

The Index 2020



CLARION
HOUSING GROUP

Summary findings from Clarion Housing's
annual behavioural insights survey



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Foreword from Clare Miller, Group Chief Executive

Clarion is the largest social landlord in the country and in order to maintain and improve the service we provide, we seek to understand as much as we can about the challenges, hopes and fears of everyone who lives in a Clarion home.

While this happens naturally through interactions with colleagues and in the community, it is through our annual Index that we can build a clear picture of the experiences of the more than 350,000 residents.

The Index (now in its ninth year), is a summary report of our annual survey of 2,000 Clarion residents that includes renters and shared owners. A randomly selected group of residents are recruited for a 15 minute telephone interview,



which is conducted by Enventure Research on our behalf.

As Group Chief Executive, I take an extremely close interest in the findings and I want to open this report by reflecting on some of the most compelling answers and set out how this will help influence the service we deliver as a social landlord over the next 12 months.

Positivity before the pandemic

Interviews with our residents were conducted between 16 May and 24 June, a unique time when the first restrictions from the national Covid-19 lockdown were just beginning to be lifted. Before we discuss the impact of the pandemic, it is important to note the findings that suggest that many of our residents were experiencing an improvement in their circumstances in comparison to the previous 12 months.

I was encouraged to see that the number of residents reporting they had gone without food fell from 15% in 2019 to 6% this year. Moreover, the number of people saying they had concerns about their finances dropped from 42% last year to 28% in this survey. These figures are still far higher than anyone would wish them to be of course, but we believe the positive trend reflects the vital work of our Clarion Futures and Tenancy Sustainment teams working together in supporting people in financial difficulty.

Our residents were also very positive about their communities. The percentage of people who said they “feel they belong in their neighbourhood” has increased significantly from 83% to 89%. In parallel, 66% said there was a need for more socially rented homes in their area, demonstrating the strength of support for investment in new social housing.

I am pleased to note that 81% are able to access the internet and two thirds of them feel confident enough to manage some of their bills online. Being digitally connected will have been a lifeline for many during lockdown, particularly residents who had to self-isolate or shield.

A new reality

The pandemic has had an impact on the lives of everyone in the country, but the results from our survey show that it has been uneven.

13% of residents reported being unemployed just before lockdown, a slight increase on last year (11%). In May-June 2020, 27% of Clarion’s residents who had been in paid work prior to March 23rd had

been furloughed. For Clarion residents aged 18-24 this figure rises to 38%. Sadly, we also found that 18-24 year olds were most likely to respond to say they were, “not coping well during the pandemic” – with 24% saying this was true for them.

Overall it was reassuring to see 86% of Clarion residents report they felt they were ‘coping well’ during the pandemic and especially heartening among our older residents. Fewer than 5% of those over 65 said they struggled to access food during the pandemic, illustrative of tight knit communities and services like “Primetime at the Vine” in Bradford, which Clarion Futures supported through a grant to deliver hot and cold meals to older and vulnerable residents.

Our priorities for the next 12 months

What matters above all else is to do everything we can to keep our residents and staff safe during this ongoing public health crisis. A third of all our residents were advised to shield at the height of the pandemic and we know that many have health vulnerabilities.

At the same time, we want to continue to provide as much support to our residents as we can. For the last 2 years, we have helped 4,000 people each year into work and despite the huge impact of the virus on the labour market, we supported nearly 500 people into new jobs between April and June this year. We’ve expanded the support available through our money guidance service and rolled out a community grant programme worth over £100,000.

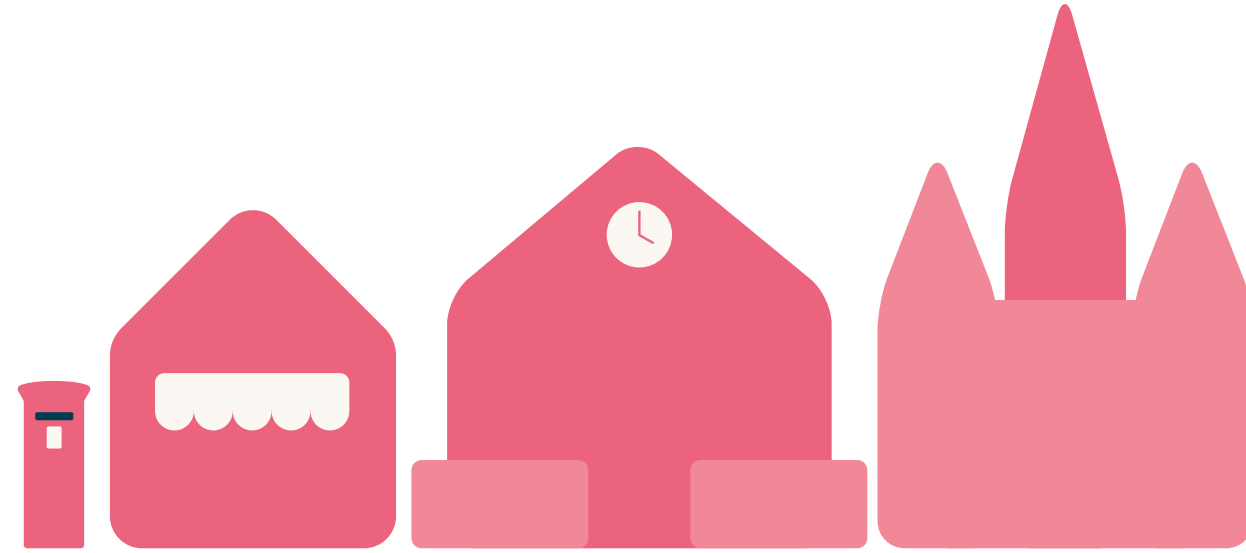
This year’s Index shines a light on the variety of challenges our residents are facing, but also contains cause for optimism about the strength of our Clarion communities and the resolve and unity they have shown over the last few months. I hope you enjoy reading it in detail.

Clare Miller
Group Chief Executive

Key findings

92%

of residents have access to everything they need in their area



81%

of residents use the internet and two thirds of them manage their billing accounts online



75%



regularly talk to their neighbours

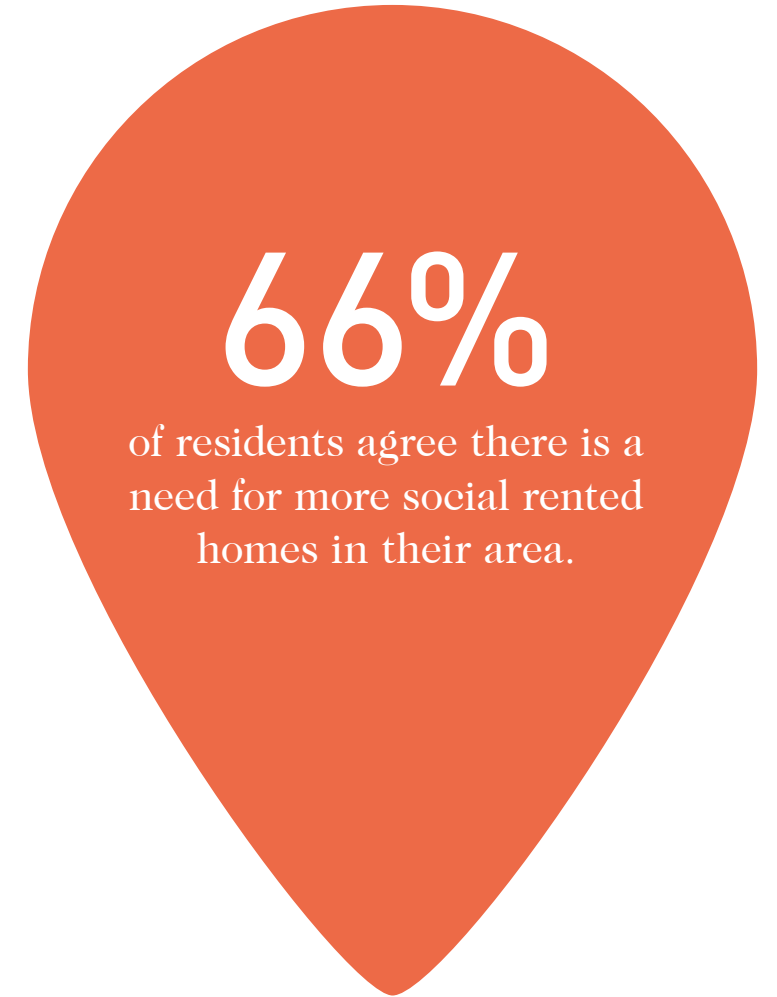


89%

feel they belong in their neighbourhood

66%

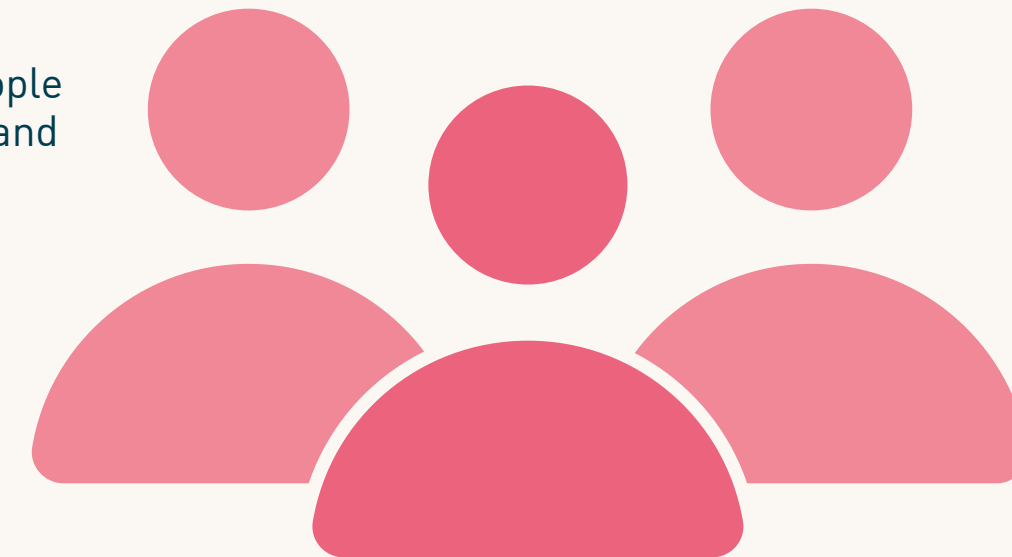
of residents agree there is a need for more social rented homes in their area.





Community & neighbourhood

Clarion's communities are at the heart of everything we do. Our mission is not only to provide good quality, affordable homes to people failed by the market, but to promote thriving and welcoming neighbourhoods.



Community & neighbourhood

We ask several questions each year to understand how residents feel about their neighbourhoods and we scrutinise the results carefully, sharing findings with teams across the whole organisation.

We are always pleased to see positive results, where residents value their community, feel part of it and see their future there.

Despite challenging times, it is encouraging that our key metrics in this topic have not just stayed high this year, but have actually increased in several cases:

- 88% the percentage of residents who said they are satisfied with their neighbourhood has increased significantly from 84% to 88%.
- 89% the percentage of residents who said they feel they belong in their neighbourhood has increased significantly from 83% to 89%.
- 81% of shared owners feel part of their community where they live
- 75% of residents talk to their neighbours regularly
- 64% say they can easily borrow something they need from a friend or neighbour

These positive feelings often vary by age, demonstrating a pattern that we also see through most of our wellbeing results: people in middle age show lower life satisfaction generally, and express more negative feelings, than people older or younger than them. We see a similar pattern each year and it is repeated in wellbeing measures nationally. This middle-aged dip is thought to be related to these people experiencing the competing pressures of dependent children, work and elderly parents, finding it harder to make time for themselves.

Current needs

The question which bucks this age-related trend is whether your area gives you access to everything you need, where an overwhelming 92% of residents agreed. This result doesn't vary by age, remaining above 90% in agreement across all age groups; nor did it vary by other demographics we commonly see disparities in - gender or working status. There was only a very slight difference where a disability was present. This suggests our neighbourhoods and communities meet a wide range of residents' needs well. It is very reassuring that people do not have to travel to access what they need, particularly at a time while many household's horizons were necessarily more limited.



Future needs

As well as thinking about current needs, now many people are living longer it's vital we think about residents' requirements in the future. We want residents to feel secure and comfortable in their homes and live independently for as long as possible. Good, accessible design will offer older residents independence and confidence. We know that poor quality, inaccessible housing acts as a barrier to independent living so our Clarion 2040 Standard will be applied to all of our homes (not just new-builds) to ensure that our properties meet the quality standards we set. A parallel standard is being developed to ensure the quality of our neighbourhoods and community spaces.

We asked residents whether they felt their home would meet their needs in ten years' time. Those aged under 35 were least likely to say that it would, perhaps as their family may still be growing. But these younger residents in particular were quite certain about whether it would or not. Residents over 55 were asked a slightly different question; whether their home would offer what they need to live *independently* in ten years' time.

Encouragingly, two thirds (67%) said yes, their current home would enable them to live independently. But there is a significant amount of uncertainty here with 17% saying they didn't know.



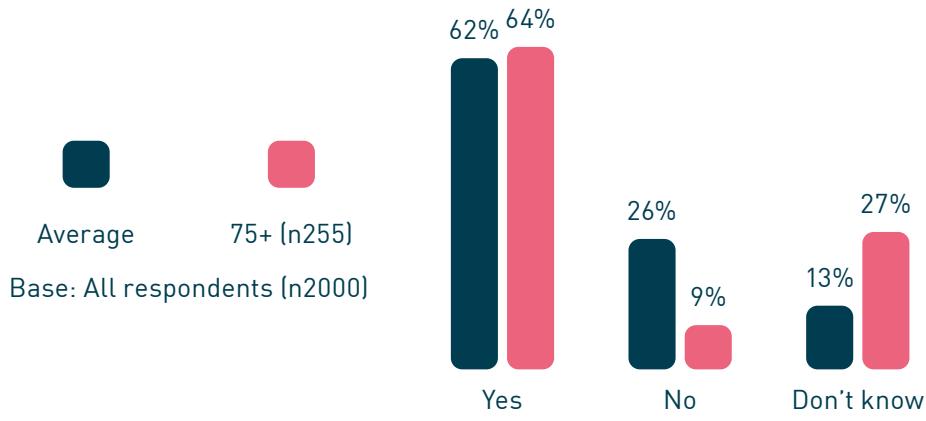
Future uncertainty is perhaps connected to not knowing what level of support may be needed. People witnessing friends and family with dementia for example, may feel independent living is something to hope for, not expect.

For the over 75s, this uncertainty is even greater: 27% say they don't know. This may be an additional source of stress for some, potentially compounding concerns about the future.

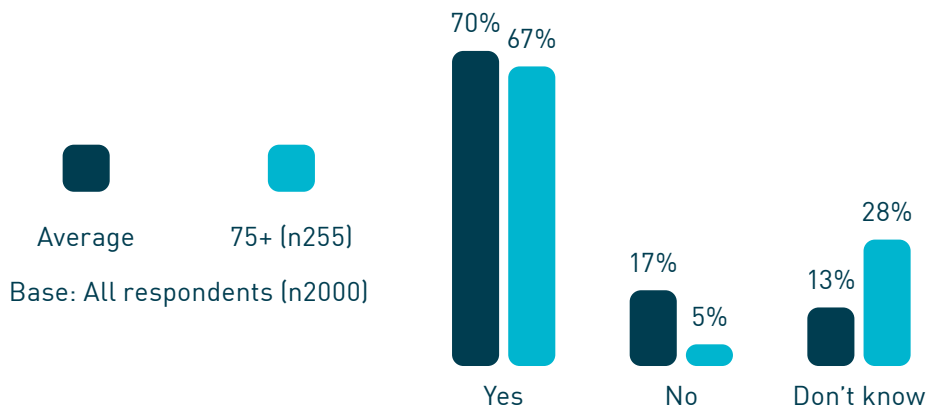
A very similar pattern is seen when residents were asked if their *community* will offer everything they need in 10 years' time - overall 70% agreed, but residents 75 and over were significantly less certain.



Percentage of residents who agree their home will offer everything they need (to live independently if 55+) in ten years' time



Percentage of residents who agree their community will offer everything they need in ten years' time



Access to open spaces

Access to open spaces, such as a garden, balcony, patio, roof terrace or even a green space within walking distance was of significant importance during the strictest phase of lockdown, when people could only leave the home to exercise once a day, and not by car.

Only 7% of our residents said they had no access to any of these and nearly 70% said they had access to a garden. Families with children were most likely to say they have a garden (76% vs 66% of those with no dependent children at home), providing much needed breathing space, in particular when many children were learning at home. As well as a positive impact on wellbeing¹ people with access to a garden felt stronger ties to their surroundings being more likely to say they belonged there (90% vs 79% with no access) and feel part of their community (85% vs 79%).

Talking to your neighbours

Each year we're happy to see that three quarters (75%) of our residents say they regularly talk with their neighbours. The percentage doing so increases steadily with age: our youngest residents are significantly less likely to chat regularly to their neighbours than every other age group.

80% of people with gardens regularly talk to their neighbours

Residents who talk to their neighbours regularly are more likely to feel that they can easily borrow something they need from their neighbours (79% vs 17% of those who don't talk to their neighbours).

Fear of crime

Last year we saw a slight rise in the number of residents who are worried they might become a victim of a crime, up to 29%. We noted at the time that there had been a rise in the reporting of violent offences such as knife crime in the media, which may have influenced this result. This year, with people advised to stay at home, we see that the fear of becoming a victim of crime has dropped dramatically to 22%, the lowest we've seen since starting the survey 2012 . Not only are people not going out – particularly at night - but the news agenda has clearly moved away from crime to coverage of the pandemic.

Our very youngest and oldest residents (those aged 18 -24 and 75+) were the least likely to be concerned about being a victim of crime, significantly less so than all other age groups (highest among those aged 45-54 at 26%). Geographically, residents in London are significantly more likely to be concerned than those living elsewhere (28% vs 15% outside London).

1. www.clarionhg.com/news-research/2020/september-2020/report-uncovers-clarion-resident-experiences-during-the-pandemic

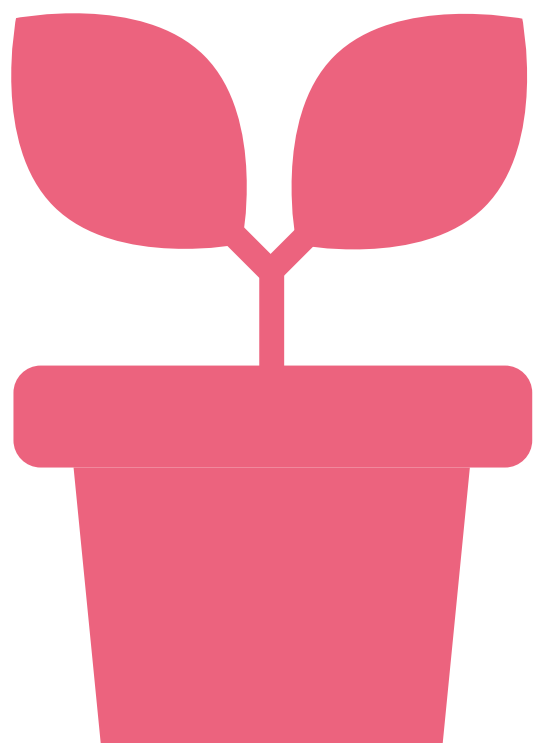
Building new homes

Clarion is certain that building more social rented homes is a key way to help alleviate the current housing and affordability crisis. Social rented homes have provided an essential safety net during the pandemic. Rather than being NIMBYs, suspicious of new development, the majority of our residents agree that there is a need for more socially rented homes in their area, with two thirds agreeing (66%) and only one in five (21%) disagreeing that there is a need for more of this tenure, very similar to last year.

Two thirds of residents agree there is a need for more social rented homes in their area

Views vary by tenure, age and to a lesser extent geography, with residents in London slightly more likely to agree there is a need for more homes than those in the North or East regions. The disparity between residents and shared owners is most notable with a 14 percentage point

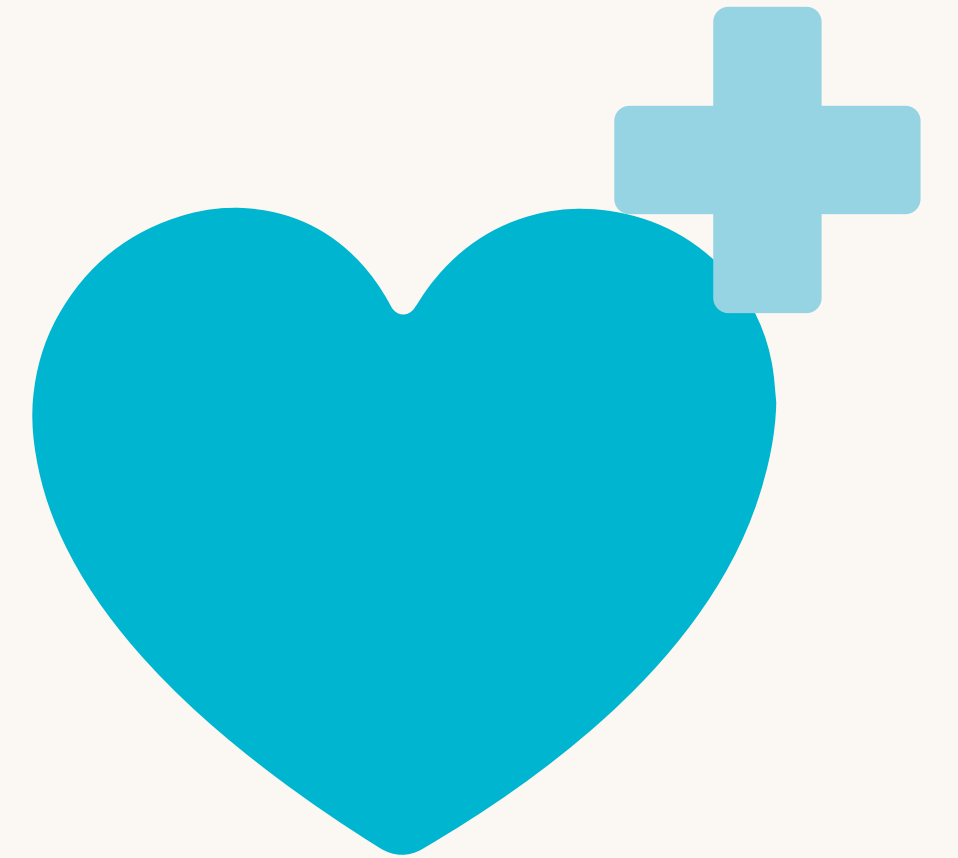
difference: 67% of tenants agreed that more socially rented homes are needed in their area, compared with only 53% of shared owners. This is perhaps an indication that shared owners do not see the full value of a social tenancy that our residents do, rather than a criticism of building mixed and balanced communities.





Wellbeing

Our survey this year ran during a time of unprecedented challenges to people's wellbeing. Many people were stuck at home, unable to exercise or socialise, possibly causing stress on themselves and their relationships.



Wellbeing

The very first steps towards easing lockdown had begun just before the survey interviews started, with people still being encouraged to work from home and limit their contact with other households.

Other surveys running through the same time period reported depression and anxiety were more prevalent in society than before¹, and women in particular were bearing the emotional brunt of the pandemic². Other groups identified as having disproportionately high and sustained levels of anxiety and depression were young people, those living alone and those on the lowest household incomes³. Studies showed that worries hadn't lessened through May and June, even though lockdown had eased slightly.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) routinely tracks the nation's wellbeing and reported that overall, wellbeing scores were lower than for the comparable period in 2019⁴. In particular, anxiety scores just before lockdown were noted as the highest since data collection started in 2012.



1. www.covidsocialstudy.org/results 2. www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/women-are-bearing-the-emotional-brunt-of-the-coronavirus-crisis
3. www.covidsocialstudy.org/results 4. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/measuringnationalwellbeing/april2019tomarch2020

Feeling in control

For many people the coronavirus pandemic has acted as a reminder that despite our best efforts, we can still be blindsided by unexpected circumstances. Feeling in control of our lives, having agency as individuals, is an important factor in our overall health and longevity.

We first asked residents if they feel in control of what happens in their life in 2015. Since then we have had consistently high results and for the last two years 87% of residents have said they felt in control. This year, we see this drop significantly to 82%; while a drop could be expected, the result is still remarkably high given the circumstances.

Still it appears the pandemic has had an effect: only 71% of people who reported they were not coping well during the pandemic said they felt in control of their lives, compared to 84% of those who said they were coping well. The result was also much lower for the small proportion of residents who said they had found it difficult to access sufficient food (70%) during the pandemic (83% for those who found it easy).



Feeling in control of our lives, having agency as individuals, is an important factor in our overall health and longevity.

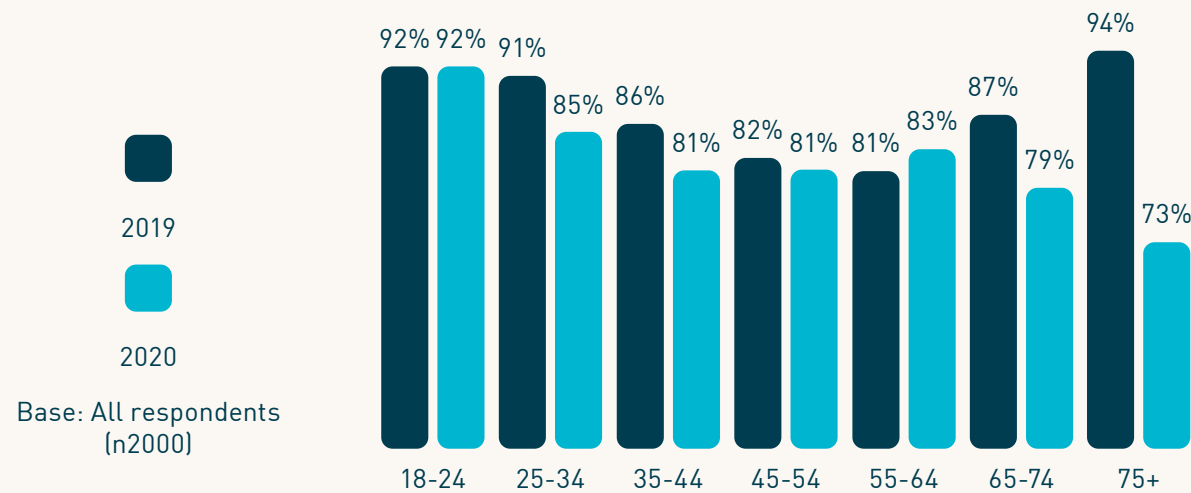
This year

Normally we can plot ‘feeling in control’ against age in a graph and a U-shaped curve appears, where younger people and older people feel most in control, and those in middle age feel it least.

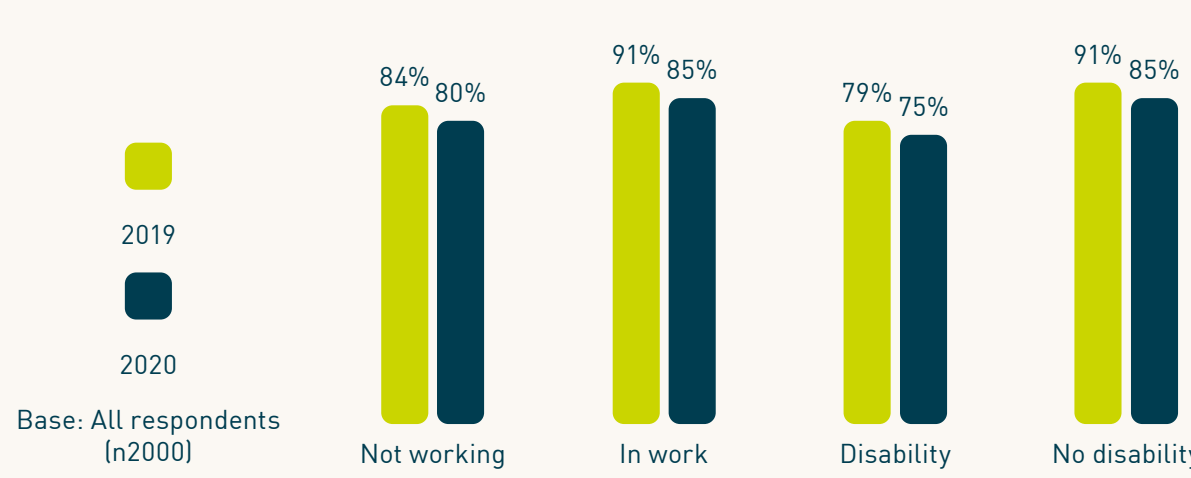
This year, feeling in control still varies by age and we start to see the familiar U-shape as we go up the age groups (see chart opposite) but instead of bouncing back in older age, it actually continues to decline. Now people aged 65 and over are least likely to feel in control. Those over 70 had been instructed to isolate in their homes and were experiencing a more serious form of lockdown than younger groups which may have contributed to this loss of control.

Feelings of being in control were lower than average for people who had been instructed to shield (79%).

Percentage of residents feeling in control of what happens in their life, by age and year



Percentage of residents agreeing with the statement ‘I feel in control of my life’, by key demographics



Previous years’ results have shown us that people with a disability and people not in paid work tend to feel less in control of their lives. While feelings of control have dropped across all groups by around 5 percentage points, this is still the case. The differences are still approximately the same and it is important to note the disparities haven’t grown.

Loneliness

While most of us experience transient feelings of loneliness at various points in our lives, prolonged, chronic feelings of loneliness can have serious and damaging effects on people’s wellbeing. The ONS measures loneliness as part of their wellbeing dashboard and we do so in the same way for comparative purposes. A small percentage of our residents say they are always or often lonely (8% this year, down from 10%) but this is higher than the GB population as a whole (5%).

More people this year said they felt at all lonely than last year (53% up from 46%). We should bear in mind that residents had been through a period of social isolation

where they were unable to go out or have visitors. While some groups would have stayed digitally connected, that was not the case for everyone (see page 54, “Digital”).

Our youngest residents were far more likely to report feeling lonely at least occasionally (43%) than those older than them, despite almost all of them being online (99%) and so perhaps able to maintain at least some of their social network during lockdown.

We have seen before that one of the strongest differentiators in this measure is presence of a disability – residents with a disability are more than twice as likely to always or often feel lonely (13%) than those without (5%)¹.

We see a strong correlation between loneliness and how people coped during the lockdown: those who felt lonely struggled more during the pandemic; or vice versa. A fifth (20%) of those residents who said they were not coping well said they were always or often lonely, compared to 5% of those who said they were coping well. Similar patterns were seen in results around mental health getting worse.

These findings highlight the importance of the community work of our charitable foundation, Clarion Futures, as well as the support offered by frontline housing teams to engage residents and help build relationships. Teams across the whole business embarked on welfare calls to older and disabled residents during lockdown – the findings here indicate that perhaps younger residents were feeling isolated too.

1. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandlonelinessgreatbritain/3aprilto3may2020

Impact of the virus on wellbeing

Earlier in the year, we published a brief report¹ on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdown in Spring 2020, we don't intend to repeat those findings here, but in a chapter on the wellbeing of our residents, it would be impossible not to look at the impact of it.

In March 2020, 2.2 million people who were considered to be especially vulnerable to Covid-19 were instructed to shield at home, meaning they shouldn't leave their homes or have any visitors, where possible. We know that we house a disproportionately older cohort of people and households including someone with disability or long-term health condition. Overall, a third of residents reported they had been instructed to shield, and this was significantly higher in the older age groups (65-74: 58% and 75+: 65%). This is around 10 times the proportion of wider population advised to shield, reflecting the profile of our residents.

People were also instructed to 'self-isolate' if they or someone in their household displayed symptoms of Covid-19 including a fever or a persistent new cough. Overall,

9% of our residents had to self-isolate for this reason, and were more likely to have to do so if they were of working age or there were children in the home. Consistent with national observations that people from black and minority ethnic groups (BAME) were disproportionately negatively affected, 11% of these residents had to self-isolate due to symptoms, compared to 8% of white residents.



Fortunately, the majority of residents (83%) said that they had friends or family who would care for them if they became sick. The importance of building resilient communities and providing individual contact and support is highlighted by the 17% who feel they may not.

1. www.clarionhg.com/news-research/2020/september-2020/report-uncovers-clarion-resident-experiences-during-the-pandemic

Physical activity

In previous years, we have asked residents about their regular physical activity and have seen some dramatic changes recently with big drops in people taking part in regular exercise.

This year, we amended our question slightly because people's ability to get out and exercise was limited to exercising once a day for an hour; gyms were closed and fitness classes were limited to being online. A fifth (20%) of residents said they were doing more physical exercise than before lockdown; this was mostly the case for younger residents aged 18-24 with twice that proportion saying they were doing more. This might be people doing fitness videos, or making the most of their permitted once daily exercises. Women were also significantly more likely to say they were doing more exercise than before lockdown than men. Sports England suggest that men and boys are more reliant on team sports for exercise than women and girls are. So, while all team sports stopped during lockdown, women, who are more likely to do yoga or fitness classes which could continue at home remotely, were more able to continue their exercise.

However, overall twice as many people (39%) said they were in fact doing *less* exercise than before lockdown and in this case, there isn't that much difference across the age groups, or gender. This is a particular concern for older residents as not getting physical activity, for even short periods, could mean they are unable to get back to previous fitness levels.

Research shows that taking part in regular physical activity is beneficial to both physical and mental health. Recent work² has shown that this link, particularly of exercising outdoors, has been appreciated by more people during lockdown, which for many has been a period of significant reappraisal.



2. www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Lockdown-Research-Implications-for-Womens-Participation.pdf

Mental and physical health changes

Most of our residents (71%), said that their physical health hadn't changed since the start of the pandemic and 8% said it had actually got better.

Young residents were significantly more likely to say it had got better (19%), with those over 55 much less likely to (3%). This may be related to younger people increasing their physical activity – 36% of people who increased their activity said their physical health had got better.

Overall, one in five said their physical health had got worse. People who reported a disability were significantly more likely to find this (26% vs 17% without a disability) as were residents aged between 35 and 64, compared to both younger and older people.

People's mental health has been more likely to be affected negatively: over a quarter of residents said it had got worse, only two thirds said it had stayed the same and 3% said it had got better. Polling by Ipsos MORI slightly before our survey found similar results, with 20% of their respondents reporting being concerned about mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety¹.

Again, the strongest difference was seen between age bands, with younger residents most likely to be affected somehow: one in ten saying their mental health had got better and nearly 30% saying it had got worse.

Older residents, 65 and over, were most likely (79%) to say their mental health hadn't changed, and least likely to say it had got worse (16%) but there may be a generational effect here, with older residents less ready to identify feelings such as low mood and anxiety as mental health concerns.

Unlike with changes to physical health, there were strong gender differences, with women more likely to say their mental health had got worse. Again, this was reflected in Ipsos MORI polling, with women, particularly mothers of young children, reporting high levels of anxiety. Women are more likely to be in jobs and industries affected by lockdown, or be responsible for additional childcare or home-schooling^{1,2}.

These differences and others, including the effect on residents with a disability, are covered in more detail in our report on the impact of Covid-19 on residents.

People's mental health has been more likely to be affected negatively: over a quarter of residents said it had got worse.

1. moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/2020/06/04/covid-19-impacts-on-financial-wellbeing/

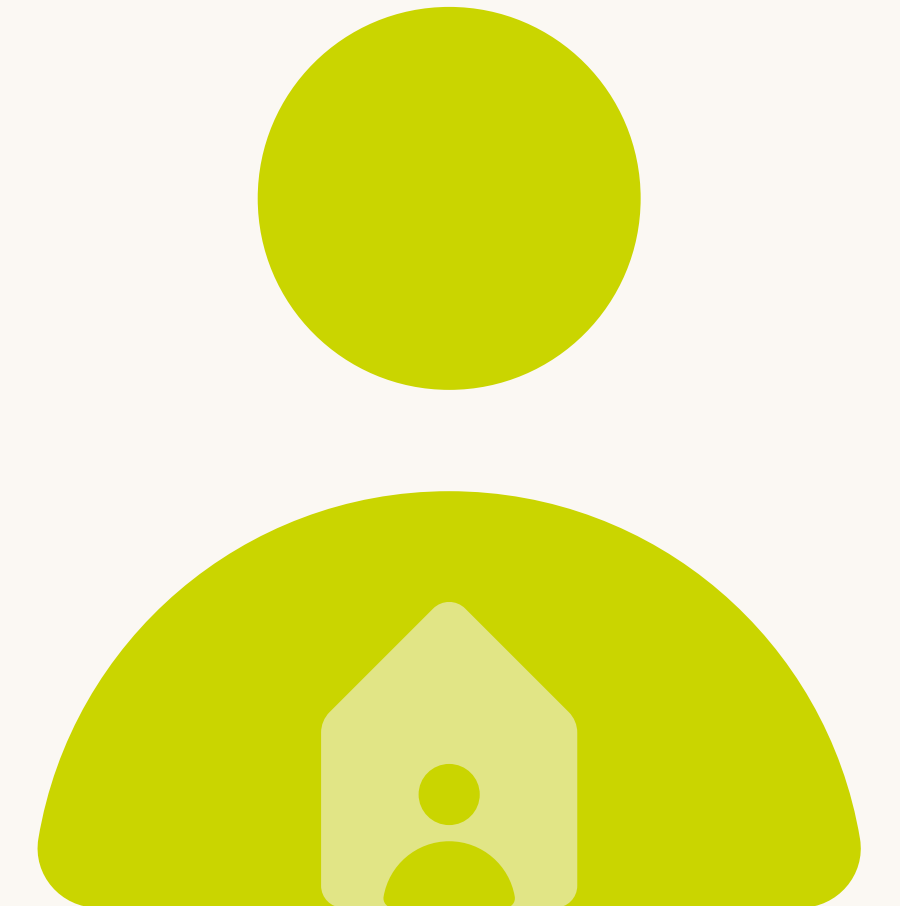
2. www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/women-are-bearing-the-emotional-brunt-of-the-coronavirus-crisis



Landlord resident relationship

Clarion works across over 170 local authorities and despite this national presence, we know how important it is to meet residents' needs locally.

Over the past year, housing management teams have been working with Clarion Futures, Asset and Resident Involvement, alongside residents to develop our Local Offers. This cross departmental initiative has been high on the agenda and resident views and experiences are shaping what is delivered.



Landlord resident relationship

This local focus has been more important than ever this year when both staff and residents were confined to their close neighbourhood due to the Covid-19 lockdown.

Have you been in contact with us in the last 12 months?

This year we asked residents a new question, whether they had been in contact with anyone at Clarion over the last 12 months; 71% of residents said they had. This reinforces the importance of carrying out representative sample surveys such as this – otherwise Clarion would not hear from, or have the opportunity to learn from, nearly a third of residents. It also provides context to subsequent questions, as we can see whether being in touch may have affected residents’ views of Clarion.

Younger residents were far less likely to have been in contact with us (only 57% of those aged 18-24) than our older residents. Those in the middle age bands were most likely to have been in touch (76% of those 35-54) as well as those in

work and those with dependent children.

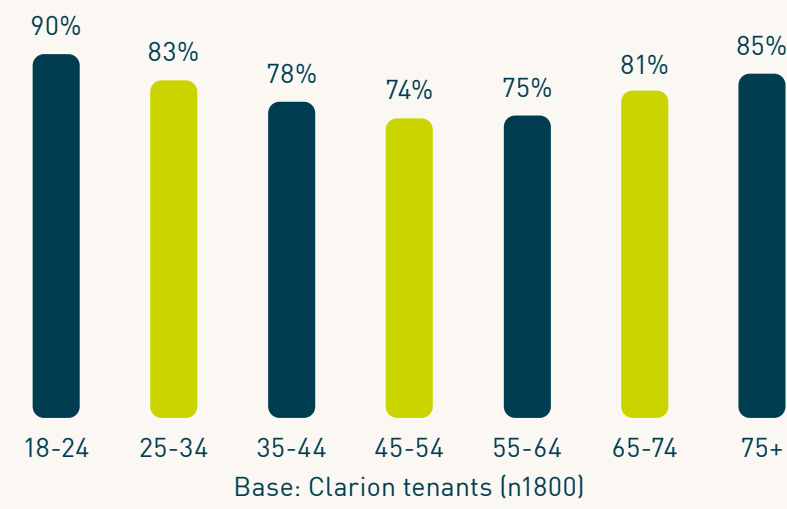
Although colleagues made over 80,000 welfare telephone calls to older and vulnerable residents at the start of lockdown, only 70% of residents over 75 said they had been in contact with us. There was also no statistically significant difference in response from residents who had been instructed to shield due to a vulnerability (71%). Given that calls were targeted to those most likely to fall into these groups, it is possible that the welfare call went to someone else in their household, or, perhaps more likely, that they hadn’t interpreted that call as ‘being in contact’ with us, as they hadn’t proactively reached out.

How satisfied are you with your landlord?

Another new question this year, “How satisfied are you with your landlord?” was included while other regular customer satisfaction surveys were suspended during lockdown. 80% of tenants said they were satisfied and this figure mirrors closely the level we routinely see from our usual quarterly satisfaction survey.

There is significant variation with age – as with almost all of our metrics, middle aged tenants are least satisfied (see chart opposite), significantly less than the youngest or oldest ones.

How satisfied are you with your Landlord, by age



80% of tenants are satisfied with Clarion as their landlord.

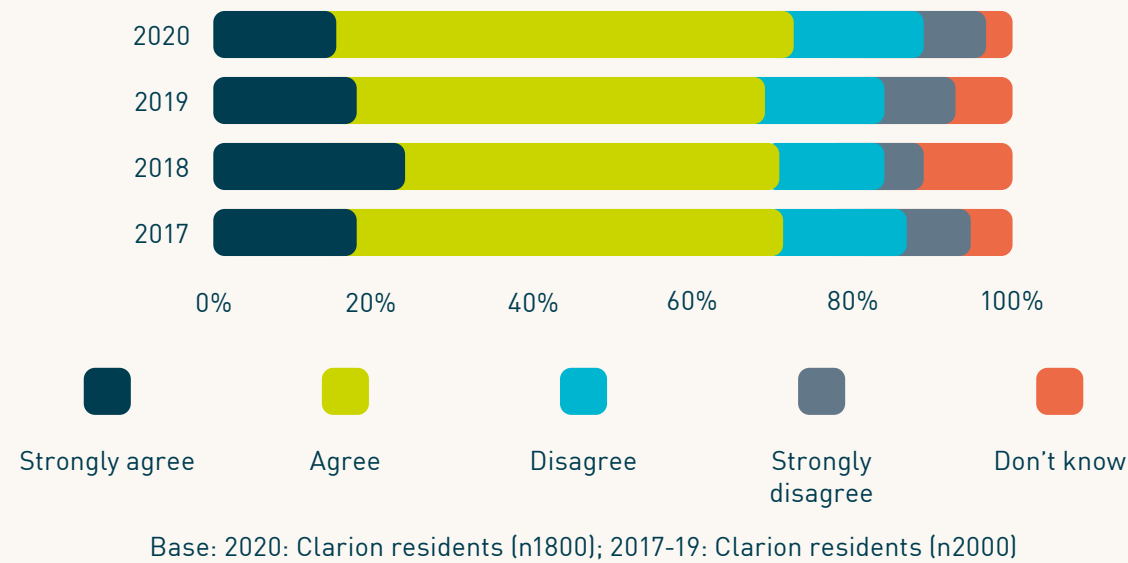


Trust and confidence in Clarion

In line with high levels of satisfaction, we have also seen a significant increase this year in the proportion of residents agreeing that they have trust and confidence in Clarion, up to 73% from 68% last year. This marks a recovery to 2017 levels, prior to the introduction of the new ways of working and known teething problems with the new IT platform.



To what extent do you agree with the statement: "I trust and have confidence in my landlord"



How easy do you find it to access Clarion's services?

In 2018 we saw a dramatic drop in the number of residents who said they found it easy to access Clarion services than in previous years. We were aware of difficulties in our contact centres, which meant longer waiting times and frustration for some residents. This was a particular concern for those unable to use the internet as an alternative, evidenced by the fact that older residents saw the biggest decline in ease of access¹.

Significant effort has been made to improve service delivery, embed our new systems and ways of working. It's reassuring this year to see that investment pay off as the proportion of residents finding it easy to access our services increased last year and is now back up to the 2017 baseline of 70% before new systems were implemented. Additionally, two thirds of tenants said they were confident if they requested something from Clarion it would be dealt with. Clearly there is more to be done to enhance services and make them easy to access for all residents, but the trend is starting to go in the right direction with fewer residents also finding it difficult to

access services.

Ease of access continues to vary significantly by operating region, with Clarion's London areas having a higher proportion saying they find access difficult than elsewhere. Given that access to the website and contact centres are the same for all residents regardless of geography, there may be something about the demographic profile of London residents that contributes to this finding, or it may be a symptom of the convenience they are accustomed to living in a 24-hour global city. As in previous years, people in the middle age bands (aged 35-64) found it least easy to access Clarion's services. This might be because they are less able to phone when the contact centres are open, due to work or family commitments. There have been striking increases in the ease of access measure across both our youngest (mostly online) and oldest (mostly not online) residents, suggesting that improvements to services have not been limited to a single channel but advances across the board.

Percentage of residents who find it easy/difficult to access Clarion services, by age, over time



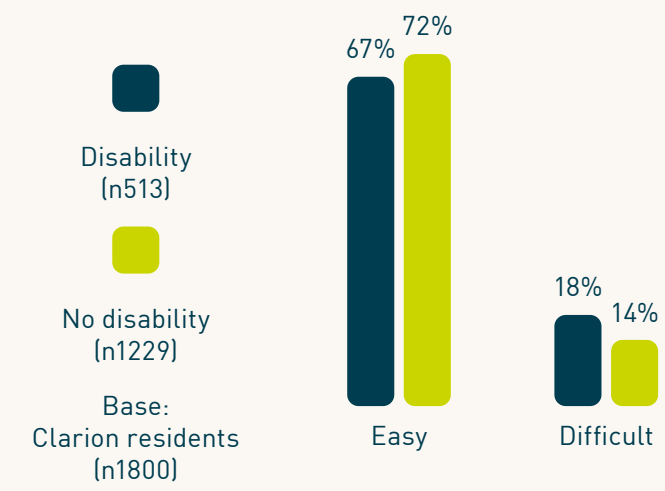
70% of tenants find it easy to access our services

1. www.clarionhg.com/news-research/clarion-research/the-clarion-index-2018/

Access and Disability

While the majority of residents find Clarion services easy to access, we know that residents who have a disability or long-term health condition are less likely to. In response to a similar finding in 2018, a cross-departmental working group was set up and in consultation with the resident's Clarion Ability Network (CAN), further research was undertaken to better understand the issues. As a result, new training has been introduced for customer services and housing teams as well as changes made to systems. This year, the gap between residents with a disability or long-term health condition and those without has grown slightly, after converging a little last year. Clearly this shows that more needs to be done to address these concerns, so this will need to be revisited, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 related finding that people with a disability have struggled more than other groups to deal with the impacts of the pandemic as detailed in our August 2020 report¹.

Percentage of residents who find it easy or difficult to access Clarion services



1. www.clarionhg.com/news-research/2020/september-2020/report-uncovers-clarion-resident-experiences-during-the-pandemic



People with a disability have struggled more than other groups to deal with the impacts of the pandemic as detailed in our August 2020 report.



Household finances

People living in Clarion homes are predominantly on low incomes and since 2016, we have seen them increasingly having to manage with less as the impacts of austerity policies are being felt.



Household finances

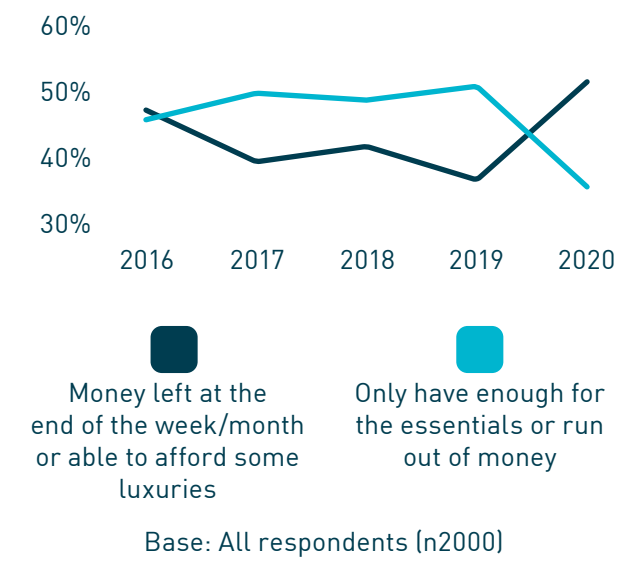
Over the past five years, The Clarion Index has found that the worst financial difficulties have been experienced specifically by those impacted by welfare reforms – working age households in need of support. This year, we see the financial impact of Covid-19 across several of our household finance measures, but not always in the way one might expect.

Last year, over half (51%) of our residents said they either only had enough money for the essentials, or that they ran out of money before the end of the week or month. This year that figure has dropped significantly to 36%, and there has been a corresponding rise in the proportion of people saying they can afford the some luxuries, or even have money left over at the end of the week or month. Following a general downward trend from 2016, this has shot up from 37% (the lowest we had seen) to 52% - the highest since the question has been asked. Consistent with the last two years, 11% of residents didn't answer the question, or said none of the categories apply to them.

Given what we know about the financial impact of lockdown more generally, what's happening here is perhaps surprising. The number of households struggling day-to-day has dropped

significantly, while the proportion of residents managing well has increased.

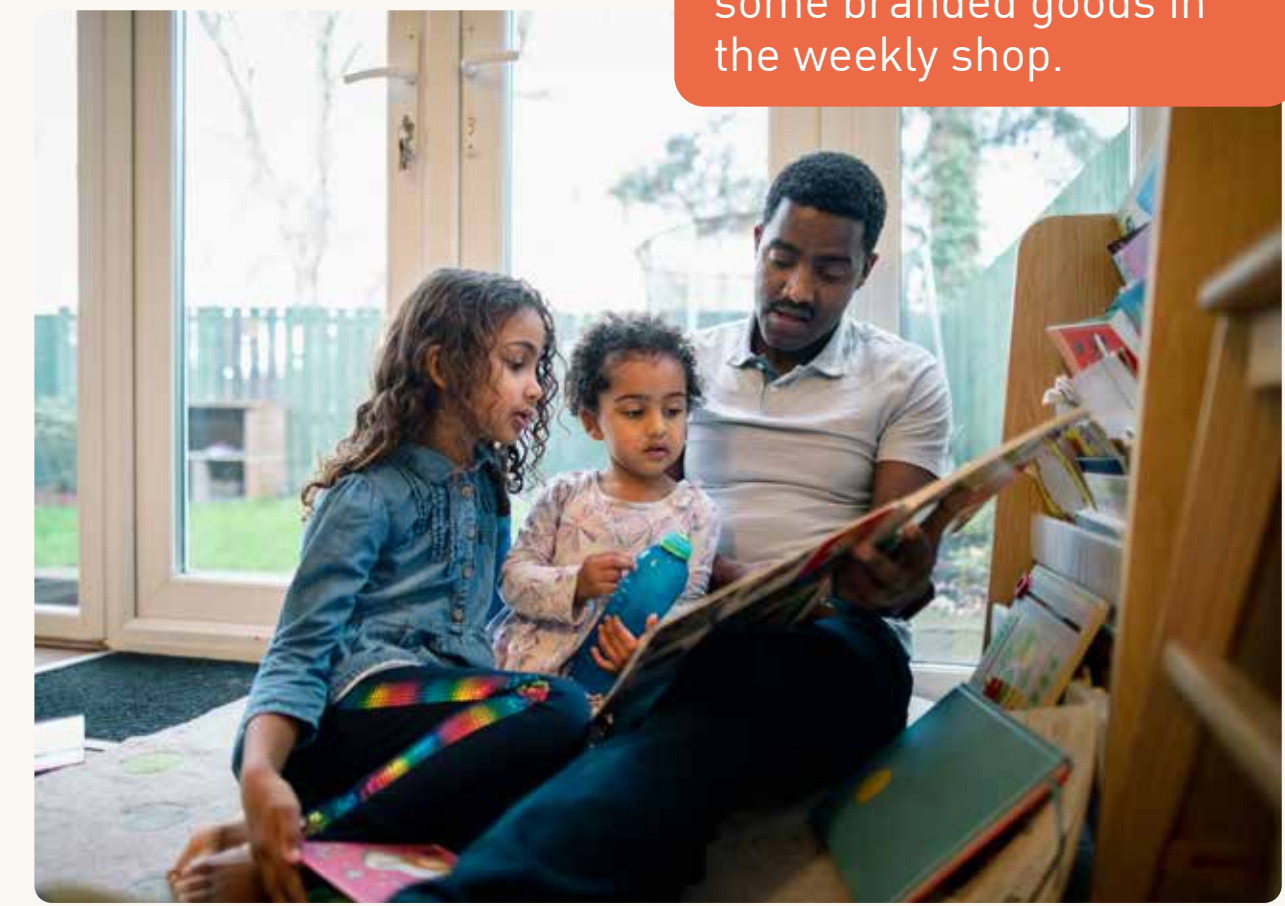
Resident financial experience, over time



Benefit Claims

Responding to the significant increase in benefit claimants as a result of the pandemic, and perhaps a recognition that payments were insufficient, in March 2020 the government announced an increase to Universal Credit and the Working Tax Credit allowance equivalent to £20 a week¹. Deductions following any overpayments of benefits were also paused. For those claiming Universal Credit for the first time, the additional £20 a week may not have appeared very generous. For those already carefully budgeting to live within the limitations of Universal Credit or with Tax Credit support, it will have provided a material boost. This may start to explain the shift shown in the chart [page 36]. An extra £80 a month to anyone who was just getting by, could be sufficient to move them from affording only the essentials to managing to buy some luxury items too. It is important to note that where households can afford some luxuries as well as the essentials, we are not talking about buying a Porsche, but likely treating themselves to some branded goods in the weekly shop as opposed to supermarket own-brand.

To further understand this dramatic reversal we can consider the other financial and wellbeing information we collect, and look at how specific groups might be experiencing the impact of welfare reform and Covid-19 differently.



Where households can afford some luxuries as well as the essentials, we are not talking about buying a Porsche, just some branded goods in the weekly shop.

1. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-chancellor-rishi-sunak-provides-an-updated-statement-on-coronavirus

Worrying about money

Last year about two in five (42%) Clarion residents said they worried about money, this year this has fallen to 28%. It could be tempting to read this as a positive finding. However, worry is subjective and bigger anxieties may displace lesser ones. In light of the lockdown environment when surveys were carried out, it is possible that people simply felt they had bigger things to worry about. While fewer residents were worried about money, specific groups still worry more about money than others:

- Having children living at home means households are significantly more likely to have worries about money (32%) than those without (26%);

- Those with a disability are significantly more likely to worry (32%) than those without (27%);
- Working age residents (18-64) are much more worried about money issues (33%) than the over 65's (12%);
- The 'squeezed middle' aged 45-54 are the most likely to be worried about money (40%) followed by younger residents aged 18-24 (38%)

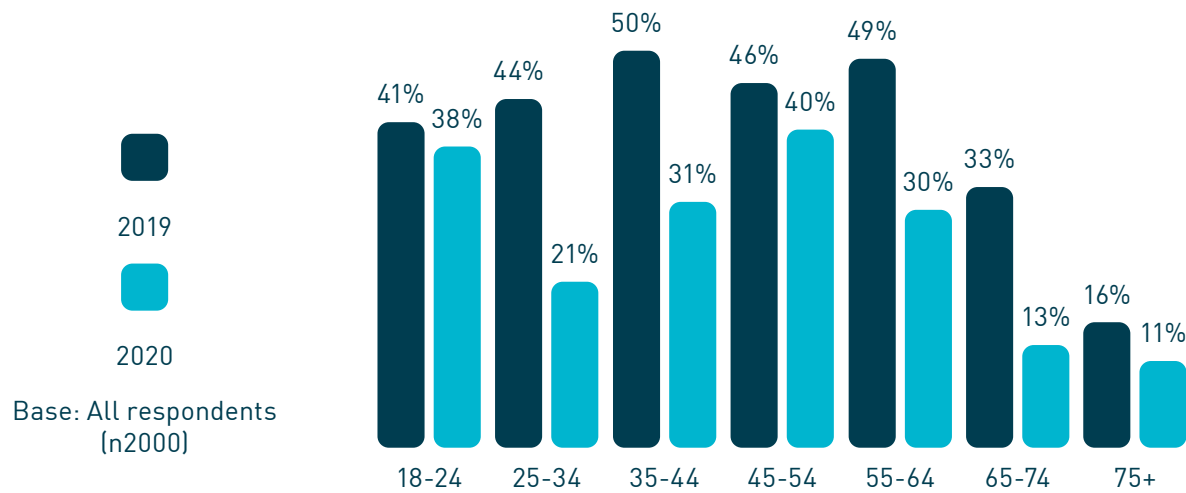
- Female residents are slightly more likely to be worried (29%) than their male counterparts (26%)

Although money worries have decreased overall, the groups who are most worried are the same as in previous years. Of course, some residents will feature in more than one category since a tenancy holder might have a disability and also have children at home, for example.

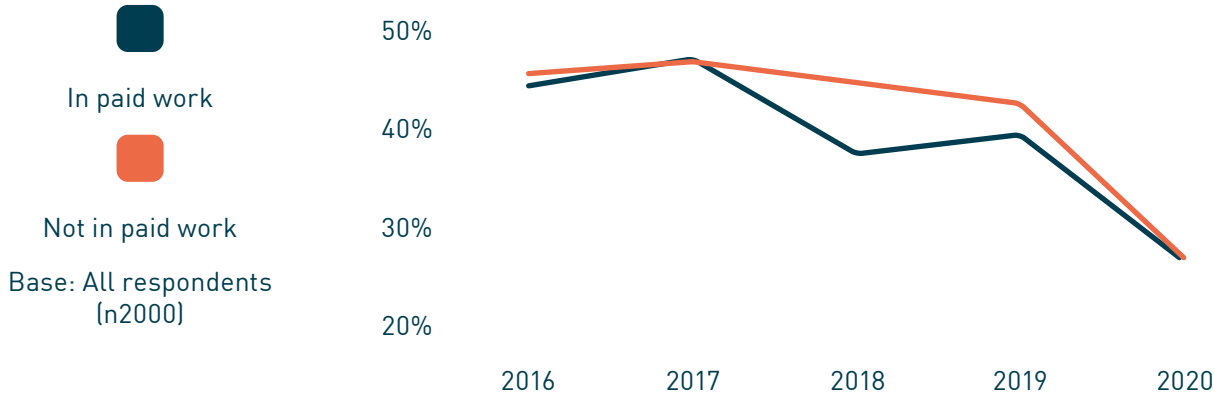
For the past few years people not in paid work have been significantly more likely to worry about money issues than those who were. But interestingly, this gap has now closed and at a much lower level (28%) than back in 2017 (47%), the last time the figures were the same.

1. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-chancellor-rishi-sunak-provides-an-updated-statement-on-coronavirus

Percentage of residents worried about money issues by age and year



Percentage of residents in paid work or not, worried about money issues over time



Softer measures

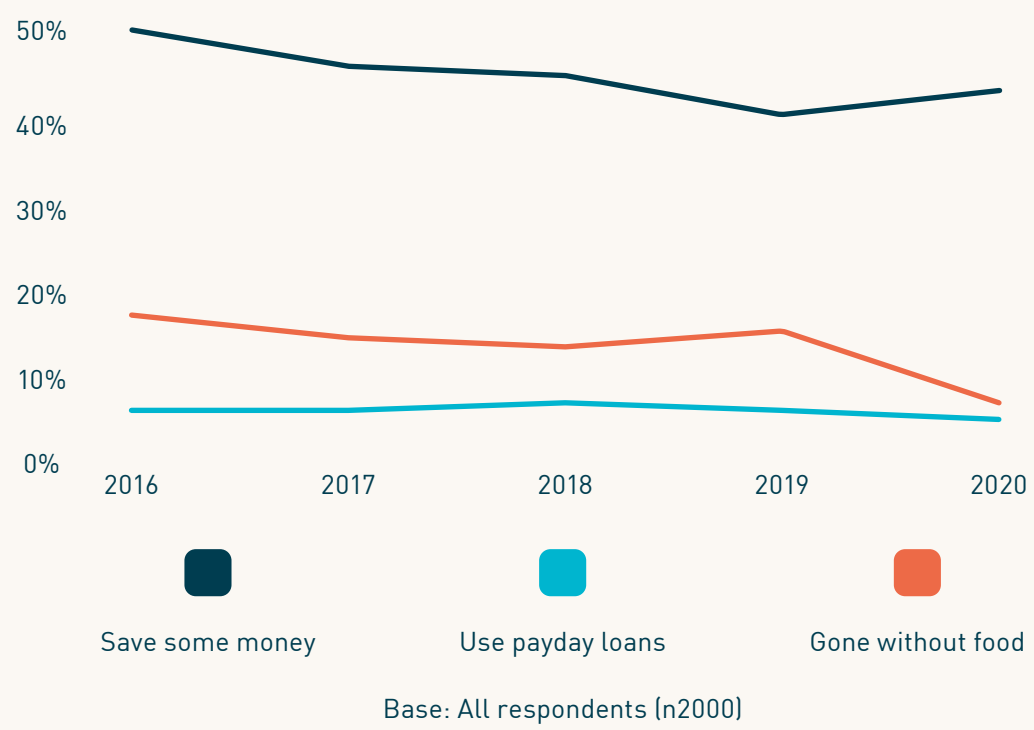
As well as asking outright for the resident’s financial situation, we also ask a series of related questions which give us a broader picture of their status.

Because we ask them every year, we’re able to track how residents are doing. Over the past few years, residents’ ability to save any money at all has been reducing, but for the first time since 2016, there has been a small increase on last year’s figure. It is hoped that this is the start of a new trend and not just a ‘blip’ as a result of lockdown and the associated benefits changes. It is also encouraging to see a continued reduction in residents using payday loans and cash converters which tend to have high interest rates, and offer poor value for money (6% in 2018; 5% in 2019; 4% in 2020).

The combination of results suggests a reversal in previously worrying trends where previously more and more households were struggling to make ends meet. Following years of austerity and cuts and caps on benefits, in 2020, government has increased support for our most vulnerable citizens. This change of tack was as essential as it was welcome.

At the time of writing, these benefit changes and increased levels of support are time-limited to 12 months. It’s crucial that benefits are permanently held at levels that people can live on.

Percentage of residents exhibiting financial behaviours, over time.



Food poverty

Food poverty is defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet. The past few years have seen an increase in residents – and the wider population – using food banks and going without food. As a result, Clarion Futures Money & Digital have made tackling food poverty a key priority of their work by supporting food banks, pantries and cooking schools.

Because food poverty is one of the starkest indicators of a wider experience of poverty, families in food poverty are almost certainly going without other essentials. It is encouraging therefore that the proportion of Clarion residents going without food has fallen from 15% last year to 6% this year. Reducing this to zero is of course the goal.

In previous years, food poverty was clearly driven by financial stress, with the demographic of those going without food tightly correlated to where welfare reforms were focussed; working age families and the disabled being worst affected. During lockdown, there was some concern that access to food, rather than cost, may

become an issue for some. Fortunately, this does not appear to have been as prolific as perhaps feared, with 91% of residents telling us they found it easy to access what they needed during lockdown.

Worryingly however, of those who found it difficult to access food during lockdown (n.165), over half (53%) said their mental health had got worse in that period. This highlights the importance of tackling food poverty, regardless of its cause.

The work done by Clarion Futures has no doubt had a significant impact on the overall reduction in residents going without food, as has the increase in community and government action during the pandemic. The survey also found a slight reduction in foodbank use (8% to 6%) this year which may suggest the

longer-term strategies around cooking schools and community pantries are starting to have an impact locally.

Contrary to any perception that food poverty is something that primarily affects the elderly, last year one in five residents aged 18-44 had gone without food in the previous year. Thankfully this proportion has decreased markedly this year but the age profile of food poverty remains skewed towards those of working age.

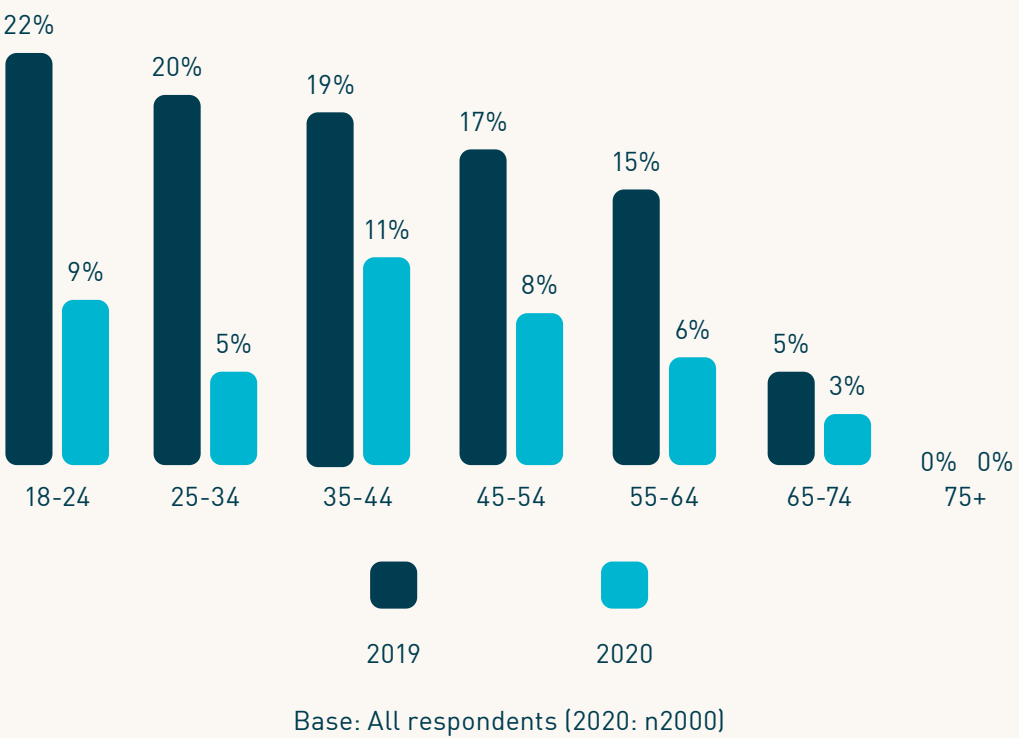


Although less marked than in previous years, there is a statistically significant difference between people with or without children at home going without food (8% vs 5% respectively) and residents with a disability are also more likely to have gone without food (9% vs 5% without).

6% of Clarion residents had used a food bank in the last year.

Food banks have become higher profile during the pandemic with media features and communities rallying around each other to support those shielding or having to isolate. This makes it somewhat surprising that only 6% of Clarion residents have used a food bank in the last year, compared to 8% last year.

Percentage of residents who have gone without food because they couldn't afford it in the last year, by age, over time



COVID-19 impact on finances

When asked specifically about any impact the pandemic had on their household finances, a quarter (25%) of residents said it had a negative impact.

The majority (69%) said there had been no change to their situation and 2% did not know. Only 5% said it had a positive impact and those in work were slightly more likely to say this (6% vs 4%). Residents were asked whether they had applied for any support from government either through Universal Credit, benefits or small business grants as a result of the pandemic and 14% had, although this figure rises to 27% of those aged 18-24. This is consistent with national findings that show young people have been particularly badly hit financially as a result of lockdown².

Awareness of Clarion Futures money guidance has increased from 24% last year to 37% this year.

2. www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/young-workers-in-the-coronavirus-crisis

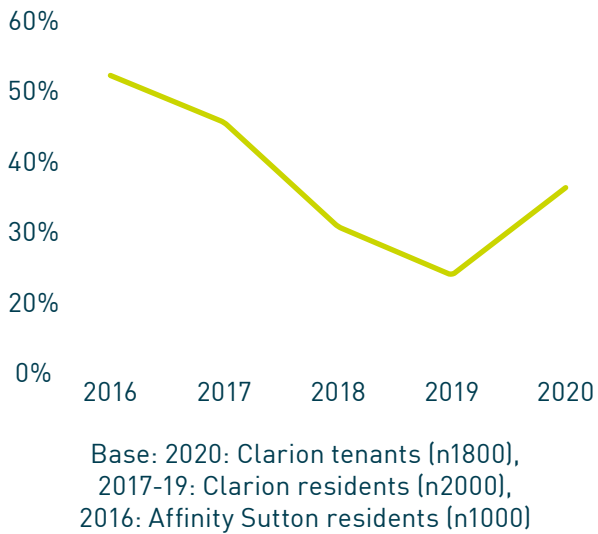
Awareness of our services

Clarion Futures provide a range of services to support residents to manage their household finances, such as access to affordable loans, credit unions and guidance on money management.

The introduction of GDPR (a change to data protection law) in 2018 made it more difficult for Clarion Futures to market their financial inclusion guidance services to residents. This added to an already declining awareness of these services following a boost from a marketing campaign in 2015. Since GDPR was introduced, colleagues have been working hard to find ways to communicate these important support services within the new regulations. It is therefore encouraging to see awareness of this service starting to recover as demonstrated in the chart opposite.

Awareness levels across all of Clarion's support services were very low last year with nearly two thirds (63%) of residents unaware of any services offered, this has improved slightly to just over half this year (55%).

Awareness of money guidance service over time





Employment

At the time of the surveys for this report, England was in lockdown with people being told to stay at home wherever possible. It was an understandably odd time to be asking about people's employment.



Employment

Residents were generally happy to talk about employment and it allowed us to gain some insight around how lockdown situation was impacting jobs right in the middle of the pandemic.

Of course, things will have changed since, even in the time it takes for this report to be published, but these findings offer a snapshot from May-June 2020. These can be compared with previous years to see the early impact of COVID-19, and future surveys can be used to monitor how things change over time.

Residents were asked what their employment status was before the pandemic and, if they were in paid work, how the lockdown had affected their work.

Paid work

This year slightly more residents were in paid work than last year with 43% in employment compared to 41% in 2019. What is striking is that a much larger proportion were working full time; 32% of residents up from 26% last year.

Despite the overall shift to more full-time work, part time work remains most common among women, with 14% doing so, compared to only 4% of men.

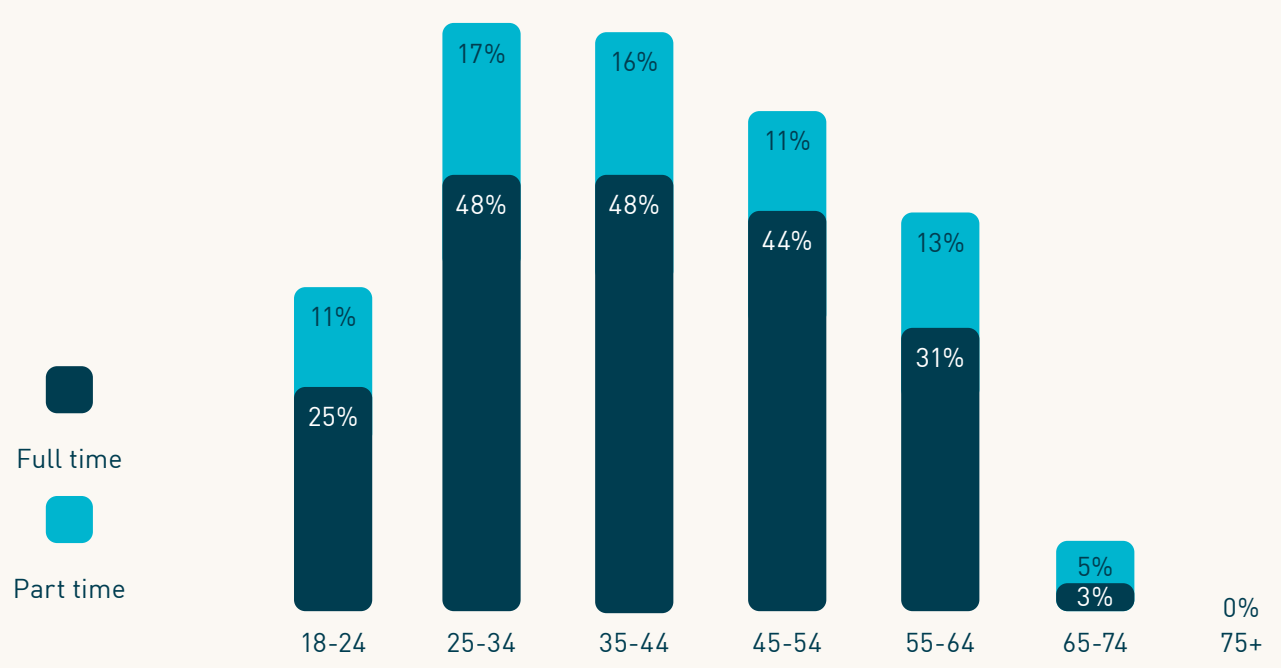
Residents with dependent children in the home are also consistently more likely to be working part time hours (20%).

Among people in paid work, it is encouraging to see a reduction in zero hours contracts from 6% to 4% this year, alongside corresponding increases in permanent contracts (75% to 77%) and

fixed term contracts (4% to 8%). While some appreciate the flexibility that comes with zero hours contracts, at a time of economic contraction, it is likely to leave workers vulnerable to sudden reductions in earnings. Self-employment is also an attractive option for those seeking flexibility around other commitments and the proportion of residents who are self-employed has remained unchanged from 2019 at 9%. But with restrictions around support payments to this group compared to waged workers on furlough, they may now be facing new financial challenges.

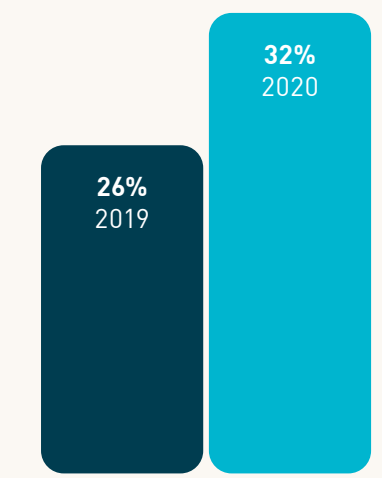
Of residents in work, 44% have at least one other adult in paid employment in their household, up from 37% last year and we know from previous studies that this has a material impact on households being lifted from poverty.

Paid employment by age

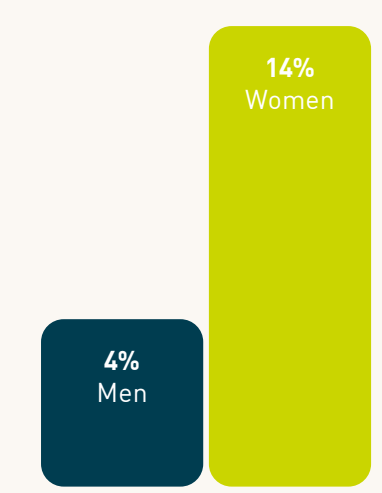


The proportion of residents in full time work has increased from 26% in 2019 to 32% this year.

Full time work



Part time work



Other working status

Given that 23% of residents are aged 65 and over, it is unsurprising that the same proportion are fully retired from work. However, the fact these numbers match could be misleading as it implies everyone over 65 is retired whereas 8% of those aged 65 to 74 are still working (3% full time and 5% part-time), while 2% of those under 65 are retired. The proportion of residents working beyond retirement age has reduced from 11% in 2019 where it had been static since 2018. While older residents have typically been insulated from benefit cuts and were well-catered for during lockdown, this highlights the importance of recognising individual experiences concealed within the larger numbers.

As in previous years, a higher proportion of men are retired than women (30% vs 19%), but because so many more residents are female (67% vs 33%), Clarion actually houses more retired women than men. Last year male residents were significantly more likely than women to report having a disability or being unable to work due to a long-term health issue (18% vs 12%) but this year there is no difference between them, both are now down to just 10%.

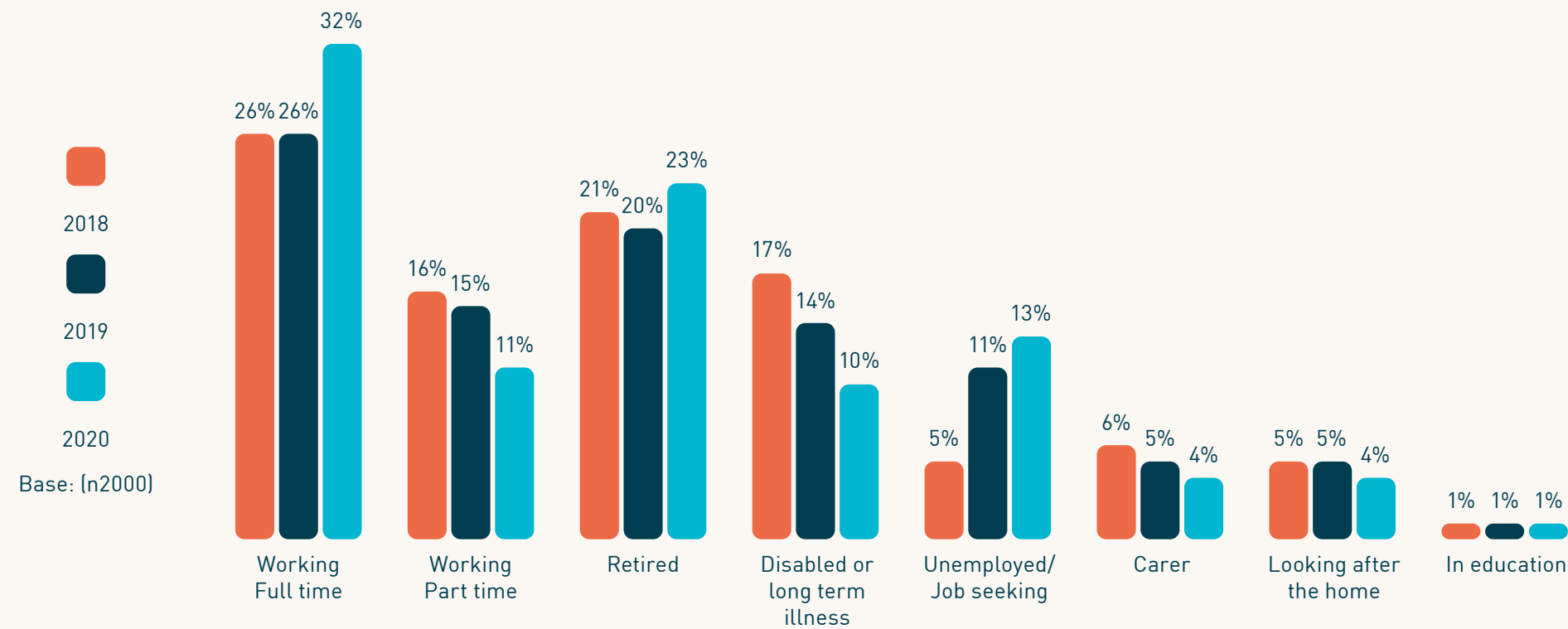
We have also seen a closing of the gender gap among carers over the past few years and this year there is just one percentage point difference with 3% of male residents and 4% of female residents providing care – this continues a downward trend as last year it was 4% and 6%, and in 2018 it was 1% and 8%.



23% of residents are aged 65 and over.



Working status by year



This year there has been a continued decrease in residents who are not working due to a disability or long-term illness (17% in 2018, 14% in 2019 and 10% in 2020). Last year, the overall number of residents saying they have a

disability or long-term health condition had remained almost the same, and the decrease here was accompanied by a spike in the number of residents who were unemployed and seeking work. This was largely attributed to the requirement for more people to seek work under Universal

Credit. However, in 2020 we see no corresponding uptick in unemployment to explain the continued decrease.

What we may be seeing here is a quirk of timing, with more people responding to the survey during lockdown who would ordinarily be unable to answer a telephone survey due to being at work. This may also explain any return to pre-2020 levels of full time versus part time workers in future surveys. Because of the unique circumstances of the interviews – mid-lockdown- it would be careless to draw any firm conclusions from these findings without further corroboration.



At the time of the survey, 13% of residents were unemployed, a slight increase on last year (11%) when it had increased from 5% in 2018 following changes related to Universal Credit. Any follow-up to this survey is anticipated to find a significant increase in this measure when the furlough scheme comes to an end.



Changes due to Covid-19

In May-June 2020, 27% of Clarion's residents who had been in paid work prior to March 23 had been furloughed. This is consistent with the findings from an early ONS survey of businesses¹ still trading or temporarily paused, which found that 27% of the workforce had been furloughed. For Clarion residents aged 18-24 this figure rises to 38%. While 7% of residents were made redundant or lost their jobs as a result of the lockdown, this was higher (10%) for young people aged 18-24. This too, is consistent with observations made by the Money and Pensions Service:

"Younger people are more likely to work in shut-down sectors and more likely to have lost work. Younger people are also less financially secure going into the crisis."²

Despite this, 86% of residents in paid work said they feel secure in their jobs, this highlights the time-sensitivity of these surveys as this provides quite a contrast to findings from surveys carried out before Treasury had started to deliver on the Job Retention Scheme announced on 20 March. For example, in a survey undertaken over 19-21 March, Ipsos MORI found that 53% of workers rated the threat

to their job or business as high or very high³, and on 25 March, Zurich with the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge found that a third expected to have lost their job within four months⁴. The introduction of furlough and other support arrangements will undoubtedly have had a significant impact on people's feelings of job security by the time surveys were carried out with Clarion residents in May. Additionally, nearly half (46%) of Clarion's residents in work, are employed in the public sector which may well have placed them in greater demand throughout lockdown, not less.

46% of working residents are employed in the public sector.

As mentioned above, we continue to see the same gender split as in previous years, with more women working part time than men (14% vs 4%). This might suggest that female workers were more precariously placed during lockdown, but in fact men were more likely to have been made redundant or lose their job

27% of Clarion's residents who had been in paid work prior to March 23 had been furloughed.

(10% vs 6% of women) by the time our interviews were performed. Women proved more likely to be furloughed (29% vs 21% of men). For a detailed exploration of the differing impacts of Covid-19 related changes to employment see our dedicated report. More recent research findings and anecdotal evidence from our staff on the front line suggests that now women, people with a disability and people who have had to shield due to vulnerability are disproportionately likely to be targeted for redundancy. Further analysis and follow up interviews will be required to understand how our residents continue to be affected and the industry and sector drivers behind the findings.

1. www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/furloughingofworkersacrossukbusinesses/23march2020to5april2020

2. moneyandpensionsservice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covid19-impact-on-financial-wellbeing-in-the-UK.pdf

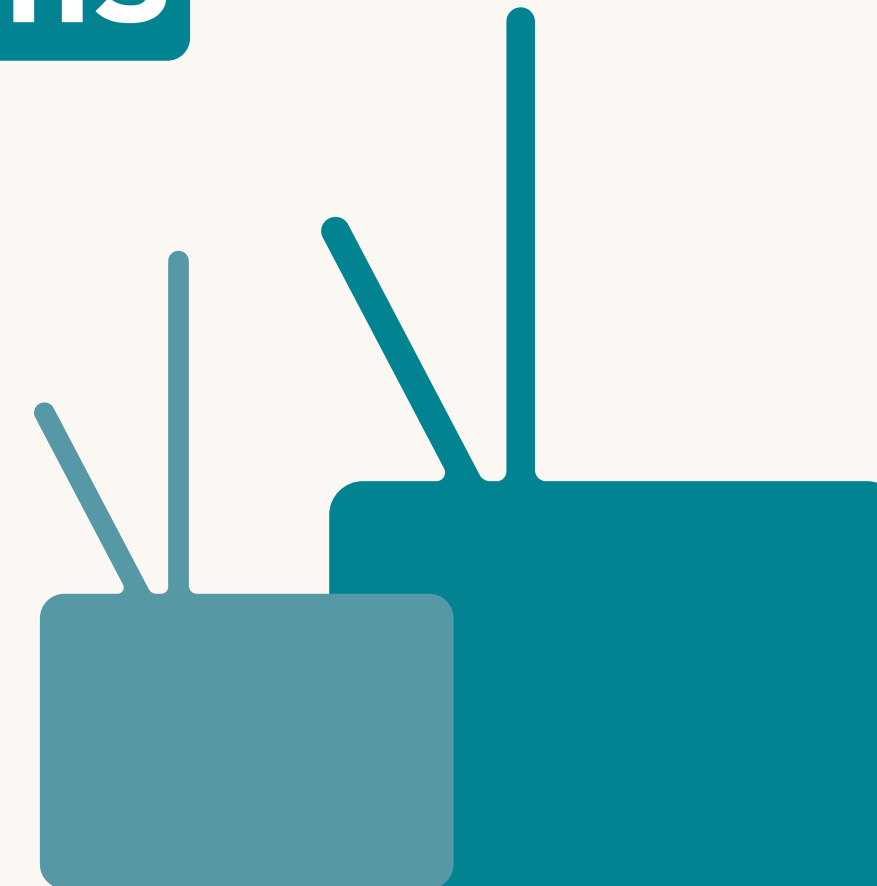
3. www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/britains-view-covid-19-high-threat-their-business-jumps-19-points-week 4. ftp.iza.org/dp13183.pdf





Digital & communications

Being online during lockdown will have been a virtual lifeline for residents, hugely important to both their wellbeing and their finances. Internet access will have enabled them to shop while shielding, stay in touch with friends and family on social media and via video conferencing apps and apply for Universal Credit or government support if necessary.



Digital & communications

Beyond lockdown, digital skills were already a necessity for performing many jobs, and as they may now be advertised online only, searching and applying for them too. Even jobs that do not involve using computers or being desk-based, require a degree of digital literacy that was not a requirement just a few years ago.

According to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics¹ currently 96% of GB households can access the internet. Following a plateau for a few years prior to 2019, this has risen sharply from 90% to 96% of households in only two years.

Since 2011, when just 57% of Affinity Sutton residents (now part of Clarion) were online, the yearly increase and subsequent levelling off of residents getting online has largely mirrored the national trend, but usually around 10% below ONS figures. Last year we were thrilled to see a sharp rise from 76% to 81%, closing the gap a little between our residents and the GB population. This figure hasn't changed this year so unfortunately that gap has widened, though as we'll see there have been some significant changes in behaviour.

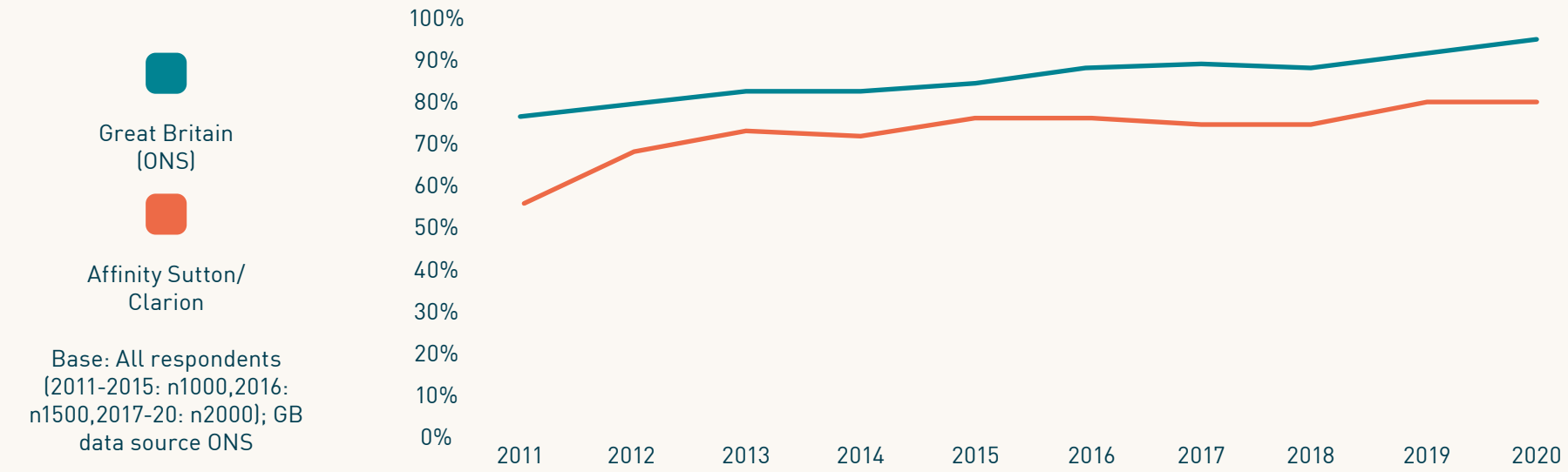
Looking closely at the ONS data, it seems that the national growth has come mainly from households of older people, with a sharp increase in people over retirement age doing online shopping.

Indeed, their conclusion is that the only space for growth in the future is in older age groups. Our data reflects this too: the graph opposite shows that the percentage of residents aged under 45 online is now at a level where it is reasonable to assume it's unlikely to increase further. The only age group to have shown a notable increase (of four percentage points) are early retirees, aged 65 to 74. This reflects what the ONS have found. It is also clear that the proportion of residents online declines markedly after the age of 55 and the only group where fewer than half are online is the over 75s.

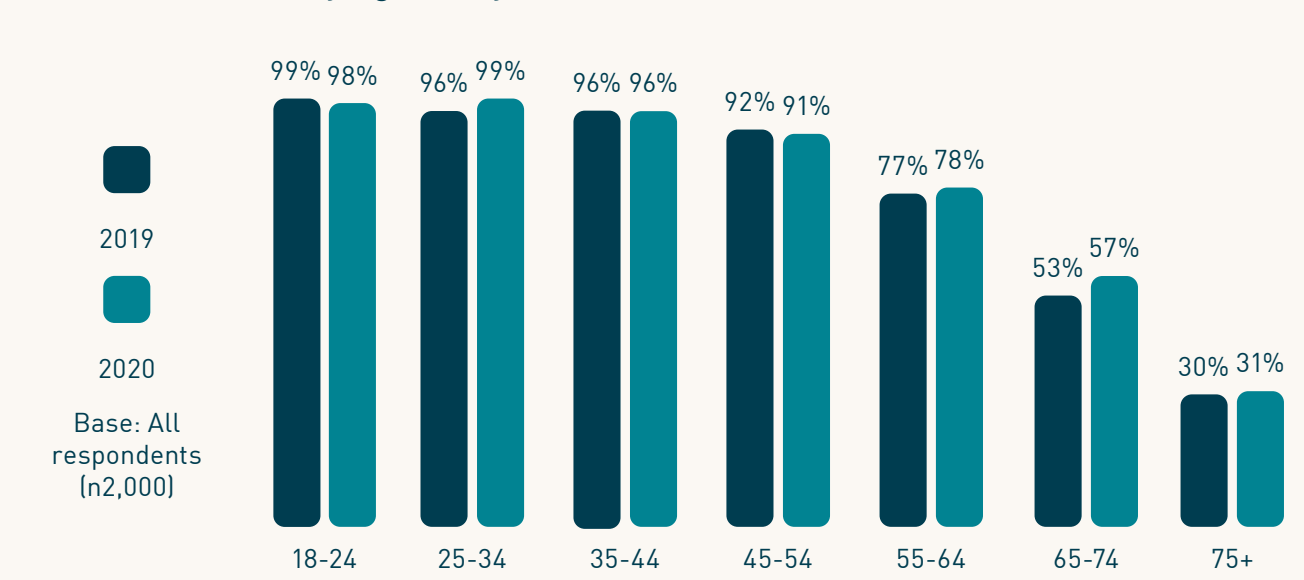
81% of Clarion residents access the internet

1. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020

Internet access over time



Internet access by age and year



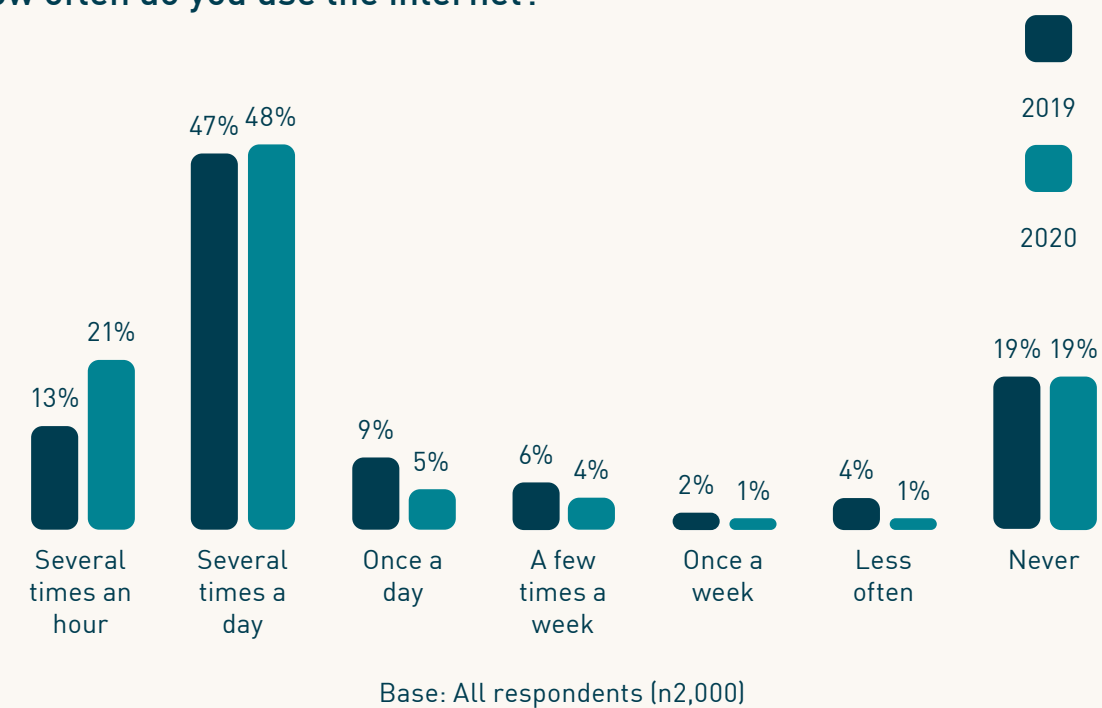
Frequency

While the proportion of residents getting online has remained steady overall, the frequency with which they use the internet has changed substantially this year. This may well reflect changed behaviours during lockdown, with people working from home, checking-in more frequently with friends, gaming online and staying up to date with the news. To a lesser degree it may also reflect the slightly different sample picked up during the calls this year, which includes more full-time workers and fewer people with a disability than before.

A fifth of residents (26% of internet users) use the internet several times an hour. Nearly two thirds of these high frequency users (63%) are aged under 45.

In 2017 fewer than half of our residents (47%) said they used the internet multiple times a day, a figure which has increased sharply since then to 69% this year. This year 93% of internet users aged 18-34 went online at least several times a day.

How often do you use the internet?



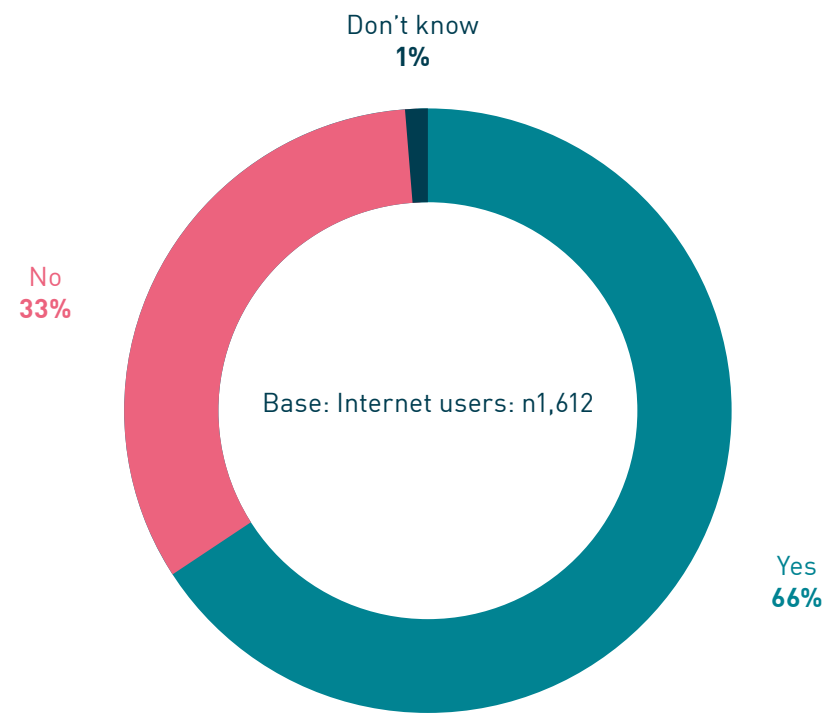
Online activities

Last year, four in five online residents said they felt confident using services on the internet. This varied by age, and we found that older internet users reported lower levels of confidence. We asked a slightly different question this year, whether residents managed any of their billing accounts online (banking, utilities etc) and found that two thirds (66%) were doing so.

Residents aged between 25 and 44 were significantly more likely to (77%), but even so, over half of residents 65 and over were managing their billing accounts online.

ONS figures¹ show that 76% of GB internet users use online banking (the only comparable statistic they publish). While overall this is higher than our figure, they find only half of those over retirement age doing so.

Do you manage any of your billing accounts online?



1. www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020

Accessing our services online

So, 81% of our residents use the internet, most of them several times a day, and 66% manage their billing accounts online.

We know that confident, digitally connected customers have high expectations of dealing with businesses online – wanting to carry out transactions, find information, and chat with staff online when it is convenient to them.

Residents are aware that they can both pay their rent or report a repair online – even 45% of those who never use the internet were aware of this online option.

90% of online residents know you can pay your rent or report a repair online

Even if residents log a repair online, hearing back from us by phone is still the most popular method, with 40% preferring this option. Email and text are around equally popular (17% and 18%) and only slightly fewer residents are channel neutral and just want to hear back (14% said any method was fine).

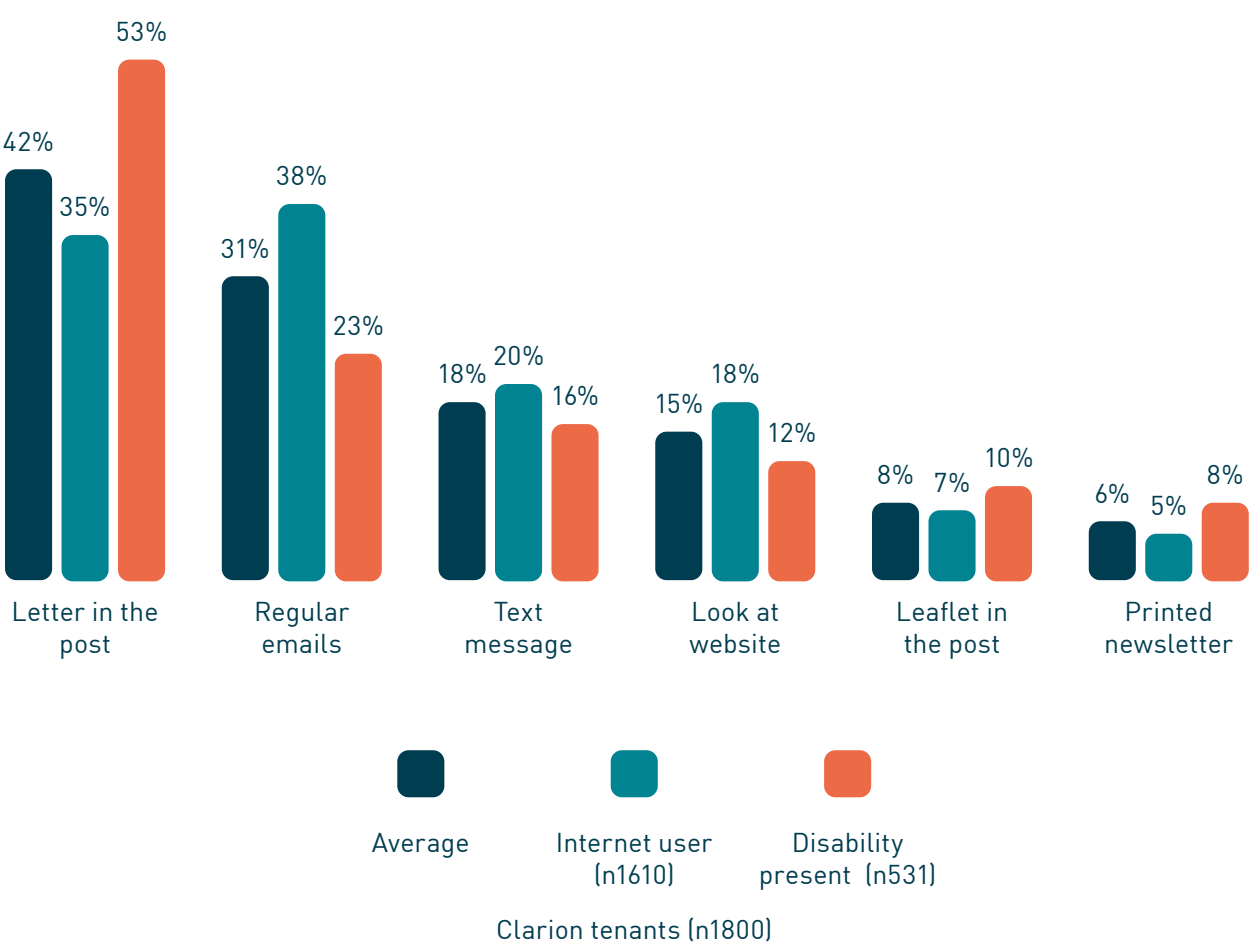
Of course, we also have a significant minority (19%) of residents who don't use the internet, so getting our offer right for them remains essential. Clarion continues to provide alternatives to digital communications and Clarion Futures continue help to those who want to, to get online.



Finding out information from Clarion

One in six tenants said they will look at the Clarion website to find out information when they want it; very few were interested in either a regular printed (6%) or digital (2%) newsletter. Residents who used the internet were most likely to say they prefer regular emails (38%) and residents who aren't online were most likely to say they would like a letter in the post (68%). As noted earlier, residents who report a disability tend to find it harder to access our services, so it seems especially important for them to easily find information from us and stay up to date. These residents had significantly different preferences for finding out information, compared to those without a disability – this may be related to differing internet usage among this group too.

Preferences for finding out information from Clarion



Methodology

Market Research Society registered, Enventure Research was commissioned to undertake this year's resident survey with randomised customer contact details provided by Clarion.

In previous years we have interviewed a representative sample of 2,000 residents. This results in 1,800 surveys with residents and 200 with shared owners. This year we used a slightly different methodology as a sample of 500 shared owners was required for a related project.

The sample was boosted to 2,300 this year to accommodate 300 additional shared owners. For consistency in reporting with previous years, a random sample of 200 of the shared owners were included with the 1,800 resident responses to give a representative sample of 2000 residents.

Quotas were used for age, gender and region. All calls were completed between 16th May and 24th June 2020.

The questionnaire this year included a number of new questions specifically related to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and how the subsequent lockdown restrictions had affected residents' lives. Some of these questions were taken verbatim from other research organisations to enable comparison against their national datasets. The rest of the design closely replicated the content and order of previous years to ensure results were comparable and it was timed to be no more than 15 minutes long to prevent incomplete interviews.

To ensure the survey was as inclusive as possible, calls were made at different times of day including evenings and weekends.

Where Clarion data since 2017 is cited, the source is Enventure Research, where Affinity Sutton resident data from 2012 and 2013 is cited the source is DJS Research Ltd, where figures for 2014-16 and 2011 are used the source is Qa Research Ltd.

There are likely to be interactions between the different demographics reported in this publication. This report mainly focuses on individual characteristics, so differences cited here cannot necessarily be attributed directly to the characteristic being described.

We refer to 'Clarion Housing' and 'Clarion' throughout this report to apply to the activities of Clarion Housing Group Limited which comprises, Clarion Housing Association Limited, Clarion Futures and Latimer Developments Limited. Please see our website clarionhlg.com, for more details.

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