



# Is Levelling Up cutting through?

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Three years into the agenda, is Levelling Up hitting home in target areas of the UK?



# Contents

---

3. Executive summary

---

4. Key findings

---

4. Our survey data

---

5. The changing views of Levelling Up in the North and Midlands

---

18. Charting a path for a Levelling Up revival

---

19. About DWF

---

19. Contact the team

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# Executive summary

Many people believe the next election will be decided by which party is seen to be doing the most to ‘Level Up’ the country, in particular within the former ‘Red Wall’ seats in the North and the Midlands.

Rishi Sunak’s opening speech as Prime Minister included a pledge to Level Up every region in the UK, taking forward the policy that helped Boris Johnson sweep to victory in the 2019 General Election, and Kier Starmer has said his approach will be built around a strategic plan with funding for infrastructure.

However, the term ‘Levelling Up’ appears to have lost its shine amongst many voters, becoming synonymous with disappointment and suspicion, especially amongst those people the policy was thought to have been designed to help.

Given that this campaign promise was apparently important to the Conservative Party winning seats that had been held by Labour for decades, and thereby securing the current majority in Parliament, could the changing perception of Levelling Up have a significant bearing on changing political fortunes particularly in those places considering themselves most in need of Levelling Up assistance. If so, what can political parties learn from the changing perceptions of residents in the Midlands and the North?

In June 2021, DWF worked with YouGov to understand the views of residents in the North and the Midlands on different elements of the Levelling Up agenda, using the data to publish the report “[Will Levelling Up meet voter priorities?](#)”

Since that report, the Levelling Up White Paper has been through many changes, Boris Johnson (and now Liz Truss) has resigned as Prime Minister and the Labour Party has sought to

argue that it is best placed to deliver Levelling Up. Not only has it been a period of great change, but also disappointment; since the Levelling Up agenda was launched in 2019, London has seen the highest increase in public funding, whilst the North has fallen further behind<sup>1</sup>.

Our research suggests people are losing belief that the Levelling Up agenda will be delivered. Residents within the North and Midlands have not noticed significant improvement in their local areas, nor do they have increased pride in their hometowns, or much optimism for the future.

Residents living in Levelling Up Target Areas (LUTAs) are more familiar now than a year ago with the idea of Levelling Up, but are very mixed on what its priorities actually are. Some see it as a programme to provide equal opportunity between their area and the South East, others as a programme to encourage investment and economic growth in the North and Midlands, while others still believe there is no meaning to the programme at all.

Clear priorities for the Levelling Up agenda were identified in our [2021 research](#), centring on safety and security, job security, and improving local high streets. We have found no evidence that residents in these areas have seen any real improvement in any of those priorities. As such, the research suggests that people in the North and Midlands may be increasingly clear and familiar with Levelling Up and what it is supposed to mean, but they have little faith in or excitement about its prospects.

In fact, people living in LUTAs are far more likely to say their local areas have both *declined* and *received less funding* in recent years than they are to laud any success or improvements. This is a worrying finding and suggests a real problem for the Levelling Up agenda.

This being noted, it is of course highly likely that apparent frustration with the Levelling Up programme and perceptions around economic and social decline in local areas, is linked to general decline in trust and competency evaluations surrounding the government in between the 2021 and 2022 surveys.

All this presents an opportunity for political parties to revive the Levelling Up agenda and win votes. To achieve this will require commitment to delivering a bold vision of prosperity across the country and our data suggests one potential avenue which policymakers might look towards is empowering Metro Mayors to be at the forefront of the agenda. They are generally viewed favourably by those who are aware of them, and do not seem to attract blame for policy failures to date. In many cases, they are also better placed to react quickly to support investment opportunities and support the development of skills within the community.



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<sup>1</sup> [IPPR North](#), 26th June 2022, Marcus Johns and Ryan Swift

# Key findings

Our key findings are as follows:

## ↳ **Levelling Up message is clearer but the impact is not**

The concept of Levelling Up is better understood than it was in our June 2021 survey and an increasing number of people are associating it with the promise of economic opportunity and success. However, it may seem surprising that it is the residents in LUTAs who are disillusioned with the programme and fail to see positive impacts so far.

## ↳ **Funding fear is palpable**

People are dissatisfied with the funding they understand their local area is to receive, believing it is lower than in previous years and that they still receive less government investment than those in the South East of England. They are also concerned with the impact that feared cuts to public spending would have on the success of Levelling Up.

## ↳ **Local areas and local pride decline further**

Residents in the North and Midlands see their local area has having declined even further since 2021, and local pride has not been restored.

## ↳ **Missed opportunities and mismatched priorities**

The key priorities for Levelling Up identified by YouGov/DWF research in 2021 have not been addressed, and, if anything, many people believe these issues have worsened.

## ↳ **Critical transport in decline**

The importance of local and national transport links is increasing as the country emerges from the pandemic, but people are experiencing a worsening in their services and local and national links.

## ↳ **Could a regional approach provide a route for Levelling Up success?**

There are distinct and important regional divides, highlighting the need for a targeted approach to Levelling Up which addresses the specific needs of residents in each area. In particular, the North of England shows higher levels of dissatisfaction with transport, and the Midlands more in need of pride revival.

# Our survey data

## Our survey data uncovers the changing views of residents from June 2021 to September 2022.

This report is based on a major survey undertaken in September 2022 by YouGov on behalf of DWF. The research involved a re-contact survey, re-recruiting people who took part in very similar research in 2021, to see how attitudes towards Levelling Up and their local area have changed over the past year.

The total sample was 1,035 adults (18+) living in the North and Midlands of England, and two-thirds (67%) of these respondents took part in the first wave of the study in June 2021. The remaining third were fresh respondents, brought into the sample to top up the responses to create a representative sample of over 1000 residents in LUTAs.

The research used bespoke, custom-built targets for both waves, creating a fully representative sample frame for all adults (18+) living in unitary or combined local authorities across the North and Midlands on political and socio-demographic measures including age, gender, education, past General Election and EU Referendum votes, and political attention. As well as covering LUTAs, this sample covered the vast majority of 'Red Wall' areas under YouGov's definition of constituencies which the Conservatives won from Labour in the 2019 General Election in the North and Midlands.



# The changing views of Levelling Up in the North and Midlands

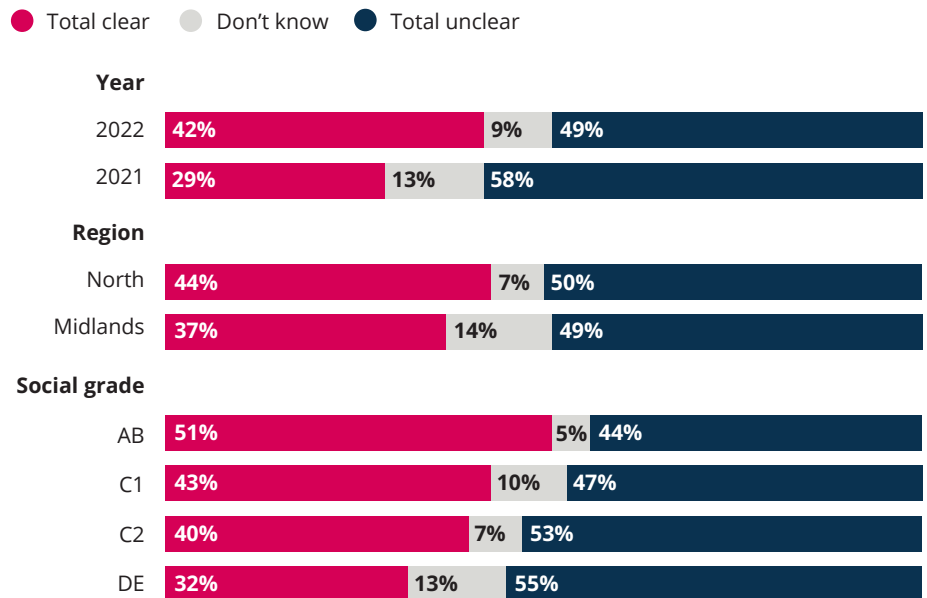
## Levelling Up message is clearer but the impact is not

Three years have passed since 2019 General Election and the birth of the Levelling Up programme, but there is no evidence of significant cut through for policy in the very areas it is supposed to improve. Compared to 2021, clarity on what Levelling Up means has certainly increased, but still more people are unclear (49%) than clear (42%) on what the term means. Clarity is stronger in the North of England than it is in the Midlands, at 44% and 37% respectively, and much stronger amongst those who have noticed improvements in their local area (65%) compared to those who say it has declined (41%). It is also stronger amongst those of a higher social grade, with 51% of those in AB being clear, compared to 43% of those in C1, 40% of those in C2 and just 32% of those in DE.

Most people continue to associate Levelling Up with ensuring opportunity in the North and Midlands is more akin to the South East (29%), but an increasing number understand it simply as encouraging economic growth and success in the North and Midlands (25% in 2022 compared to 14% in 2021).

Similar to the 2021 figures, only 8% recognise Levelling Up as increasing government spending in the North and Midlands. Reflecting general disillusionment with the term Levelling Up, those who feel their local area has declined are more likely to say 'it doesn't really mean anything at all', than those who have seen improvements, by 31% to 16%.

### How clear or unclear are you about what politicians mean when they talk about "Levelling Up"?

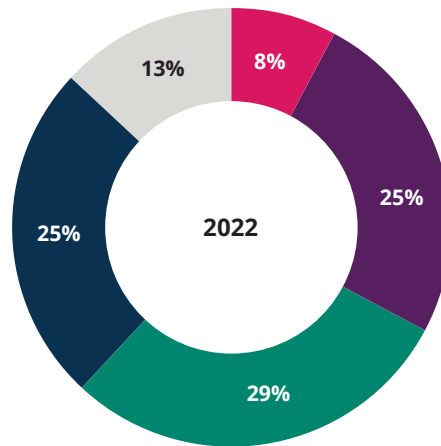


Compared to 2021, clarity on what Levelling Up means has increased, but more people are still unclear (49%) than clear (42%).

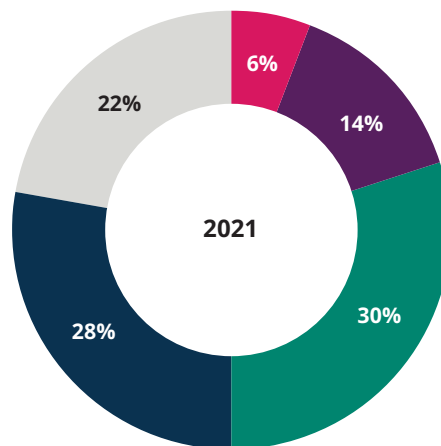
Perceived awareness of the term Levelling Up may have increased, but opinions on the concept are mixed. When people were asked how they'd feel hearing that their area was part of the Levelling Up agenda, whilst 23% say they would be pleased, there are significant feelings of indifference (25%) and suspicion (23%).

There is also little belief that Levelling Up will actually happen, with a vast majority (82%) thinking it's unlikely that the economy and opportunities in the North and Midlands will be levelled up to match London and the South. Many of the negative feelings surrounding Levelling Up and its future prospects will highly likely be linked to general decline in approval and support for the Government in 2022 versus 2021 (and again versus 2019, when the Conservatives won an 80 seat majority built firmly on new-found support in the North and Midlands).

### When politicians talk about "Levelling Up" what do you think this means in practice?



- Mostly about spending more government money in the North and Midlands
- Mostly about encouraging economic growth and success in the North and Midlands
- Mostly about making sure that people in the North and Midlands have the same opportunities as people in the South East
- It doesn't really mean anything at all
- Not sure



An increasing number of people define Levelling Up as encouraging economic growth and success in the North and Midlands (25% in 2022 compared to 14% in 2021).



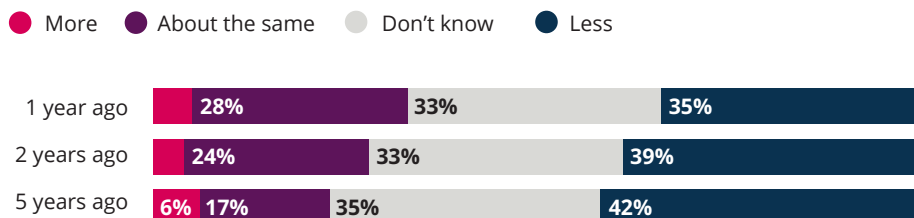
## Funding fear is palpable

Worryingly, despite the aims and objectives of the policy agenda being to raise the amount of money coming into the North and Midlands, there is the general perception that funding in LUTAs is actually lower today than it has been in previous years – particularly compared to 5 years ago (42%). As such, over half (53%) of the public in LUTAs are dissatisfied with funding in their local area, with those in the North West displaying higher levels dissatisfaction (60%) than other regions.

Likewise, the strong belief still remains among residents in the North and Midlands that their area gets less government investment than places in the South East (66%). There are, however, high levels of residents being unsure on how much funding their local area actually receives, especially amongst young adults (18-24), highlighting the opportunity for politicians and local leaders to do better to communicate increases in funding and investment.

Relatedly, there seems to be a non-linear relationship between dissatisfaction with funding and age – those in middle age (50-64) were most likely to be dissatisfied (61%, 11% satisfied) compared to 44% dissatisfied for young people (27% satisfied) and 51% for over 65s (26% satisfied).

### Do you think your local area gets more, less, or about the same funding as it did...



People think funding in Levelling Up Target Areas is actually lower today than it was 1, 2 and 5 years ago.

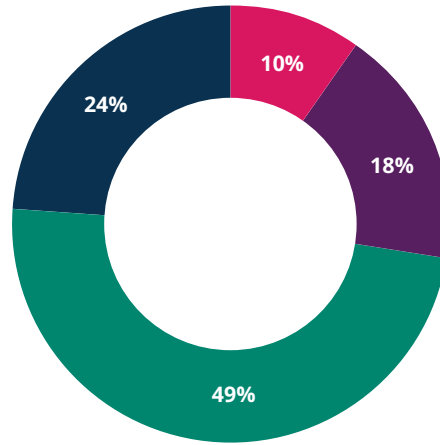


## 8 Is Levelling Up cutting through?

Many people think that tax and public spending cuts will have a negative impact on Levelling Up (49%). Just 10% think that this would help to improve the Levelling Up agenda.

The new Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt has been clear that there are public spending cuts to come, which might well drive up dissatisfaction and disappointment with Levelling Up even further. This dim view of spending cuts (and tax cuts) is generally shared across 2019 Labour (59%) and Conservative (48%) voters.

**Imagine if the government began to cut back tax and spending, do you think this will have a positive or negative impact on Levelling Up, or will it have no impact at all?**



- Total positive
- Make no difference
- Total negative
- Don't know

49% of people think that cutting tax and spending will have a negative impact on Levelling Up, compared to 10% who think the impact would be positive.





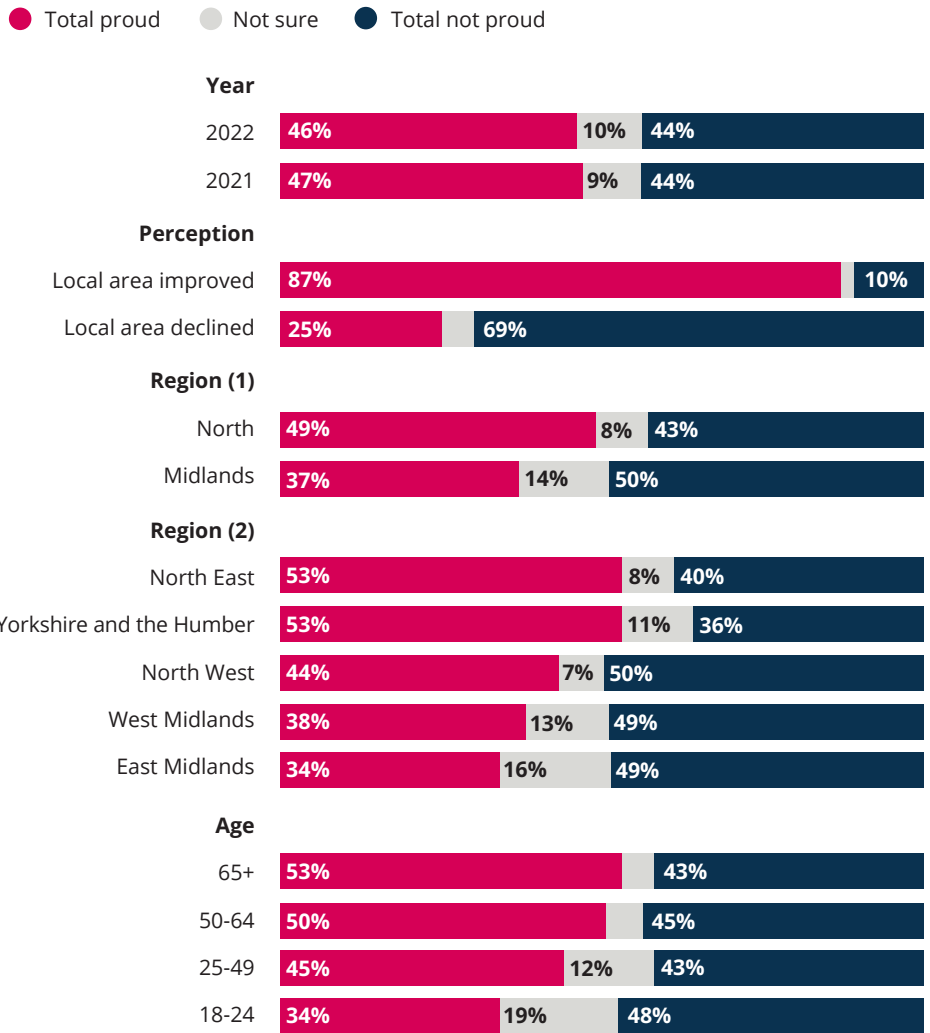
## Local areas and local pride decline further

People want to feel pride in their local area, but despite this – and despite the Levelling Up agenda – level of pride in local areas remains mixed, having not improved since last year. Again, many people living in LUTAs tend to think things are only getting worse.

A year on from our original survey, people continue to say that it is important for them to be able feel pride about the area that they live in (80%), but far fewer tell us they are indeed proud of their local area (46%). Residents think their local area has declined even further in recent years now when compared to last year (33% to 41%), and a similar pattern occurs when asked about the North and Midlands as a whole (44% to 52% saying it has declined). When looking at the intersection between these two perceptions, those who have noticed improvements are much more likely to be proud of their local area, compared to those who have seen declines (by 87% to 25%).

87% of people who have seen improvements in their local area are proud of where they live, compared to only 25% of people who are seeing decline.

### How proud would you say you are of where you live at the moment?



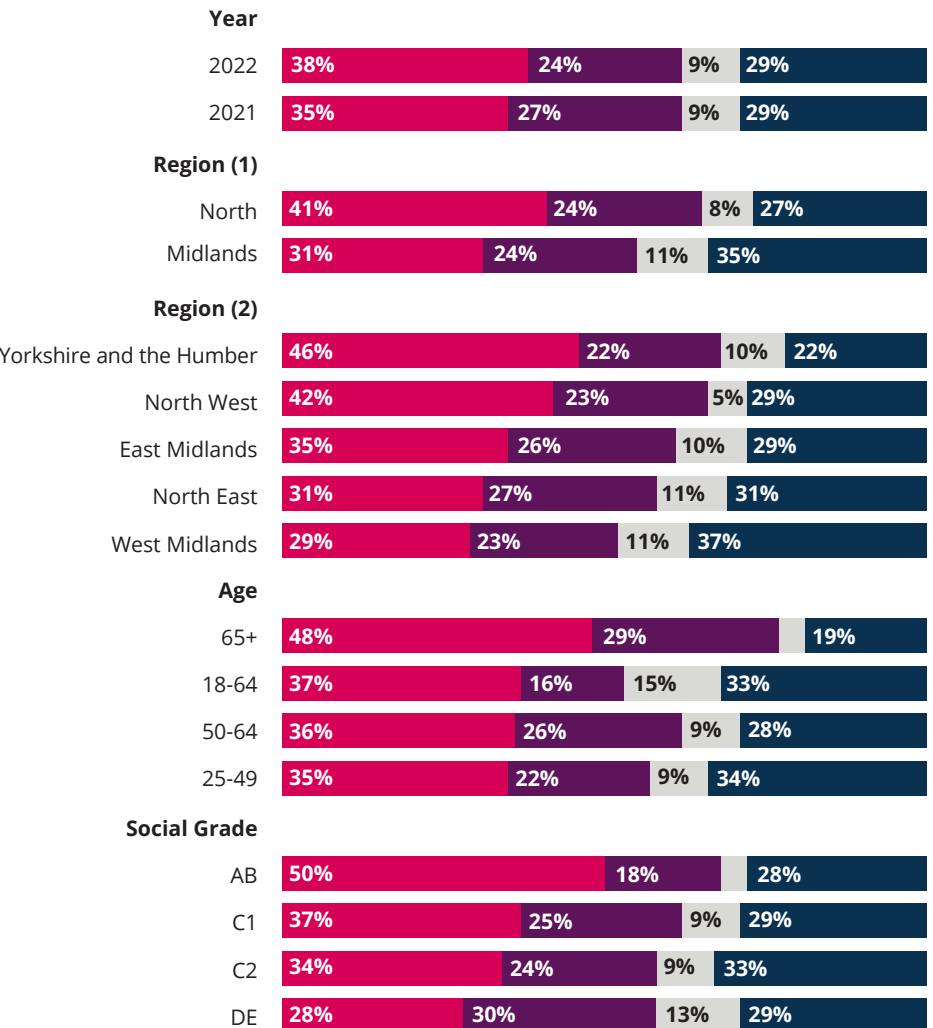
When thinking about whether their local area is a place people generally move to or away from, opinions are again rather mixed. Similar to the situation in 2021, 38% say that their area is the sort of place people want to move to, but 29% say it is the sort of place they want to get away from. One quarter say neither.

Feelings about local areas are not equal within LUTAs, however. There are strong regional divides, with people in the North more likely to be proud than those in the Midlands (by 49% to 37%). Northerners are also more likely to say their local area has stayed the same (47%) compared to those in the Midlands, who more likely to say it has declined (48%), and more in the North (41%) say people “move to” their area, than in the Midlands (31%).

41% of people in the north say their local area is the sort of place people want to move to compared to 31% in the Midlands.

### Would you say your local area is more...

- The sort of place that people would like to move to
- Neither
- Don't know
- The sort of place that people try to get away from



## Regional disparities

Looking more granularly at the survey results, the East Midlands is the area least likely to be proud (34%), and the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber is the most likely (both at 53%). Yorkshire and the Humber also stands out as also having particularly high levels of those saying their area is a place people move to (46%). Despite the attraction of the UK's second largest city, people in the West Midlands are the most likely to say their area is the type of place people are trying to get away from (37%).

Focussing just on Northern disparities, the North West is significantly less proud, at just 44% saying so, but a higher number say it's a place people "move to" (42%) than in the North East (31%).

Looking at those areas classified by YouGov as being in the political 'Red Wall', we find this group is less likely to be proud of their local area (37% vs 48% elsewhere), and less likely to say their locality is the type of place people want "move to" (32% vs 40% elsewhere). These are the only metrics where we see real deviation between the Red Wall and other LUTAs.

These disparities suggest a great deal of variation in terms of assessments of local areas within LUTAs. This is very important, as it is clear that some communities could well need to see much more work than others to bring pride up in line first with the rest of the North and Midlands, and then with the South East and London.

## Pride issue in younger age groups

Looking at other demographics, feelings of pride in LUTAs increase with age, with only 34% of those aged 18-24 feeling proud of their local area, and this figure rising to 53% of those aged 65 or older. Perhaps reflecting opinion on job opportunities and the kind of priorities different generations look for in a place to live, and reiterating patterns found with pride of place, younger age groups are more likely to say people "move away from" their area, with around a third of aged 18-49s saying so.

Likewise, those over 65 are far more likely than other age groups to say their area is the kind of place people want to "move to" (48%). That said, the number saying their area has declined lately also increases with age, from 40% of those aged 18-24 to 58% of those aged 65+. There are, however, big gaps in the percentage of respondents saying "don't know" between the young and old, suggesting a certain degree of apathy from the younger generation – or an increased sense of interest and awareness in their local area among older people.

## Social divisions

Further illustrating the necessity for Levelling Up to consider bespoke targets and programmes for communities within regions, there are also stark differences between social grades, with AB residents being far more likely to say their area is a place people move to (50%) than those in C1 (37%), C2 (34) or DE (28%). Similarly,

pride decreases across social grades, from 55% of AB residents saying they are proud of their local area, to just 35% of those in DE grade.

Reiterating the findings from last year which highlighted a divide between those who voted Remain in the 2016 EU Referendum and those who voted Leave, Remainers report more pride (56% vs 44%) are more likely than Leavers to see their local area as a place people move to (47% vs 34%). The same disparities are not found when looking at past General Election vote, reflecting the apparent cross-cutting nature of Leave/Remain dynamics across parties in the North and Midlands.

## No evidence of increasing pride

Overall, there is no evidence from this survey that the Levelling Up agenda has done anything to increase pride and satisfaction with their local areas among those living in the areas supposed to be benefitting most from the policy. There is also no sense in which people think that their local area is improving or becoming more attractive now three years on from the 2019 election. If the success of the Levelling Up programme is to be measured on the grounds of improving local pride and satisfaction, it does not appear to be passing the test yet. This may be a reflection of lead times in projects funded by Levelling Up inspired programmes (not having had time yet to materialise on the ground). It could also reflect current dissatisfaction with government generally.



## What are the public priorities in 2022?

As in 2021, LUTA residents continue to see good employment prospects (45%), a more attractive town centre (35%) and better housing (25%) as key pull factors to bring people and businesses into the local area. Good employment prospects come out as top across all groups, but for those who say their area has declined a more attractive town centre is also seen as particularly important (43%), and younger people are driving the desire for better housing (36%).

There has been a slight increase since 2021 in people prioritising better local and national transport links to encourage residents to move to and stay in an area.

When considering attracting business investment to the local area, again consistent with 2021, government subsidies for new businesses are still seen as most important (38%), as are a more attractive town centre (23%) and transport links to the rest of the country (25%) and locally (22%). The importance of these is felt stronger in the North than the Midlands.

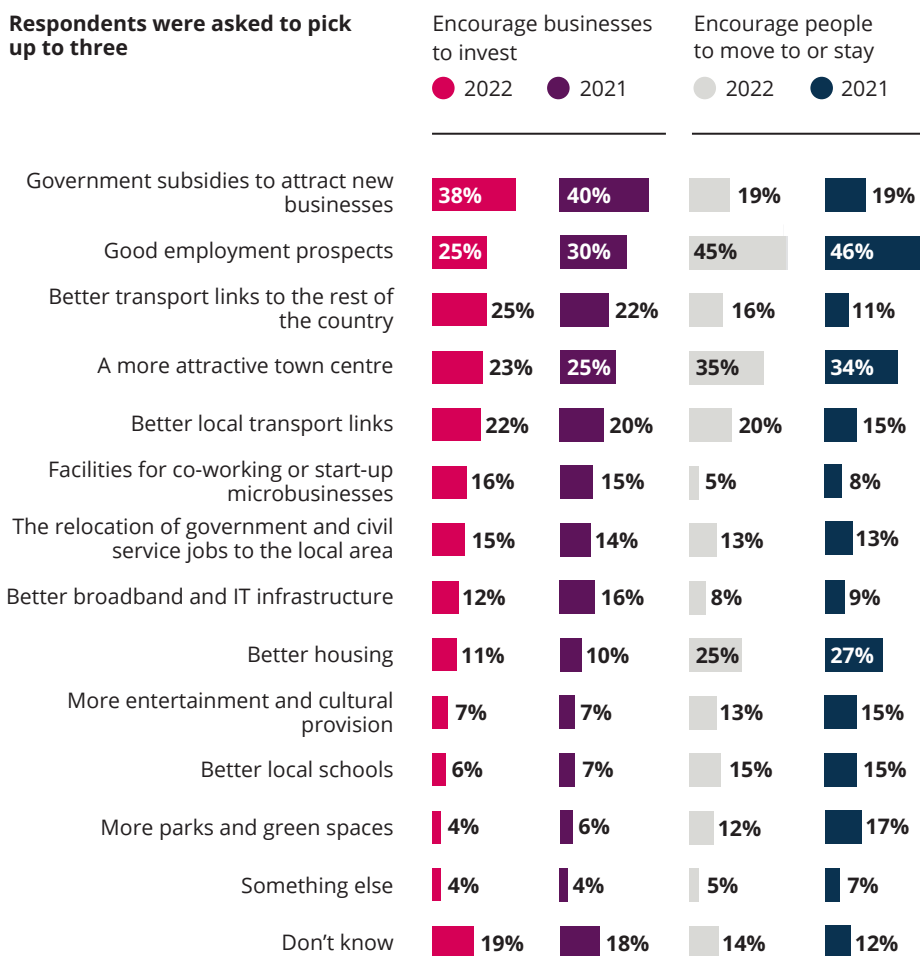
Thinking about the country as a whole, when asked to pick their top three priorities for the UK Government today, 52% of people in the North and Midlands say they want the Government to prioritise the economy.

Health (39%), immigration and asylum (23%), the environment (21%) and crime (20%) are also all seen as important focal points for the government. 'Levelling Up the North and Midlands' is identified as a top priority by just 18% of the public in its target areas, but is seen as more of a priority in the North (20%) than the Midlands (13%).

In terms of how to deliver growth, the public back the use of subsidies to encourage business investment, as such leveraging new and better jobs to an area. Policy makers may want to develop the new Subsidy Control regime to better support and prioritise inward investment in Levelling Up areas.

## What do you think would do most to encourage businesses to invest in / people to move to or stay in your local area?

Respondents were asked to pick up to three



People think Government subsidies would have the biggest impact on encouraging businesses to invest in their local area.

## Could a regional approach provide a route for Levelling Up success?

### A resident's view of Metro Mayors

There are stark differences in who the public views as responsible for both Levelling Up delivery and for perceived decline in local areas.

Central government and local authorities tend to attract the most hostility in this regard. In this light, one potential avenue for greater success is to look to local directly elected Mayors to lead the way in terms of communicating and delivering the benefits of the Levelling Up agenda.

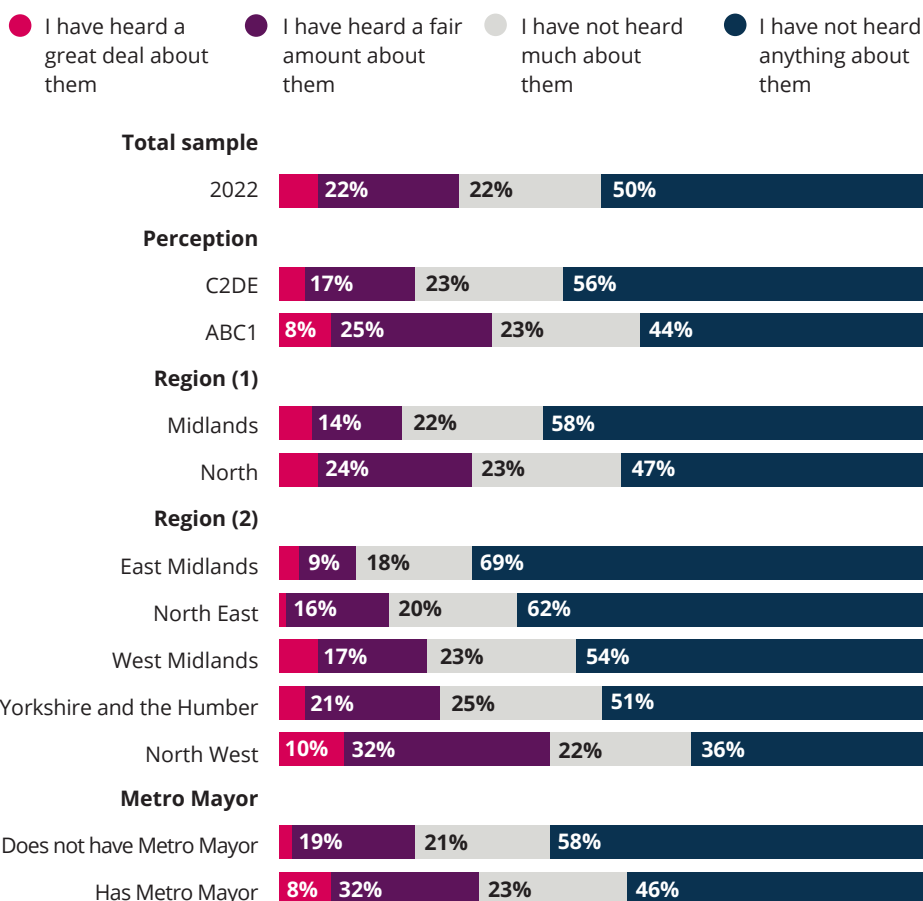
Those who say their local area has declined increasingly blame the UK Government now than they did previously (41%, up from 31% in 2021). They are also likely to blame the local council (38%), but less so now than a year ago (44%). There is a party-political dimension to the blame game; looking at partisan divides, 2019 Labour voters are more likely to blame the UK government for local decline (55%), whereas 2019 Conservative voters more likely to say the local councils (53%).

So, decline in the local area is primarily blamed on the UK Government and one's local council, with only 5% blaming Mayors. Likewise, local councillors (53%) and MPs (51%) are seen to have more influence over the amount of funding their local area gets than Metro Mayors (19%).

Away from the largely quite negative findings in the rest of the report, the data does suggest that there is perhaps room for Metro Mayors to grow into taking a positive leadership role in the Levelling Up programme. Metro Mayors appear to avoid a lot of the criticism levelled at, for example, the Government for decline and policy failures in LUTAs, and are generally viewed favourably by those who are familiar with them<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> [Centre Think Tank: How Metro Mayors can help shake the UK out of its productivity slump.](#)

### To what extent, if at all, have you heard of Metro Mayors?



42% of people in the North West have heard at least a fair amount about metro mayors compared to only 12% in the East Midlands.



Importantly, a significant portion of LUTA residents are yet to be aware of Metro Mayors at all, with 50% saying they've not heard anything about them at all and only 27% saying they have heard a fair amount or a great deal. As such, only 16% say they have been a success and 18% say they have positively contributed to Levelling Up (with 47% and 38% saying 'don't know' respectively).

Further still, even when looking at opinion solely in areas with a Metro Mayor present, nearly half (46%) report having not heard anything about them, and 43% simply 'don't know' if they've been a success or failure.

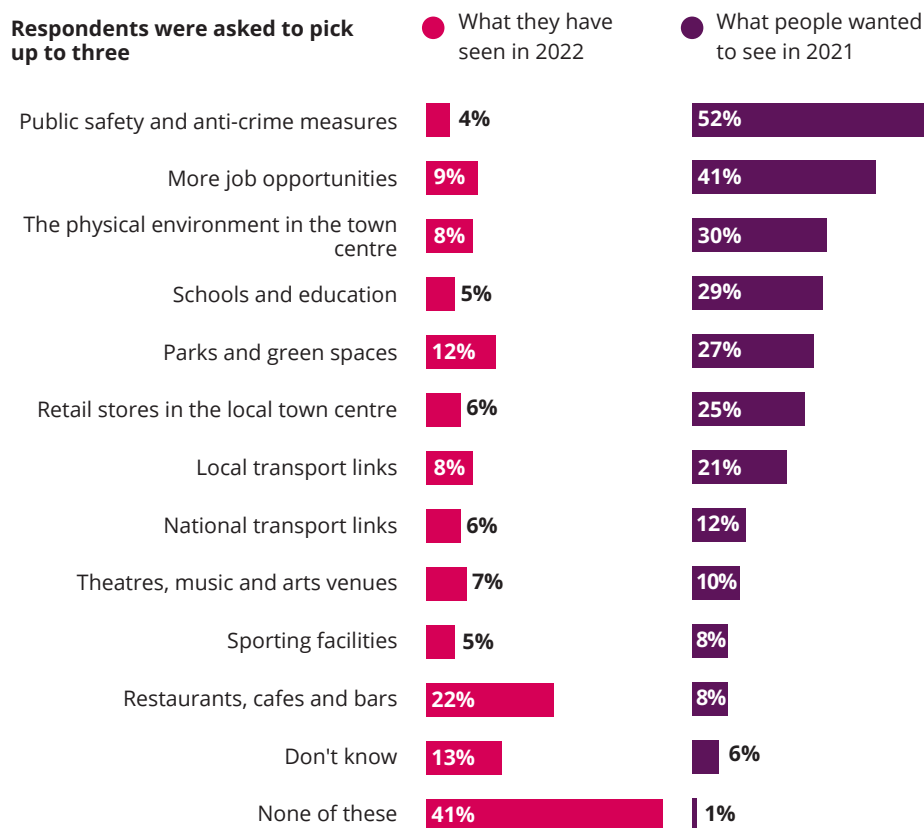
Demonstrating the potential for Metro Mayors to re-shape public opinion, they are viewed more favourably by those who do know who they are, with the North West in particular showing increased awareness (only 36% have not heard anything at all) and positivity – 25% say they've been a success and 27% say they have a positive impact on Levelling Up.

However, this finding does not necessarily correlate with this region having a more positive opinion of their local area. In fact – as mentioned throughout this report – whilst a large group do say their area is somewhere people “move to”, those in the North West are generally less proud than other Northern regions and are more negative about key priorities, such as transport services and links. They are also the most negative about the prospects of tax cuts, meaning further dissatisfaction could now grow. The lack of correlation between a prominent Metro Mayor and satisfaction with the local area and Levelling Up highlights that (whilst the region needs reassuring and reviving positivity) these two are not yet seen as linked, and there is as such, potentially, room for a positive association to grow.

### Missed opportunities and mismatched priorities

Simply put, the survey indicates that key priorities for local areas highlighted by those in the North and Midlands in our research both this year and last have not been addressed. This is, we suspect, the key driver behind the lack

### What people told us in 2021 they wanted to see improved in their local area, compared to what they have now seen improve over the last year



Of the 2 factors seen as most important to people, only 4% have seen improvements in public safety and anti-crime measures and 9% have seen improvement in job opportunities.



of enthusiasm for and belief in the Levelling Up agenda and its priorities among those living in the very areas it is supposed to improve.

In 2021, improving public safety and anti-crime measures, encouraging economic growth and success, and improving the appearance of the town centres were identified as top priorities for the Levelling Up project. However, when looking now at what people have actually seen improve most over the last year, it is restaurants, cafes, and bars which have the highest percentage saying they have improved most (22%), albeit one possible explanation for this is the re-emergence of that sector after the pandemic.

This is problematic for the Levelling Up programme and policymakers, as hospitality was seen as an improvement priority for just 8% of people in 2021. That said, it may feed into one expressed priority: the appearance of town centres. This perhaps highlights issues with proper communication and accreditation of the Levelling Up programme.

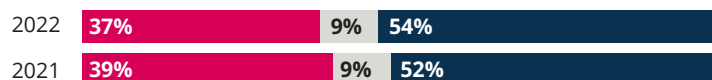
That said, it is very clear that public priorities from 2021 don't appear to have been addressed. Or at least, the public do not feel they have been addressed and have not noticed progress. Only 9% say they have seen improvements in job opportunities, 8% for the physical environment of the town centre, and just 4% in public safety and anti-crime measures. The largest group (41%) report seeing no areas improve at all, and this figure rises to 52% of those who view their local area as having declined over the last year.

On a more positive note, amongst those who see their area as having improved, the areas pinpointed as most improved include restaurants, cafes and bars (41%), parks and green spaces (30%) and job opportunities (20%).

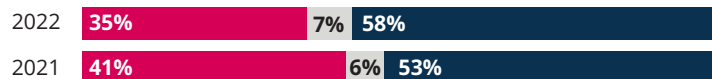
### Thinking about your local area, how good or bad do you think the following currently are?

● Good ● Don't know ● Bad

#### The physical environment in the town centre



#### Retail stores in the local town centre



#### Parks and green spaces



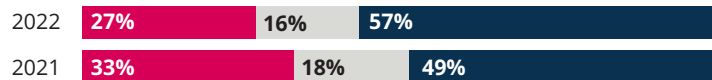
#### Schools and education



#### Sporting facilities



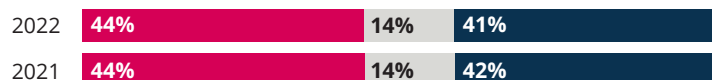
#### Public safety and anti-crime measures



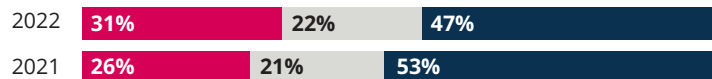
#### Restaurants, cafes and bars



#### Theatres, music and arts venues



#### Job opportunities



#### Local transport links



#### National transport links



People rate every category more poorly than in our 2021 survey with the exception of job opportunities. However, job opportunities still only rate as good by 31% of residents.

When asked about the priorities highlighted in 2021 in isolation, negative perceptions of public safety and anti-crime measures have increased since 2021, from 49% saying this in 2021 to 57% now. Correspondingly, 44% say that public safety and crime have gotten worse in the last year and 37% say they've stayed the same – just 3% say they have got better. As one of the top identified priorities for people in policy target areas last year, these increasingly negative figures on public safety and

crime are extremely worrying. Similarly, more people continue to say the physical environment in their town centre is bad (54%) than good (37%), and 47% say it has got worse over the last year.

Slight progress is seen to have been made with the provision of jobs since 2021, with increasing numbers saying opportunities are good (from 26% to 31% now), and that it is easy for young people to find a job (17% to 22%).

Nevertheless, a larger number still say opportunities are bad (47%) and hard to come by (53%). Residents of LUTAs also continue to say it is even harder to find a good quality job (64%). When directly asked if job opportunities have got better or worse, only 8% say better, 30% say worse and 38% say they've stayed the same. These findings are consistent across regions, but difficulty in finding jobs is felt worst by those in social grade DE, with 22% finding it very difficult, compared to just 13% of their AB counterparts.





### Critical transport in decline

In 2021, transport came out as an area for Levelling Up policymakers to target – particularly local transport. Opinions on the quality, and change in quality, of public transport are mixed, more do continue to say local and national transport is good (51%), than bad (39%). However, both local and national transport links are increasingly seen as bad or very bad compared to last year. Whilst provisions for cyclists are seen by 24% as having improved over the last year, less than 10% say the same for any other area of transport, and many say they have worsened. Their priorities identified in 2021 – roads, buses and train services – are the areas identified by the most as having worsened (by 50%, 39% and 36% respectively).

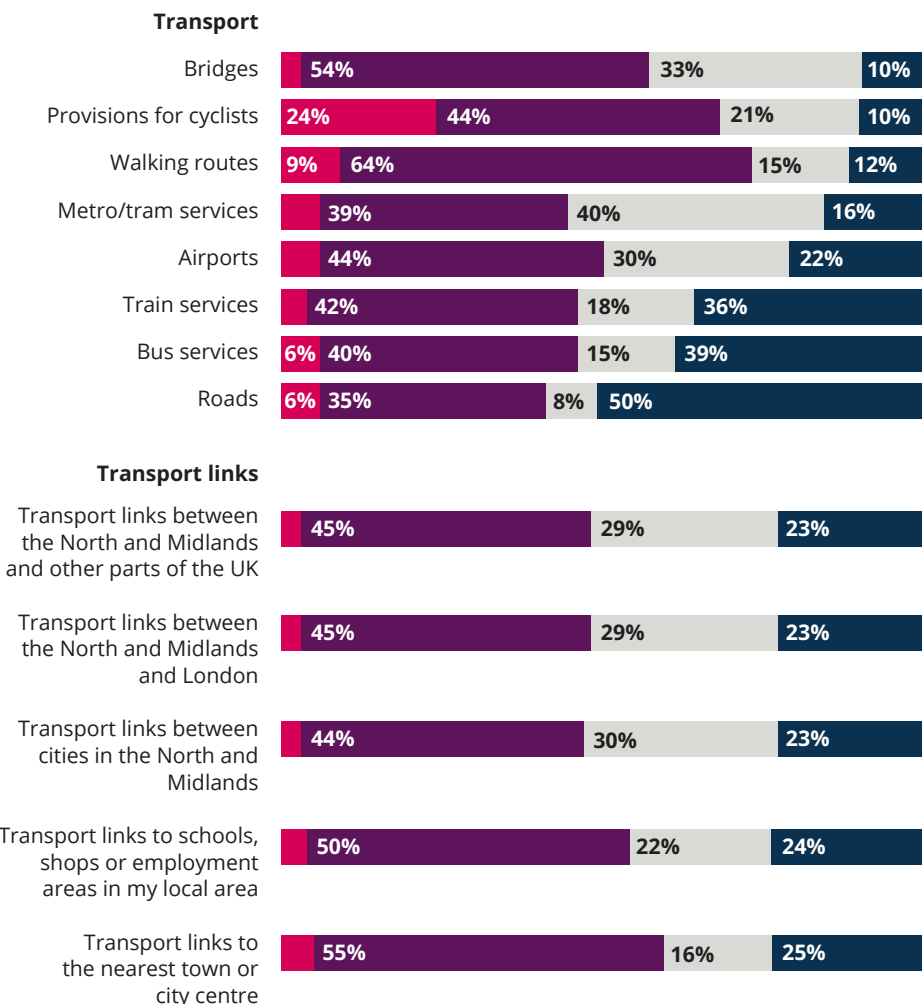
Those aged 65 or older are particularly negative about transport links, being the most likely out of all age groups to say each transport link has got worse across the board. On the other hand, younger people (18-24) feel significantly better about transport services and links, being more positive than other groups about all transport links and roads, walking routes and bus services in particular.

Looking at regional disparities, those in the North are more likely than in the Midlands to say local (45% v 28%) and national (44% vs 24%) transport links are bad, and that links services across the board have got worse. Specifically, those in Yorkshire and Humber display higher levels of those saying bus services have worsened (52%) and along with the North West, train services, with 43% and 41% respectively saying they've got "worse". More in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber also report worsening of links to places outside of their local area.

Simultaneous to perceptions of transport declining further, national and local transport links have become increasingly recognised as a value for encouraging new residents and businesses to move to and invest in the area. This evidence again suggests that, so far, Levelling Up has missed the mark in terms of what the local public wanted to see improve, particularly for those in the North.

### Would you say the following transport links in your local area got better or worse in the last year, or have they stayed about the same?

● Better ● Stayed the same ● Don't know ● Worse



Transport has seen little improvement in the last year in all areas apart from provision for cyclists. Rating the poorest are roads, bus services and train services.

# Charting a path for a Levelling Up revival

The 2019 General Election result surely demonstrated that there is enthusiasm amongst the electorate for the Levelling Up agenda.

At the time the concept wasn't defined, but whether voters thought it was about improving the opportunities of people living in areas which have not shared in the prosperity of recent years or creating a more geographically balanced economy, they backed the idea and the sentiment.

While other factors are surely at play, the survey suggests that the Levelling Up agenda has faltered. The survey data shows that people are beginning to lose belief that it will ever be delivered, which is perhaps unsurprising when many initiatives have yet to be completed and there are negative headlines about cuts to funding streams<sup>3</sup>.

If Levelling Up was delivered it would be a hugely popular policy and almost certainly contribute to the economic revival of the UK. Therefore, policy

makers should consider the results in this survey, in particular recognising that devolution is popular and Metro Mayors are well positioned to take forward practical Levelling Up initiatives such as overseeing inward investment funding and developing skills programmes.

The survey results suggest that Central Government should aim to be clearer about funding formulas so it can be demonstrated that those areas in need are benefiting from greater proportions of public funding. Likewise, there should be more stringent checks on public funding to drive up compliance and performance, thereby giving people assurance as to how it is managed. This will give people confidence that there is a regeneration framework which is helping those areas with the greatest need.

Policy makers should think hard before considering cuts to Levelling Up funding. Our research shows that people do not feel their voting priorities have been met in important areas such as job creation and the built environment. The difficult choice emerging is that cutting funding and subsidies is likely to hamper inward investment and growth, while increasing that dissatisfaction and growing disillusionment.

With the national government enduring a difficult period in terms of popularity and public confidence, this could be increasingly important for Levelling Up policy makers moving forward if they are to avoid the Levelling Up agenda losing public support, thereby damaging the economy, growth and investment.

<sup>3</sup> The Independent, 1 February 2022, [The UK's Brexit replacement for EU regional funding cuts payments by billions](#)





## About us

DWF is a leading global provider of integrated legal and business services. With its origins in the North West of England, it has a long established reputation of working with public bodies, large employers and strategic service providers across the north and midlands. For many years, we have worked with regional and local authorities as well as central government bodies on significant regeneration, infrastructure and carbon reduction projects across these regions. DWF has recently worked with authorities to assess the challenges they face in tackling critical issues, from the future of the high street to climate change. At the Legal 500 UK Awards 2019, DWF was named Public Sector Law Firm of the Year (outside London) and is recognised by the Legal 500 as a tier one business for local government in the North West.

With such strong ties to the north and midlands and with the majority of its UK employees working in the regions, DWF sees the Levelling Up of the UK as one of the most critical issues facing the Government today.

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## This research was conducted by YouGov

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,035 adults, of which 698 adults also took part in the 2021 wave of the survey. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th – 20th September 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults living in district or unitary local authorities in the North and Midlands (aged 18+).

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Our Integrated Legal Management approach delivers greater efficiency, price certainty and transparency for our clients.

We deliver integrated legal and business services on a global scale through our three offerings; Legal Advisory, Mindcrest and Connected Services, across our eight key sectors. We seamlessly combine any number of our services to deliver bespoke solutions for our diverse clients.

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