Lewisham High Streets Survey

The Independent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic business headcount and survey of high streets in Lewisham 2023

Survey conducted by London South Bank University Business School for Lewisham Council

April 2023

Executive Summary

We report the findings from the second annual independent high street business headcount and survey conducted on behalf of Lewisham Council. This ongoing study, called for by Mayor of Lewisham, Damien Egan, emphasises the continuing importance of independent business to the health of the local high streets, the richness that is added to the high street offer by the wide ethnic diversity of the business owners trading here, and the contribution this makes to the local economy and the wellbeing of residents.

We find that despite some inevitable churn in business numbers, independent businesses continue to be the backbone of the high streets. They make up two thirds of the traders. In addition, our headcount shows that between the two studies, ethnic diversity has been maintained with 65% of independent businesses still owned by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people.

The last few years have been difficult ones for the high street and the survey investigated ongoing business confidence, and the nature of the relationship between council and independent business. We report that despite the many challenges:

- Seven in ten independent business owners rate Lewisham highly as a place to do business.
- Almost nine in ten believe they will still be trading in Lewisham in two years' time.

Business owners in Lewisham value the connectivity of their high streets, and the customer communities that this opens up for them. And in terms of the response to the growth in online trade we identify that over the course of the last year, new businesses are pivoting towards goods and particularly services that can't be provided online or can be provided better by the addition of in person customer service. We suggest more research into the digital divide on the basis that not all high street businesses will benefit from e-commerce, but all will benefit from the footfall that could be generated by wider digital promotion.

In response to the climate emergency, Lewisham Council has set an ambition for Net Zero by 2030. Our research has established that while there is a broad understanding that recycling, waste reduction and energy efficiency are important new behaviours for every small business, and knowledge that these behaviours are incentivised by cost, more work is needed to join the dots and build awareness of the long-term benefits.

Finally, another way of attracting additional footfall is through events. Lewisham 'London Borough of Culture' is recognised by the independent high street business community as an investment that has benefitted the community through a sense of pride in the area, and specifically, in attracting additional customers to independent businesses.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Background & Context

Lewisham Council's Economy, Jobs and Partnerships team asked London South Bank University to conduct the second annual headcount and independent high street business survey, at nine Lewisham locations. The research continues the longitudinal headcount survey started in 2021 and explores emerging issues for independent businesses in the changing high street environment.

The aims were to (1) obtain more depth of detail on the characteristics of the borough's independent high street businesses and (2) survey business attitudes, knowledge and opinions to enable Lewisham Council to identify and seek to address any inequalities of engagement and support in protecting local high streets.

Research Objectives

1.1. Track the headcount and ethnicities of independent businesses.
1.2. Describe independent business demographics, including business age, numbers employed, expansion plans and owner-ethnicities.
1.3. Take a snapshot of business confidence.
1.4. Evaluate the current relationship between council and businesses in terms of business support needed and programmes offered.

2.1. Explore opportunities to employ UKSPF monies (e.g. to develop and strengthen e- and m-commerce capabilities)
2.2. Collect business opinion on location assets to link to town centre attraction.
2.3 Evaluate awareness and benefits of Lewisham Borough of Culture activities.
2.4 Assess knowledge and understanding of sustainability and readiness for Net Zero 2030.

Important Note: The term BAME is used throughout this report only as an abbreviation for: Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic. Its use does not reflect the view that it is representative of one ethnicity grouping.

Method & Data

A census level outcome for the ethnicity and headcount of independent business owners was requested for the defined high streets. In addition to the street-level businesses, those located above the ground floor were also included. A >90% response was targeted on the headcount, and an ethnically reflective sample of >50% on the full survey. The council were particularly keen to achieve responses from black-owned businesses.

Nine high street locations (as defined in the 2021 study) were included:

- Lewisham Town Centre
- Catford Town Centre
- Deptford High Street
- New Cross Road
- Blackheath
- Sydenham
- Forest Hill
- Crofton Park
- Honor Oak

The survey was also administered online through the business newsletter, and a further study conducted in *Lewisham Shopping*, the town centre mall. The online survey collected 25 responses of which ten were usable. Since these were not duplicated respondents, the information was aggregated into the main dataset. It is worth noting that some of the qualitative responses from this source were quite robust. While many business owners did not hold back in face-to-face interviews, for the purposes of the analysis it was assumed that the tone of the online responses simply reflected the self-completion method, and so they were incorporated.

Scheduling and data collection

Fieldwork was conducted between the 10^{th} and 29th January 2023, and the online survey stayed open until February 10^{th} with reminders included in the business newsletters sent during this period.

Teams of four students worked on each high street over three or four consecutive days to achieve the maximum possible response, updating the 2021 business owner ethnicity and headcount survey at each location at the same time. The *Lewisham Shopping* data was collected over two days in the final week of the survey.

The questionnaire was created in Qualtrics and administered in face-to-face interviews using a mobile app which aggregated responses remotely to a secure database. Data collection was supervised throughout the duration of the study. Students adopted an appointment system for return visits if a store was busy, or the owner was not present, and full, usable surveys were completed by 470 independent business owners (60% of the total independent businesses).

Headcount & ethnicity

Key findings

1. In Lewisham, independent businesses remain the backbone of the local high street. They account for two thirds of businesses there.

2. The cultural diversity and richness of the high street offer in Lewisham is driven by the ethnicities of the business owners. The second annual headcount shows 65% of independent business owners are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

3. The high streets are also evolving. Over 120 new ventures have invested on Lewisham high streets since the last survey.

The first objective for the study was to update the headcount of independent and BAME-owned businesses on nine high streets in Lewisham. The main story is contained in Table 1 and remains positive despite the economic headwinds.

	High St	Independents				BAME Owned			
	Premises	2021		2023		2021		2023	
			%		*%*		*%*		*%*
Lewisham Town Centre	219	120	*55*	137	*63*	94	*78*	101	*74*
Deptford	184	128	*70*	140	*76*	86	*67*	98	*70*
Sydenham	165	101	*61*	105	*64*	65	*64*	70	*67*
New Cross	143	92	*64*	106	*74*	72	*78*	75	*71*
Catford	133	70	*53*	74	*56*	54	*77*	54	*73*
Blackheath	121	57	*47*	62	*51*	20	*35*	23	*37*
Forest Hill	114	76	*67*	71	*62*	41	*54*	38	*54*
Crofton Park	112	82	*73*	81	*72*	49	*60*	49	*60*
Honor Oak Park	35	31	*89*	26	*74*	16	*52*	13	*50*
	1226	**757**	***62***	**802**	***65***	**497**	***66***	**521**	***65***

Table 1. Independent High Street Business Headcount and Ethnicity Report

A small increase in independent business numbers: a steady proportion of BAME-led businesses.

Since the last headcount in 2021:

- The number of trading independent high street businesses observed on Lewisham high streets has increased from 757 to 802 (+6%), now accounting for 65% of all businesses.
- The number in Black, Asian and Minority ethnic ownership has increased from 497 to 521(+5%), now 65% of all independent high street businesses.
- Looking at individual streets, the number of independent businesses has fallen slightly at Forest Hill, Crofton Park and Honor Oak, yet this has not disproportionately affected Black, Asian and Minority ethnic ownership.
- Although new multiple brands have also invested across the high streets, these national brands are still no stronger in proportion to independents.
- This means the distinctiveness of each location is being maintained. While the proportion of BAME-owned business on each high street has shifted a few points up or down since 2021 the overall picture is steady, confirming that the Lewisham high streets continue to reflect the diverse local populations they serve.

As noted earlier, a longer survey was successfully conducted with 470 independent business owners across the high streets. Please note that in this sample BAME business ownership is one point lower (64%) than in the headcount data but gives a fuller distribution of ethnicities on the ONS descriptors, shown in Table 2.

Asian and Asian British ownership stands at 28%; Black/African/Black British at 15%; Other Ethnicities 11% and Mixed /Multiple groups at 7%.

The main difference between this survey and the 2021 study is that this year we achieved a larger sample size and surveyed a rather larger proportion of black business owners, and this representation allows a more detailed focus in the subsequent analysis.

Q9	Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background	Independent Owners
		%
	White	
1	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	30
2	Irish	1
3	Gipsy or Irish Traveller	0
4	Any other White Background	5
	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	
1	White & Black Caribbean	1
2	White & Black African	1
3	White & Asian	3
4	Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background	2
	Asian/Asian British	
9	Indian	5
10	Pakistani	6
11	Bangladeshi	2
12	Chinese	5
13	Any other Asian background	10
	Black/African/Black British	
14	African	10
15	Caribbean	4
16	Any other Black/Caribbean background	1
	Other Ethnic Group	
17	Arab	4
18	Any other ethnic group	7

Sample size of high street data. n = 470. Question non-response: 3%

Table 2. Business Owner ethnicities
A very wide range of ethnicities in the independent business community

Using the longitudinal audit data we evaluated the quantitative effect of individual business churn on the overall high street. The audit shows that while 128 businesses have closed in eighteen months, another 120 have opened either in those premises or in other vacant sites. This is a small net loss overall, but the vacancy rate across the nine high streets is still below the national average of 9% reported by the Local Data Company for Q4 2022.

Any single vacancy has a different relative effect on perceptions of vitality on a large or a small high street, so we examined openings, closures and vacancies as a proportion of total high street premises in each location. From this, despite high churn rates in some locations, only New Cross, Forest Hill and Honor Oak showed substantial increases in vacancy *proportion*: other high streets were stable, and Lewisham, Crofton Park and Blackheath showed very marked improvements.

	Businesses Closed		Businesses Opened		Observed Void %	
	No.	%	No.	%	2021	2023
New Cross	28	20	23	16	10	15
Deptford	26	14	17	9	10	11
Catford	21	16	20	15	10	11
Sydenham	14	8	15	9	4	3
Crofton Park	9	8	10	9	8	2
Lewisham	9	4	17	8	5	1
Forest Hill	8	7	2	2	5	12
Blackheath	7	6	13	11	10	5
Honor Oak	6	17	3	9	0	9
Total	**128**	**11**	**120**	**10**	**7**	**8**

Table 3. Business churn and voids by high street
Vacancy rate below national average (9%: LDC) but high churn on some high streets

Perhaps equally important to high street attractiveness is the diversity of the business mix offered. Figure 1 shows the changes to each of the main categories within the churn described in Table 3. It could be argued that these changes are an organic response to the continuing rise of online shopping, which now accounts for about a quarter of national retail sales.

The largest number of business openings were in the service and leisure categories, offers that are harder or impossible to deliver digitally – opticians, barbers, nail salons, restaurants, bars and coffee shops. And, despite established online delivered grocery services, openings in the convenience category outpaced closures – speciality and fresh foods, and convenience grocery stores now serving as the larder on the doorstep of the local communities. Unsurprisingly, comparison store openings were rather fewer than closures, with an overall decline consequently.

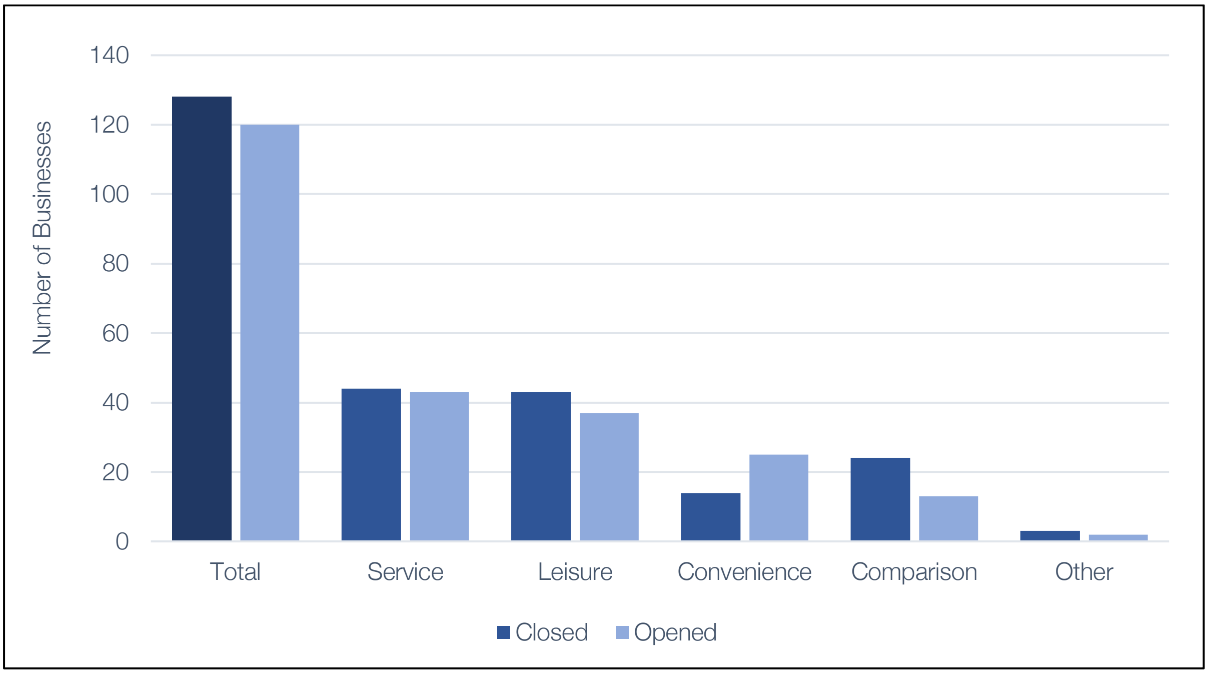


Figure 1. The changing high street business mix over 18 months
Openings slightly outpaced by closures and a changing balance between convenience and comparison.

The pattern reflects the national picture, where convenience but also leisure openings have now shown net gains since the first half of 2021[1]. Comparison and service outlets are showing net losses in store numbers nationally, but the rate of attrition has slowed. In Lewisham, service business closures are almost balanced by new openings.

On Lewisham high streets and nationally then, the total offer is moving slowly away from comparison retail. In this study there is evidence too perhaps that independent high street business may be deciding not to compete with the range, price-cutting and targeted promotion employed by online retailers, but is instead choosing to create an alternative, distinct and service-led market offer.

[1] Local Data Company, H12022, Leisure and Retail Analysis.

Further business-owner characteristics

Key findings

1. The independent high street businesses are well established. A third in existence for over ten years, over half for more than five.

2. Independent business owners create multiple jobs: over a quarter of those surveyed now employ between four and six people.

3. Seven in ten business owners rate Lewisham highly as a place to do business – which is promising for further investment in the borough.

The second objective of the study was to collect data on demographics, including owner age, years' trading, numbers employed and future expansion plans. In reporting the survey data we have shown results from the aggregated high street and online sample (470 surveys), and for comparison, where the emphasis called for it, we show data from the sub-sample of black business owners (73). These responses were to survey questions 1 to 6, and 10, and the data is in Appendix 1.

The independent high street businesses in Lewisham are well-established. Over half (58%) have been trading for five years or more, and a further 17% for more than four years. That is, about three quarters of current traders were robust enough to survive the Covid crisis and the subsequent economic shocks. And encouragingly, new and innovative businesses are continuing to invest and create jobs on the borough's high streets. Over 120 (26%) of the owners surveyed had opened within the past three years - during or since the pandemic – and 23 of those less than a year ago. A focus on black-owned businesses in the borough shows that they follow much the same pattern.

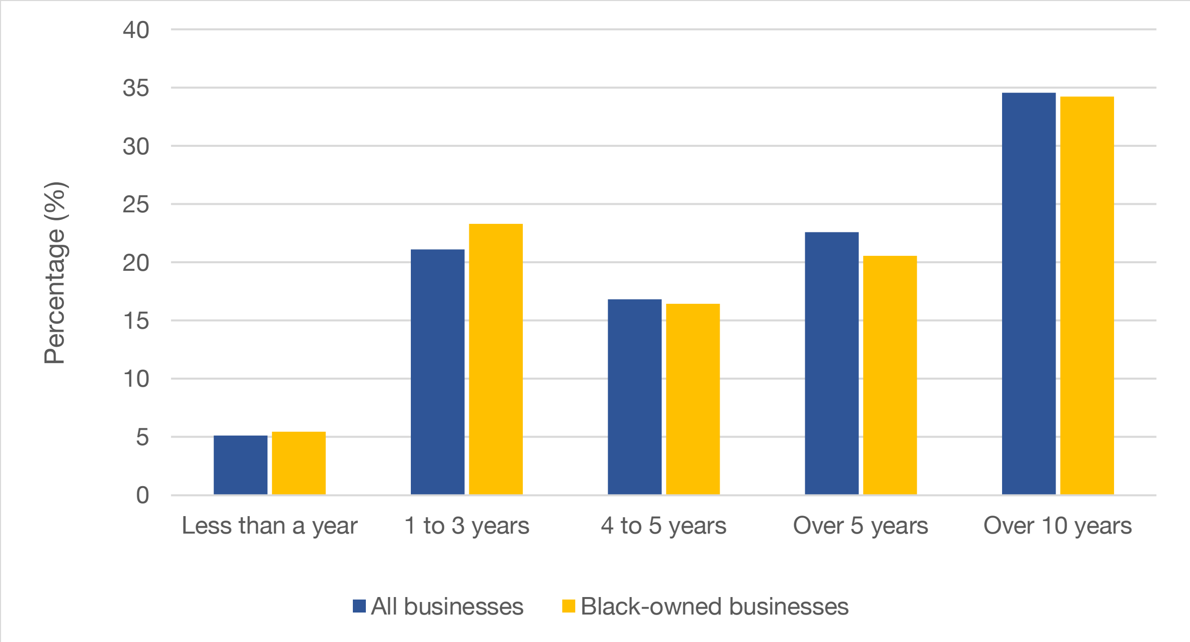


Figure 2. How many years have you been trading at this location?
Sample: 470 independent and 73 independent black-owned businesses

Employment

Independent high street businesses create multiple jobs, and the data suggests a slight increase in numbers employed between 2021 and 2023. Just over half the business owners (56%) this time are employing between one and three people; 27% between four and six (vs 25%) and 16% (vs 12%) over six. We did find that black business owners are likely to employ fewer people (67% vs 56% have between one and three staff this time). A reason may be that they are slightly more likely to be single outlet businesses (95% vs 85% in the total sample). Nevertheless, they were also more confident, being twice as likely to say that they would employ more people this year (21% vs 11%). Compared with last time there is however a notable decrease of about a third in this metric (34% and 15% in 2021) although this may now reflect the increases that have already taken place.

Age

It is interesting to note that the age profile of the sample is highly concentrated between 35 and 54. Of the two tiers in this demographic, 30% are in the younger and 39% in the older; just 12% are aged between 18 and 34. The population of business owners on the high street is therefore an aging one. This may have an implication for the future if it means that the high street is becoming less attractive to younger entrepreneurs, wanting to start physical businesses.

Barriers facing such potential start-ups might include access to the finance necessary to fit out and stock a physical business. This may be particularly true of new food and beverage businesses that require expensive or specialist equipment, as well as the more general up-front costs associated with taking on a new lease. Further, some may have started online but now see an opportunity to expand into a physical space, despite the additional overhead required. They may face a lack of relevant support and advice that could see them successfully through that transition.

Future expansion

Finally we asked how the people rated Lewisham as a place to do business. The question has a bearing on business expansion plans, with implications for future jobs. The response was very strongly positively skewed, with over 70% rating the borough positively, and an even stronger positive bias for black business owners (Figure 3).

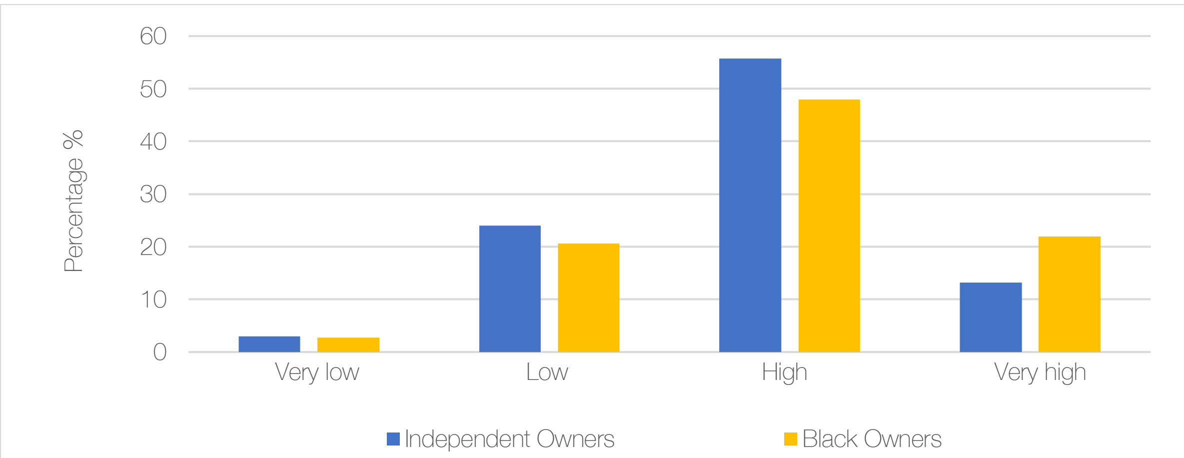


Figure 3. How do you rate Lewisham as a place to do business? From low to high, the response is 70% positive. 20+% of black-led business rates the borough highly positively.

Clearly the implication is that when thinking about expansion there is a higher probability that sites will be sought within the borough rather than outside, with all that entails for jobs and investment within Lewisham.

Business confidence

Key findings

1. Strong economic forces are likely to have an impact on business confidence: falling demand, decreasing footfall, and rising costs.

2. These effects are probably reflected in the unwillingness to increase staff numbers this year (83%)

3. And yet 87% of respondents believe they are likely to be trading in Lewisham in two years' time.

The third objective of the study was to take a snapshot of business confidence, at the start of 2023. The survey did not ask the question directly but instead we draw on three sets of responses; (Q7) What are the three biggest challenges facing your business today? (Q5) How likely are you to be trading in the borough in two years' time? And (Q3) How likely are you to employ more staff this year? The full data is in Appendix 1.

Challenges

Business challenges are a source of risk to business continuation, and hence a reason for declining confidence. Challenges were identified with an open question and no prompt. The first response is therefore likely to be the most pressing. First responses were themed for separate quantitative analysis separately. Scores were then compared with those for all responses.

The comparison then highlights the initial importance of each variable – how concentrated or diffuse - and its secondary occurrences over a wider group of respondents. Eighteen different challenges were identified in all, and most scored only in single digits. The four most significant challenges are the cost of living, followed by a lack of customer parking, declining demand and footfall following Covid, and increasing energy costs. Reading across all responses, that order changes so that the top three challenges become substantial: 25% are concerned about the economy, 20% about footfall and decreasing demand, and 18% about rising energy costs. The increases and the changing order show that these are not single high street issues (as for example closing bank branches in Deptford and in Catford). Unsurprisingly the same answers also feature as responses to other survey questions. They are significant challenges.

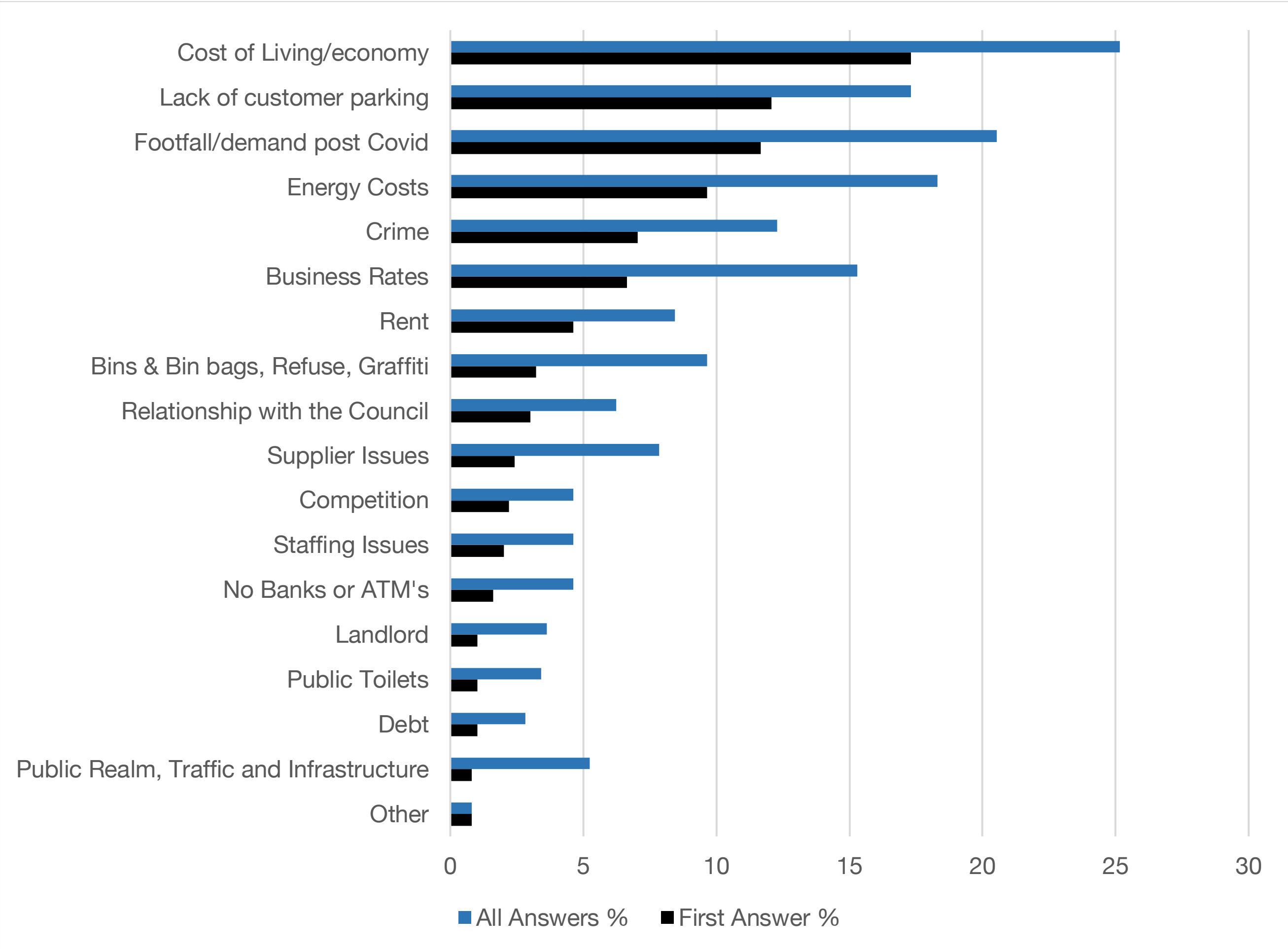


Figure 4. What are the three biggest challenges facing your business?
Falling demand and rising costs are very serious and widespread challenges

As noted in the previous section, there is some optimism about recruitment, but it is not strong. When asked how the number of staff employed would change in the coming twelve months, only 6% of business owners said it would decrease. A substantial majority (83%) believed that it would be staying the same. With so many other costs increasing, and this one within the owners control it is an understandable finding.

Confidence in the future

And yet, despite everything, business owners seem confident that they will survive the strong headwinds (Figure 5). Almost all believed that they would be trading in Lewisham in two years' time; just 7% said that they did not know. This level of confidence is reflected in the sample of black business owners – in fact a slightly higher proportion (58%) believed their business was "very likely" to be open in two years' time.

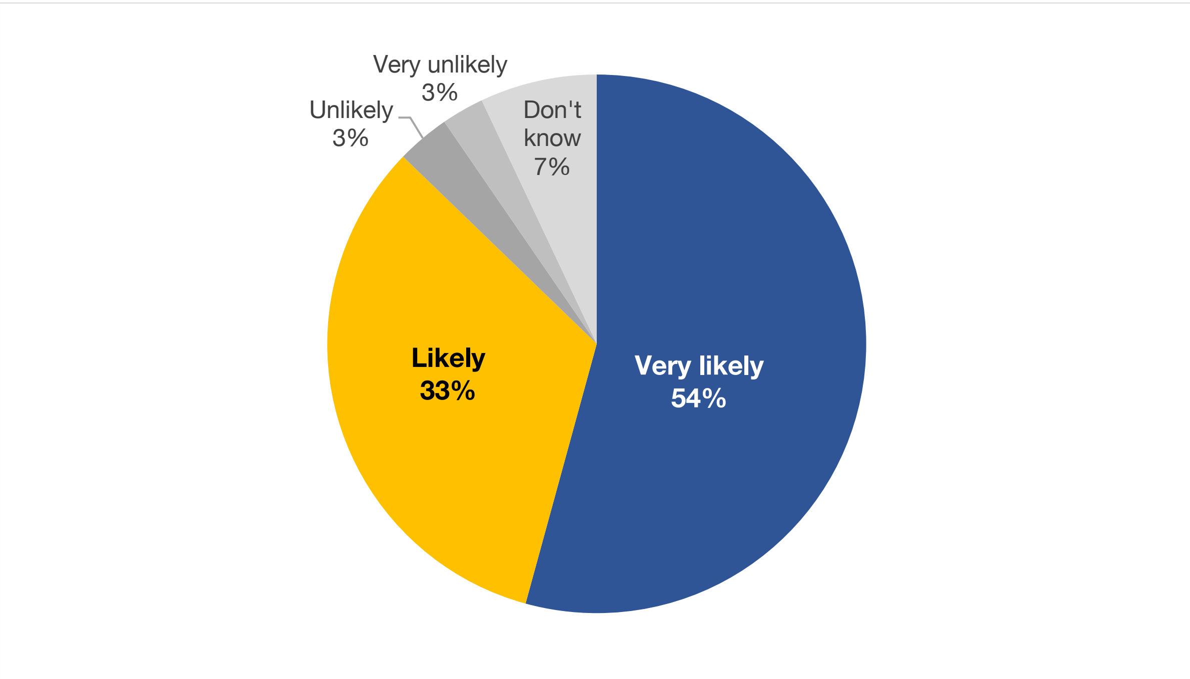


Figure 5. How likely are you to be trading in the borough in two years' time?
Sample: 470 independent business owners

Relationships with the council

Key findings

1. Almost 50% of black independent business owners, and nearly 40% of all respondents believe Lewisham council is business friendly.

2. Independent business owners are seeking support in a range of areas, in particular for marketing and business planning.

3. They expressed little interest in learning about the Net Zero initiative; the perceived need to act is not yet compelling.

The fourth objective for the study was to evaluate the current relationship between the council and independent high street businesses in terms of business support needed and programmes offered. From the survey, Q11 sought the extent which respondents agreed the council is business friendly, and Q8 sought to identify areas where further business support might be demanded. In response to Q11 a third of respondents were non-committal. But of those that expressed a view, it is twice as likely to be positive than negative. The responses by the black business owners have been reported separately here, because they are even more positively skewed; almost half of the sub-sample have a favourable opinion.

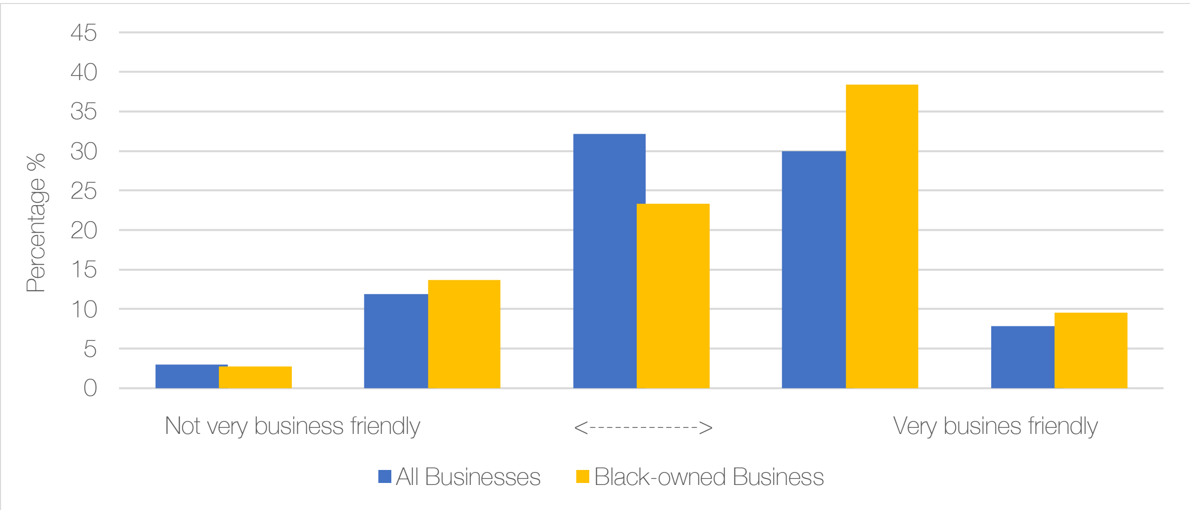


Figure 6. To what extent is Lewisham council business friendly?

Five-point scale where 1 is Not very business friendly and 5 is Very business friendly.

Q8 was designed to assess the demand for various types of business support programmes that the council could offer. The levels of interest differed greatly between the suggestions: marketing, the most popular, was selected by a third of those that answered the question, followed by business planning (19%) and networking (16%). Accounting and financial management support elicited 13% agreement, and the other suggestions were all in single digits.

Given the perception of falling demand identified earlier, support for marketing makes perfect sense, as does networking if it is seen as a source of potential business development.

Only 5% of the sample saw a need to understand the concept of “carbon neutral” better, even when coupled with the idea of a reduction in energy usage. This highlights a need for greater flow of information about the NetZero by 2030 ambition. It is a complicated proposition, and one where the business owners may not yet fully perceive a need for future compliance.

The table of responses to Q8 in the appendix also shows a systematic difference between the sample and sub sample. Black business owners are rather keener for support, with responses on average double across the selection.

The digital divide

Three key findings

1. Unlike their national brand rivals, only a third of independent high street businesses surveyed are selling online.

2. We propose exploratory research to ask if there is always a broad and realistic imperative to compete for sales online.

3. A further strategy is to explore effective digital publicity to support physical stores that are niching away from online business.

Research question 2.1 concerns ongoing thinking about the digital divide. That is, the gap between large and small businesses in terms of adoption of digital marketing capabilities, including selling direct to consumers via online channels. A component of this problem in the context of the local high street is the long-term consumer trend to online buying. Figure 6 shows that this has been a gradual and persistent change, one temporarily accelerated by the Covid crisis.

The ratio of online to offline is lower for groceries, and rather higher in comparison goods, particularly fashion. The change in behaviour also affects local high street food and beverage businesses, introducing competition from home delivery services supplying from dark kitchens or simply widening the competitive catchment.

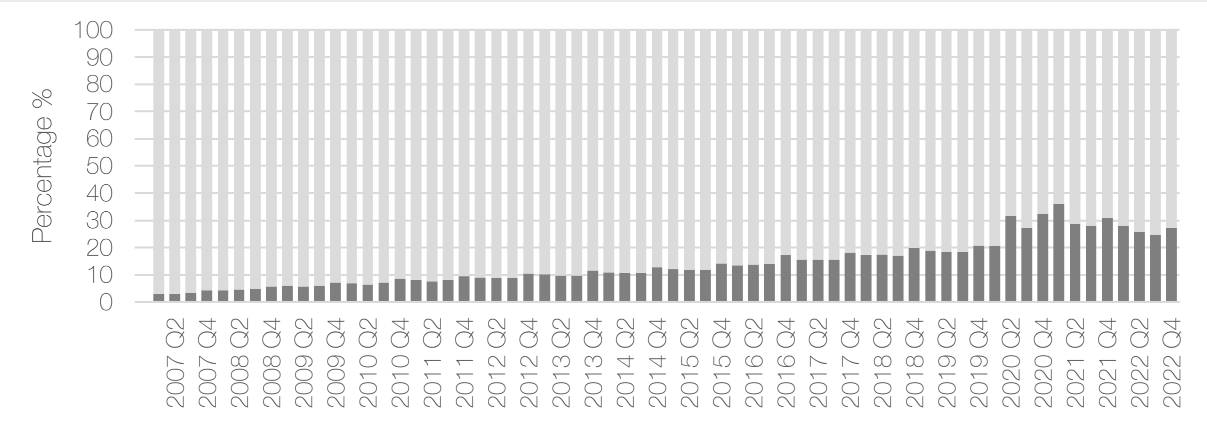


Figure 6. Trend in the ratio of online to offline UK retail sales each quarter 2007 to 2022
https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi

Online comparison retail is dominated by large, sometimes global brands and pure play aggregators, where hyper-competition is characterised by low prices, almost unlimited range, free delivery and returns and intense promotion including complex behaviourally targeted marketing activations.

The question for brick-and-mortar retail is often framed as: “how can I get back my 25% missing share?” But the response for independent high street businesses is far more nuanced than “start competing for it online”. There are obvious gaps in technological know-how, in available time and resources, and in the inevitable disparity in market power between independent business and the online aggregators that give market access. It also seems that for many large tech-first businesses, a dash for scale is happening at the expense of profit.

To explore this, we asked the independent businesses and the multiple brands in the Lewisham shopping centre whether they currently sell online, if they want to know how to, or if they don’t want to at all. Compared with almost 90% for mainly national brands, only a third of the high street businesses are online *at all*. A further third want to know how to be, while 38% do not want to be online.

Q23	Do you currently sell online?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Yes, my business is already online	35	33	89
2	No, but I want to know how to be	27	34	3
3	I don't want to be online	38	33	9

% of those who responded

Table 4. The digital divide.
Only a third of independent businesses are selling online.

In terms of the high street businesses this raises more questions than it answers, partly because the digital marketing activities for national brands are unlikely to be happening at store level. It would be interesting to explore:

With the rejectors, have they thought the issue through? Are they speaking from experience? What is it that is being rejected? Why is it being rejected? What can be learnt from this knowledge more widely?

For those who want to know more, before resources are invested in e-commerce training or mentoring, is there a clear rationale with realistic achievable outcomes? Are these common across business types? Are there additional resources that could be permanently adopted by independent businesses to carry this through?

For those already online, what is being done and how? Is online already a profitable part of the business? What if anything is *not* working? Again, are there common features of successful strategies, or a common set of challenges?

Second, the digital divide comprises more than e-commerce, therefore there may be further routes to explore. For example,

- How can digital technologies enhance current business processes?
- Are there any services that could be created digitally and delivered online to a wider group of customers?
- What digital tools can be harnessed cost-effectively and how, to publicise individual businesses or better, whole high streets credibly, to drive footfall?

Digital publicity might be more important to high street businesses than e-commerce. The evidence of an organic evolution towards high street business categories that do not compete directly with online traders is important, but footfall dependent. In Lewisham, high streets are well connected with much of London, but to become even more successful, they must build far wider mental availability – that is, feature more strongly in the mental maps of consumers from a wider catchment.

Location assets

Key findings

1. Business owners recognise and highly value the connectivity that brings customers easily to each high street.

2. They also acknowledge the importance of a broadly mixed range of retail and leisure offers as key to place attractiveness.

3. While place promotion was called for, few could name a single asset that might be used as its focus. The markets were the most obvious.

Research question 2.2 called for us to collect business opinion on location assets to link to town centre attraction. Q13 and Q14 were open-ended questions probing the strengths and limitations of the borough as a business location. Q24, 25 and 26 also open ended, asked about amenities, characteristics and attractiveness of individual high streets.

Answers were wide ranging, and were analysed by identifying themes, grouping responses and reporting opinion quantitatively. Two strong impressions emerge from the analysis: first that opinion about the borough is largely positive (as reported earlier), and second while opinion about high street attraction is concerned about issues in the public realm, crime and customer parking, the greater issue is expanding the range in the offer of goods and services. There are calls for family centred activities, cinema, gyms and leisure centres in particular locations. Opinion is divided about the benefits of more national brands versus more independents.

Q13 had an 84% response rate, and the opportunity to give multiple answers. The opinions expressed give more detail around the earlier finding that Lewisham is “good for business”. A quarter of the responses identified the transport links that bring trade easily to each location:

"Access to central London"

"Excellent connectivity"

And a fifth of the responses identified the diversity, sense of community and (14%) the nature of the customers that support local businesses.

"Close knit community, everyone knows each other, regular customers"

Attention is also drawn to the busyness of the locations (14%) and there is acknowledgment of council initiatives, including in the public realm.

In probing the limitations (Q14), the greatest number of responses expressed dissatisfaction with customer parking arrangements (24%), but the second highest set of opinions were broadly:

"I can't see any limitations – but there's room to improve."

Areas identified for improvement were more widely diffused, but examples include reducing crime and increasing security (11%); specific cases where council relationships were strained (6%) and high levels of traffic on the high streets (4%).

Turning to specific high street attractiveness, Q24 asked if there were any specific amenities or services that would encourage visitors to spend more time at the location. 358 individual responses were collected, of which nearly half (47%) were "no". Once again parking attracted the strongest response (22%) from across the borough. Other suggestions were more specific: businesses based in Deptford and New Cross called for public toilets, for the return of bank branches and for a more robust response to graffiti. In Blackheath, Sydenham and Crofton Park some business owners wanted to see more national brands; in Lewisham and Catford the call was for a wider range of independent businesses and particularly for more food and beverage. Here there were also calls for a leisure centre, youth clubs and a cinema. There was an undercurrent of opinion that identified more events, and more markets as a potential visitor draw (6%).

When asked what is the single best thing about this high street (Q25), surprisingly few (3%) responded “my business”. One third of all responses referred to the variety of shops and businesses on offer, a further 12% to the cafes, restaurants and bars, while 20% identified connectivity and ease of access. Further, 17% thought the location was central, busy and safe. In other words, for those that expressed an opinion, business owners are by and large satisfied with the location they trade in. They also recognise that the important feature in attractiveness is the breadth of offer. Few however were able to point at a single feature that could be used to promote the place (11%). Of those about half referred to the markets.

Therefore responses to Q26 (What would bring more people to this high street) were largely repetitive, and there is a sense of respondent fatigue at the end of the questionnaire. One idea that emerges is that there is an opportunity to promote some high streets rather more widely (Deptford, Catford, Lewisham) to raise awareness of what is on offer there. The call for youth clubs, leisure centres and general family centric activities also emerged again as a fairly strong view.

Lewisham London Borough of Culture 2022

Key findings

1. Awareness of Lewisham as London Borough of Culture reached 44% with 40% visual brand recognition.

2. Involvement with the activities was low, but a quarter of the sample believed these had made a positive impact on the area.

3. Of those who thought this, three quarters felt they created a good atmosphere and half believed they resulted in more customers.

Research question 2.3 asked for an evaluation of the awareness and benefits of the "We are Lewisham" London Borough of Culture activities that had been taking place during the preceding year. Awareness was tested with a verbal prompt, and recognition of the branding was collected by showing the logo in the Qualtrics app.

The scores were 44% and 40% respectively, a few points higher for the sub sample of black business owners. The survey identified however that few participants had attended or were involved in the events.

Attitudes towards the initiative were nevertheless quite strongly positive, a quarter saying that it had made a positive impact to the area. And of those respondents, most were able to say what that impact had been, the most important being that it created a good atmosphere (72%), and that it had fostered a sense of pride in the area (48%). Around half (43% in the sample and 50% for the sub sample) believed they had seen more customers because of the initiative.

The survey responses are reported in Table 5.

Q18 - 22 London Borough of Culture 2022	Independent owners	Black owners
	%	%
Did you know that Lewisham was London Borough of Culture 2022	44	47
Do you recall seeing this branding?	40	44
London Borough of Culture events:		
Involved in?	3	2
Attended?	6	2
Do you feel that being the London Borough of Culture has made a positive impact to the area?	25	24
And to your business?	16	7
If yes, can say what that impact has been?		
More customers	43	50
A good atmosphere	72	79
More pride in the area	48	57
More things for young people to do	31	21
Events that brought new people to the high street	11	0
Other	6	29

Table 5. London Borough of Culture awareness and impact scores
Awareness and attitude scores are strong; but participation in events was low.

Net Zero and the climate emergency

Key findings

1. More knowledge of the Net Zero by 2030 proposition is needed, for the sake of the planet, but also to inform about future compliance.

2. Greater knowledge might also prompt further beneficial action on energy usage now, by linking energy reduction and energy efficiency.

3. But we also saw knowledge and motivation to adopt other beneficial behaviours in areas such as recycling and waste management.

The final research objective asked for an assessment of knowledge and understanding of sustainability and readiness for Net Zero by 2030, the council's published ambition. From the responses it is clear that the issue is a complex one and still not well understood. Three questions inform this view. Q16 asks what steps the business owners are taking to reduce the impact of their businesses on the environment. Q17 asks directly what support the council can offer in this regard. Finally, Q15 asks the extent to which energy bills have increased. This is a relevant source of insight because, all things being equal, the price of energy should drive down usage and drive up awareness of climate change issues by association. It should be a motivating factor.

From Q16 knowledge of the issues goes beyond reducing energy usage. Half of all respondents had taken steps to do this. In addition, more than half have taken steps to reduce the waste they produce (again, this knowledge may be cost related).
Far fewer had adopted green energy suppliers (15%), invested in energy efficiency (10%), or joined community wealth building initiatives (9%). Other scored 11%, and most of this open-ended response referred to recycling issues, another part of the jigsaw.

There is perhaps room for an information campaign because the subject matter is complex, and the motivation to act still not pressing for many people since the benefits are long-term and collective.

This is probably why, when asked an open-ended question to establish what more the council could do to help reduce environmental impact (Q17), the overwhelming response (38%) was “no”, followed by a call for more information (18%). The third response was a call for additional incentives (presumably a response to the cost *disincentives* already in place).

Further then, in motivating business owners to change behaviours, cost increases are a factor, and the greatest is the energy price rise. Q15 identifies that for two thirds of business owners, energy costs have doubled and for a further 20% increased by three times. It is therefore already good sense to reduce usage, and invest in increasing efficiency, even in small ways. What may still be missing is the connection between these actions and the bigger picture.

Cost plays a part elsewhere too. 15% of responses to Q17 concerned the prices for waste management services and the pink (red?) waste bags that are now needed. But the value of these costs in helping to drive down waste is not yet apparent.

Appendix: summary of survey responses

The following tables report the responses to each survey question, first for all independent businesses, then for the sub-sample of black owners, and finally from the separate sample of managers of the Lewisham Centre businesses.

Sample sizes unless otherwise noted are 470, 73 and 41 respectively.

Q1	How many years have you been trading at this location?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Less than a year	5	5	10
2	1 to 3 years	21	23	**15**
3	4 to 5 years	17	16	**12**
4	Over 5 years	23	21	24
5	Over 10 years	35	34	39

- Over half the businesses are well established
- Little difference between the sample and the black business owners
- Shopping centre businesses seem more polarised – newer or a bit longer-established

Q2	How many people do you employ here At the moment?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	1 to 3	57	67	22
2	4 to 6	28	21	29
3	More than 6	16	12	49

- Black owned businesses more likely to employ fewer people.
- A big difference between independent and multiple businesses in number of jobs provided.
- Partly a reflection of store size perhaps

Q3	Over the next 12 months do you expect the number of staff employed at this site to:	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Increase	10	**21**	**17**
2	Decrease	6	3	12
3	Stay the same	**83**	77	71

- A little more optimism among black business owners
- Some pessimism in the shopping centre

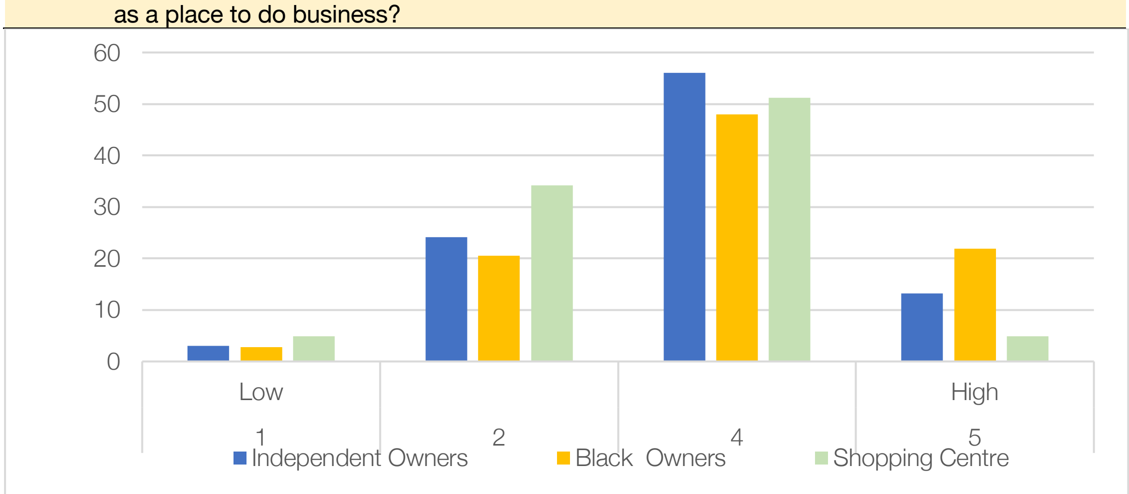
Q4	Do you have any other sites or businesses?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Yes, in the borough	4	1	**5**
2	Yes, not in Lewisham	9	4	**34**
3	No	87	95	61

- Black business owners a little less likely to have expanded yet.
- Shopping centre non-anchor businesses still include national brands.

Q5	How likely are you to be trading in the borough in two years' time?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Very likely	54	58	**68**
2	Likely	33	32	22
3	Unlikely	3	3	0
4	Very unlikely	2	1	2
5	Don't know	7	7	7

- Multiple business managers more confident than independent business owners
- Little difference between the two ownership samples

Q6 How do you rate Lewisham as a place to do business?



- No mid-point in the scale – data is highly positively skewed for all three samples.
- Two thirds are positive.
- And over 20% of black business owners are *highly* positive in rating Lewisham as a good place to do business.

Q7	What are the three biggest challenges your business is facing today?	
	First Answer %	All Answers %
Cost of Living/economy	17	25
Lack of customer parking	12	17
Footfall/demand post Covid	12	21
Energy Costs	10	18
Crime	7	12
Business Rates	7	15
Rent	5	8
Bins & bin bags, refuse, graffiti	3	10
Relationship with the Council	3	6
Supplier Issues	2	8
Competition	2	5
Staffing Issues	2	5
No Banks or ATM's	2	5
Debt	1	3
Public Toilets	1	3
Landlord	1	4
Other	1	1
Public Realm, Traffic and Infrastructure	1	5

- The impact of the economy is the greatest challenge for independent businesses.
- Respondents also disaggregated its effects including falling demand and rising energy costs
- Staffing pressures and supplier issues seem to have lower priority
- Throughout the survey, a lack of parking spaces is perceived to be a major drag on trade

Q8. What support do you think your business might benefit from?	All Indepen. Businesses	Black-owned Businesses
	%	%
Marketing	33	53
Business Planning	19	32
Networking	16	30
Accounting and Financial Management	13	29
Trading online	9	29
Property advice	9	23
Access to Investment	8	15
Reducing my carbon footprint/energy usage	5	8
Other	5	8
Mentoring	4	7
Bid Writing	0	4

- Black-led businesses twice as likely to perceive the need for support.
- The greatest demand is for marketing support, followed by business planning

Q9	Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background	Independent Owners	Lewisham Centre
		%	%
	White		
1	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	30	34
2	Irish	1	0
3	Gipsy or Irish Traveller	0	0
4	Any other White Background	5	5
	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups		
1	White & Black Caribbean	1	5
2	White & Black African	1	0
3	White & Asian	3	0
4	Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background	2	0
	Asian/Asian British		
9	Indian	5	5
10	Pakistani	6	5
11	Bangladeshi	2	2
12	Chinese	5	2
13	Any other Asian background	10	2
	Black/African/Black British		
14	African	10	12
15	Caribbean	4	2
16	Any other Black/Caribbean background	1	0
	Other Ethnic Group		
17	Arab	4	2
18	Any other ethnic group	7	0

Response rate: 3%

- The ethnicity of the sample reflects the headcount data: around two thirds of the business owners surveyed are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic.
- 15% of respondents identified as black.
- The high street businesses across Lewisham are a good reflection of the culturally rich and ethnically diverse population in the borough
- Non-response to this question by those agreeing to participate at all was low.

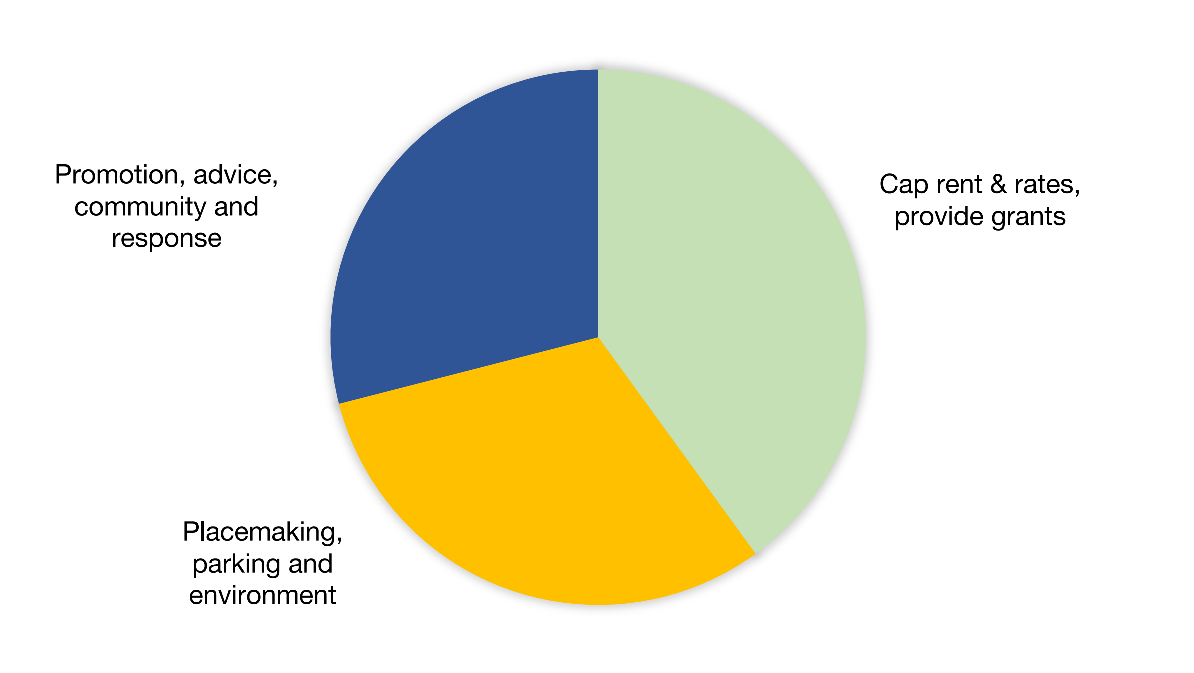
Q10	What age are you	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	18-24	2	1	10
2	25-34	12	11	17
3	35-44	39	41	37
4	45-54	30	29	17
5	55-64	12	14	0
6	65 and over	3	4	0

- Little difference in the age profile between samples of independent business owners
- Those employed as managers in the Lewisham Centre tend to be younger.

Q11	To what extent would you say Lewisham Council is business friendly?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
	1 = not friendly; 5 = very friendly	%	%	%
	1	3	3	5
	2	12	14	0
	3	33	23	29
	4	30	**38**	46
	5	8	**10**	5
	N/R	15	12	15

- This is good news. The responses are positively skewed
- Although a third of all respondents were non-committal, and a further 15% did not answer, those who did respond are over twice as likely to be positive than negative.
- Almost a fifth of black business owners who responded believe the council is not business friendly, but about 50% believe it is – rather more than in the sample as a whole.

Q12	If I were in charge of Lewisham Council the one thing I would do to help independent businesses this year would be:



- Responses have been interpreted as forming three themes.
- The first comprised suggestions for further direct financial support – rate caps etc
- The second, 31% of responses, offered suggestions including improvements to public realm, amenities, environment and parking (which made up 10% of all responses alone)
- The third theme was around council support for the high street and business in general – training, promotion of the location, and developing a business community.

Q13 What are the strengths of the Borough of Lewisham as a business location?

	%
Well Connected	25
Diversity, Community and Culture	20
Good customers	14
Busy locations	14
A good place for business	11
A good mix of businesses	9
Cleaning and recycling services	5
The parks	1
Other	1

- A very clear response to the physical location, transport links and to the community and culture
- Acknowledgment of ongoing customer support
- And some positive response to council initiatives, and to the physical environment

Q14. And what are its limitations as a business location (up to three)?	
	%
Parking Restrictions	24
No Limitations	**22**
Crime & Security	11
Low Footfall	10
Council Relations	6
Competition	5
Refuse and Recycling	4
Traffic	4
Rent & Rates	4
Few public amenities	3
No Banks	2
Community	2
Accessibility	1
Other	1
Awareness	0
Environment	0

- Over a fifth of responses indicated no limitations! (e.g. *"All good"*)
- Otherwise, few surprises. Lack of parking for customers perceived strongly as a limitation.
- Crime and perceptions of security are the next biggest concern, but only 11% of responses.
- And a sense that footfall is lower than it used to be.
- A range of individual concerns about the council (6% of all responses)

Q15	Have your energy bills gone up in the last 12 months?	Independent Owners	Black Owners
		%	%
1	Yes, increased but not doubled	20	22
2	Yes Doubled	45	44
3	Yes, trebled or more	21	23
4	No - about the same or decreased	2	1
	N/R	11	10

- Almost every business owner surveyed is facing a dramatic increase in energy costs
- There is no obvious difference between the two samples
- Over a fifth of the respondents are dealing with a threefold increase.

Q16	Net Zero 2030: Are you taking any steps to reduce the impact of your business on the environment?	Independent business	Black Owners
		%	%
1	Reducing energy use	52	60
2	Reducing waste	58	59
3	Using green/renewable energy	15	10
4	Increasing the energy efficiency of my premises	10	10
5	Buying more goods produced locally	9	5
6	Other	11	10

- Over half of all respondents are taking steps to reduce energy use and waste.
- Black-led businesses more likely to be reducing energy use, but less likely to use green energy
- Few businesses are increasing energy efficiency or involved in community wealth building.

Q17. Is there anything the Council can do to support you to reduce your environmental impact?”	
	%
No	38
Don't know/more information please	18
Grants and Incentives	13
Improve recycling services	14
Improve distribution of red bags	9
Improve waste management	6
Other	4

- This is an area for further communication
- The question elicited only 160 responses, almost four in ten negative.
- A further 18% asked for more information
- Almost a third concern waste management and recycling, but not energy efficiency.

Q18 - 22 London Borough of Culture 2022	Independent owners	Black owners
	%	%
Did you know that Lewisham was London Borough of Culture 2022	44	47
Do you recall seeing this branding?	40	44
London Borough of Culture events:		
Involved in?	3	2
Attended?	6	2
Do you feel that being the London Borough of Culture has made a positive impact to the area?	25	24
And to your business?	16	7
If yes, can say what that impact has been?		
More customers	43	50
A good atmosphere	72	79
More pride in the area	48	57
More things for young people to do	31	21
Events that brought new people to the high street	11	0
Other	6	29

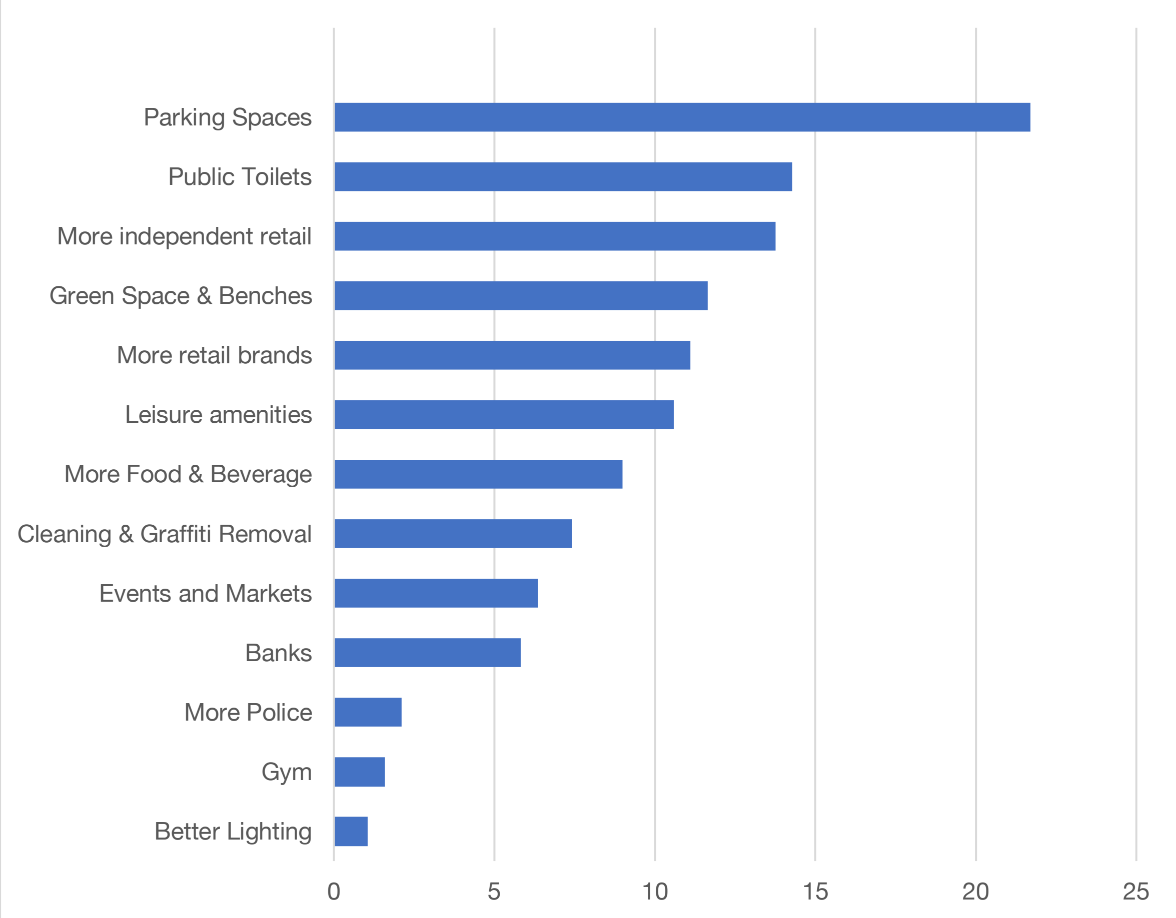
- The London Borough of Culture has achieved good brand awareness among all independent businesses, with little difference between the two samples.
- Black respondents were slightly more likely to be aware of the brand and branding
- Participation in the events by all business seems disappointing.
- But on the other hand a quarter believe the initiative has made a positive impact
- Particularly in bringing new customers (around half of the responses), creating a good atmosphere (about three quarters of responses) and engendering a sense of pride.

Q23	Do you currently sell online?	Independent Owners	Black Owners	Shopping Centre
		%	%	%
1	Yes, my business is already online	35	33	89
2	No, but I want to know how to be	27	34	3
3	I don't want to be online	38	33	9

% of those who responded

- About a third of independent businesses are trading online, but almost 90% of multiple brands
- A further third are not interested in trading online
- A quarter of the sample and a third of black business owners are interested in knowing more.
- Trading online is not inevitably the best digital strategy for small business, as many recognise.

Q24. Are there any public amenities or services that would make this high street a more attractive place for shoppers to spend time in?

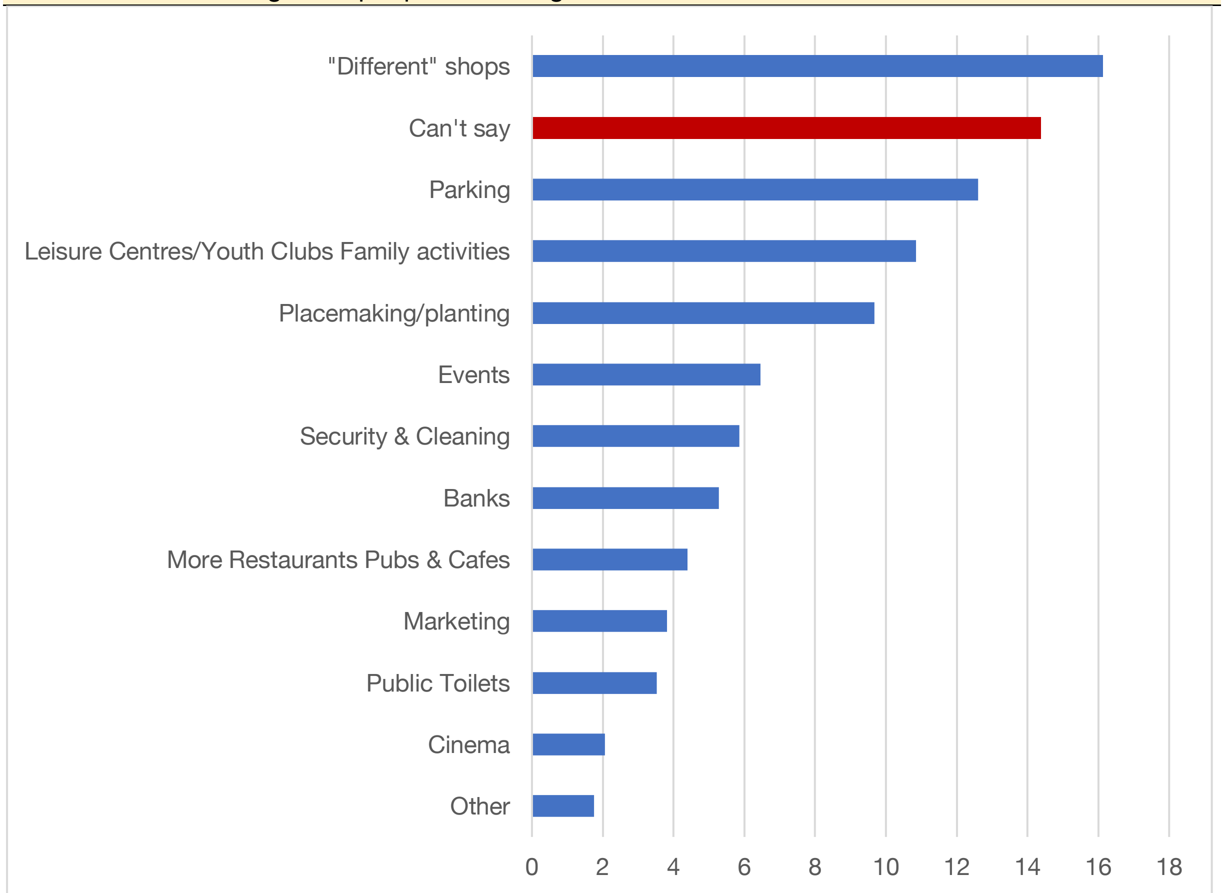


- This question elicited 358 responses, of which almost half (47%) were “no”.
- The remaining answers have been reported as percentages of all other responses.
- Ideas were quite wide ranging and sometimes contradictory.
- They did not always refer to “amenities and services”.
- There were some calls for more independent and innovative businesses; an almost equal number called for more national brands to improve high street attractiveness.
- Similarly, for more restaurants, pubs and cafes.
- But also for markets, leisure centres, gyms and particularly family and children’s activities.

Q25 For visitors, what is the single best thing about this high street?	
	%
A wide variety of shops and businesses	32
It's easy to get to	19
Its busy, central, friendly and safe	17
A wide variety of restaurants and cafes	12
A distinctive feature	11
The Market	6
My Business	3

- Owners drew attention to the wide variety in retail businesses and the food & beverage offer
- The location and ease of access both featured strongly, as well as the vitality
- 17% named a particular feature of the place, of which 6% was a market.

Q26 What would bring more people to this high street?



- There is little extra information in this question: there is a little more emphasis on the idea of a leisure centre that would attract families, a cinema, and a suggestion that place promotion might be an option for Deptford, Lewisham and Catford.

Q28 When are you currently open for business?

Session	Average High St.	Shopping Centre	Difference +/-
	%	%	%
Morning	80	92	-15
Afternoon	75	88	-17
Evening	59	56	5
Night	15	0	100

- The purpose of this question was to describe the relative attractiveness of the locations at different points of the day. The numbers represent average values across days and high streets.
- More high street businesses are open in the morning than the afternoon.
- Just over half of the respondents are trading in the evening.
- Very few are trading at night.
- By comparison with the national brands in the Lewisham Centre, the high streets are somewhat less open during the day: there may be several reasons for this including business mix, availability of staff (and/or trade), head office and other management expectations.
- 93% of the independent businesses believed their opening hours were about right.