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# What factors are linked to people feeling able to **influence decisions** affecting their local area?

Future Generations Indicator 23

This report outlines some factors linked to whether or not adults in Wales feel that they can influence decision-making in their local area, for example decisions made by a local authority.

This report is based on National Survey interviews carried out in **2018-19**. It provides an update of [previous analysis based on the 2014-15 survey](#).

## Key findings

Holding other factors constant<sup>1</sup>, the factors below were found to be linked with people in agreement with the statement: **“I can influence decisions affecting my local area”**.

- **People age 16 to 24**, compared with older people.
- Being **less qualified** (below GCSE grade C or equivalent), in comparison with being more qualified.
- Thinking the local area has a **strong sense of community**.
- Having high overall **satisfaction with the local area as a place to live**.
- Having a good **understanding of what the local councillor does for the community**.
- Agreeing that the **local councillor works closely with the local community**.
- Being satisfied with the availability of **local authority services**.
- Agreeing that **information about local authorities** can be accessed in a preferred manner.
- Agreeing that the local authority **consults local people** when setting its budget.

There were 7 factors included in our analysis and found **not** to be linked to people feeling able to influence decisions that affect their local area, including: being in material deprivation; economic status; whether people live in an urban or rural area; and whether people have good general health. As with all analysis of this type, we are unable to attribute cause and effect or to allow for factors not measured in the survey.

<sup>1</sup> For this analysis, we have controlled for a range of factors so that even if they are related (e.g. general health and age), the link between each factor and the percentage of people feeling that they can influence local decision-making can be explored independently.

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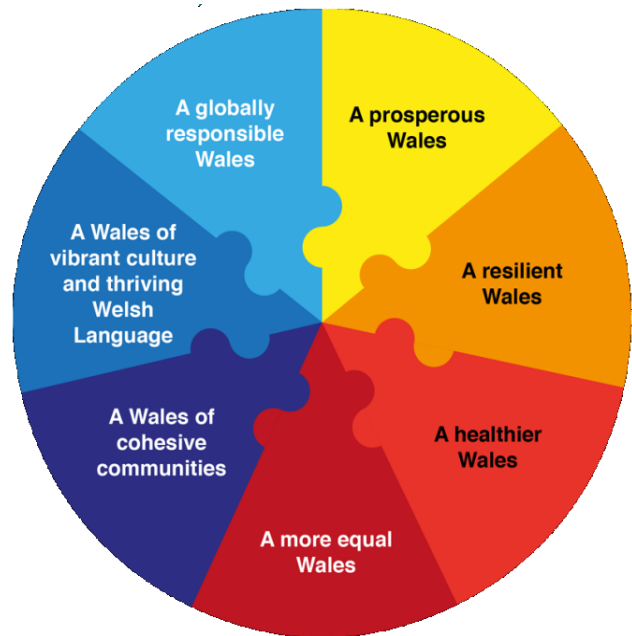
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## 1. Background

[The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) focuses on improving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales. To achieve this, the Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about long-term issues and targets, work better with communities and stakeholders, and to take a more joined-up and cohesive approach to decision-making. To ensure that this vision is achieved, the Act puts in place seven well-being goals<sup>2</sup> (**Figure 1**).

The Act requires the Welsh Government to set [national indicators](#) measuring achievement against the well-being goals. The [National Survey for Wales](#) measures progress against 15 of the 45 national indicators. The survey involves face-to-face interviews with a random sample of 12,000 people across Wales each year.

This report focuses on [National Indicator 23](#): **‘Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area’**.



*Figure 1. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: seven well-being goals<sup>3</sup>.*

## 2. Question used in the National Survey

Information relating to National Indicator 23 was collected by asking National Survey respondents whether they agreed with the statement “I can influence decisions affecting my local area”.<sup>3</sup> This question was answered using a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘1 = strongly agree’ to ‘5 = strongly disagree’. For the analysis in this report, people who responded ‘strongly agree’ or ‘tend to agree’ were combined into a single ‘agree’ group, people who responded ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘tend to disagree’ were combined into a single ‘disagree’ group, and people who neither agreed nor disagreed were not included in this analysis.

**Overall, 19% of adults agreed that they felt that they were able to influence decisions affecting their local area.**

<sup>2</sup> Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: The Essentials, which can be viewed [online](#).

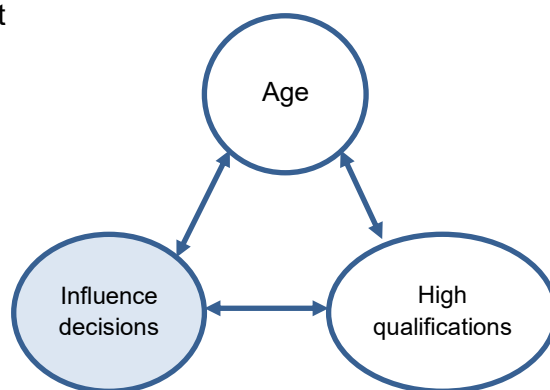
<sup>3</sup> See the National indicators for Wales [technical document](#) for more information.

### 3. Method of analysis

To get a clear understanding of how particular factors contribute to people feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area, we used a **statistical technique<sup>4</sup> to explore the link<sup>5</sup> between each factor and people feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area, whilst holding all other factors constant**. Holding other factors constant (also referred to as controlling for other factors) is important because it allows us to look at each predicting factor independently (i.e. ensuring that the effect we are measuring is not influenced by external factors). For example, we could examine the link between two separate factors (age and highest qualification) and people feeling able to influence local decisions. We might know that a person's age is linked to them feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area, however a person's age might also be linked to the highest level of qualification that they have achieved (see **Figure 2**, where being able to influence local decision-making is shortened to 'influence decisions'). To look at the effect of one factor (e.g. age) on people feeling able to influence local decisions, we would need to control for the effects of all other factors. We can then get a much clearer idea of how one single factor links to being able to influence local decision-making, without the influence of other factors.

#### ***The complexity of relationships between factors***

To understand these results, it is important to note that we cannot always be sure about what factors are *linked to*, and which are *affected by*, people feeling able to influence local decisions. For some factors this relationship is clear based on prior knowledge. For instance, being of a younger age might be linked to people feeling able to influence decisions in their local area; however, we know that whether a person feels able to influence decisions does not change their age. For other factors, however, the relationship is not as obvious. For example, people feeling satisfied with their local area as a place to live might cause them to feel able to influence decisions, or feeling able to influence decisions might cause people to be satisfied with their local area as a place to live: the relationship could also work both ways<sup>6</sup>.



**Figure 2** Importance of holding other factors constant in statistical analysis.

<sup>4</sup> This technique is known as logistic regression. More information about the methods used in this report can be found in the accompanying [regression methodology report and technical report](#).

<sup>5</sup> While this analysis can tell us about the *likelihood* of relationships between factors, it cannot tell us about causal relationships (e.g. it would be incorrect to say that feeling satisfied with their local area *causes* people to feel they can influence local decisions).

<sup>6</sup> This relationship can be even more complex, as there could be other factors which we haven't considered (and are not available from the National Survey) which may be linked to people feeling they can influence local decisions *and* people feeling satisfied with their local area.

## ***Interpreting the results***

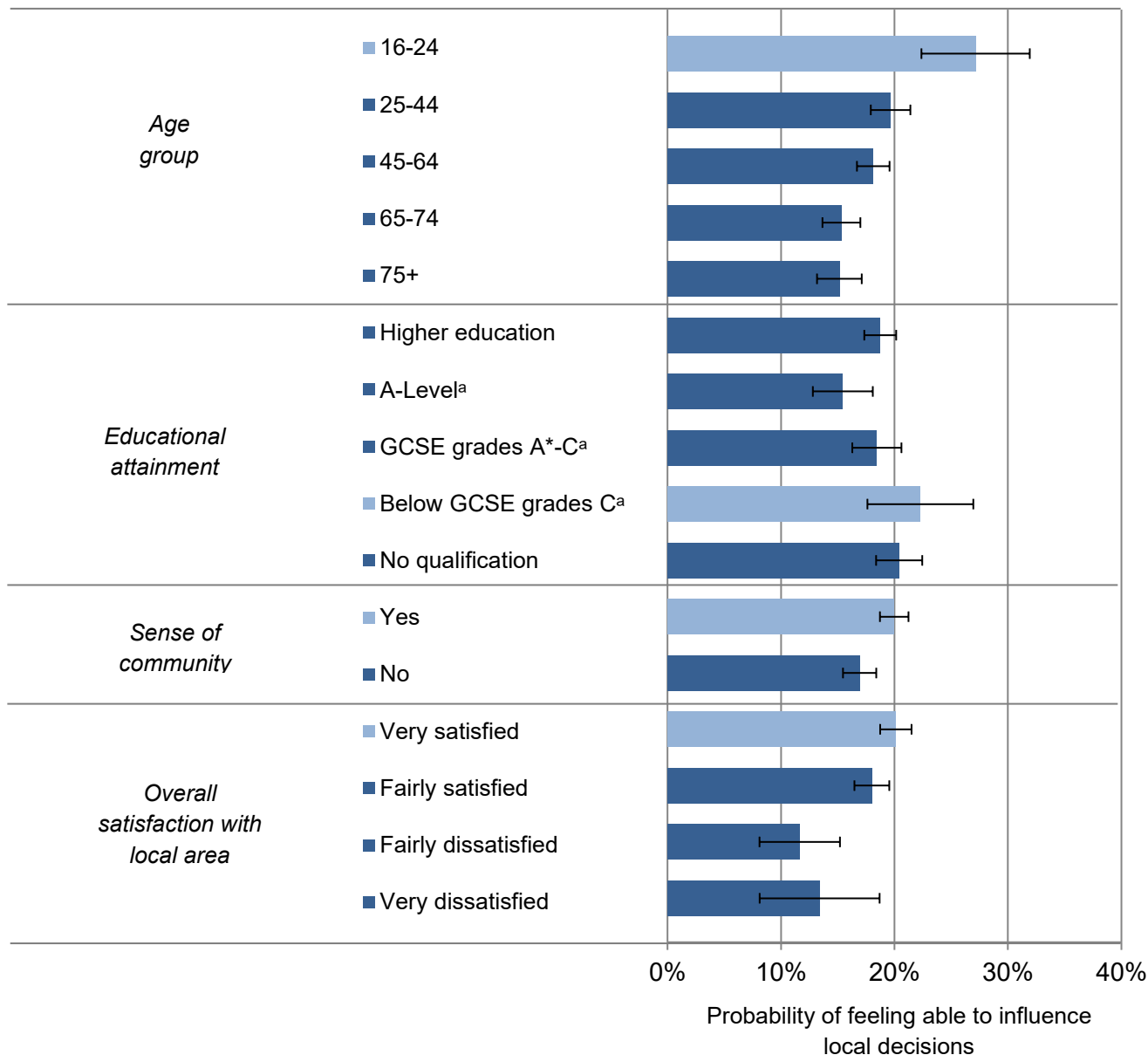
All of the factors presented in the charts in this report are statistically significant predictors of people feeling able to influence local decisions, as tested by our chosen regression model.

In this report, we use 'predictive margins' – presented as percentages (%) – to show the probability of a relationship between each factor (whilst holding other factors constant) and the dependent variable (people feeling able to influence local decisions). The results show within a particular factor (e.g. sex) the likelihood of one 'average' group of people with a shared characteristic (e.g. females) people feeling able to influence local decisions, compared with another 'average' group of people with a different shared characteristic (e.g. males). Error bars on the charts show the 95% confidence interval of the predictive margins for each group. Overlapping error bars mean that while a factor is a significant predictor of people feeling able to influence local decisions, it is not entirely clear which group within the factor is the most predictive.

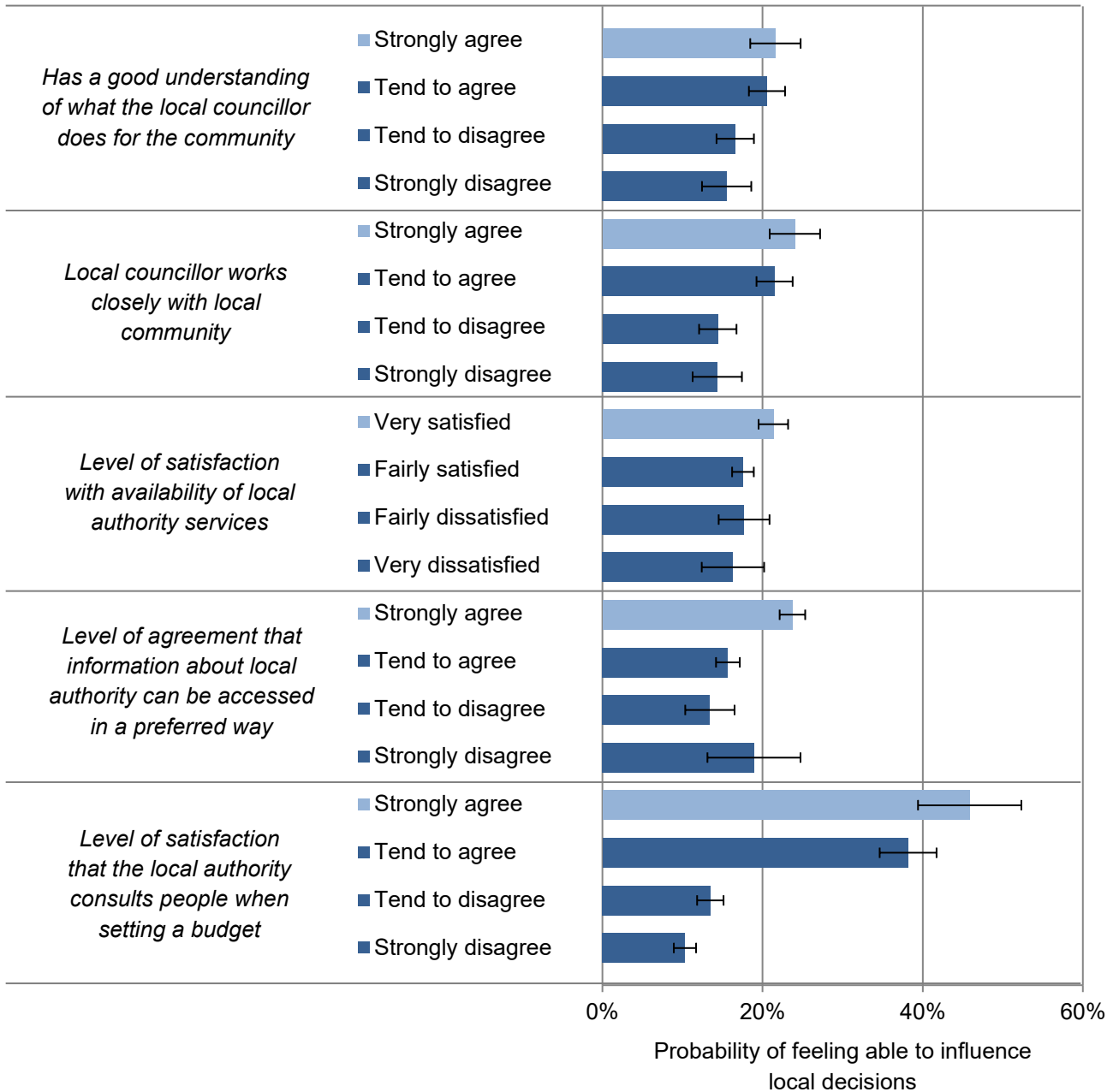
#### 4. Main factors linked to people feeling able to influence local decisions

Overall, 19% of people felt that they were able to influence decisions affecting their local area. **Figure 3.1** shows all the individual factors (whilst **holding other factors constant**) which were found to have an association with people feeling that they are able to influence local decisions. Within each factor, the group with the highest probability (percentage) of feeling able to influence local decisions is highlighted in light blue. The following sections provide a more detailed analysis of each of these factors.

**Figure 3.1** Main factors linked with the likelihood of people feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area.



**Figure 3.1 (continued)** Main factors linked with the likelihood of people feeling able to influence decisions affecting their local area.



## 4.1 Analysis

**Holding all other factors constant**, the factors discussed in this section were found to be linked to people feeling that they are able to influence decisions which affect their local area. Individual factors which share a similar characteristic are grouped into **themes** (e.g. demographic factors). Factors **not** found to be linked to people feeling able to influence local decisions are listed in [Section 4.2](#).

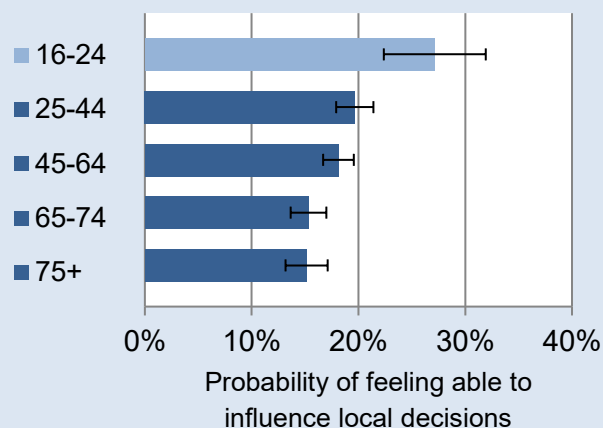
### 4.1.1 Demographic factors

#### Age group

Compared with people aged 75+, people aged 16-64 were more likely to feel that they can influence local decisions (**Figure 4.1**).

**16-24 year olds** were the age group most likely to feel that they can influence local decision-making, and people aged **65-74** and **75+** were least likely.

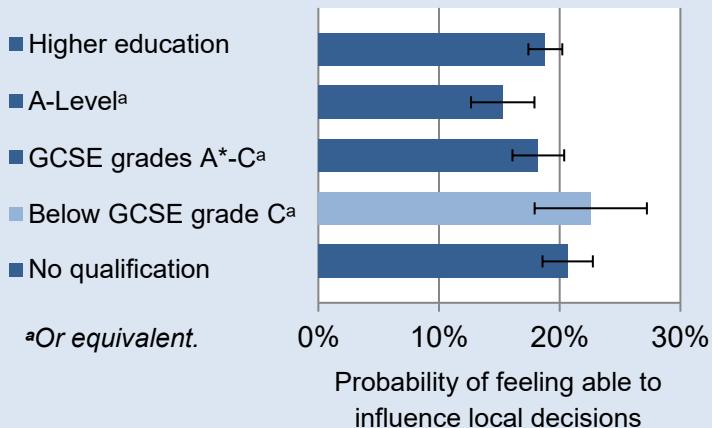
**Figure 4.1** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and age group.



#### Educational attainment

Overall, people with lower educational attainment (**below GCSE grade C or equivalent**) were the group most likely to report that they felt able to influence local decision-making (as shown in **Figure 4.2**).

**Figure 4.2** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and educational attainment.



<sup>a</sup>Or equivalent.



## 4.1.2 Community cohesion

### Sense of community

Overall, people who felt that their local area had a **sense of community**<sup>7</sup> were more likely to feel that they were able to influence decisions affecting their local area. See **Figure 4.3**.

### Overall satisfaction with local area

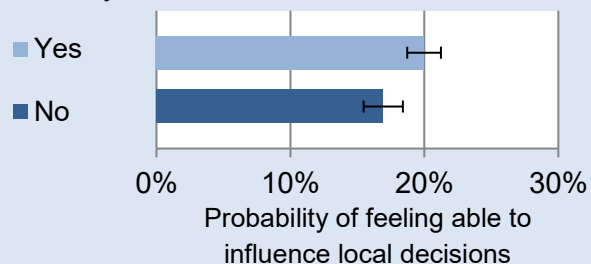
People who felt **very satisfied** with the quality of their local area as a place to live were the group most likely to feel that they can influence decisions which affect their local area, and people who were **fairly dissatisfied** were the least likely. See **Figure 4.4**.

## 4.1.3 Local democracy

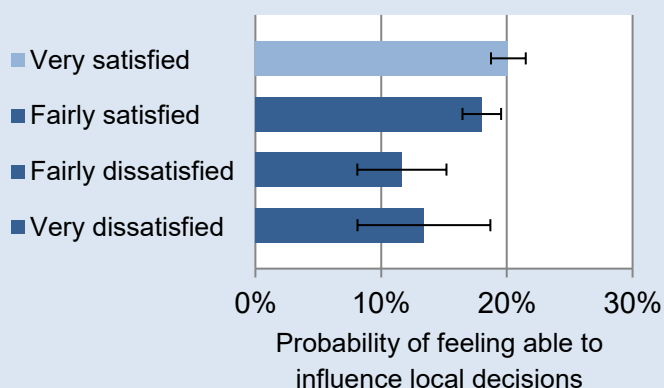
### Understanding of what the local councillor does for the community

People who **strongly agreed** that they understood what their local councillor did for the community were the most likely to feel they can influence local decisions, and people who **strongly disagreed** were the least likely. See **Figure 4.5**.

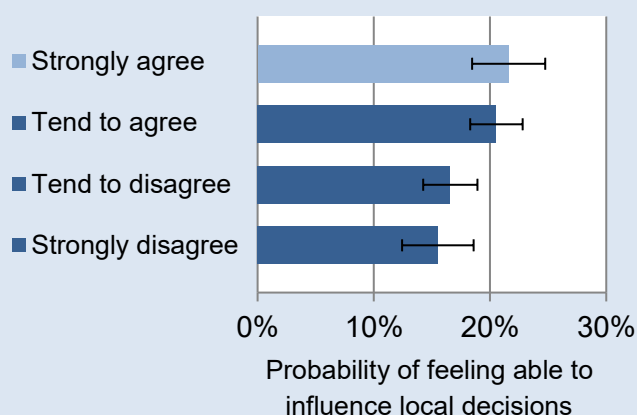
**Figure 4.3** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and sense of community.



**Figure 4.4** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and overall satisfaction with local area.



**Figure 4.5** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and understanding what the local councillor does for the community.

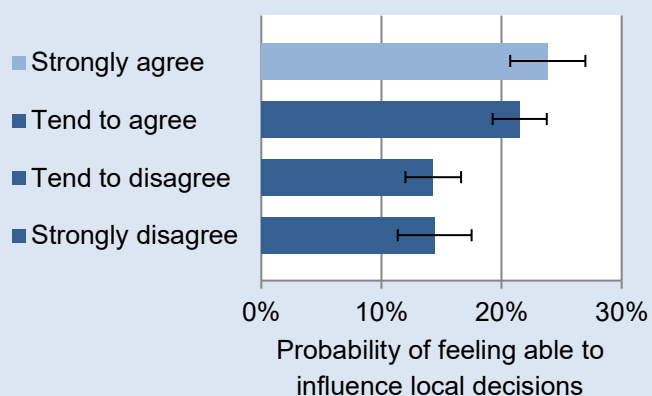


<sup>7</sup> In the National Survey for Wales, the measure of sense of community is made up of a combination of the following three elements: 1) sense of belonging to local area; 2) people from different backgrounds get along well together; 3) people treat each other with respect and consideration.

### **Agreeing the local councillor works closely with the community**

People who **strongly agreed** that their local councillor worked closely with the community in their local area were the most likely to feel that they can influence local decision-making, and those who **strongly disagreed** were the least likely. See **Figure 4.6**.

**Figure 4.6** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and agreeing the local councillor works closely with the local community.

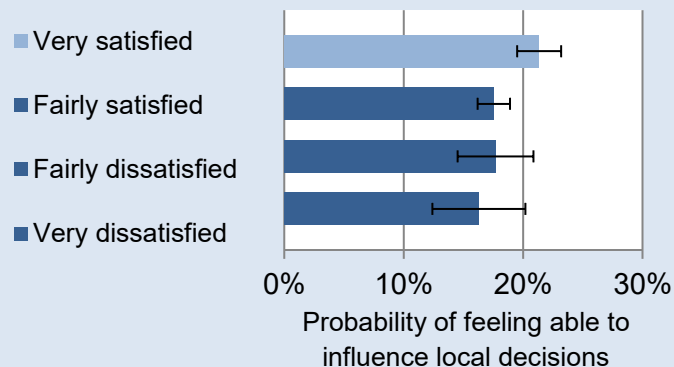


### **4.1.4 Local authority services**

#### **Satisfaction with availability of local authority services and facilities.**

As shown in **Figure 4.7**, people who were **very satisfied** with the availability of local services and facilities were the most likely to feel able to influence local decision-making, and those who were **very dissatisfied** were the least likely.

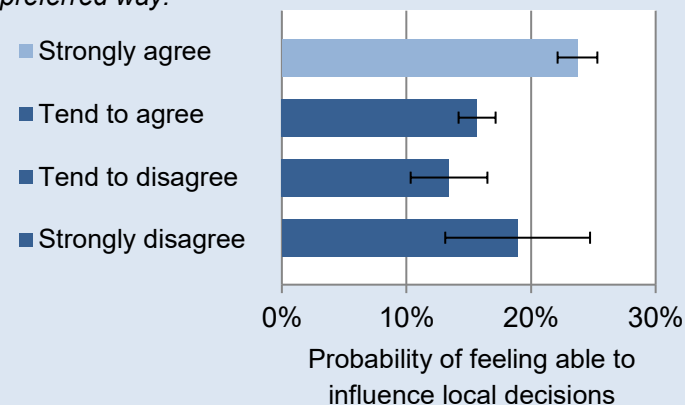
**Figure 4.7** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and overall satisfaction with local authority services.



#### **Can access information about their local authority in preferred manner**

People who **strongly agreed** that they were able to access information about their local authority in a preferred manner were the most likely to feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area, and those who answered **'tend to disagree'** were the least likely. See **Figure 4.8**.

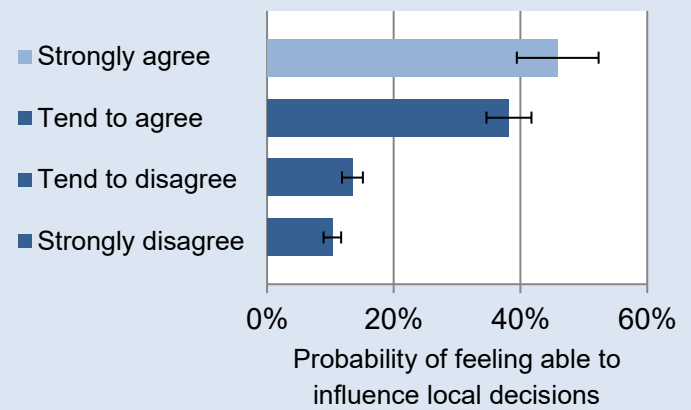
**Figure 4.8** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and agreeing information about their local authority can be accessed in a preferred way.



### **Local authority consults local people when setting a budget.**

People who **agree that they are satisfied that their local authority consults people when setting a budget** were more likely to feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area, than those who disagree. People who 'strongly agree' that their local authority consults people when setting a budget were the most likely to feel able to influence decisions and those who **strongly disagree** were the least likely. See **Figure 4.9**.

**Figure 4.9** The relationship between feeling able to influence local decisions and agreeing the local authority consults local people.



## **4.2 Factors not linked to feeling able to influence local decision-making**

In this analysis, other factors were included in our regression model, but we did **not** find a link between the following factors and whether people felt that they could influence decision-making in their local area:

- Being in material deprivation.
- Economic status.
- Whether people live in an urban or rural area.
- Whether people have good general health.
- Whether people have a long-term limiting condition.
- Whether or not people know how to find out about local authority services, and.
- Whether people have been in contact with their local councillor in the past 12 months.

## 5. Summary and recommendations for further research

In summary, we have provided an analysis of individual factors (and overall themes) linked to **National indicator 23: 'Percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area'**.

Overall, four central themes<sup>8</sup> emerged from our analysis:

1. Demographic factors.
2. Community cohesion.
3. Local democracy.
4. Local authority services.

The relationship between particular factors and people feeling able to influence local decision-making could be more complex than suggested in this analysis, and the results could **vary** between and within different areas. Therefore, further research could include more small-scale investigations involving more diverse approaches (such as qualitative<sup>9</sup> or mixed-methods<sup>10</sup> research).

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<sup>8</sup> In total, we looked at factors linked to **7 National Indicators for Well-being** as part of a project using data from the 2018-19 National Survey for Wales. As some factors were found to be linked to more than one National Indicator, we have provided a separate document which highlights the similarities and differences between the individual factors, and overall themes, found to be linked to all National Indicators. This document is available **online**: Hafferty, C. (2020). *Key themes linked to a selection of National Indicators for Well-being in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR Report. Available at: <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019>.

<sup>9</sup> **Qualitative research** is often used to understand people's underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations to uncover trends in people's thoughts and opinions to provide a better understanding of a particular issue. Qualitative data collection methods are often small-scale and collect non-numeric data by using techniques such as interviews and focus groups. On the other hand, *quantitative* research seeks to understand a problem by collecting numerical data which can be used in statistical analysis, often to produce generalised results for a large sample of a population (e.g. attitudes, behaviours, and opinions). For example, the National Survey for Wales predominantly collects and analyses information in this way.

<sup>10</sup> **'Mixed-methods'** is an approach to research which involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data within the same study. As policy makers, practitioners, and others in applied areas strive to produce well-informed research based on multiple forms of evidence (such as the multi-faceted well-being of communities and future generations), mixed-methods research can be a good way to explore these complex social situations.

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*Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.*

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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