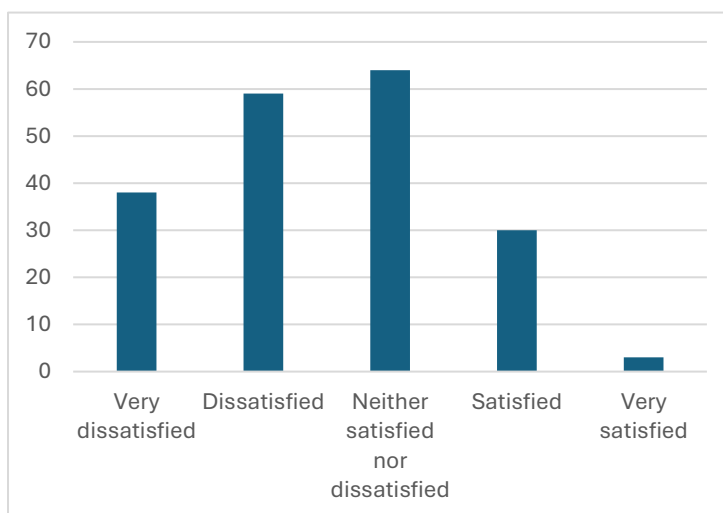


# Parish & Town Council Snapshot Survey – Satisfaction with your Local Planning Authority

194 Responses from 186 Parish Councils (85% of councils).

## Overall, how satisfied are you with the Planning Service?

The survey responses reveal a predominantly negative perception of the Planning Service. A combined 50% of respondents report being either *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied*, whereas only about 17% express satisfaction. The largest single group is those who feel *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (33%), indicating a substantial

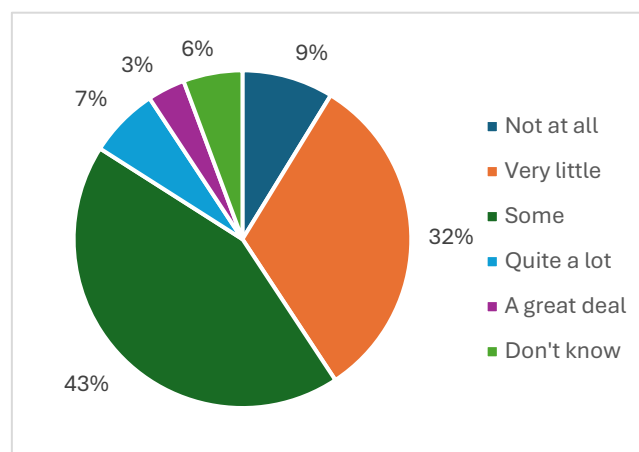


proportion of neutral or undecided sentiment. This distribution suggests the service is not meeting expectations for many councils, with satisfaction levels notably low and dissatisfaction disproportionately high.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Overall, how satisfied are you with the Planning Service?</b>				
<b>Very dissatisfied</b>	14	12.50%	24	29.27%
<b>Dissatisfied</b>	31	27.68%	28	34.15%
<b>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</b>	46	41.07%	18	21.95%
<b>Satisfied</b>	19	16.96%	11	13.41%
<b>Very satisfied</b>	2	1.79%	1	1.22%

## Being heard: To what extent are your council's views given due weight in officer reports/decisions?

Responses indicate that many councils do not feel adequately heard during the planning process. Nearly 41% believe their views are given *very little* or *no* weight, while 43% feel they are given *some* weight—suggesting limited but inconsistent recognition. Only



around 10% feel their views carry significant weight (*quite a lot* or *a great deal*). The presence of a small *don't know* group reflects some uncertainty about how much influence their feedback actually holds. Overall, perceptions point to a lack of meaningful engagement or influence in decision-making.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Being heard: To what extent are your council's views given due weight in officer reports/decisions?</b>				
Not at all	11	9.82%	6	7.32%
Very little	41	36.61%	21	25.61%
Some	49	43.75%	35	42.68%
Quite a lot	5	4.46%	8	9.76%
A great deal	3	2.68%	4	4.88%
Don't know	3	2.68%	8	9.76%

“Being heard” shows low confidence overall, but the mix differs

- West respondents are more likely to feel not heard.
- North has fewer feeling ignored and slightly more feeling heard, yet still suffers much higher overall dissatisfaction (pointing to issues beyond just “voice”, e.g., access or performance).

### **Communication & access: How easy is it to get clear, helpful information or speak to a case officer when needed?**

Communication emerges as a significant challenge. Over 56% of respondents find it *difficult* or *very difficult* to obtain clear, helpful information or to reach case officers when needed. Only 10% find the process *easy* or *very easy*, highlighting a notable accessibility gap. Nearly 30% remain neutral, which may indicate inconsistency across cases or officers. These results suggest that improving communication pathways and officer availability could substantially enhance user experience and trust.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Communication &amp; access: How easy is it to get clear, helpful information or speak to a case officer when needed?</b>				
Very difficult	15	13.39%	29	35.37%
Difficult	41	36.61%	24	29.27%
Neither easy nor difficult	38	33.93%	20	24.39%
Easy	11	9.82%	5	6.10%
Very easy	3	2.68%	0	0.00%
Don't know	4	3.57%	4	4.88%

The North struggles most to reach or get useful responses from officers; compared to the West which is also strained but less so.

### Online planning portal/website: How easy is it to find, track, and comment on applications?

Perceptions of the online portal are considerably more positive. A majority—just over 60%—find it *easy* or *very easy* to navigate, track, and comment on applications. Only about 19% report difficulty, while 20% sit in the neutral middle. Very few respondents have not used the portal. This indicates that the digital interface is a comparative strength of the planning service, even if other aspects of communication remain problematic.

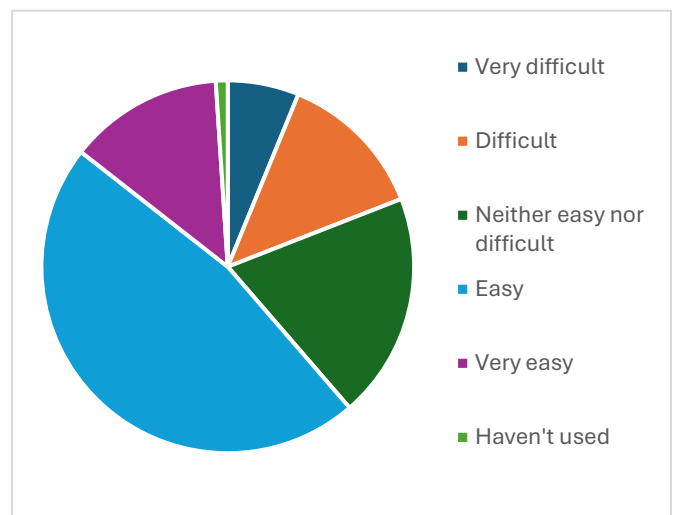
	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Online planning portal/website: How easy is it to find, track, and comment on applications?</b>				
Very difficult	0	0.00%	12	14.63%
Difficult	12	10.71%	13	15.85%
Neither easy nor difficult	16	14.29%	22	26.83%
Easy	62	55.36%	29	35.37%
Very easy	22	19.64%	4	4.88%
Haven't used	0	0.00%	2	2.44%

The portal experience is a West strength and a North weakness. This is the largest single “service touchpoint” gap in the data.

### Enforcement (if applicable): How effective is planning enforcement?

Views on enforcement skew negative but are more mixed than some other areas. Roughly 48% consider enforcement *ineffective* or *very ineffective*, while 27% say it is *neither effective nor ineffective*.

Only about 6% believe enforcement is effective. Meanwhile, a sizeable 24% report the question is not applicable or do not know.



The results suggest that where enforcement is relevant, it is largely perceived as weak or inconsistent.

Enforcement confidence is low across both areas, but lower in North.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Enforcement (if applicable): How effective is planning enforcement?</b>				
Very ineffective	25	22.32%	27	32.93%
Ineffective	24	21.43%	17	20.73%
Neither effective nor ineffective	27	24.11%	17	20.73%
Effective	7	6.25%	2	2.44%
Very effective	2	1.79%	0	0.00%
Not applicable / Don't know	27	24.11%	19	23.17%

### Over the past 12 months, the planning service has...

Most respondents feel the planning service has not improved. Approximately 48% believe it has *stayed the same*, while 40% feel it has *worsened*. Only 5% report improvement, with the remainder unsure. This indicates an overwhelming perception of stagnation or decline, which may be contributing to dissatisfaction in other areas such as communication and enforcement.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>Over the past 12 months, the planning service has...</b>				
Worsened	28	25.00%	50	60.98%
Stayed about the same	71	36.60%	22	26.83%
Improved	6	3.09%	4	4.88%
Don't know	7	3.61%	6	7.32%

### Optional – About how many planning applications did your council comment on in the last 12 months?

Among the 188 responses, engagement levels vary widely. Around 58% of councils commented on between 0 and 10 applications in the last year, with similar proportions in the 0–5 and 6–10 groups. A quarter handled 11–25 applications, and 14% dealt with 26 or more, indicating a broad spectrum of workloads.

A small proportion were unsure. This distribution shows that most councils have a relatively low to moderate volume of interaction with the planning system, which may shape their expectations and experiences.

Workload exposure is comparable, maybe a touch higher in West; this doesn't explain the North dissatisfaction gap by itself.

	West	West %	North	North %
<b>(Optional) About how many planning applications did your council comment on in the last 12 months?</b>	<b>108 Responses</b>		<b>80 Responses</b>	
0-5	20	18.52%	35	43.75%
6-10	37	34.26%	17	21.25%
11-25	28	25.93%	16	20.00%
26+	16	14.81%	10	12.50%
Don't know	7	6.48%	2	2.50%

## What’s most likely driving the scores?

The scores appear to be driven primarily by persistent difficulties accessing officers and obtaining clear, helpful information, an issue that is especially pronounced in the North and strongly linked to overall dissatisfaction. Differences in digital experience further shape sentiment: while most users in the West find the planning portal easy to use, the North experiences substantial friction, compounding existing communication challenges. Low confidence in enforcement effectiveness also undermines trust in planning outcomes across both areas, again with a sharper impact in the North. Finally, a strong perception that the service has worsened over the past year in the North amplifies negative sentiment, even when other aspects of the service might otherwise be viewed neutrally.

## Quick wins and medium-term actions

### For North:

Improving communication and user experience will require a clearer triage and call-back process, with a published same-day or next-business-day officer response standard and active tracking of adherence, which should quickly lift perceptions of communication and access. Alongside this, a focused usability push on the planning portal—fixing basic navigation issues, simplifying search, status, and comment journeys, introducing a one-click “track my application” entry point with plain-English status labels, and offering a short guide for parish clerks and councillors—should substantially reduce the current 30.5% finding the portal difficult and help push ease-of-use above 55–60%. Finally, introducing routine, standardised enforcement updates detailing progress, next steps, and expected timelines would improve transparency and strengthen confidence in enforcement effectiveness.

### For West:

The service should focus on preserving the West’s strong portal performance—where 75% find it easy to use—and replicating the features and processes behind that success in the North. At the same time, addressing the “being heard” gap is essential, with improvements such as adding a concise decision-rationale section that explicitly references parish or council input and piloting a short “consultation receipt” note

confirming how comments were considered. Together, these steps aim to reduce the 46.4% of respondents who currently feel their views carry little or no weight.

### **Overview:**

- **North:** Communication/access and portal ease are the dominant issues; enforcement confidence is very low; sentiment has worsened for many.
- **West:** Still net-negative overall, but portal is a strength; the big gap is respondents feeling not heard.

Overall, the findings point to a planning service whose core challenges centre on communication, accessibility, and consistency of user experience, with particularly acute issues in the North. Councils report difficulty accessing case officers and obtaining clear information, and this barrier is the strongest driver of overall dissatisfaction. While the West benefits from a well-functioning digital portal, the North experiences greater friction, compounding existing communication problems and widening the experience gap between areas. Low confidence in enforcement further undermines trust in outcomes, and perceptions of recent service decline in the North amplify negative sentiment even when individual service elements may be neutral.

The recommended actions—introducing a clear triage and call-back standard, undertaking focused portal usability improvements, increasing transparency in enforcement, and replicating the West’s digital strengths in the North—offer a targeted route to strengthening the user experience. Enhancing how councils’ input is acknowledged through decision rationales and consultation receipts could also help address the significant “being heard” gap. Taken together, these interventions create a coherent improvement pathway aimed at restoring confidence, reducing friction, and delivering a more responsive and consistent planning service across all areas.

**Cllr Jan O’Hara**, Executive Member for Planning at NNC, said: *“We welcome the feedback and on-going involvement of Towns and Parish Councils. We are undergoing a significant improvement programme within our Planning services including: restructuring and recruiting, improved systems and processes, enhanced planning enforcement resources and practices, and improvements to customer interactions. We are already starting to see positive outcomes as a result of this activity, and we are confident the experience of our customers and stakeholders will continue to improve over the coming months.”*

**Stephanie Gibrat**, Assistant Director – Planning at WNC said: *“West Northamptonshire Council welcomes the survey findings and would like to thank those who took time to feed back on the WNC Planning Service. The results of the survey will be considered as we continue our improvement journey and deliver our Action Plan 2026-2030. In addition, we will continue to hold our monthly Parish Surgery and look forward to working with our S106 volunteer group to gain direct feedback.”*