

# LGIU: Covid-19 information and misinformation survey

In October 2020, we sent a survey to over 3000 councillors selected randomly from an online database. Three-hundred and forty six (346) individuals responded to the survey. We asked them about their satisfaction with official communications about public health and Covid-19 and we also asked them about any unofficial communication they may have seen, with a specific focus on misinformation.

## Official public health information

How satisfied are you with public health information to you as councillors?

Councillors in general were more satisfied with the information that they received from their own councils or local public health authorities than they were with official public health messaging from central government.

Only 35% of councillors were satisfied or very satisfied with public health messaging from central government to them as councillors, while more than double - 76%- of councillors were satisfied or very satisfied with the messages that they received from their own councils to support them in their role as councillors. (49% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with central messaging compared to just 10% overall dissatisfaction with council messaging to them).

How satisfied are you with public health information to the public?

Councillors were even less happy with central government messaging to the general public and the difference between satisfaction with central and local messaging was even starker. Only 24% of councillors were satisfied or very satisfied with public health messaging, while 62% were satisfied or very satisfied with council messaging to the public. (61% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with central government public health messaging to the public and 13% were dissatisfied with local authority messaging.)

## Evidence based decision making

We asked councillors how confident they were that local decisions were evidence driven. Fewer than half were very or extremely confident (44%), a quarter were somewhat confident (25%), almost a third (30%) were not-so or not at all confident.

# Public Health Misinformation

## Concern about misinformation

We asked councillors how concerned they were about the level and pervasiveness of public health misinformation. Nearly two-thirds (62%) were concerned a great deal or a lot and only one in ten was concerned only a little or not at all.

## Covid-19 information sharing through informal networks

We asked councillors to think about their unofficial channels of information and information shared through networks - and asked them how they'd seen or heard information shared.

### **Official information shared through informal networks:**

- 64% of councillors say that they have seen *official* information shared 'as true' through informal networks.
- Nearly as many - 59% report having seen official information shared while being denounced as false in informal networks.

### **Misinformation shared through informal networks:**

- Two-thirds of councillors - 67% - say that they have seen or heard Covid-19 misinformation shared as true.
- Just under half - 46% - of councillors report having seen Covid-19 misinformation shared as 'untrue' as a warning or to counter the misinformation.

## Spotting misinformation online:

We asked councillors how confident they are at spotting public health misinformation online. Just under half - 47% - were very or extremely confident they are able to detect that misinformation when they see it. Only 15% were not-so or not-at-all confident that could identify misinformation.

This contrasts sharply with the confidence that councillors have in the 'average person's' ability to identify public health information. Only a single respondent was extremely confident that the public can do so and only 4% overall were very confident. The vast majority of councillors 75% were not-so or not at all confident that the average person can identify online public health misinformation.

## Countering public health misinformation

We asked councillors how comfortable they were countering public health information if they encountered it. The vast majority were comfortable countering public health information at

least some of the time. Twenty-nine percent were always comfortable, 30% often comfortable and further 26% sometimes comfortable.

### Common Covid-19 misinformation - assessing belief and pervasiveness among councillors

We presented our councillors with a randomly ordered list of ten statements which are widely circulating online. Two of our statements were true, one was partially at least arguably true and 7 other statements were false. All statements were phrased neutrally and we avoided including salacious details. We asked councillors if they believed them 'probably or definitely true' and we also asked if they'd seen them from official or unofficial sources - regardless of whether they believed them true or not.

In the survey itself we did NOT indicate whether or not we believed these statements to be true, but we did provide a link at the end of the survey to a [fact page about these statements](#).

#### The true statements

Statement	Do you believe this?*		Have you seen this? **	
	Probably or definitely true	Probably or definitely false	From official sources	From unofficial sources
Black and minority ethnic community members are more susceptible to Covid-19	82%	12%	70%	30%
A Covid-19 vaccine would not be 100% effective	67%	15%	47%	38%

\*Respondents were also allowed a 'don't know' option

\*\*Respondents were allowed to choose both options for have you seen, so percentages can exceed 100%

#### The arguably partially true statement

Statement	Do you believe this?*		Have you seen this? **	
	Probably or definitely true	Probably or definitely false	From official sources	From unofficial sources
The Chinese government is responsible for creating and spreading Covid-19	16%	65%	21%	73%

\*Respondents were also allowed a 'don't know' option

\*\*Respondents were allowed to choose both options for have you seen, so percentages can exceed 100%

### The false statements

Statement	Do you believe this?*		Have you seen this?***	
	Probably or definitely true	Probably or definitely false	From official sources	From unofficial sources
Mask wearing can be harmful to your health because of rebreathing CO2 or your own pathogens	7%	85%	5%	58%
Children cannot be harmed by Covid-19 infections	10%	84%	16%	57%
Mask wearing and remote schooling increases children's vulnerability to exploitation by paedophiles or others who wish to harm them.	11%	73%	7%	45%
Technology like 5G mobile signals play a role in the spread of Covid-19	1%	95%	3%	74%
A Covid-19 vaccine will be promoted to spread illness or harmful technologies.	2%	94%	1%	60%
There is no Covid-19 pandemic or it has been grossly overblown.	5%	92%	6%	75%
This pandemic was planned to benefit global powers or industries.	4%	86%	3%	67%

\*Respondents were also allowed a 'don't know' option so numbers may not reach 100%

\*\*\*Respondents were allowed to choose both options for 'have you seen', so percentages can exceed 100%

Ingrid Koehler  
LGIU  
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