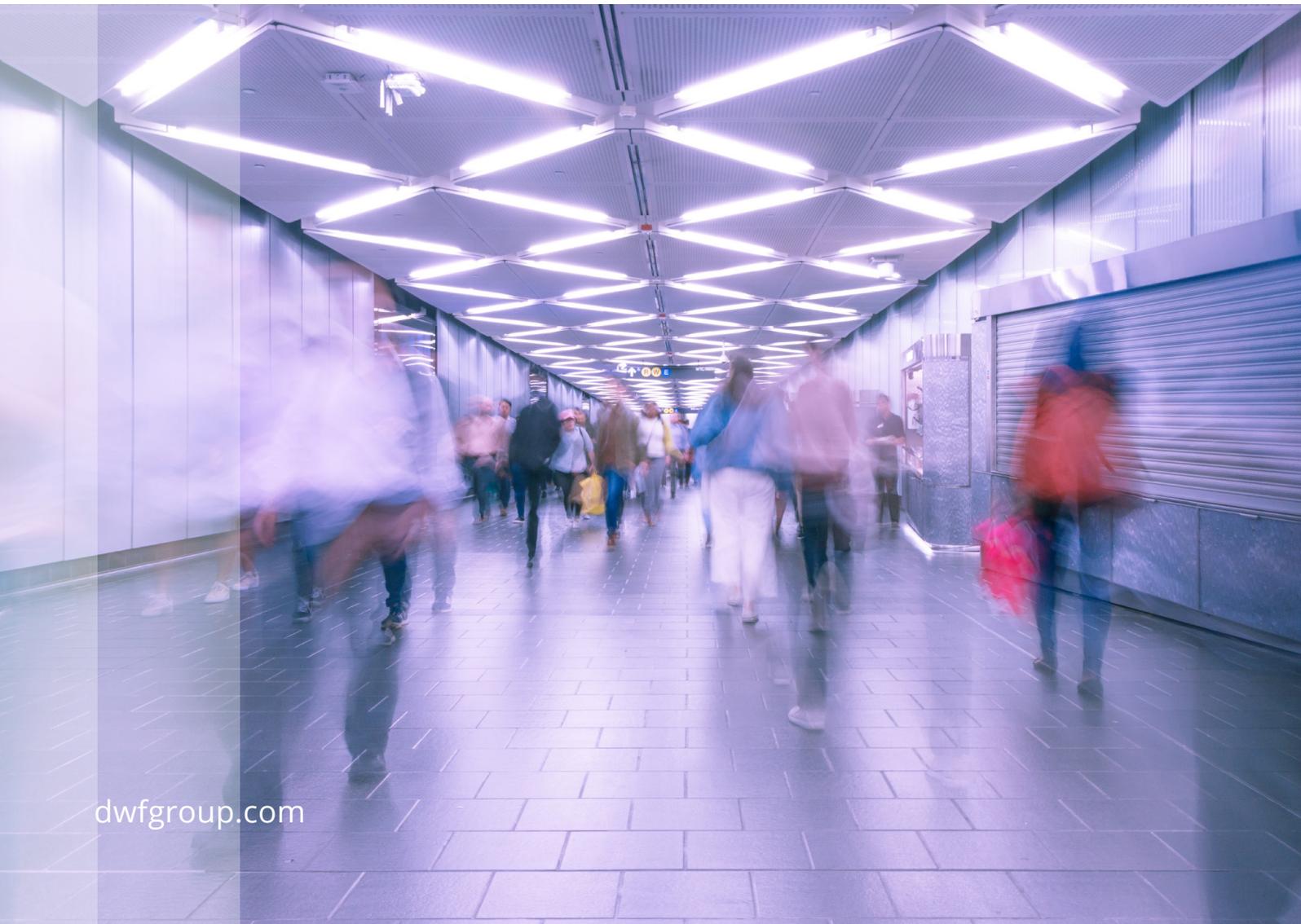




# Will Levelling Up meet voter priorities?

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DWF's YouGov survey examines the views of voters in England's North and Midlands.



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# Introduction

## In Government, the Conservatives have made Levelling Up a core message but now face the challenge of translating a big picture promise into effective policies.

At the last General Election, the Conservative Party manifesto set out an ambition to help spread economic success and opportunity to those parts of the country that missed out in the past, in particular the North and Midlands. The vision obviously resonated with voters, contributing to an 80 seat majority, including winning seats such as Bishop Auckland, which prior to the 2019 election had been held by Labour since 1935.

In Government, the Conservatives have made Levelling Up a core message but now face the challenge of translating a big picture promise into effective policies. To achieve this, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has appointed Michael Gove as the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities supported by a team including former Bank of England chief economist Andy Haldane and Neil O'Brien, who is leading on the Levelling Up white paper which is expected to be published in October 2021.

In this report we study whether the promises around Levelling Up will match what voters in the Midlands and the North actually want. In particular we assess whether there is a clear understanding of what Levelling Up means and whether the scope of what is being promised is too narrow, for example would politicians be wise to include law and order within the Levelling Up initiative. In doing so, our objective is to support the design of important regeneration initiatives, such as the Levelling Up Fund, and in due course the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which will launch in April 2022 replacing EU funds lost following Brexit and supposedly reducing 'inequalities between communities'.

It's important to recognise that some meaningful steps towards Levelling Up have already been made. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 the Chancellor of the Exchequer has backed measures introduced to deliver upon Levelling Up. This includes £3.6 billion to help regenerate over 100 towns in areas such as broadband connectivity, skills and transport, but also grant funding to build the industries of tomorrow, including helping grant funding to help the industries of tomorrow, from electric vehicles to wind energy and other advanced manufacturing. Each of these makes a meaningful difference to the local area, but to succeed in meeting the scale of the Government's ambitions will inevitably require a host of other initiatives across every government department.

Delivering on Levelling Up also requires ministers to make difficult choices. Some measures can be delivered quickly and will offer short term benefits. Should these be prioritised above more expensive, speculative initiatives which may result in long-term improvement? Should inward investment be prioritised over infrastructure? Should the Government focus on addressing differences between regions when research suggests the disparity within regions in terms of income, prosperity or life expectancy are equally large within regions?

Ultimately we hope that this research can help to inform decision makers at all levels of government to make the right decisions about how best to deliver the practical improvements on the ground that meet the aspirations of those who will most directly benefit.

DWF has expertise in precisely the areas where the Government's Levelling Up is most focused. This includes helping to deliver regeneration projects in every part of the UK, from Spaceports in Cornwall to the "world-leading" Energy Transition Zone in Aberdeen. Our work in designing inward investment projects, delivering public funding programmes and meeting the related compliance requirements (such as Subsidy Control and Public Procurement) means we understand the importance of the Levelling Up agenda, but also the steps which need to be taken for it to be as effective as possible.

We believe that the goal of Levelling Up is to spread economic prosperity and opportunity to every part of the country is a worthy objective. However delivering the concrete improvements that are needed will be no easy task.

We hope that this research will help all those involved whether at national, regional, or local level to understand the priorities of those whose lives could be improved if Levelling Up delivers on its promises. In particular we hope that this research helps inform the decision making process and thereby contribute to the objective of Levelling Up.



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Public Sector

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# Executive summary

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This report has been commissioned to better understand the views of voters in the North and Midlands, ahead of long-term funding decisions being made in the Comprehensive Spending Review 2021.

**The eight key findings from the research are:**

## 1. Levelling Up confusion

Despite general support for Levelling Up there is no clear understanding of what exactly it means. However, our sample was able to put forward an idea as Levelling Up should be defined, which may help the Government clarify its message in future.

## 2. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. And a more attractive town centre

Jobs are widely seen as a way to make an area more appealing, but opinions on the ability for young people to secure jobs, let alone 'good quality' ones are currently downbeat. Based upon this, the Government would do well to put securing high quality jobs at the forefront of the Levelling Up Fund and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund's objectives, recognising that for many voters this will be a measure of the success of Levelling Up.

## 3. An opportunity to revive pride in place

Residents of the North and Midlands want to feel pride in the areas they live in. However, in reality they have mixed feelings about the state of their towns, presenting an opportunity for politicians to win votes by addressing this, provided they can show a clear connection between devolution and improvements to local areas.

## 4. Local leaders matter

Both local councils and mayors are seen as having a larger impact on local improvements than the national government. Local MPs are also seen as influential on investment, especially those from a governing party. This supports the Government's statements that power should be devolved from Westminster. The Government may reflect on this by giving Mayors and Councils greater powers and decision-making ability when it comes to public funds. Political parties may choose to take account of this finding by prioritising Mayoral elections.

## 5. Security is a priority

For those surveyed, a priority for government investment is public safety and anti-crime measures, with nearly half believing these measures are currently not fit for purpose. While support for these measures is strong across all groups, age does have an influence.

## 6. Reversing the decline

A significant number of those surveyed see their area as having declined over recent years. There is also a connection between leave voters and a stronger negative perception of their local area. The resounding message is more needs to be done in the North and the Midlands. The Conservative Party may look to consolidate their hold on former redwall seats by being tough on crime, whereas the Labour Party may see this as an opportunity to win back votes.

## 7. Local transport matters

Those surveyed place a greater importance on local transport rather than regional or national links. Local roads and buses are much higher priorities than train services or links between the North and Midlands and London.

## 8. Bridging the divide

When looking at the results by markers such as age or voting/political views, some clear divides emerge. Remain voters are generally more positive about their areas, while older people displayed more pessimistic views than younger ones. What will be the long-term impact of this?

## What is the methodology?

DWF commissioned YouGov to undertake this unique piece of research. Bespoke quota-sample targets and a weight scheme were constructed by YouGov using census, election results and annual population data to make a sample of 1094 individuals representative of all adults living in unitary and combined local authorities in the North and Midlands. The fieldwork was undertaken between 1st and 11th June 2021.

On 22nd September 2021 we invited a panel of regional and local government stakeholders to discuss the results. Their views are shared in the report.

# Key findings

The key findings from our research conducted by YouGov.

## 1. Levelling Up confusion

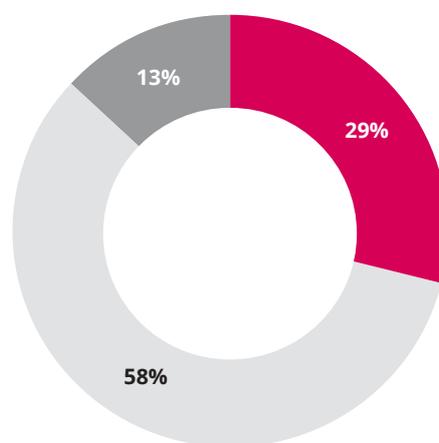
The term Levelling Up was not widely understood. Only a minority (29%) were clear about the term Levelling Up, against 58% who were unclear. But when asked about how they might define Levelling Up in practice, there was greater clarity: 30% thought it meant people in the North and Midlands have the same opportunities as those in the South East. An even greater number (37%) thought achieving that rebalancing of opportunities would make the biggest difference to their lives.

In contrast, just 6% believed Levelling Up was about spending more government money in the North and Midlands. One sign showing the degree of cynicism about politics, 28% agreed with the statement that Levelling Up “doesn’t mean anything at all”. The research shows that the term Levelling Up is ill-defined in the minds of those surveyed. But based on the priorities given in the survey, it is clear what outcomes they would see as success in achieving the Levelling Up goal. The Government has recently appointed Michael Gove MP to lead the initiative and Neil O’Brien MP, with a remit to define exactly what the programme should be aiming to deliver and what the long-term investment needed should prioritise. This research could certainly help to guide the Government about the priorities of voters in the North and Midlands.

“These results reflect the confusion for voters. Does it mean big projects – HS2 and Northern Powerhouse rail or is it small pot of money for potholes and hanging baskets?”

Kevin Lee,  
Director of Mayor’s Office, GMCA

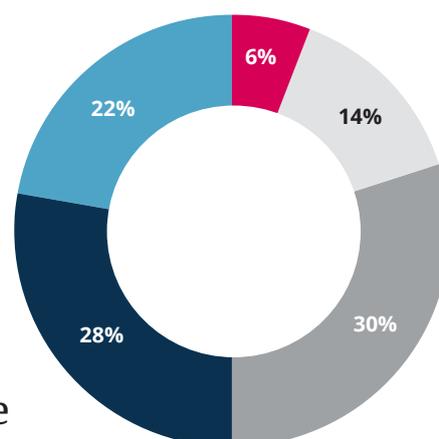
### How clear or unclear are you about what politicians mean when they talk about Levelling Up?



- Total clear
- Total unclear
- Don't know

Despite being bandied about, what politicians mean by Levelling Up is unclear to a majority of people.

### 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

People have a clearer idea of what they think Levelling Up means, although views are split on this.

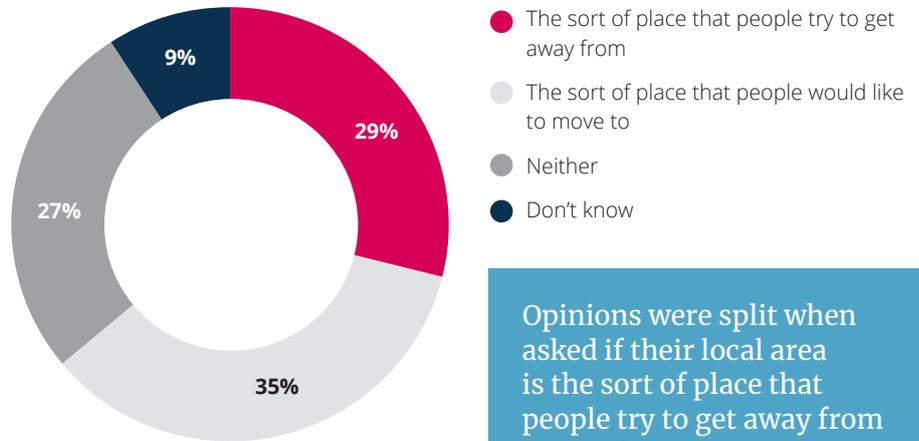
## 2. Jobs. Jobs. Jobs. And a more attractive town centre

There is a balanced view about whether respondents' town or city is a place that people would move to or stay away from. 29% believe their town or city is the sort of place people try to get away from against 35% thinking it is the kind of area people would like to move to.

The key reasons that would make their areas more attractive would be more jobs (46%), especially high skilled and long-term jobs, as well as improvements to the physical appearance of the town centre (34%). Almost two thirds of those surveyed (62%) have a very downbeat view about the ability of young people to secure jobs in their local area – and an even more negative perception (70%) about their ability to land “good quality” employment. When asked about their feelings if a major international corporation were to announce substantial investment in their local area, nearly half (47%) said they would be pleased.

There is strong support for making changes to the physical environment of these areas as a way to restore pride in the town or city. At the same time, the Government needs to weigh up directing funding towards short-term improvements and those which create long-term change, for example, the investment in Nissan in 1984 continues to pay dividends today. Any mayor or local authority interested in attracting external investment can be confident that there is likely to be significant support for the idea but they also need to be able to show how any jobs created will give direct benefit to the community. There is a strong desire for high skilled employment and for jobs that can persuade the young to stay working locally rather than having to move elsewhere are also important factors.

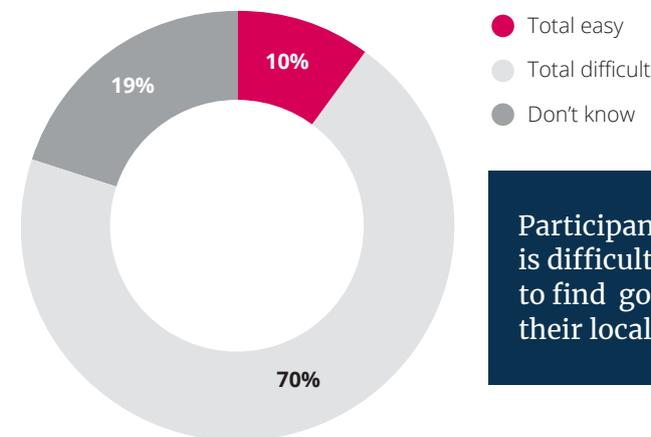
### Would you say your local area is more...



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

Opinions were split when asked if their local area is the sort of place that people try to get away from or people try to move to.

### And how easy or difficult do you think it is for young people to find good quality jobs in your local area?



- Total easy
- Total difficult
- Don't know

Participants widely believe it is difficult for young people to find good quality jobs in their local area.

**“In South Tyneside we have a high number of job vacancies but over 7,000 people unemployed. The skills gap is a big problem.”**

John Scott, Head of Economic Growth, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

**“Based on our research, the Government should focus public funding upon creating new, well paid jobs either through inward investment or nurturing existing businesses to grow.”**

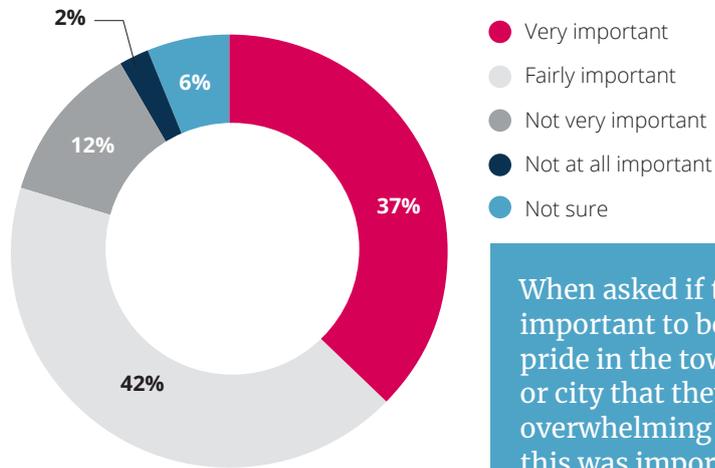
Jonathan Branton, Partner, Head of Government and Public Sector, DWF

### 3. An opportunity to revive pride in place

According to our survey, there is a strong desire for people to feel pride in the places where they live. Almost 4 in 5 of those surveyed (79%) believe it is important to feel proud of where you live. However, there is a huge disconnect with how they actually feel. This is driven by concerns about crime, lack of job opportunities locally and a poor perception of town centres.

There are some very positive perceptions about certain aspects of their local areas around schools and local transport links. Parks are seen almost universally in a positive way with 73% believing their area has good green spaces. But these positive sentiments are trumped by very negative concerns about the current state of the physical environment, crime and job opportunities. Over half (53%) of those surveyed feel that job opportunities in their area are bad or very bad, and 87% believe it is important or very important that it is prioritised in future government investment. What these findings show is that there is a significant appetite for changes that will help to restore pride in these areas but only if they end up tackling the priorities they have identified.

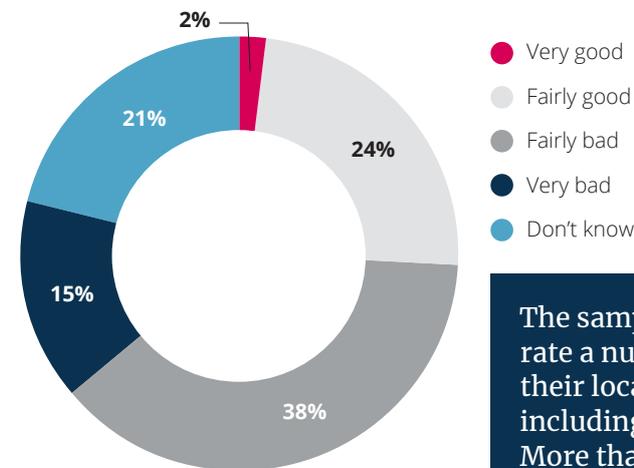
#### How important, if at all, is it to you to be able to feel a pride in the town, village or city that you live in?



- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Not sure

When asked if they felt it was important to be able to feel pride in the town, village or city that they lived in, an overwhelming majority said this was important to them.

#### How good are job opportunities in your area?



- Very good
- Fairly good
- Fairly bad
- Very bad
- Don't know

The sample were asked to rate a number of elements of their local area as good or bad, including job opportunities. More than half stated these were fairly bad or very bad.



“During the pandemic people started to spend much more time at home, so I think pride in place has risen up the agenda for a lot of people.”

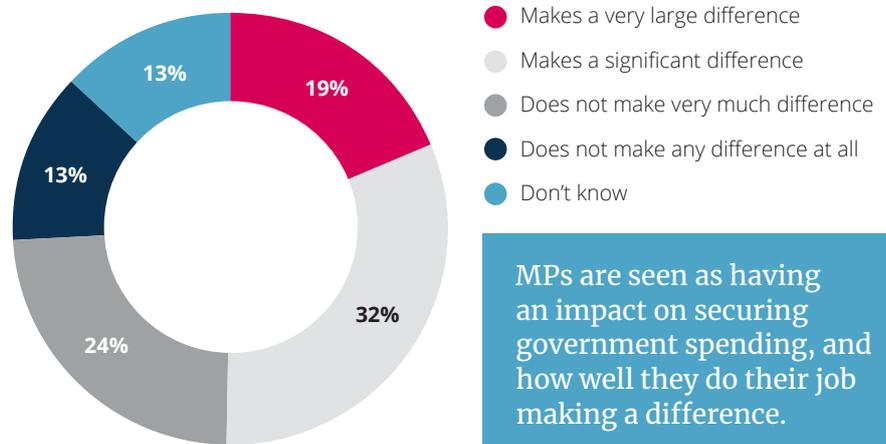
Sarah McMillan,  
Director, Northumberland County Council

#### 4. Local leaders matter

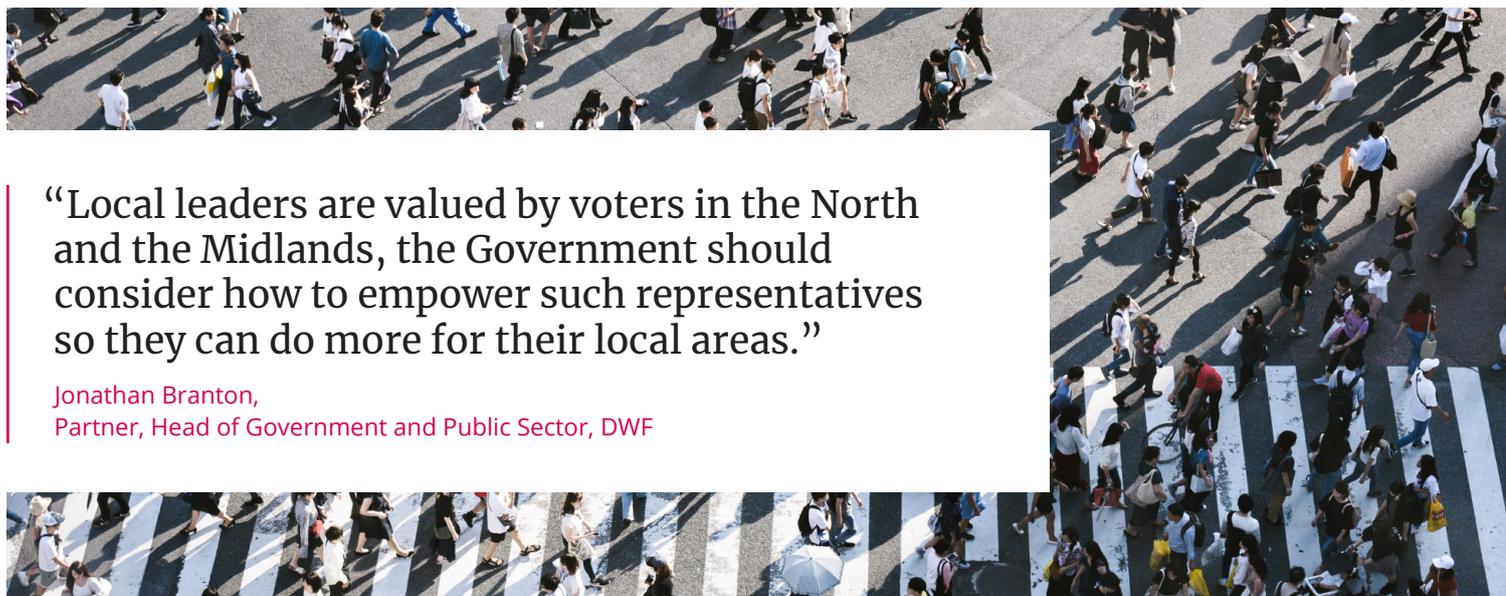
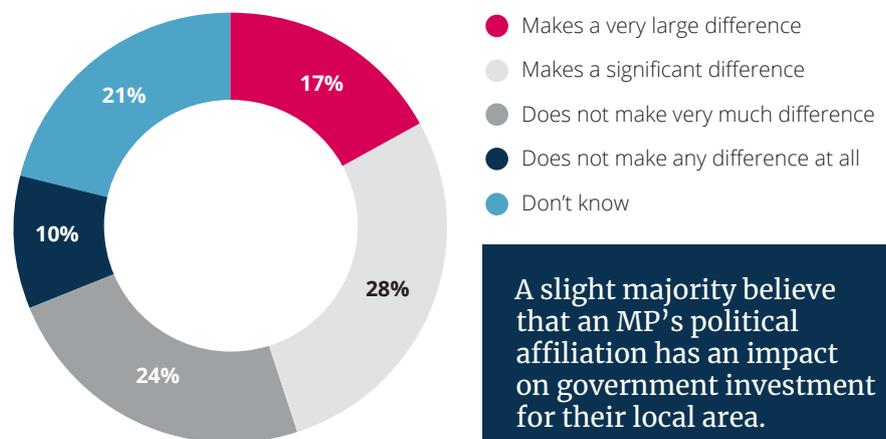
Councils and city mayors are seen as having a bigger responsibility and a greater role than the national government in delivering improvements locally. In addition, over half (51%) of those surveyed thought their local MPs had an influence over the level of government investment in their area. Just under half (45%) thought that having an MP of the same party as the Government would help their chances of securing that investment.

While much of the media attention (and the accompanying investment) around the Levelling Up agenda has been driven by the national government, the research shows that there is an opportunity for local politicians to take ownership of the delivery of many of the programmes that will be funded. And because they are trusted as having a key role to play in delivery, they could reap the local political rewards for delivering these changes. We would argue that city Mayors should be given greater powers and resources to make improvements in their local areas, working with councils, but that there also needs to be a solution for areas without Mayors.

**When it comes to government spending in local areas, how much difference do you think it makes if the local MP is good or bad at their job?**



**When it comes to government spending in local areas, how much difference do you think it makes if the local MP is a member of the same political party as the Government?**



“Local leaders are valued by voters in the North and the Midlands, the Government should consider how to empower such representatives so they can do more for their local areas.”

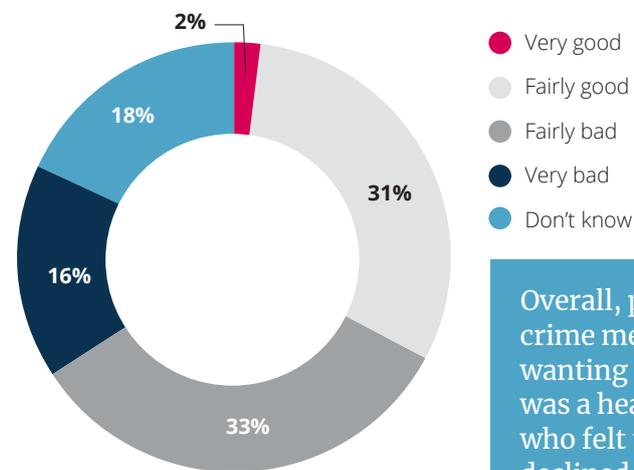
Jonathan Branton,  
Partner, Head of Government and Public Sector, DWF

## 5. Security is a priority

Lower crime is seen as the best sign of successful regeneration of a local area (31%), just ahead of more high skilled, well paid jobs (30%) and a cleaner, better quality town centre environment (24%). When asked what things they would like to see improved in their local area, over half (52%) want to see public safety and anti-crime measures, with 62% of over 65s prioritising this. Of all groups, only 18-24s did not put this as their top priority. A significant majority (89%) said it is important that the Government invests in improving these measures, and nearly half of those surveyed (49%) believe that these measures in their local area are currently bad. While concern and support for improving public safety and anti-crime measures was strong across the board, it was strongest with over 65s and weakest with those aged 18-24. Half (49%) of those surveyed described the local public safety and anti-crime measures as bad or very bad. 89% thought that this should be a key priority for future government investment.

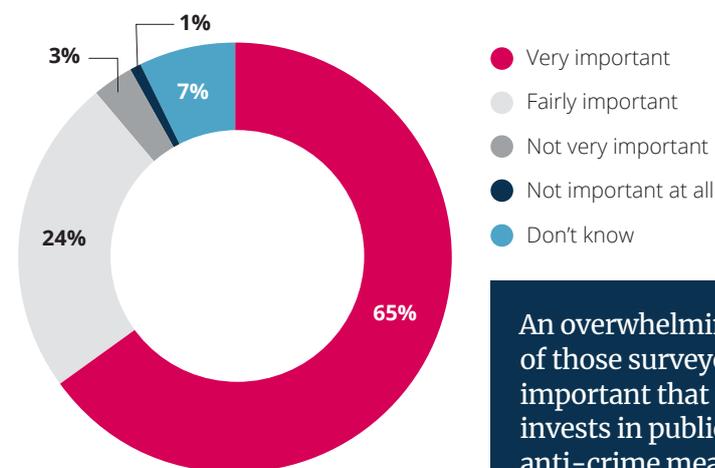
Much of the Levelling Up agenda is focused on issues identified elsewhere in the research – around improving the physical environment of town centres or attracting new jobs to an area, either through private sector investment or shifting central government offices. However, what is mentioned less is the issue that was overwhelmingly the most vital issue that needed to be addressed: reducing crime and improving a sense of security.

**Thinking about your local area, how good or bad do you think public safety and anti-crime measures are?**



Overall, public safety and anti-crime measures are seen as wanting in local areas. There was a heavy link between those who felt their local areas had declined and their negative view on these measures.

**Thinking about your local area, how important do you think it is that the government invests in improving public safety and anti-crime measures?**



An overwhelming majority of those surveyed believe it is important that the Government invests in public safety and anti-crime measures. This view is shared across groups.

“Residents want a safe, nice place to live.”

John Scott, Head of Economic Growth, South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

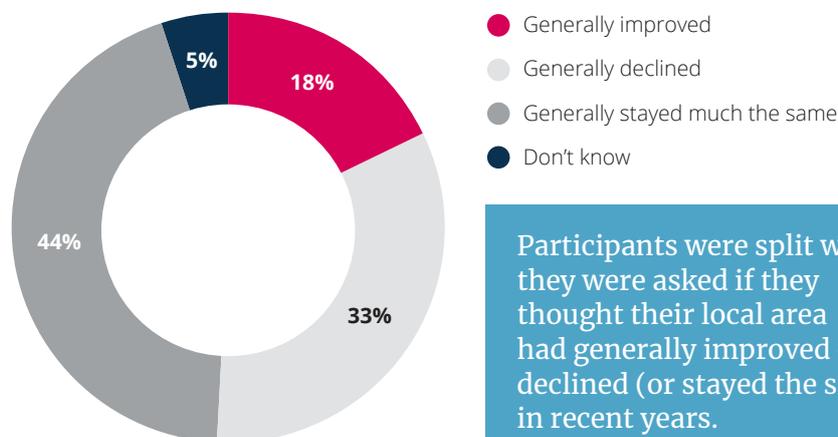
“Security wasn’t in the forefront of my mind when thinking about Levelling Up, but this survey illustrates that it absolutely does play into the agenda.”

Sarah McMillan, Director, Northumberland County Council

## 6. Reversing the decline

A significant minority of our survey sample – one third (33%) – believe that their area has declined in recent years with just 18% thinking they have improved. Leave voters – along with those from C2DE socio-economic backgrounds – were most likely to have a negative perception with 41% believing their areas had declined recently. Two thirds (65%) believe that the South East attracts more investment than their own area. While there are clearly aspects of these communities that are getting better or where they are proud of what the area has to offer, what is apparent is that many feel that their areas are in decline – and that their most important concerns remain unaddressed.

### In recent years, do you think your local area has...



- Generally improved
- Generally declined
- Generally stayed much the same
- Don't know

Participants were split when they were asked if they thought their local area had generally improved or declined (or stayed the same) in recent years.

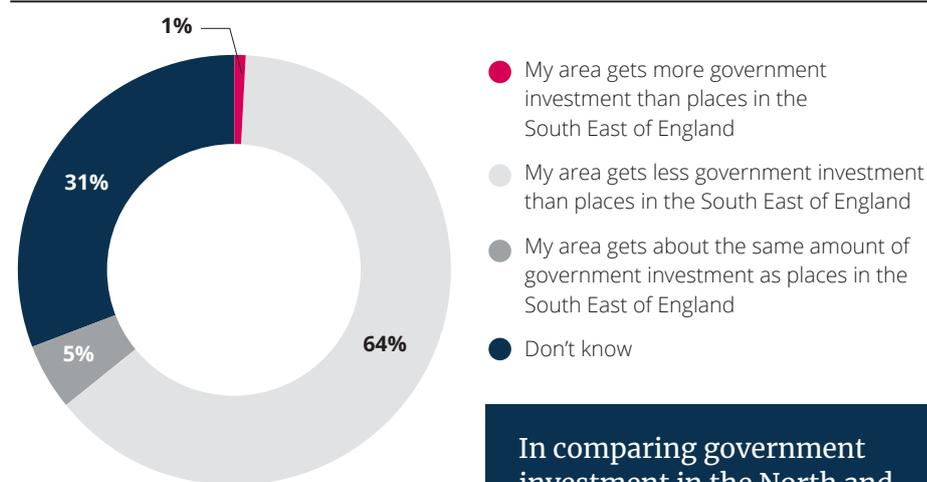
### Inward investment

DWF has supported leading automotive manufacturers on many high profile initiatives, including the UK's first gigafactory and diversifying operations to meet changes in technology. This has involved advising on issues relating to public funding such as state aid, subsidy control and grant funding powers.

When advising on high profile projects, it's crucial to appreciate that investment decisions rely upon a detailed understanding of the overall eco-system. Decision makers will scrutinise what has been done to ensure the supply chain in the local area is as strong as possible, to ensure appropriate grid connections, and to embed relevant skills amongst the local population.

We advise on many projects that are critical to the economies of the North and Midlands but we also appreciate the scale of the challenge.

### Thinking about government investment, which of the following best reflects your view?



- My area gets more government investment than places in the South East of England
- My area gets less government investment than places in the South East of England
- My area gets about the same amount of government investment as places in the South East of England
- Don't know

In comparing government investment in the North and Midlands with that received by places in the South East of the country, a significant majority think their area gets less.

**“We need long-term devolved flexible funding streams to enable us to plan improvements and ensure investment makes a difference.”**

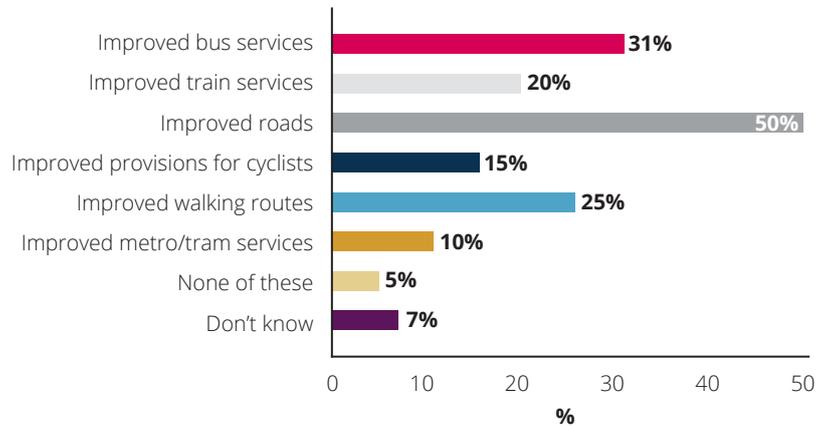
Corinne Watson,  
Place and Enterprise Manager, Cumbria County Council

## 7. Local transport matters

Our survey results clearly demonstrate the importance of the car rather than public transport. Half of those surveyed (50%) put improving local roads as their top priority, followed by better bus services (31%), and walking routes (25%). Only 20% opted for better train services. The two key priorities that would improve their or their family's lives were, improving local transport to schools, shops or employment, and better links between cities in the North and Midlands. A small minority (13%) backed better links from the North and Midlands to London.

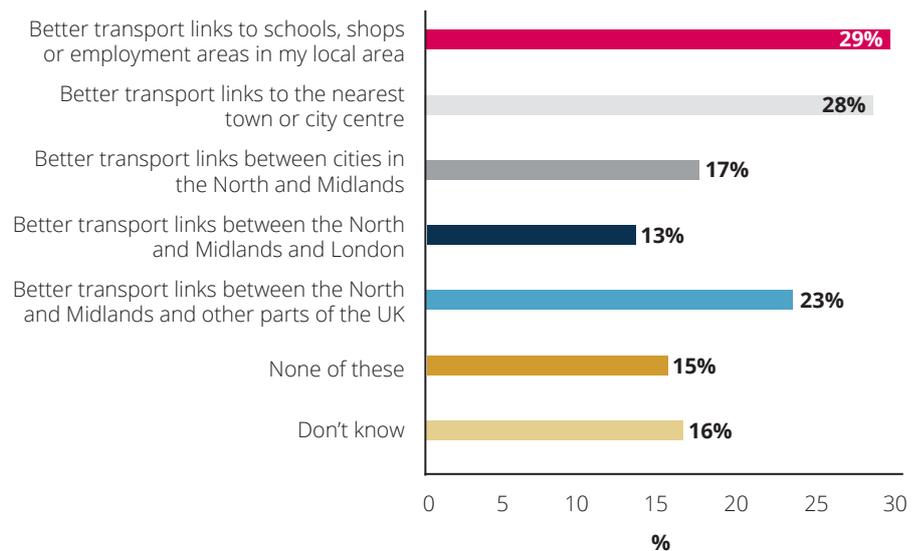
Local, visible improvements are clearly viewed in a more positive light than national or even regional transport changes. This shows that their priorities are on areas that deliver concrete change – maybe small scale but at least visible or measurable change – rather than national or regional schemes where the benefit is less tangible or immediate.

**Thinking specifically about transport links, which of the following would do the most to improve you and your family's life? Please tick up to two.**



When asked which travel improvements would benefit them and their families, half of respondents backed improving roads, followed by bus services, while provision for cyclists and metro/tram services trailed at the bottom.

**And thinking again about transport links, which of the following would do the most to improve you and your family's life? Please tick up to two.**



Looking at transport links more specifically, local links took priority. Transport to schools, shops and employment in the local area and links to the nearest town or city centre are most desirable.

“Good local public transport, including greenways and cycleways are vital for people on low incomes for travelling to work, education and for example leisure centres, which is important for health and well being. These survey results reflect that view.”

Rachel Laver,  
CEO, Marches LEP

## 8. Bridging the divide

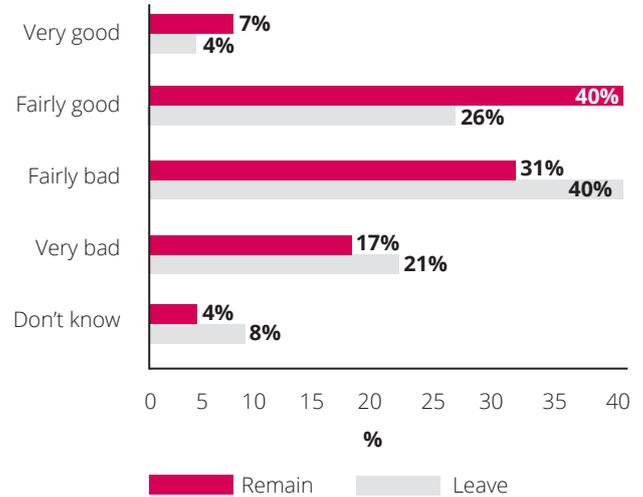
Within our survey sample, there were clear divides about the attitudes of different groups. Leave voters are significantly more downbeat about the places where they live than remain voters. In 9 out of the 10 attributes we assessed about a given area, from sporting facilities to crime levels, remain voters were more positive about their area than leave voters. Town centres were viewed positively by 47% of remain voters but only 30% of leave voters. Likewise, those over the age of 50 were consistently more pessimistic than those aged 18-24. Over 70% of those over 50 believed that their town or city received less investment than the South East. In contrast, that figure was only 47% for 18-24s. Half (52%) of those over 50 think the North and Midlands has declined in recent years against 29% of those aged 18-24.

The redrawing of the political map that began to be visible during the Brexit referendum and a major factor in delivering a Conservative Government in the 2019 General Election, is visible in this research. Many of those with the most negative perceptions about where they live and work are also typically likely to have voted for Brexit and now support the Conservatives in office.

“We can deliver better and deliver more for Government by working in a holistic way across transport, skills, health and other areas.”

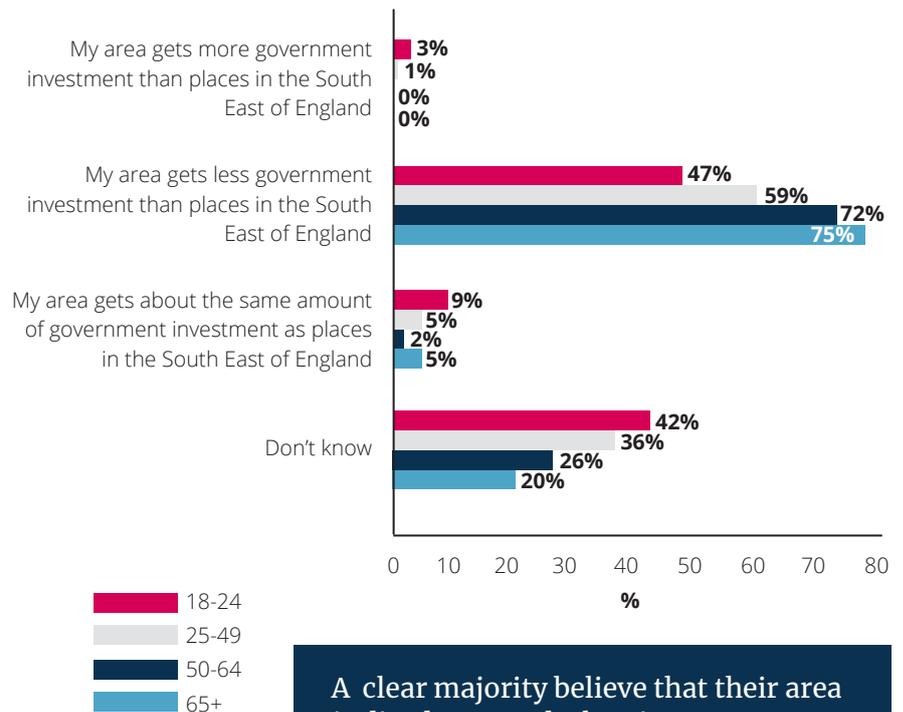
Kevin Lee,  
Director of Mayor's Office, GMCA

### Thinking about your local area, how good or bad do you think the physical environment in the town centre is?



When asked to rate the physical environment of their town centres, leave voters were more pessimistic about them and widely rated them as bad.

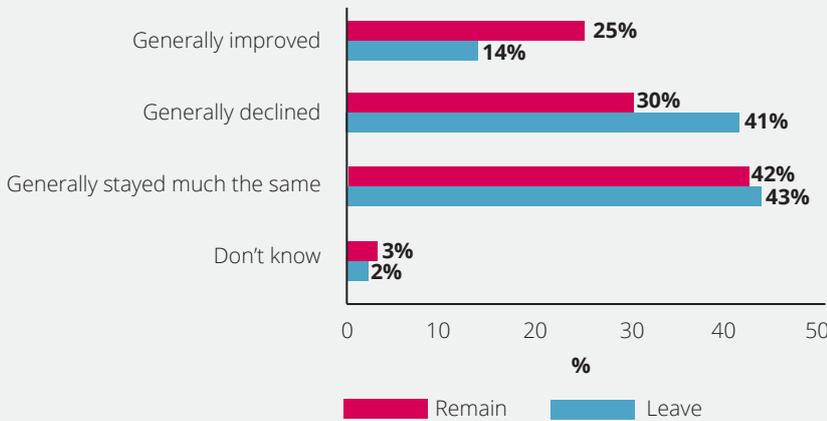
### Thinking about government investment, which of the following best reflects your view?



A clear majority believe that their area is disadvantaged when it comes to government investment compared to the South East, this is felt most strongly by those over 50.

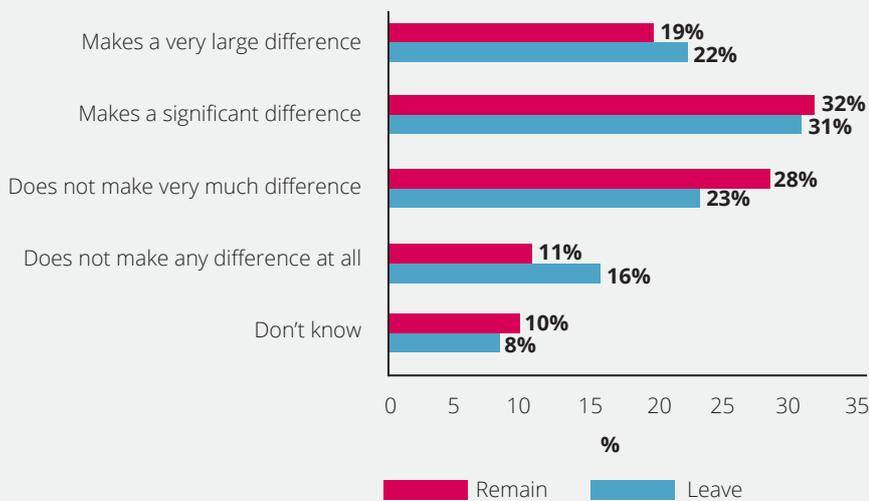
# Bridging the divide: the differing views of leave and remain voters

## In recent years, do you think your local area has...



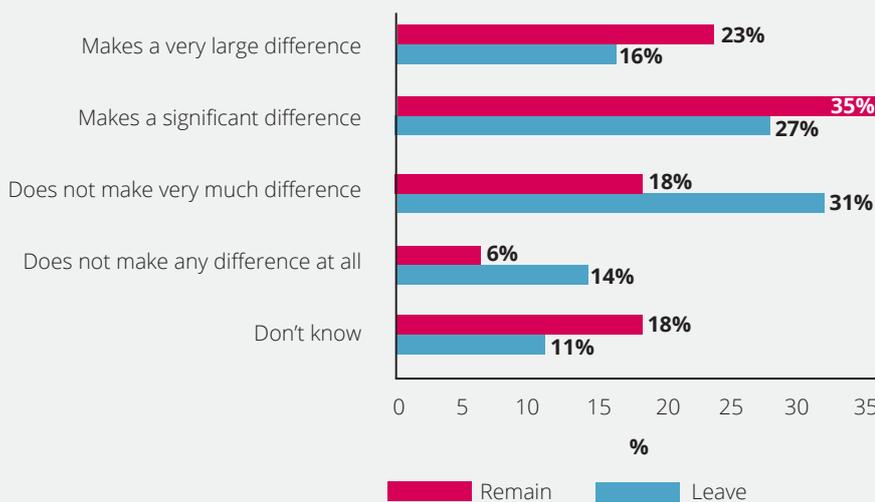
This is one area where the leave/remain dichotomy is both evident and where they come together. While there is agreement about their local areas staying the same, those who voted leave strongly view their area as having declined, while those who voted remain are largely split on the issue.

## When it comes to government spending in local areas, how much difference do you think it makes if the local MP is good or bad at their job?



Leave or remain, just over half of those surveyed thinks whether a local MP is good or bad at their job has an effect on government spending in their local area. They are also evenly matched among those who think it makes no difference.

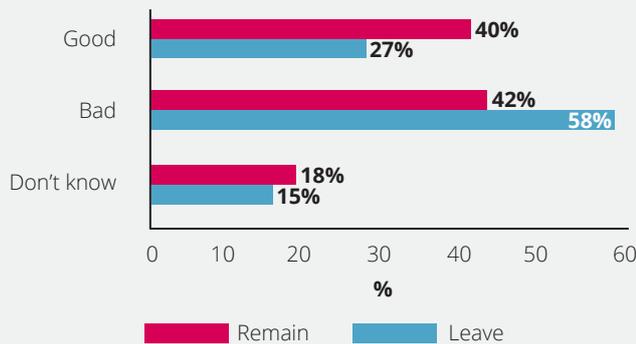
## When it comes to government spending in local areas, how much difference do you think it makes if your local MP is a member of the same political party as the Government?



However, when asked if the local MP being a member of the same party as the Government has an influence on government spending locally, there is a difference of opinion. Over half of remain voters tend to believe it does make a difference, while leave voters were split. Nearly a quarter of remain voters did not see it making a difference, with the rest unsure.

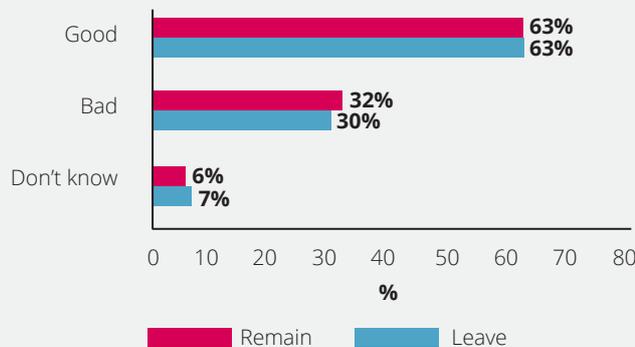
14 Will Levelling Up meet voter priorities?

Thinking about your local area, how good or bad do you think public safety and anti-crime measures are?



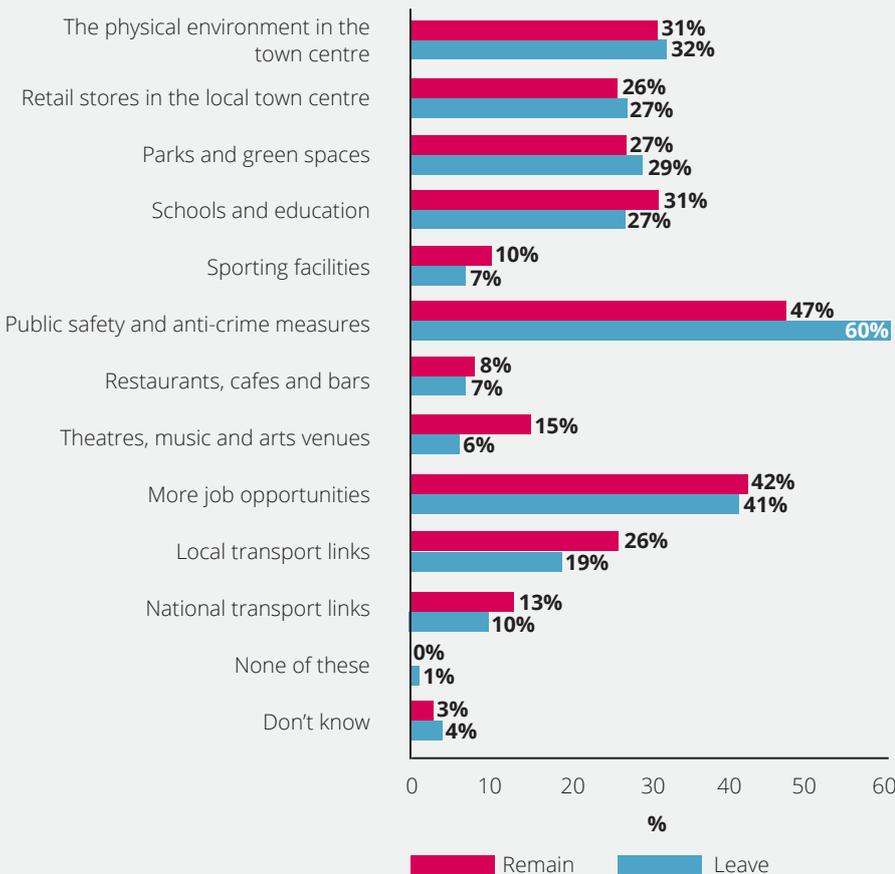
On the current state of public safety and anti-crime measures in their local area, remain voters are evenly split, with under half thinking they are good and the same leaning towards bad (and the remainder unsure). Over half of leave voters responded that they thought these measures were bad and under a third thinking they are currently good.

Thinking about your local area, how good or bad do you think local transport links are?



Both sides were in agreement on what they think of local transport links. Roughly two-thirds think they are currently good, with one-third thinking they need improvement.

Which of the following would you personally most like to see improved in your local area? Please choose up to three.



They share similar priorities in what they want to see improved in their local area – but more leave voters want to see public safety and anti-crime measures improve, while remain voters see local transport links as a higher priority than leave voters.

# Growth-enhancing spending across the regions: Onward research

The think tank, Onward, has undertaken extensive research about Levelling Up, particularly examining divergences between different parts of the country.

Onward's recent report, entitled [Levelling Up growth-enhancing spending](#), was authored by Neil O'Brien OBE MP who was subsequently appointed by the Government as Levelling Up adviser. The report looked at key measures where there were differences in spending across a range of areas that demonstrate why more investment is required in the North and Midlands.

Table 1 from the report shows government levels of growth-enhancing spending across four sectors (2018-19): transport, science and technology, housing and community amenities, and recreation, culture and religion. London received almost double that of any other English region in transport spending, and more than any other region in the other categories. Meanwhile, the North East, West Midlands and East of England all received more in transport spending than both the South East and South West. Margins were slimmer in the other three spending areas. The South East and South West had higher spending per head on science and technology than the North and Midlands, but received lower spending on recreation, culture and religion.

Figure 1 shows that London received nearly twice as much per capita transport spending (2018-19) than any other part of England. When looking at investment in transport over more than a decade, a clear trend is visible. From 2007-2019, London received nearly three times as much in investment than the rest of the country, which received an average of £2,232 per head over this period.

Looking at combined government and higher education expenditure on R&D (2001-2017), figure 2 shows a clear advantage for London and the South East. However, it is not just North vs South. The Midlands have been the least advantaged, and the South West has seen a significant decline. Again, London has had the highest levels of expenditure and a steady upward increase. However, the North and Midlands have consistently seen less expenditure than the national average.

**Table 1** | Published spending levels on growth-enhancing spending, per-head, 2018-2019, compared to England average.

	Transport spending	Science and Technology	Housing and Community amenities	Recreation, Culture and Religion
North East	£486	£81	£159	£95
North West	£412	£81	£103	£101
Yorkshire and the Humber	£276	£88	£164	£99
East Midlands	£268	£89	£108	£86
West Midlands	£467	£82	£123	£87
East of England	£493	£94	£129	£83
London	£903	£101	£272	£126
South East	£422	£95	£133	£86
South West	£308	£99	£102	£87
<b>England average</b>	<b>£474</b>	<b>£91</b>	<b>£149</b>	<b>£96</b>
Wales	£395	£84	£409	£165
Scotland	£642	£128	£260	£187
Northern Ireland	£354	£48	£411	£281
<b>UK Average</b>	<b>£481</b>	<b>£93</b>	<b>£182</b>	<b>£112</b>

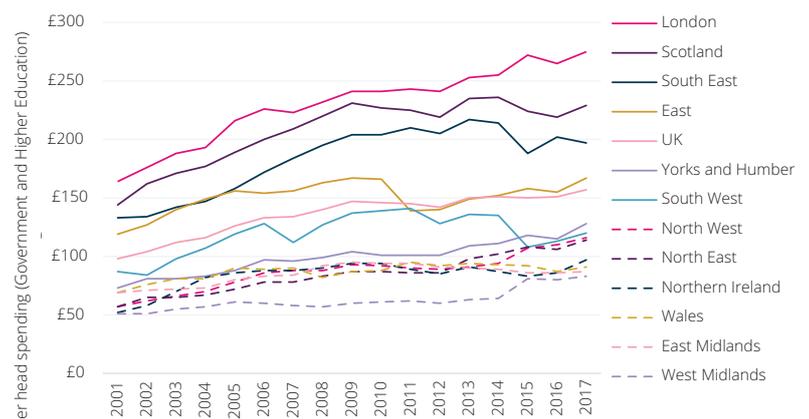
Source: Onward analysis, ONS, Country and Regional Analysis, 2018-19 & Rhodes. C, Research and Development Spending, House of Commons Library, 2020

**Figure 1** | Cumulative capital investment in transport, 2007-2019.



Source: Onward analysis, ONS, Country and Regional Analysis, 2018-19

**Figure 2** | Combined Government and HE expenditure on R&D per-region (2001-2017)



Source: Onward analysis, ONS, Country and Regional breakdown of expenditure on R&D in the UK by sector of performance, 2019

# Conclusion

## DWF's research should assist senior Government figures in designing Levelling Up to meet voter priorities ahead of the Comprehensive Spending Review and launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Fundamentally, whilst there is confusion about the exact meaning of Levelling Up, there is support for what the initiative is trying to achieve. What is more surprising is that voters in the Midlands and the North see lower crime as the best measure of whether regeneration has been successful, supporting the view that Levelling Up needs to be a genuinely cross-Government initiative. It may also indicate that which party is tougher on law and order will be a major political issue of the coming years.

More broadly, we believe that the Government is right to identify regional disparity as a priority and expect that the Levelling Up initiative to become more popular once it is better defined and if it aligns with the distinctive sense of pride that many of those surveyed feel about the places where they live and work.

Following the greatest economic disturbance in over 300 years, there will be significant pressure on the public purse. Therefore, Ministers will have to make difficult decisions as to how to allocate public funding.

Our research clearly shows that certain attributes of towns and cities are seen as positive, such as green spaces, sporting and recreational facilities and schools.

However, these are, for many, insufficient to compensate for the many deeply felt concerns, especially around levels of crime, rundown town centres and lack of local job opportunities. There is a sense that the physical infrastructure of many of the towns and cities in the North and Midlands is run down and in decline.

Therefore, we see a golden opportunity for the Government to use the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other initiatives, including the Levelling Up Fund to tackle a major concern of voters:

the lack of high quality jobs outside London. To this end, we believe the Government can harness the power of inward investment to make Britain as attractive as possible for investors. To do so, we strongly recommend designing the Subsidy Control Bill to not only minimise bureaucracy, but also direct funding to priority areas.

Interestingly, improving transport, whether public or private, is viewed in a rather neutral way; neither a source of pride nor a critical problem to be fixed, except if it is part of improving the physical environment of an area.

There is a strongly held belief that areas in the North and Midlands have been neglected by the national government in the past and that their area has suffered from under investment in comparison with the South East. Conversely, there is a belief in the ability of the local MP or mayor or council to be able to make a difference. Given this, we would recommend the Government creates a system where the concerns of MPs in the Midlands and the North are better heard and that supports Mayors and councils to make a real difference. In our view, this would be a Minister who attends cabinet and is therefore able to make the needs of left behind regions heard.

Anyone making decisions on how to make the right investments for the future in a way that will deliver on the priorities this research has identified would increase their prospects not just to improve the fabric of their communities but also to reap the political rewards for doing so.

As the Prime Minister said on 15 July 2021 "Levelling Up can only be achieved with a strong and dynamic wealth creating economy. There has got to be a catalytic role for government, and government is there to provide

a strategic lead but that requires consistency from government – not chopping and changing."

Based on DWF's experience of advising on many of the UK's regeneration initiatives, we wholeheartedly agree that the "chopping and changing" must stop.

Instead, we call for the Government to clearly set out how the Levelling Up initiative will help change the lives of those in left behind areas, including long term metrics against which to judge progress. Aligned with this, we call for a system involving a minister as a national strategic lead, backed by local champions with long term funding commitments to effect real change.



**“Levelling Up can only be achieved with a strong and dynamic wealth creating economy. There has got to be a catalytic role for government, and government is there to provide a strategic lead but that requires consistency from government – not chopping and changing.”**

**Boris Johnson, 2021**



## 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 the most critical issue facing the Government today.

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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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