

# Living in Lancashire Wave 24



**Research Title:** Living in Lancashire Wave 24

## **Objectives:**

This wave of the Living in Lancashire panel focuses on:

- what effect, if any, the economic downturn is having on Lancashire residents;
- looked into their priorities and level of confidence for the future;
- perceptions of personal and vehicle safety;
- perceptions of crime; and
- priorities for the criminal justice system.

**Methodology:** mailed to all panel members (3,097 residents), with a response rate of 83% (2,560 questionnaires were returned)

**Conducted by:** Corporate Research and Intelligence team, Lancashire County Council

**Fieldwork:** 25/02/09 to 23/04/09

## **Summary Results**

### **Lancashire's economy**

#### *Local and national priorities*

- There are wide differences in local and national priorities. The **economy** is seen as the most important issue nationally by far (70%), but only about a third as many people see it as a key local issue (26%).
- The most important local issue is **crime and law and order** (44%), but the economic issue of **unemployment** is the second most important local issue (32%).
- **Activities for teenagers** (48%) and **road and pavement repairs** (45%) are seen as the most important things for improvement locally, though the third highest priority is for **job prospects** (43%), which is ahead of the **level of crime** (40%) and **clean streets** (37%). Job prospects are more likely to be mentioned as a priority by those in the youngest age group 16 to 24 years (62%) and those from socio-economic groups DE (48%).

#### *The state of the economy*

- Almost three in five Lancashire residents say that they and their family are worse off compared to last year (59%), with one person in five feeling much worse off (20%). Only one person in ten considers themselves better off (10%).
- Panel members are quite pessimistic about the economy over the next 12 months, with most thinking the economy will get worse locally (68%), across Lancashire (74%) and especially in the country as a whole (84%). People in east Lancashire are more likely to think things will get worse locally than those in the west of the county (71% and 66% respectively).

- The current economic downturn is expected to last beyond December 2010 by two people in five (40%), or about half of panel members giving an answer. This suggests a recovery expected at least two years from the date of fieldwork.
- Three-quarters of people are concerned about someone they know being made redundant or unemployed in the next 12 months (74%, or 84% excluding don't know answers). Seven in ten residents are concerned about their current financial situation (70%), with a quarter very concerned (23%).
- Amongst panel members who are currently employed, more than one person in three is concerned about being made redundant or unemployed in the next 12 months (36% very or fairly concerned). Full-time and part-time workers are equally likely to be concerned. Employees from the more deprived C2 and DE socio-economic groups are more likely to be concerned than those from groups AB and C1.
- A quarter of panel members agreed that financial worries were having a negative effect on their relationships (25%). Younger respondents were more likely to agree with this.

### *Changes in spending*

- Panel members answer that they have recently reduced their spending in a wide variety of areas, particularly luxury items (65%), eating out or takeaways (54%) and going out (42%). One person in three answers that they have recently reduced spending on the essentials of household food (35%) and gas, electricity or heating (32%)<sup>1</sup>. Reductions in spending on heating come despite the winter of 2008/9 being the coldest in more than ten years.
- In the next 12 months panel members are most likely to say they expect to reduce spending on Christmas or birthday presents (33%), holidays abroad (32%) and gas, electricity or heating (31%).
- From the same list, the main areas where people had spent more money than last year were on gas, electricity and heating (42%), household food (29%) and travel and transport (20%). This could possibly be because of higher prices or spending money differently for example (eg meals taken at home rather than meals out).

### *Conclusions*

Perceptions of the economy appear to be changing as quickly as the economy itself, with job prospects being named as a much higher local priority on this survey than on a similar survey only five months previously. While the economy is seen as the most important priority nationally, this is likely to have greatly increased in priority in the last 12 months as seen elsewhere, reflecting the current economic downturn.

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<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note that the question did not ask for previous usage of each item. While each household will buy food and gas or electricity, not every household will have previously spent on every item on the list, eg going for a holiday abroad.

There is an expectation that the economy will get worse, and therefore communications to the public may need to reflect this. This could be by providing reassurance or details of what the county council is doing to support businesses and members of the public during the recession, (eg prompt payments and welfare rights information).

The finding that employees from the lower socio-economic groupings are the most worried about becoming made redundant is important to note. If these concerns are warranted and unemployment is more common in these groups, then this will widen the gaps with higher groups that already exist both financially and in other areas of deprivation, and also potentially in other areas such as mental wellbeing. This will need to be monitored to allow action by the relevant agencies and policy areas. Also previous panel research has shown a strong link between levels of financial difficulty and anxiety or depression, whatever the socio-economic group.

It also appears clear that a wide swathe of the Lancashire public is already feeling the force of the economic downturn, (reduced spending on heating during a cold winter being a dramatic sign of this). Reduced spending and the expectation of reduced spending are likely to have an impact on local businesses throughout the county, particularly local shops (especially luxury shops and clothing retailers), restaurants and takeaways. This will need to be considered by the council and its partners in their actions to respond to the downturn.

## **Community safety**

### *Perceptions of safety*

- About nine in ten panel members feel safe when at home during the day and after dark, though there are significant falls in the proportions feeling very safe, compared with the same question in 2006. While only a minority feel safe when in their nearest town centre after dark (29%), the proportion feeling very unsafe has fallen significantly compared with 2006 (33% falling to 25%).
- When asked about any feelings of harassment or intimidation, panel members are most likely to be concerned about harassment or intimidation due to their age, (7% very or fairly worried with 21% slightly worried). The overall proportions concerned about being harassed due to each factor have stayed almost exactly the same compared with the same questions asked in 2004.
- A third of respondents from a black or ethnic minority background answered that they were very worried about being harassed or intimidated because of their ethnic origin (35%), while a quarter of BME respondents were very worried due to their skin colour (26%) and religion (24%).
- One in six people consider that burglary is a very or fairly big problem in their local area (17%, and 20% excluding don't know answers). Only eight per cent consider street robbery or mugging to be a problem in their neighbourhood, (similar to that found on the same question asked in 2004). Panel members from east Lancashire are more likely to say that burglary is a problem than those from the west of the county (24% and 17% respectively).

### *Vehicle and transport safety*

- Damage to vehicles and theft from vehicles are seen as the biggest vehicle crime problems (18% and 14% answering these are very or fairly big problems respectively). Joy-riding and vehicle theft are considered very or fairly big problems by one in eight and one in ten people respectively.
- Demographically, panel members living in council or housing association accommodation are about twice as likely as owner occupiers to say that damage to vehicles, (36% and 18%) and theft from vehicles, (25% and 13%), are a very or fairly big problem.
- Anti-social behaviour is the biggest cause of people feeling unsafe on public transport, with almost half of all respondents answering that it makes them a great deal or quite a lot unsafe (45%).

### *Criminal Justice*

- The most common first priorities for the criminal justice system as a whole are bringing people who commit crimes to justice followed by reducing crime. The most frequently named second priorities are meeting the needs of victims of crime, followed by respecting the rights of people accused of crimes and treating them fairly.
- The most important priorities panel members have to improve their confidence in the criminal justice system are for tougher sentences, tackling anti-social behaviour and bringing more offenders to justice.
- Most panel members are not confident that the sentencing of offenders was appropriate, (83% answering not very or not at all appropriate).
- One respondent in three answered that they had heard of their district community safety partnership (33%) and only about one person in seven felt informed about it (13%).
- While most panel members think that crime levels nationally have increased (63% answer that crime has increased a little or a lot), most panel members think that locally crime levels are about the same (60%), though three in ten think it has increased (29%).
- The most important crime and anti-social behaviour priorities for panel members' local areas are seen to be reducing anti-social behaviour (43%), reducing drug taking and dealing (27%) followed by improving road safety and reducing theft and burglaries (both 18%).

## *Conclusions*

Three in ten panel members think that crime has increased locally in the last two years, three times as many as think it has fallen. This matches the findings of the recent Place survey 2008 which was taken across the county. Both these sources of perceptions compares with the number of recorded crimes actually falling by 15%<sup>2</sup> between 2006/7 and 2008/9 across Lancashire. Also by comparing the Place survey results with the BVPI surveys, the perception of anti-social behaviour has decreased significantly in all areas of the council, and in most districts has fallen significantly compared with 2003. There are likely to be many reasons for these discrepancies between actual figures and perceptions, (eg media coverage, the types of crimes that have reduced – are the crimes that have fallen less 'newsworthy' crimes?)

It may well be worth considering how the perceptions relate to actual crime figures at smaller areas, (eg district or below). Where perceptions are worse than the recorded figures, it may be worth highlighting this, and where actual figures match figures, communicating what is being done to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

When considering communications is important to consider what methods would be best to communicate with an increasingly time-pressured population. Ipsos-MORI, on their recent event for their Place survey analysis highlighted a London Borough, which had the highest increase in council satisfaction compared with the BVPI 2006 survey, at a time when most councils recorded a fall. One of the key drivers of this was considered to be this council's direct communication style, which used advertisements on buses and in tube stations highlighting council tax reductions, as well as signs on lampposts that said the council had provided more police/community safety wardens in the local area. It may be that this direct style could be the most effective way of reducing concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour. It is likely that any communications should highlight what is being done to tackle the key local crime and anti-social behaviour priorities found in the report.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Multi Agency Data Exchange (MADE, [www.saferlancashire.co.uk/made](http://www.saferlancashire.co.uk/made))