

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The South Lakeland Business Premises Survey was carried out by Invest in South Lakeland, the Economic Development team at South Lakeland District Council.

The Business Premises Survey is carried out each year to help provide an up-to-date assessment of the supply and demand of business premises in South Lakeland. This helps to better plan for how much land needs to be allocated for employment uses through the Local Plan. The survey is also used to better understand the opportunities and challenges faced by businesses operating in South Lakeland.

## Method

The Business Premises Survey was sent to 4,619 businesses on the South Lakeland Business Rates Register.

There was a press release to advertise the consultation on social media, South Lakeland News and the local press.

Businesses were able to complete a paper copy and return free of charge by post, or online using the link provided. 91% of completed surveys were returned by post.

## Responses

There were 1,000 complete useable responses to the consultation. This represents a response rate of 22% of businesses that received the survey, which is considered a statistically significant sample and can be considered representative. A similar response rate was seen in the previous years' surveys.

## Summary

- Overall there was a satisfactory response rate from the district as a whole. Just under a third of businesses responding to the consultation are from Kendal or the surrounding area, while there is also a good response rate from the Ulverston and Windermere/Bowness areas.

- There was also a good representation from businesses of all ages, including those trading for a reasonably short time (under 5 years) up to those who have been operating for over 31 years.
- The vast majority of responses were from businesses in the wholesale/retail and hospitality/catering, which is expected due to the nature of the South Lakeland economy.
- Limited companies, soles traders and partnerships were the main types of businesses responding to the survey.
- The majority of responding businesses are currently operating from retail outlets, while those in offices, residential (hotels, B&Bs etc.), food/drink and general industrial premises also contributed a satisfactory response rate.
- There was a good response rate from businesses located throughout South Lakeland. The majority were situated in more urban locations, however there were a significant amount from villages and rural areas too.
- The majority of respondents classed their premises as their main workplace/headquarters. Almost half indicated that their floor space was under 2,500 ft<sup>2</sup>, and two thirds employed between 1 to 5 employees. This shows that the majority of responses were from small businesses.
- Half of all responding businesses are happy with their current broadband speeds, while just under a third are not. Levels of satisfaction are slightly lower in rural areas compared to more urban areas.
- Three quarters of respondents feel confident about the next twelve months, with the majority expecting their staffing levels to stay the same. There are more businesses expecting their staffing levels to increase (17%) than decrease (7%).
- When comparing results to last year's survey, there has been a slight increase in the response rate from those in the retail sector and office based businesses, and a slight decrease from those in the hospitality sector.
- Due to the exclusion of farming and agricultural businesses in this year's study (for data protection reasons), there has unsurprisingly been a reduction in responses from this sector of the economy compared to last year.
- Of the 1,000 responding businesses, 18% indicated that they would expect their premises needs to change in the next 3 years. The majority expect to increase in size by means of expanding their existing premises or moving to a larger site.

- The majority of those possibly looking for new premises would do so in Kendal, either in a town centre or edge of town (e.g. industrial estate) location.
- The most likely types of premises these businesses would be looking for are offices and retail units. Two fifths of respondents would prefer a premises under 2,500ft<sup>2</sup>, while just under a third would prefer something slightly larger (2,501 – 9,999ft<sup>2</sup>).
- All responding businesses feel that the location/accessibility of premises, cost and access to customers were very important factors to consider when choosing a new premises.
- One in six are current offering apprenticeships, trainee schemes or other work placements, while one in ten would be interested in doing so.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to leave comments and/or suggest how the council could help their business grow. The main comments/issues relate to parking, business rates, transport/infrastructure and ways in which the council could support/assist their business.
- The rate of businesses expecting their premises needs to change over the next 3 years has gone down slightly (-5%) compared to last year's survey. A premises on the edge of town has replaced the town centre as the most likely place businesses would look for new premises.