



Life in Lancashire Wave 16

The Lancashire County Council Website

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 July. 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 Direct.gov.uk and the Lancashire County Council website

- About one in three of the panel (31%) say they have heard of Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk), and a third of these people have seen or heard advertising for it in the last month (33%).
- People are most likely to have seen the advertising on the internet (45%) and on television (39%).
- About two in five people say have done something as a result of seeing or hearing the advertising (41%). People who have seen the advertising on a poster are most likely to have done something (61%).

1.2 The Lancashire County Council website

- Information on road works (45% rating as very important), information on school terms (40%), and voluntary groups and organisations (34%) are seen as most important areas to have on the website.
- The most important things to be able to do on the county council's website are being able to report problems (50% very important) and being able to make a formal complaint against the county council (39%).
- Applying for a job through the website is seen as particularly important for those aged 16-24 years (64%), full time workers (44%) and people from a BME background (56%).
- When compared to the question on information, respondents see being able to do something on the website as more important than being able to find information.

- The most common suggestions for content on the county council's website are for a calendar of events or being able to make a complaint.

1.3 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.

1.4 Recommendations

1.4.1 The Lancashire County Council website

Many of the most important information types and things to do on the website are already available, and it may just be necessary to make them clearer on the website. One way would be by adding a link to report highways faults to the homepage. Also consider the possibility of adding a calendar of events to the website.

One area that does seem important to develop is to allow online applications. Currently, the website only allows the download of the relevant form, but actually applying for jobs was important for most of the panel, particularly those aged less than 25 years. This should be a priority area to develop. Use the results of this survey, together with the research on use of the website from May 2006 to advise on a new website design or layout.

1.4.2 Finding out about council services

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.

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

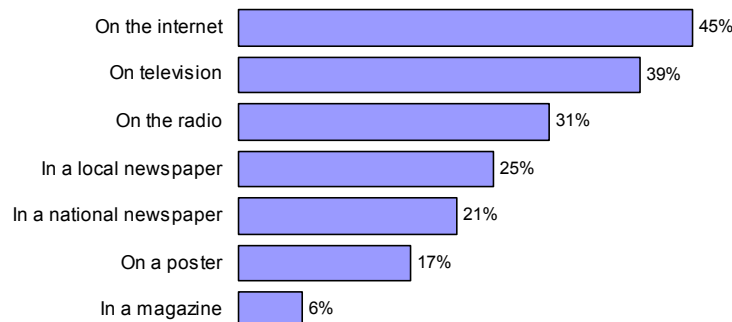
A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.

5.1 Public services on the internet

The final section of the questionnaire dealt with the public services website Directgov and the required services for the Lancashire County Council website.

About one in three of the panel (31%) say they have heard of Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk), and a third of these people have seen or heard advertising for it in the last month (33%). The youngest age group, of people aged 16-24 are most likely both be aware of Directgov (54%), and to have seen advertising for it in the last month (62% of those who have heard of it).

Chart 1 - And where did you see or hear the advertising for Directgov?



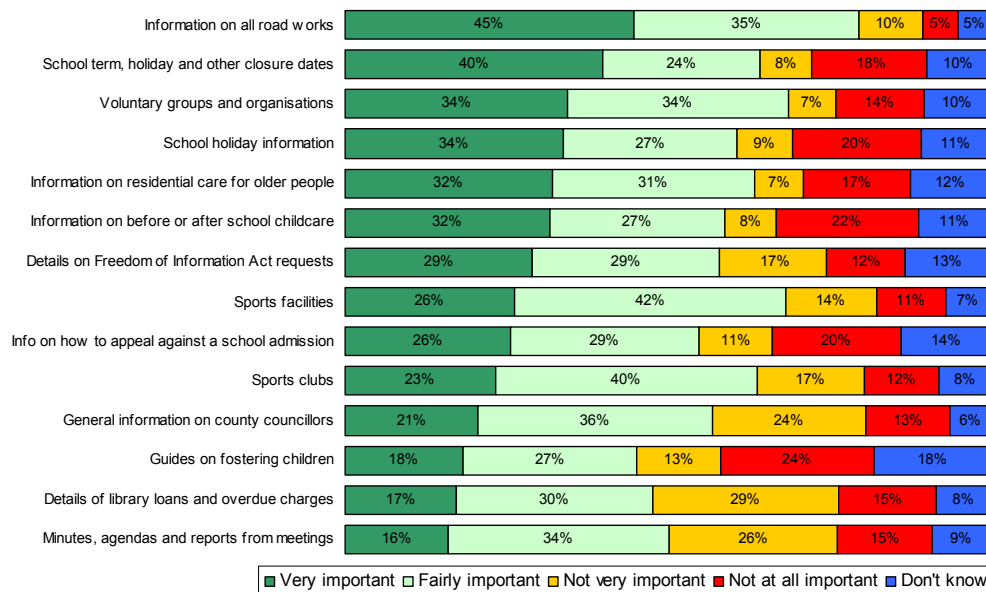
Base: All respondents exposed to advertising for Directgov in the last month (Unweighted 148, Weighted 147)

About two in five people say have done something as a result of seeing or hearing the advertising (41%). People who have seen the advertising on a poster are most likely to have done something (61%).

5.2 The Lancashire County Council website

The final section of the questionnaire looked at accessing services via the Lancashire County Council website (www.lancashire.gov.uk). Firstly, the questionnaire asked about the importance of being able to get various information types from the website. Information on road works (45% rating as very important), on school terms (40%), and voluntary groups and organisations that can offer support (34%) are seen as most important areas to have on the website.

Chart 2 - How important, if at all, is it to be able to get information on each of the following from the Lancashire County Council website?

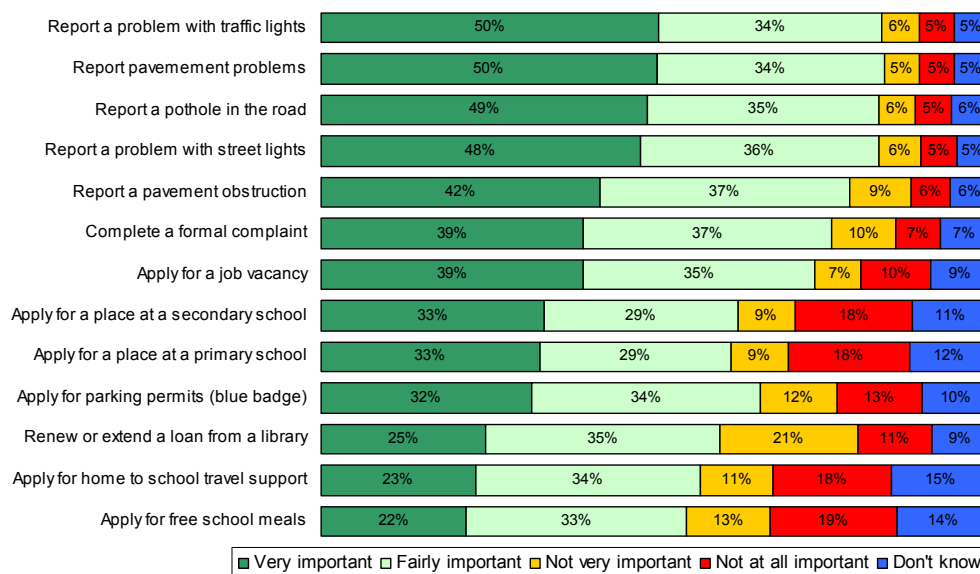


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Looking demographically, information on childcare is seen as most important for panel members aged 16-24 years or those with children in the household (50% and 41% rating as very important respectively). Those aged 16-24 years are also most likely to rate information on sports clubs and sports facilities as very important (42% and 44%). Black and ethnic minority respondents are significantly more likely to rate details of voluntary groups and library loans as very important (47% and 29%).

The second question focused on things that people are able to do on the county council website. The most important were reporting problems (eg with traffic lights, potholes, street lights) and being able to make a formal complaint against the county council (39% very important). When compared to the question above on information, respondents see being able to perform a task on the website as more important than being able to find out information.

Chart 3 - And how important, if at all, is it to be able to carry out these services on the Lancashire County Council website?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Completing a complaint against the county council online is seen as significantly more important for BME respondents (52% rating very important) and those aged 16-24 years (67%). People with children in the household are more likely to want to be able to apply for primary school places (41%) and apply for free school meals over the internet (25%). Applying for a job through the website is seen as particularly important for those aged 16-24 years (64%), full time workers (44%) and people from a BME background (56%).

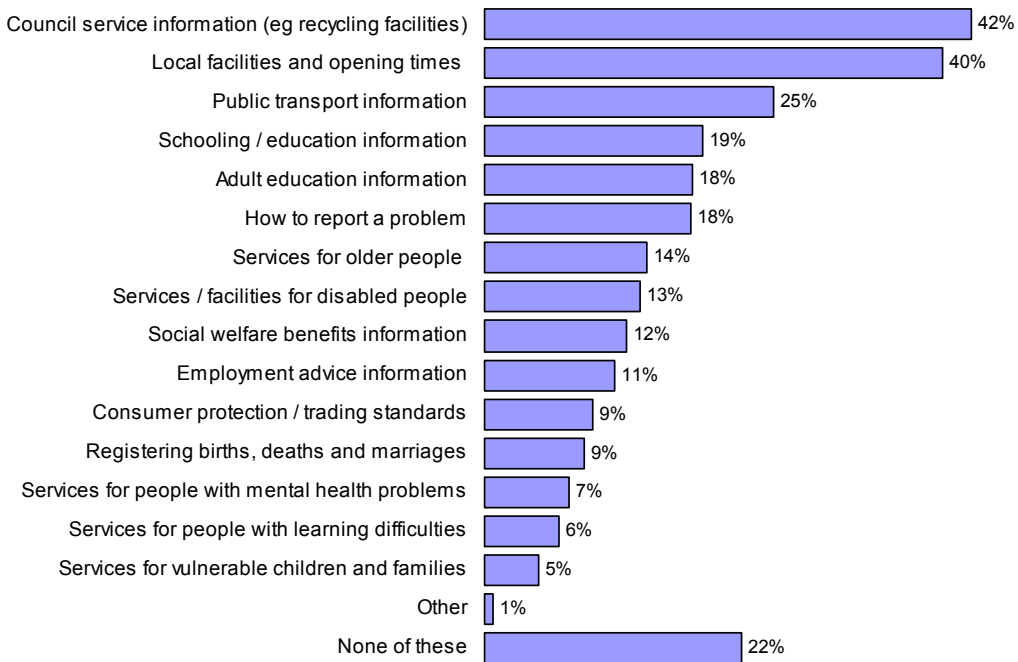
The final question on the survey asked whether members of the panel had any other suggestions for content on the county council's website. These are shown in the table below. The most common answers are for a calendar of events or being able to make a complaint. Information on roadworks, complaints and mapping data are already all available from the homepage of the internet, so it may be only that this information needs to be made clearer.

What else would you like to be able to get or do using the Lancashire County Council website?	
	Count
Events calendar for all events in county, days out information	19
Making a complaint, report a problem and track progress	18
Register query online, sent on directly, get a response	13
Find out about the work of councillors, contact information	9
Recycling eg collection dates, how to	9
View planning applications, planning information	8
How to access services and what we provide	7
Highways eg road traffic, plans	7
Local people's views on services, suggestion scheme	7
Public transport	6
Accountability eg spending	6
Maps - footpaths, rights of way, directions	5
Housing	5
Telephone directory for services	4
Student support	4
Online questionnaires	3
Recommended suppliers eg builders, plumbers	3
Care services and support for the elderly	3
Make it user friendly, especially search engine	2
Being environmentally friendly	2
Leisure centres eg classes, opening times	1
Vote on elections	1
Download teacher support information	1
Find out about employment law	1
Environmental health information	1
Information by district	1
Police station numbers and hours of work	1
More depth to information already there	1
Tourist information	1
Voluntary services	1
Family history	1

5.3 Finding out about county council services

The next section of the questionnaire looked into how get their information on 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 4 - 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)

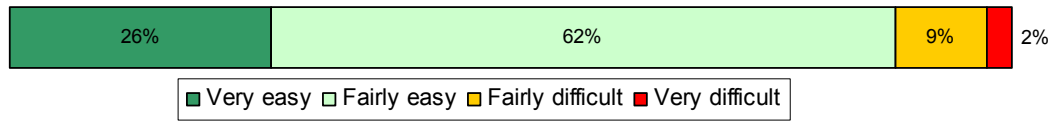
Generally speaking, 57% of respondents thought that the information provided met their needs fully, (shown in the chart overleaf). However BME respondents were only about half as likely to think this (32%). About three in ten (62%) of people thought it was fairly easy to obtain the information, but only 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 5 - Generally speaking, did the information provided meet your needs?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

Chart 6 - Generally speaking, how easy did you find obtaining the information you required?

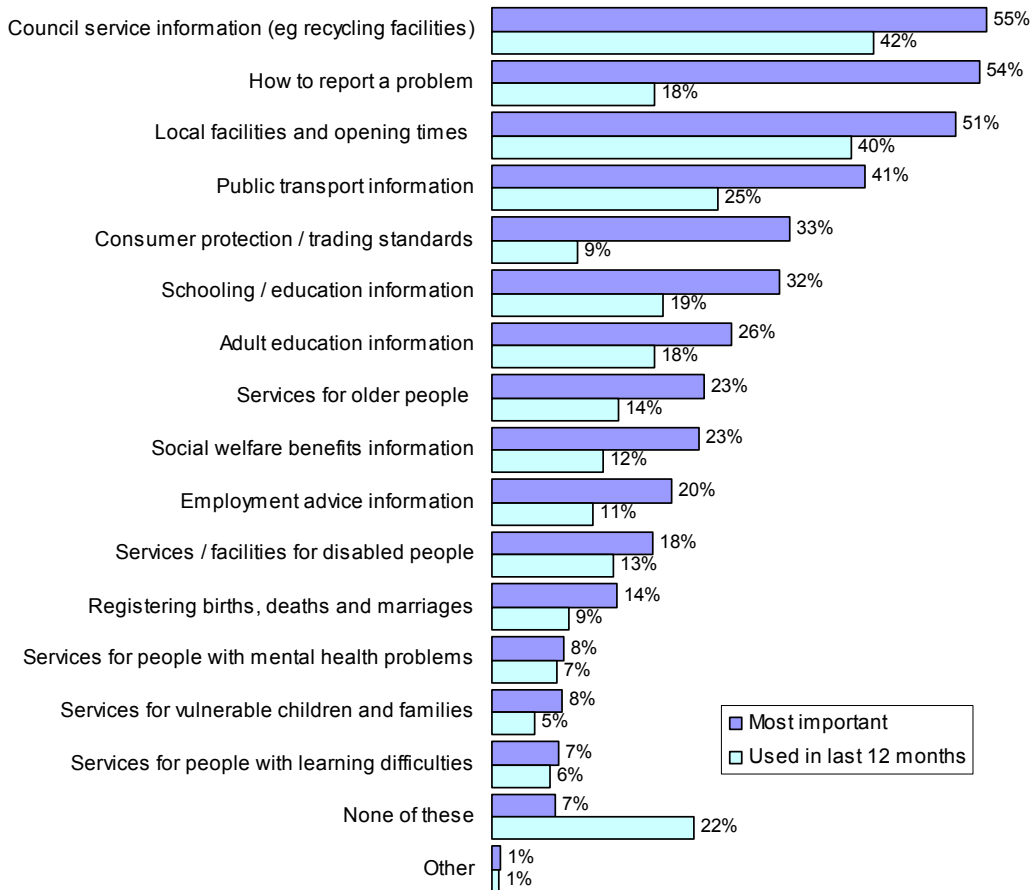


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461, Weighted 1083)

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%).

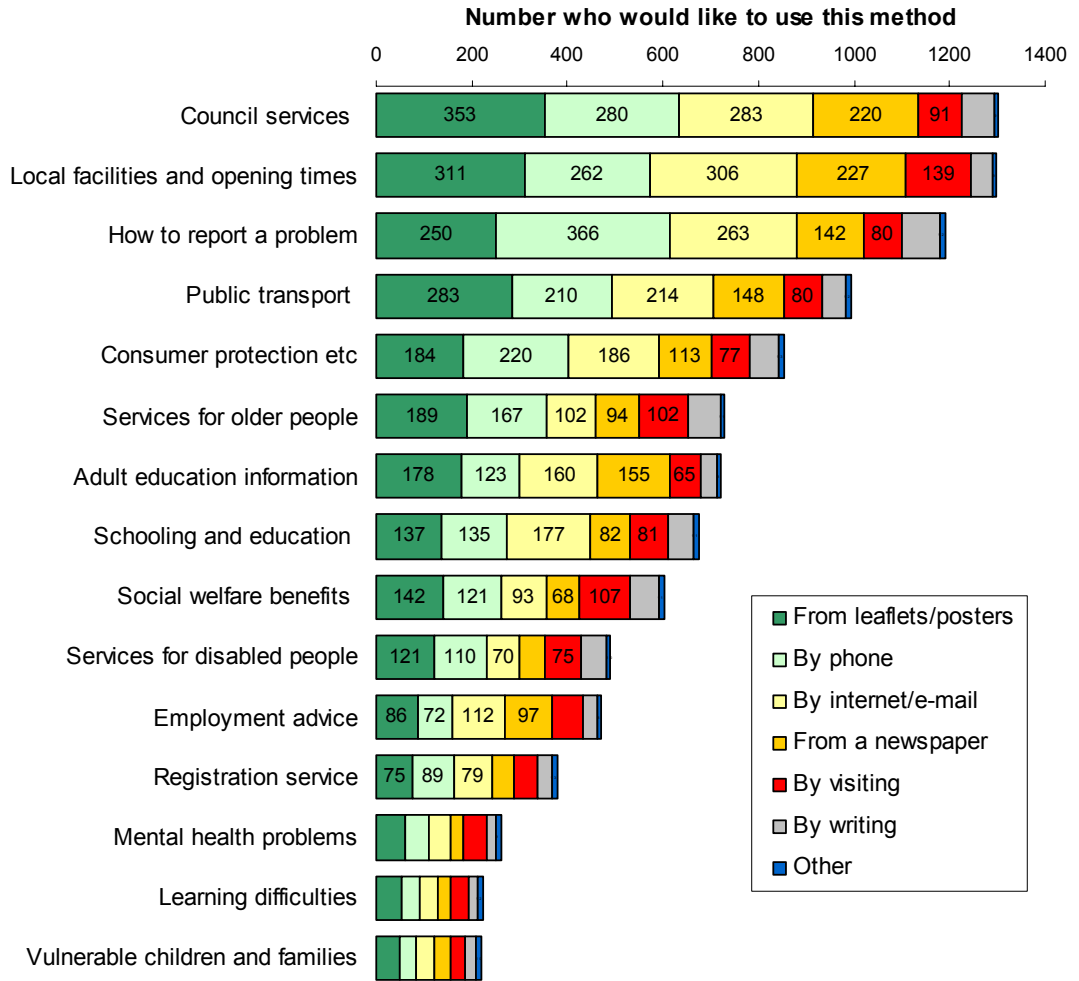
Chart 7 - What information on county council services is most important and useful to you? Vs Which, if any, of the following information on county council services have you accessed in the last 12 months?



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

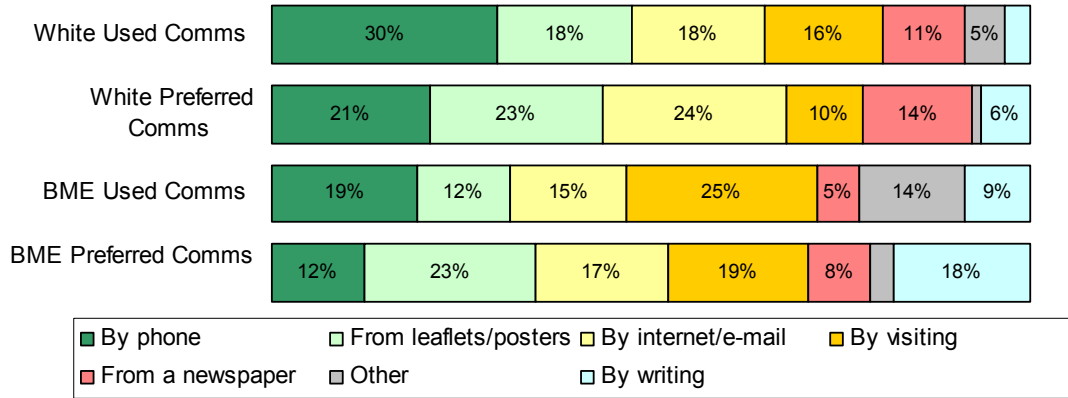


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1461)

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 9 - 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)

6 Summary

6.1 Public services on the internet

- About one in three of the panel (31%) say they have heard of Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk), and a third of these people have seen or heard advertising for it in the last month (33%). The youngest age group, of people aged 16-24 are most likely both be aware of Directgov (54%), and to have seen advertising for it in the last month.
- People are most likely to have seen the advertising on the internet (45%) and on television (39%).
- About two in five people say have done something as a result of seeing or hearing the advertising (41%). People who have seen the advertising on a poster are most likely to have done something (61%).

6.2 The Lancashire County Council website

- Information on road works (45% rating as very important), information on school terms (40%), and voluntary groups and organisations (34%) are seen as most important areas to have on the website.
- The most important things to be able to do on the county council's website are being able to report problems (50% very important) and being able to make a formal complaint against the county council (39%).
- Applying for a job through the website is seen as particularly important for those aged 16-24 years (64%), full time workers (44%) and people from a BME background (56%).
- When compared to the question on information, respondents see being able to do something on the website as more important than being able to find information.
- The most common suggestions for content on the county council's website are for a calendar of events or being able to make a complaint.

6.3 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.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Public services on the internet

The most effective method of advertising the Directgov website has been over the internet, perhaps surprisingly, given that the some of the population not have internet access. Also the youngest age group are most likely to have heard of it, perhaps because of two of the advertising means being online and on radio.

7.2 The Lancashire County Council website

Many of the most important information types and things to do on the website are already available, and it may just be necessary to make them clearer on the website. One way would be by adding a link to report highways faults to the homepage. Also consider the possibility of adding a calendar of events to the website.

One area that does seem important to develop is to allow online applications. Currently, the website only allows the download of the relevant form, but actually applying for jobs was important for most of the panel, particularly those aged less than 25 years. This should be a priority area to develop.

Use the results of this survey, together with the research on use of the website from May 2006 to advise on a new website design or layout.

7.3 Finding out about council services

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.

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