



Life in Lancashire Wave 16

Fieldwork 7 June – 14 July 2006
The county of Lancashire
Finding out about county council services
Using county council services
Use of public buildings
The Lancashire County Council website

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1 Executive Summary

Wave 16 of Life in Lancashire was sent to 2,367 members of the panel on 7 June. A reminder was sent to non-respondents on 28 June. The fieldwork ended on 14 July 2006.

The questionnaire covered attitudes to the county of Lancashire, explored how people access council services and whether their background affects this, and the Directgov and Lancashire County Council websites.

In total 1,461 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 62%.

1.1 Finding out about council services

- The vast majority of people (78%) have found out information about county councils services in the last 12 months. The most common information sought tends to be around council services, facilities and their opening times, and public transport information. These are also the most important information types, along with reporting problems.
- There is a wide range of channels preferred to access information and services, with the telephone, the internet and e-mail and leaflets and posters all popular. Black and ethnic minority respondents were most likely to access a service by visiting it.
- Generally speaking, 57% of respondents thought that the information provided met their needs fully. Only a third of BME respondents thought this though.
- The survey asked a series of brand attribute statements. A third agrees that the county council does a good job of caring for local people, and this increases to 41% of those aged 60 or over. A quarter (24%) agrees that the county council treats all parts of Lancashire fairly.
- About half of the panel say that the county council is too remote and impersonal (48%). Two in five agree that Lancashire County Council is committed to providing equal services for everyone (42%).

1.2 Using county council services

- 54% of respondents had used a service provided by Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months. Of these people, 85% thought that the service they received was good. One in seven said the county council's approach to their age made the service good.

- One in seven (14%) of respondents had experienced a difficulty using Lancashire County Council services, but this rises to over a third (36%) of BME respondents.

1.3 Use of public buildings

- In the main the public buildings that have been visited most recently by respondents were libraries (32%), county parks and picnic sites (18%), county council offices (7%) and schools (6%). A fifth of respondents had not visited any of the buildings.
- The buildings themselves tend to be easy to find and easy to get to by most modes of transport, with the exception of the train. The vast majority of people were satisfied with the buildings feeling welcoming, safe, having a good design and having a good range of facilities.
- Four in five of the panel thought that having staff that made them feel valued and wanted would help a lot. This was consistent across all sub-groups.
- Three in five black and ethnic minority respondents said having staff who could talk in different languages would help a lot. Respondents from a BME background were also significantly more likely to say that staff who are varied by race, religion and gender would help a lot, compared to white respondents.
- A third (36%) said having staff who are varied in terms of their age would help a lot, and this rises to 52% of respondents aged 60 or over. For being varied by disability 21% thought it would help a lot.

1.4 Key recommendations

- The internet is now one of the most important information sources, and it is important to keep the county council's website as easy to use and up-to-date as possible. However, there a wide range of preferred access types, and so ensure there are always a variety of options for different people; there is no 'one size fits all' access type.
- Undertake further qualitative research to build upon this research. There are particular needs to improve access provision for black and ethnic minority residents. There may also be access difficulties for older people, and that this, in part, could be intrinsically linked to disability. Conduct focus groups with people from these groups to inform the Customer Access Strategy.
- The most important factor overall is having staff that make people feel valued. Therefore staff training and ensuring staff deal with the public politely and efficiently is of paramount importance.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Life in Lancashire regularly since August 2001. A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

Each Life in Lancashire wave is themed. Firstly, it enables sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. And secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning ie the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be unrepresentative of the population as a whole. The current panel was recruited in September 2005.

3 Research Objectives

The main questions areas looked at:

- attitudes towards the county of Lancashire;
- ways to find out about Lancashire County Council services;
- whether people's background had affected their use of services; and
- the county council website.

4 Methodology

Wave 16 of Life in Lancashire was sent to 2,367 members of the panel on 7 June. A reminder was sent to non-respondents on 28 July. The fieldwork ended on 14 July 2006.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 1,461 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 62%.

All data are weighted by gender, age, ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. The weighted responses have been scaled down to match the effective response of 1,083 which is the equivalent size of the data if it had not been weighted and was a perfect random sample.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances that apply to the results in this survey. Sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample as well as the percentage results.

Number of respondents	50/50 + / -	30/70 + / -	10/90 + / -
50	14%	13%	8%
100	10%	9%	6%
200	7%	6%	4%
500	4%	4%	3%
1000	3%	3%	2%
2000	2%	2%	1%

On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1,000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

5 Main Research Findings

A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.

5.1 Finding out about county council services

The vast majority of panel members (78%) have found out some information about county councils services in the last 12 months. The most common information sought is for council services (42%), facilities and their opening times (40%), and public transport information (25%).

Chart 1 - Which, if any, of the following information on county council services have you accessed in the last 12 months?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

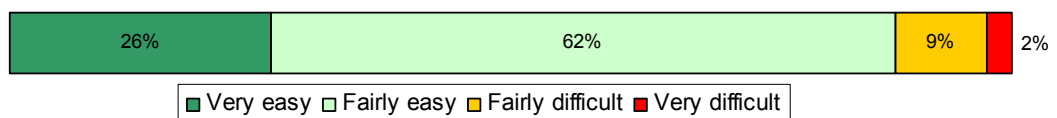
Generally speaking, 57% of respondents thought that the information provided met their needs fully, (shown in the chart overleaf). However BME respondents were only about half as likely to think this (32%). About three in ten (62%) of people thought it was fairly easy to obtain the information, but only 26% said it was very easy. Therefore there are opportunities to increase the ease of obtaining information and ensuring the information better meets people's needs.

Chart 2 - Generally speaking, did the information provided meet your needs?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Chart 3 - Generally speaking, how easy did you find obtaining the information you required?

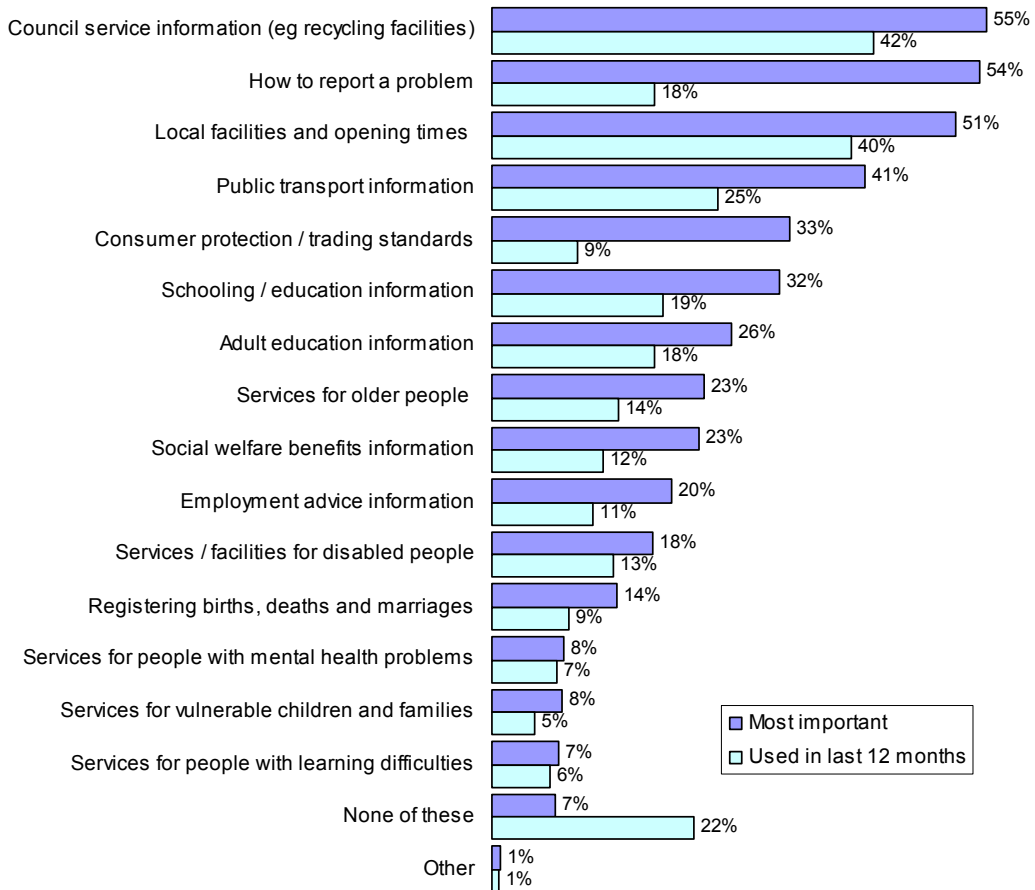


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

There were some differences between the information that the panel considered most important and useful to them, and that which had been actually used in the last 12 months. This is shown in the chart overleaf. While some frequently used information such as council service information and opening times are also considered to be important; information on how to report a problem and consumer protection information are used less often, but still considered important.

Looking demographically, employment advice information is particularly important for 16-24 years olds, with half rating it as important and useful (47%). Information on children’s schooling and education is significantly more important for panel members from an ethnic minority (51% BME against 30% of white respondents). Social welfare benefits information is also more likely to be rated important to BME respondents (51% BME against 21% of white respondents). Public transport information is more likely to be rated important by white respondents (46%) than black and ethnic minority panel members (26%).

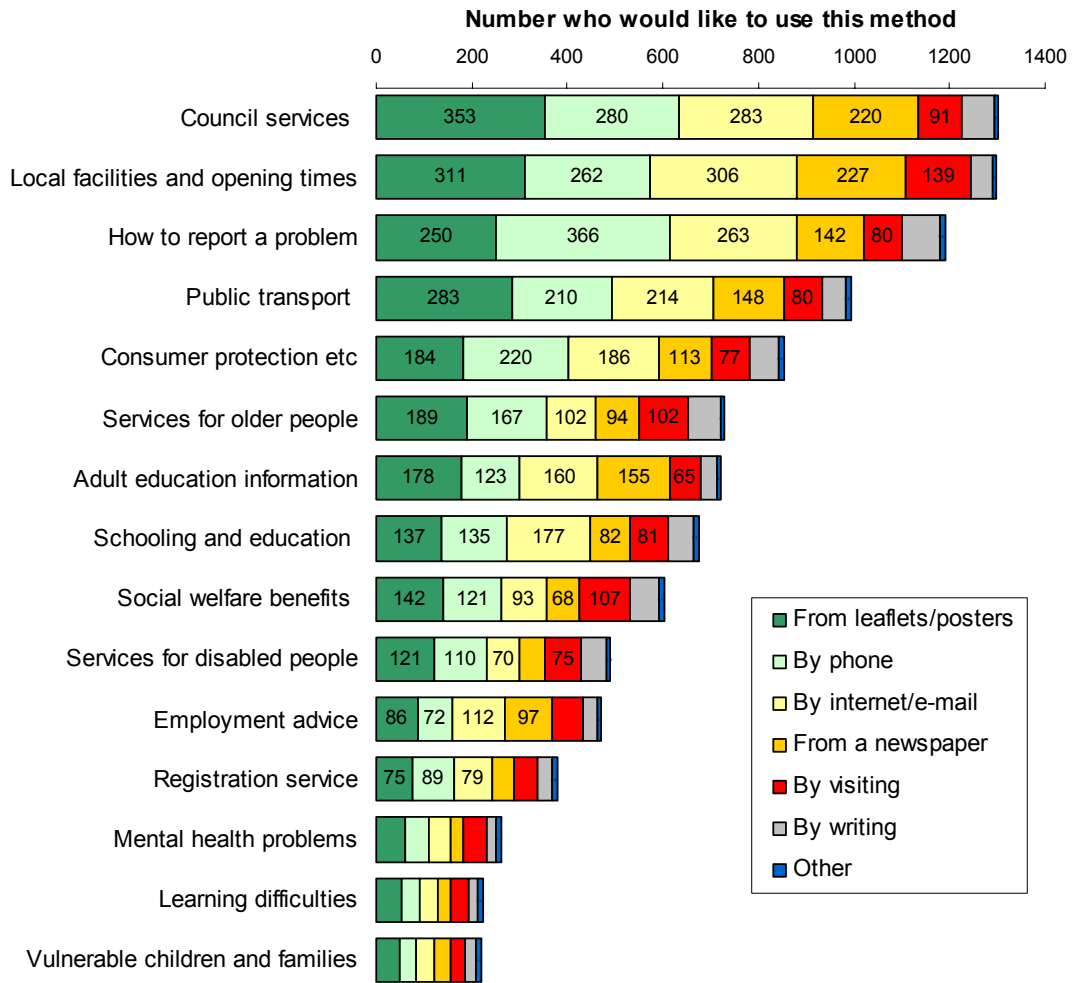
Chart 4 - What information on county council services is most important and useful to you? Vs Which, if any, of the following information on county council services have you accessed in the last 12 months?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Leaflets and posters, the telephone and internet are the most common preferred methods of finding out information, with the proportions varying depending on the information type. For example, the telephone is the most preferred type for how to report a problem.

Chart 5 - How would you like to access this information? (by information type)

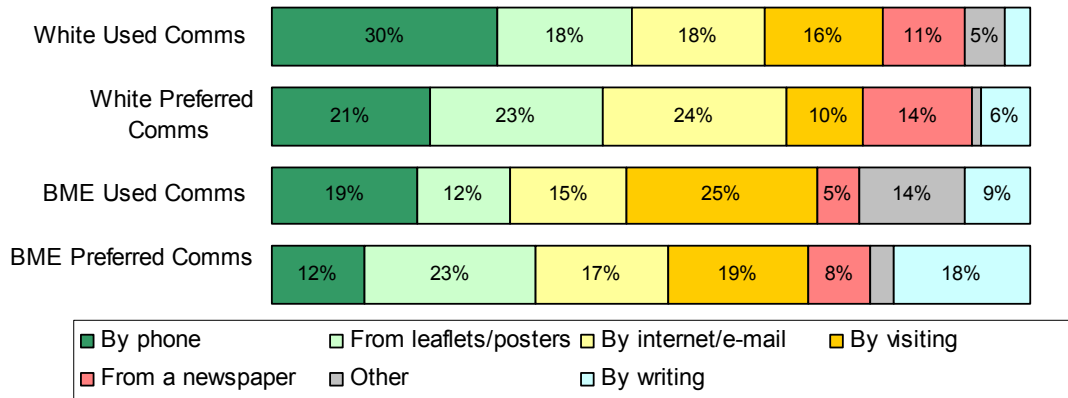


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461)

Comparing between total used and preferred communication type and ethnicity yields the chart below. This means that of all the communications used for all services by white respondents, three in ten were accessed by telephone, for example. So while the telephone was the most used type for white respondents, the internet was the most preferred. Visiting in person was the most used access type for BME respondents.

There is a wide spread of preferred access types, with similar proportions preferring the phone, leaflets and poster and the internet and email for white respondents. For black and ethnic minority respondents, leaflets and posters, visiting, writing and the internet are all preferred types. This shows that it is important to have multiple options for the public to access information and services.

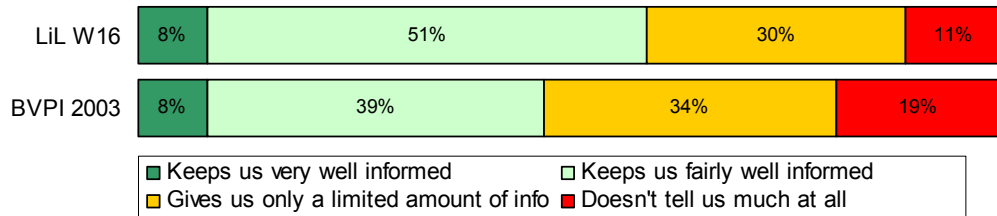
Chart 6 - What information on county council services is most important and useful to you? Vs Which, if any, of the following information on county council services have you accessed in the last 12 months? (Sum of all communication types by ethnicity)



Base respondents: White used communications (1218); white preferred communications (1238); BME used communications (48); BME preferred communications (50)

The panel were next asked how well informed the county council keeps them informed. This question was also asked on the BVPI 2003 survey and is shown in the chart below. The different methodology of the questionnaires, (the BVPI survey was a random mailing rather than a citizen’s panel), means the results are not directly comparable however.

Chart 7 - How well informed do you think Lancashire County Council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?

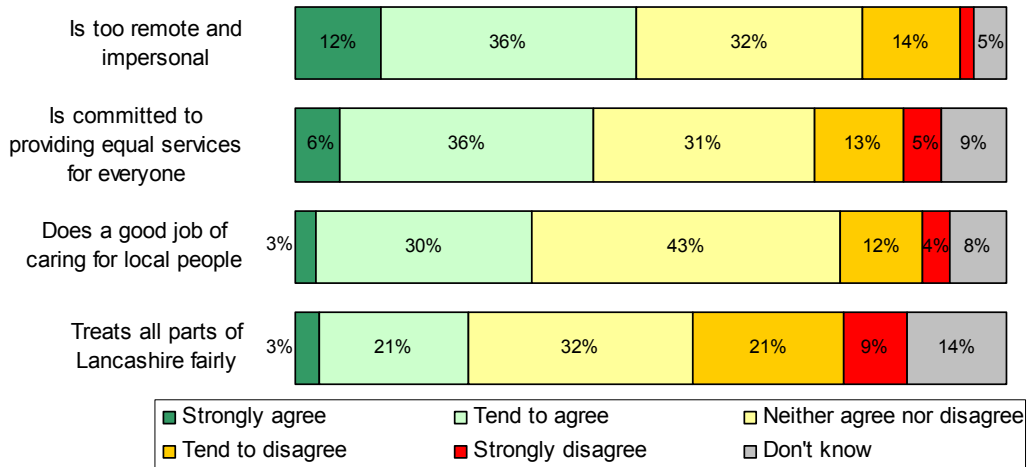


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Respondents were next asked how much they agreed with a variety of statements on the county council. They were most likely to agree that the council is too remote and impersonal (48% agreeing), with people from socio-economic group C2 most likely to agree, with 22% agreeing strongly. Two in five of the panel agreed that the county council is committed to providing equal services for everyone (42%). A third of respondents agree that the council does a good job of caring for local people (33%), though this is significantly higher amongst the over 60s and those who say they know about local government (41% and 40% respectively). The final statement that the council treats all parts of Lancashire fairly is disagreed with more than agreed. Residents of Burnley and Pendle are significantly

more likely to disagree than the panel overall (48% disagree in Burnley, 8% in Pendle).

Chart 8 - How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Lancashire County Council? Lancashire County Council...



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

5.2 Using Lancashire County Council services

The next section of the questionnaire asked for people’s experience of service from the county council, and whether this was affected by their background.

Just over half said they had used a Lancashire County Council service in the last 12 months.

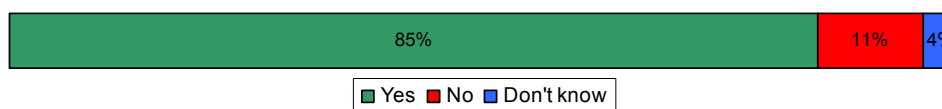
Chart 9 - Have you used any services provided by Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Five in six service users rated the service they had used as good (85%).

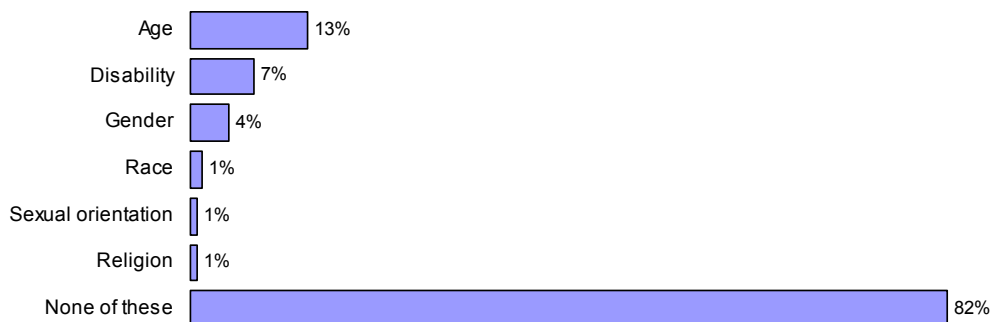
Chart 10 - Would you say that the service you received was good?



Base: All respondents who have used a county council service in the last 12 months (Unweighted 740, Weighted 591)

The majority of service users rating the service as good said that it was not due to any particular approach to their background (82%), though a quarter of service users aged over 60 said it was good because of the approach to their age (25%). One in six people with a disability said it was due to the approach to their disability (16%).

Chart 11 - Was the service good because of the county council’s approach to your...?



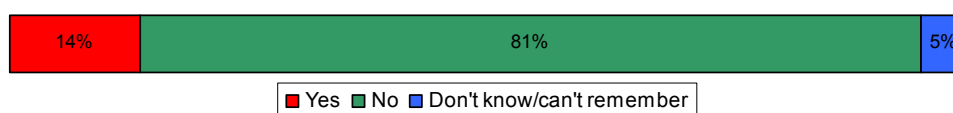
Base: All respondents saying the service they received was good (Unweighted 609, Weighted 489)

Service users were asked to give comments on how the county council’s approach made the service good. The grouped responses are shown in the table below.

How did the county council's approach to these things make the service good?		Count
Polite, helpful, friendly		41
Fast, comprehensive		28
Clear information, questions answered		12
Information in leaflets/internet easy to understand		10
Was treated well, considerate		9
Explaining details, took time to go through, listened		7
Knowledgeable, professional		6
Phoned them back, quick reply, kept informed		5
Provided a good service		4
Upgraded, excellent facilities		3
Treated equally		2
Dealt with issues based on my needs		2
Ease of access, straightforward procedures		1
Good staffing		1
Face-to-face contact		1
Home visit		1
Free services		1
Good staff training		1
Provided transport		1

One in seven (14%) of respondents had experienced a difficulty using Lancashire County Council services, as shown below, but this rises to over a third (36%) of BME service users.

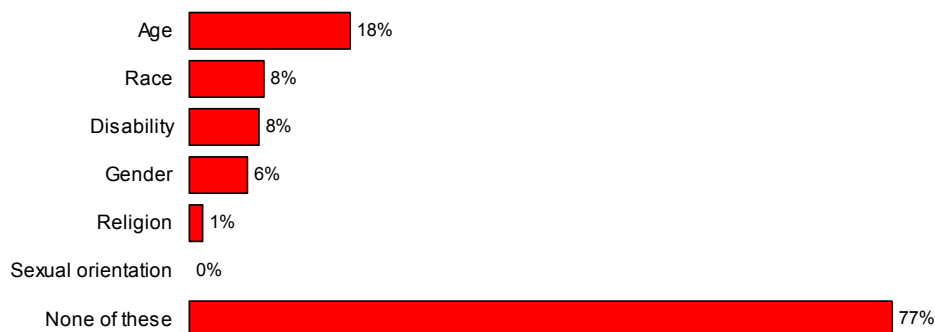
Chart 12 - Did you experience any difficulty using the county council's services?



Base: All respondents who have used a county council service in the last 12 months (Unweighted 740, Weighted 591)

Again, service users are unlikely to say an equality stream is the reason for their difficulties, though 18% do suggest their age as the reason. One in six BME service users who have had a difficulty said it was due to their race, but this was from a very small sample.

Chart 13 - Were any of the difficulties you received due to the county council’s approach to your...?



Base: All respondents saying they experienced difficulties using services (Unweighted 98, Weighted 78)

Asked for the reason for the difficulty, two people mentioned language difficulties, one of whom was from an ethnic minority.

How did the county council’s approach to these things give you difficulties in using the service?	Count
Language barriers – can’t interact properly	2
Unclear information	2
Reduction of services, eg bus routes, courses	2
Treated differently	1
Rushed, rude	1
Failed to consult properly	1
Equality of access, eg in rural areas	1
Not delivering the service	1
Floor surfaces difficult to negotiate	1
Too much positive discrimination	1
Staff not available to meet requirements	1
Lack of understanding of problems/needs	1
Having to chase people up	1
Telephone is always busy	1

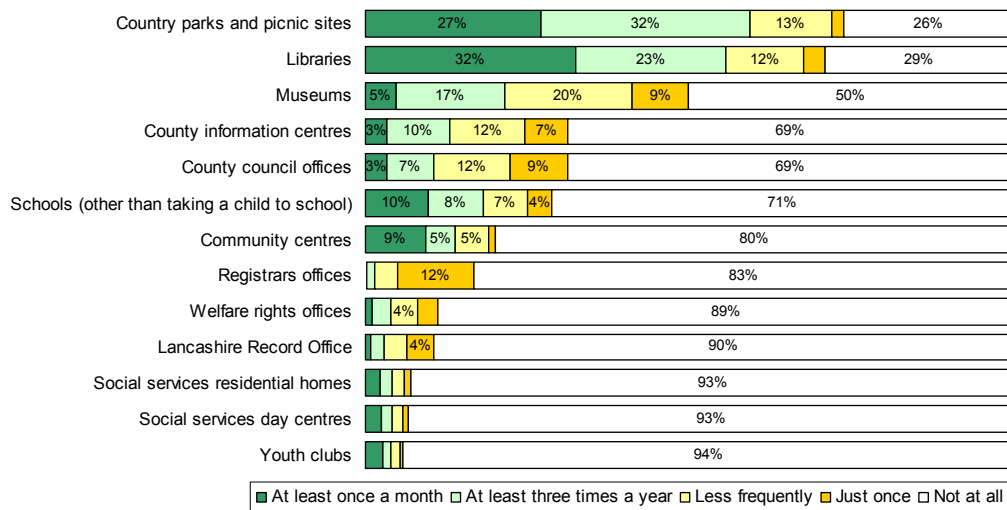
The final section asked those people experiencing a problem because of the county council’s approach to their equality strand, how the county council could overcome these difficulties. This is shown below:

How can Lancashire County Council overcome these difficulties?	
	Count
Consulting before proposals are made, listening to people	6
Personal attention, meeting individual needs	3
More funding, eg transport, IT courses	3
Contacts and responsibilities, tell people what is done	2
Plain language	2
Freephone telephone, more comprehensive listings	2
Tolerance and mindfulness	2
Better internal communication, check information first	1
Consider family circumstances	1
More accessible	1
More staff and time to help	1
Treat everyone alike	1
More young people in public facing jobs	1
More equality and diversity training	1

5.3 Use of public buildings

The next section asked how members of the panel used Lancashire County Council buildings, and the first section asked how often they are used. Only parks and picnic sites, libraries and museums have been used by at least half the panel in the last year.

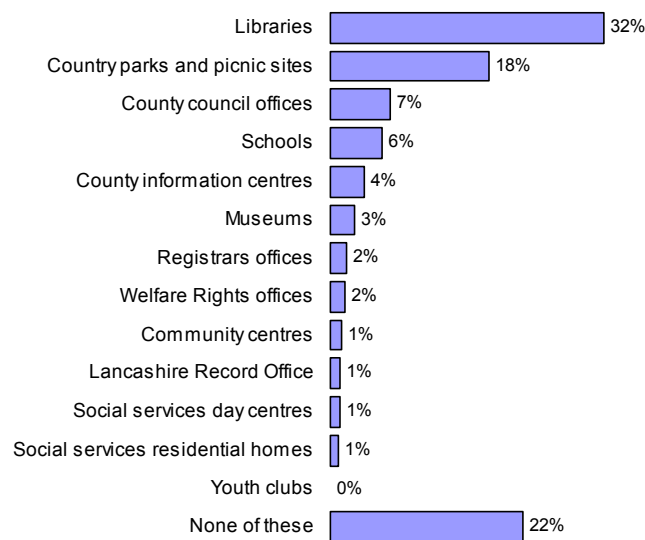
Chart 14 - In the last 12 months, how often, if at all, have you visited/used each of the following to access Lancashire County Council services...?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Most recently, respondents are most likely to have used a library (32%) or a country park and picnic site (18%). A fifth of the panel has not visited any building (22%).

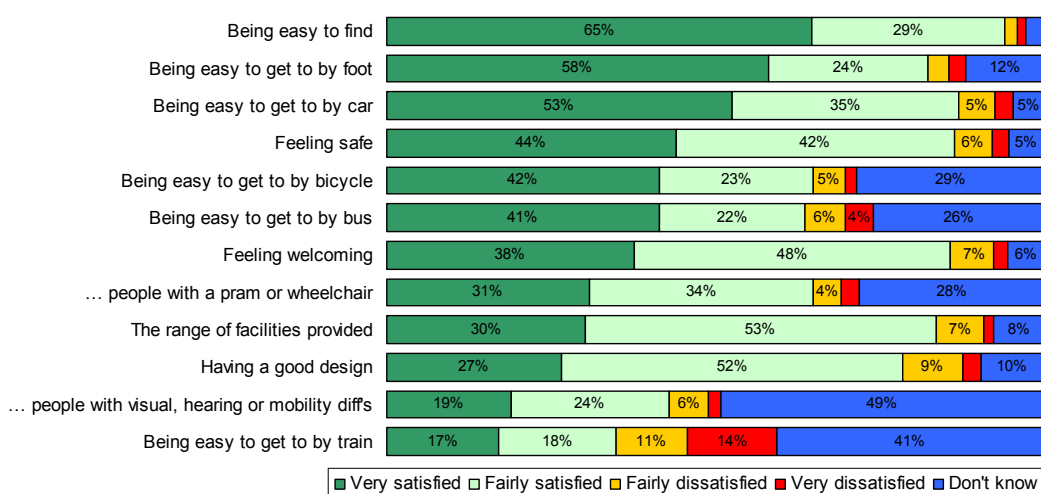
Chart 15 - Which one of the following have you visited most recently to access county council services...?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

The buildings themselves tend to be easy to find and easy to get to by most modes of transport, with the exception of the train. The vast majority of people were satisfied with the buildings feeling welcoming, safe, having a good design and having a good range of facilities. There is, however, the opportunity to make more people very satisfied, rather than fairly satisfied, by making improvements to these factors. In terms of meeting the needs of people with prams, in a wheelchair, or with visual, hearing or mobility difficulties, a significant number of respondents did not know. Again there are opportunities to increase satisfaction in these areas.

Chart 16 - Thinking about this building, how satisfied are you with it in terms of...?

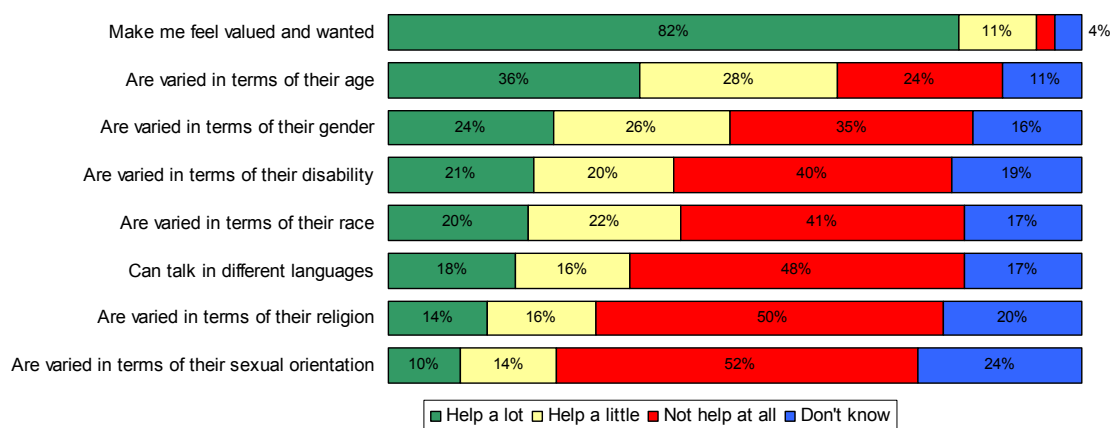


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

The final question in this section asked if a number of factors would help respondents access county council services. The vast majority of the panel said that having staff that made them feel valued and wanted would help a lot (82%). This was consistent across all sub-groups. While 48% of respondents said that having staff who could talk in different languages would not help at all, 18% said it would help a lot. This increases significantly to 62% of black and minority ethnic respondents who said it would help a lot.

A third (36%) said having staff that are varied in terms of their age would help a lot, and this rises to 52% of respondents aged 60+. In terms of staff who are varied by gender, 24% thought it would help a lot, rising to 42% of black and ethnic minority respondents. Having staff that are varied in terms of their race would help 20% of respondents a lot overall, rising to 46% of BME respondents and 33% from DE social groupings. One in seven felt that having staff who are varied in religion would help a lot, increasing to 41% of BMEs. For being varied by disability one in five thought it would help a lot, and this was 31% for respondents with a disability. One in ten of the panel thought that having staff varied by their sexual orientation would help a lot and there were no significant differences by equality strand. The preference for varied staff from people from a black or ethnic minority background is particularly important since BME respondents were more likely to visit a service in person than white respondents, as shown earlier.

Chart 17 - Which of the following, if any, do you feel would help you access county council services? Having staff who...



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

6 Summary

6.1 Finding out about council services

- The vast majority of people (78%) have found out information about county councils services in the last 12 months. The most common information sought tends to be around council services, facilities and their opening times, and public transport information.
- The channels used vary by service, but predominantly tend to be by telephone. The internet and e-mail are popular channels, as are letters and posters.
- Generally speaking, 57% of respondents thought that the information provided met their needs fully. But for BME respondents only 32% thought this. 62% of people thought it was fairly easy to obtain the information, but only 26% said it was very easy.
- The information that people think is the most important and useful to them is again council services, facilities and their opening times and public transport information. The other important element is information on how to report a problem.
- There is a wide spread of preferred communication type to access information on services. This means that for the best service access there needs to be options for the public to choose the type that is most relevant to them.
- The survey asked a series of brand attribute statements. A third agree that the county council does a good job of caring for local people – this increases to 41% of those aged 60+. A quarter (24%) agrees that the county council treats all parts of Lancashire fairly – this increases to 38% of BME respondents. But 48% of Burnley residents and 38% of Pendle residents disagree, compared to 30% overall.
- About half of the panel say that the county council is too remote and impersonal (48%). Two in five agree that Lancashire County Council is committed to providing equal services for everyone (42%).

6.2 Using county council services

- 54% of respondents had used a service provided by Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months. Of these people, 85% thought that the service they received was good. Respondents were asked if this good service was because of their equality strand. Whilst 82% said it was not because of the county council's approach, there was

some good service because of the county council's particular approach. One in seven said the county council's approach to their age made the service good (25% for those aged 60+).

- One in seven (14%) of respondents had experienced a difficulty using Lancashire County Council services, but this rises to over a third (36%) of BME respondents. Although 77% of people had not experienced a difficulty using the service because of the county council's approach to their equality strand, 18% of those experiencing a problem said it was because of their age – this rises to 25% of disabled respondents who had experienced a problem. Eight per cent of those experiencing a problem said it was because of their race, and 8% because of their disability.

6.3 Use of public buildings

- In the main the public buildings that have been visited most recently by respondents were libraries (32%), county parks and picnic sites (18%), county council offices (7%) and schools (6%). A fifth of respondents had not visited any of the buildings.
- The buildings themselves tend to be easy to find and easy to get to by most modes of transport, with the exception of the train. The vast majority of people were satisfied with the buildings feeling welcoming, safe, having a good design and having a good range of facilities. There is, however, the opportunity to make more people very satisfied, rather than fairly satisfied, by making improvements to these factors.
- Four in five of the panel thought that having staff that made them feel valued and wanted would help a lot. This was consistent across all sub-groups.
- Three in five black and minority ethnic respondents said having staff who could talk in different languages would help a lot. Respondents from a BME background were also significantly more likely to say that staff who are varied by race, religion and gender would help a lot, compared to white respondents. This is particularly important since BME respondents were more likely to visit a service in person than white respondents.
- A third (36%) said having staff who are varied in terms of their age would help a lot, and this rises to 52% of respondents aged 60+. For being varied by disability 21% thought it would help a lot, and this was 31% for respondents with a disability.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Looking by type of communication for accessing information on council services, there is a wide spread of preferred information type. Certainly, on previous preferred communications type questions, the internet has come a long way behind leaflets for example. It may well be now that with wider use of the internet, (and not just amongst younger age groups), the internet is now as important an information source. It is therefore important to keep the county council's website as easy to use and up-to-date as possible. However, there a wide range of preferred access types by respondents, and so there needs to be options for different people to access at different times; there is no 'one size fits all' access type.

The research here particularly shows that there are needs to improve access provision for black and ethnic minority residents, with one in three BME service users having a difficulty and fewer BME respondents happy with council information they have obtained. Black and ethnic minority residents are more likely to prefer staff that can speak different languages, and are varied by race religion and gender. It has also shown there may be access difficulties for older people, and that this, in part, could be intrinsically linked to disability. This research has given the broad picture in quantitative terms. It is now important to explore and probe the specific needs of the sub-groups in more depth in order to effectively inform the Customer Access Strategy. It should be noted however, that more important than any of these factors is having staff that make the public feel valued. Therefore staff training and ensuring staff deal with the public politely and efficiently is of paramount importance.

8 Appendix

8.1 Socio-Economic Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A

- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B

- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1

- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2

- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D

- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E

- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income

8.2 Marked Up Questionnaire