

AUTUMN 2022



South East Councils
Deliver Better Together

SOUTH EAST **1,000**

BIANNUAL REGIONAL MONITOR

Savanta:
ComRes

#SECSouthEast1000

SEC COMMENTARY–THE CHAIRMAN’S VIEW

The Autumn *South East 1,000 Regional Monitor* is published amid rather interesting times politically. While tracking the developments of interest in Whitehall, SEC was delighted to hear from the Minister for Levelling Up, Dehenna Davison MP.

Although some do query its future, **if the Levelling up programme continues, it must address the ultimate issue of local government finance in the long term with an emphasis on certainty and flexibility.** The increasingly adverse UK economic situation now makes this a priority.

For SEC, recent months have been busy times, not least as, with partners Localis and *The MJ*, we hosted the *Summit of the South East* with the former Minister for Local Government, Paul Scully MP. The Minister’s thoughtful comments on the range of challenges that local authorities face was widely appreciated.

Whether with parliamentary arenas like the APPG South East, or thought leadership platforms as with Localis, South East Councils will continue to engage a diverse range of policymakers, decision-takers and opinion formers. Our *South East 1,000 Regional Monitor* with its public, business, and councillor cohorts, is a unique, yet firm, evidence base, to underpin our efforts to make the South East region a great place to live, work and do business.



Cllr Nicolas Heslop, Chair, South East Councils (SEC)

“I would like to thank South East Councils for your ongoing research and for the work achieved in partnership with Localis thinktank”.

Paul Scully MP former Minister for Local Government

“I was pleased to read of the recent work of South East Councils and the APPG for the South East, focusing on securing investment for the region in the context of the levelling up agenda.....”

Dehenna Davison MP Minister for Levelling Up

SOUTH EAST 1,000

South East Councils (SEC) publishes the *South East 1,000* twice a year, in spring and autumn.

Areas for gauging views are focused on:

- Skills
- Transport
- Communities
- Infrastructure
- Decision-making

There are also ‘topical’ questions on current pressing issues. Based on responses from around 1,000 stakeholders, across three separate cohorts, the *South East 1,000* is one of the largest and authoritative regular surveys in the region.

METHODOLOGY

Savanta ComRes interviewed 1,001 people between 3rd October and 24th October 2022. Three separate cohorts:

- 521 Members of the Public (18+)
- 270 Business decision makers
- 210 Councillors

Councillor data was weighted by Council type, Council control, Party and Gender. Business data was weighted to be representative of South East England by Industry & Sector type. Public data was weighted to be representative of South East England adults by Age, Gender and County. Savanta ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables available at www.comresglobal.com

GUEST COMMENTARY–THE COUNCIL CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S VIEW

A ‘perfect storm’, ‘unprecedented’ and ‘challenging times’ have become normal phrases for local government over the past 3 years. You could think that a perfect storm will come and go, there would be a period of recovery and at least be some breathing space before the next one. Not so for local councils. Significant budget pressures and funding gaps, staff recruitment and retention issues, the impact of new burdens and a lack of certainty over the implementation of significant government policy such as adult social care reform are all well documented. And that’s just the past 6 months.

Are we down and out? No. Despite turbulent times, councils continue to be the lynchpin to delivering solutions in their local communities. As leaders of ‘place’ we have the innate understanding of what our residents and businesses need to be resilient, to regenerate and to transition towards net zero.

As established partners in the health system, we are pivotal in enabling happy, healthy communities. We innovate. We collaborate. We deliver. Difficult decisions lie ahead for all councils, but we will continue to be part of the solution across the South East region.



Susan Halliwell, Chief Executive, Bracknell Forest Council

FINANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Pandemic driven impacts and related changes ravaged various local authority income streams whether business rates, parking fees, social rents or tourism take. While councils fronted Covid efforts in every district, unitary and county, the “national recovery” that Ministers spoke of was not, and is still not, adequately funded. SEC has advocated that Councils should be encouraged to actively explore innovation in revenue raising.

Since its inception in 2020, the *South East 1,000 Regional Monitor* has found increasing numbers of respondents holding the view that certain taxes, levies, or charges should not be set or managed at the national level but rather the local or regional level. A notable point for the *Autumn 2022 Monitor* is that **there is a widespread increase in preferences for certain taxes, levies or fees being set and managed at a Regional level**. All six options probed saw ‘Regional’ preference increase on the previous monitor, some significantly; for example an overall 8% increase in support, to 30%, for the Apprenticeship Training Levy, while support in the Councillor cohort for Stamp Duty almost doubled to 21% (compared to 13% in Spring 2022).

| | | Should be set and managed within LOCAL council area | Should be set and managed at a REGIONAL level | Should be set and managed at a NATIONAL level |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|
| | TOTAL | 12% DOWN 2% | 15% UP 2% | 62% UP 2% |
| Vehicle Excise Duty (Car tax) | Public | 12% | 15% | 58% |
| | Businesses | 14% | 18% | 58% |
| | Councillors | 11% | 10% | 73% |
| | TOTAL | 24% DOWN 4% | 30% UP 8% | 29% DOWN 2% |
| Apprenticeship training Levy | Public | 24% | 30% | 29% |
| | Businesses | 20% | 36% | 31% |
| | Councillors | 33% | 32% | 25% |
| | TOTAL | 39% DOWN 6% | 26% UP 5% | 26% UP 2% |
| Business Rates | Public | 32% | 25% | 30% |
| | Businesses | 34% | 31% | 31% |
| | Councillors | 64% | 22% | 11% |
| | TOTAL | 19% DOWN 8% | 20% UP 2% | 50% UP 9% |
| Stamp Duty (House tax) | Public | 17% | 18% | 50% |
| | Businesses | 19% | 23% | 50% |
| | Councillors | 23% | 21% | 51% |
| | TOTAL | 39% DOWN 1% | 25% UP 2% | 19% UP 1% |
| Local tourist tax (Hotel tax) | Public | 34% | 26% | 18% |
| | Businesses | 33% | 26% | 26% |
| | Councillors | 60% | 22% | 10% |

DEVOLUTION OF POWERS

When Councillors, businesses and the public were asked, for this *Regional Monitor*, if powers and competences were to be devolved away from central Government to their area, at what level they would most like to see these powers transferred to, **the main preference of all respondents (39%) for any devolution for was to their town, city or borough level**.

Given the strong push, and incentives, by Ministers for new Combined County Authorities it is interesting that only a third (33%) of respondents preferred devolution at a county level. One in five respondents (21%) indicated that any devolution should be at the South East England region level – evoking memories of the old South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and Development Agency (SEEDA).

| | TOTAL | PUBLIC | BUSINESSES | COUNCILLORS |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------|------------|-------------|
| My Town, City or Borough | 39% | 35% | 31% | 59% |
| County level | 34% | 36% | 31% | 30% |
| The South East Region | 21% | 21% | 32% | 6% |

WORKING WITH LONDON

Last year South East Councils set out to re-establish the Wider South East Dialogue process that had existed pre-pandemic to enable the local authority leaderships of the London, South East and East of England regions to discuss strategic policy matters of interest and concern. From its inception, the *South East 1,000 Regional Monitor* has probed business, councillor and public views on what topic areas they thought councils in the South East should talk to the Greater London Authority (GLA) on. For the latest Monitor, '**Developing initiatives to reduce the impacts of Climate Change**' saw an increase of 5% since the previous monitor. For the fourth successive monitor, Housing has not been a 'top three' focus.

| | TOTAL | CHANGE |
|--|-------|--------|
| Improving health and social care services | 43% | +1% |
| Improving transport links between the South East and London | 43% | same |
| Developing initiatives to reduce the impacts of climate change | 42% | +5% |

PLANNING

Elements of the 2020 Planning for the Future White Paper that caused unease (principally over housing numbers) were folded into the Levelling-Up White Paper, followed by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. There have been, in some quarters, suggestions for some planning competencies to be moved from district level to county level. Others have called for planning to be at a regional level – or indeed, on an inter-region basis. When asked at what level they thought planning decisions that affect their local area should be taken, a clear majority of respondents said 'local' – by their district or borough council.

Overall, only one in five (20%) believe such decisions should be taken at County level. There is very low support among any of the three polling cohorts; for planning decisions to be taken at a regional level – indeed only 4% of councillors surveyed agreed.

| | TOTAL | PUBLIC | BUSINESSES | COUNCILLORS |
|---|-------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Local – by my local district or borough council | 58% | 53% | 45% | 85% |
| County – by the County Council | 20% | 21% | 25% | 9% |
| Regional – by an authority covering the South East region | 13% | 13% | 20% | 4% |
| National – by a central government agency or department | 3% | 3% | 6% | 1% |

HOUSE BUILDING

Since the backlash to the Planning for the Future White Paper, South East Councils has been keen to probe views and attitudes towards building more houses. The Autumn 2020 Regional Monitor has found that:

- A majority of all respondents support building new homes in their area (57%) and in the South East (60%).
- It is clear that respondents do not favour housebuilding in rural areas (42%) or coastal areas (36%).

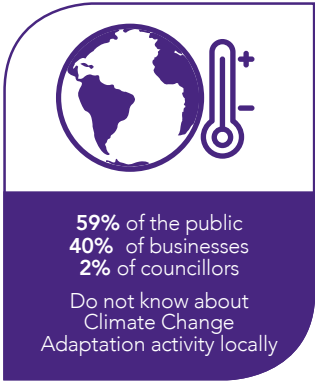
| | TOTAL | AGREE 57% | DISAGREE 25% |
|--|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Support building new homes in my local area | Public | 56% | 25% |
| | Businesses | 58% | 28% |
| | Councillors | 60% | 23% |
| | TOTAL | 60% | 23% |
| Support building new homes in South East England | Public | 61% | 20% |
| | Businesses | 58% | 26% |
| | Councillors | 59% | 28% |
| | TOTAL | 27% | 42% |
| New homes should be built in rural areas of the South East | Public | 29% | 37% |
| | Businesses | 35% | 39% |
| | Councillors | 14% | 58% |
| | TOTAL | 32% | 36% |
| New homes should be built along coastal areas of the South East | Public | 34% | 35% |
| | Businesses | 33% | 36% |
| | Councillors | 28% | 40% |
| | TOTAL | 32% | 36% |

CLIMATE CHANGE, ADAPTATION & RESPONSIBILITY

As the Autumn 2022 Monitor is being drafted, the COP27 UN summit is beginning in Egypt, with global leaders, including UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP attending.

Since its inception, the South East 1,000 monitor has probed respondents’ awareness about local Climate Adaptation – activity on preparing and planning to address the impacts of Climate Change.

Overall, the majority (58%) of respondents said they know about measures with 42% saying they either did not know very much, or anything at all, about measures being undertaken in their area. Looking at the ‘don’t know’ responses across the polling cohorts, the public are the cohort most likely to indicate this - 59% for this latest monitor.



Responsibility

Allowing multiple choices, broadly equal numbers of all respondents thought government (89%), councils (90%), Businesses (91%) and the Public (90%) should be responsible for taking measures to tackle climate change.

Respondents were probed on what they are doing, or may be planning to do, on a personal level, to help tackle Climate Change impacts based on several named options. (Multiple choices permitted).

- 84% said they were actively recycling more.
- Nearly two thirds (64%) said they were using energy-efficient appliances and lighting at home.
- Only 13% said they actively planned to buy or drive an electric vehicle.

What can help to do more?

South East Councils is interested in learning what more services or support could help local communities address the impacts of Climate Change. Respondents were presented with several named options with multiple choices permitted.

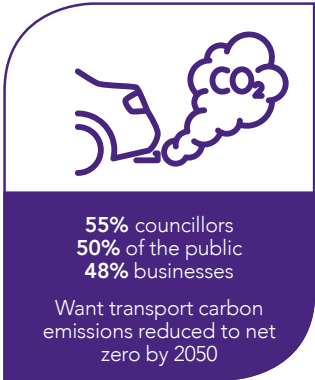
| | TOTAL | PUBLIC | BUSINESSES | COUNCILLORS |
|--|-------|--------|------------|-------------|
| More recycling facilities | 32% | 36% | 33% | 18% |
| More energy efficient homes being built | 38% | 34% | 27% | 61% |
| Increased public transport options | 35% | 31% | 26% | 55% |
| More charging points for electric vehicles | 22% | 20% | 28% | 21% |
| Financial assistance for insulating homes | 37% | 32% | 33% | 52% |
| Increased/improved coastal flood prevention schemes | 12% | 10% | 17% | 8% |
| Building alternative waste disposal facilities with fewer emissions than landfill to turn waste into usable energy | 32% | 32% | 37% | 26% |
| Development of a plan for heat waves and higher temperatures | 16% | 16% | 21% | 10% |
| Installation of better-draining pavements to deal with floods and stormwater | 21% | 23% | 22% | 16% |
| Improved water storage and use | 26% | 27% | 27% | 22% |

TRANSPORT

‘Reducing transport related carbon emissions to net zero by 2050’ remains the highest ranked local priority for respondents overall at 50% – an increase of 1% on the same question for the previous South East 1,000 monitor last spring.

The joint second preference, from named options with multiple preferences permitted, was a **‘transport network that protects and enhances natural and historic environments’ (43%)**.

Surprisingly, ‘Better connectivity to London’ only attracted 15%, overall, of respondents preferences.



COMMUNITIES

'Place-shaping' is a term widely used by policymakers, decision-takers and opinion leaders. Ultimately for SEC it is about community. Since its inception in 2020, the South East 1,000 monitor has sought to probe a sense of 'place', tease out views about community affinity, and gauge local identity.

What is local?

The strong sense of what is 'local' has continued with 69% of all respondents indicating local means their village, town or city borough. (The percentage is the same as for the Spring 2022 monitor).

| | TOTAL | 69% | SAME |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| My Village or Town or City Borough | Public | 67% | Down 1% |
| | Businesses | 61% | Down 3% |
| | Councillors | 83% | Up 2% |
| My immediate neighbourhood | TOTAL | 14% | UP 1% |
| | Public | 16% | Up 2% |
| | Businesses | 14% | Up 1% |
| My County | Councillors | 10% | Up 3% |
| | TOTAL | 10% | SAME |
| | Public | 9% | Same |
| My Region | Businesses | 16% | Up 3% |
| | Councillors | 5% | Down 3% |
| | TOTAL | 2% | DOWN 2% |
| | Public | 1% | Down 2% |
| | Businesses | 5% | Down 2% |
| | Councillors | 1% | Same |

Local affinity and identity

The majority of all respondents (46%) continue to feel they do not have a say over important decisions that affect their area. (An increase of 1% on the Spring 2022 Monitor).

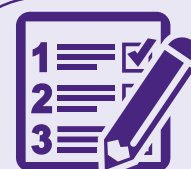
There has been an overall 5% increase, to 21%, of respondents. The proportion of those disagreeing that things need to change in their area has increased 5%.

| | TOTAL | AGREE 63% | DISAGREE 17% |
|--|-------------|-----------|--------------|
| I feel a strong connection to my local area | Public | 53% | 20% |
| | Businesses | 59% | 23% |
| | Councillors | 92% | 3% |
| I get on well with my neighbours | TOTAL | 75% | 10% |
| | Public | 70% | 13% |
| | Businesses | 73% | 8% |
| I feel like I belong where I live | Councillors | 90% | 3% |
| | TOTAL | 67% | 15% |
| | Public | 60% | 17% |
| I feel I have a say over important decisions that affect my area | Businesses | 62% | 20% |
| | Councillors | 88% | 5% |
| | TOTAL | 31% | 46% |
| I think things need to change in my area | Public | 18% | 54% |
| | Businesses | 30% | 45% |
| | Councillors | 62% | 24% |
| | TOTAL | 51% | 21% |
| | Public | 46% | 22% |
| | Businesses | 55% | 20% |
| | Councillors | 60% | 18% |

LOCAL PRIORITIES

All respondents were asked to list what they saw as the top three priorities for their own local area.

Affordable Housing has been a top two issue for respondents to the Monitor since the South East 1,000 began in 2020.



25% Supporting local economy
40% Increase housing affordability
39% Improving infrastructure

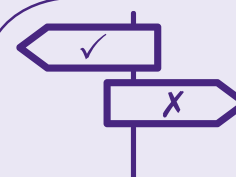
Top three priorities for area as ranked by respondents

DECISION MAKING

Overall, respondents' confidence in central Government making the right decisions for their area has continued to fall in each edition of the Monitor (for Autumn 2022 it is now at 25%).

Confidence in Councils (50%) is double that in central Government (25%).

Notably confidence is, overall, very high in local businesses with three quarters (76%) of all respondents indicating trust in local businesses to make the right decisions.



25% UK Government
50% Local council
76% Local businesses

Confidence in bodies to make the right decisions for my local area

LOCAL CONTROL

From a suite of options, respondents were asked if they would support or oppose their local area gaining more power on specific policy areas. There was clear and strong support, overall, for more local power over the policy areas of Transport (77%), Skills (75%) and Housing (74%).

Notably, overall, a majority (52%) of respondents probed, believed their local area should have more power over Tax and Spending.

| | | SUPPORT | OPPOSE |
|---|--------------|------------|------------|
| Transport (bus services and local trains) | TOTAL | 77% | 9% |
| | Public | 73% | 7% |
| | Businesses | 75% | 14% |
| | Councillors | 87% | 5% |
| Providing Affordable Housing | TOTAL | 74% | 11% |
| | Public | 70% | 11% |
| | Businesses | 68% | 17% |
| | Councillors | 90% | 6% |
| Providing access to Skills and Training | TOTAL | 75% | 7% |
| | Public | 72% | 6% |
| | Businesses | 75% | 11% |
| | Councillors | 84% | 5% |
| Tax and spending | TOTAL | 52% | 22% |
| | Public | 47% | 22% |
| | Businesses | 50% | 26% |
| | Councillors | 69% | 16% |

SKILLS

Among respondents, overall, **54% want education, training and skills investment prioritised for skilled roles** such as engineers, police officers, plumbers etc...

By contrast, overall, 17% **want investment prioritised for unskilled roles** such as retail and agricultural workers or cleaners.



Local Employment Market

Respondents were asked to list their top three priorities for investment in their local employment market (multiple options were permitted).

For the fifth successive regional monitor, the 'training and development of employees' remained the top preference at 49% overall. Although this is down 7% on the Spring 2022 monitor.

The most notable increase since the previous monitor was with **'Providing more childcare'** which increased by 4% to 42%

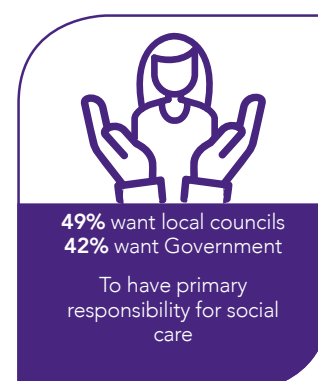
| TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES | 49% | DOWN 7% |
|--|-----|---------|
| Public | 48% | |
| Businesses | 44% | |
| Councillors | 60% | |
| INCENTIVES TO BUSINESSES TO TAKE ON MORE EMPLOYEES | 43% | UP 1% |
| Public | 44% | |
| Businesses | 42% | |
| Councillors | 42% | |
| ESTABLISHING BETTER LINKS BETWEEN EDUCATION PROVIDERS AND BUSINESSES | 40% | UP 1% |
| Public | 37% | |
| Businesses | 37% | |
| Councillors | 53% | |
| INCREASING FLEXIBLE AND PART TIME LEARNING PROVISION | 44% | SAME |
| Public | 43% | |
| Businesses | 47% | |
| Councillors | 41% | |
| PROVIDING MORE CHILDCARE | 42% | UP 4% |
| Public | 41% | |
| Businesses | 39% | |
| Councillors | 49% | |
| CAREERS AND GUIDANCE | 24% | SAME |
| Public | 25% | |
| Businesses | 28% | |
| Councillors | 18% | |

SOCIAL CARE

All respondents were asked who should have primary responsibility for social care (including social work, social services, care homes and nursing homes).

The greater number of respondents overall (49%) indicated they wanted local councils to have primary responsibility for Social Care.

Within separate polling cohorts, highest support for Government was with business at 45%.





SE Councils economic update- November, 2022- Vicky Pryce

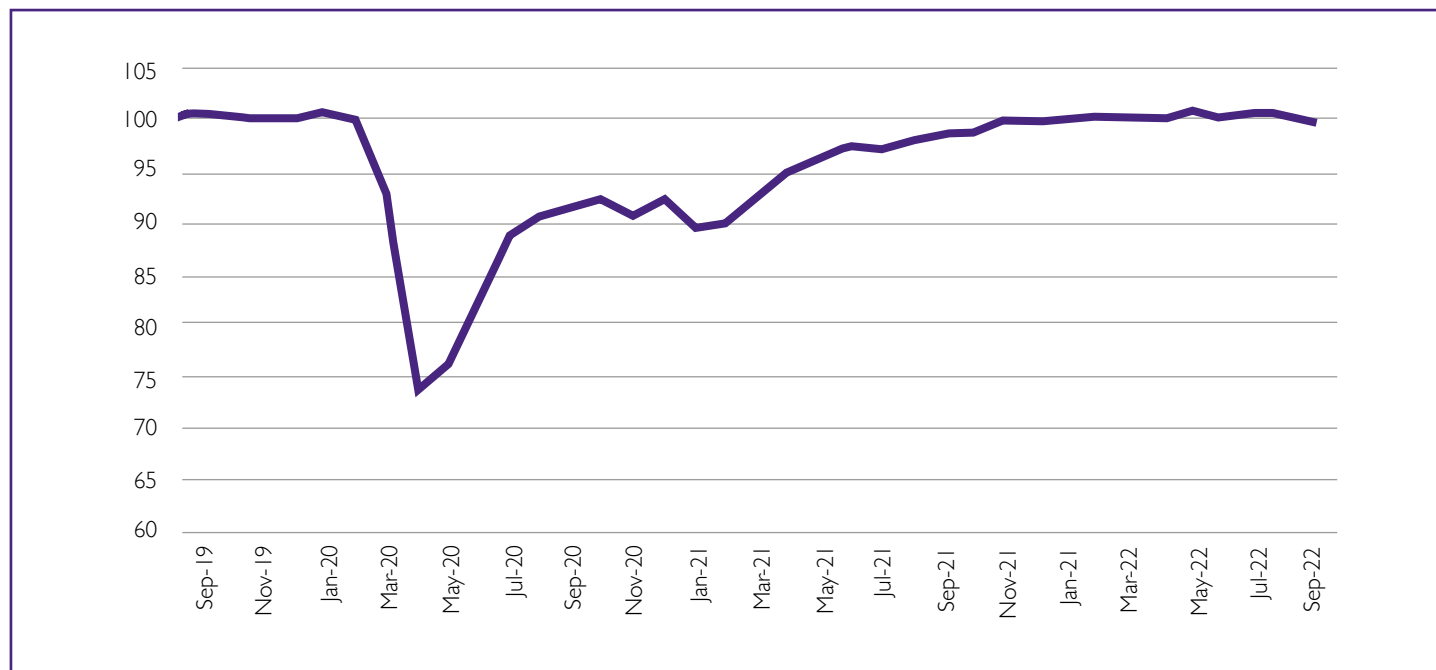
The last six months have seen Prime Ministers - and Chancellors - come and go with real upheaval in the markets. Following Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation, successor Liz Truss's disastrous 'unfunded' tax-cutting mini-budget' on September 23rd - unsupported by Office For Budget Responsibility (OBR) analysis - was rejected by the markets, leading to the pound dropping to record lows against the dollar and threats to the stability of the UK pensions industry.

Foreign investors dumped gilts at the highest rate ever and the Bank of England had to abandon (for a while at least) plans to start selling gilts on its balance sheet – known as Quantitative Tightening (QT) - and embark on new Quantitative Easing (QE) which it has pledged to stop in order to bring long term yields down to ensure the flow of funds to individuals and businesses did not come to a halt and the economy, with it the pensions industry, did not nosedive.

Following Bank of England intervention, Jeremy Hunt arriving as Chancellor, and Rishi Sunak now as Prime Minister, yields are back to pre mini-budget levels. QT has started, admittedly in a gentle way, so as not to upset the markets.

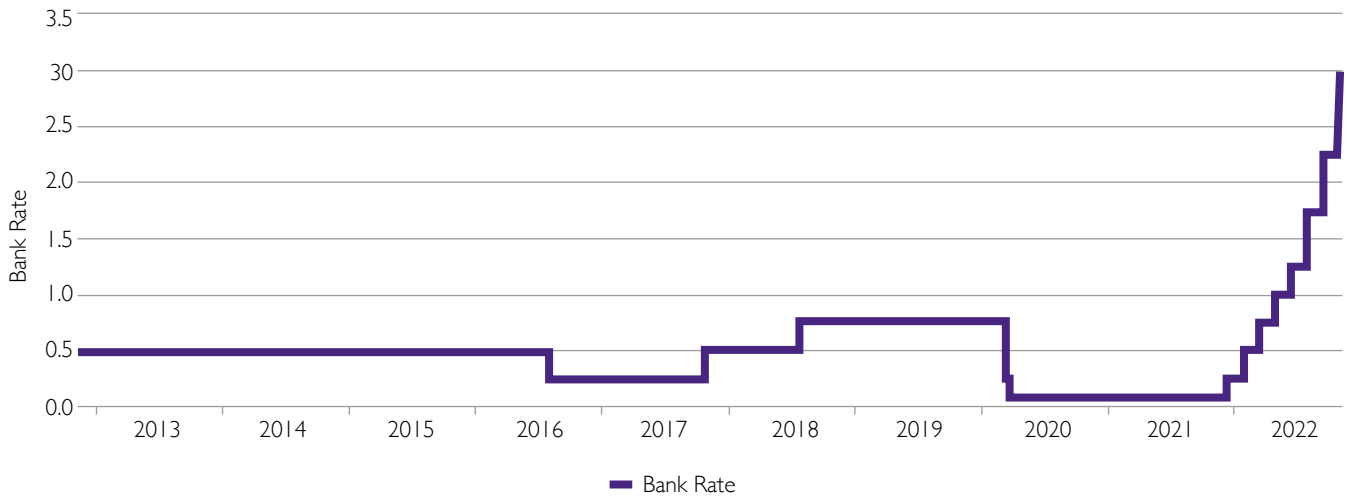
While there are accusations that 'the markets now run the British economy' there is no doubt, given size of government debt, there is a stark realisation that the UK will need to borrow considerable sums for years to come. The considerable amount in the borrowing total made up of RPI - indexed gilts, is already raising the costs of servicing billowing government debt as inflation has zoomed and higher interest rates paid on new debt are now forecast to cost some £100m per annum by 2027-28 (OBR published forecast at Autumn Statement on 17th November).

That was not the only worrying aspect in accompanying analysis for the Autumn statement. OBR economic forecasts suggest the largest fall on record in living standards over this year and next, with a GDP drop of 1.4% in 2023. Hardly surprising given the 0.2% drop in UK output in the third quarter, leaving the UK, unlike most G7 countries, with output still below pre-pandemic levels.



Consumer and business confidence has plummeted with indications of a contraction in manufacturing and services in early autumn. One of the most worrying aspects is the fall in business investment in the third quarter which had, in any case, been weak since the financial crisis and again after the Brexit vote shock. Prospects for businesses and households also had worsened as the Bank of England raised rates by 0.75% on 3rd November by the highest pace in 40 years.

Official Bank Rate



What is in store for the UK economy

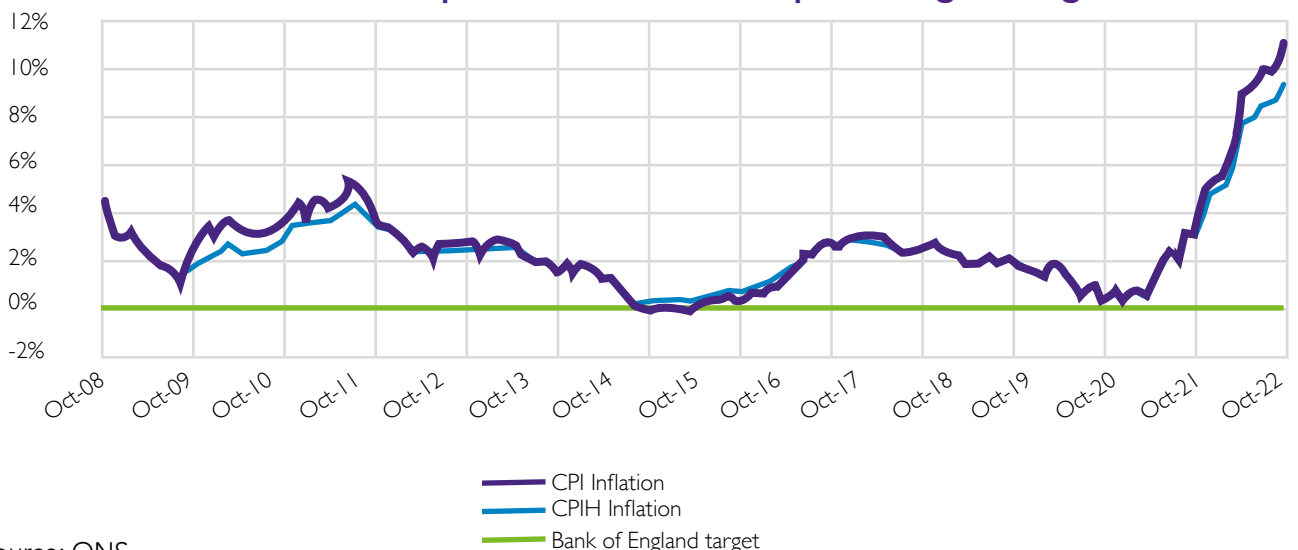
The BoE forecast accompanying the latest interest rate increase expected the economy to stay in recession for the next two years and then show only anaemic growth thereafter. The OBR was more optimistic with growth recovering by 1.3% in 2024, then between 2% and 2.6% in the years that follow within the 5-year forecasting period. *There were also differences in the employment outlook.* Unemployment, expected to increase to a peak of 6.4% by the BoE, was, according to the OBR likely to stay below 5% before starting to improve again.

In truth, there is so much that is uncertain at present. The war in Ukraine and energy price volatility make the art of forecasting more precarious than ever.

The OBR explains its greater optimism on growth, in later years, on expectations that households will dip into savings to sustain consumption and on higher than anticipated net migration. Both BoE and OBR expect a fall in inflation given a double hit on demand in the economy. First the rise in central bank rates here (as in most of the advanced world) will have the impact of slowing down demand. Second, tax increases and public sector cuts announced in the autumn statement will depress activity, so bringing inflation down, after a while.

Of course, much of the inflation pressures, **including those faced by local councils across the South East of England**, have been due to international factors. Energy and food prices are the main price increase components seen so far, leading to the 11.2% UK inflation figure, on a year-on-year basis, recorded in October. At the same time core inflation is rising, suggesting some trends are becoming more embedded and will be harder to shift. Nevertheless both the BoE and the OBR seem to think that inflation, though likely to average some 7.1% next year, will start to fall back near to target by sometime late 2024.

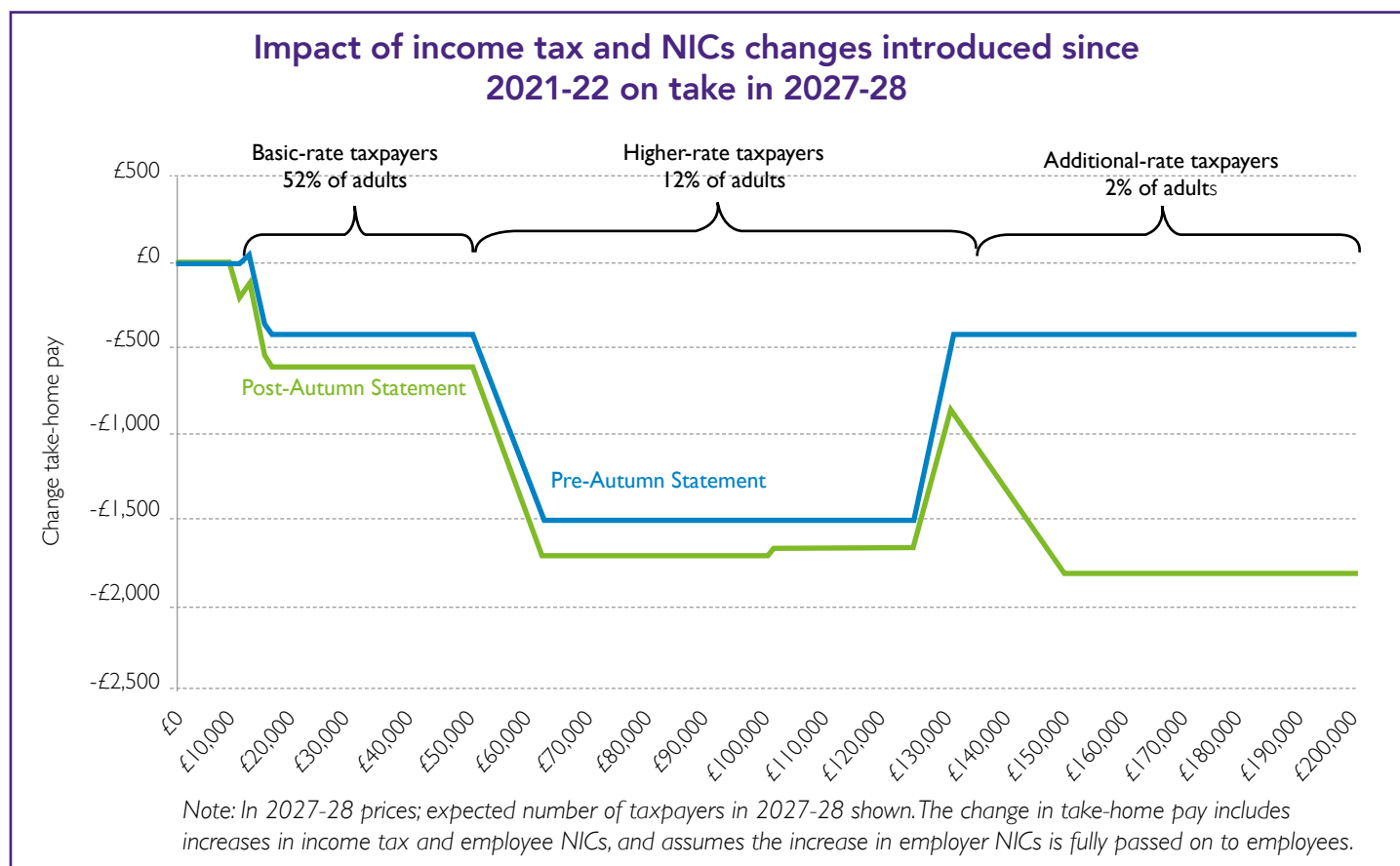
UK consumer price inflation, annual percentage change



Source: ONS

The road ahead is likely to be painful. More stealth taxes for all are being introduced. A reduction in the threshold for higher rate taxpayers, alongside a freezing of thresholds for basic and higher rate of income tax, inheritance tax, VAT registration and NICs, sit beside measures on lifetime tax-free pension contributions and reductions in allowances for capital gains and dividend tax.

These changes provide the bulk, alongside windfall tax extension, of plugging revenue gaps but also will pay for (what is seen as) generous decisions for pensioners and benefits rising in line with inflation. In addition, increasing energy costs are only partly compensated for by the extension of the electricity price freeze for another year at least for households. All together leading to sharp falls in real disposable incomes. Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) post- Autumn Statement analysis suggested those with a taxable income circa £9,000 or more will see their take-home pay fall, with most higher-rate taxpayers seeing a fall of £1,700 per year by 2027-08 and for those on £150,000+ by £1,815. The result would be that, on average, household income per head in 2007-08 will be no higher than it was in 2018-19, the year before the pandemic hit.



While the NICs employers' threshold will increase costs and inhibit employment at a timing of rising interest rates and increasing working capital pressures, many SMEs will nevertheless welcome the help given over business rates over the next year or so and the apparent willingness to contemplate reform in this area.

Impact on Finances and on Local Councils

Two particular points on impacts stand out:

One is the forecast period of five years. Despite an OBR forecast that debt to GDP ratio will start declining in the end of the forecast period, there is *no expectation that the UK government's budget will balance during the period, in sharp contrast to earlier fiscal rules*. That ambition has obviously been abandoned in the light of current realities. We will effectively be borrowing each year, and still to the tune of £67bn by 2027/8 despite cuts in earlier current and capital spending plans. Many departmental budgets are to be hit - though Health & Social Care alongside Education and Defence will see increases before the General Election that has to be held by January 2025.

Second is the future of the Levelling-up agenda. Ambitions remain unclear though there was an Autumn Statement nod to continued devolution with an intention for more English elected mayors announced. There was, at least, an acknowledgment of the difficulties local councils are facing in meeting statutory obligations in the face of sharply rising costs by the relaxation of the cap for council tax rate rises. Of course, it remains to be seen how that is, or will be, implemented by local authorities, and whether that makes a material difference for any. Separately, some councils in the South East of England have been bearing the bulk of 'unauthorised' arrivals from Channel crossings. A new UK agreement with France on extra resources to address migrant Channel crossings has just been announced and that may, or may not, give some degree of respite to demands upon councils located in proximity to the south coast.

Overall, many uncertainties remain as to whether the UK economy can, in the end, prove resilient as long-term growth plans appear to lack detail and funding. This includes those for tackling Climate Change. It should also be noted there are capital spending cuts pencilled in for the latter part of the government's spending envelope period.

DELIVER BETTER TOGETHER

With most South East local authorities as members, South East Councils (SEC) aims to work in partnership to make the region a great place to live, work and do business.

SEC aims to provide and act as a unified democratic voice on South East interests to:

- Promote and maintain the South East's position as a leading global economy
- Seek and secure fair funding across the diverse landscape of the region
- Monitor and highlight the economic and social pulse of the region

Much of our work involves making the case to Government, Parliament and Industry, as well as through the media: utilising case studies, facilitating local delegations and hosting events.

SEC is the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the South East.

We are proud to be an associate member of the Local Government Association (LGA).

For further information on this report please contact

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