



# **Community Energy Member/Investor Reach & Impact Report**

**2022**

**Commissioned by Community Energy England**

**Produced by CAG Consultants**

**Funded by Westmill Solar Co-operative**





Produced for Community Energy England by CAG Consultants

<https://communityenergyengland.org/>

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# 1 Introduction

In 2021 CAG Consultants, in partnership with Fiveways<sup>1</sup>, were commissioned by Community Energy England to conduct a survey for the members, supporters, staff and volunteers of community energy organisations aimed at understanding the impact of being involved in a community energy organisation – i.e., to determine what secondary impacts or changes flow from people’s involvement.

Between November 2021 and January 2022, the three organisations kindly facilitated an online survey amongst their members and contacts. This report highlights the combined results of those surveys<sup>2</sup>. No incentive was offered for completing the survey – recipients were told that their community energy organisation would report back the results.

The following responses were received:

Organisation	Sent	Complete responses	Response rate	First response	Last response
Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE)	1378	218	15.8%	17-Nov	03-Jan
Energy 4 All	3300	539	16.3%	07-Dec	31-Jan
Repowering	1037	65	6.3%	13-Dec	30-Jan
Total	5715	822	14%		

We are grateful to Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE), Energy4All and Repowering for their participation in and support for this research.



We also thank Westmill Solar Co-operative, who kindly provided a grant to fund this research as part of their ongoing efforts to use the revenue from their community energy installations to support Community Energy England and the broader growth and development of the community energy sector.

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<sup>1</sup> CAG Consultants is an employee-owned co-operative with more than 30 years’ experience of high-quality research and evaluation on economic, social and environmental issues, with particular expertise on evaluation and sustainable energy. Fiveways have broad expertise in advising and evaluating the community and voluntary sector, including governance and diversity issues.

<sup>2</sup> The surveys differed slightly between the organisations – these differences are noted below.

## 2 Respondent profile

### 2.1 Involvement in their community energy organisation

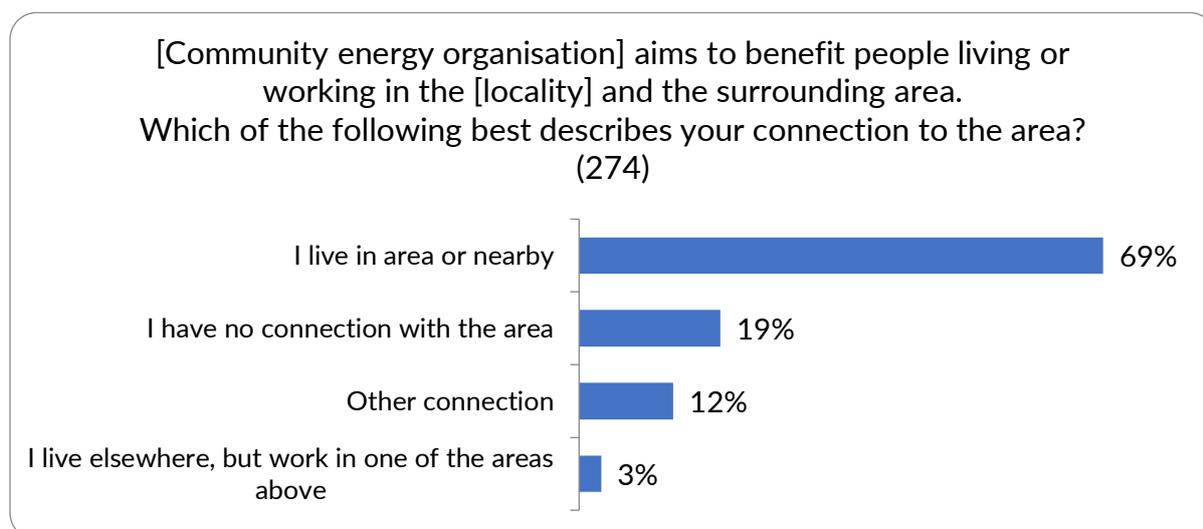
- 70% of respondents (756<sup>3</sup>) had invested in their community energy organisation.

### 2.2 Involvement in other community energy organisations

- For 75% of respondents (822) their community energy organisation was the first community energy organisation they had been involved in.

### 2.3 Link with the area<sup>4</sup>

- 69% of respondents (274) live in the locality of the community energy organisation.
- 19% had no connection with the area.



### 2.4 Gender

- 67% of respondents who gave their gender (744) were male, 32% female and 1% self-described.

### 2.5 Ethnicity

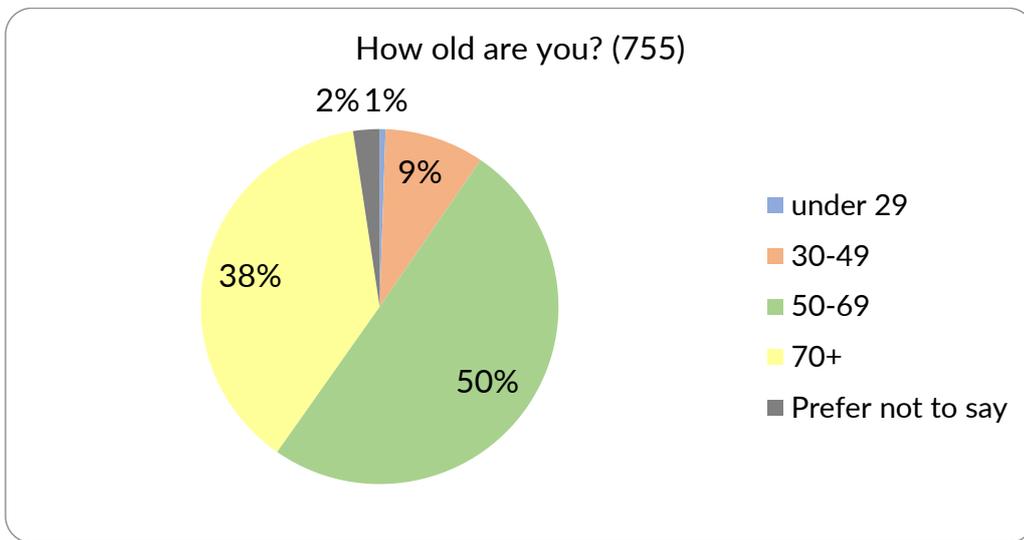
- 95% of respondents who gave their ethnicity (716) were White/White British.

### 2.6 Age

- 88% of respondents (755) were over 50.
- 38% were over 70.

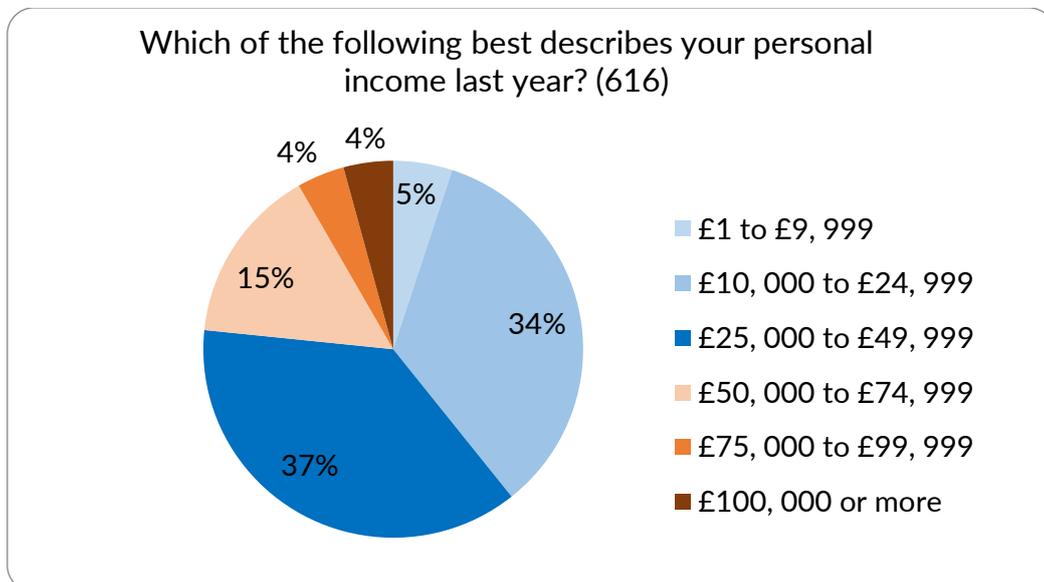
<sup>3</sup> Not every respondent answers every question. Numbers in brackets represent the number of respondents that answered the question.

<sup>4</sup> Repowering and BWCE only



## 2.7 Personal income level

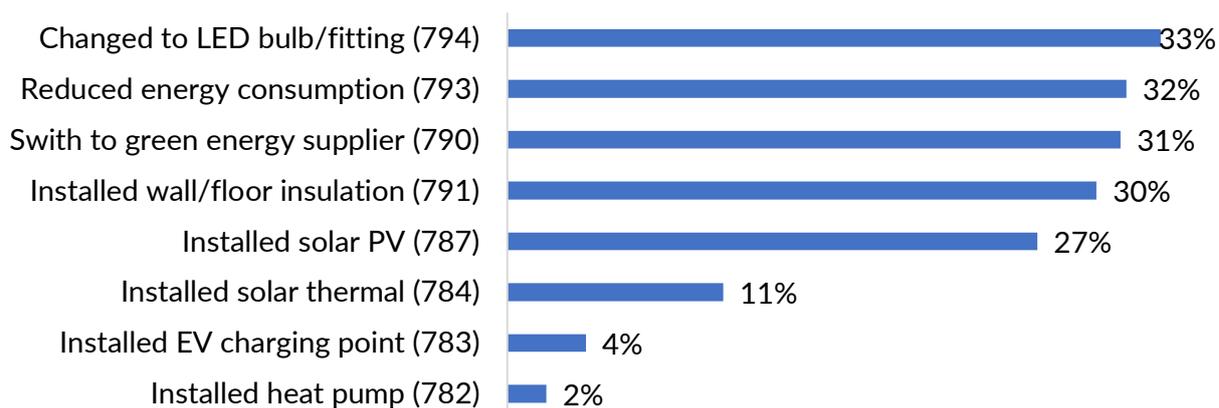
- Of the 616 respondents who indicated a personal income level, 39% had an annual personal income level of £25,000 or less, 23% had an income of £50,000 or more.



## 2.8 Action on energy efficiency

- 64% of respondents (794) had taken at least one of the energy efficiency actions listed in the survey *before* their involvement with their community energy organisation. 31% had taken three or more of these actions.
- The most common actions taken were changing to LED lighting, reducing energy consumption, switching to a green/renewable energy supplier, and installing wall or floor insulation and with roughly a third of respondents having done each of those actions before their involvement with the community energy organisation
- 

Proportion of respondents that had taken action on energy efficiency measures before their involvement in the specific community energy organisation.



Qualitative responses reveal that several respondents were already committed to acting in these areas before their involvement with their community energy organisation and that they see their investment as supporting their wider approach to reducing their carbon footprint

*“My interest in renewable energy and climate change predates knowing about [community energy organisation] but involvement with an energy co-op has strengthened my commitment.”*

### 3 Motivations for involvement in a community energy organisation

Motivations for members getting involved in their community energy organisation are shown on p9. Key findings on respondents' motivations are:

- The three most important reasons for getting involved in a community energy organisation are:
  - "To take action to tackle climate change" - 92% of respondents (815) thought this was "very important" or "important",
  - "To support the development of community owned renewable energy projects" - 90% of respondents (814) thought this was "very important" or "important" - and
  - "To make my money align with my principles" - 86% of respondents (813) thought this was "very important" or "important"

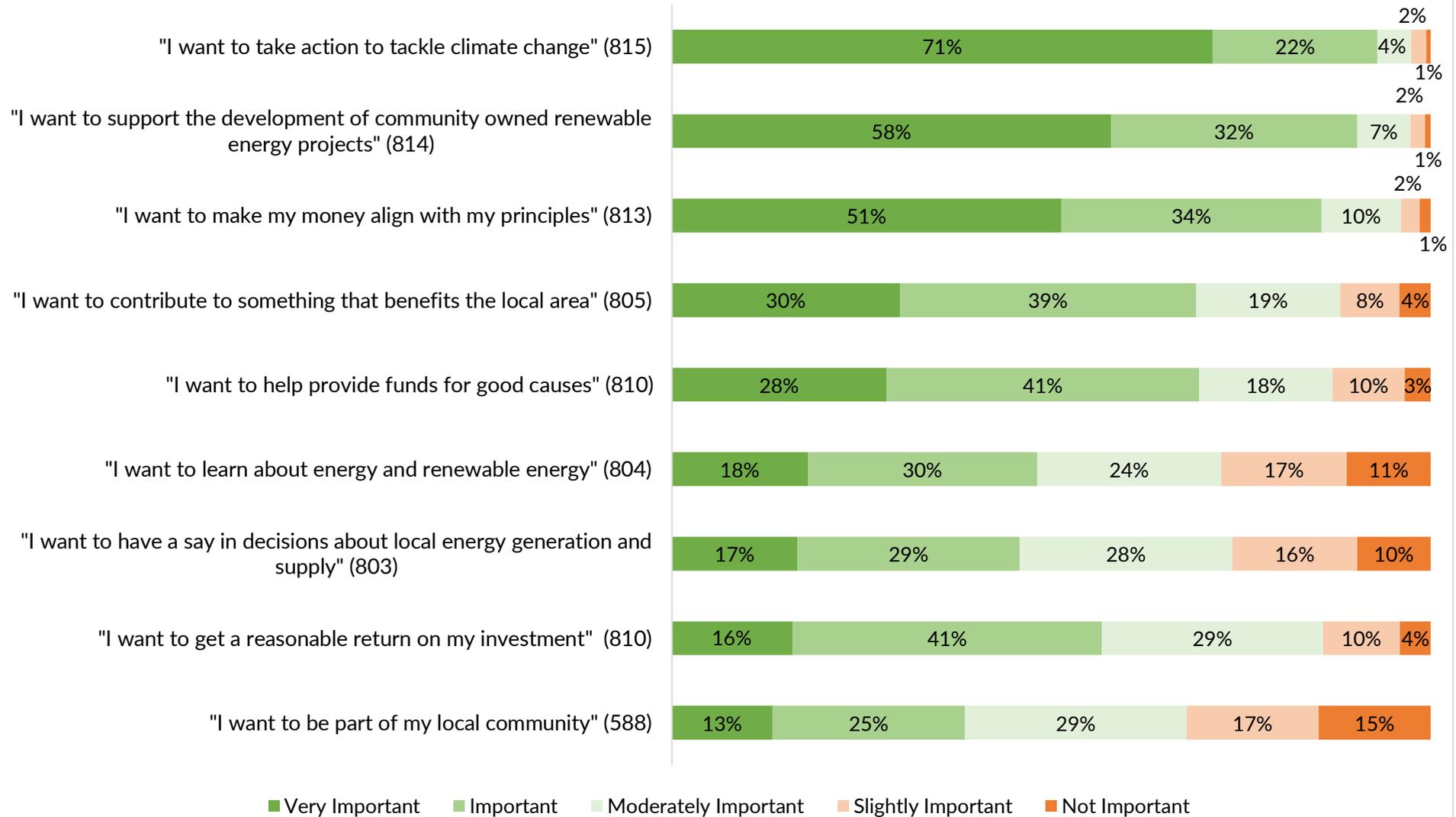
*"For the future of my children and their children this is the only way to go now."*

*"We firmly believe that community energy schemes are the way forward to help tackle the climate crisis. Larger scale projects are also important but community-based ones get local people involved and means that they feel part of the solution rather than just bystanders."*

*"[I wanted to] transfer investments away from conventional "trackers" which are almost certainly fossil-fuel heavy."*

- Two further reasons for getting involved in their community energy organisation are:
  - "To help provide funds for good causes" - 70% of respondents (810) thought this was "very important" or "important" - and
  - "To contribute to something that benefits the local area" - 69% of respondents (805) thought this was "very important" or "important"
- Getting a reasonable return on investment was considered "important" or "very important" by 57% of respondents (810)
- Meeting others with similar interests was the least important of the options given - considered "important" or "very important" by 18% of respondents (792).

There are many reasons why people become involved with community energy organisations.  
How important are the following reasons for you?



## 4 Changes enabled by involvement in a community energy organisation

This section considers whether involvement in a community energy organisation influences people's knowledge and behaviour, and if so how.

### 4.1 How involvement has enabled action

Key findings, shown in the chart on p11, were that:

- 78% of respondents (558<sup>5</sup>) said their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them learn how co-operatives work, with 31% seeing the relationship as “extremely” or “very” helpful.
- 76% of respondents (740) said their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them to get involved in other sustainable energy initiatives, with 33% seeing the relationship as “extremely” or “very” helpful.
- 73% of respondents (734) said their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them to talk more to friends, family, neighbours or colleagues about community energy, with 21% saying it was “extremely” or “very” helpful.
- 70% of respondents (780) said their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them to learn about renewable energy, with 27% seeing the relationship as “extremely” or “very” helpful.

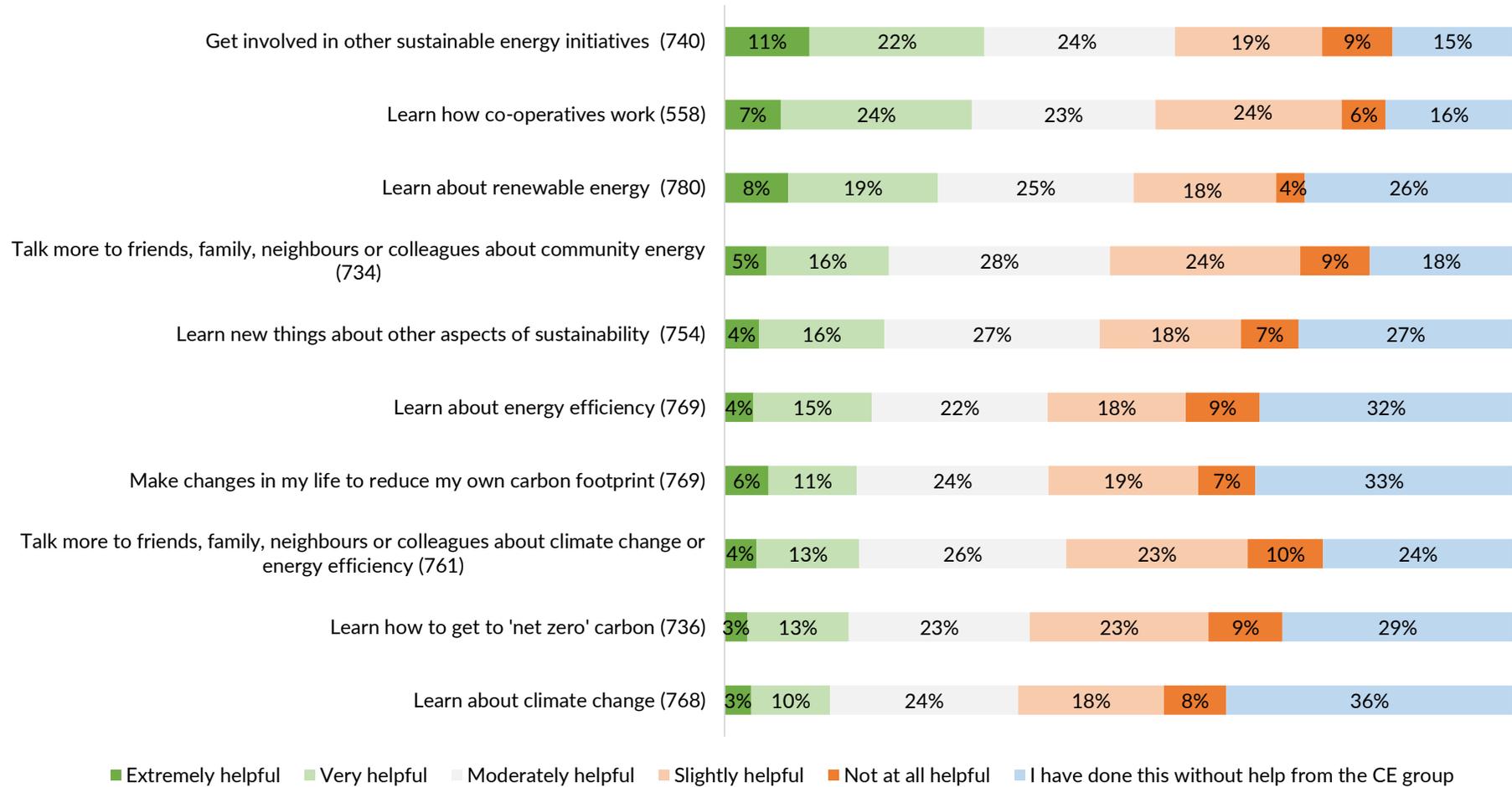
*“My interest in renewable energy and climate change predates knowing about [the community energy organisation] but involvement with a community energy organisation has strengthened my commitment.”*

- In addition, two thirds of respondents felt their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them talk more to friends, family, neighbours or colleagues about climate change and energy efficiency (761) and a similar proportion felt their relationship with a community energy organisation had helped them learn new things about other aspects of sustainability (754).
- Areas in which respondents felt their relationship with a community energy organisation was not as helpful included enabling them to:
  - Learn about climate change. 56% (768) said the relationship had helped but only 13% described it as “extremely” or “very” helpful.
  - Learn about energy efficiency. 59% (769) said the relationship had helped but only 19% described it as “extremely” or “very” helpful.

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<sup>5</sup> Energy4All and Repowering only

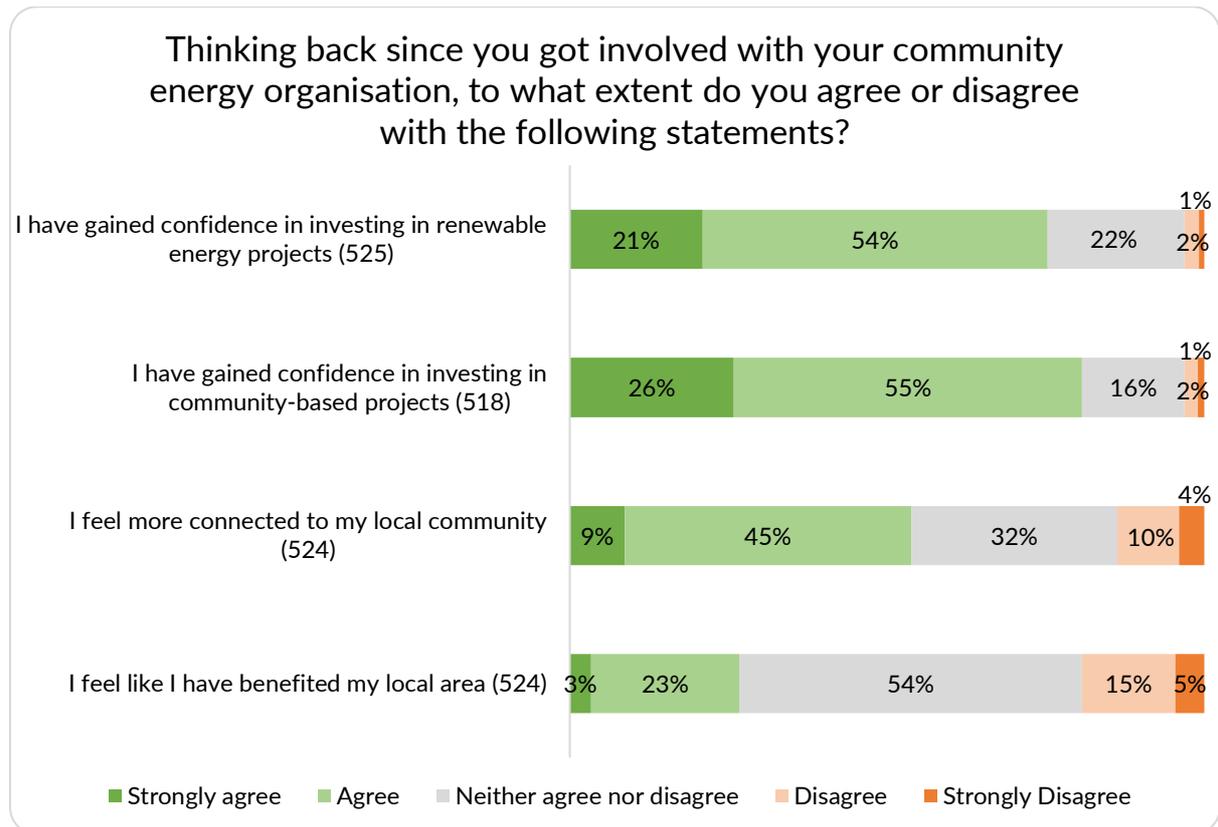
## Thinking about your relationship with your community energy organisation, how helpful has it been in enabling you to do the following?



## 4.2 Confidence to invest and connection with the local area

8 out of 10 respondents (518<sup>6</sup>) agree that they “have gained confidence in investing in community-based projects”, three quarters (525) agree “they have gained confidence in investing in renewable energy projects.”

Fewer respondents agree that they feel more connected with, or have benefited, their local community – but as we have seen above (2.3), 30% of respondents did not live in the locality of the community energy organisation.



*“It’s normalised this kind of investing [in other community energy enterprises] and I feel more confident investing money with other organisations.”*

*“I was already on a journey to reducing my carbon footprint. I don’t think I’ve learned anything about doing this from the community energy organisation. However, I do trust them to develop renewable energy projects that I can invest in with confidence.”*

<sup>6</sup> Repowering and Energy4All only

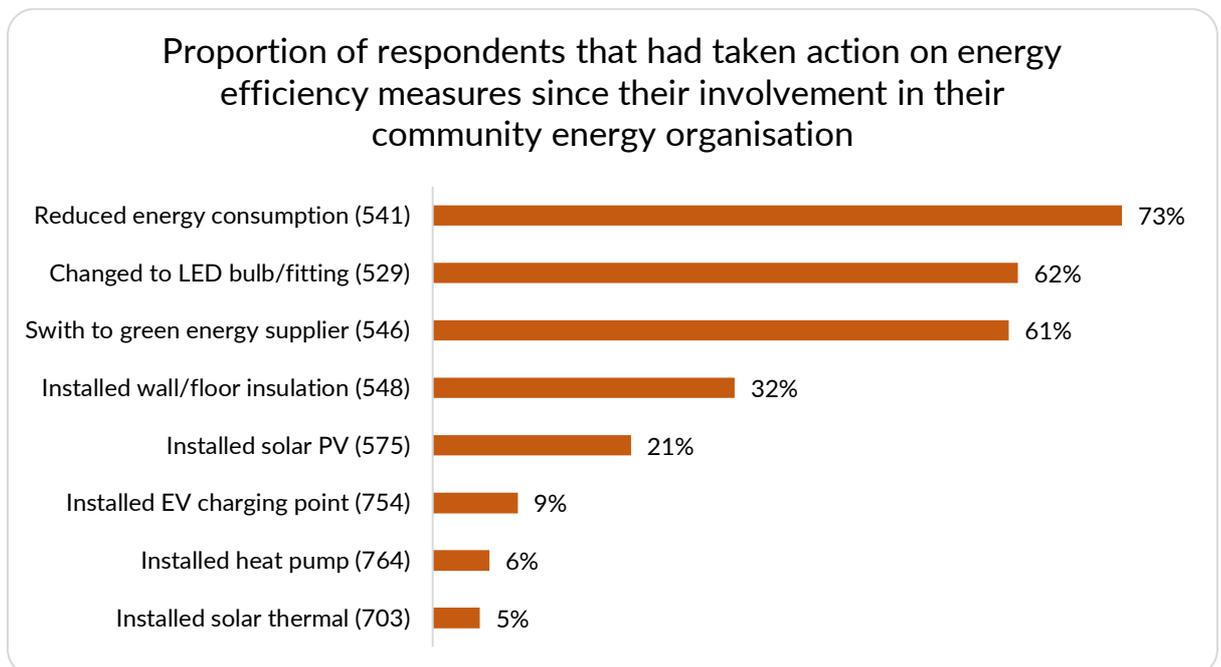
## 4.3 Energy efficiency actions

### 4.3.1 Action taken since involvement with a community energy organisation

Respondents were asked about a range of actions individuals could take with regards to energy efficiency. They were asked to consider if they had taken these actions before or after their involvement with the specific community energy organisation that had sent them the survey and the extent to which their relationship with that organisation had influenced taking that action.

The chart below shows that the pro-environmental actions most commonly taken after involvement with a community energy organisation are:

- Reducing energy consumption – 73% of respondents (541) who had not taken action before their involvement with their community energy organisation did so after.
- Changing lights to LED bulbs and fittings – 62% of respondents who had not taken action before their involvement with their community energy organisation (529) did so after, - and
- Switching to a green/renewable energy supplier – 61% of respondents who had not taken action before their involvement with their community energy organisation (546) did so after.



*“It has made me think about retrofitting the home I’m about to buy as something that is possible, not directly but in terms of a constant reminder of what needs to be done and that everyone can do something.”*

- Where respondents haven’t taken action, qualitative responses reveal the main barrier is the accommodation they live in (rental, blocks of flats, conservation areas or listed).

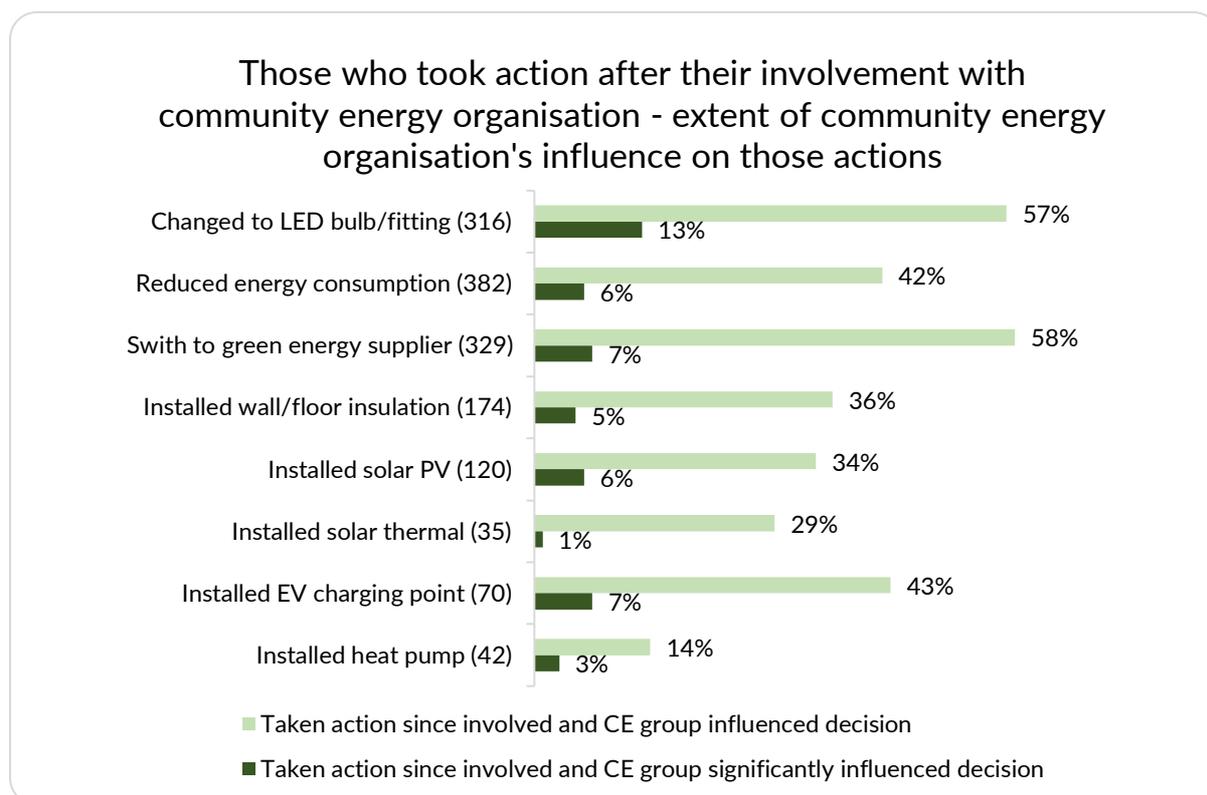
### 4.3.2 The community energy organisation's influence over those actions

Over half of respondents who switched to LED bulbs and fittings (316) or switched to a green/renewable energy supplier (329) since their involvement with their community energy organisation said their decision to do so was influenced by their involvement with that group.

In the case of changing to LED bulbs and fittings, 13% said that their community energy organisation was “extremely” or “very influential” over them taking that action (7% of those who switched their supplier)

The other behaviours taken by members that community energy organisations appear to have had some influence over are:

- Reducing energy consumption. Of the 382 people who took action since their involvement, 42% said that their community energy organisation had had some influence over them taking action, including 6% who said that they were “extremely” or “very influential” in them doing so.
- Installing an EV charging point. Of the 70 people who took action since their involvement 43% said that their community energy organisation had had some influence over them taking action, including 7% who said that they were “extremely” or “very influential” in them doing so.



## 5 Investment intentions

### 5.1.1 More investment

The survey asked those who had already invested about their investment intentions. The findings were:

- 88% of investors who gave a definite answer (442) indicated that they would buy further shares in their community energy organisation in the future, 12% said they would not<sup>7</sup>.

From qualitative responses, decisions about further investment would involve consideration of the following:

- Availability of funds to invest, or whether funds need to be prioritised elsewhere
- Inflation
- The balance of risk in people's portfolio between investments covered by The Financial Services Compensation Scheme and those which are not.

*"Inflation seems to be rising, and 4% in the future might not be attractive to me. If 4% was the norm, then I would be interested. I try to make a modest amount of money with my investments, all of which are community/renewable/social kinds. It is a very tough field."*

*"It was a big deal to invest £250 but I had the money - I might not have it again in a few months due to other pressures on family budgets."*

Those who answered "no" had already decided that these factors would mean they would not invest.

### 5.1.2 Waiving interest to support the community energy organisation's community work

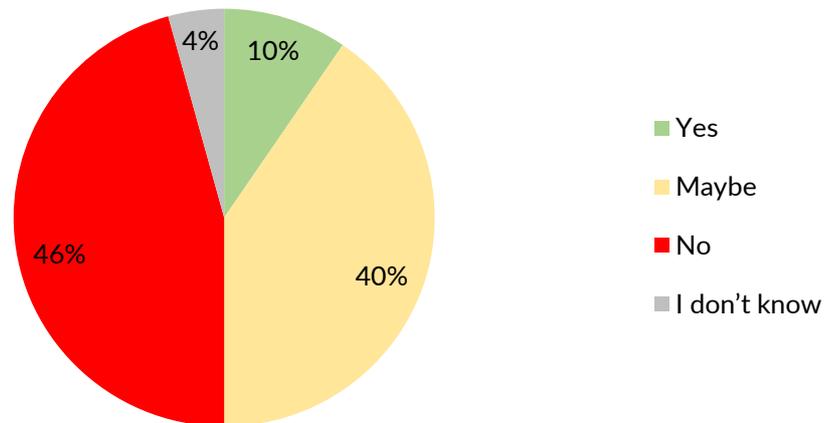
- 10% of investors asked who would consider investing again (210)<sup>8</sup> would consider waiving their annual interest to support the community energy organisation's community benefit fund, 46% would not.

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<sup>7</sup> Whereas the Repowering and Energy4All survey asked this question in general, the BWCE question asked if people would invest with a target interest rate of 4%,

<sup>8</sup> BWCE (all investors) and Repowering (investors who intend to invest again) only

Would you consider waiving the annual interest on your investment and donating it to the community energy organisation's community fund? (210)



The overriding reason given by those not considering this (44%) was that they felt it was important for the investor to receive a financial return on their investment if the community energy organisation wanted to attract more investment. Others felt they needed the return as part of their personal income, or to top up their pensions. In addition, charitable giving is seen as a personal choice – people have other causes and communities they would prefer to donate to.

*"I'm trying to invest ethically with any spare money but there needs to be a return on investment for this to be a viable way to invest. In my view, charity donations should be separate. I am happy to accept a reduced financial return on my ethical investments, but I am still hoping to build a portfolio of them to avoid the stock market and to save long term towards my retirement as well as to benefit the community and planet."*

*"I think investors need to see a return on their investment just as the consumer of electric benefits too. I am not against any profit sharing for community benefit, but I think if you want investors, then they would need a return on their investment, otherwise you would need to look for donors or funders."*

Those answering "maybe" (40%) were asked what factors would motivate them to donate their interest in that way. The main facilitating factors are:

- Healthy financial circumstances/affordability
- Details on the impact the community work is achieving/would achieve
- Being able to support projects that aligned with the individual's charitable giving preferences (or locations)
- Being able to Gift Aid their donations
- Having the flexibility to donate a proportion of their interest, rather than all of it.

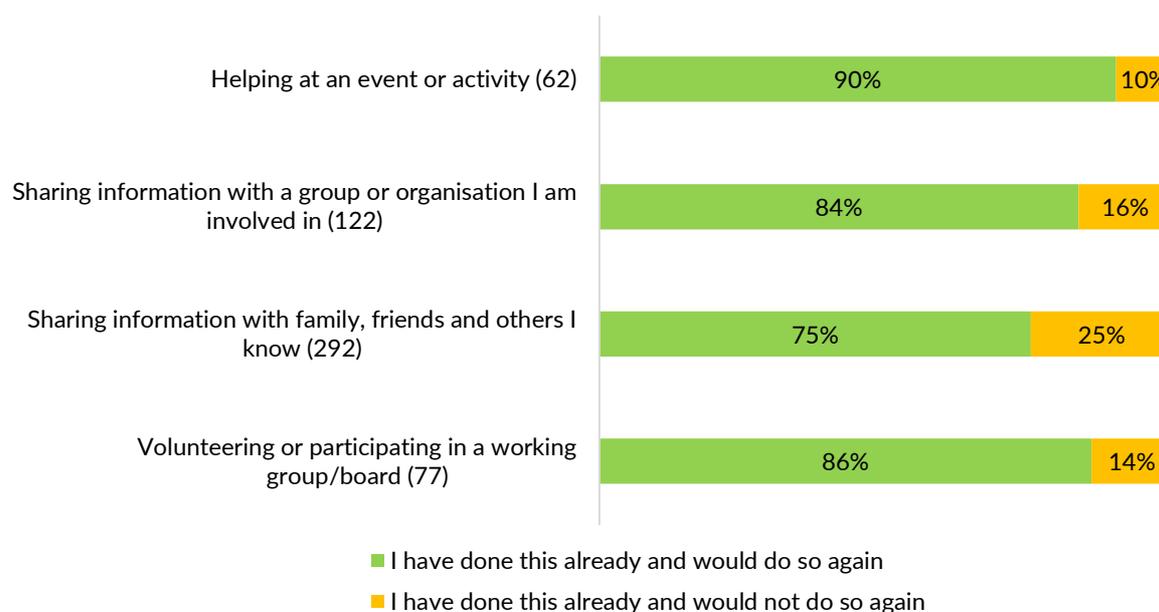
## 6 Engaging members in their community energy organisation

### 6.1.1 Those who have already supported their community energy organisation in other ways

- 45% of respondents (757) had previously supported their community energy organisation in one or more of the other ways listed in the survey. The most popular way was sharing information about their community energy organisation with family, friends and others they know, 292 people (39%) had done this.
- A high proportion of those who have supported previously would do so again, ranging from three quarters of those who had shared information about their community energy organisation with family, friends and others they know (292) to nine out of ten of those who had helped at an event or activity (62).

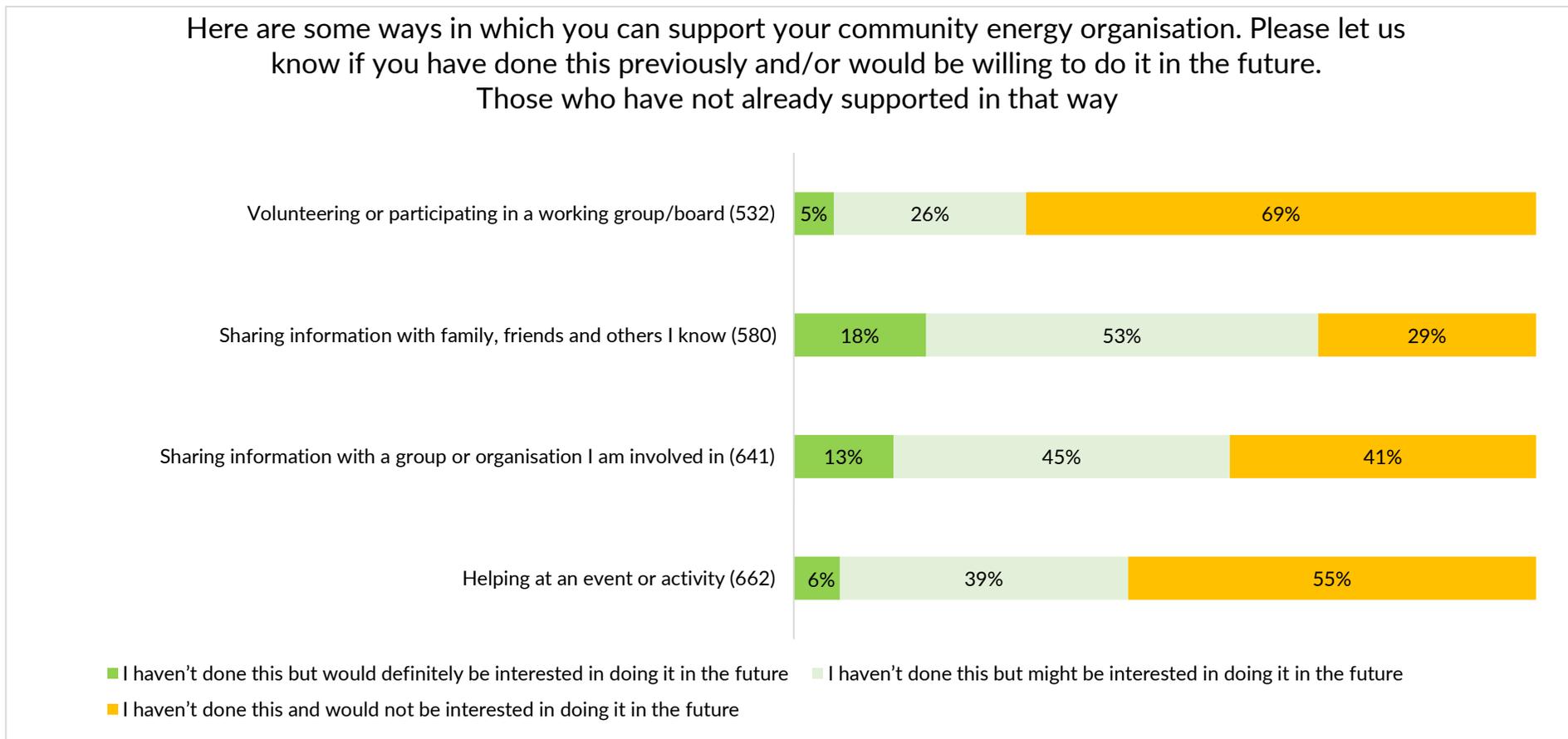
Here are some ways in which you can support your community energy organisation. Please let us know if you have done this previously and/or would be willing to do it in the future.

Those who have supported in that way already



### 6.1.2 Those who have not yet supported

- Those who have yet to support in other ways are more likely to be interested in sharing information about their community energy organisation either with friends and family (18% would be definitely interested) or organisations they are involved in (13%) than volunteering or helping at an event.
- The main reason given for not getting involved was not living in the area of the community energy organisation.



## 7 The effectiveness of their community energy organisation

- Respondents<sup>9</sup> felt their community energy organisation was most effective at
  - providing community benefit. 64% (442) felt their organisation was “extremely” or “very” effective at this.
  - keeping them up to date with their work. 59% (548) describing their organisation as “extremely” or “very” effective)
  - dealing with enquiries 56% (321) felt their organisation was “extremely” or “very” effective at this – and,
  - enabling members to engage in decision making. 49% (424) describing their organisation as “extremely” or “very” effective.
- Respondents identified areas their community energy organisation could improve, including:
  - increasing their knowledge of energy issues and renewables. 22% (529) felt their community energy organisation was “extremely” or “very” effective at this.
  - engaging with the local community. 26% (454) felt their organisation was “extremely” or “very” effective at this.
  - providing ideas and inspiration on actively supporting their community energy organisation and community energy more widely. 27% describing their organisation as “extremely” or “very” effective.

As noted above, most respondents did feel they were well informed about their co-op’s work.

*“I am VERY impressed with the co-operative’s effectiveness more generally, not least in demonstrating that co-operatives work, and we need lots more of them.”*

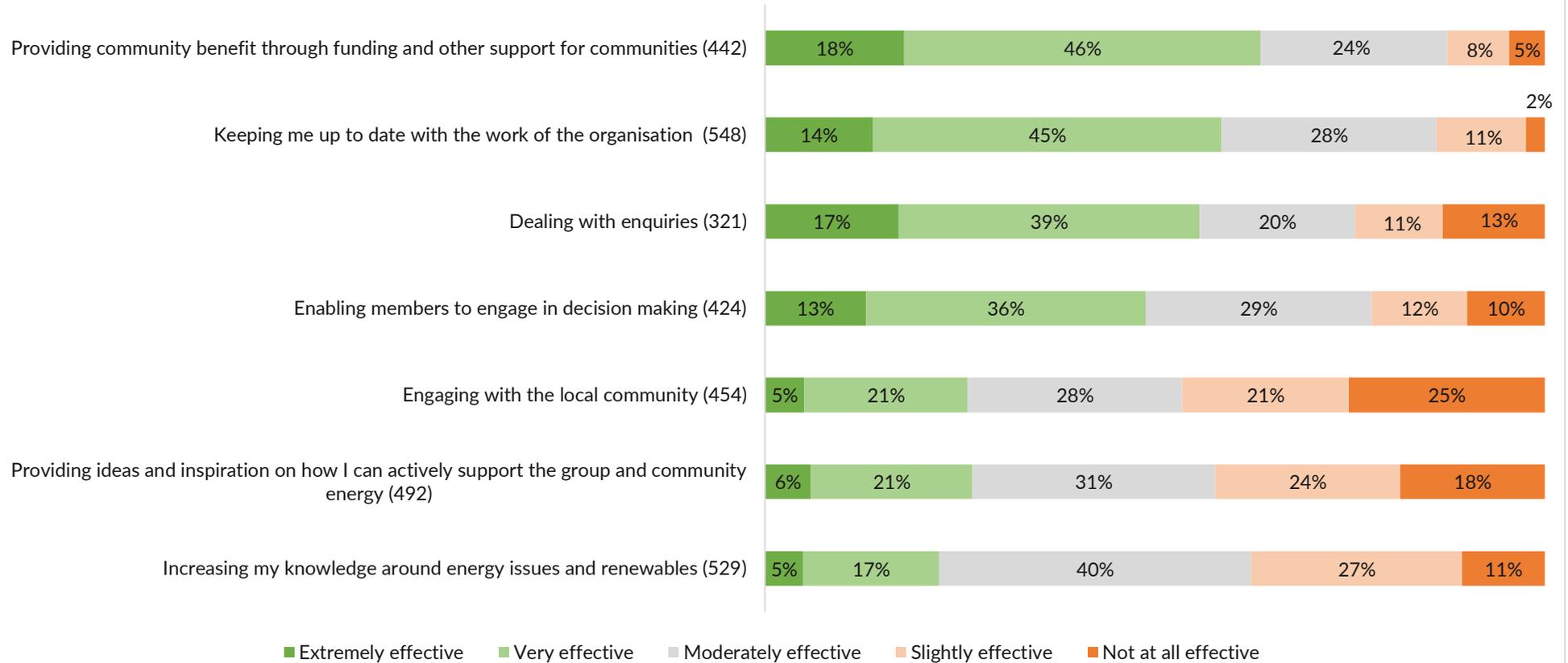
However, qualitative responses reveal that some respondents would welcome more feedback, especially if they were to be encouraged to share information with others.

*“It would be helpful and informative to know the data on how much energy has been saved by installing solar panels on local schools. It’s tricky, of course, as most people are overwhelmed by their e-mail inboxes. Maybe send out some informative short films about recent projects?”*

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<sup>9</sup> Repowering and Energy4All

## In your experience how effective has your community energy organisation been in doing the following?

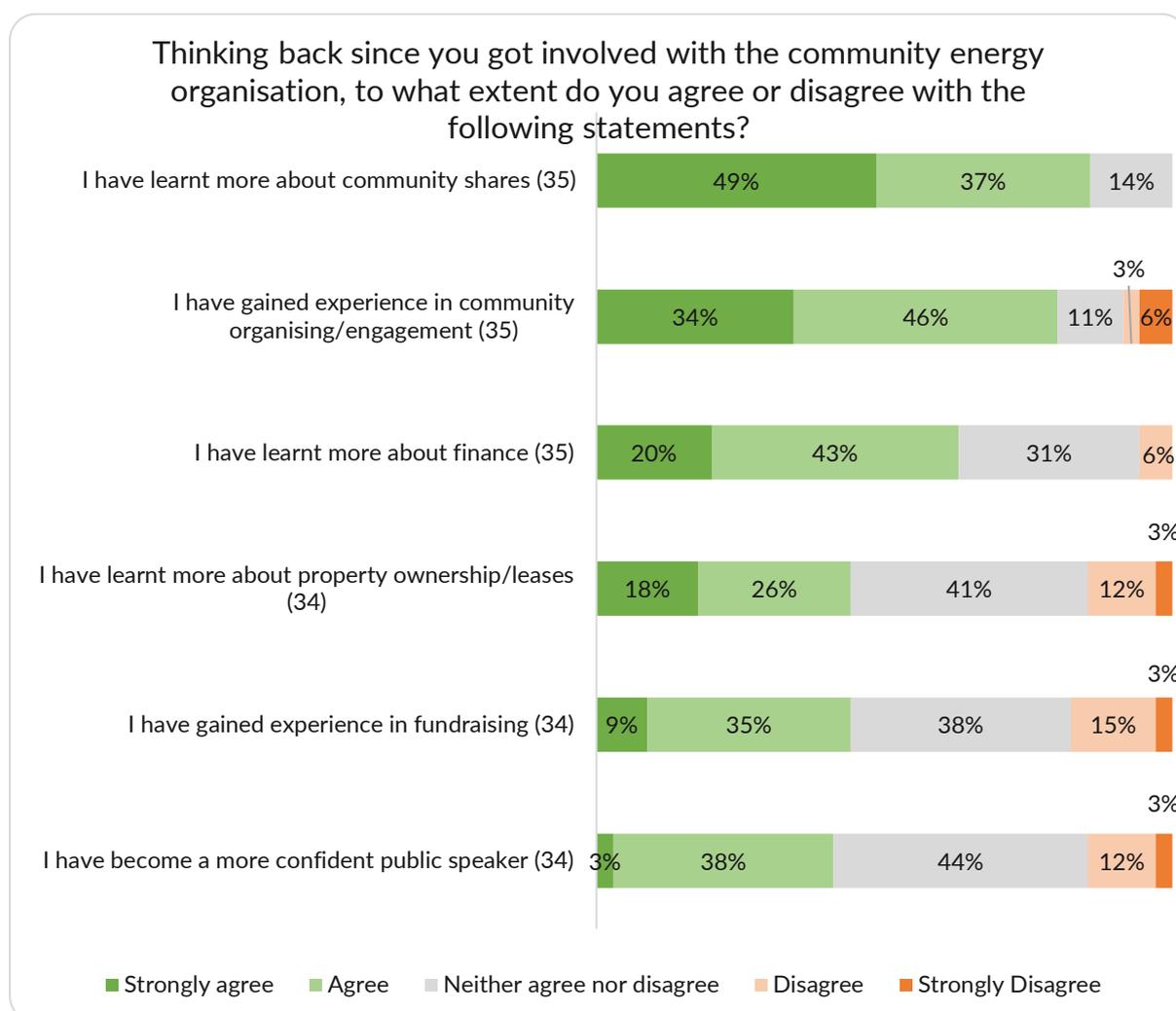


## 8 Volunteering for their community energy organisation

Additional questions were asked of board members

### 8.1 Benefits of volunteering<sup>10</sup>

- 86% of board members (35) agreed they had learnt more about community shares
- 80% of board members (35) agreed they had gained experience in community organising/engagement.



### 8.2 Employment

22% of board members (41) agreed that volunteering for their community energy organisation had helped them to gain employment or to progress, or change, their career.

*“Being a volunteer has given me a wealth of additional examples to draw on in interviews and has been beneficial in helping direct my future career in sustainability.”*

<sup>10</sup> Energy4All and Repowering only

*"It has given a real practical insight into community projects, setting up co-operatives and making projects happen! This has been very useful when advising others in my work as a consultant on community projects. I can advise from real practical experience."*

The main benefit of involvement was thought to be the opportunity to work alongside like-minded people and the satisfaction of addressing and overcoming challenges.

*"It's been a wonderful experience, gaining confidence and a new network of like-minded and enthusiastic people which has been incredible."*

*"A feeling of pride that we have achieved so much. A feeling of hope from how many people support us and do want to make a difference to their communities if given the chance."*



## CAG CONSULTANTS

Founded in 1983, CAG Consultants is an independent, employee-owned co-operative. We provide support, research and analysis, policy advice and training in a wide range of fields relating to sustainable development and climate change. We have practitioners in stakeholder & community involvement, regeneration, evaluation, economics and regulatory affairs. We deliver high quality, innovative and thoughtful work for our clients, who include government departments, local authorities, public agencies, the NHS and regeneration and community planning partnerships across the UK. We pride ourselves on our strong ethical approach and our commitment to social justice and improving and protecting the environment.

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