## Caithness Covid-19 Recovery Survey

The Survey ran for 2 weeks predominantly available via social media with a post featured on the Thurso Community Development Trust social media pages and further distribution via social media pages of each of the lead Covid-19 Community Support Groups in Caithness.

In total **1071** people throughout Caithness responded to the survey.

Community Council Area

Respondents were asked on entering the Survey which community council area they were in. While this initial report gives the result of Caithness as a whole this means that the survey results can be filtered into each community council area and made available to those groups.

| Thurso	33.8%	362
Wick	24.93%	267
Caithness West	2.33%	25
Halkirk	6.35%	68
Bower	1.40%	15
Castletown	7.56%	81
Sinclair Bay	5.32%	57
Watten	2.80%	30
Dunnet & Canisbay	6.54%	70
Tannach & District	3.73%	40
Dunbeath & Berridale	0.47%	5
Latheron, Lybster & Clyth	4.76%	51
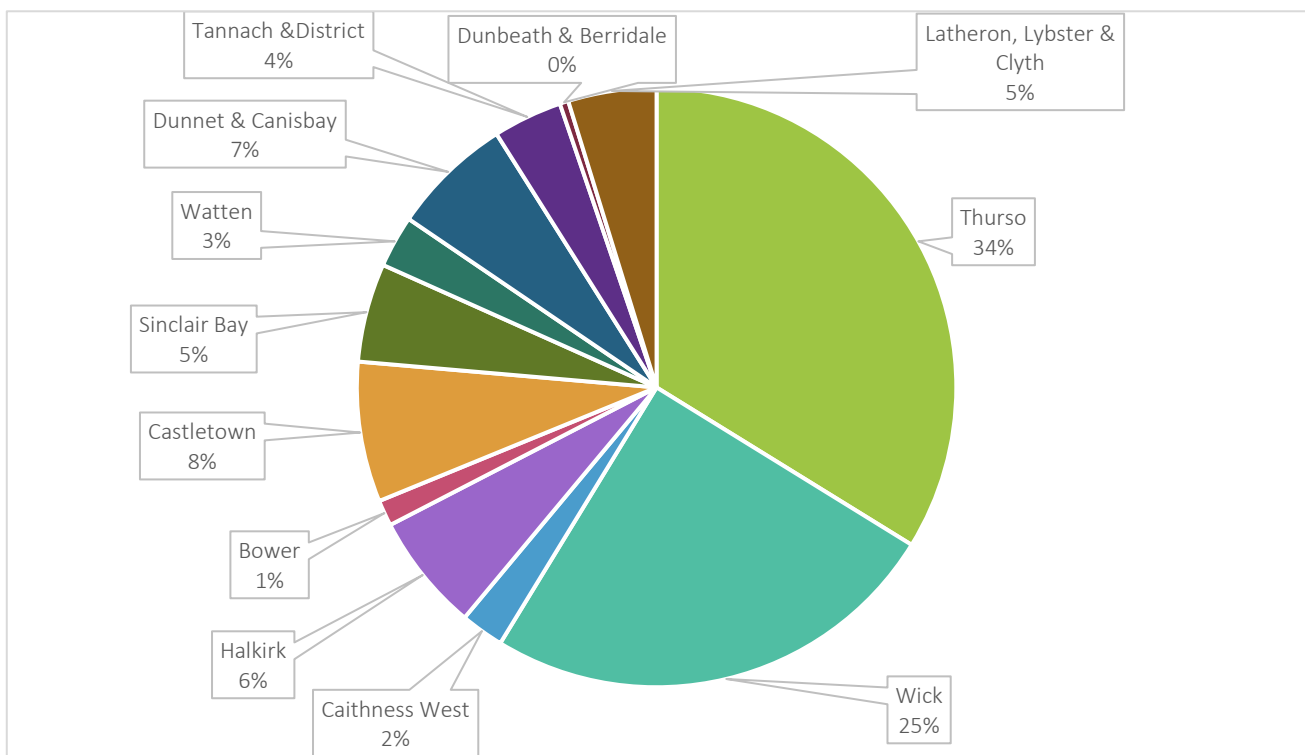
Note: While Dunbeath & Berridale record as 0% in the bar chart, as above there were 5 responses, rounded has impacted in the graphic.

Demographics

Gender

As can be expected from Surveys of this nature conducted over social media (statistic from Facebook illustrate that 52% of women use social media compared to 48% of men) more women responded than men to the Survey.
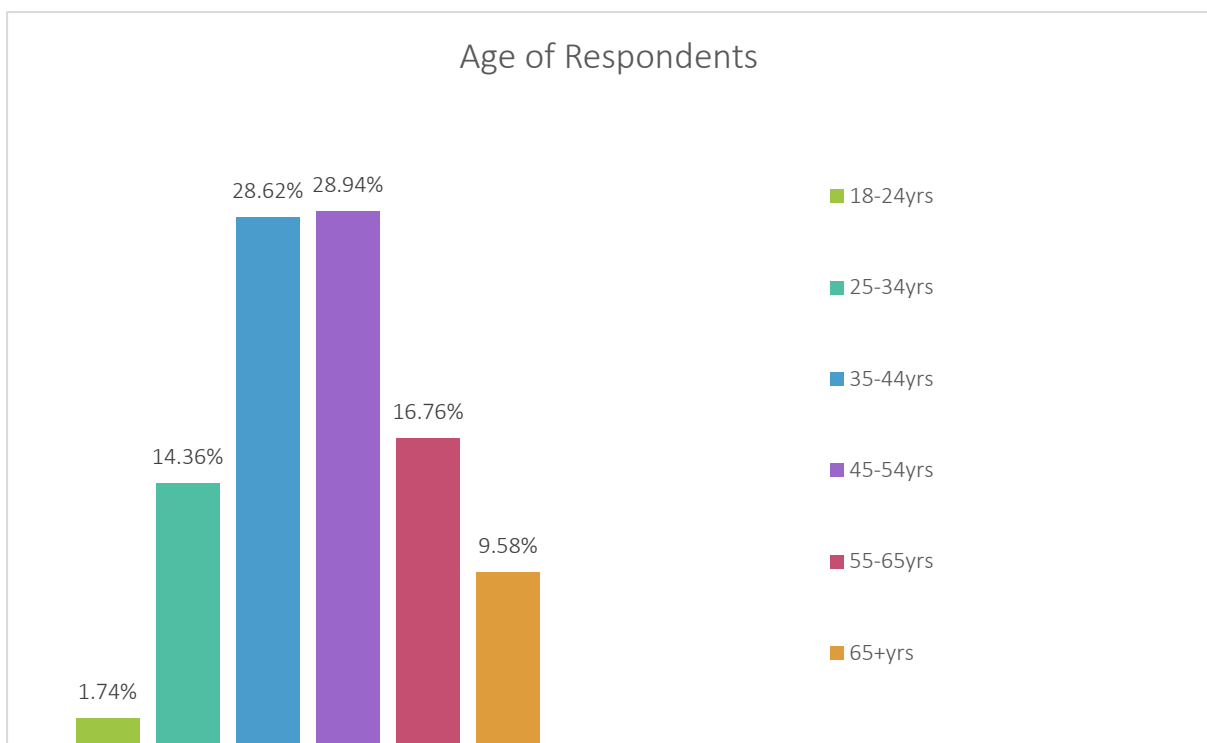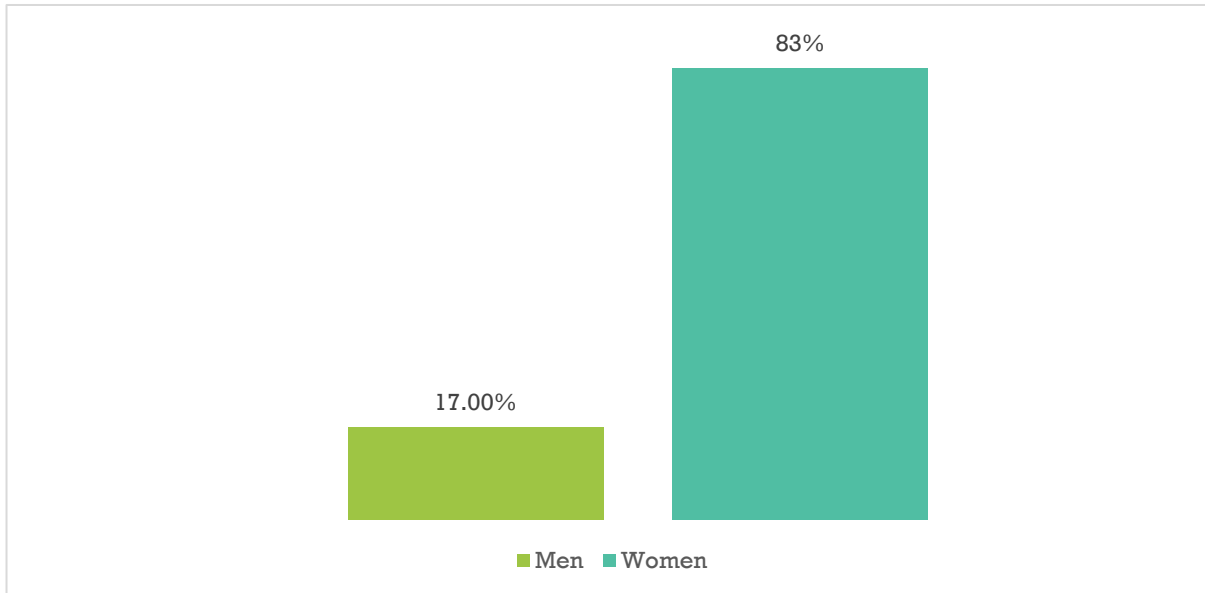
Community

Q2 Since the commencement of lockdown have you or a family member required assistance from the community organisation operating in Caithness?

- 9.79% of respondents had required assistance
- 90.21% had not required any assistance

Q3 Of respondents who answered yes to the question above, a further question asking if you felt that a continued level of support would be need post Covid-19 the following responses were recorded.

- 24.44% felt that a continued level of support would be needed
- 75.56% felt that no further assistance would be required

Q4 A following open ended question was then asked for positive respondents to the above questions asking the support would be needed to continue.

41 responses were recorded

Of those responses 70% felt that a continuation of hot meals provision would be beneficial.

80% mention a prescription delivery service.

30% mention continued provision of a shopping service.

42% state in responses an advice/support/friendly call line will be needed.

Other comments range from the emotional support and advice that has been available via the various telephone lines from Community Support Services across the county. Concerns are also raised should people need to re-isolate under track and trace post lockdown or during a potential second wave of the virus.

Q5 Respondents were then asked to rate a series of statements on how much they agreed or disagreed with them.

- Community Spirit had improved during the Covid-19 Crises
  Strongly disagree – 1.80%
  Disagree – 1.79%
  Neutral – 14.16%
  Agree – 51.56%
  Strongly Agree – 30.59%

- Information on who to contact for support was clear and easy to find
  Strongly disagree – 1.80%
  Disagree – 5.67%
  Neutral – 21.36%
  Agree – 49.62%
  Strongly Agree – 21.55%

- Kindness has been evident across my community
  Strongly disagree – 0.94%
  Disagree – 1.60%
  Neutral – 11.70%
  Agree – 49.34%
  Strongly Agree – 36.42%

- I have learned more about the role of community groups
  Strongly disagree – 2.27%
  Disagree – 6.81%
  Neutral – 33.93%
  Agree – 43.48%
  Strongly Agree – 13.52%

- I have either become a volunteer or am interested in volunteering in the future
  Strongly disagree – 3.69%
  Disagree – 11.25%
  Neutral – 45%
  Agree – 29%
  Strongly agree – 11.06%

- The level of support from community groups has addressed issues caused by Covid-19 e.g. shopping, isolation
  Strongly disagree – 1.42%
  Disagree – 1.90%
  Neutral – 14.90%
  Agree – 53.23%
  Strongly Agree – 28.56%

Q6 An open ended response was then requested asking, "Do you have anything else to add about how your community has responded to Covid-19 in terms of support or anything you would like to see going forwards in your community?

171 responses were submitted

Examples of positive responses indicative of other positive responses include:

"I have met new friends due to people being home…..brilliant."

"Many thanks to all who have 'made a difference' during this time."

"The Glebe in Thurso is considered a poor area, but we are rich in kindly neighbours during this crises. Appreciated the anonymity of prescription collection from an outside agency for future safety sake."

"The provision of meals for the vulnerable has been a great asset. Going forward, meal deliveries even once a week for isolated elderly and vulnerable people would be fantastic, as it would ensure they have at least one full, decent meal per week. We all understand how nice it is to not have to prepare a meal yourself in some way, eg getting a takeaway, going to family for a meal, but not everyone has that and it would certainly continue to bring joy as well as nutritional benefit."

"The community has responded well in taking care of those most vulnerable and hopefully post covid there will be more of awareness of elderly isolation"

"The level of activity to support those in need in Caithness makes me feel proud to be part of the community."

"I think it would be great if the community services could apply for some sort of funding that could cover the cost to continue the support for vulnerable people. Im sure there are many people within our local community who require help with shopping, isolation, prescriptions and meals on a more regular basis whether or not there is the concern of covid19 but who perhaps haven't had the involvement of social care services!"

Examples of negative responses which are indicative of others received:

"At first it was quite disappointing to see the hoarding that was going on with food and essentials. I think a lot of people considered themselves not eligible for support."

"Not heard or seen a single person from community groups"

"More council communications at a local level"

"The community has pulled together offering loads of different support to people during this crisis. A bit More could be done to advertise eg by chance I discovered the youth club were letting locals borrow jigsaws / books but I and others didn't know about this."

"I'm not shielding but I'm in a vulnerable group. I'm staggered by the way fellow customers have not followed social distancing inside large shops (Coop, Tesco, Lidl). The lack of shoppers with face masks, contrary to Scottish Government advice is just another example of this. I don't want help with my shopping, I want my community to think of others when shop."

"I wish it didn't take a pandemic to get to know my community."

"Despite information bring available there is still a high level of complacency around things like shared responsibility for wearing masks in shops and respecting other people's safety. I'm unsure how it might be addressed."

Summary
Of the 172 responses 68% were recorded as positive responses to community support. In general negative comments related to individual areas which will be passed on in the Community Council area reports. These are mainly regarding anti-social behaviour and incidents where social distancing guidelines have not been followed.

Further negative comments refer to lack of information, again these will be passed on in Community Council area reports as responses vary across the county. General comments regarding lack of information stem from a reliance of groups and information sharing to have occurred online and not through other means. There were also several comments regarding a perceived lack of information from Highland Council.

Positive responses range from people who have received support and are shielding and are fully appreciative of the support to those who have observed the community support efforts and have felt more connected as a community as a result. Pride in the Caithness community is expressed throughout along with a desire for community groups in Caithness to continue working together for the benefit of the community.

A strong positive theme which emerges in the responses is a growing awareness for those who are experiencing elderly isolation and a hope that services and kindness can continue towards those members of the community. Positive responses were also received regarding local shops who had changed or amended their services to include support for those who are having to isolate and that this in turn has encouraged more to shop locally.

Economy
Note, an error has been made in the survey design for the first question in the economy section where the option for a Keyworker was not included. Comments from 4 respondents at the end of the Survey remarked on this and all have selected the option of work from home instead.

Q7 Please describe how best explains your employment circumstances during the Coid-19 crises?
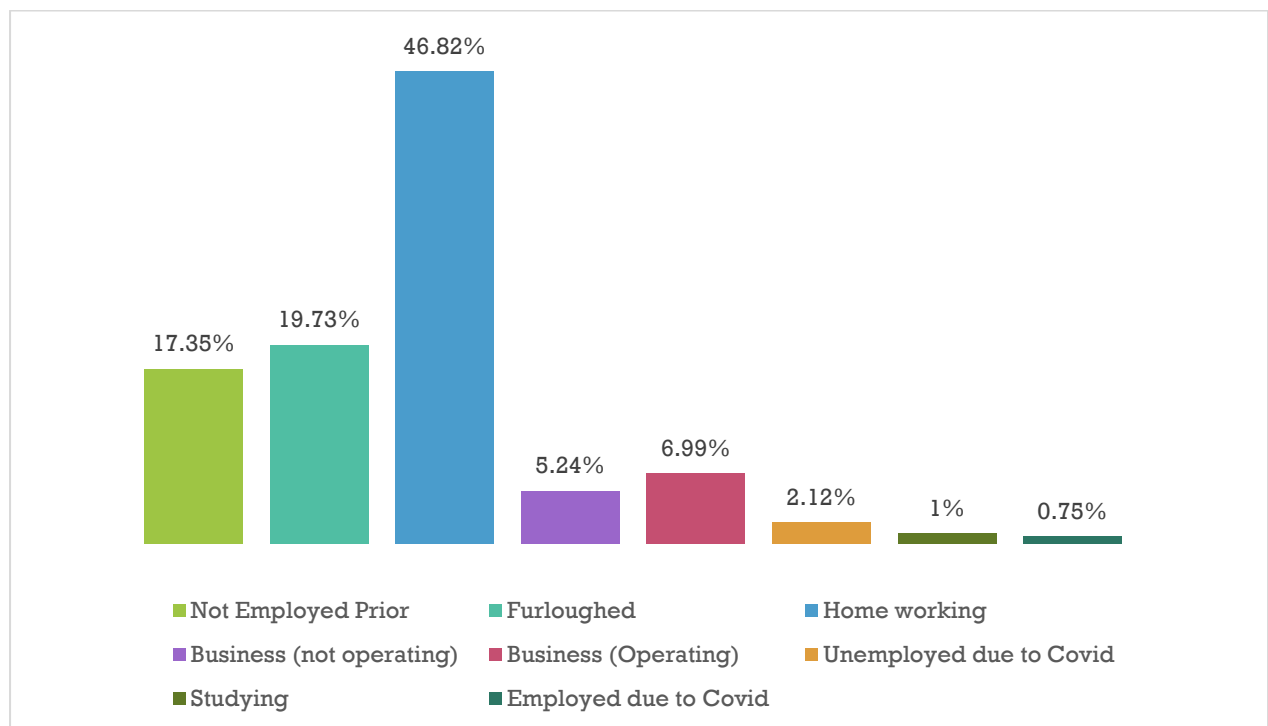
Q8 How do you feel about your finances and the economy as we move forwards?

This question was available as a select all which apply to a respondents circumstances. 883 responses were recorded against this question with results as follows:
I am concerned the business I work for may not open again – 3.4%
I am concerned the business I own may not be able to open again – 2.6%
I have suffered a loss of income due to Covid-19 – 19.03%
I am concerned generally for the economy of Caithness as a result of Covid-19 – 87.09%

Q9 If you are a business owner have you been able to access one of the grants available to assist your business?

188 responses were recorded for this question with 64 able to access grants but 124 who have not.

Ability to Access Grants

Yes
34%

No
66%
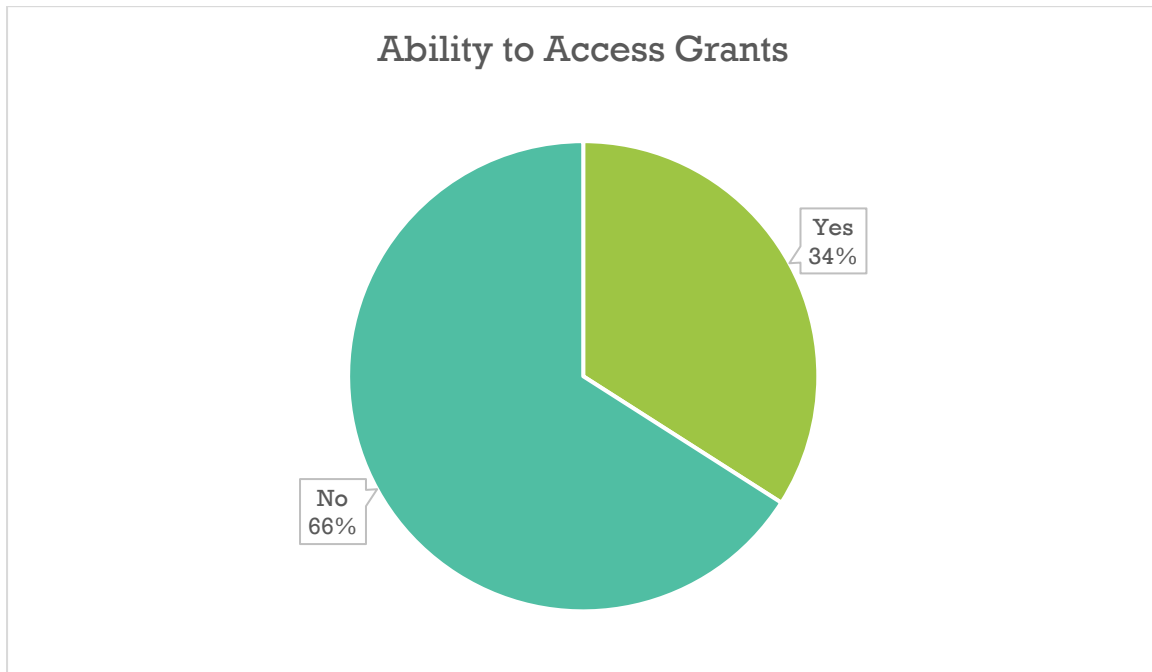
Q10 Tourism is a significant sector in the Caithness economy. How do you feel about tourists returning to the Highlands and to Caithness?

969 responses were recorded to this question with results as follows below.

Tourism

No Tourists
25%

No opinion
56%

Tourists but with controls
17%

Welcome Tourists
2%
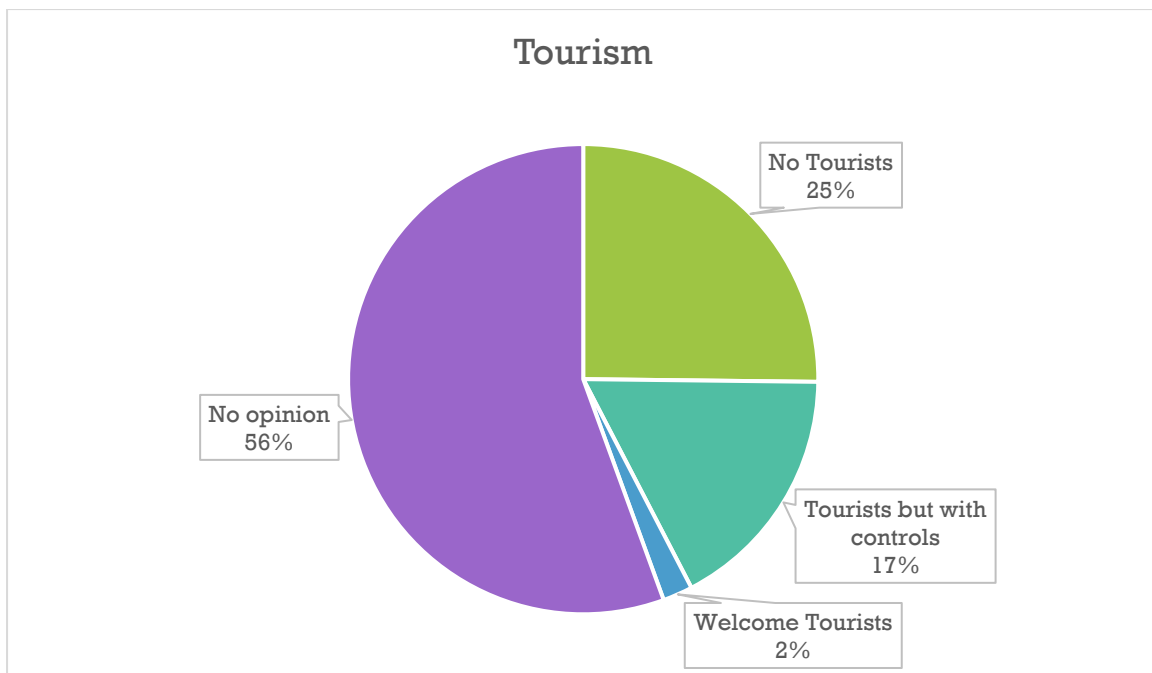
Q11 Tourism should obviously only be considered once it is safe to do so and Scottish Government guidelines allow. However, in some cases essential workers need to visit our area. For both tourism and work visitors if controls were in place which would you find acceptable.

Again, with this option, respondents could select more than one response to the question. 927 respondents answered the question.

67.31% supported a Visitor Charter, information published which gives an agreement between visitor and community on how to behave/use services.

47.90% supported the use and opening of self-catering accommodation.

29.02% supported the opening of campsites and use of motorhomes.

16.5% felt that none of these options were acceptable.

Q12 Do you have anything else to add on the economy or tourism?

This response was open ended and requested comments with 135 responses recorded, examples of responses indicative of comments in general are included below.

"Support and consideration to impact on this sector [tourism] must be taken into account moving forward"

"I'm hoping people are not complacent and go around things as normal. It's a difficult balance. Who would monitor the charter etc? Wouldn't want folk not to get the Caithness welcome were known for. Campsites/motor homes would be my biggest concern."

"Very worried for our hospitality and tourism businesses and the people working within it and the wider links associated with it. Also for the young people working in it and in the future. Our children."

"I think its important to highlight we will welcome tourism to the county once covid-19 has been brought under better control. Any visitors coming too soon put the whole community at risk of a much larger outbreak than we have previously seen."

"It is incredibly disappointing that many self-employed people are not eligible for government support."

"When coming to Caithness, tourists will be using supermarkets. This causes a huge risk for those working in the frontline as nobody knows where they have come from or if they have the virus. Allowing people from anywhere to have access to local amenities has huge risks in causing the virus to spread. Until the virus is dramatically gone, campsites should not open as it only attracts tourist from all over."

"I think tourism is so important to this area that we need to embrace its return once the correct and safe procedures are in place."

"Sadly our tourism and wedding based businesses have lost all income until next year with no government help at all its been incredibly tough and heartbreaking to be successful to having debt letters in a few months. I do feel tourism needs to get going for the local economy soon or we will see a loss of hotels and many local services opened because of the nc500 but I do also agree this cannot be until it is safe and low level risk."

Wellbeing

Q13 Now that we are in Phase One, please select how best describes how you are feeling a the moment rating on a scale of 1-5 with one being not doing so well to 5 feeling on top of the world.

748 responses returned.

Wellbeing rating 1 (low) - 5 (high)

Rating	Percentage
5	10.16%
4	23.79%
3	29.27%
2	24.86%
1	11.89%
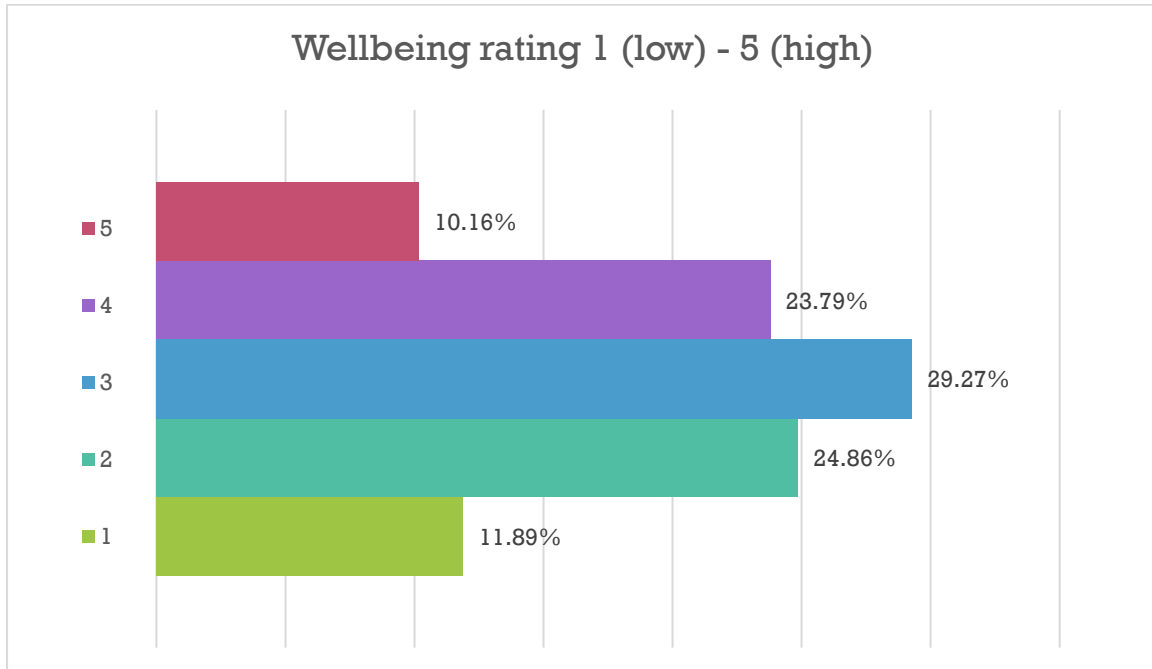
Q14 Have you experienced any benefits to lockdown?

Respondents were asked to select all that applied to their experiences and also had an option of 'Other'. Some of the 'Other' responses are noted below.

- I have enjoyed a slower pace of life – 66.43%
- I have been walking more – 45.39%
- I have been cycling more – 12.39%
- I have taken up a new skill or hobby – 12.68%
- I have been gardening/growing – 45.10%
- I have been connecting more (albeit virtually) more with friends and family – 39.34%

Other responses

- Quality family time and time with children
- DIY and work around the home
- Cooking and eating together as a family
- Connecting with immediate neighbours
- Volunteering in the community
- Enjoying the ease in pressure of having to physically get to work
- Insight into children's education
- Enjoying the roads being quiet, shops being quieter

Q15 What have been the impacts for you of lockdown?

596 people responded to this question. Again, respondents were asked to select all that applied to their circumstances and an 'Other' option for self-completion was supplied.

- Feelings of isolation – 40.77%
- Decline in mental health – 24.50%
- Decline in physical health – 18.96%
- Difficulty sleeping – 40.44%
- Increased anxiety – 44.63%
- Difficulties with family/relationships – 17.79%

Other responses

- Increased workload in working from home
- Balances of working from home and managing home schooling
- Home schooling in general
- Inability to visit family members out with the area
- Financial issues
- Inability to visit family member in care homes and not knowing when this might be possible again
- Having to become carers due to lack of social care available
- Lack of a work/life balance
- Feeling disconnected from grandchildren
- Domestic abuse

Q16 Are there any life changes which you have taken up during lockdown that you want to carry on?

626 responses. Again, respondents were asked to select all that applied to their circumstances and an 'Other' option was included.

- Working from home – 26.68%
- Using digital means to connect to friends and family – 38.66%
- Learning new skills or hobbies – 16.61%
- Online learning – 18.85%
- Increased walking to complete daily activities – 44.89%
- Increased cycling to complete daily activities – 11.66%
- Gardening and/or growing produce – 44.41%

Other responses

- Attending organised groups online
- Increased connection with friends and family by using digital
- Being a stay at home parent
- Spending more time in the local area
- Less shopping trips and when they are made completing them locally and using local shops
- Exercising
- Not judging people on their behaviour, showing kindness
- Living more mindfully and slower

Q17 Is there anything else that you would like to add about wellbeing.

This was an open-ended question, comments which indicate general feelings are used below.

"Concern for the vulnerable that isolation has a huge impact longterm on well being. Can't go out, don't go out, can't be bothered to go out, spiral down"

"I had high hopes of using lockdown to do online courses and learning new hobbies, but as time went on, I became too depressed to do anything productive which I regret."

"Community recovery should place some focus on mental health and wellbeing."

"Some of the most simple actions / inexpensive considerations could make life so much easier for some members of our community. Installation of ramps, handrails, befriending service, amenity services - now, more than ever, have we realised that greenery, nice treats, flowers, colour, scents, can have a huge benefit to the well-being of members of our community - old and young."

"I have a history of mental health issues, one being PTSD, which was never addressed by NHS because we have not enough support in Caithness with regards to Mental Health. I am lucky, I enjoy a quiet life and I had my family with me. I worry that in the release of lockdown, a lot more support will be required as I know that the isolation is having a negative impact on a lot of my friends. I also think about the impossibility of going to the funeral of loved one and a whole part of the grieving process having been by-passed but not resolved. I think about all the young people who struggle with socialising, those with autism, and many others who are finding the situation difficult and may find the release of lockdown even more confusing. I think about all the people who are struggling right now with depression and how deep the hole they will have to climb out of will be by the end of lockdown. I worry that we, in Caithness, will not be able to give the appropriate support timely to all of them and those I can't even think of."

"There has been so many reports about the negatives about lockdown but personally I feel the slower, calmer way of life has been beneficial for our mental health, walking and talking as a family and also getting to know our neighbours and showing respect for key workers. There has been a lot of kindness and positives."

"My biggest concern is how this will effect my children (Ages14 & 11) long term, With their friendships and schooling both taken away and the bit of freedom they had just acquired going out with friends has now been stopped and I am unsure when to allow them this freedom again"

"There is a feeling of renewed interest in health and well being which should be harnessed and developed and maintained moving forward"

Q20 Do you have anything else to add in relation to the Covid-19 Community Response?

"The Caithness community has demonstrated great community spirit and drive to be of use and support those more vulnerable to COVID - I'd love for there to be a community wide learning around how to contribute to and volunteer in your community going forward."

"I think the wind farm funds have responded well to the crisis. Without their money a lot of the local community initiatives would not have happened"

"I reiterate the point that money and economy can't cure the disease. People seem to add humanistic characteristics to the virus when talking about it. Like "restaurants may open but just during the week" The virus doesn't operate on a time or money schedule and whilst it is tough going at the minute we (the entire Uk) need to stop everything including incomers until this thing goes away."

"Worried about the affect this is having on my children's well being and education"

"We have extremely poor internet connection and this has been a huge issue for our family and neighbours."

"The community support groups gave me security, so far I haven't needed to use their support but the fact I know they are there, helps me."

- Concerns throughout this section focused on social distancing and the perceived lack of it by some members of the community. Also worries and fears over lockdown ending too early and tourists and visitors then bringing a second wave.
- Praise for the Scottish Government handling of the crises.
- Comments regarding theories which exist around Covid-19.
- Concerns for children given the lack of social contact.

Q21 What do you feel is needed going forwards towards recovery? What in your opinion does recovery look like?

- Greater support and investment in mental health services
- Improved internet connection throughout the county.
- Increased spending locally in local shops and businesses.
- Supporting local business such as hotels and hospitality in some way to change their services so that they can still make an income.
- Communication and encouragement to the community to be cautious and alert, taking the appropriate social distancing measures and continuing kindness to others in doing this.
- Local groups being able to open up, particularly for older people and finding ways that social distancing and connection can be maintained.
- Increased self-reliance and sustainability in Caithness including growing and encouraging of small businesses.
- Maintaining the level of community that we have now.
- Recovery to me looks like many in the community working together supporting each other. Focusing on developing a town centre redevelopment and in rural areas village centre redevelopment to encourage community interaction, and local and national visitor experience Caithness has it all going for it everyone needs to work as one to build a pathway out of this.