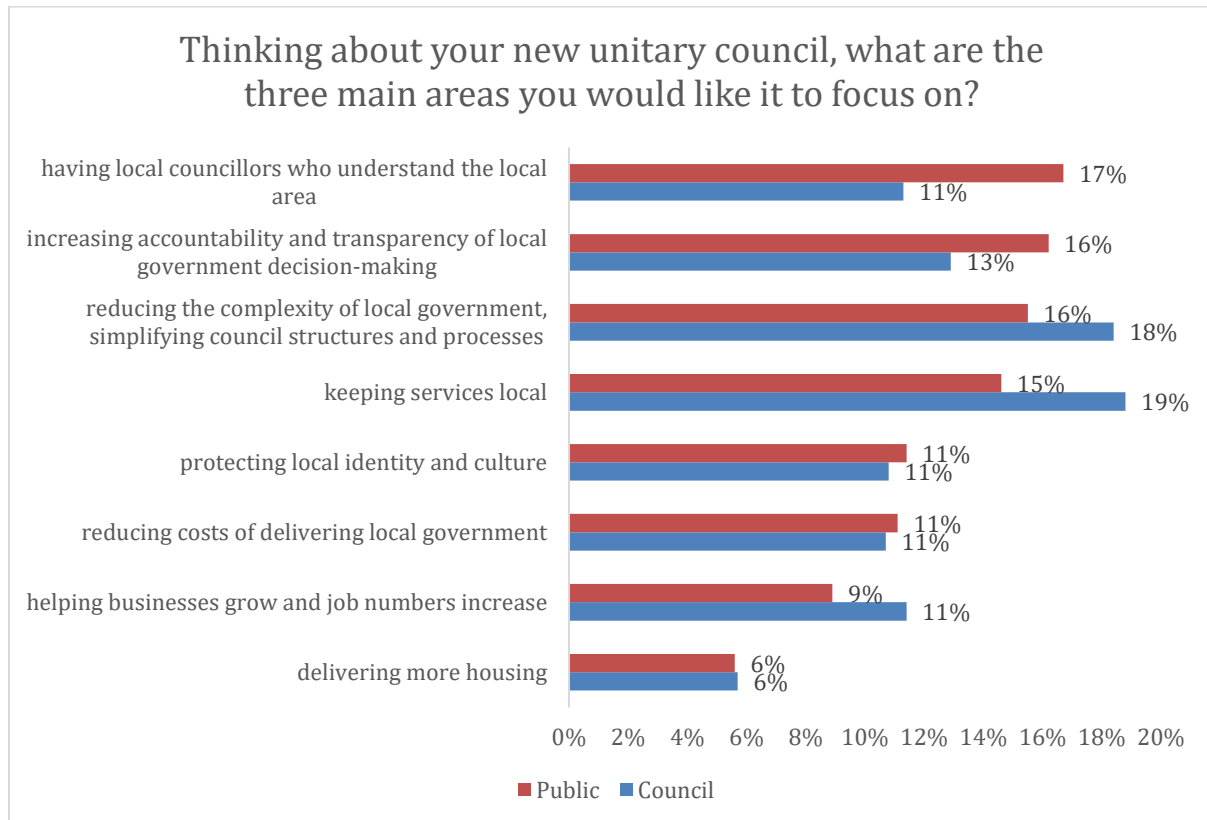
## Unitary matters

The top three priorities for the new unitary council are investing in council services, ability to respond quickly and having a councillor that know the area.



## The main areas of focus for new unitary councils

The public would like to see the new unitaries have councillors with local knowledge, increasing the accountability and transparency of local government decision-making and reducing the complexity of local decision-making.

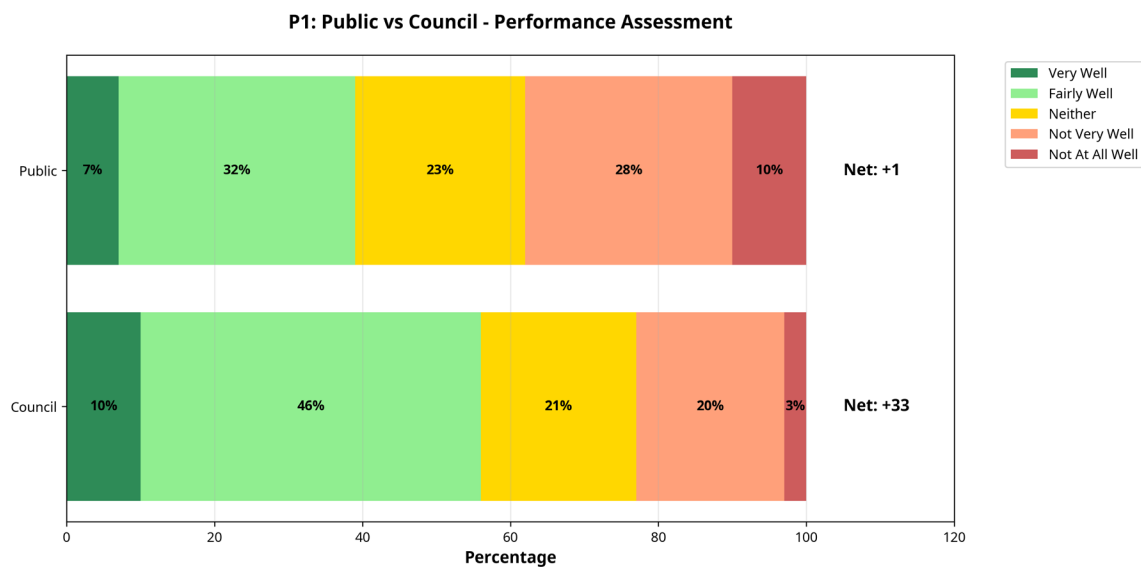


## Current Performance

Next survey respondents were asked to rate their councils on a range of factors thought to be critical for unitary, indeed, all councils.

## Responsive councils: Ability to respond quickly to an issue

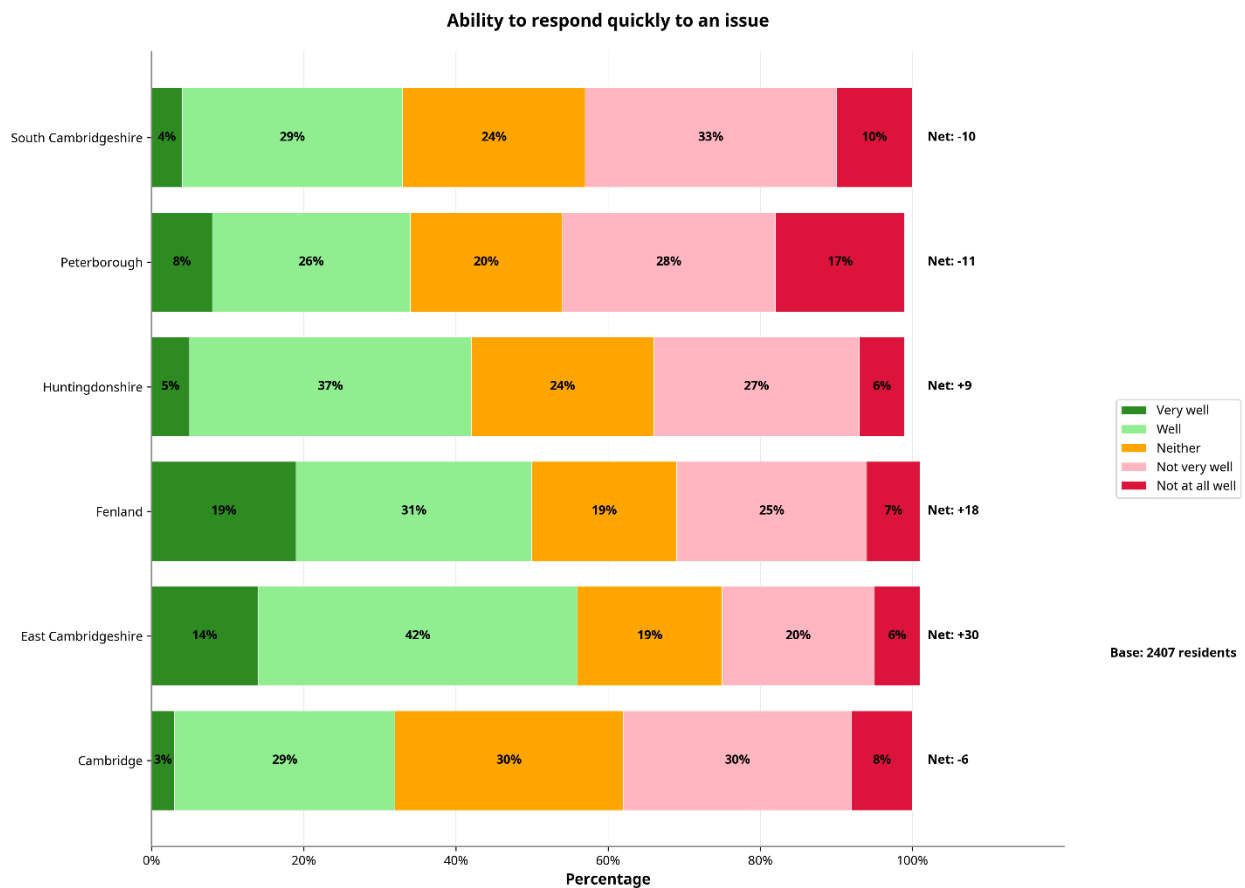
### The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +33) compared to public expectations (net score +1). This 32-point gap suggests that professional experience shapes performance expectations in meaningful ways. There is a perception gap in terms of being a responsive council.

## Geographical Performance Expectations

Perceptions of councils' ability to respond quickly to issues reveal significant district-level differences. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest confidence with 56% believing their council responds well or very well, compared to Fenland's 50%, Huntingdonshire's 42%, and Cambridge's 32%. The 24-point gap between East Cambridgeshire and Cambridge exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, combined negative responses (not very well/not at all well) show Cambridge at 38% versus East Cambridgeshire's 26%, a 12-point difference approaching significance. Peterborough occupies a middle position with 34% positive and 45% negative responses. The "neither" category remains relatively consistent at 19-30% across districts, suggesting widespread uncertainty about council responsiveness. These variations indicate that residents' experiences of council responsiveness differ substantially by district, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents reporting notably better experiences than those in Cambridge.

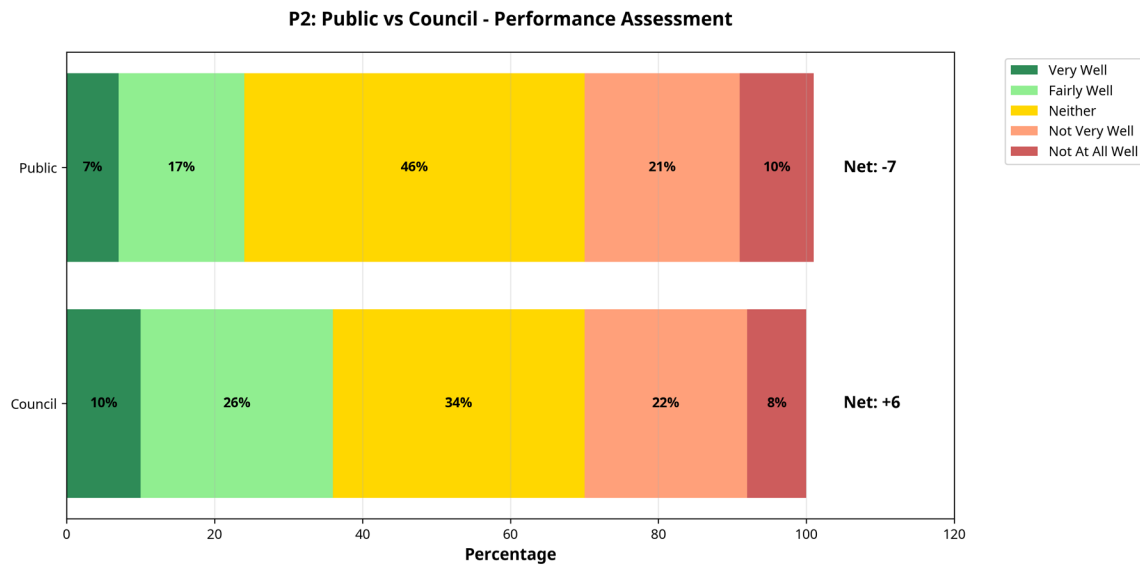


From a generational perspective, all ages have similar views and this is broadly low. Males and minorities score councils negatively on council responsiveness.



## Council sites: Calling into a council office or attending a drop in clinic

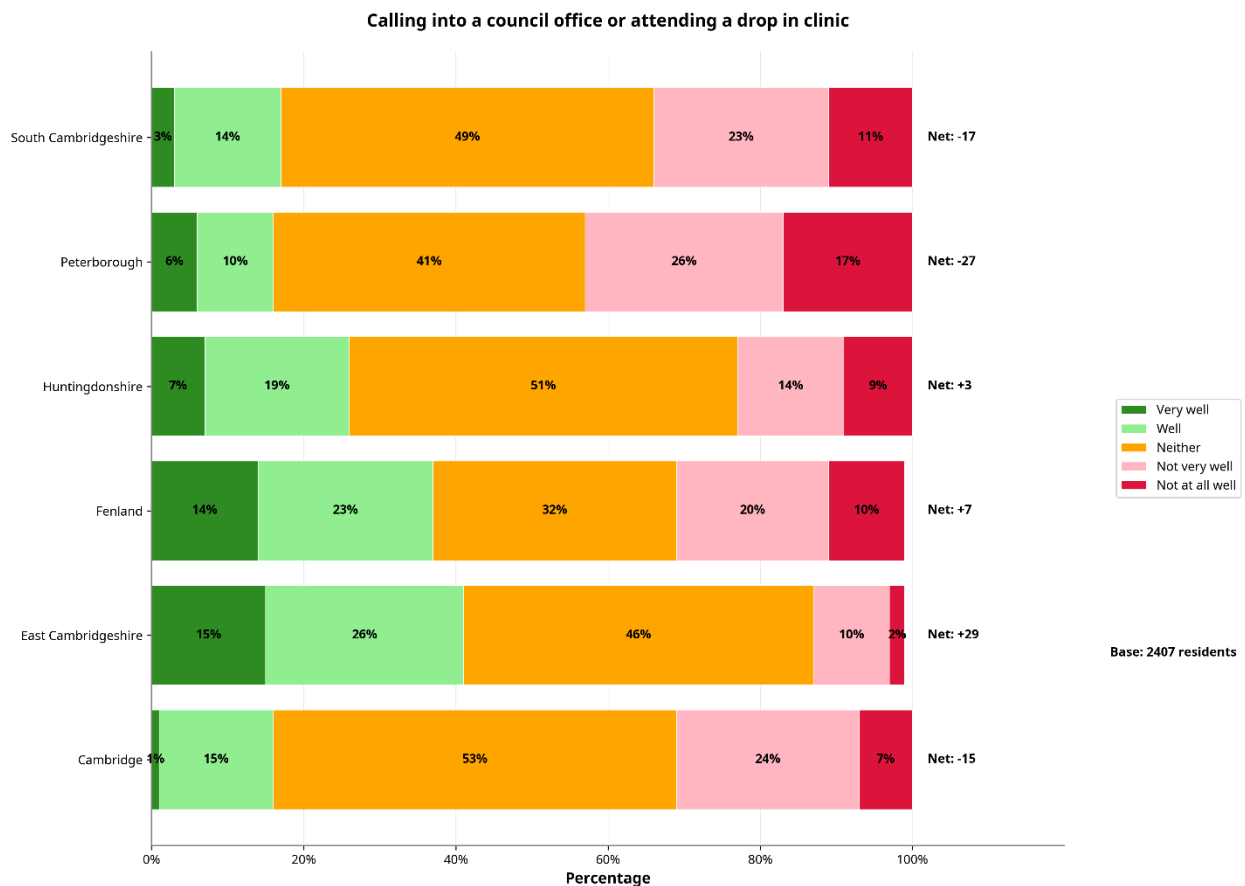
### The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in unitary council performance (net score +6) compared to public expectations which are negative (net score -7). This 13-point gap suggests that professional experience shapes performance expectations in meaningful ways.

## Geographical Performance Expectations

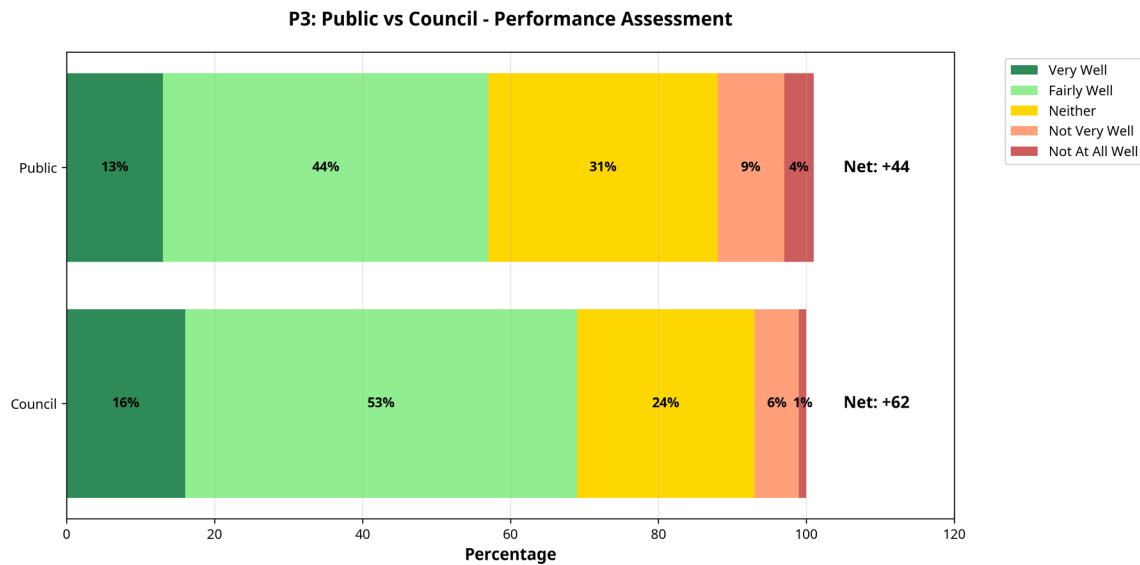
Satisfaction with calling council offices or attending drop-in clinics shows limited significant variation across districts. The most notable finding is the high proportion selecting "neither" across all areas, ranging from 32% in Fenland to 53% in Cambridge. Combined positive responses (very well/well) range from 16% in Cambridge and Peterborough to 41% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 37% and Huntingdonshire at 26%. The 25-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Cambridge/Peterborough exceeds significance thresholds. Negative responses remain relatively consistent at 12-43% across districts. The dominance of "neither" responses, particularly in Cambridge where over half of residents appear not to have engaged with these services, indicates that direct contact methods may be underutilised across the region. East Cambridgeshire again shows the highest satisfaction among those who have used these services, consistent with their positive ratings on responsiveness.



For the public of all ages, the current performance on this measure is low. Ethnic minorities tend to be more negative on this measure (-7 net).

# Digital Councils: Doing most transactions online and only meeting people face to face when necessary

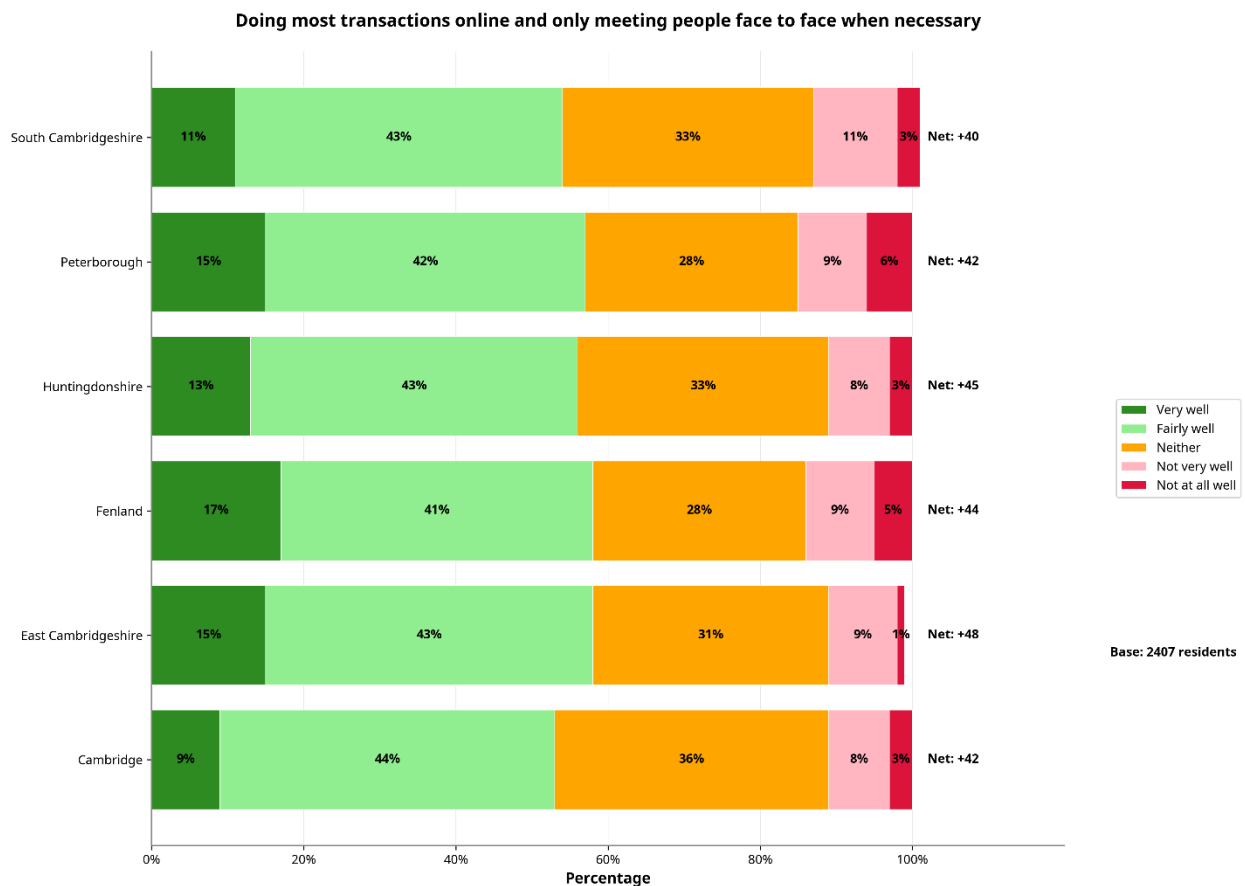
## The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +62) compared to public expectations (net score +44). This 18-point gap suggests more work is needed on this .

## Geographical Performance Expectations

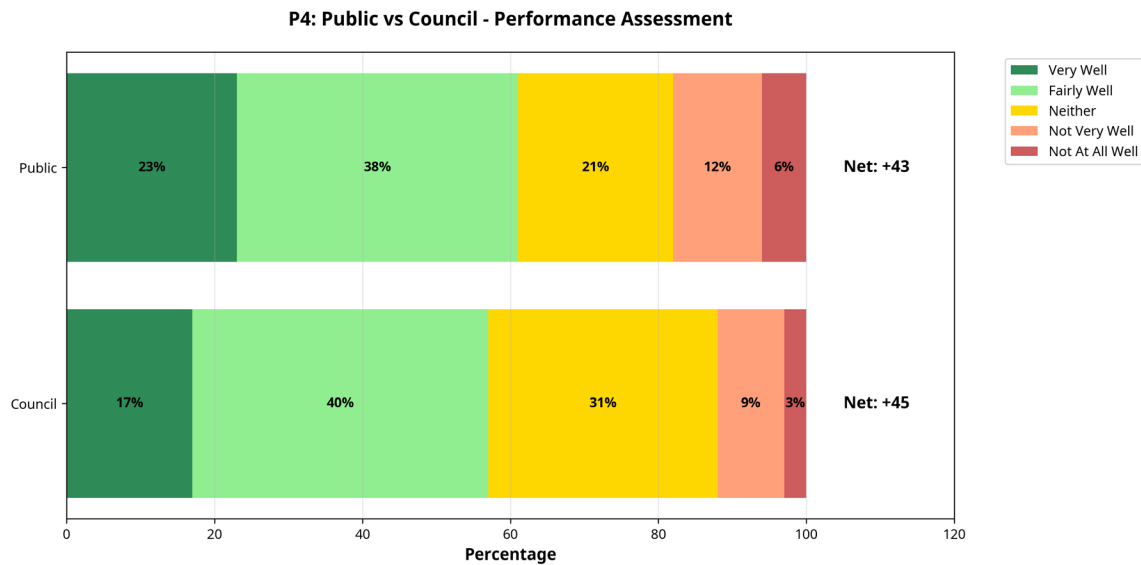
Performance for online transactions versus face-to-face contact show minimal significant variation across districts. Combined positive responses (very well/fairly well) range from 53% in Cambridge to 58% in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, whilst negative responses vary from 10% in Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire to 15% in Peterborough. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. The "neither" category shows consistency at 28-36% across all districts. The uniformity, with roughly half of residents across all areas supporting online-first approaches whilst maintaining face-to-face options when necessary. This consensus around digital transformation indicates that service delivery preferences are shaped more by individual circumstances and capabilities than geographic location. The substantial neutral responses may reflect mixed experiences or ambivalence about the trade-offs between convenience and personal contact in council service delivery.



There is a greater willingness to transact digitally by all groups except the over 75s (Net +23).

# Local Councillors: Having a councillor who knows my area

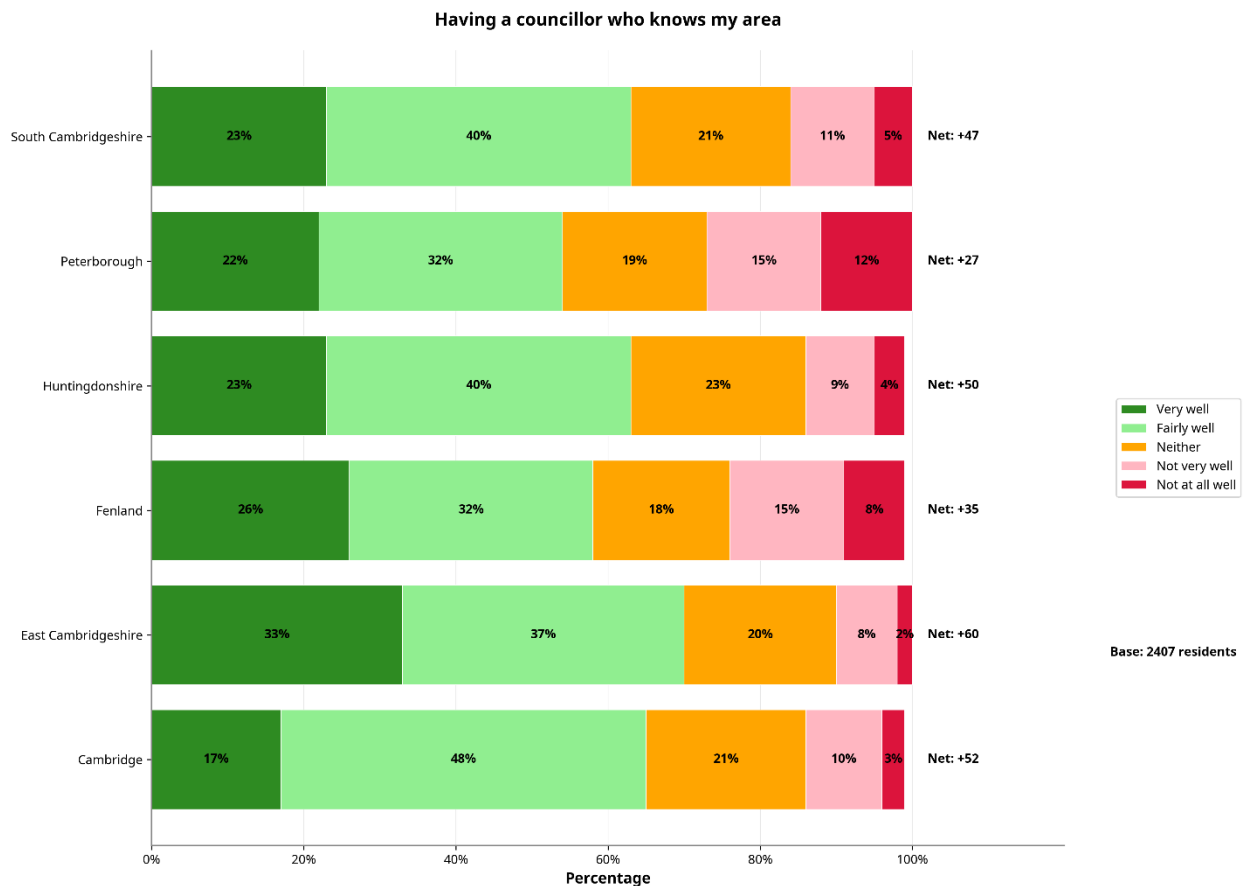
## The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals remarkable convergence between public expectations and professional assessments, with public respondents recording a net score of +43 and council workers +45.

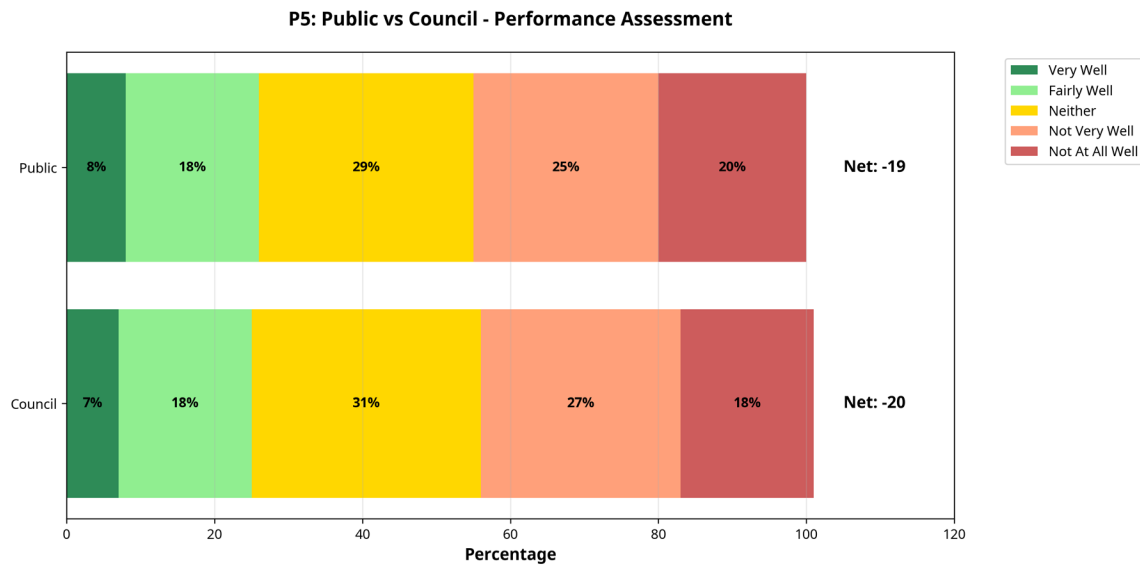
## Geographical Performance Expectations

The performance of 'having a councillor who knows their area' shows notable variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the strongest support with 70% rating this as very well or fairly well, compared to Cambridge's 65%, South Cambridgeshire's 63%, Huntingdonshire's 61%, Fenland's 58%, and Peterborough's 54%. The 16-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses remain consistently low at 10-27% across all districts. The "neither" category varies from 18% in Fenland to 23% in Huntingdonshire. These results indicate broad consensus that local knowledge matters in councillor effectiveness, with over half of residents in every district valuing area familiarity. The slightly higher support in rural districts like East Cambridgeshire may reflect the particular importance of local knowledge in dispersed communities with distinct village identities, though differences remain within statistical margins of error.



# Unitary Council: Having a single council to contact for all services

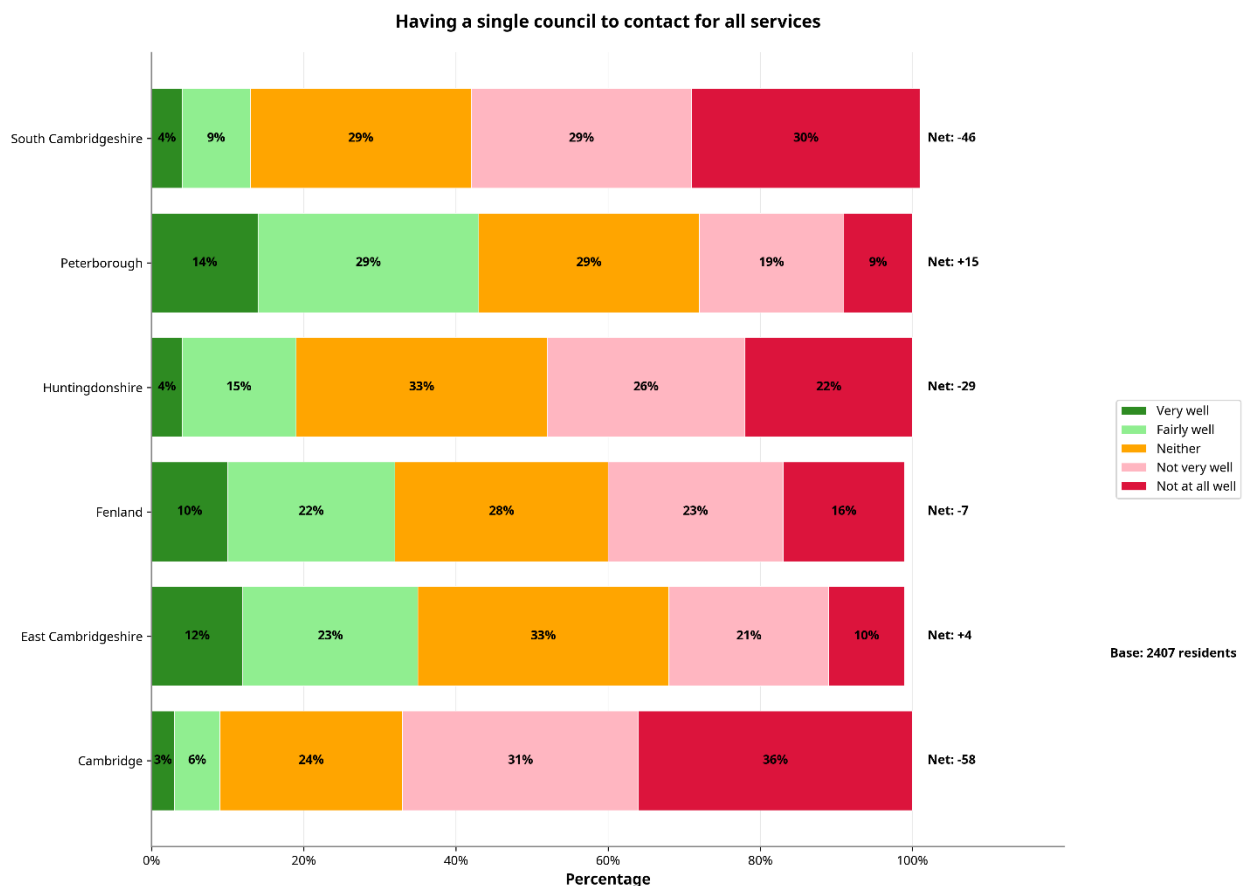
## The Professional Assessment



On this both residents and council workers are negative but it is important to understand that this is about the current performance and both feel that councils are not acting as one stop shops which they are not except for Peterborough.

## Geographical Performance Expectations

Peterborough is the only unitary council so this is an interesting question to see how all the councils are perceived in terms of being 'joined-up'. South Cambridgeshire shows the highest opposition with 59% rating this poorly (not very well/not at all well), compared to Huntingdonshire's 48%, Cambridge's 42%, Fenland's 39%, East Cambridgeshire's 31%, and Peterborough's 28%. The 31-point gap between South Cambridgeshire and Peterborough exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, Peterborough shows 43% support versus South Cambridgeshire's 13%, a significant 30-point difference shows one of the benefits of being a unitary council. Cambridge occupies an unusual position with only 9% positive responses but 24% neutral, the lowest support recorded suggesting complexity in interacting with it.

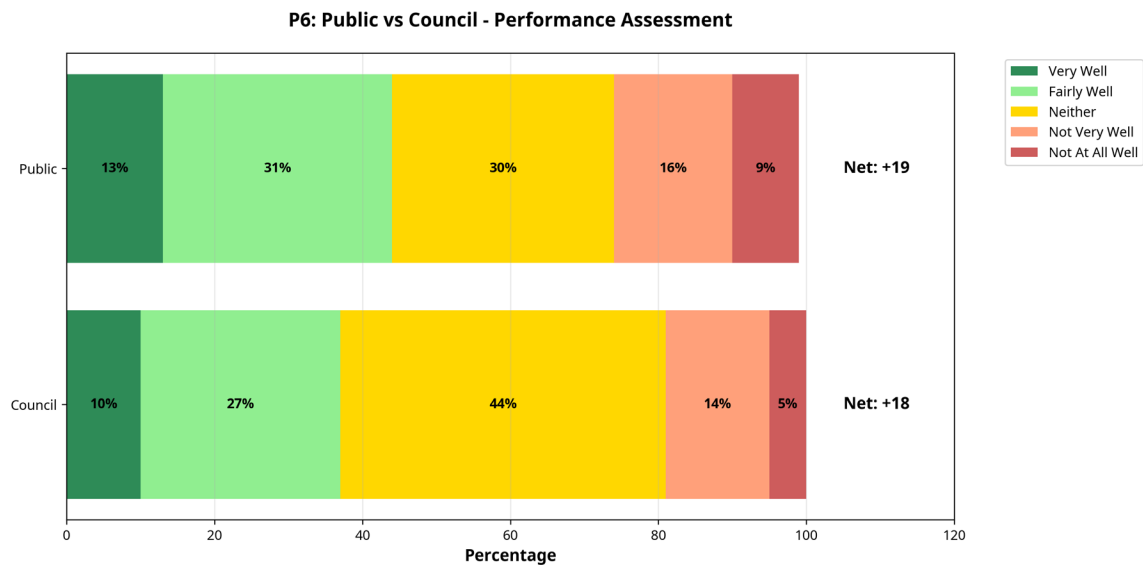


Here we observe the benefits of unitary government as Peterborough comes out on top in contrast to Cambridge which may have issues with people knowing which service to go to and who runs what. Again, we observe that younger residents tend to express more frustration with their council services not being a one stop shop (Under 35s Net -21 compared to 55-74 Net -11). Males are also more negative (Net-15).



# Councillor?: Having easy access to my councillor

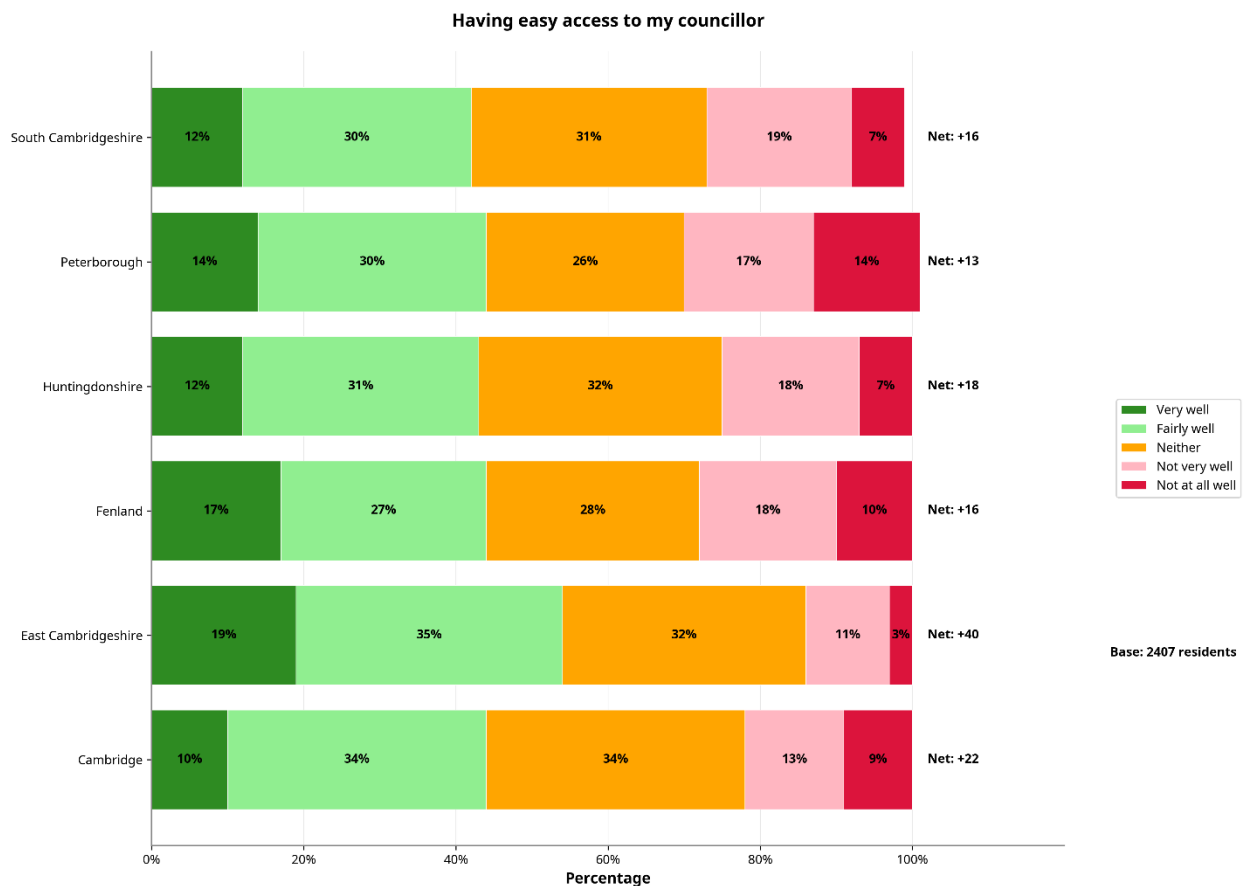
## The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals similarity between public expectations and professional assessments, with public respondents recording a net score of +19 and council workers +18. This close alignment suggests that both citizen and practitioner perspectives are broadly aligned on expected unitary council performance in this area.

## Geographical Performance Expectations

The performance on this 'easy councillor access' show limited significant variation across districts. Combined positive responses range from 42% in South Cambridgeshire to 54% in East Cambridgeshire, with Cambridge and Fenland at 44%, Peterborough at 44%, and Huntingdonshire at 43%. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. Negative responses vary from 13% in East Cambridgeshire to 31% in Peterborough, whilst the "neither" category ranges from 26% in Peterborough to 34% in Cambridge. The relatively uniform distribution suggests that councillor accessibility challenges transcend district boundaries, with roughly half of residents across all areas reporting satisfactory access whilst significant minorities experience difficulties. The substantial neutral responses, particularly in Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire, may indicate many residents have not attempted to contact their councillor, making evaluation difficult.

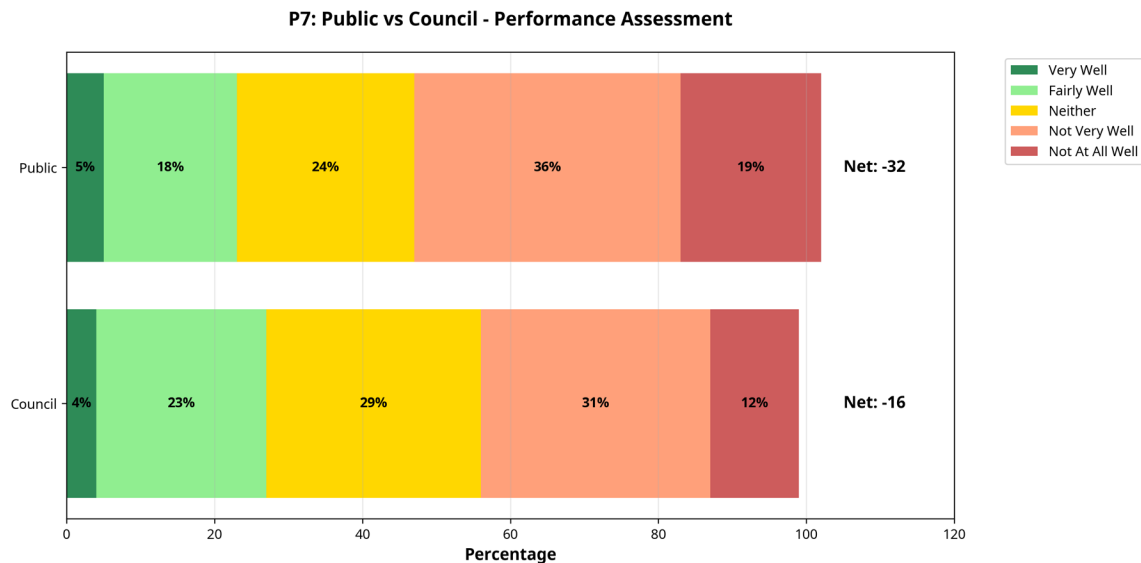


Older people are much more likely to say they have easy access to a councillor (55-74 Net +28 compared to Under 35s Net +8). White British residents say they are more likely to have easy access to a councillor (Net +28 compared to ethnic minorities Net +7) .



## Council Investment: Investing more in council services, such as education, social housing, roads and waste collection

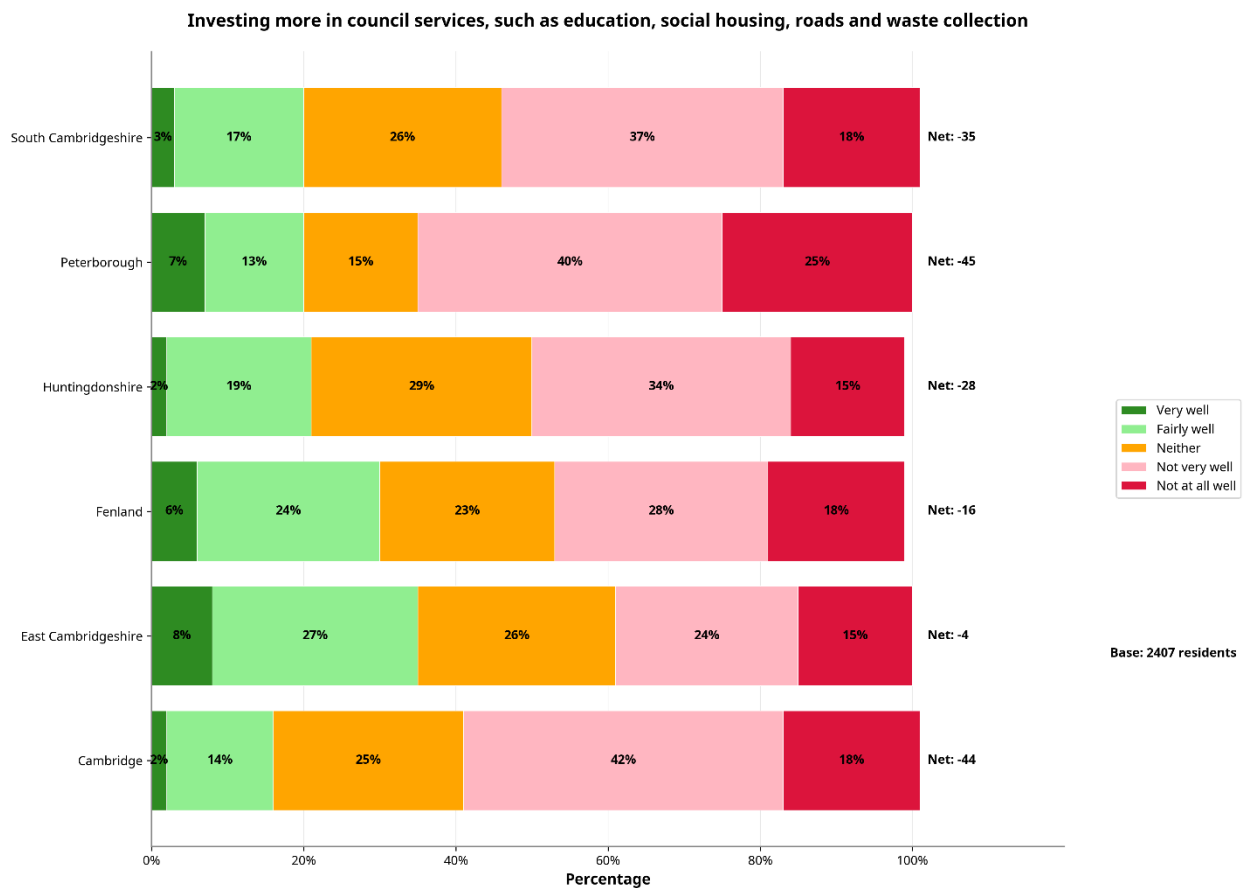
### The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in unitary council performance (net score -16) compared to public expectations (net score -32). This 16-point gap suggests that the public feel that more investment is required in key services.

## Geographical Performance Expectations

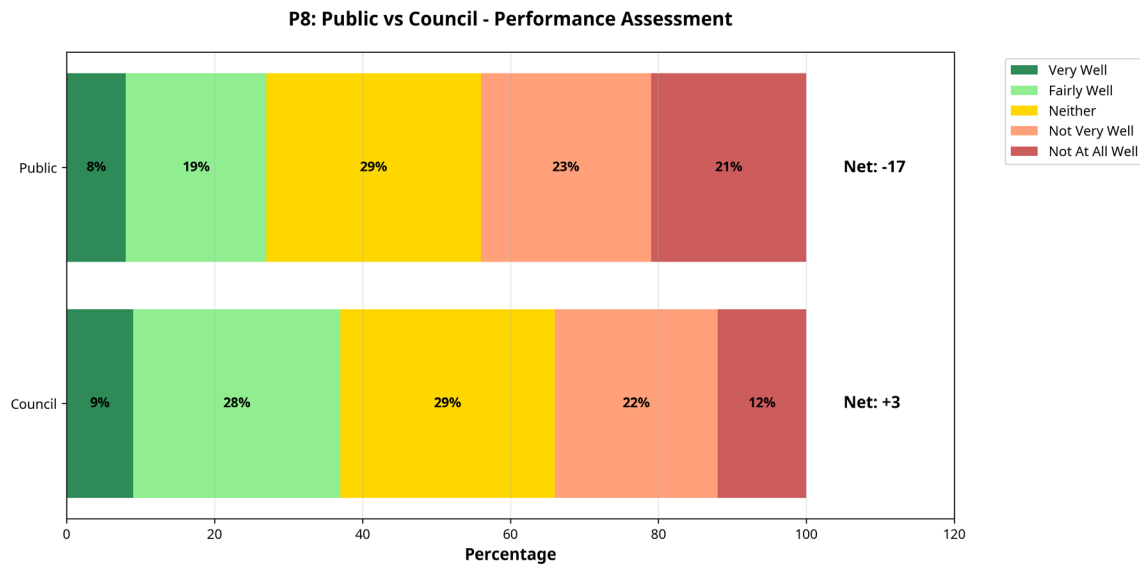
Residents' ratings of current council performance on service investment reveal significant district-level variation. Cambridge residents give the poorest ratings with 60% assessing current investment performance as not very well or not at all well, followed by Peterborough at 65%, South Cambridgeshire at 55%, Huntingdonshire at 49%, Fenland at 44%, and East Cambridgeshire at 39%. The 26-point gap between Peterborough's negative assessment and East Cambridgeshire's represents a statistically significant difference. Positive ratings remain consistently low, ranging from 16% in Cambridge to 35% in East Cambridgeshire. The widespread dissatisfaction with current investment levels across core services suggests systemic underfunding concerns, with urban areas showing particularly more dissatisfaction. These patterns indicate residents across the region perceive significant underinvestment in essential services, though the intensity of this perception varies considerably by district.



The working middle are most likely to be negative on this issue (Net -36).

# Low Council Tax?: Keeping Council Tax as low as possible

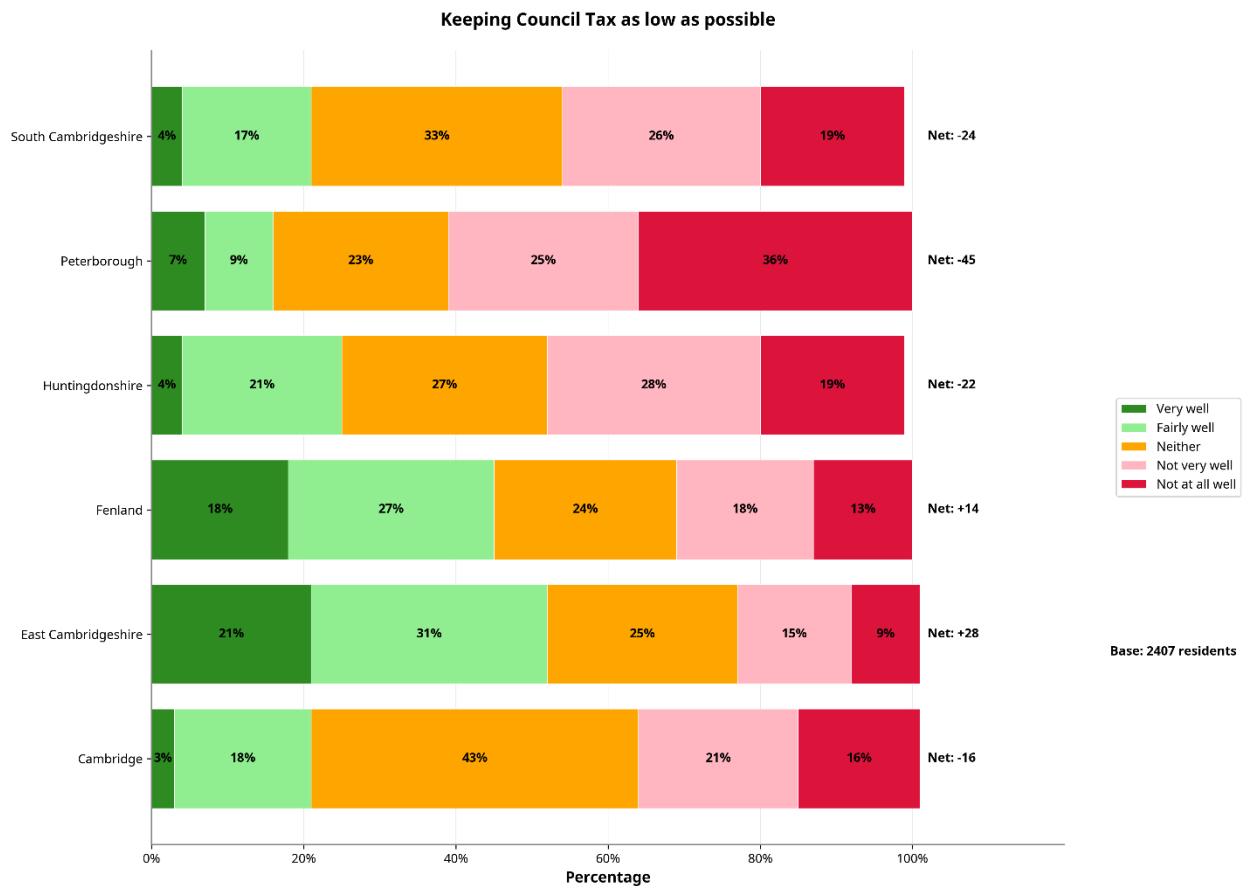
## The Professional Assessment



The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +3) compared to public expectations (net score -17).

## Geographical Performance Expectations

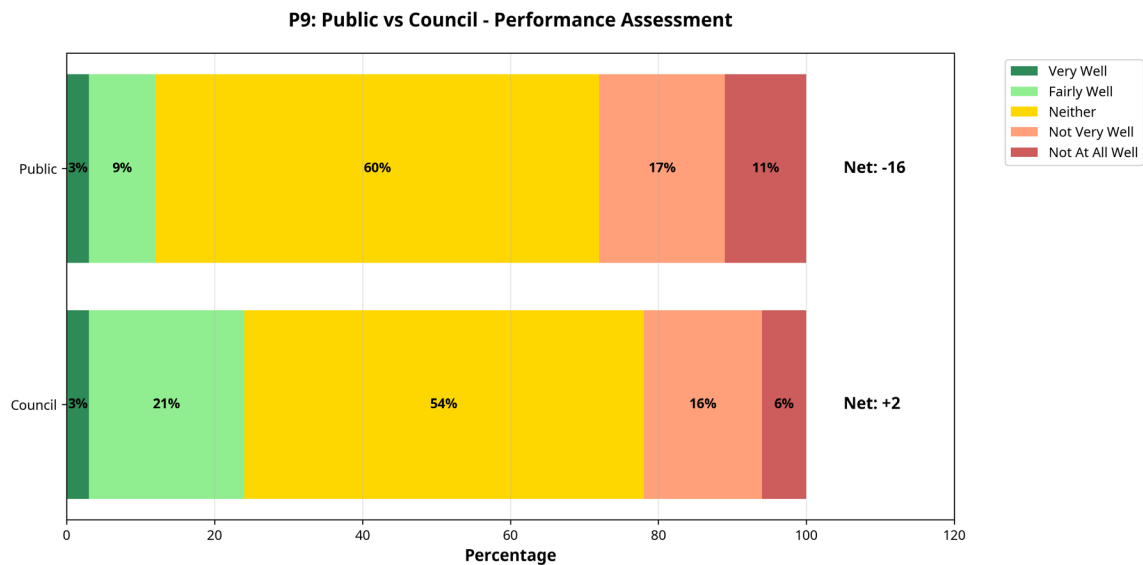
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on keeping council tax low reveals significant variation across districts. Peterborough residents rate their council most poorly, with 61% saying it performs not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 37%, South Cambridgeshire's 39%, Fenland's 31%, East Cambridgeshire's 24%, and Huntingdonshire's 47%. The 37-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings show East Cambridgeshire at 52%, Fenland at 45%, Huntingdonshire at 25%, Cambridge at 21%, South Cambridgeshire at 21%, and Peterborough at 16%. The 36-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough in positive ratings is statistically significant. These patterns reveal a significant divide in perceptions of fiscal management, with East Cambridgeshire and Fenland residents viewing their councils as relatively effective, whilst Peterborough residents express strong dissatisfaction with their council's tax performance, consistent with their broader distrust of council decision-making and service investment concerns.



Younger people tend to think that council tax is not kept as low as possible (under 35s Net -25). Ethnic minorities also tend to disagree with keeping council tax as low as possible (Net -20).

# Using digital or AI to improve services

## The Professional Assessment

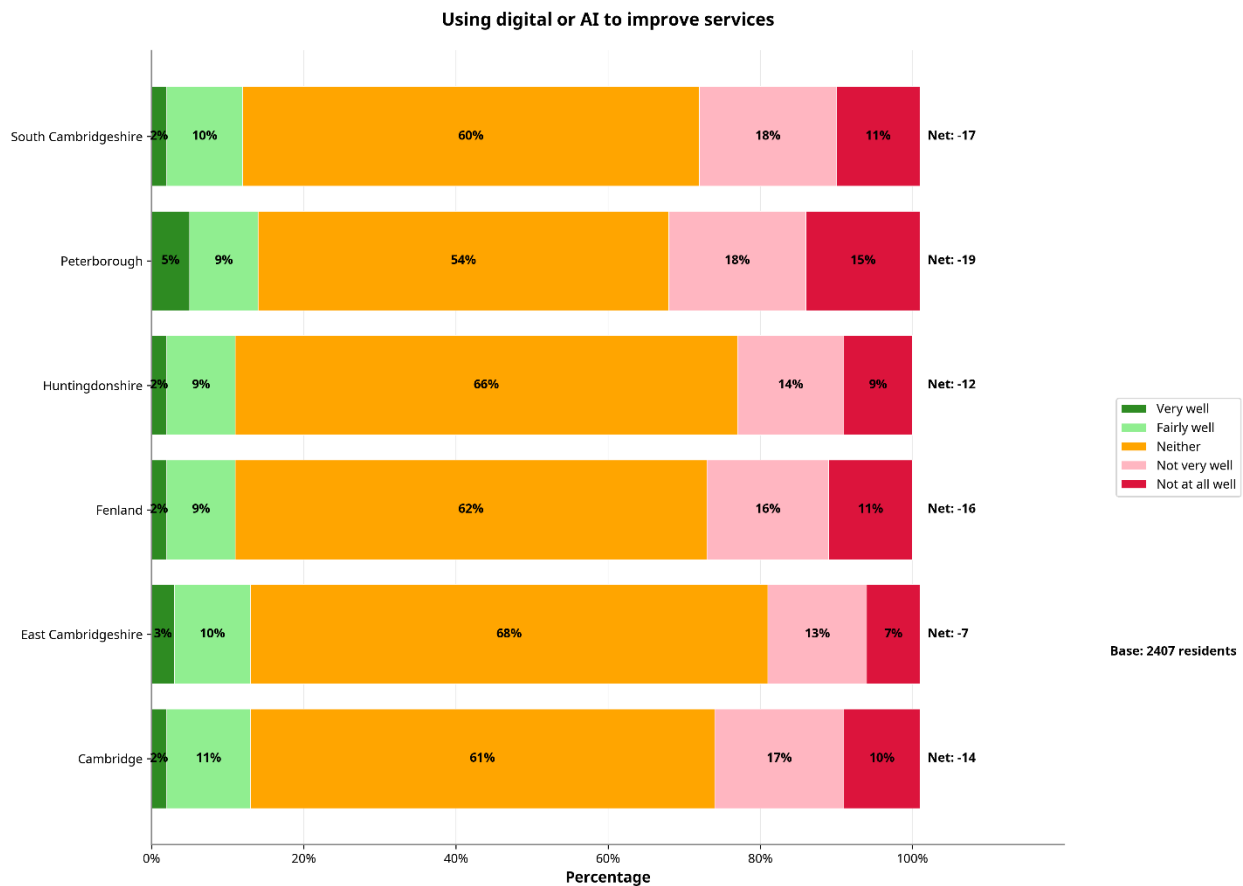


The performance assessment reveals a significant professional divide, with council workers expressing notably more confidence in council performance (net score +2) compared to public expectations (net score -16). This 18-point gap that the public think councils have a way to go using digital.



## Geographical Performance Expectations

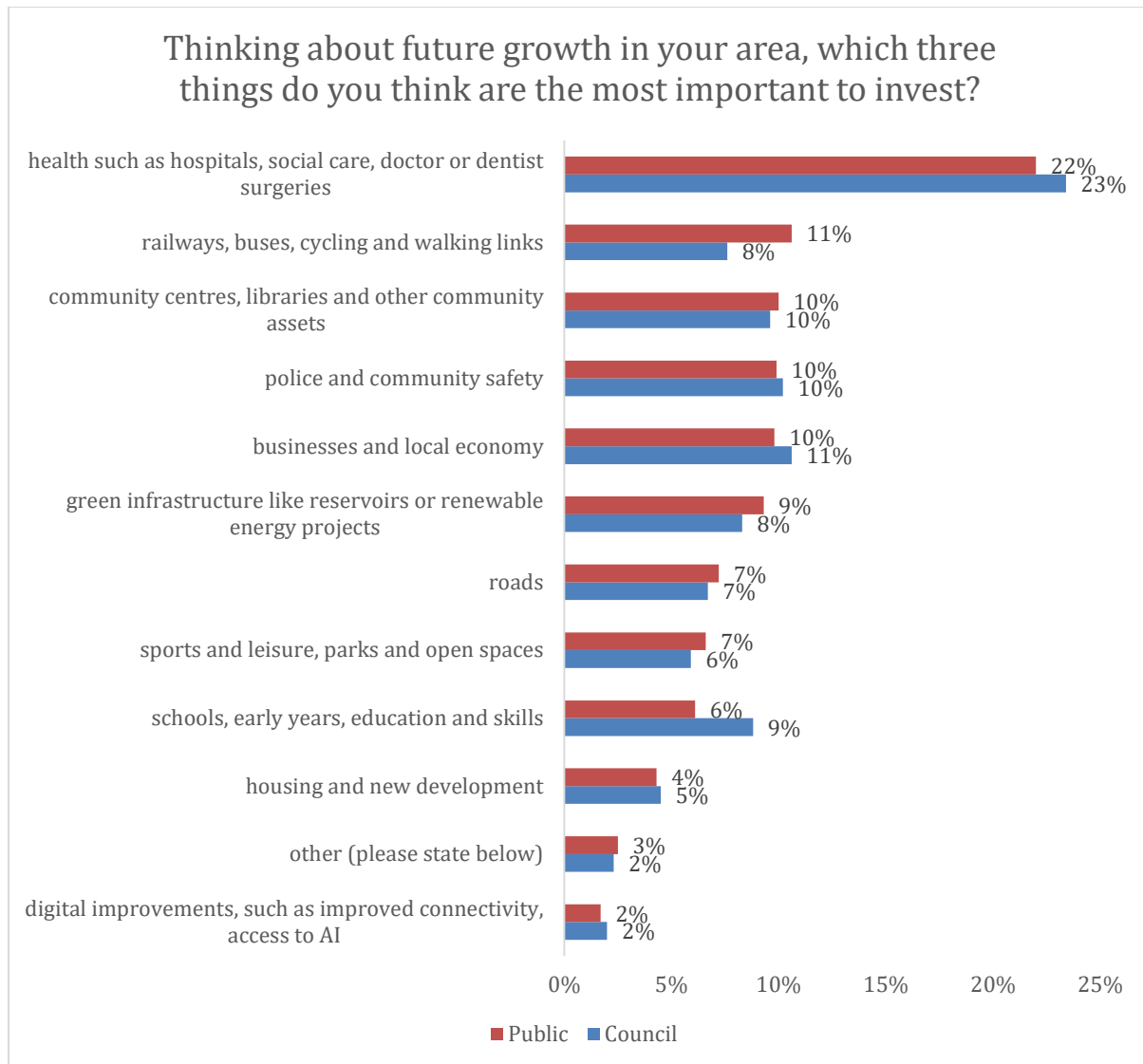
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on using digital technology and AI to improve services shows minimal significant variation across districts. The dominant response across all areas is "neither," ranging from 54% in Peterborough to 68% in East Cambridgeshire, suggesting widespread uncertainty about or unfamiliarity with councils' digital initiatives. Positive ratings remain consistently low, from 11% in South Cambridgeshire and Fenland to 14% in Cambridge and Peterborough, whilst negative responses range from 20% in East Cambridgeshire to 33% in Peterborough. These differences fall within confidence intervals and do not reach statistical significance. The overwhelming neutral response indicates that digital transformation efforts either remain largely invisible to residents or have yet to demonstrate tangible service improvements. This pattern suggests councils across the region face similar challenges in implementing and communicating digital innovation, with residents unable to assess performance in an area where they may have limited direct experience or awareness of behind-the-scenes technological changes.



The 35-54s are most negative about the current performance in this area (Net -24).

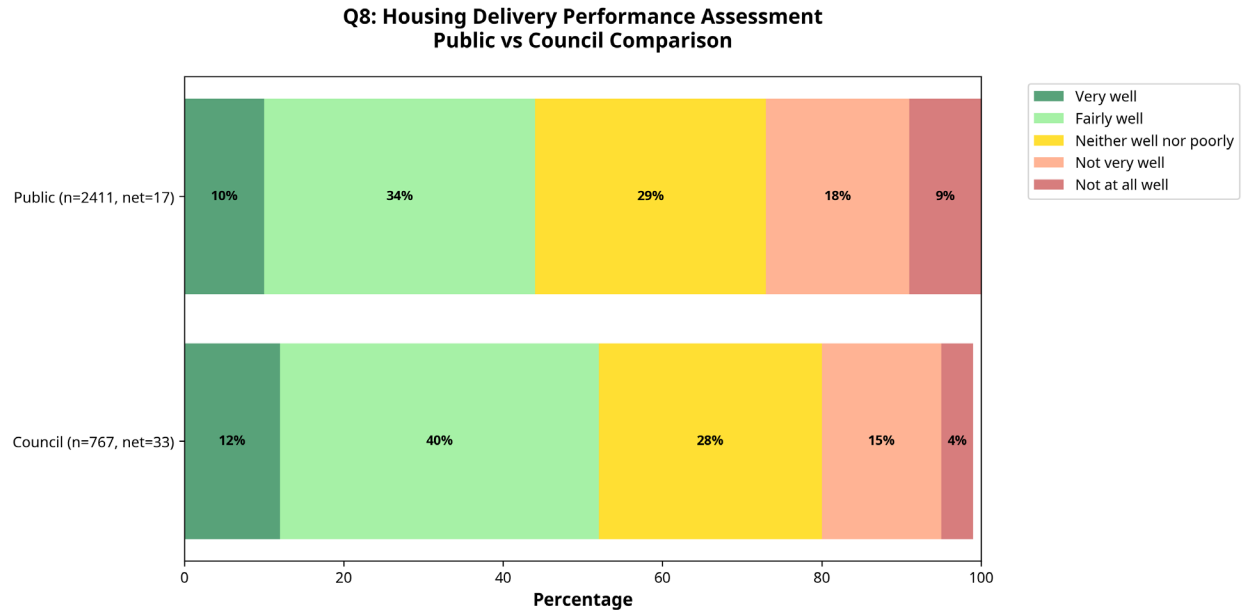
## Future growth

Residents would most like to see investment in health, transport and community infrastructure.



## Housing Delivery

Again, respondents were asked to rate their councils on several different measures. On housing delivery, council staff are substantially more positive than residents.

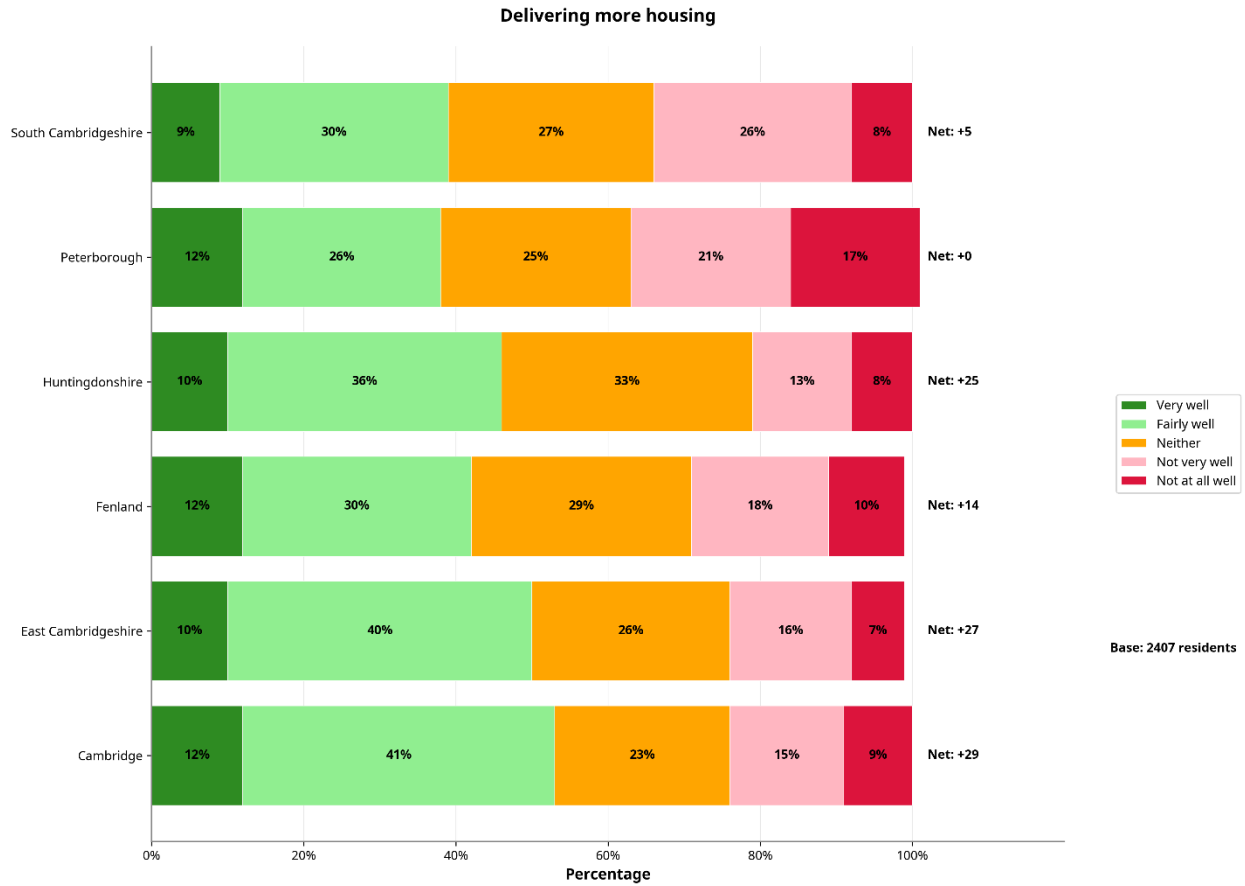


**Figure: Housing Delivery Performance Assessment**

## Geographical differences

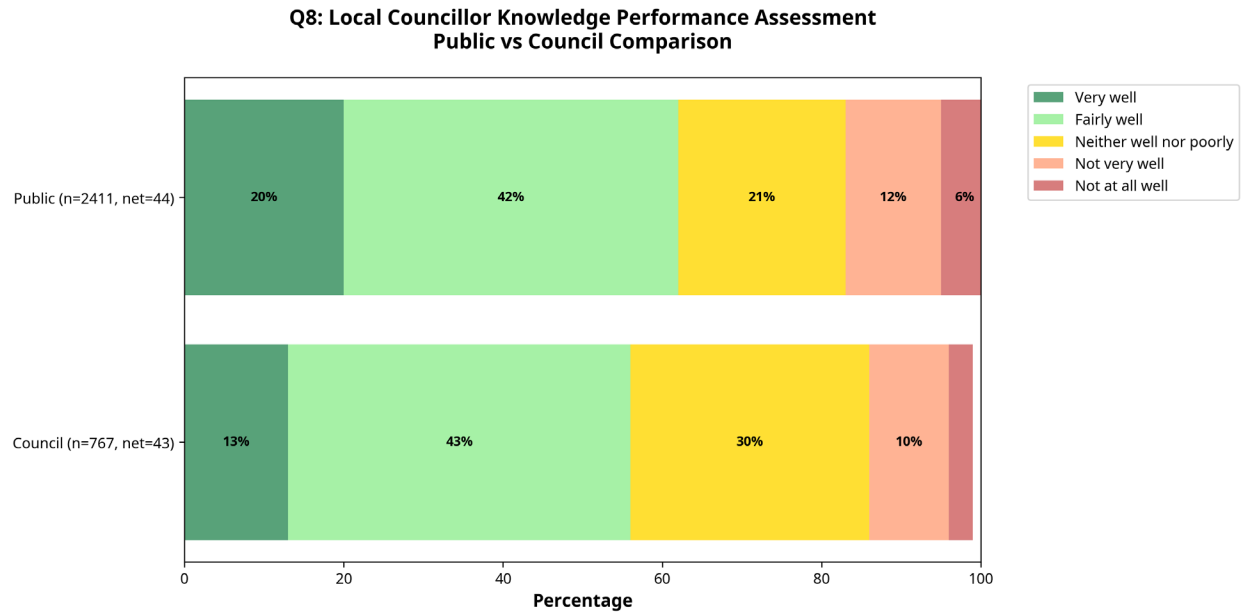
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on housing delivery shows limited significant variation across districts. Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire show the highest positive ratings at 53% and 50% respectively, whilst Peterborough shows 38%, South Cambridgeshire 39%, Fenland 42%, and Huntingdonshire 46%.

These differences approach but do not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses range from 21% in Huntingdonshire to 38% in Peterborough, with South Cambridgeshire at 34%. The "neither" category varies from 23% in Cambridge to 33% in Huntingdonshire.



## Councillor local knowledge

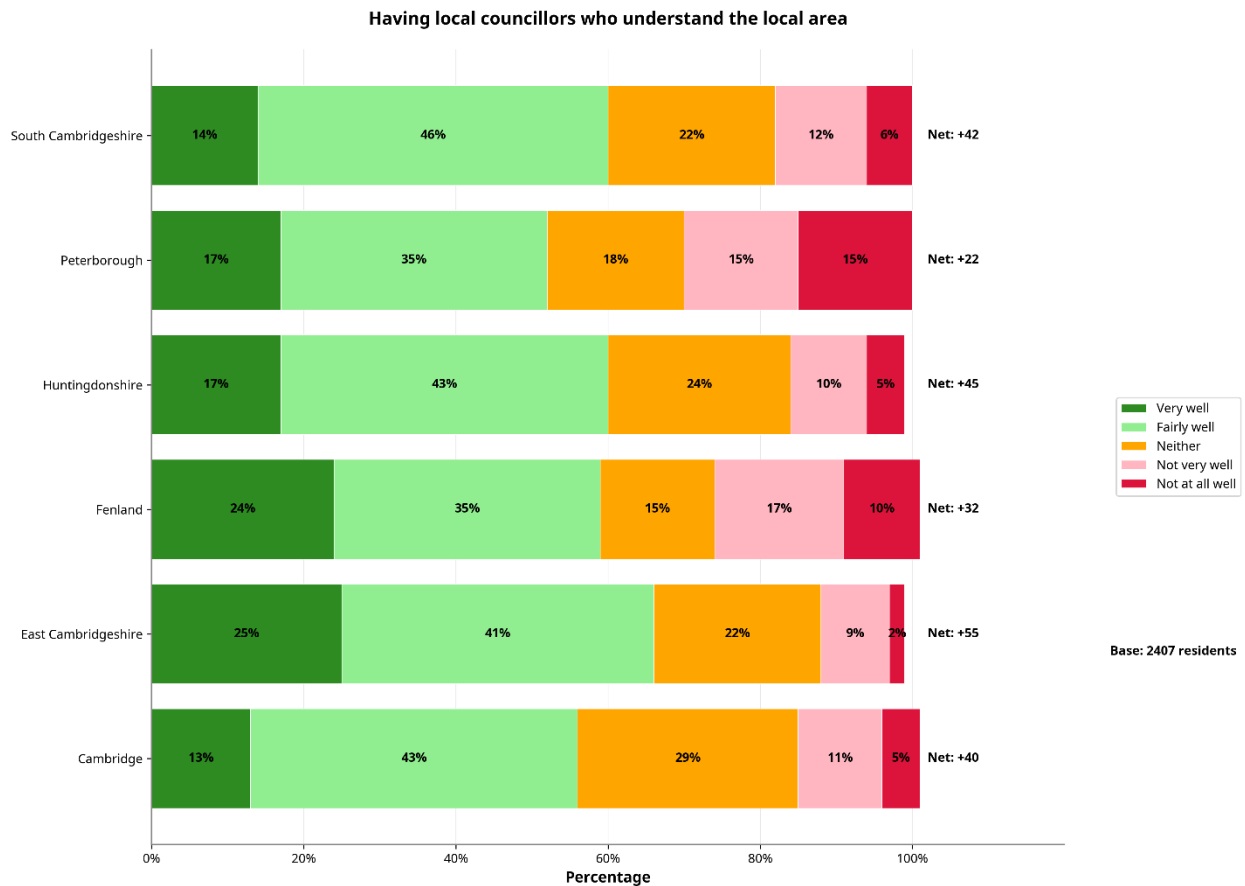
The performance on this measure is similar for both residents and council staff.



**Figure: Local Councillor Knowledge Assessment**

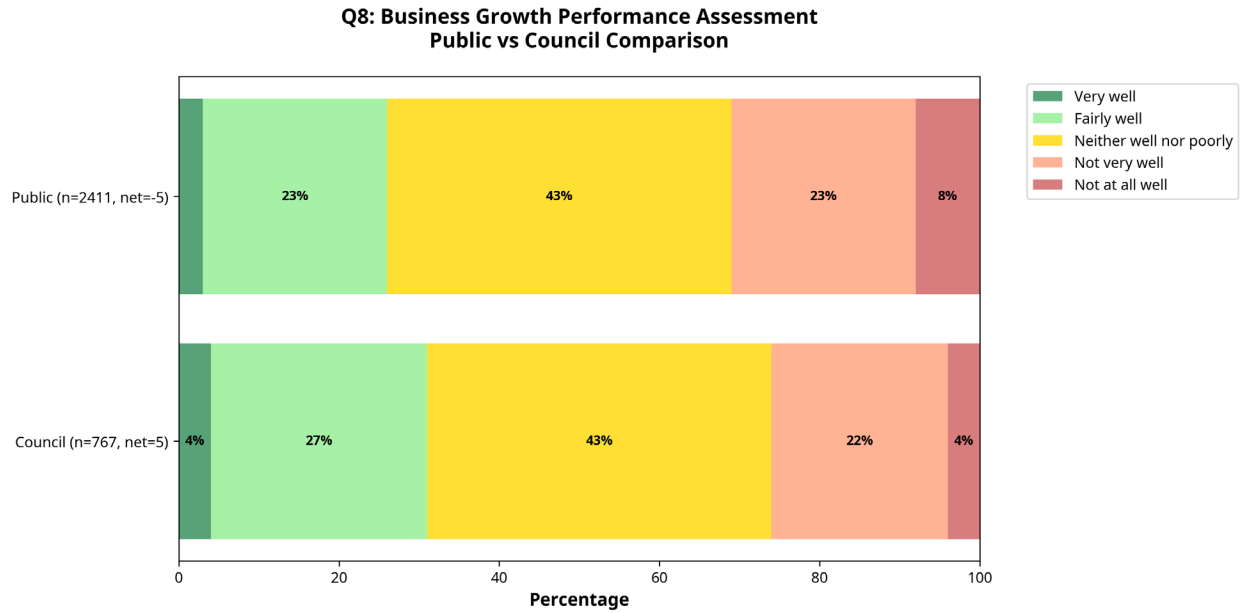
## Geographical differences

Residents' assessment of having local councillors who understand their area shows significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 66%, followed by Huntingdonshire at 60%, South Cambridgeshire at 60%, Fenland at 59%, Cambridge at 56%, and Peterborough at 52%. The 14-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds. Negative responses remain consistently low across all districts, ranging from 11% in East Cambridgeshire to 30% in Peterborough. The "neither" category varies from 15% in Fenland to 29% in Cambridge.



## Business growth

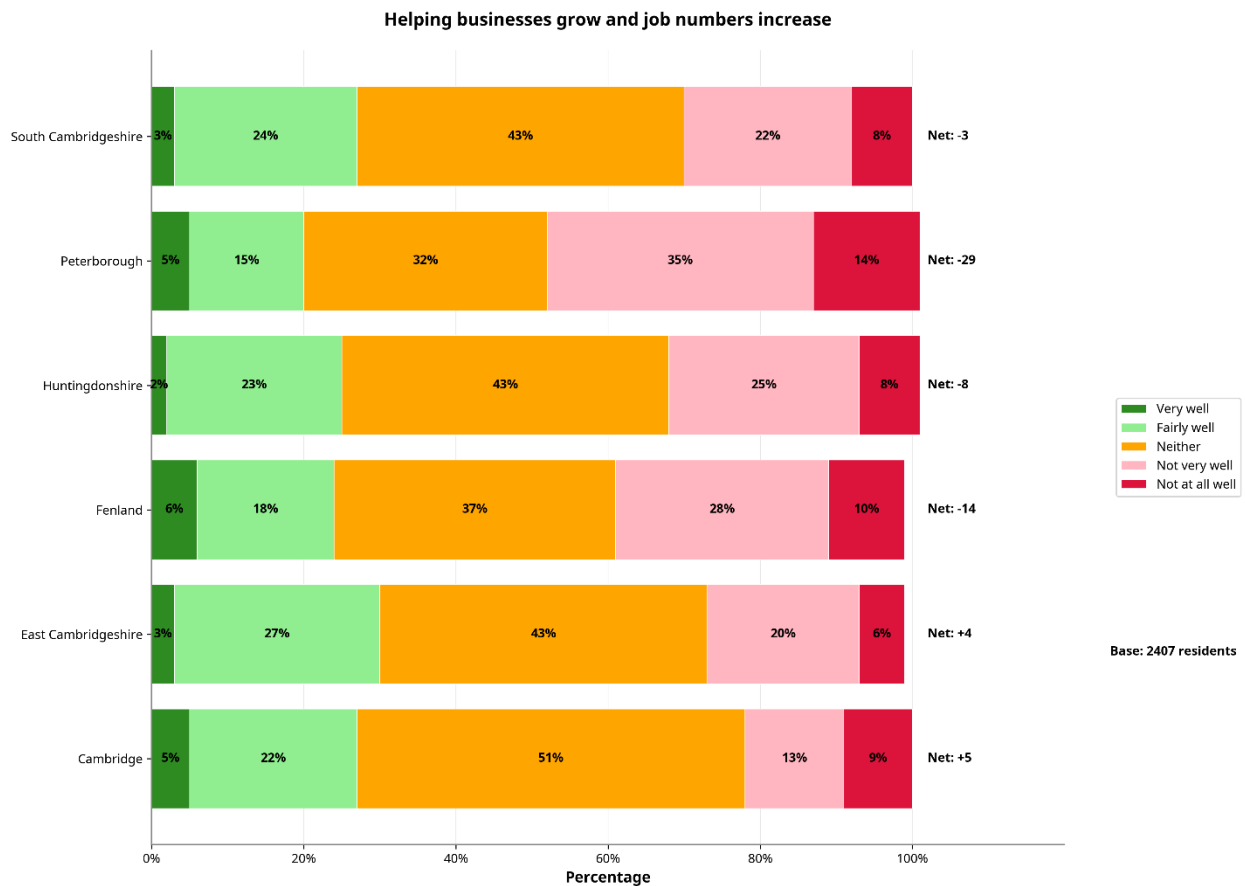
While the public are negative and the council are positive, there is not a substantial amount between them.



**Figure: Business Growth Performance Assessment**

## Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on business growth and job creation shows minimal significant variation across districts. The dominant response across all areas is "neither," ranging from 32% in Peterborough to 51% in Cambridge, suggesting widespread uncertainty about councils' economic development impact. Positive ratings range from 20% in Peterborough to 30% in East Cambridgeshire, whilst negative responses vary from 22% in Cambridge to 49% in Peterborough. Despite Peterborough showing the highest dissatisfaction at 49% versus Cambridge's 22%, this 27-point difference approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds. The high neutral responses, particularly in Cambridge where over half cannot assess performance, indicate that economic development efforts remain largely invisible to residents or that attribution of business growth to council action proves difficult. This pattern suggests residents across the region struggle to connect council activities with tangible economic outcomes.





# Accountability

This is an issue that separates the public from council staff with the public significantly more negative.

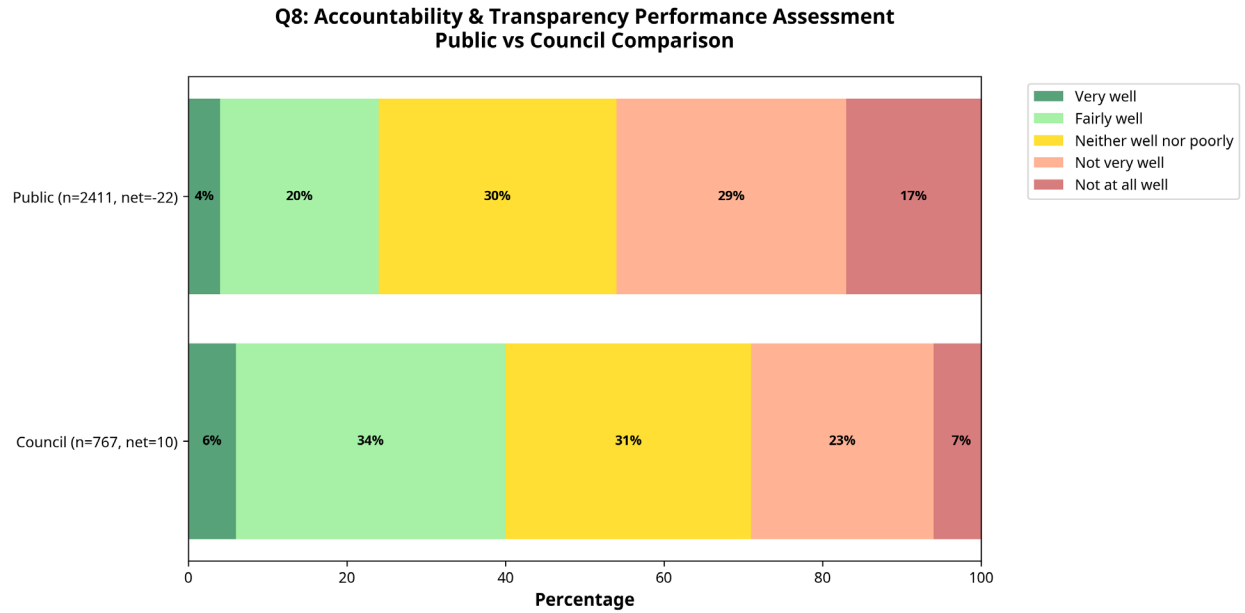
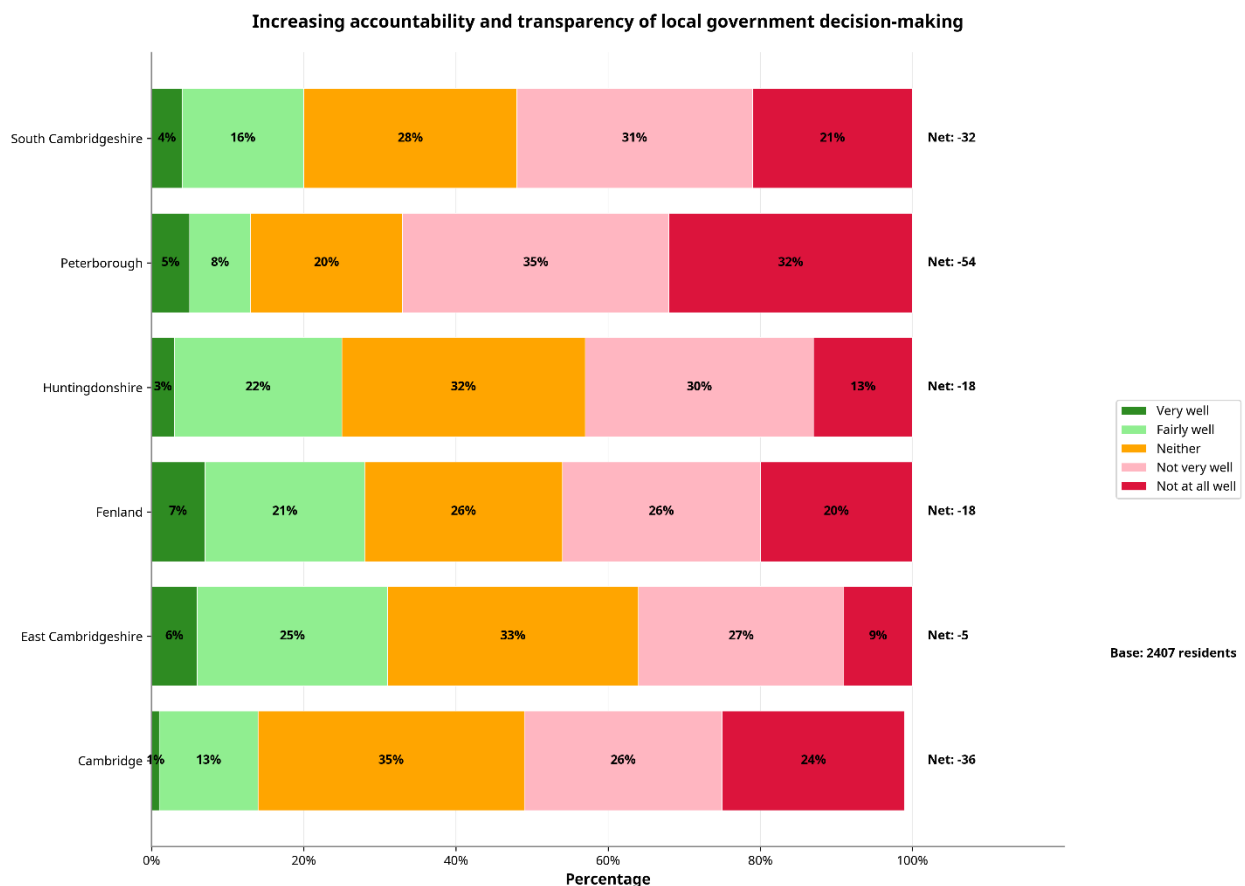


Figure: Accountability & Transparency Assessment

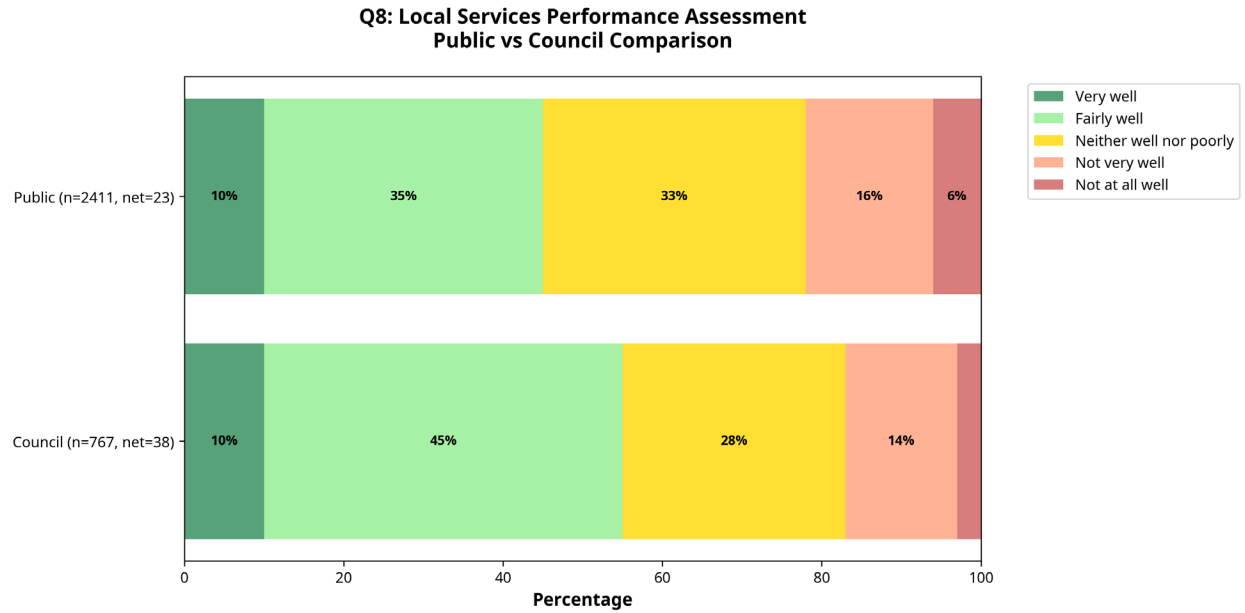
## Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on accountability and transparency reveals significant district-level variation. Peterborough shows the highest dissatisfaction with 67% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 50%, South Cambridgeshire's 52%, Fenland's 46%, Huntingdonshire's 43%, and East Cambridgeshire's 36%. The 31-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain uniformly low across all districts, ranging from 13% in Peterborough to 31% in East Cambridgeshire. The "neither" category varies from 20% in Peterborough to 35% in Cambridge. These findings indicate widespread dissatisfaction with transparency and accountability across the region, with Peterborough showing particularly acute concerns consistent with their earlier expressed distrust in council decision-making. This same observation arose in the focus groups. The generally poor ratings suggest systemic challenges in communicating decisions and engaging residents effectively, though East Cambridgeshire performs relatively better, maintaining its pattern of higher satisfaction across multiple governance measures



## Local services

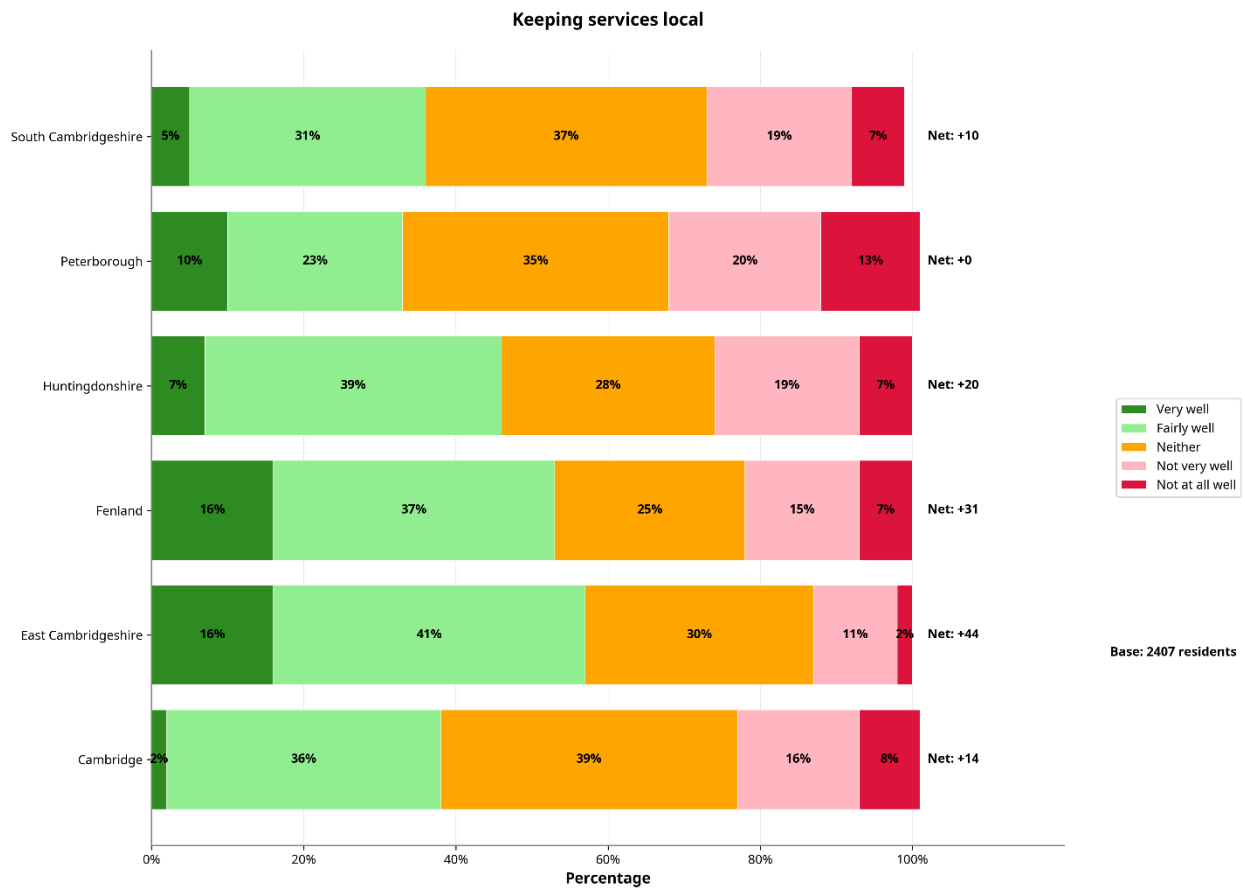
Again on local services, the public do not believe that councils perform well while councils are more positive.



**Figure: Local Services Performance Assessment**

## Geographical performance

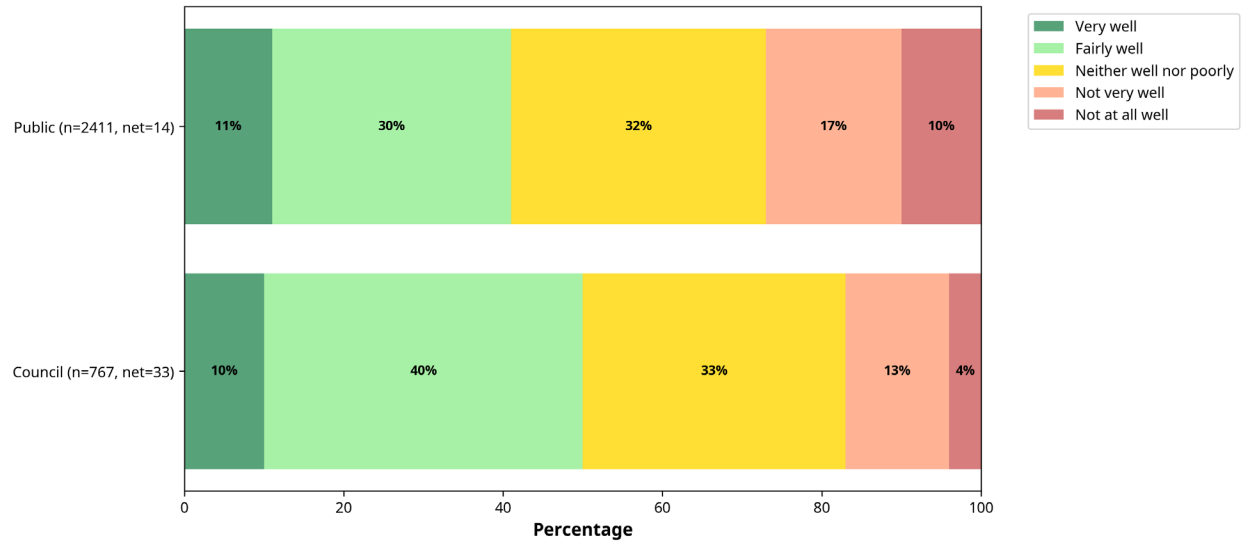
Residents' assessment of councils' performance on keeping services local shows limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire demonstrates the highest satisfaction at 57%, followed by Fenland at 53%, Huntingdonshire at 46%, Cambridge at 38%, South Cambridgeshire at 36%, and Peterborough at 33%. The 24-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches but does not clearly exceed significance thresholds given the confidence intervals. Negative responses remain relatively low across all districts, ranging from 13% in East Cambridgeshire to 33% in Peterborough. The "neither" category shows considerable variation from 25% in Fenland to 39% in Cambridge. These patterns suggest moderate satisfaction with local service provision across most districts, with rural areas like East Cambridgeshire and Fenland showing higher ratings. Urban areas show lower satisfaction with 'keeping services local'.



# Protecting local identity

The public are significantly less positive on this measure than council staff.

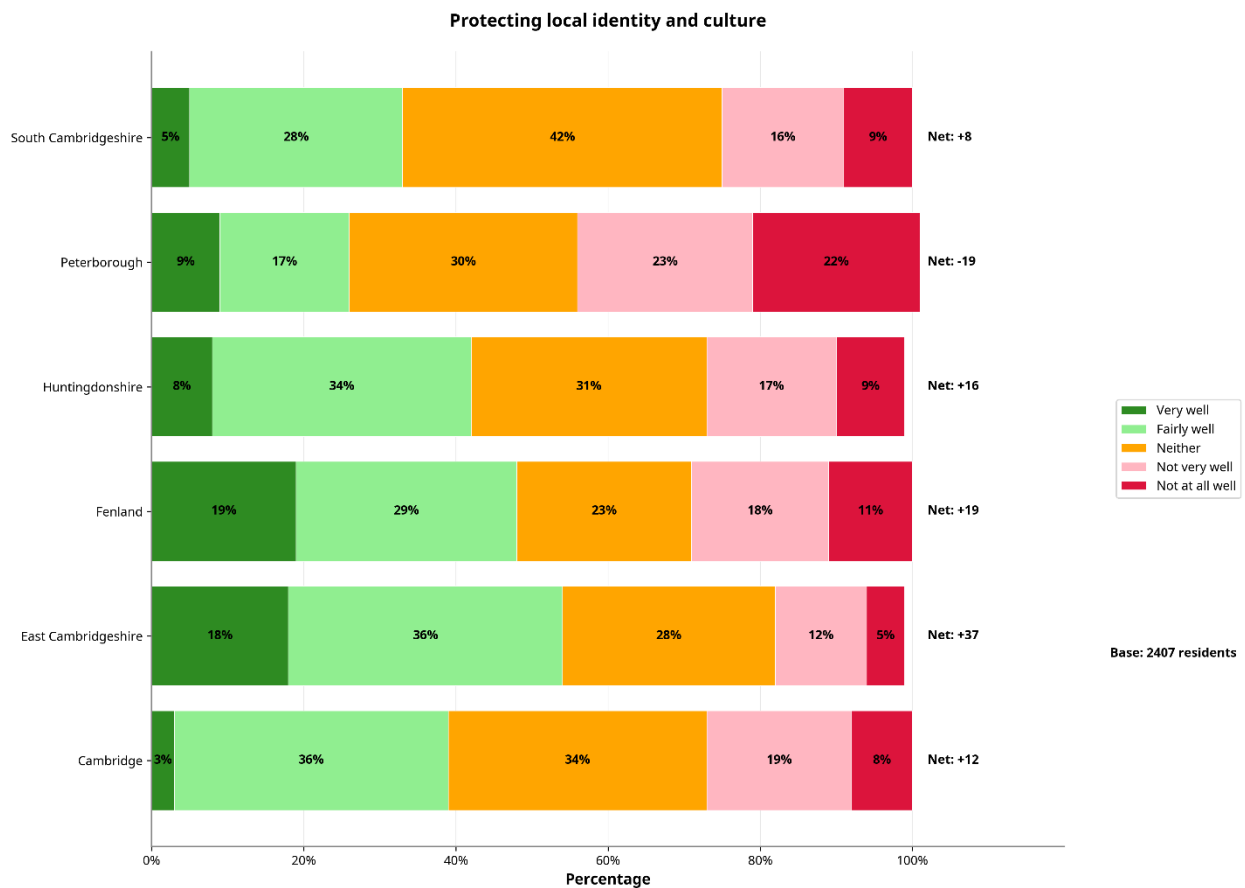
**Q8: Local Identity Performance Assessment  
Public vs Council Comparison**



**Figure: Local Identity Protection Assessment**

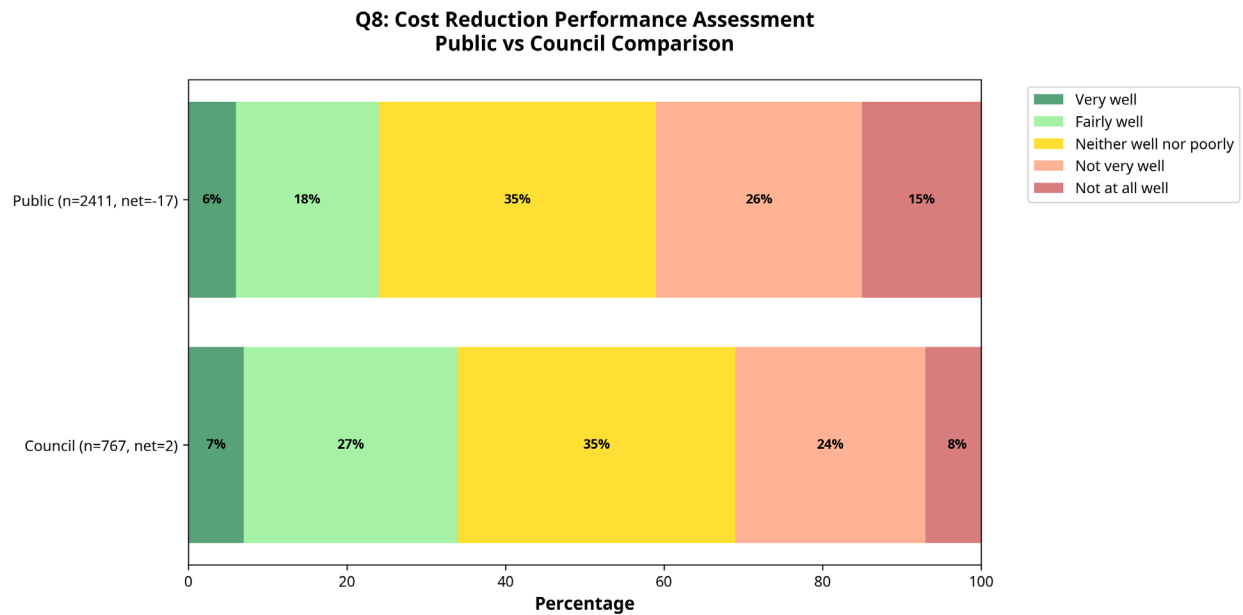
## Geographical performance

Residents' assessment of councils' performance on protecting local identity and culture shows limited significant variation across districts. East Cambridgeshire shows the highest satisfaction at 54%, followed by Fenland at 48%, Huntingdonshire at 42%, Cambridge at 41%, South Cambridgeshire at 33%, and Peterborough at 26%. The 28-point difference between East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approaches significance thresholds. Negative responses vary from 17% in East Cambridgeshire to 45% in Peterborough, with this 28-point gap also approaching significance. The "neither" category ranges from 23% in Fenland to 42% in South Cambridgeshire. These patterns suggest rural districts perceive better performance in cultural preservation, possibly reflecting stronger village identities and community cohesion. The high neutral responses, particularly in South Cambridgeshire, suggest many residents struggle to assess this somewhat abstract performance measure or feel disconnected from local cultural initiatives.



## Cost reduction

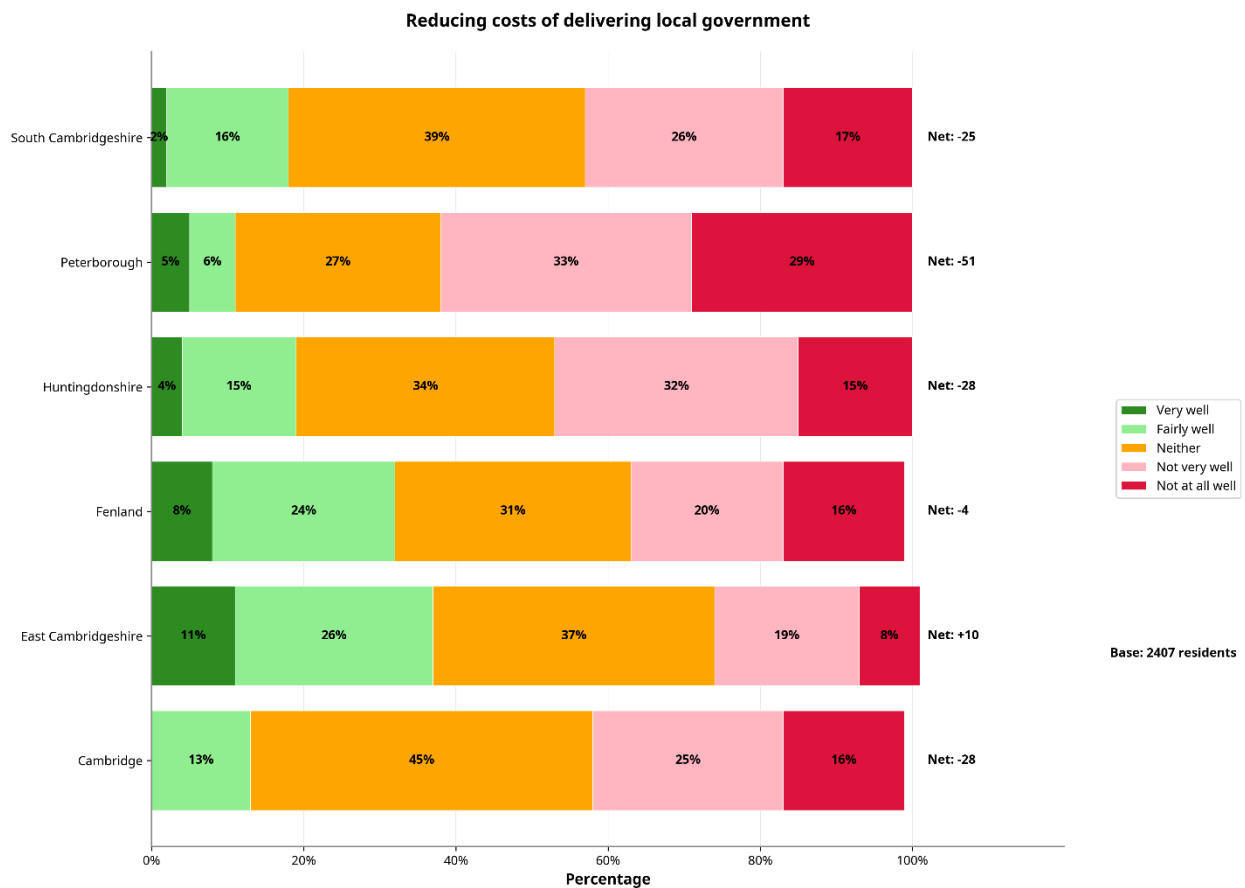
Notably here the public are significantly net negative in their view of that local government is focused on cost reduction.



**Figure: Cost Reduction Performance Assessment**

## Geographical performance

Peterborough shows the highest dissatisfaction with 62% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, compared to Cambridge's 41%, South Cambridgeshire's 43%, Huntingdonshire's 47%, Fenland's 36%, and East Cambridgeshire's 27%. The 35-point gap between Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain consistently low, ranging from 11% in Peterborough to 37% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 32%. The "neither" category varies from 27% in Peterborough to 45% in Cambridge. These findings indicate widespread scepticism about councils' efficiency efforts, with Peterborough residents expressing particular dissatisfaction consistent with their broader governance concerns. East Cambridgeshire again shows relatively better ratings, suggesting residents perceive more effective cost management. The high neutral responses, especially in Cambridge, may reflect limited visibility of efficiency measures or difficulty assessing administrative cost-effectiveness from a resident perspective.





## Reducing the complexity of local government

Both residents and council staff tend to disagree that the local government performs well in terms of reducing the complexity of government.

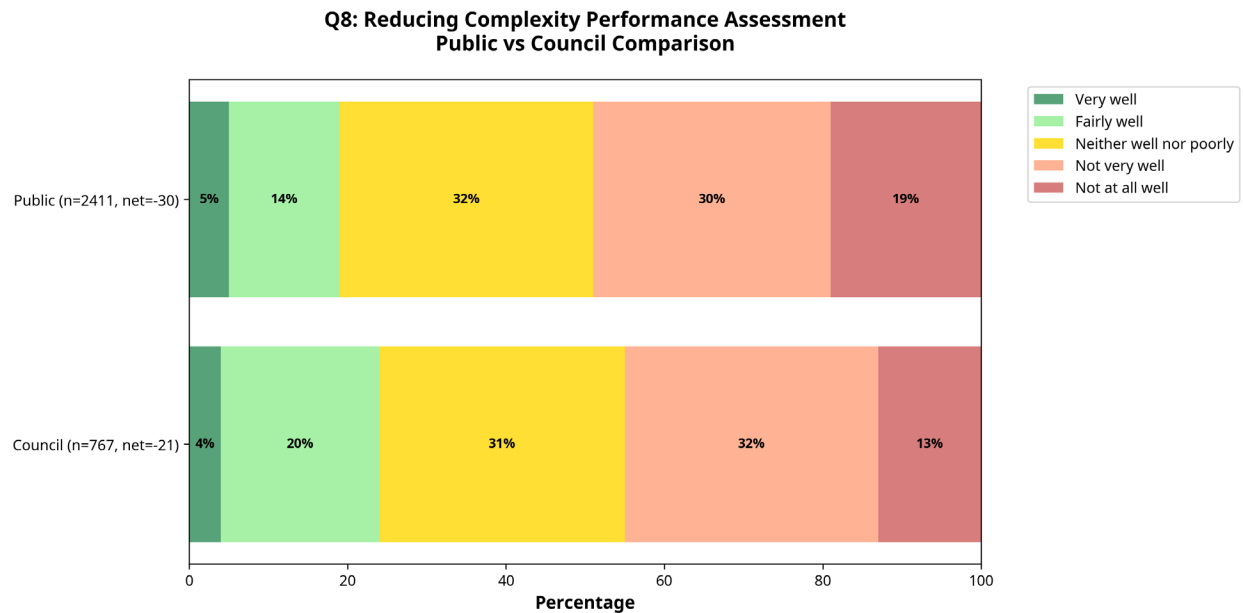
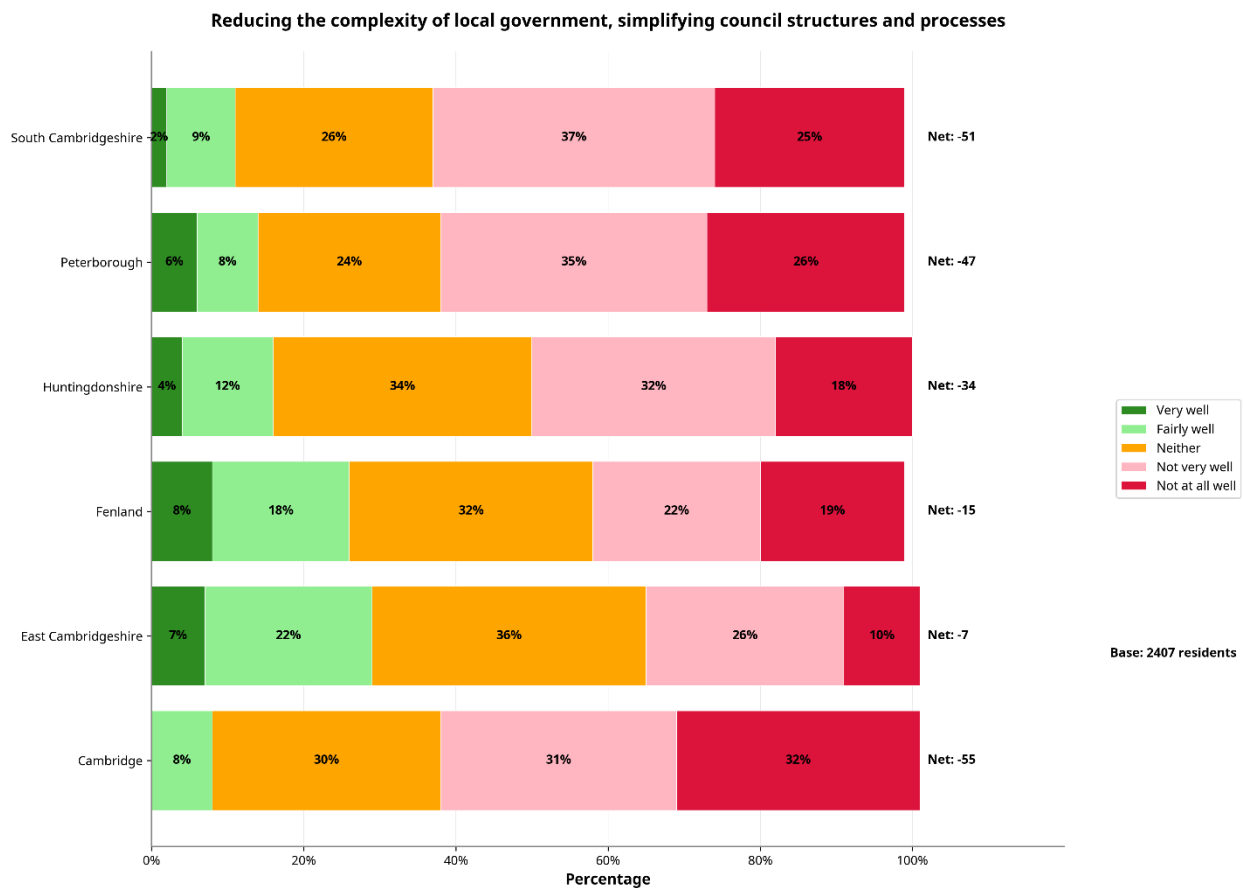


Figure: Complexity Reduction Assessment

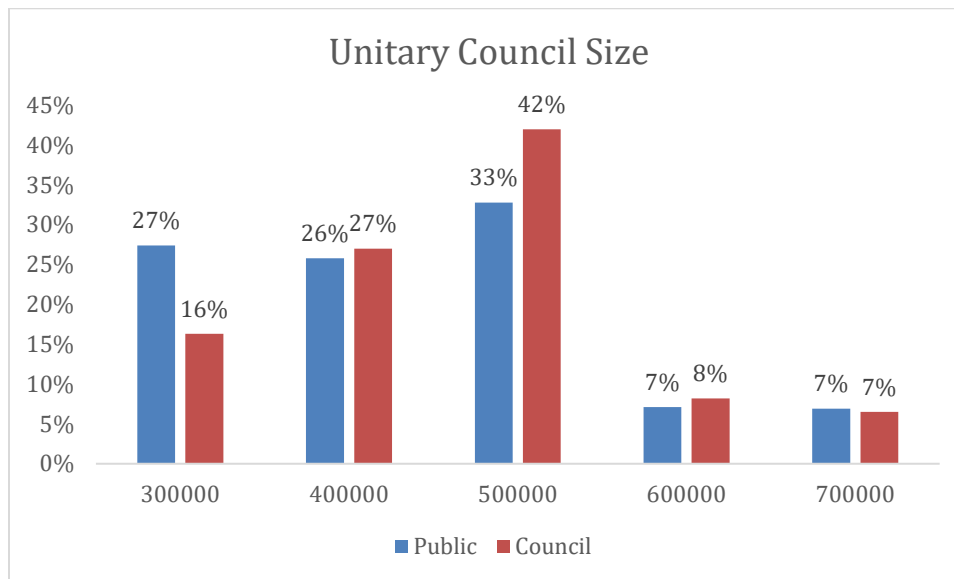
## Geographical performance

Cambridge shows the highest dissatisfaction with 63% rating performance as not very well or not at all well, followed by South Cambridgeshire at 62%, Peterborough at 61%, Huntingdonshire at 50%, Fenland at 41%, and East Cambridgeshire at 36%. The 27-point gap between Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Positive ratings remain uniformly low across all districts, ranging from 8% in Cambridge to 29% in East Cambridgeshire, with Fenland at 26%. The "neither" category varies from 24% in Peterborough to 36% in East Cambridgeshire. These findings reveal widespread dissatisfaction with current governance complexity, particularly acute in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire where the two-tier system may be perceived as especially cumbersome. Peterborough's poor rating despite its unitary status suggests complexity issues transcend structural arrangements. East Cambridgeshire's relatively better assessment maintains its pattern of higher satisfaction across governance measures, though even here the majority perceive room for improvement in simplification.



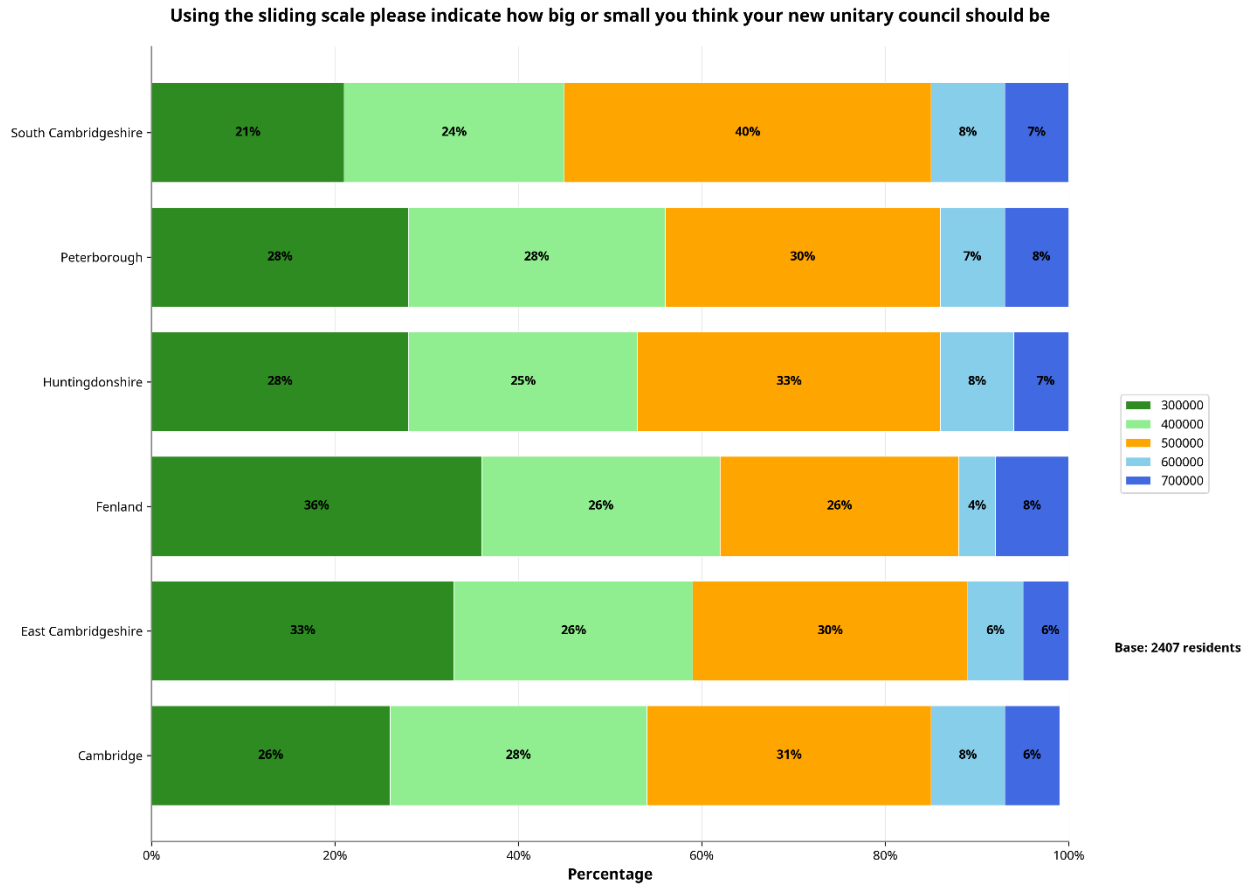
## Unitary Council Size

The public mode is for 400,000 in terms of size, although the most picked option is 500,000. Council workers, by contrast, four in ten want to see 500,000 with lower agreement with 300 or 400,000. For both groups, larger than 500,000 is less attractive.



## Geographical performance

Fenland shows the strongest preference for smaller councils, with 62% favouring populations under 400,000, compared to Cambridge's 54%, Peterborough's 56%, Huntingdonshire's 53%, East Cambridgeshire's 59%, and South Cambridgeshire's 45%. The 17-point difference between Fenland and South Cambridgeshire exceeds statistical significance thresholds. Conversely, South Cambridgeshire shows the highest support for larger councils, with 48% preferring populations over 500,000, versus Fenland's 30%, representing a significant 18-point gap. The 600,000-700,000 category shows minimal support across all districts at 4-8%. These patterns suggest rural districts like Fenland strongly favour smaller unitary authorities, potentially reflecting concerns about representation and local identity within larger structures. South Cambridgeshire's greater openness to larger councils may reflect recognition of the district's integration with Cambridge and acceptance of broader administrative units. The general preference for mid-sized authorities (400,000-500,000) across most districts indicates residents seek a balance between efficiency and local representation.



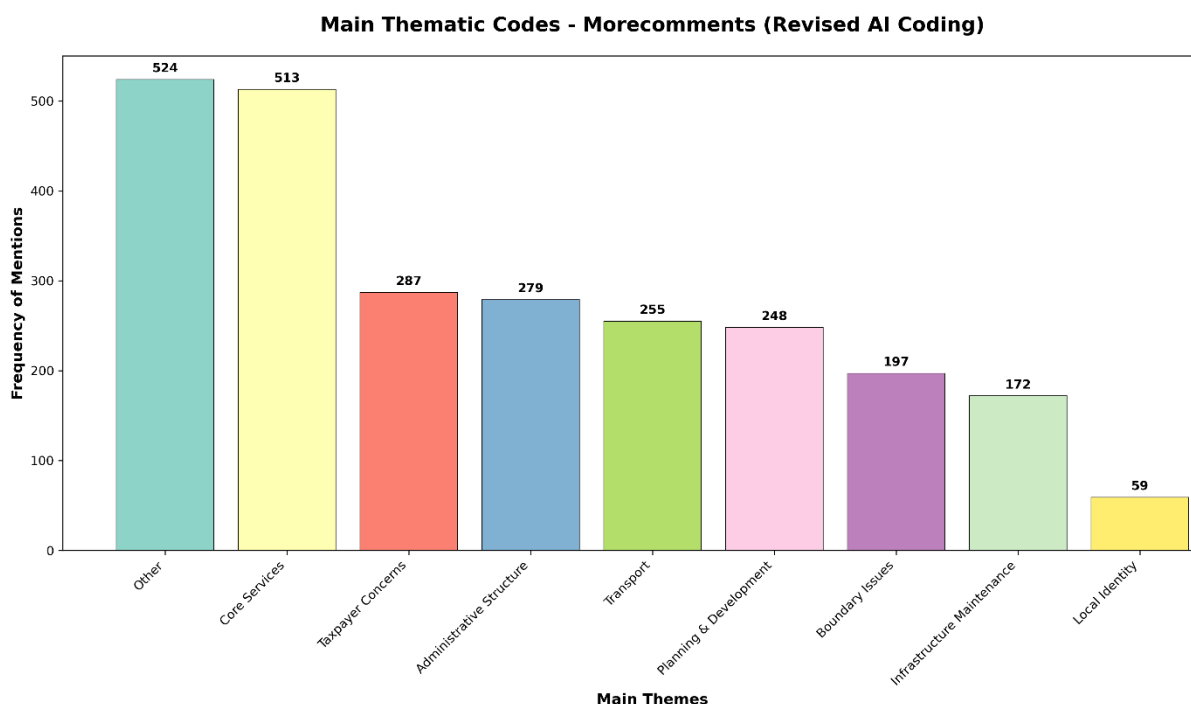
## Hopes and concerns

As well as the quantitative questions, there was one open-ended question that asked Do you have any further comments, hopes or concerns you wish to make? Some comments were short and some were extended. Therefore, in terms of coding data, a multicode approach was taken i.e. one statement could make several points and so these have all been tracked. In addition, the districts have been supplied with their individual comments in order to look at individual responses in detail. There were 1,564 comments made in total, these come both from residents and council workers. It will definitely be worth investigating both groups of comments especially in terms of future planning.

In terms of sentiment, the responses were tilted to negative.

Sentiment	Percentage
Very Positive	2%
Positive	16%
Neutral	54%
Negative	26%
Very Negative	3%

The comments were tagged for main thematic content and the further tagged for the detail on those responses. With any coding process, there are likely to be a large amount of others that do not fit into a thematic category but instead make individual points. This is what we find in this survey. Next, people are concerned about core services along with taxpayer concerns, and how the administrative structure will work. These last two sit with planning and development, and transport infrastructure.



The detailed thematic coding reveals a striking hierarchy of public concerns, with service quality and delivery dominating the discourse, accounting for over a quarter (27%) of all coded mentions. This overwhelming focus on service standards suggests that regardless of structural reforms, residents remain fundamentally preoccupied with whether their bins are collected, their roads are maintained, and their local services function effectively.

Three substantial themes emerge in the second tier: longer-term planning comments (16%), transport adequacy (15%), and concerns about the functioning of local structures (13%). Together, these themes paint a picture of communities grappling with both immediate service needs and longer-term strategic challenges around development, connectivity, and governance effectiveness.

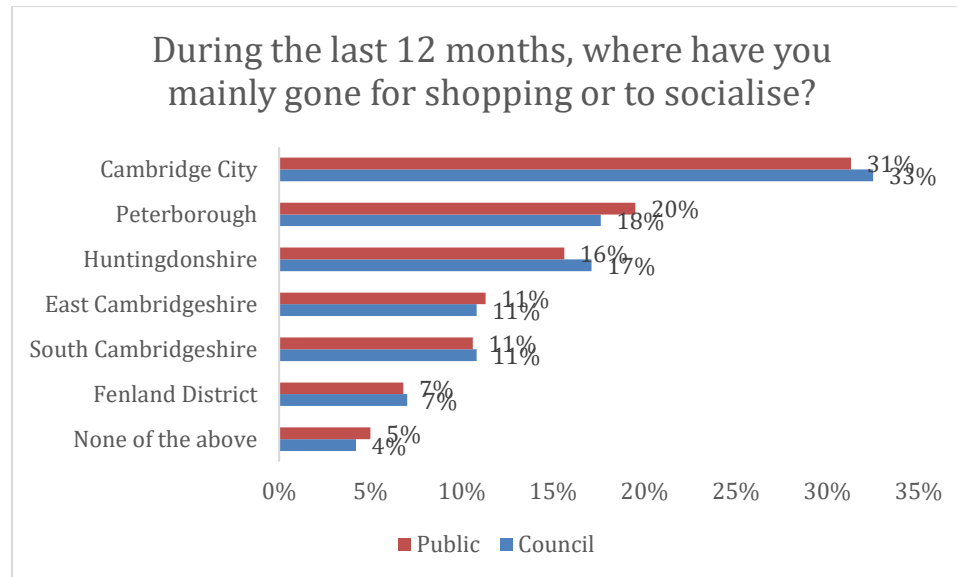
The middle range of the distribution reveals a cluster of interconnected concerns, each garnering between 8% and 9% of mentions. Here we find the cost-effectiveness of changes sitting alongside rural service maintenance and growth management issues, whilst budget allocation concerns and healthcare access each command roughly 8% of the discourse. Educational provision and housing development concerns follow closely, suggesting that residents view these issues as part of an integrated challenge facing local areas.

As we move through the lower frequencies, a tail of more specific concerns emerges, from environmental issues (5%) and protected services (5%) to community business areas and local identity questions (both around 3%). The presence of administration efficiency concerns, opposition to Cambridge-Peterborough combined authority proposals, and fears of losing local voice (each around 2%) speaks to underlying anxieties about democratic representation and administrative distance.

# Location Preferences

## Shopping and socialising

Residents are most likely to shop in Cambridge or Peterborough, and to a lesser extent, Huntingdonshire.



However, in the context of local government reorganisation, residents have emphasised that the new unitary councils should be located in places that they naturally travel to. Residents' decisions about what is a suitable place are complex and multi-faceted, but the travel time is a factor and it is therefore important to see where people travel for cultural activities, where they travel if they do not feel so well so under some level of duress and finally where they travel for work. We begin by sharing the shopping and socialising experience and then this is layered with health and work.

The analysis of shopping and socialising patterns across the six districts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough reveals complex patterns of movement and economic interaction that vary considerably by location. These data, collected over a twelve-month period, provide detailed insights into how residents navigate their region for retail and leisure activities, revealing both expected gravitational pulls towards major centres and unexpected patterns of local loyalty and cross-district movement.

Cambridge demonstrates the highest level of self-containment across all surveyed districts. When Cambridge residents were asked where they primarily shop and socialise, 71% indicated they remain within the city boundaries, a figure that significantly exceeds any other district's internal retention rate. This pronounced local focus suggests that Cambridge's retail and leisure



infrastructure adequately serves its population's needs. Secondary destinations for Cambridge residents include South Cambridgeshire at 14%, indicating some movement to retail parks and venues in the immediate surroundings, whilst East Cambridgeshire attracts 9% and Huntingdonshire 4%. Minimal interaction occurs with Peterborough and Fenland, each registering just 1% of Cambridge residents' activity, whilst 1% indicate they primarily shop and socialise outside all listed areas.

South Cambridgeshire presents a notably different pattern, with residents almost evenly split between staying within their district (35%) and travelling to Cambridge (40%). This near-equal division suggests that South Cambridgeshire maintains viable local centres—likely in market towns such as Cambourne, Sawston, and Melbourn—whilst simultaneously functioning within Cambridge's economic orbit. Huntingdonshire attracts 10% of South Cambridgeshire residents, possibly reflecting connections to St Neots and Huntingdon for those in the western parts of the district. East Cambridgeshire draws 8%, whilst both Peterborough and Fenland register just 1% each. The 5% selecting "none of the above" suggests some residents may be oriented towards locations outside the study area, potentially including Royston, Saffron Walden, or further afield to London.

Peterborough emerges as the second major urban centre, demonstrating strong internal cohesion with 63% of residents conducting their shopping and socialising within the city. This high retention rate positions Peterborough as a largely self-sufficient urban area serving its population's retail and leisure needs. Interestingly, 12% of Peterborough residents travel to Cambridge, matched exactly by another 12% who indicate they primarily use areas outside those listed, potentially including Leicester, Northampton, or Stamford. Huntingdonshire attracts 8% of Peterborough residents, likely those in the southern areas of the city accessing Huntingdon or St Neots, whilst Fenland draws 4%, reflecting connections with Whittlesey and March. East Cambridgeshire registers just 1%, and South Cambridgeshire shows no measurable interactivity from Peterborough residents, underlining the limited interaction between Peterborough and the Cambridge-centric southern districts.

Huntingdonshire displays the most evenly distributed pattern amongst the predominantly rural districts. With 46% of residents staying within district for shopping and socialising, Huntingdonshire maintains a moderate level of self-sufficiency, likely centred on its market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots, and Ramsey. Cambridge exerts considerable pull, attracting 28% of Huntingdonshire residents—the second-highest proportion of any external district population after East Cambridgeshire. This suggests that many Huntingdonshire residents, particularly those in the eastern areas around St Ives and the Hemingfords, look to Cambridge for major shopping and entertainment. South Cambridgeshire accounts for 10% of activity, whilst Peterborough draws 8%, indicating that Huntingdonshire sits at the intersection of both major urban spheres of influence. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland register 4% and 2% respectively, with 2% selecting none of the above.

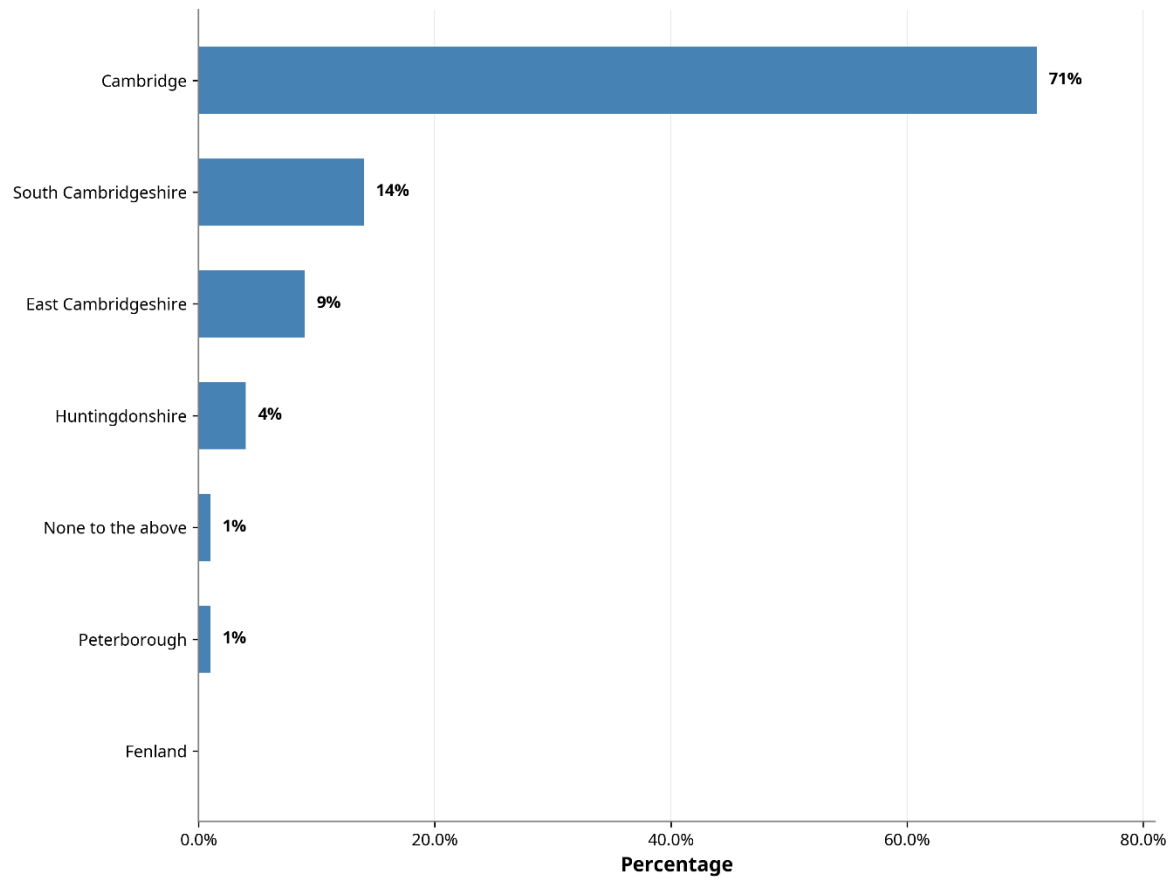
Fenland presents a distinctive pattern characterised by strong local orientation combined with significant links to Peterborough. The district retains 42% of its residents' shopping and

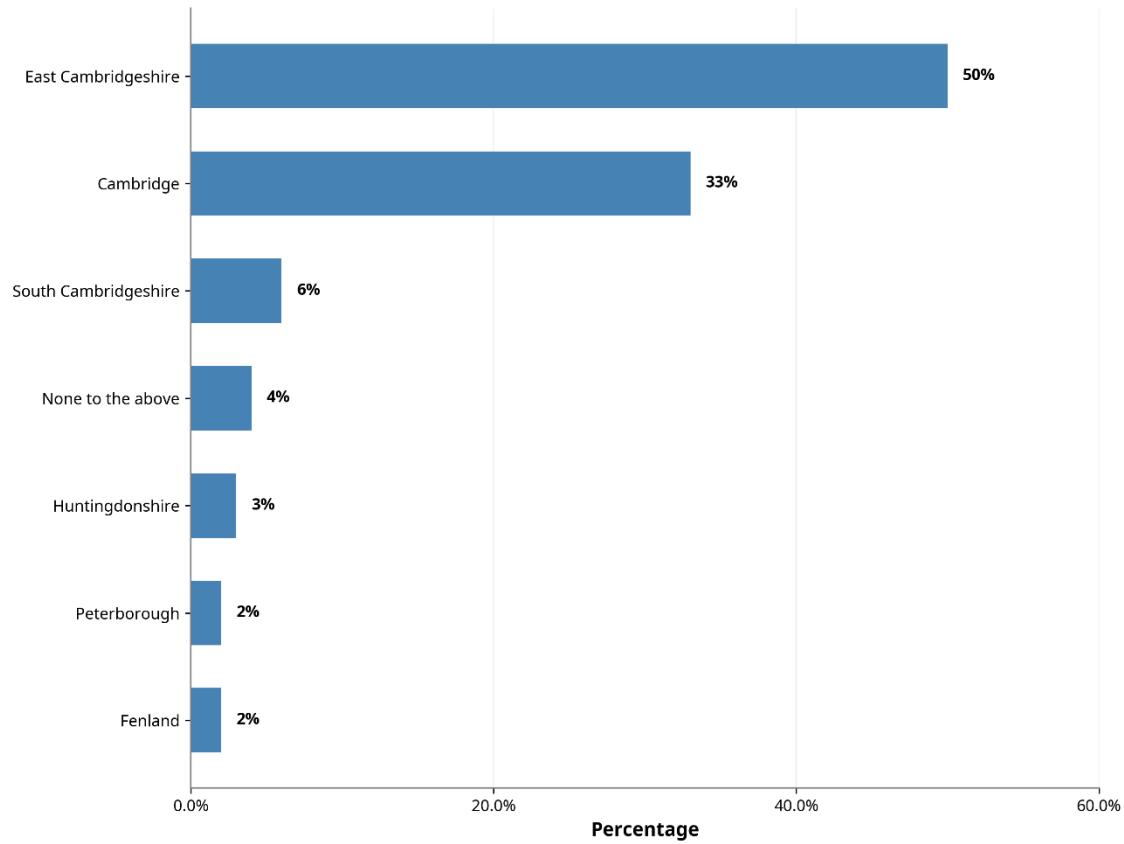
socialising activity, likely concentrated in the market towns of Wisbech, March, Whittlesey, and Chatteris. Peterborough serves as the primary external destination at 23%, reflecting both geographical proximity and transport links, particularly from March and Whittlesey. East Cambridgeshire attracts 13% of Fenland residents, possibly those from southern areas accessing Ely, whilst Cambridge draws just 11%—a notably low figure given Cambridge's regional dominance, suggesting that distance and potentially limited transport connections reduce Cambridge's appeal for Fenland residents.

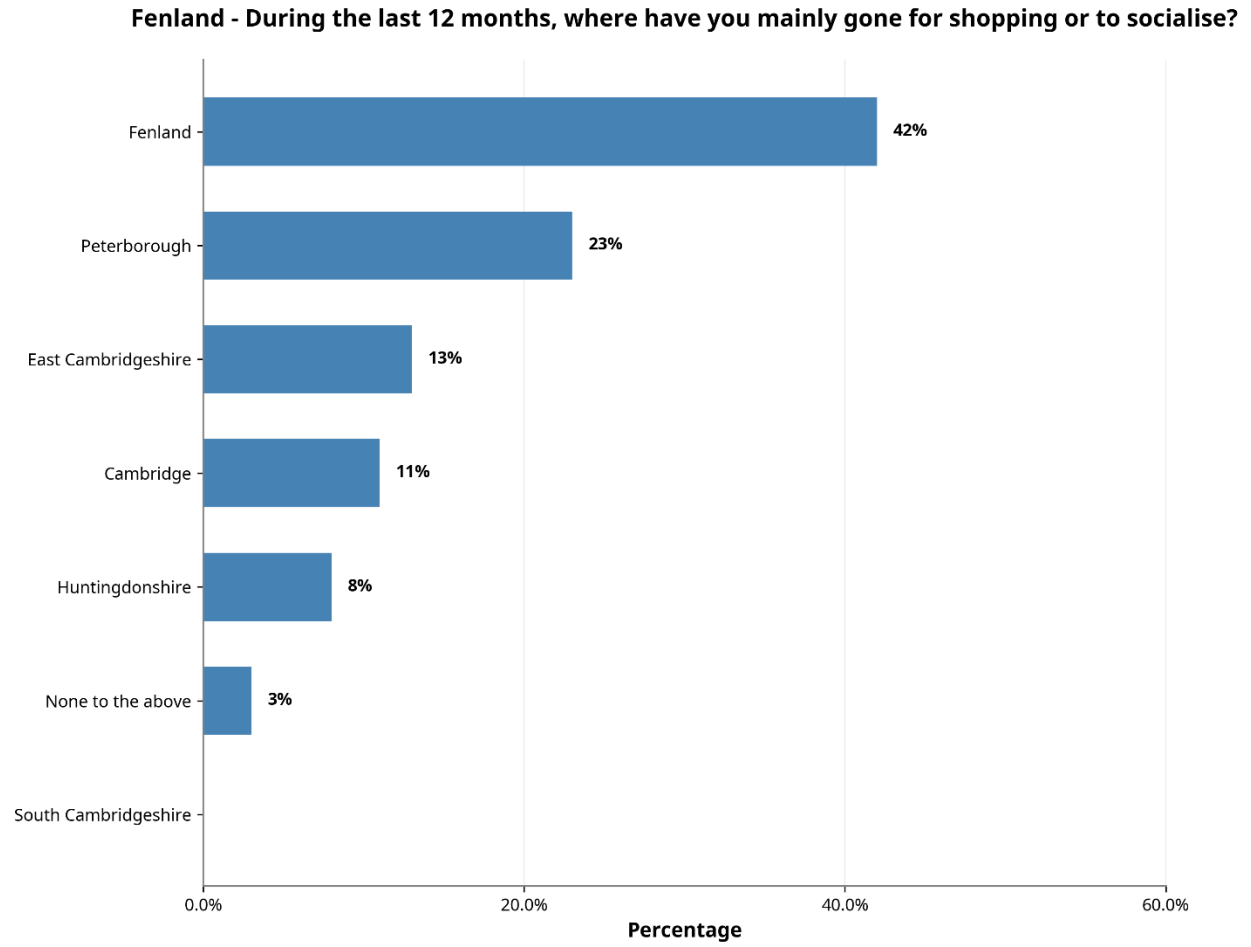
Huntingdonshire accounts for 8% of activity, whilst 3% indicate they shop and socialise primarily outside the listed areas, potentially in King's Lynn or Downham Market. South Cambridgeshire shows no recorded activity from Fenland residents, highlighting the minimal interaction between these geographically separated districts.

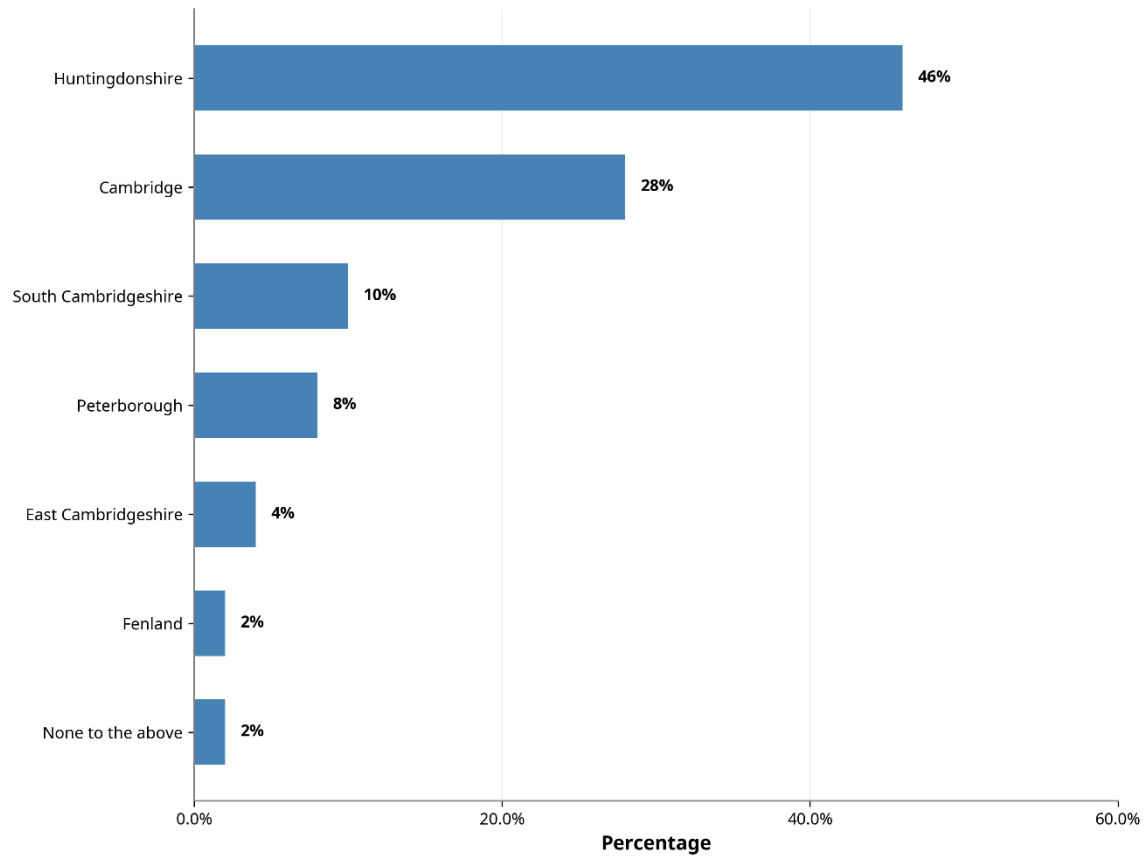
East Cambridgeshire exhibits the most pronounced external orientation of all districts, with an exact 50-50 split between internal and external activity. Half of residents remain within district, likely utilising Ely as the primary centre alongside smaller towns like Soham and Littleport. However, the other half of resident activity flows elsewhere, with Cambridge commanding 33%—the highest proportion of any district's residents travelling to Cambridge after Cambridge itself. This strong connection likely reflects both commuting patterns and the relative accessibility of Cambridge from much of East Cambridgeshire via the A10 and rail links which was supported in the focus groups. South Cambridgeshire attracts 6% of East Cambridgeshire residents, potentially those accessing retail parks or specific venues, whilst 4% indicate they primarily use areas outside those listed. Huntingdonshire draws 3%, and both Peterborough and Fenland register 2% each, indicating limited northward and westward orientation despite geographical proximity to Fenland.

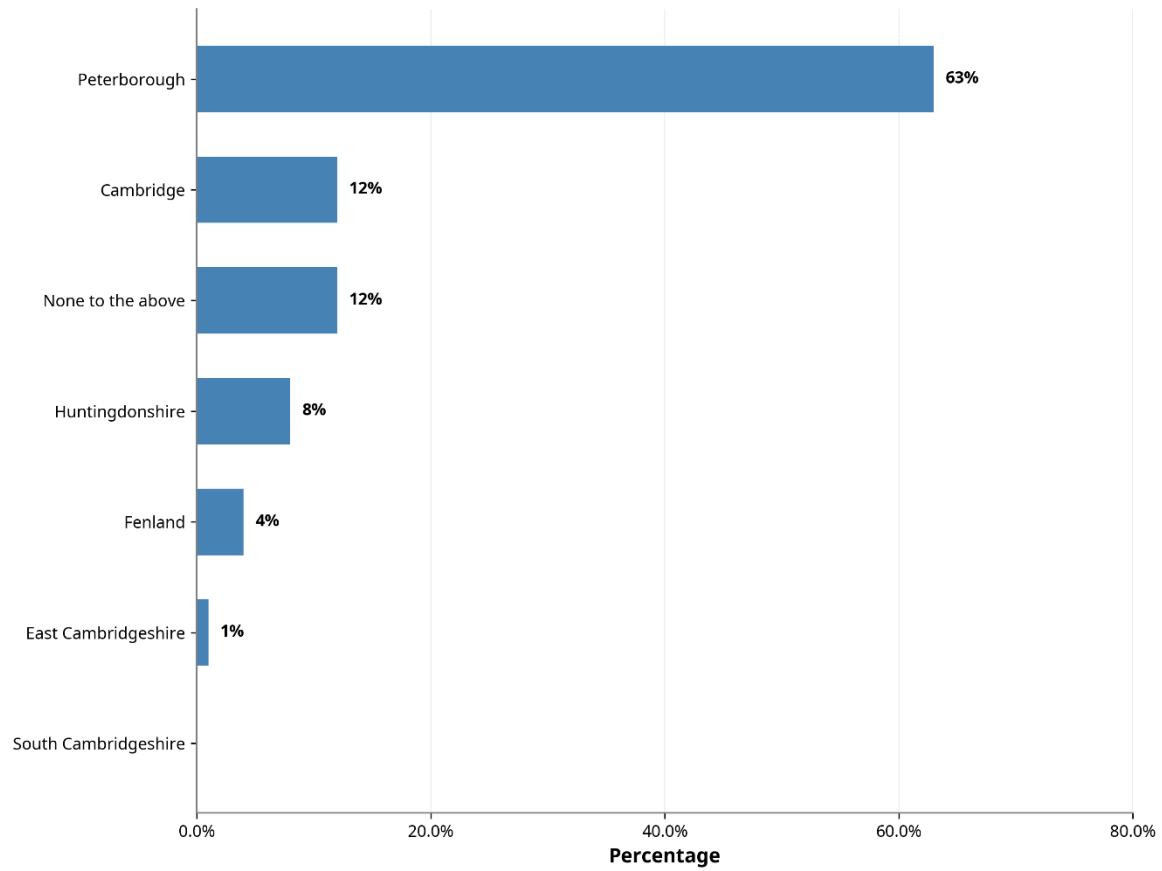
These detailed patterns reveal a region with two distinct urban poles—Cambridge dominating the southern and eastern districts whilst Peterborough serves the north—with varying degrees of self-sufficiency in the rural districts. The data indicate that administrative boundaries only partially reflect actual patterns of movement and economic activity, with some neighbouring districts showing surprisingly limited interaction whilst others demonstrate strong connections despite distance. The variation in "none of the above" responses, ranging from 1% in Cambridge to 12% in Peterborough, suggests differential orientation towards areas outside the study region, with Peterborough residents potentially maintaining stronger links to other regional centres whilst Cambridge residents find their needs met within the immediate area.

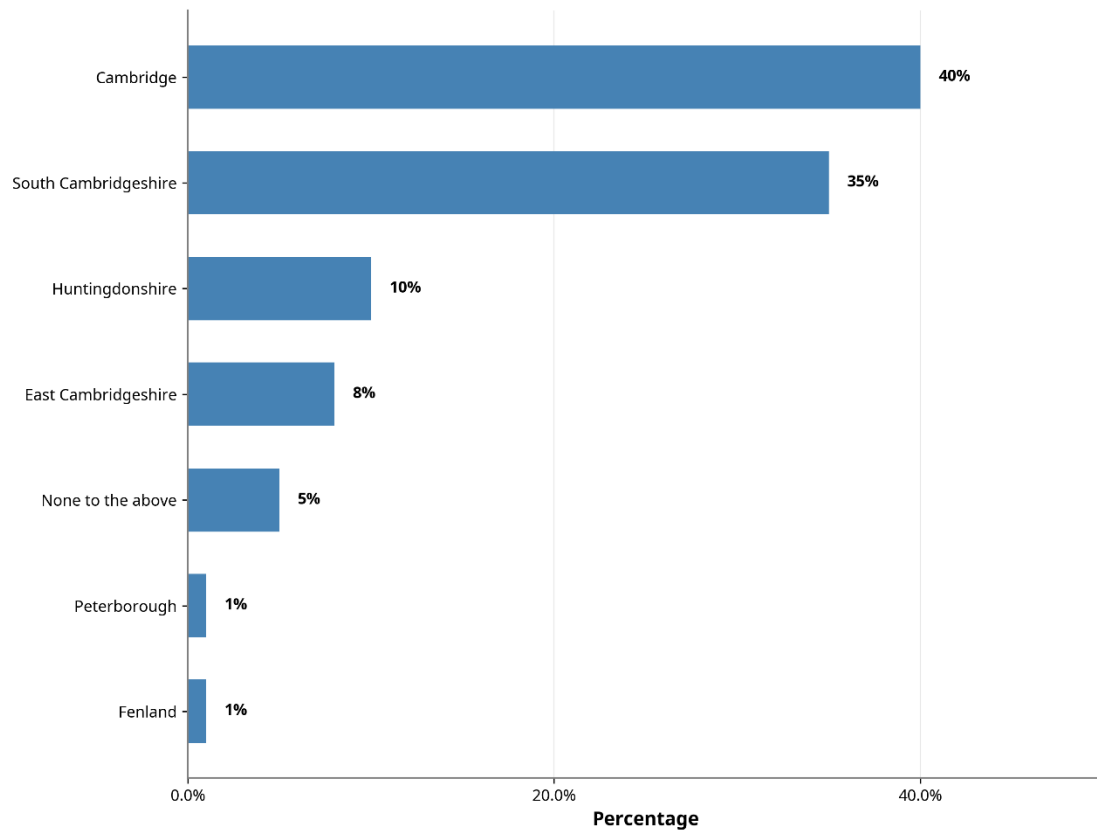
**Cambridge - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?**

**East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?**



**Huntingdonshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?**

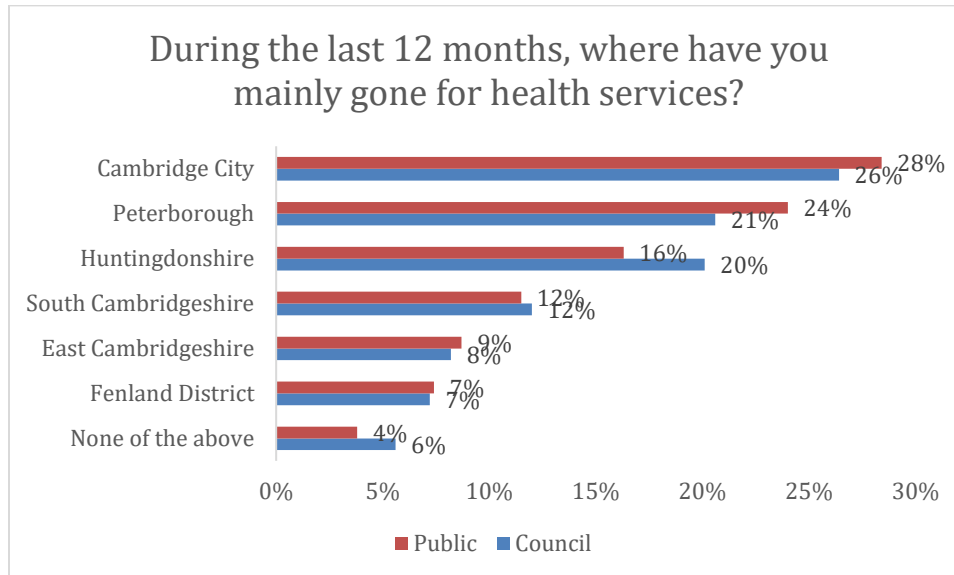
**Peterborough - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?**

**South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for shopping or to socialise?**



## Health services

Again, residents have mainly gone to health services in Cambridge, Peterborough or Huntingdonshire.



The analysis of health service utilisation patterns across the six districts reveals markedly different configurations from those observed in shopping and socialising behaviours, with far greater local containment and more pronounced disparities in cross-district healthcare flows. These data illuminates questions about healthcare accessibility, service provision, and the complex interplay between administrative boundaries and clinical commissioning arrangements. Cambridge demonstrates the highest level of healthcare self-sufficiency, with 88% of residents accessing health services within the city. This exceptional retention rate likely reflects the concentration of specialist services at Addenbrooke's Hospital and associated facilities, alongside comprehensive primary care provision. The remaining 12% of Cambridge residents' healthcare activity disperses thinly, with South Cambridgeshire accounting for 8%, East Cambridgeshire 2%, and Huntingdonshire 1%. No measurable healthcare flows occur to Peterborough or Fenland, whilst no respondents indicated accessing healthcare outside the listed areas, suggesting Cambridge's medical infrastructure comprehensively serves its population's needs.

Peterborough exhibits similarly high healthcare self-containment at 81%, anchored by Peterborough City Hospital and its network of primary care facilities. Cambridge attracts 15% of Peterborough residents for healthcare, substantially higher than the reverse flow and likely reflecting specialist service access at Addenbrooke's. Huntingdonshire accounts for 5% of Peterborough residents' healthcare activity, whilst South Cambridgeshire and Fenland each

draw 2%, and East Cambridgeshire 1%. The 6% selecting "none of the above" may access specialist services in Leicester, Northampton, or London.

Huntingdonshire shows moderate healthcare self-sufficiency at 64%, with Hinchbrook Hospital and local primary care serving the majority of needs. However, substantial healthcare flows occur to other districts, with Fenland attracting 16% of Huntingdonshire residents—a surprising finding given Fenland's limited acute hospital provision, potentially reflecting GP registration patterns or community service access. Peterborough draws 12% of Huntingdonshire residents, whilst Cambridge accounts for 10%, likely for specialist services. East Cambridgeshire attracts 4% of activity, with South Cambridgeshire at 2%. The 4% selecting "none of the above" may reflect healthcare access in Bedfordshire or further afield.

East Cambridgeshire demonstrates moderate local provision at 58%, with Princess of Wales Hospital in Ely serving as the primary acute facility alongside local GP practices. Cambridge commands 34% of East Cambridgeshire residents' healthcare activity—the highest external healthcare dependency observed in any district—reflecting both geographical proximity and the pull of specialist services. South Cambridgeshire accounts for 3% of healthcare activity, matching the proportion accessing services outside the listed areas. Notably, no East Cambridgeshire residents report accessing healthcare in Peterborough, Huntingdonshire, or Fenland, suggesting a strong southward orientation in healthcare pathways despite proximity to Fenland.

Fenland exhibits moderate local healthcare retention at 53%, served primarily by the North Cambridgeshire Hospital in Wisbech alongside primary care facilities in market towns. Peterborough emerges as the major external healthcare destination at 24%, reflecting both proximity and established patient pathways, particularly from March and Whittlesey. Huntingdonshire attracts 11% of Fenland residents, whilst Cambridge draws 7%—relatively low given Cambridge's regional specialist role, suggesting distance and transport barriers may limit access. East Cambridgeshire accounts for 3% of activity, matching the proportion accessing services outside the listed areas. South Cambridgeshire shows no measurable healthcare flows from Fenland, highlighting the minimal interaction between these geographically separated districts.

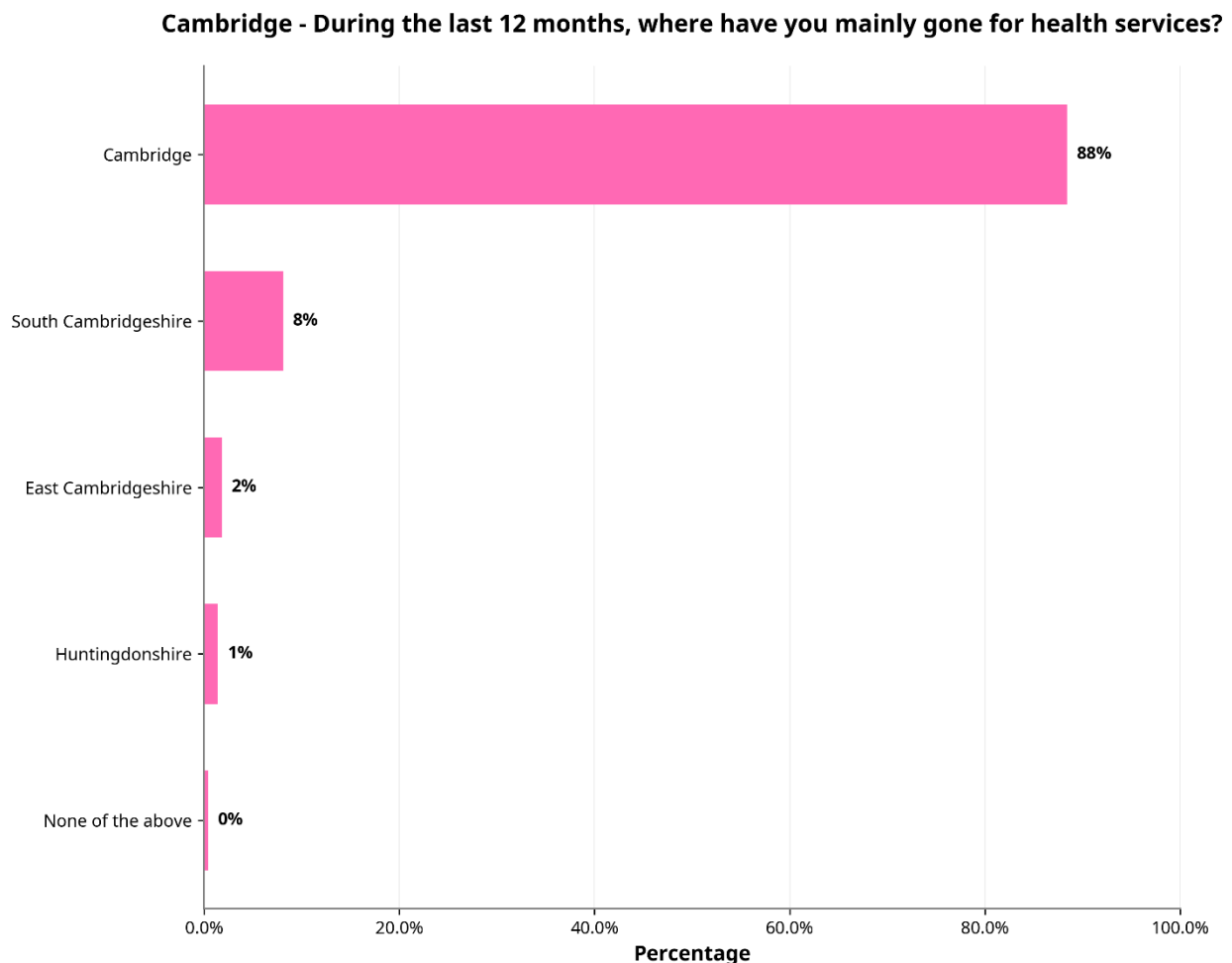
South Cambridgeshire presents the most dispersed healthcare pattern, with only 50% of residents accessing services within district—the lowest retention rate observed. Cambridge dominates external healthcare flows, attracting 37% of South Cambridgeshire residents, reflecting both proximity and the location of acute and specialist services. Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire each draw 4% of residents, whilst the 4% selecting "none of the above" may access services in Hertfordshire or Bedfordshire. Notably, neither Peterborough nor Fenland registers measurable healthcare flows from South Cambridgeshire, reinforcing the district's strong orientation towards Cambridge.

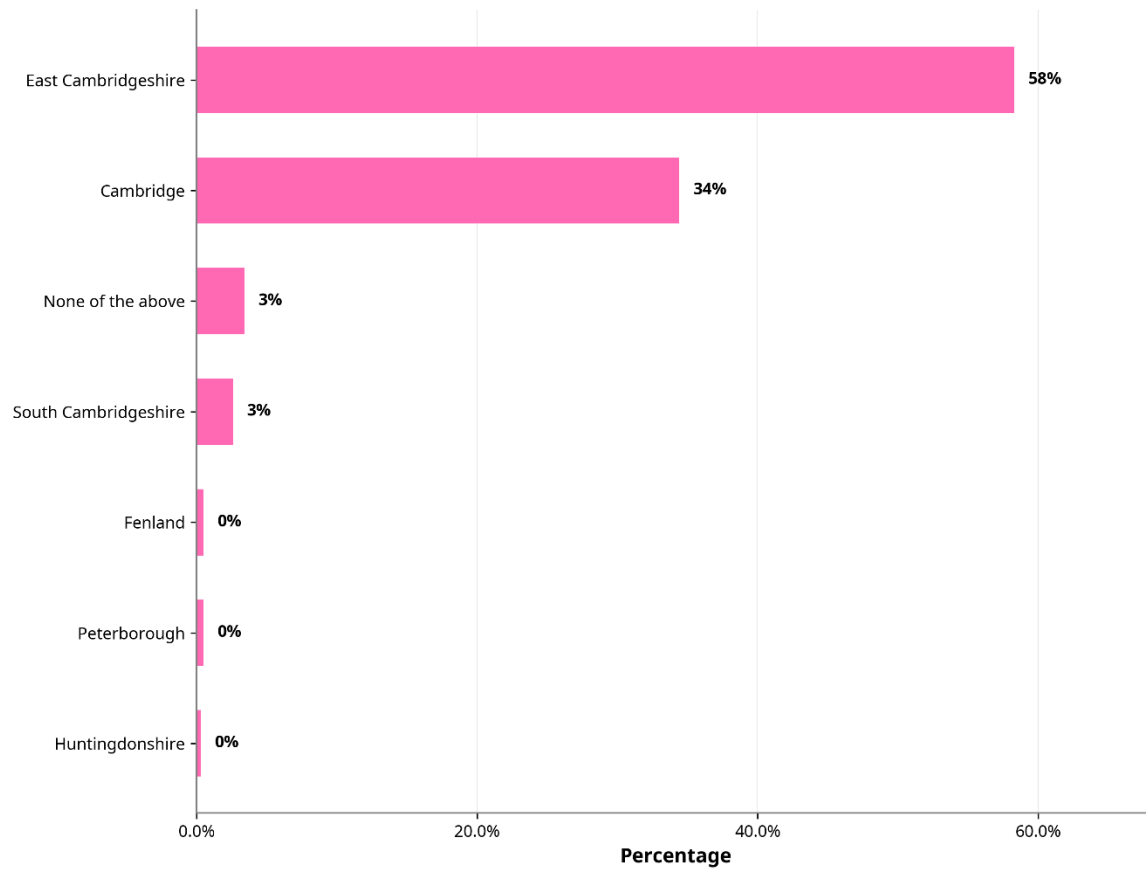
Comparing healthcare patterns with shopping and socialising behaviours reveals fundamental differences in how residents navigate their region. Healthcare shows consistently higher local

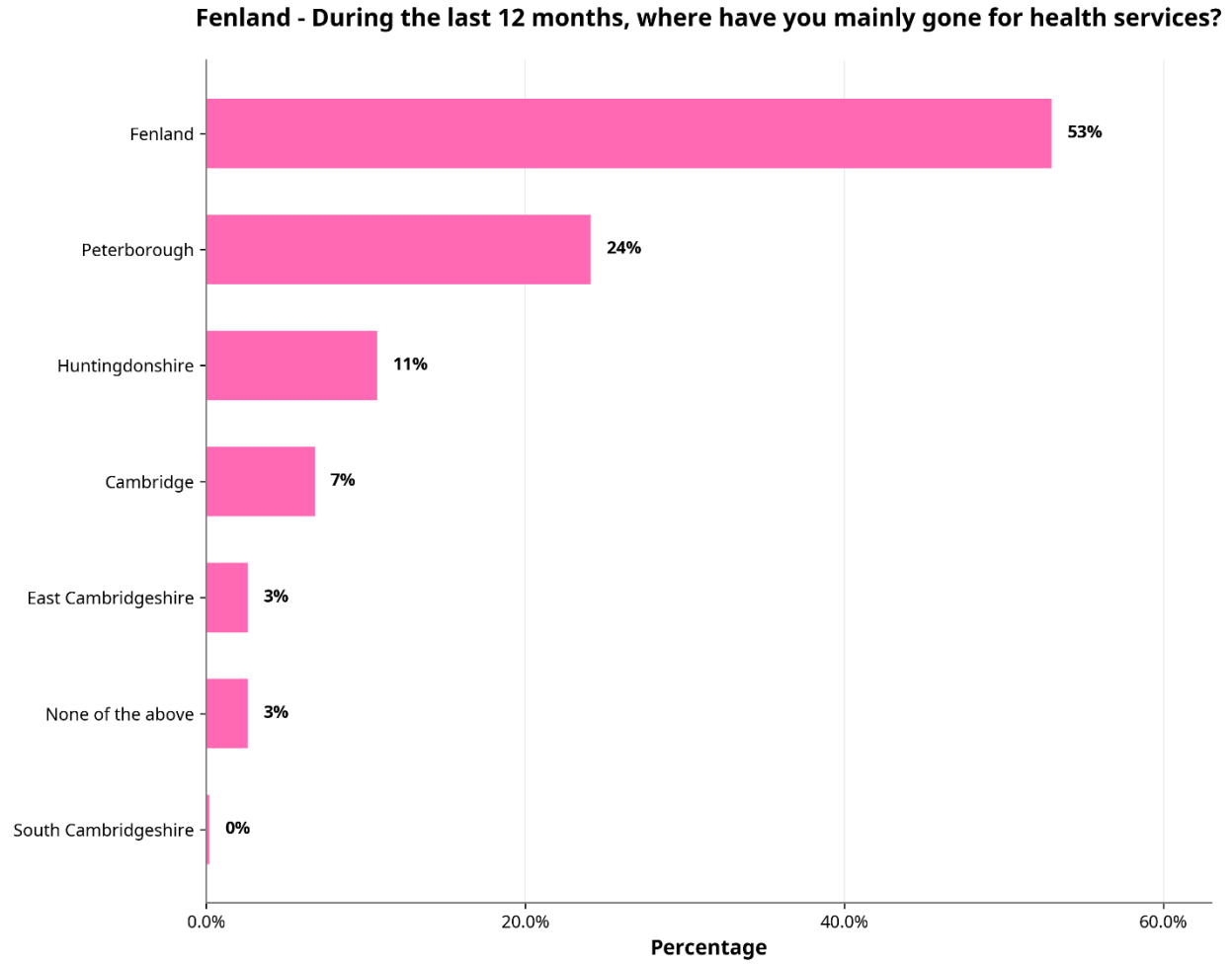
retention rates than shopping across most districts, reflecting the distribution of GP practices and the principle of local provision. However, the pull of specialist centres creates distinct healthcare geographies, with Cambridge commanding substantial healthcare flows from surrounding districts whilst Peterborough serves a more geographically constrained catchment. The absence of reciprocal flows in many cases—such as Cambridge residents rarely accessing healthcare elsewhere—highlights the hierarchical nature of healthcare provision.

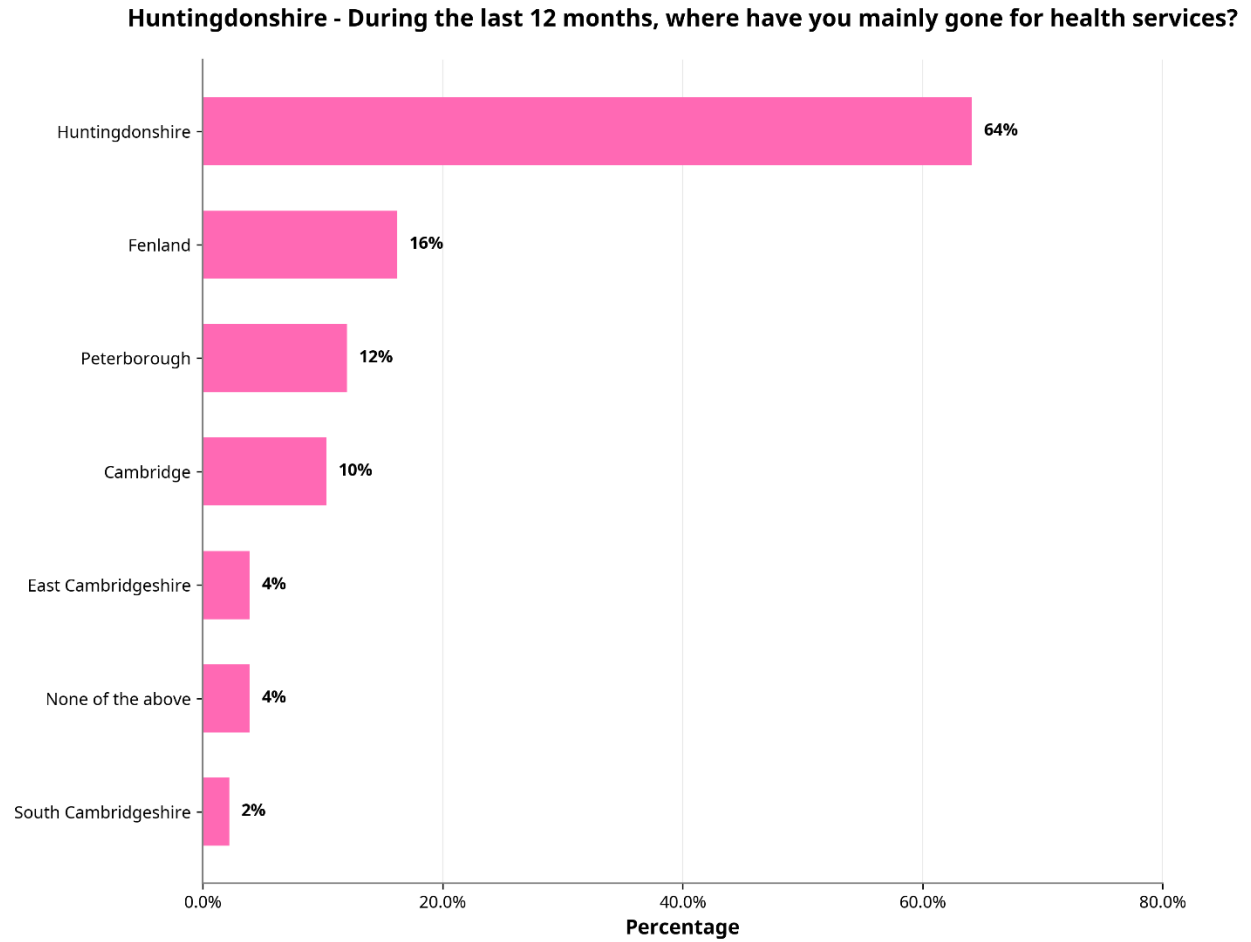
The data suggests that administrative boundaries poorly reflect actual healthcare geographies, with some districts showing stronger healthcare connections to neighbouring areas than internal cohesion. Any reconfiguration of local government must carefully consider these established healthcare pathways and the implications for clinical commissioning, ambulance services, and integrated health and social care provision.

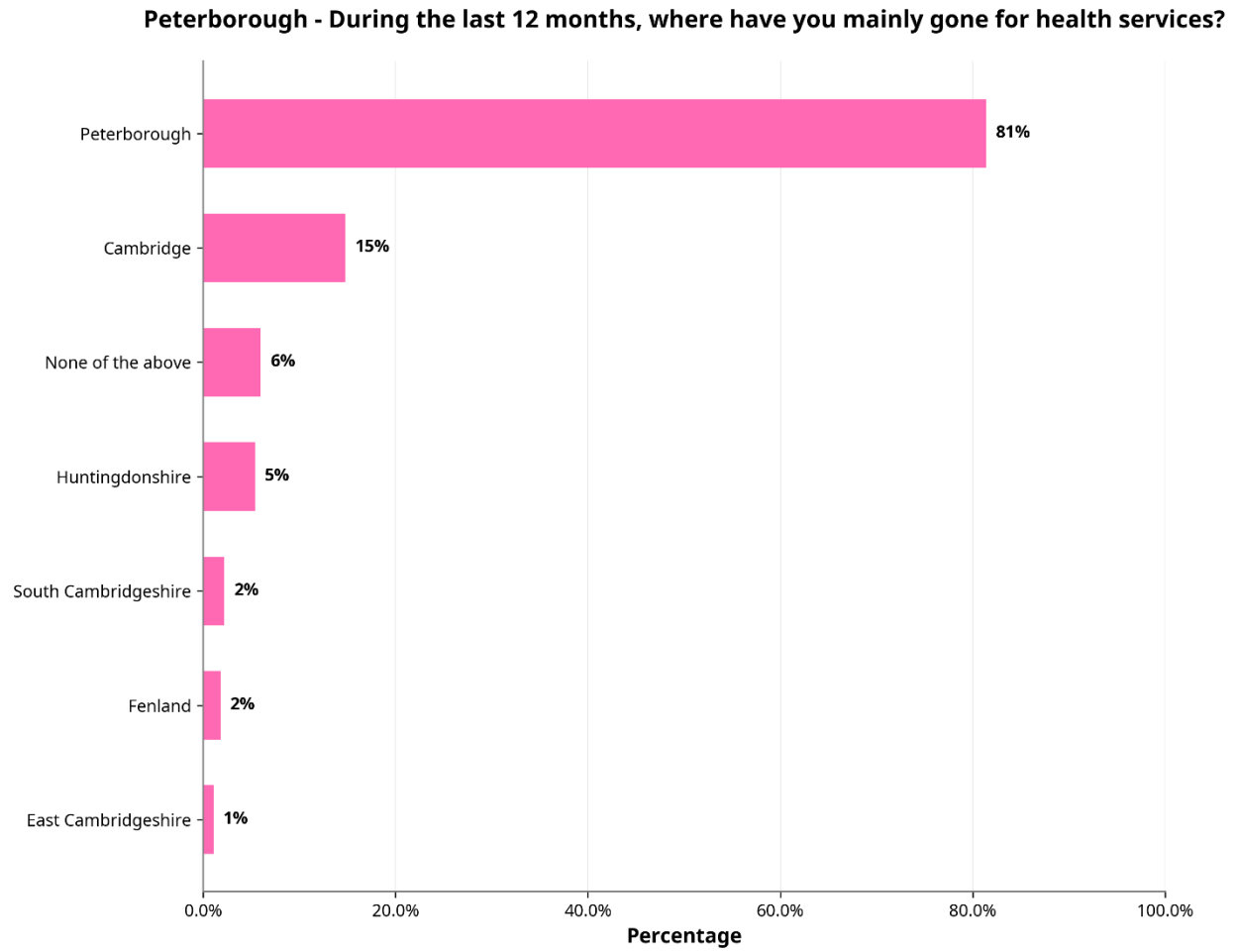
Here are the charts for each district which show where people travel for health services.

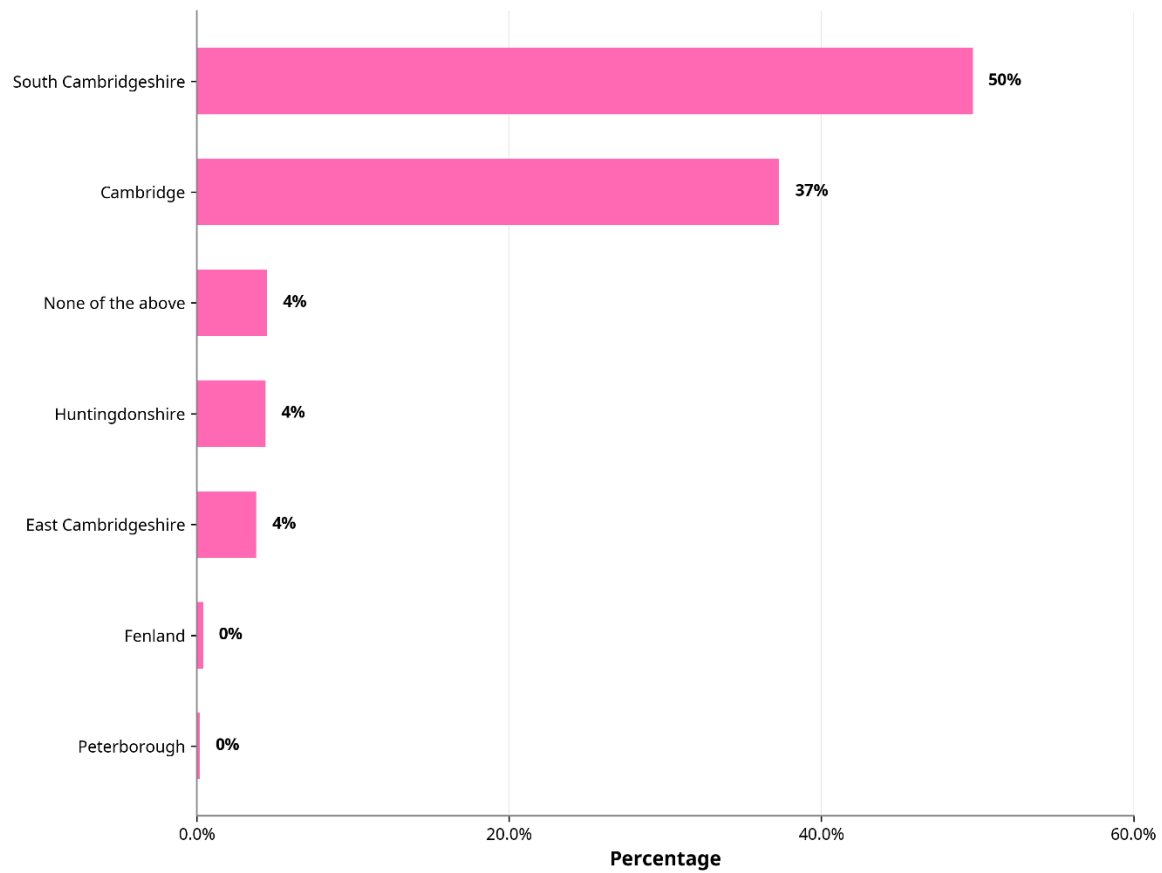


**East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for health services?**





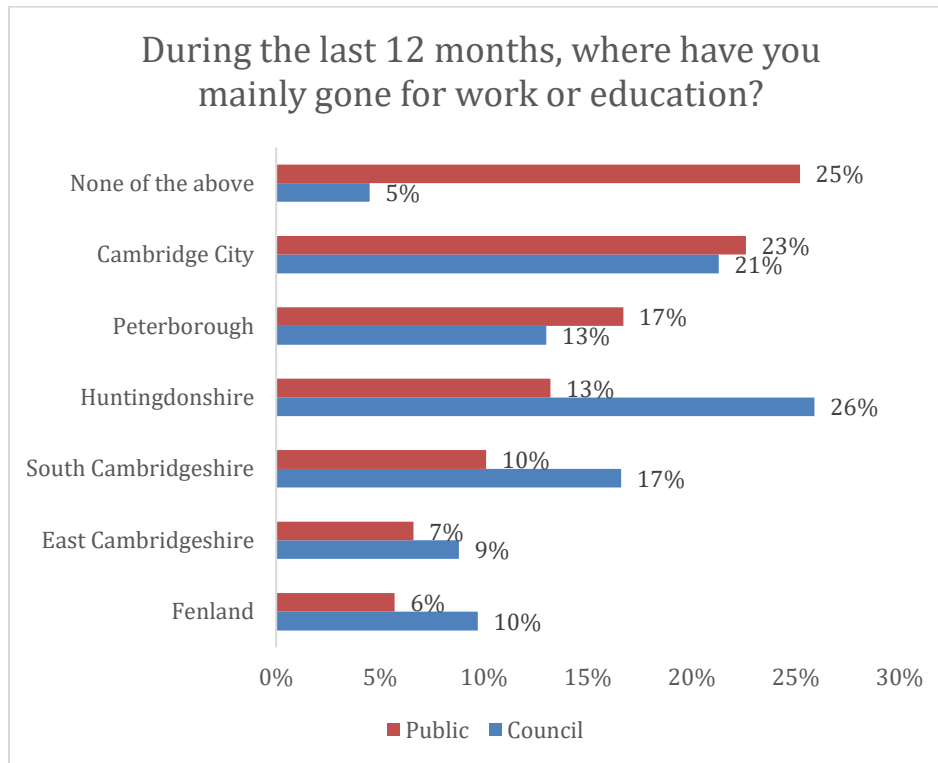


**South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for health services?**



## Work or education

Many residents do not work in any of the districts and then it is a similar pattern with Cambridge, Peterborough then Huntingdonshire.



Cambridge demonstrates the highest work/education retention at 64%, yet this figure falls substantially below its shopping (71%) and healthcare (88%) self-containment, suggesting that even Cambridge's diverse economy cannot fully employ its resident workforce. The remaining 36% of Cambridge residents commute elsewhere, with South Cambridgeshire attracting 9%, Huntingdonshire 4%, East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough each 2%, and Fenland 1%. Notably, 18% work or study outside the region entirely, indicating significant connections to London, regional universities, or remote working arrangements.

Peterborough shows moderate employment self-sufficiency at 52%, considerably lower than its shopping (63%) or healthcare (81%) retention, highlighting the distinction between service consumption and employment provision. Huntingdonshire attracts 12% of Peterborough's workers—the highest cross-district employment flow from Peterborough—whilst Cambridge draws just 4%. Remarkably, 28% of Peterborough residents work or study outside the region, the highest proportion observed, suggesting limited local employment opportunities relative to the working-age population and potentially significant commuting to Leicester, Northampton, or remote working arrangements.

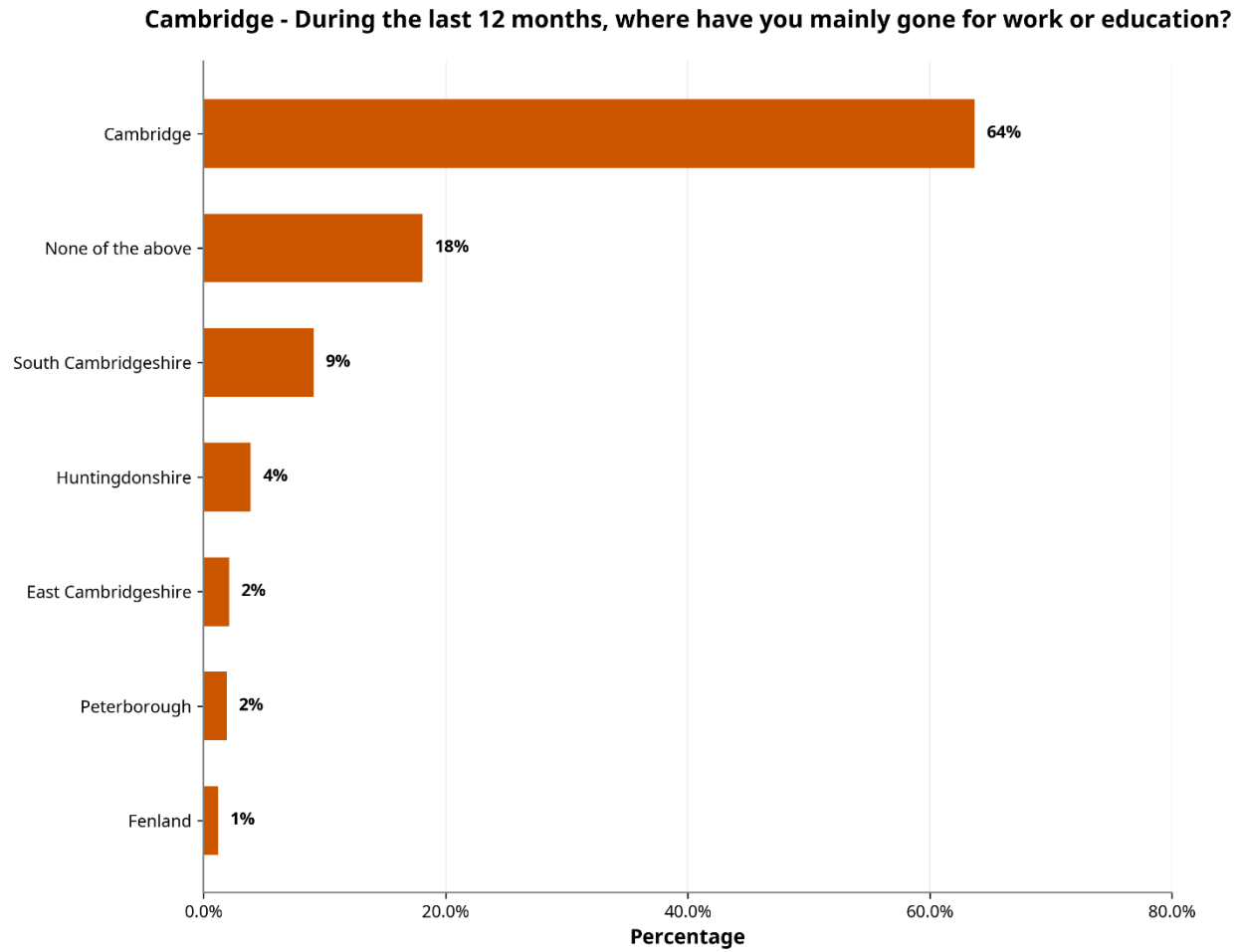
East Cambridgeshire exhibits the lowest employment self-containment at just 39%, with Cambridge attracting 24% of residents for work or education—demonstrating the district's role as a dormitory area for the Cambridge economy. South Cambridgeshire draws 8% of East Cambridgeshire's workers, whilst 23% work outside the region. This pattern, combined with minimal flows to other districts (Huntingdonshire 3%, Fenland 3%, Peterborough 1%), reveals a district whose residents predominantly look south for employment rather than to neighbouring rural areas.

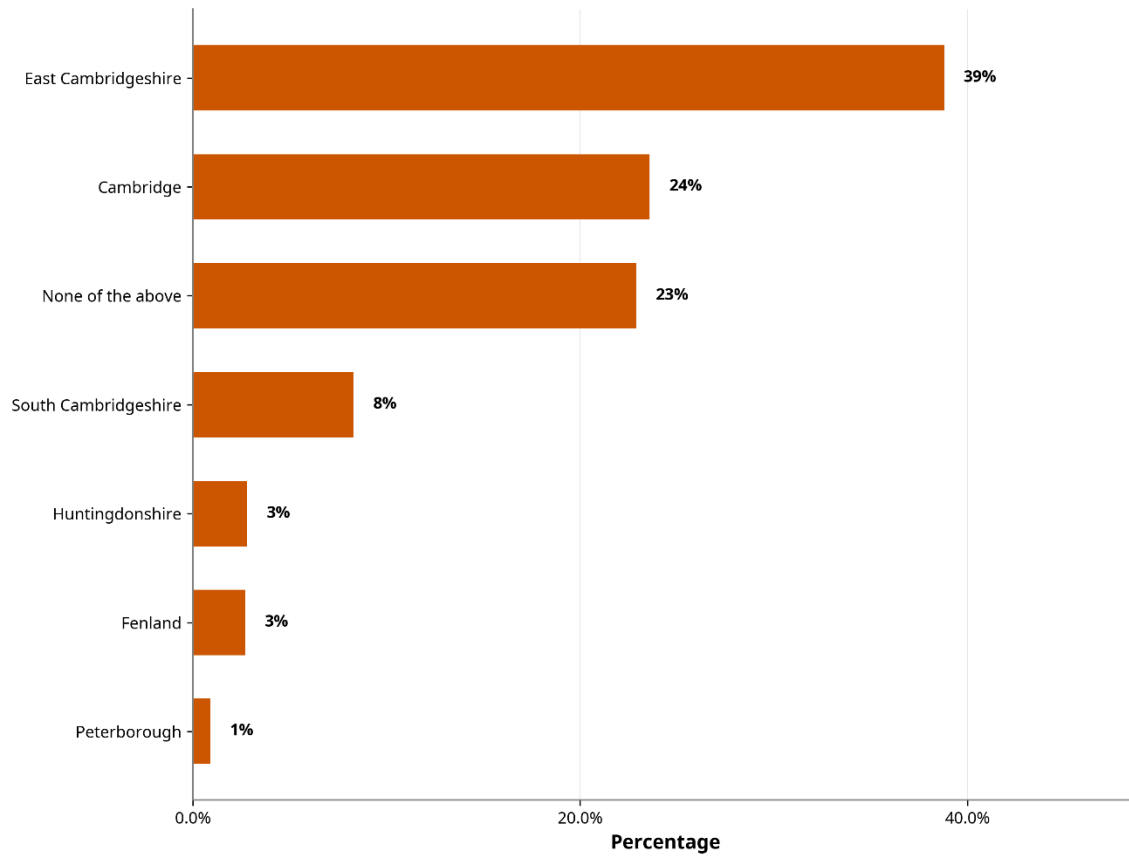
Huntingdonshire shows similarly low local employment at 38%, with residents dispersed across multiple employment centres. Cambridge attracts 13% of Huntingdonshire's workers, Peterborough 7%, and South Cambridgeshire 4%. The substantial 32% working outside the region likely reflects commuting to London, Bedford, or Northampton, highlighting Huntingdonshire's position at the intersection of multiple economic regions. East Cambridgeshire and Fenland each draw just 3% and 2% respectively, indicating limited cross-rural employment flows.

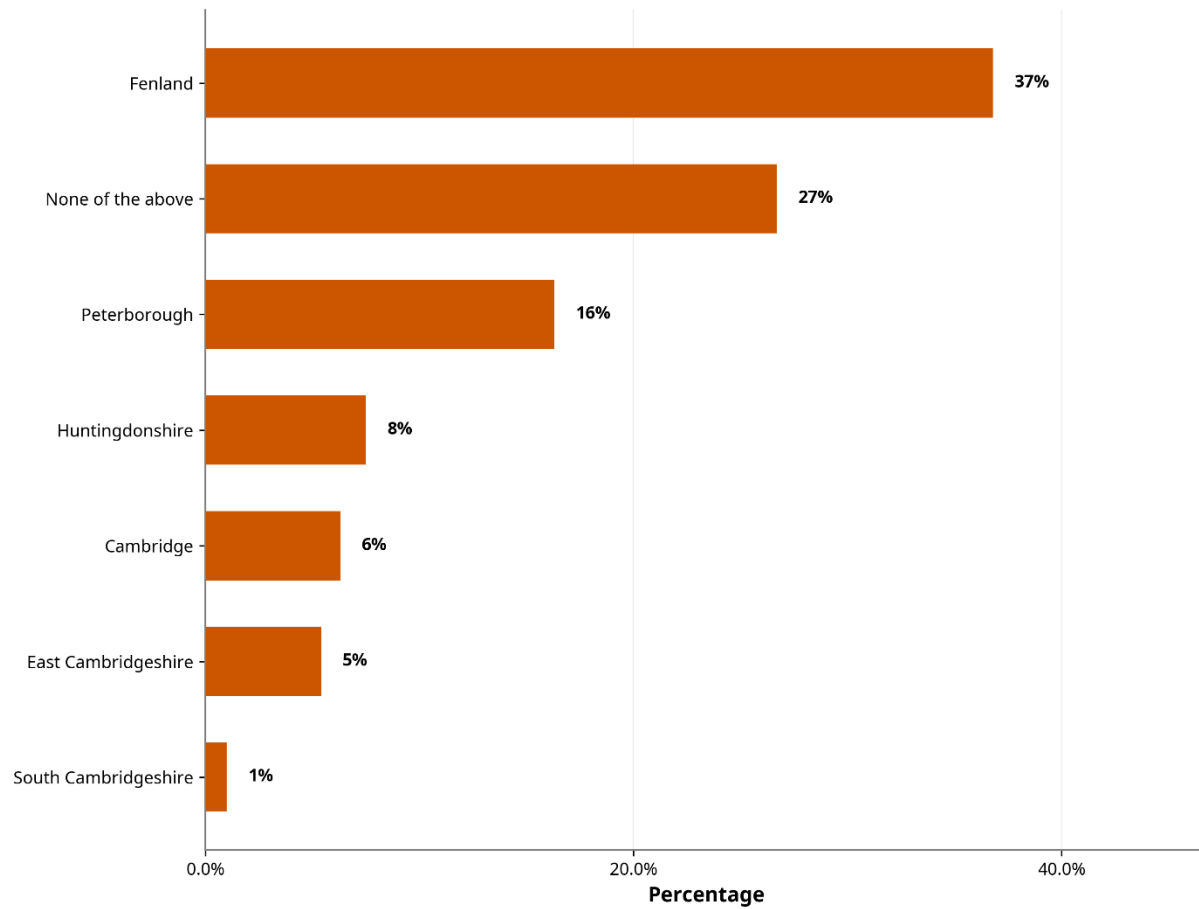
Fenland demonstrates marginally better employment self-containment at 37%, though this remains low by any measure. Peterborough serves as the primary external employment centre at 16%, reflecting established commuting patterns from March and Whittlesey. Huntingdonshire attracts 8% of Fenland's workers, whilst Cambridge draws just 6%, suggesting distance and transport barriers limit access to Cambridge employment. East Cambridgeshire attracts 5% of workers, with 27% working outside the region, potentially in King's Lynn, Wisbech's food processing extending into Lincolnshire, or agricultural employment crossing county boundaries.

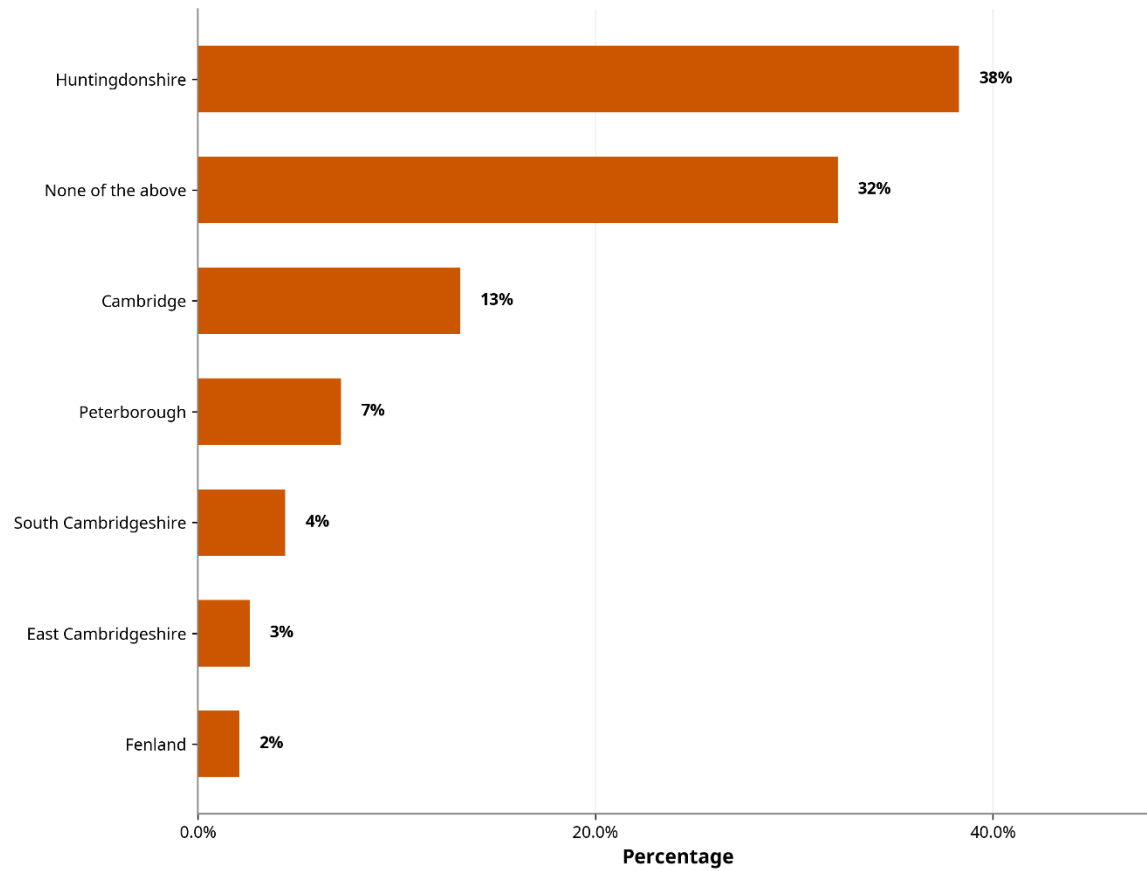
South Cambridgeshire presents the most dramatic employment dispersal, with only 34% working within district—the lowest recorded across all districts. Cambridge dominates external flows, attracting 31% of South Cambridgeshire's workers, confirming the district's role as Cambridge's primary dormitory area. Huntingdonshire draws 6%, East Cambridgeshire 3%, whilst Peterborough and Fenland each attract just 1%. The substantial 24% working outside the region likely includes London commuters, particularly from the southern settlements along the rail corridors, alongside remote workers and those accessing employment in Hertfordshire or Essex.

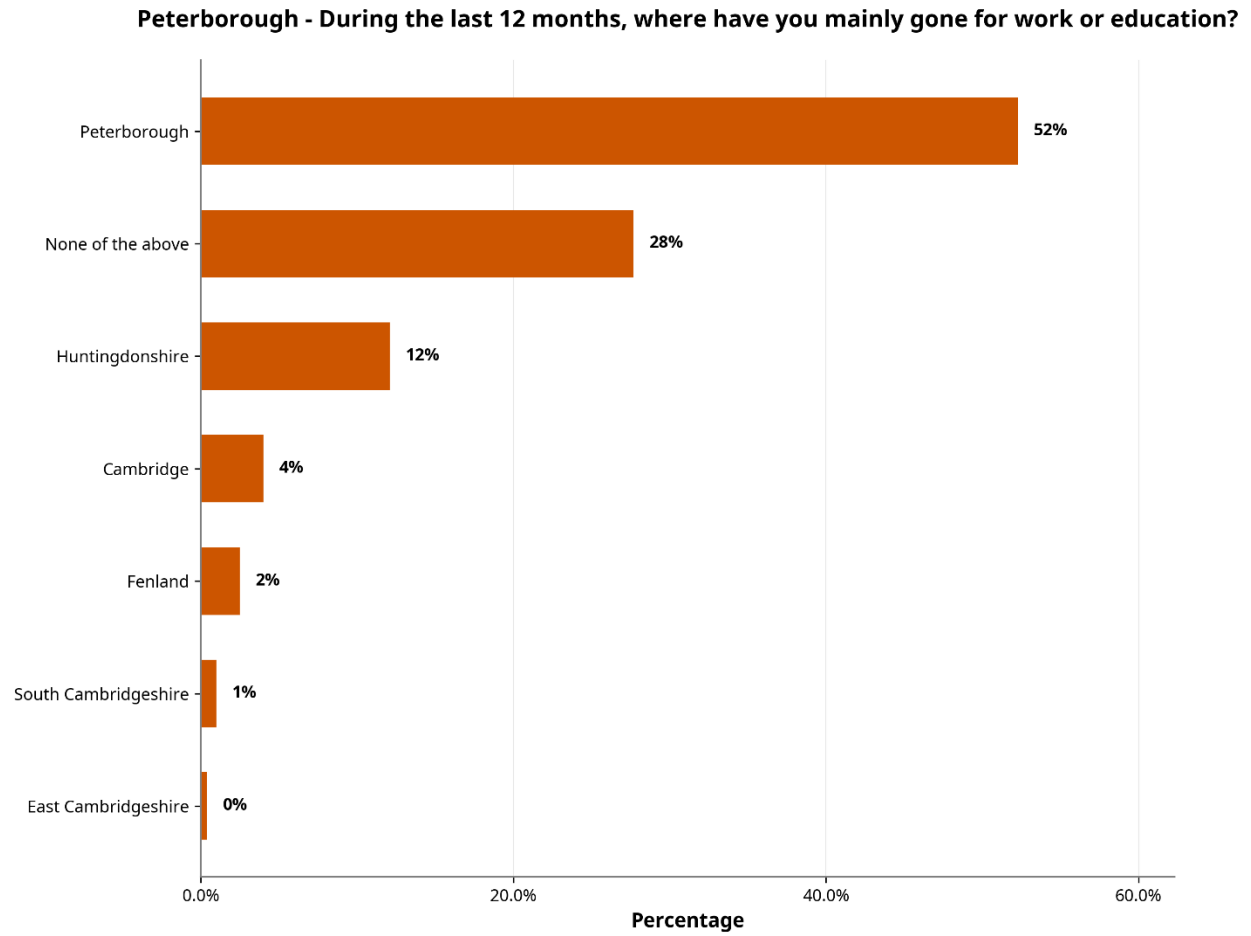
Comparing across all activity types reveals fundamental patterns in the region's functional geography. Work and education show the lowest local retention rates across all districts, averaging below 45% compared to over 60% for shopping and healthcare. Cambridge emerges as a key employment centre, whilst Peterborough's employment draw remains largely confined to its immediate hinterland. The rural districts function primarily as dormitory areas, with their residents travelling substantial distances for work whilst accessing services more locally. These patterns reveal a region where administrative boundaries bear little relationship to economic realities, where daily commuting flows create complex webs of interdependence. Here are the travel to work charts by district.

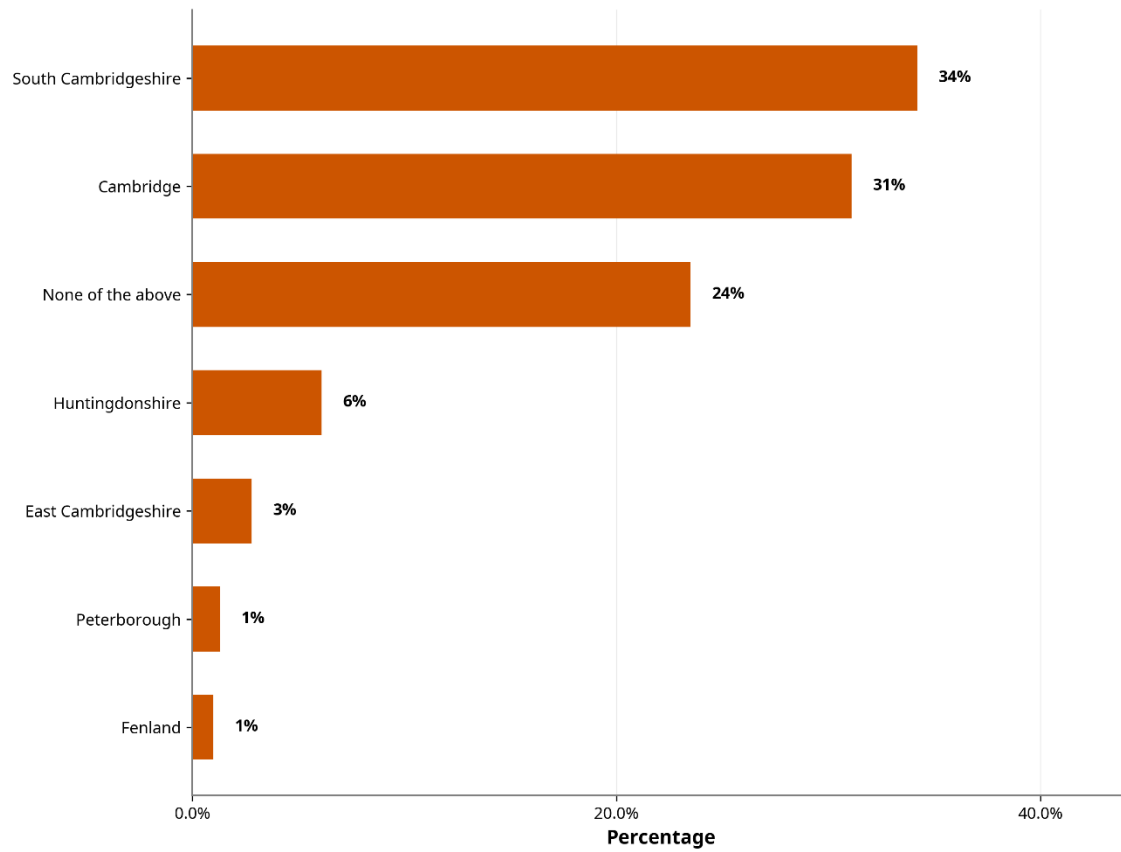


**East Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?**

**Fenland - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?**

**Huntingdonshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?**



**South Cambridgeshire - During the last 12 months, where have you mainly gone for work or education?**



## Sample profile

Below is presented the actual sample responses and the weighted sample responses. The demographic questions were optional and the count is for the unweighted totals.

Demographic Description	Count	Unweighted (%)	Weighted (%)
Gender	2358		
Male		45	47
Female		50	48
Prefer not to say		1	1
Identify gender if another way		4	4
Age	2318		
18-24		1	4
25-34		8	24
35-44		17	15
45-54		20	18
55-64		22	14
65-74		20	13
75-84		7	8
85+		1	1
Prefer not to say		4	4
Ethnicity	2310		
Asian or Asian British		1	2
Black or Black British		1	1
Chinese		0	0
Mixed/multiple ethnicities		2	2
White British or Any Other White background		94	93
Other		1	1
Prefer not to say		1	1
Disability or long-term illness	2325		
Yes		29	30
No		65	64
Prefer not to say		6	7
Location	2407		
Cambridge City		10	16
East Cambridgeshire		24	10
Fenland		12	11
Huntingdonshire		25	18
Peterborough		15	26
South Cambridgeshire		15	18
Not given		1	1

