

STANDARDS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

A report highlighting the findings of the latest
Citizens' Panel survey

February 2010



Prepared by the Head of Corporate Governance and
Policy and Community Engagement

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1. Introduction

South Ribble Borough Council maintains a Citizens Panel containing a representative sample of 1500 local residents. This panel is used on a regular basis for public consultation, and in October 2009 it was agreed that the panel should be consulted with regards to residents' views on a broad range of issues including standards in local government, local planning, the Help Direct service, social networking and the councils 'Your Area' action plans.

The following document contains the report for standards in local government, based upon the findings and analysis of the survey and contains a full set of survey tabulations.

2. Objective

The broad objective of this portion of the survey was as follows: -

To establish, from panellists, their opinions on standards in local government and of the standards of behaviour of local councillors in South Ribble.

3. Comparisons

South Ribble Borough Council believes that it is important to understand the views and perceptions of our residents. This report highlights the views of the Citizen's Panel of South Ribble late in 2009 and it is encouraging, particularly following the recent press coverage that has focussed on the MPs' expenses scandal and the declining public engagement in politics.

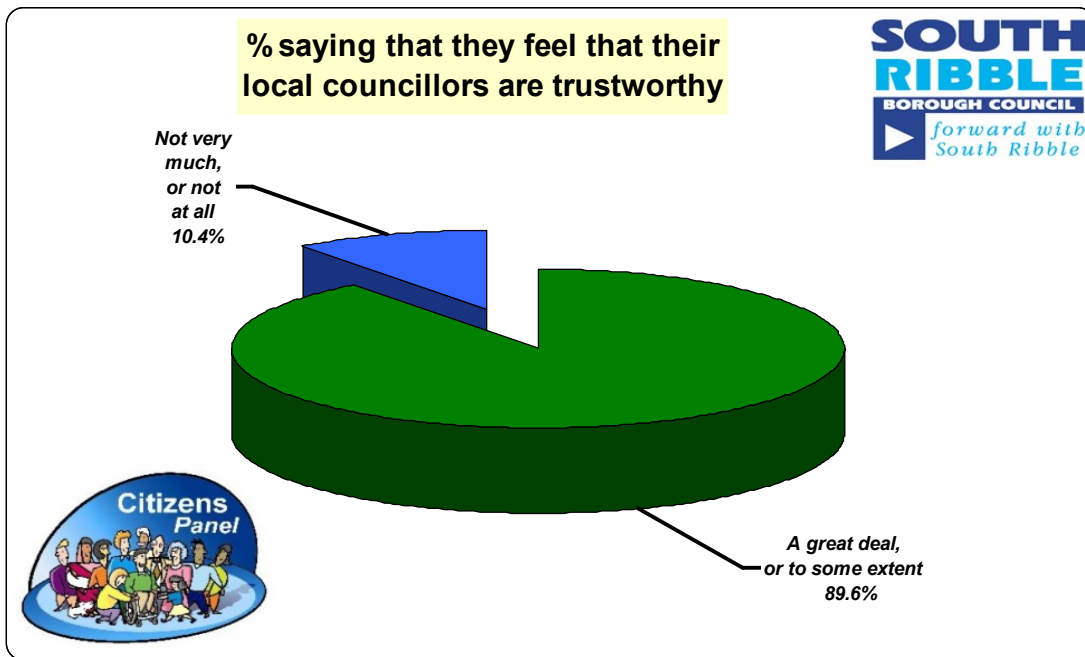
It is always helpful to be able to place these findings in context by making some comparisons. Standards for England undertake bi-annual research into the public's perceptions of ethical standards in local council's. The table extracts in sections 3.1 and 3.2 showing the national view (only), have been formulated from data taken from the July 2009 report entitled "Public Perceptions of Ethics" issued by Standards for England to facilitate broad comparison.

However, caution is needed when trying to make direct comparisons between the way people view their local area and their general view of life. Also different methodologies and approaches have been used to collect the data for these two exercises. Refer section 6.

3.1 Trust

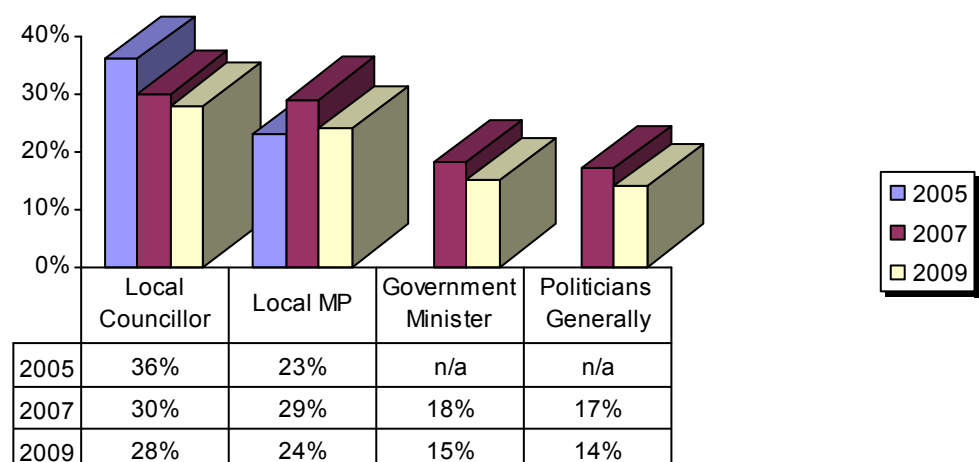
Citizen's Panel – Local View:

Nearly nine out of ten people who expressed an opinion (89.6%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are, at least to some extent, trustworthy – 33.7% totally, 55.9% to some extent.



Standards for England – National View:

How often do you think the following types of people tell the truth?



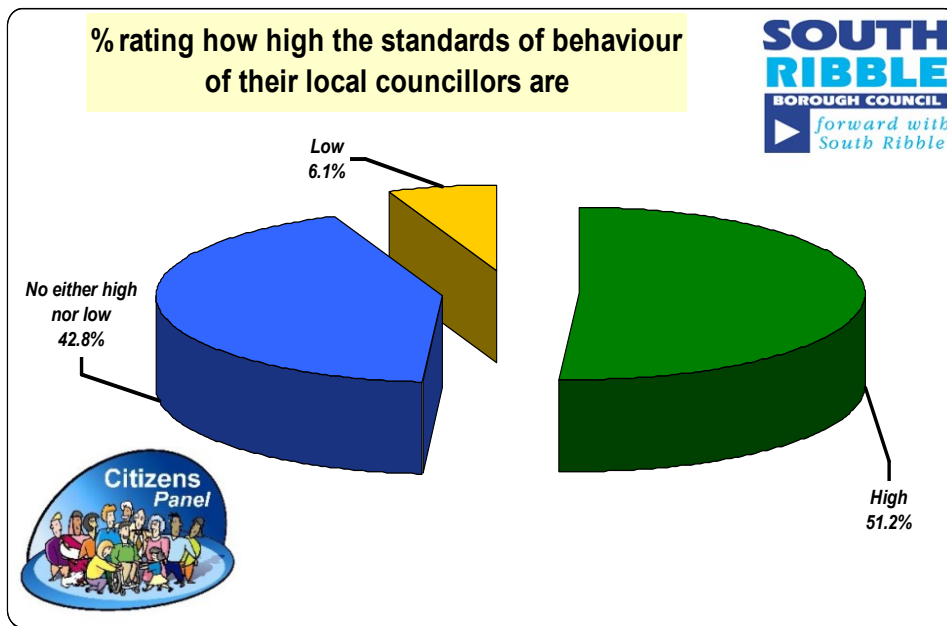
Base: All answering 2005 (1,027), 2007 (1,720), 2009 (1,735)

The table above shows the perception that local MPs and Councillors, government ministers and politicians generally tell the truth either “all or most of the time” has fallen since 2007. The Local Councillor is showing the highest mark for each of the three survey years covering the period from 2005 to 2009.

3.2 Rating Standards

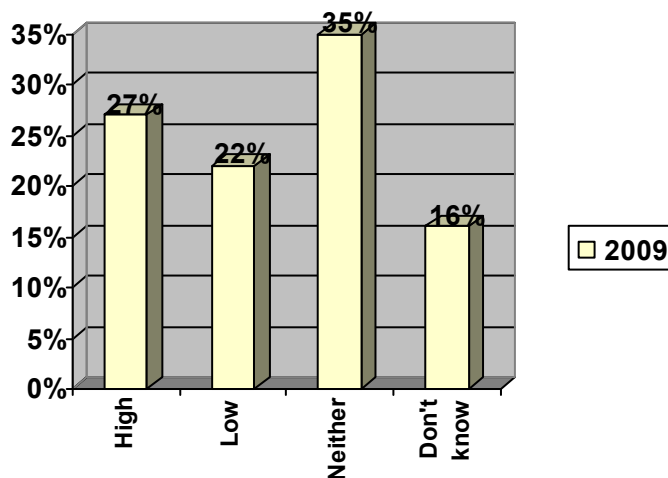
Citizen's Panel – Local View:

Over half of all respondents (51.2%) told us that they rate the standards of behaviour of their local councillors as high, with only 6.1% saying that they feel that standards of behaviour are low. The remainder 42.8% remained neutral rating them as neither high nor low.



Standards for England – National View:

Overall, how would you rate the standards of behaviour of local councillors in your area?

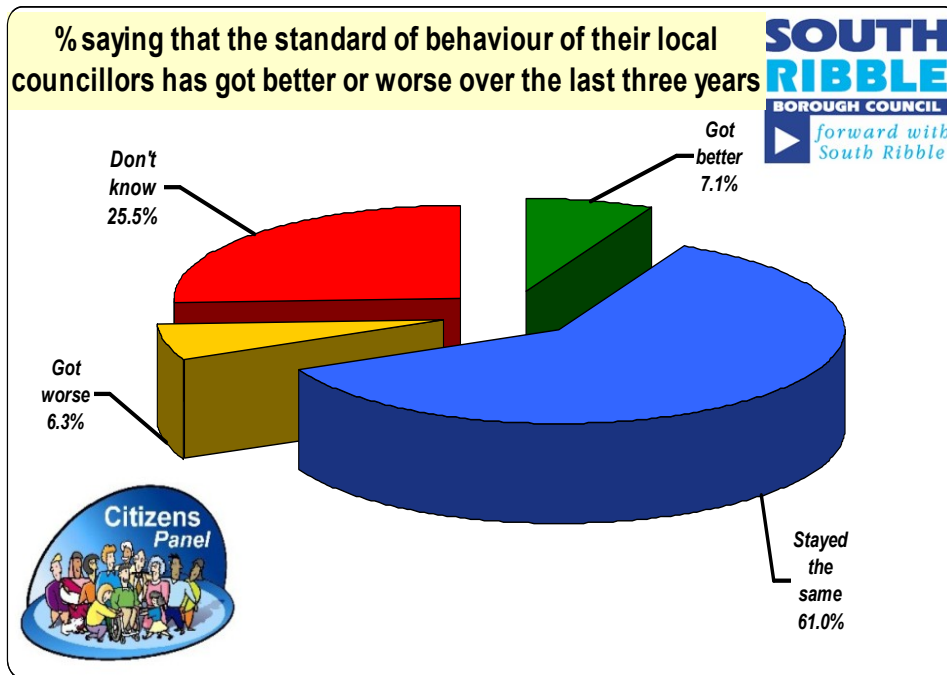


Base: 2009 (1,735)

The highest rated perception above was that councillor behaviour was neither high nor low (35%), followed by high (27%), low (22%) and don't know (16%).

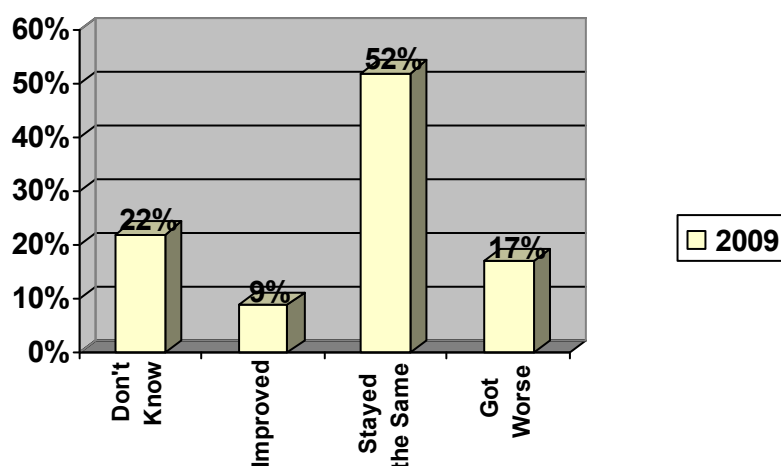
Citizen's Panel – Local View:

Over two thirds of respondents (68.1%) told us that they feel that the standards of behaviour of their local councillors have got either got better (7.1%) or stayed the same (61.0%) over the last three years, with only (6.3%) saying that they have got worse.



Standards for England – National View:

In the last few years, do you think the standard of behaviour of local councillors in your area has ...?



Base: 2009 (1,735)

The table above shows the views that councillor behaviour has improved (9%) stayed the same (52%) or got worse (17%).

4. Summary of Findings

The key findings from this survey may be summarised as follows:-

- Over half of all respondents (51.2%) told us that they rate the standards of behaviour of their local councillors as high, with only 6.1% saying that they feel that standards of behaviour are low.
- Just under two thirds of respondents (64.8%) told us that they are satisfied that South Ribble Borough Council operates a good level of ethical standards in the business it conducts.
- Just under a third (32.3%) said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with only 2.9% highlighting any level of dissatisfaction in respect of this issue.
- Just under two thirds of respondents (64.3%) told us that they agreed that they were aware there was a code of conduct that local councillors must adhere to: with just under one in five (19.5%) telling us that they disagreed.
- Just under half of respondents (43.5%) told us that they agreed that they were aware of how to complain about their local councillor if they breached the code of conduct whilst exactly a third (33.3%) disagreed.
- Just under two thirds of all respondents (63.7%) told us that were confident that appropriate action would be taken if a breach of the standards of the behaviour of a councillor was uncovered, with just over a third (36.3%) saying that they were not.
- Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (89.6%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are, at least to some extent, trustworthy.

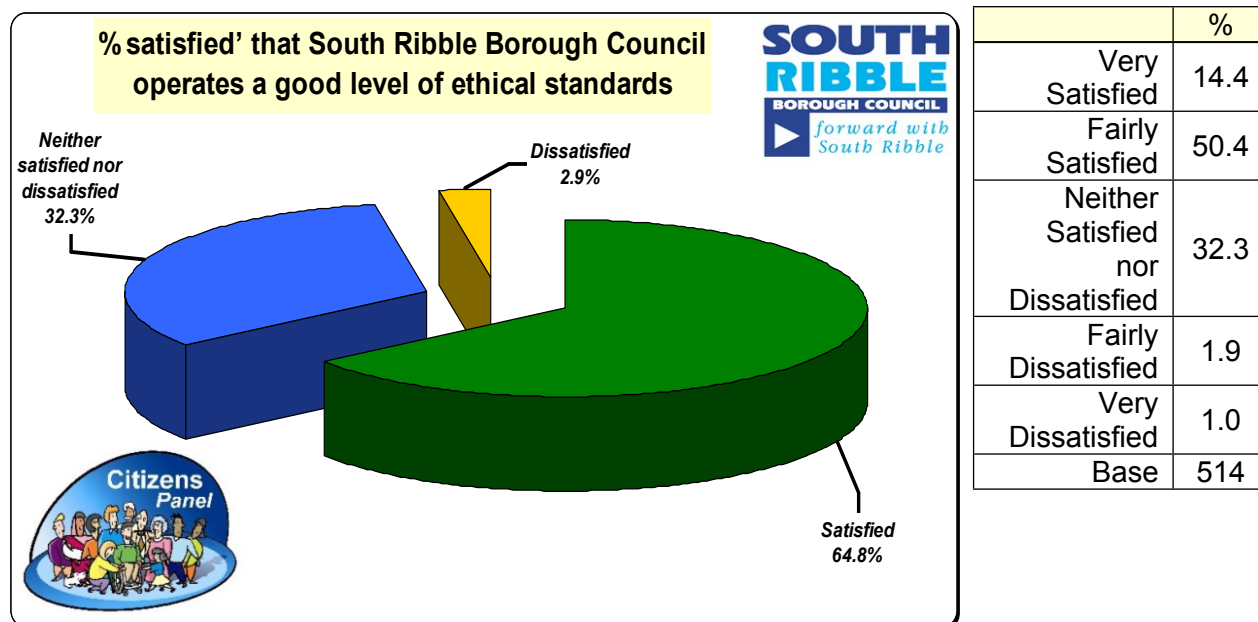
- Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (86.8%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, treat all types of people fairly.
- Over four in ten respondents (40.7%) told us that they believe that their local councillors treat them with a high level of dignity and respect with only 7.8% describing the level of respect shown as low.
- Over two thirds of respondents (68.1%) told us that they feel that the standards of behaviour of their local councillors have either got better (7.1%) or stayed the same (61.0%) over the last three years, with only 6.3% saying that they have got worse.
- Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (77.4%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are at least to some extent, in touch with what local residents think.
- Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (75.7%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, do what they promised when they were elected.
- Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (87.2%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, treat all types of people with respect.
- Nearly two thirds of respondents who expressed an opinion (63.5%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, own up when they make mistakes.
- Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (77.6%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, promote the interests of local residents.
- Over two thirds of respondents who expressed an opinion (69.8%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, explain the reasons for their actions and decisions.
- Just under six in ten respondents (58.2%) told us that they know who the Councillors for their local area, with less than a third (31.8%) saying that they do not.
- Nearly two thirds of respondents (62.5%) told us that know how to contact their local councillor if they have an issue or query, with just over a quarter (27.8%) saying that they do not.
- Just under half of respondents (46.7%) told us that they think that their local councillor is active in the area; with just over a quarter (26.7%) telling us that they are not. Over a quarter of respondents (26.5%) said that they don't know.
- Over eight out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (81.2%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, act on the concerns of local residents.
- Just over four in ten respondents who expressed an opinion (42.4%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are, at least to some extent, remote and impersonal.
- Just over a third of respondents (34.8%) told us that they agreed that they were aware of the role of the South Ribble Borough Council's Standards Committee, whilst almost a third (32.1%) disagreed. The remaining third (33.1%) told us that they were unsure.

5. Detailed Findings

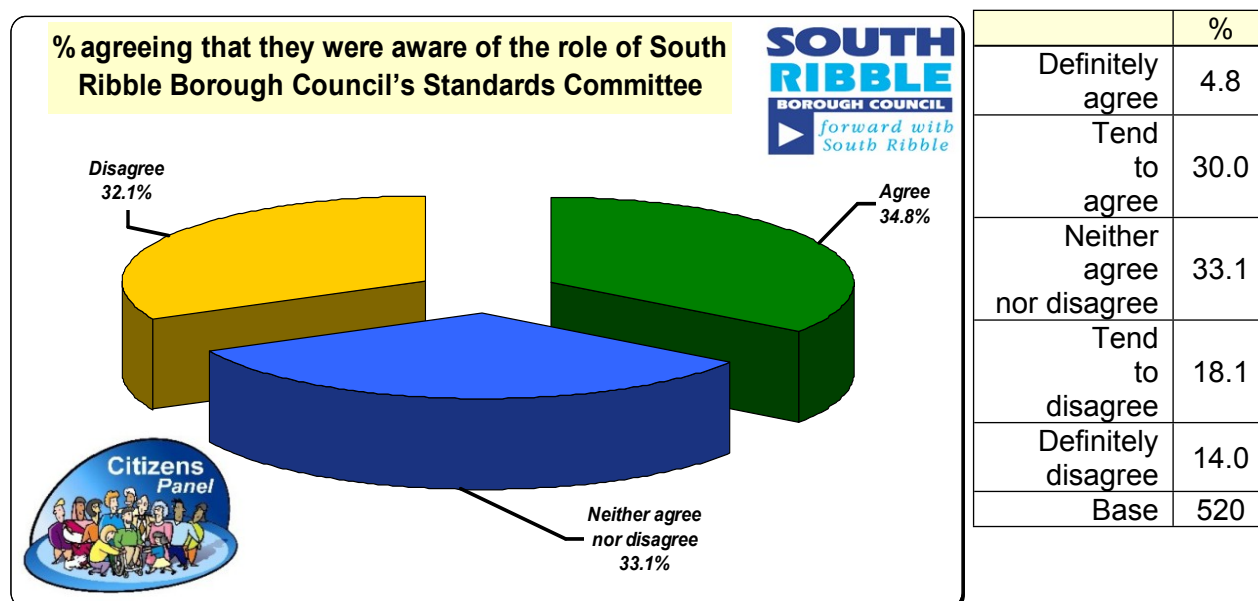
In the following section of the report, we provide a more detailed analysis of the survey findings, together with extracts from the tabulations.

5.1 Standards in Local Government

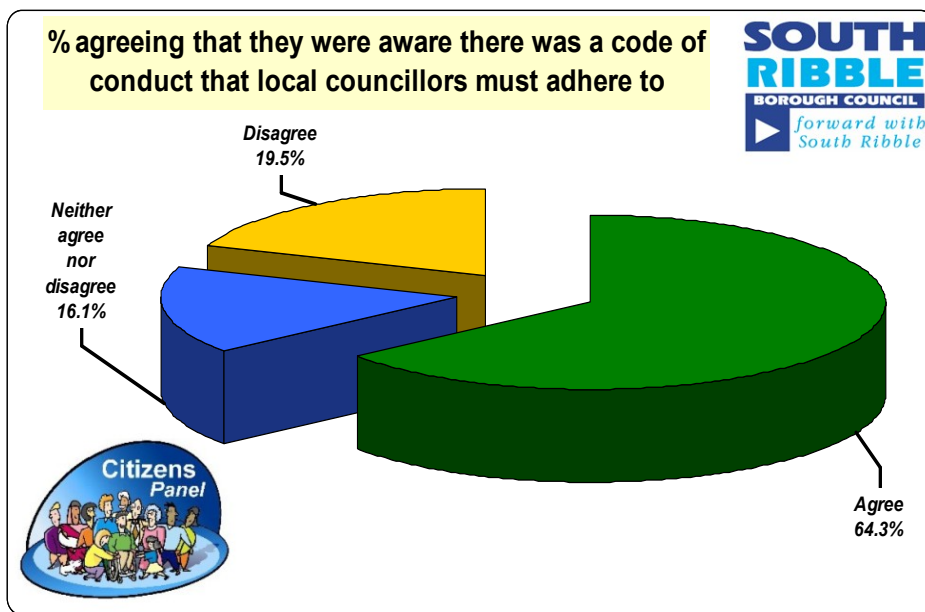
Just under two thirds of respondents (64.8%) told us that they are satisfied that South Ribble Borough Council operates a good level of ethical standards in the business it conducts. Just under a third (32.3%) said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with only 2.9% highlighting any level of dissatisfaction in respect of this issue.



Just over a third of respondents (34.8%) told us that they agreed that they were aware of the role of South Ribble Borough Council's Standards Committee, whilst almost a third (32.1%) disagreed. The remaining third (33.1%) told us that they were unsure.

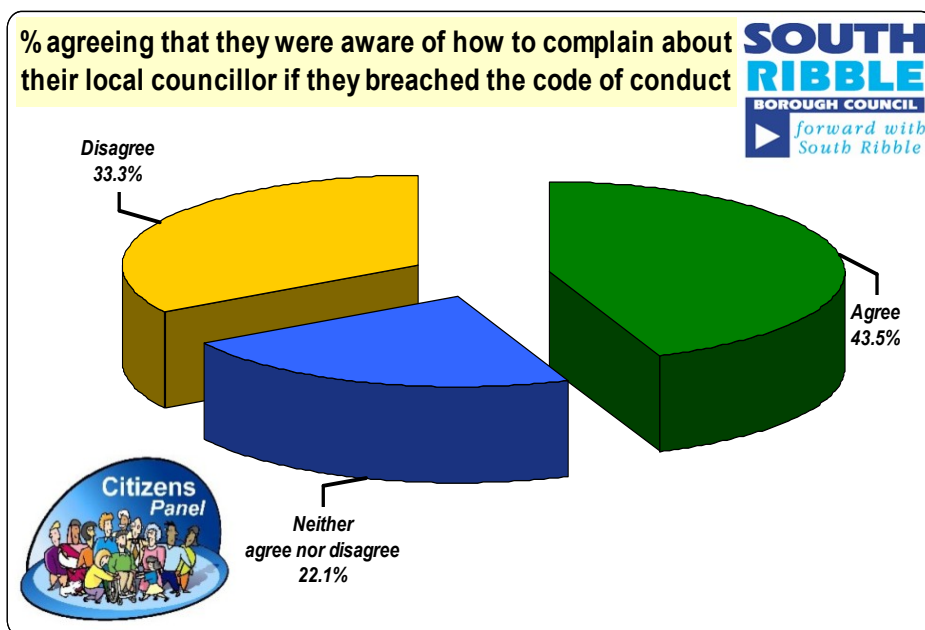


Just under two thirds of respondents (64.3%) told us that they agreed that they were aware there was a code of conduct that local councillors must adhere to, with just under one in five (19.5%) telling us that they disagreed.



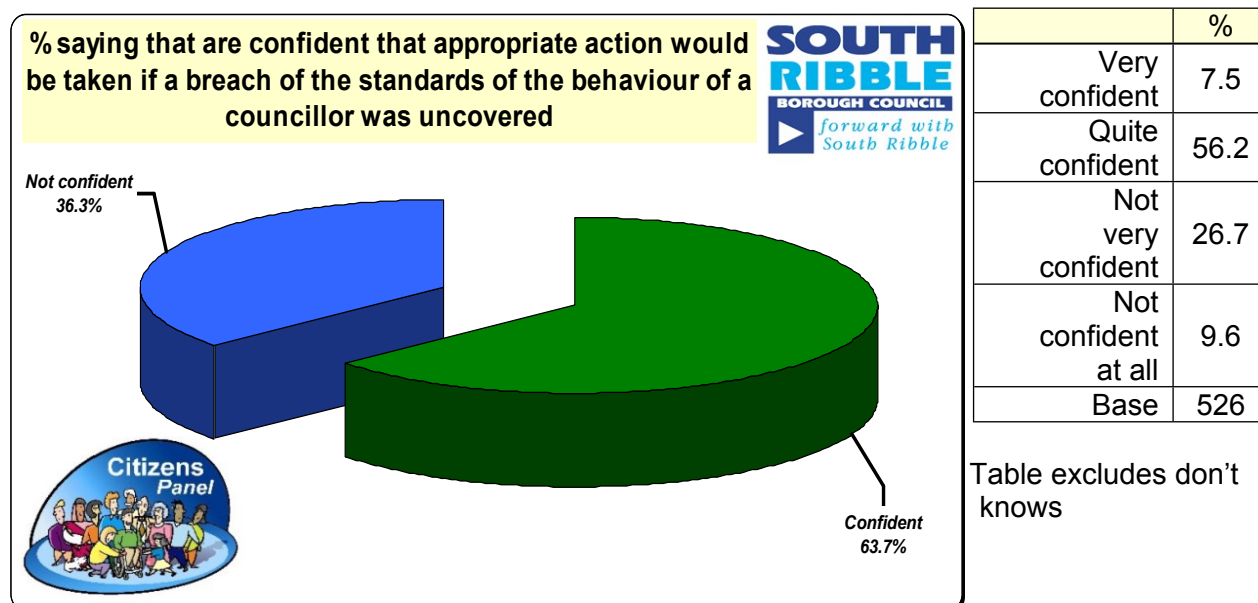
	%
Definitely agree	19.7
Tend to agree	44.6
Neither agree nor disagree	16.1
Tend to disagree	12.6
Definitely disagree	6.9
Base	522

Just under half of respondents (43.5%) told us that they agreed that they were aware of how to complain about their local councillor if they breached the code of conduct whilst exactly a third (33.3%) disagreed.



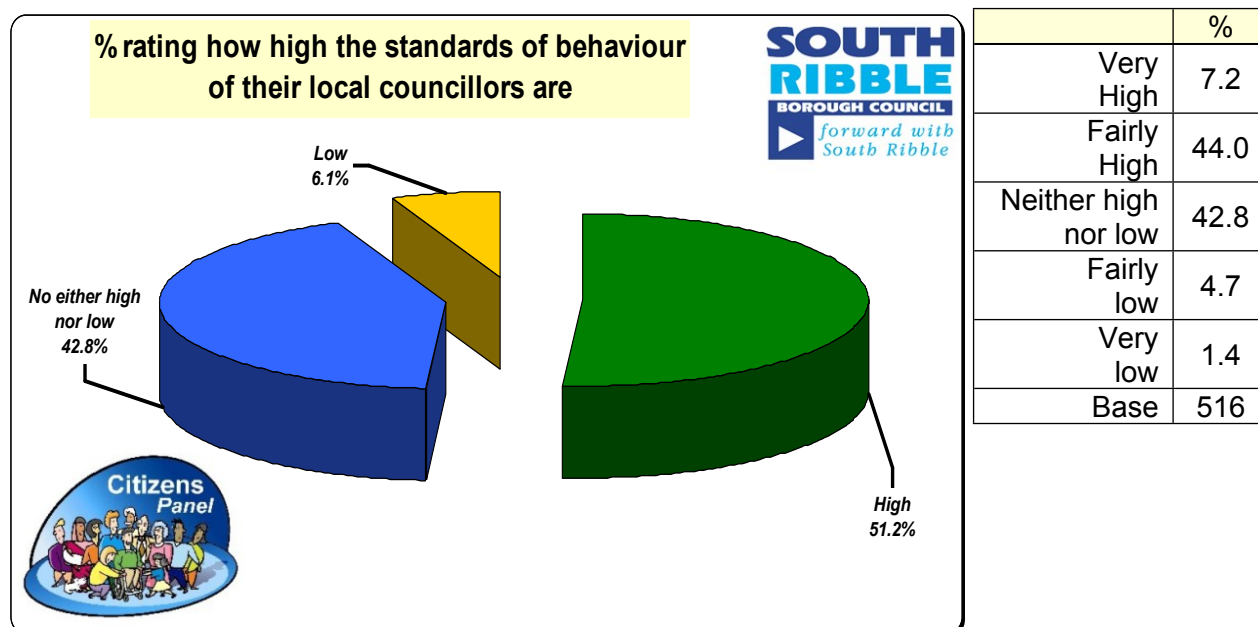
	%
Definitely agree	10.2
Tend to agree	33.3
Neither agree nor disagree	23.1
Tend to disagree	23.3
Definitely disagree	10.0
Base	519

Just under two thirds of all respondents (63.7%) told us that were confident that appropriate action would be taken if a breach of the standards of the behaviour of a councillor was uncovered; with just over a third (36.3%) saying that they were not.

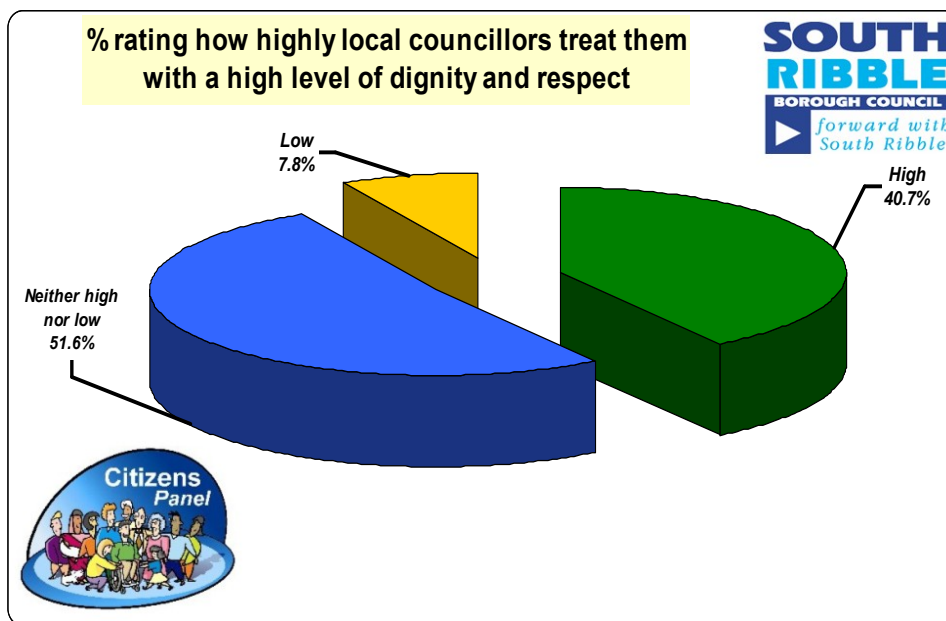


5.1.1 Standards Of Behaviour

Over half of all respondents (51.2%) told us that they rate the standards of behaviour of their local councillors as high, with only 6.1% saying that they feel that standards of behaviour are low.

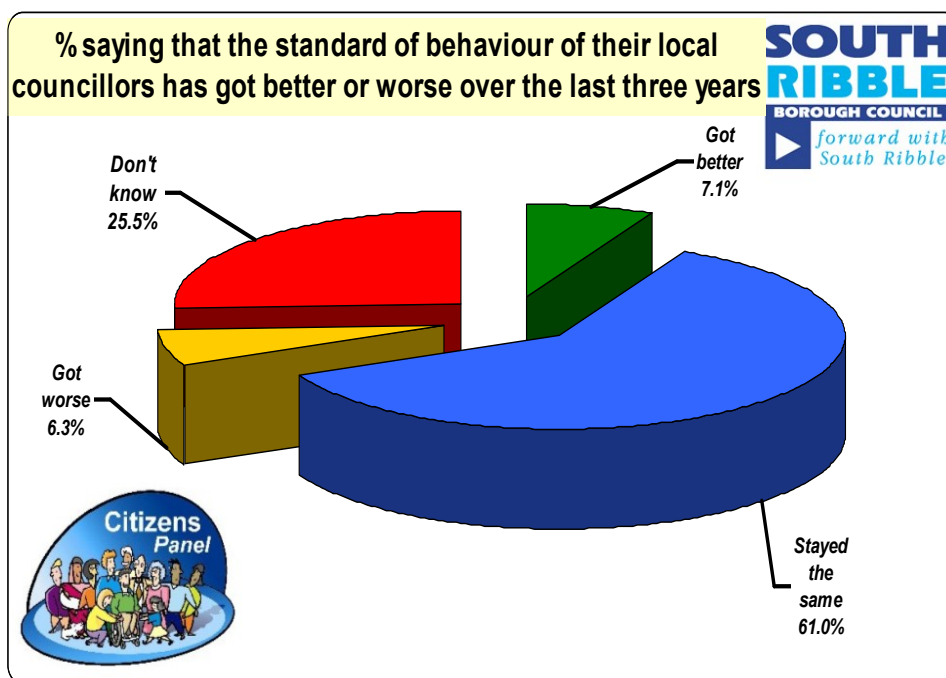


Over four in ten respondents (40.7%) told us that they believe that their local councillors treat them with a high level of dignity and respect and only 7.8% described the level of respect shown as low.



	%
Very High	6.2
Fairly High	34.5
Neither high nor low	51.6
Fairly low	6.2
Very low	1.6
Base	516

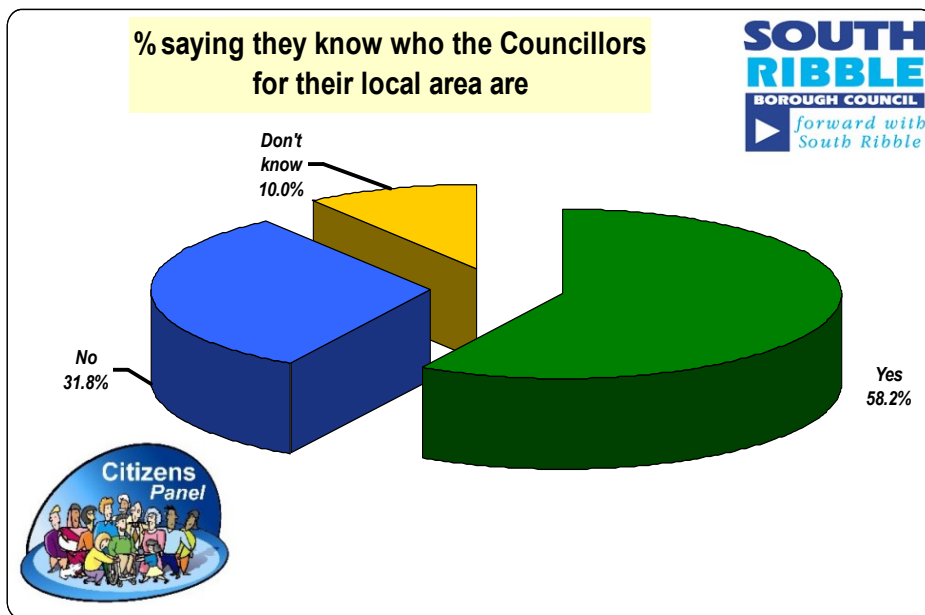
Over two thirds of respondents (68.1%) told us that they feel that the standards of behaviour of their local councillors have got either got better (7.1%) or stayed the same (61.0%) over the last three years, with only 6.3% saying that they have got worse.



	%
Better	7.1
Stayed the same	61.0
Worse	6.3
Don't know	25.5
Base	521

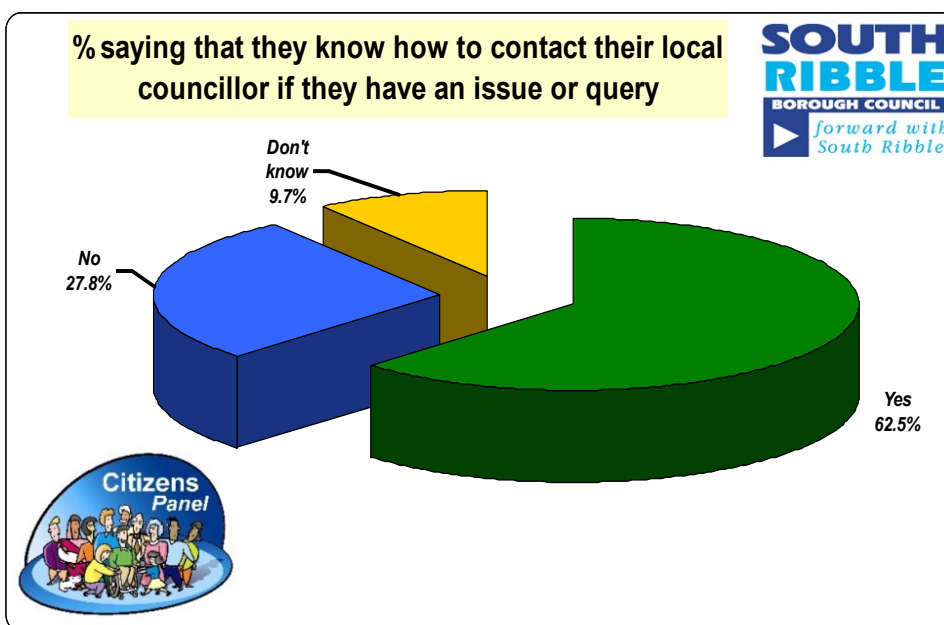
5.1.2 Councillor Awareness

Just under six in ten respondents (58.2%) told us that they know who the Councillors for their local area, with 31.8% saying that they do not.



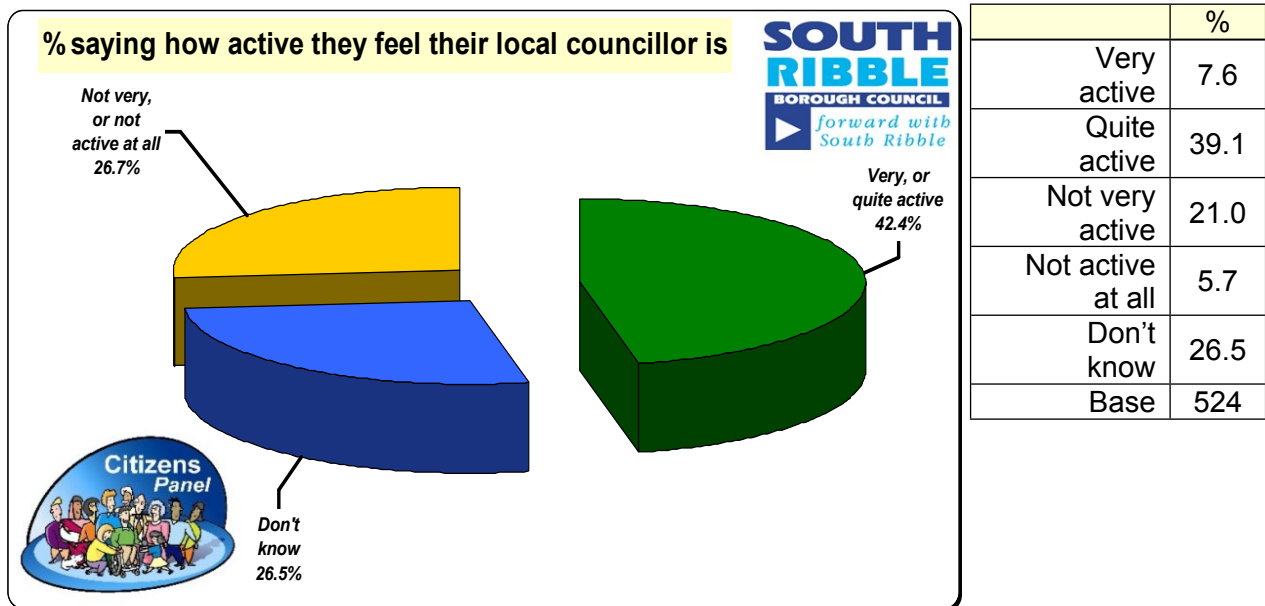
	%
Yes	58.2
No	31.8
Don't know	10.0
Base	522

Nearly two thirds of respondents (62.5%) told us that know how to contact their local councillor if they have an issue or query, with just over a quarter (27.8%) saying that they do not.

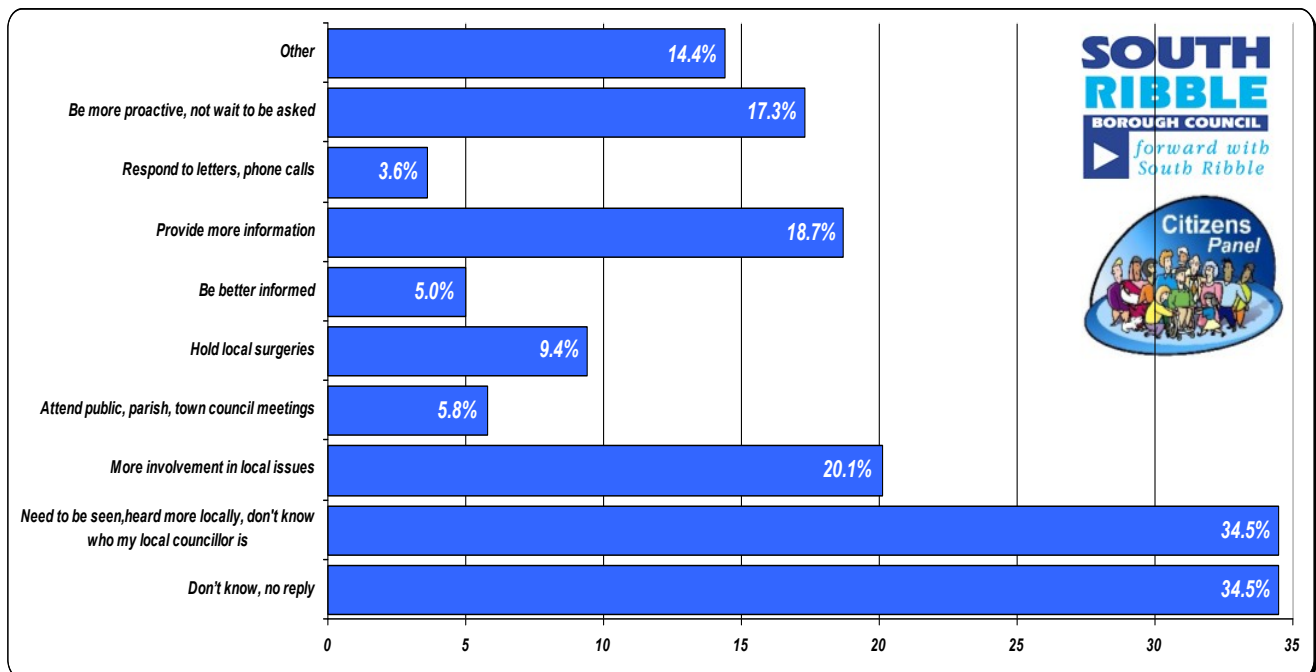


	%
Yes	62.5
No	27.8
Don't know	9.7
Base	526

Just under half of respondents (46.7%) told us that they think that their local councillor is active in the area; with just over a quarter (26.7%) telling us that they are not. Over a quarter of respondents (26.5%) said that they don't know.

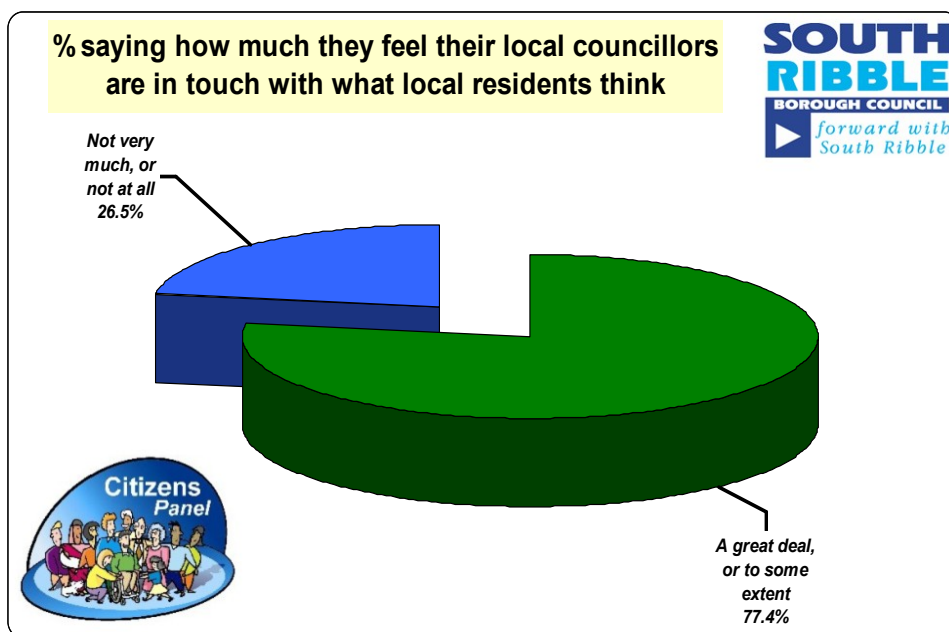


Those respondents who highlighted that they felt their local councillor was not very active or not active at all were asked for their suggestions as to how they felt they could become more involved in the issues of concern to the respondents. The most common suggestions were greater visibility and greater involvement in local issues. However, over a third (34.5%) of respondents either did not know, or did not respond.



5.1.3 Councillor Behaviour

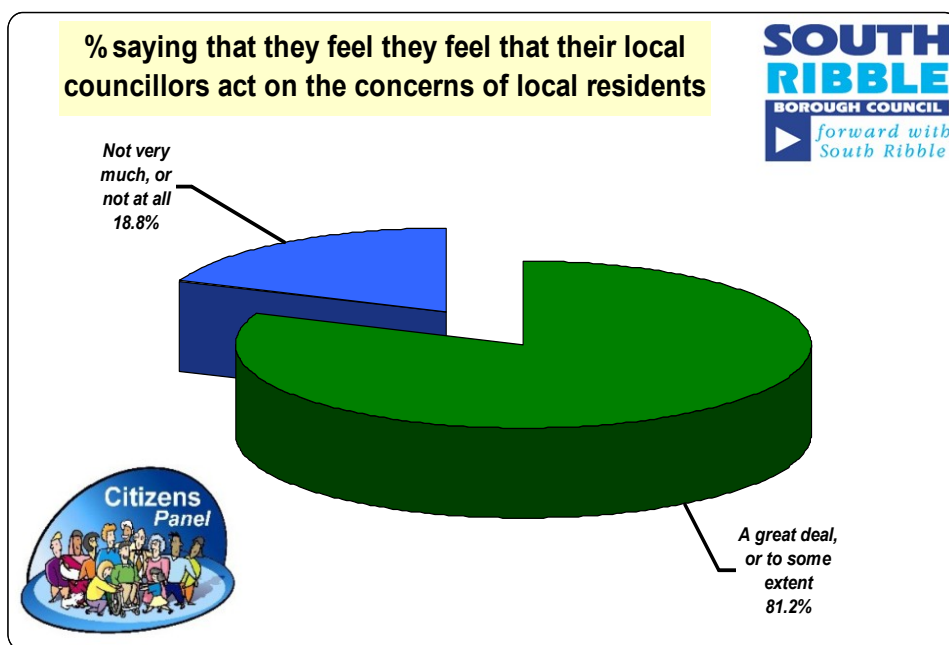
Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (77.4%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are at least to some extent, in touch with what local residents think.



	%
A great deal	18.9
To some extent	58.5
Not very much	17.5
Not at all	5.1
Base	354

Table excludes don't knows

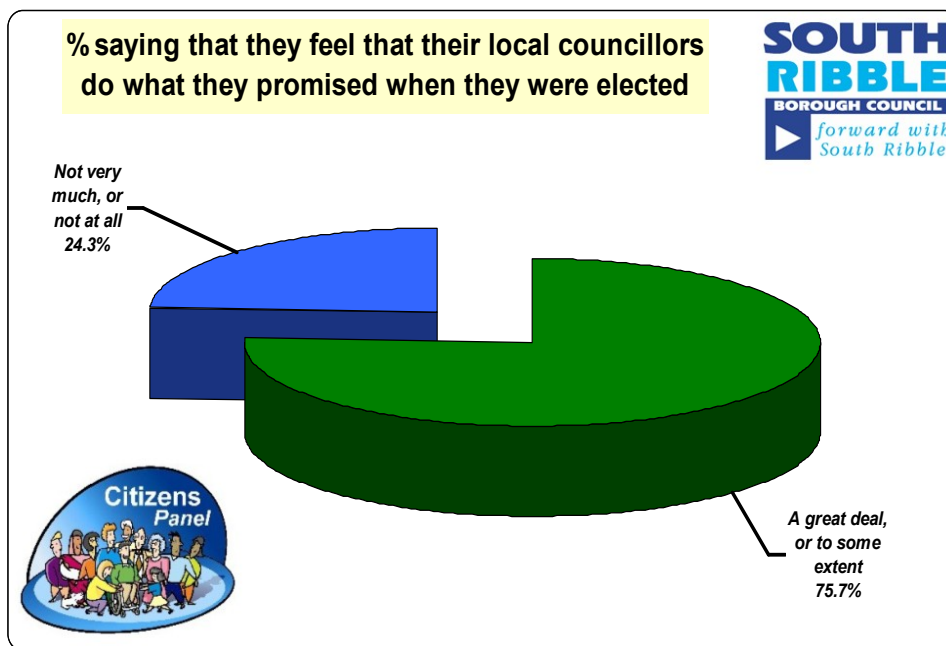
Over eight out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (81.2%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, act on the concerns of local residents.



	%
A great deal	20.8
To some extent	60.4
Not very much	13.7
Not at all	5.1
Base	351

Table excludes don't knows

Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (75.7%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, do what they promised when they were elected.



	%
A great deal	12.6
To some extent	63.1
Not very much	16.5
Not at all	7.8
Base	309

Table excludes don't knows

Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (87.2%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, treat all types of people with respect.



	%
A great deal	35.9
To some extent	51.3
Not very much	8.8
Not at all	3.9
Base	306

Table excludes don't knows

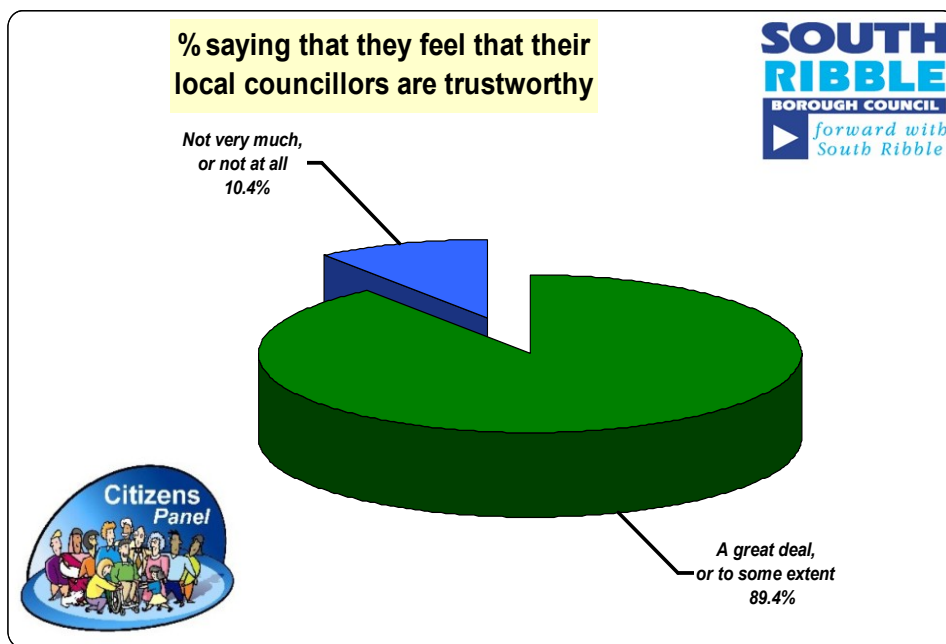
Nearly two thirds of respondents who expressed an opinion (63.5%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at lease to some extent, own up when they make mistakes.



	%
A great deal	14.6
To some extent	48.9
Not very much	22.8
Not at all	13.7
Base	219

Table excludes don't knows

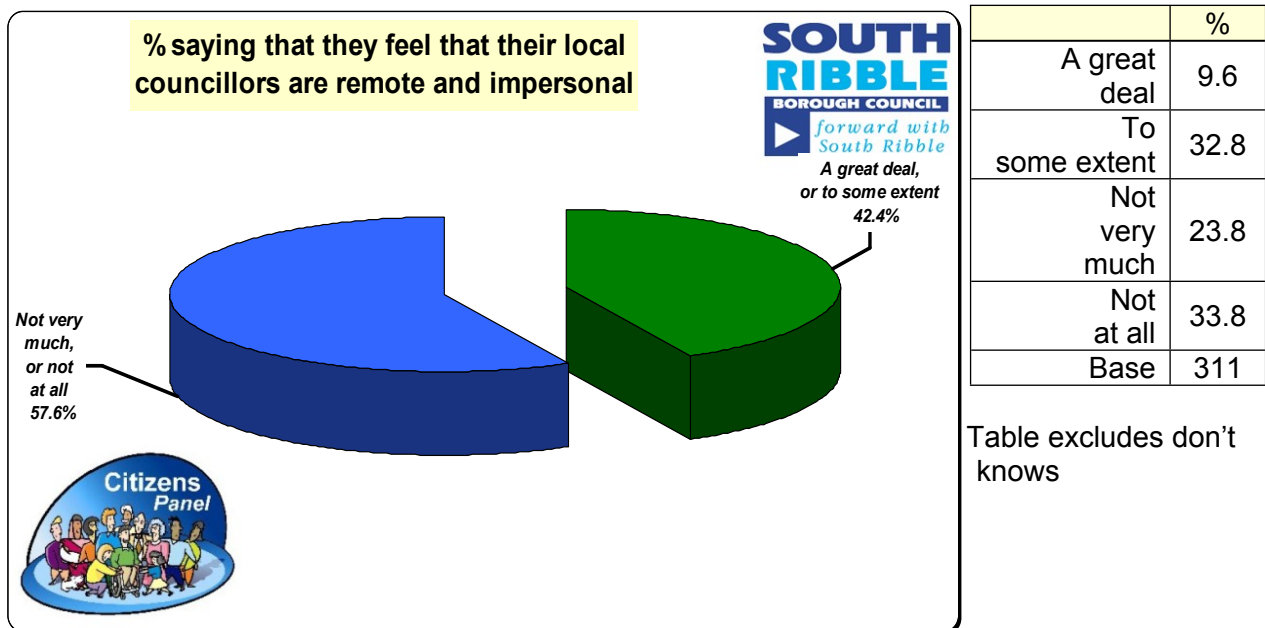
Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (89.6%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are, at lease to some extent, trustworthy.



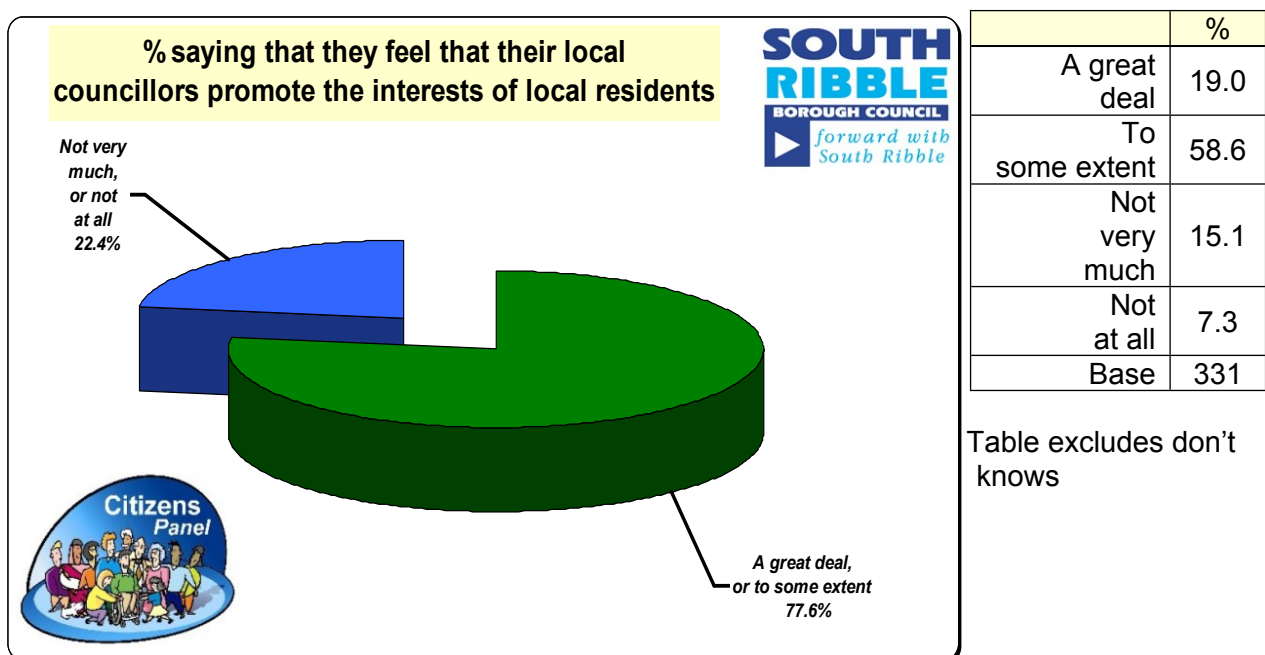
	%
A great deal	33.7
To some extent	55.9
Not very much	6.3
Not at all	4.1
Base	288

Table excludes don't knows

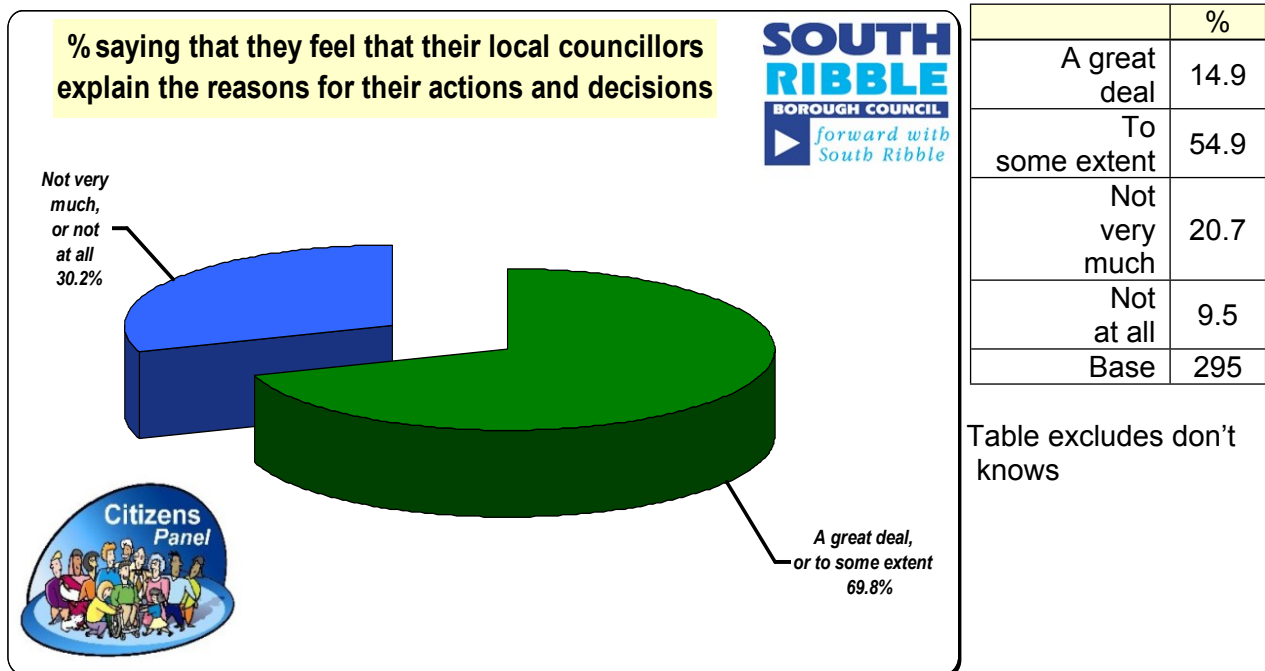
Just over four in ten respondents who expressed an opinion (42.4%) told us that they feel that their local councillors are, at least to some extent, remote and impersonal.



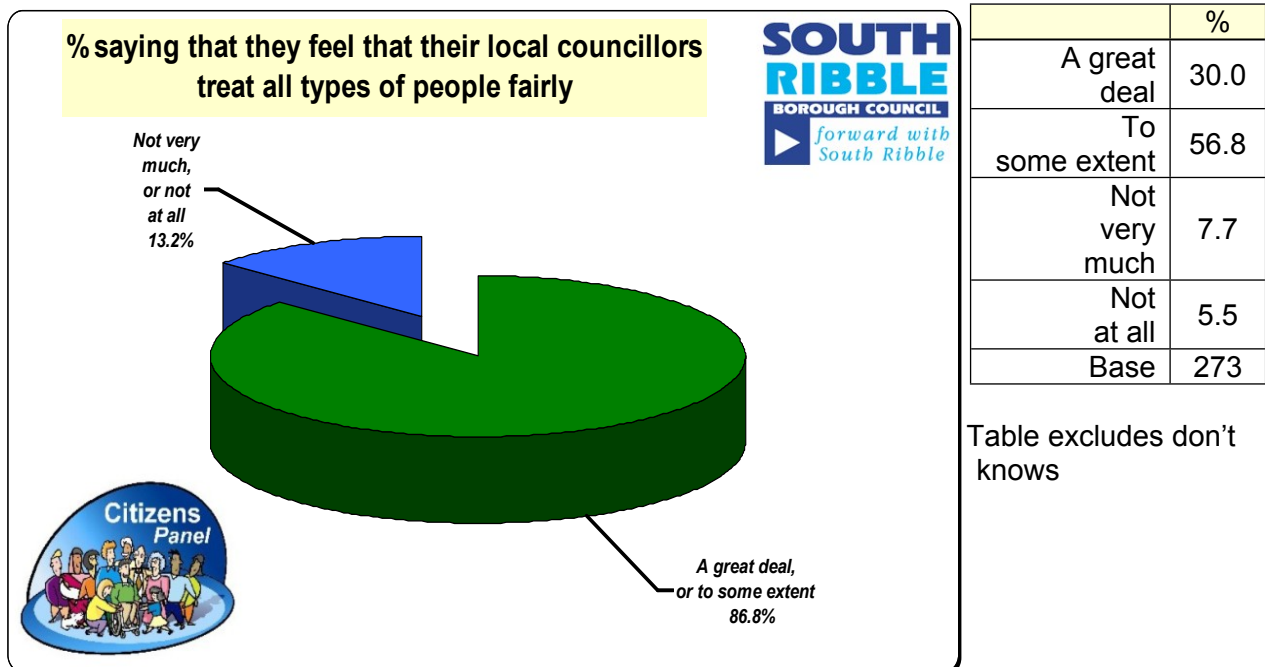
Over three quarters of respondents who expressed an opinion (77.6%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at least to some extent, promote the interests of local residents.



Over two thirds of respondents who expressed an opinion (69.8%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at lease to some extent, explain the reasons for their actions and decisions.



Nearly nine out of ten respondents who expressed an opinion (86.8%) told us that they feel that their local councillors, at lease to some extent, treat all types of people fairly.



It should be noted that significant numbers of respondents felt unable, or were unwilling, to offer any opinions on this suite of questions. Where they did respond however, the response was positive.

My local councillor	A great deal %	To some extent %	Not very much %	Not At All %	Don't Know %
Is in touch with what local residents think	18.9	58.5	17.5	5.1	31.4
Acts on the concerns of local residents	20.8	60.4	13.7	5.1	32.0
Is doing what they promised when they were elected	12.6	63.1	16.5	7.8	40.0
Treats all types of people with respect	35.9	51.3	8.8	3.9	40.6
Owens up when they make mistakes	14.6	48.9	22.8	13.7	57.1
Is trustworthy	33.7	55.9	6.3	4.1	43.8
Is remote and impersonal	9.6	32.8	23.8	33.8	39.3
Promotes the interests of local residents	19.0	58.6	15.1	7.3	35.4
Explains the reasons for their actions and decisions	14.9	54.9	20.7	9.5	42.5
Treats all types of people fairly	30.0	56.8	7.7	5.5	47.0

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Citizen's Panel

It was agreed that a postal survey of panel members was the most appropriate method to be used for this particular project.

A questionnaire, covering the different issues, was developed by the Council. At the same time, a covering letter explaining why the different issues were being consulted upon was prepared by the Council, for inclusion with the questionnaires.

The questionnaires, together with the covering letter, were despatched to the panel during November 2009.

At the time of writing a total of 530 questionnaires had been returned, representing a response rate of 40%.

The profile of respondents, who actually responded to the survey, shows that 52.2% were aged 55 or more, whilst 13.3% were aged 34 or less.

Age Profile	Respondents
18 - 34	10.0%
35 - 44	16.5%
45 - 54	18.2%
55 - 64	27.7%
65+	27.5%

Slightly more than half were male.

Gender	%
Male	50.6
Female	49.4

The following table provides a breakdown of respondents by the area in which they reside and the levels of response from these respective areas.

Local Area		%	Base
Area 1	Central	15.2	80
Area 2	Eastern	24.6	130
Area 3	Leyland East	13.3	70
Area 4	Penwortham	22.2	117
Area 5	West Leyland	11.7	62
Area 6	Western Parishes	13.1	69

6.2 Standards for England Public Perception of Ethics

The methodology used to obtain the information in the national tables featured in section 3.1. and 3.2 is as follows:

“A total of 1,735 (weighted) adults aged 18+ were interviewed face-to-face in home using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing”.

This information is taken from the Standards for England Public Perception of Ethics dated July 2009.