



in Lancashire

Life in Lancashire Wave 15

Fieldwork 15 February – 24 March 2006
Contacting Lancashire County Council
Contacting your district council
Road Safety
Living in Lancashire

Prepared by Steven Knuckey
Research and Strategy Officer
Lancashire County Council
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Contents

1	Executive Summary	4
1.1	Contacting the county council.....	4
1.2	Contacting the local district council.....	5
1.3	Buying services online.....	5
1.4	Road safety.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.5	Living in Lancashire.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6	Recommendations.....	6
1.6.1	Contacting the council.....	6
1.6.2	Buying goods and services online.....	6
1.6.3	Road safety.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2	Introduction	7
3	Research Objectives	8
4	Methodology	9
4.1	Limitations.....	9
5	Main Research Findings	10
5.1	Contacting Lancashire County Council.....	10
5.2	Contacting your district, borough or city council.....	17
5.3	Buying goods and services online.....	20
6	Summary	21
6.1	Contacting the county council.....	21
6.2	Contacting your district, borough or city council.....	22
6.3	Buying goods and services online.....	22
7	Conclusions	23
7.1	Contacting the council.....	23
7.2	Buying goods and services online.....	23
8	Appendix	25
8.1	Socio-Economic Group Definitions.....	25
8.2	Marked Up Questionnaire.....	26

Table of Figures

Chart 1 - Have you contacted Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months with a problem, query or request for information?	10
Chart 2 - a) Which services or departments have you contacted in the last 12 months?.....	11
b) And which one service or department did you contact most recently?	11
Chart 3 - Now, thinking about the last time you contacted Lancashire County Council, why did you contact them?	11
Chart 4 - How did you last get in contact with Lancashire County Council?.....	12
Chart 5 - Still thinking about the last time you dealt with the council, was your query or problem resolved by the first person you discussed it with?.....	12
Chart 6 - Was your query or problem resolved eventually during this first call/visit?.....	13
Chart 7 - And, was getting hold of the right person...?	13
Chart 8 - And, thinking of the last time you contacted Lancashire County Council, did you find the staff...?	14
Chart 9 - Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome of contacting Lancashire County Council?	14
Chart 10 -And, was getting hold of the right person... vs	15
Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome of contacting Lancashire County Council?	15
Chart 11 -How important, if at all, is each of the following to you when you contact the council...?	15
Chart 12 -Which, if any, of the following would make it easier for you to get in touch with Lancashire County Council?	16
Chart 13 -How interested, if at all, are you in using the following devices to access Lancashire County Council information and services?	17
Chart 14 -Have you contacted your district, borough or city council in the last 12 months with a problem, query or request for information?	17
Chart 15 -a) Which services or departments have you contacted in the last 12 months?.....	18
b) And which one service or department did you contact most recently?	18
Chart 16 -Now, thinking about the last time you contacted your district, borough or city council, why did you contact them?	18
Chart 17 -How did you last get in contact with your district, borough or city council?	19
Chart 18 -And overall how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the final outcome of contacting your district, borough or city council?	19
Chart 19 -Have you ever made a payment online using your debit or credit card details? This can be for any goods or services you have ever purchased.	20
Chart 20 -If you needed to pay for goods or services by Lancashire County Council, would you make a payment online using your debit or credit card?	20

1 Executive Summary

Wave 15 of Life in Lancashire was sent to 2,406 members of the panel on 15 February. A reminder was sent to non-respondents on 8 March. The fieldwork ended on 24 March 2006.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 1,640 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 68%.

1.1 Contacting the county council

- Three in ten of the citizens' panel have contacted Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months (30%).
- People contacting were most likely to do so to ask for information or help and advice (36% and 34%), or to report a problem (30%). The majority did so by telephone (70%).
- Two in five people (41%) did not have their problem resolved by the first person they spoke to (apart from the secretary). These people are only half as likely to be satisfied with the service they receive than those whose query was resolved by the first person they spoke to.
- The majority of respondents were satisfied with the final outcome of their call or visit (64%), though one in six said their query was still not resolved (16%).
- Respondents who contacted the council to complain were the least satisfied with the final outcome of their query, (with 34% dissatisfied and 26% saying their complaint is still not resolved). People who said that finding the right person was easy were much more satisfied (81%) than those who described it as difficult (28%).
- All factors of customer service were seen as important, especially the accuracy of information and the helpfulness of staff (90% and 87% definitely agree respectively).
- A single telephone number for the county council is seen as the highest priority for getting in touch easier (56%), especially by respondents aged sixty or over (67%).

1.2 Contacting the local district council

- Panel members were about half as likely again to contact their district council as the county council, with nearly half answering that they had contacted in the last year (46%).
- Those contacting the district council were most likely to do so about refuse collection (29%). They were also more likely to report an issue or problem compared to the county council (39% against 30%).
- About seven in ten use the phone to contact the district council (72%).
- The total proportion satisfied was the same as for the county council (64%).
- Respondents who complained were again less likely to be satisfied, (51% satisfied), but were less dissatisfied than those complaining to the county council and were more likely to have their problem resolved.

1.3 Buying services online

- About half of respondents have made payments online using a credit or debit card (52%).
- Panel members aged 60 years or over (31%), from socio-economic groups C2 (42%) and DE (37%) or living in a council or housing association home (25%) are significantly less likely to have done so.
- About half would pay for goods or services from the county council using their card. People aged over 60 are more reluctant to make payments over the internet (66% answering no), as are people from socio-economic backgrounds DE or living in a council or housing association background (58% and 74% saying no respectively).

1.4 Recommendations

1.4.1 Contacting the council

Making finding the correct person as easy as possible is a priority, since this is strongly related to the customer satisfaction. One problem that has been identified in other research is the strong confusion between district and county council services and it may well be that many unresolved calls have gone to the wrong council. The new contact centre must make a particular effort to deal with this problem, and passing people across directly to the correct place is a priority. Investigate the reasons why problems aren't resolved.

Despite the wider use of the internet and mobile phones, there is still greatest preference for a single helpline telephone number for the county council. This particularly true for those aged over 60 years, people from an ethnic minority and people with a disability.

1.4.2 Buying goods and services online

Allowing online payments may well make paying for services easier and faster for certain sections of the community. However there still need to be other methods available for people who are unable or unwilling to make payments over the internet.

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 research objectives for wave 15 focus on contacting the county and district council, road safety and satisfaction with county council services and the local area. The main questions areas looked at:

- usage and satisfaction with contacting the county and district council;
- the likely use of online payments for Lancashire County Council services;
- the usage of road safety education and the awareness of the Road Safety Group; and
- satisfaction with the county council and the local area.

4 Methodology

Wave 15 of Life in Lancashire was sent to 2,406 members of the panel on 15 February. A reminder was sent to non-respondents on 8 March. The fieldwork ended on 24 March 2006.

No incentive for respondents to complete the questionnaire was given. In total 1,640 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 68%.

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 1328 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.

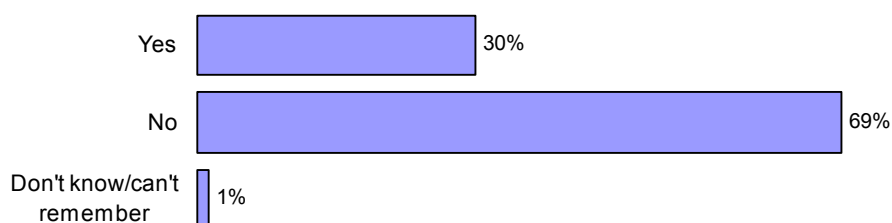
5 Main Research Findings

A marked up questionnaire can be found in Appendix 8.2.

5.1 Contacting Lancashire County Council

The first section of the questionnaire dealt with contacting Lancashire County Council. Three in ten of the panel said they had contacted the county council in the last year, as shown in the chart below.

Chart 1 - Have you contacted Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months with a problem, query or request for information?



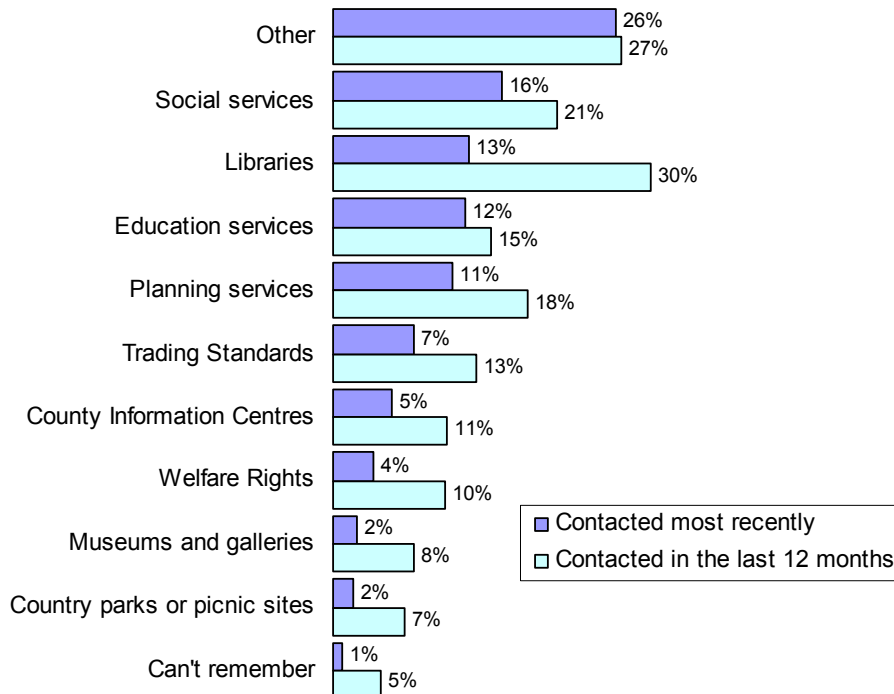
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

Looking demographically, men (26%) and panel members aged over 60 (24%) are significantly less likely to have contacted the council. Part-time workers (39%) and the heaviest service users (45%) are more likely to have contacted the council.

It was originally requested for the research to be taken only amongst panel members who had contacted the council in the last three months. This would have further reduced the number of respondents, giving a small base. On average respondents had contacted the county council between three and four months ago, meaning the experience should still be relatively fresh in their minds.

The section of the panel who had contacted the county council in the last year was given a list of possible services and asked which they had contacted. The highest proportion said they had most recently been in touch with another service not listed, (which may be because the service is one provided by the district or borough council). The majority of contacts to the 'other' category were concerns with highways (54 replies) and recycling or waste (41).

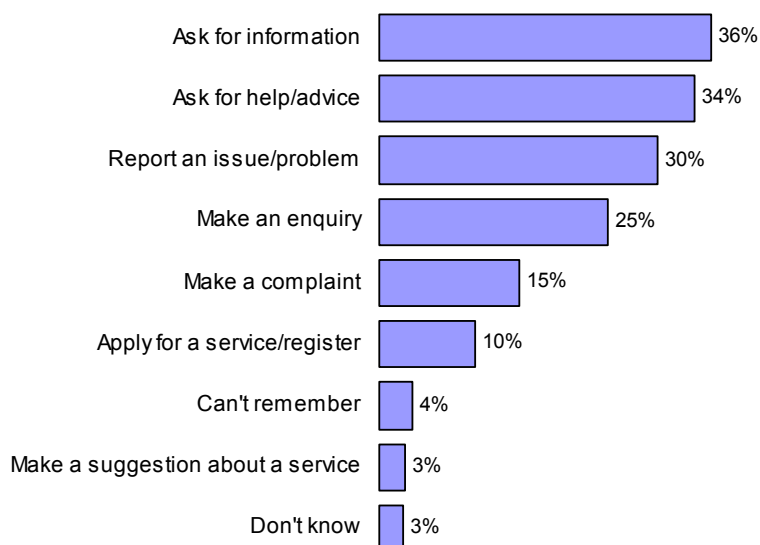
**Chart 2 - a) Which services or departments have you contacted in the last 12 months?
b) And which one service or department did you contact most recently?**



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

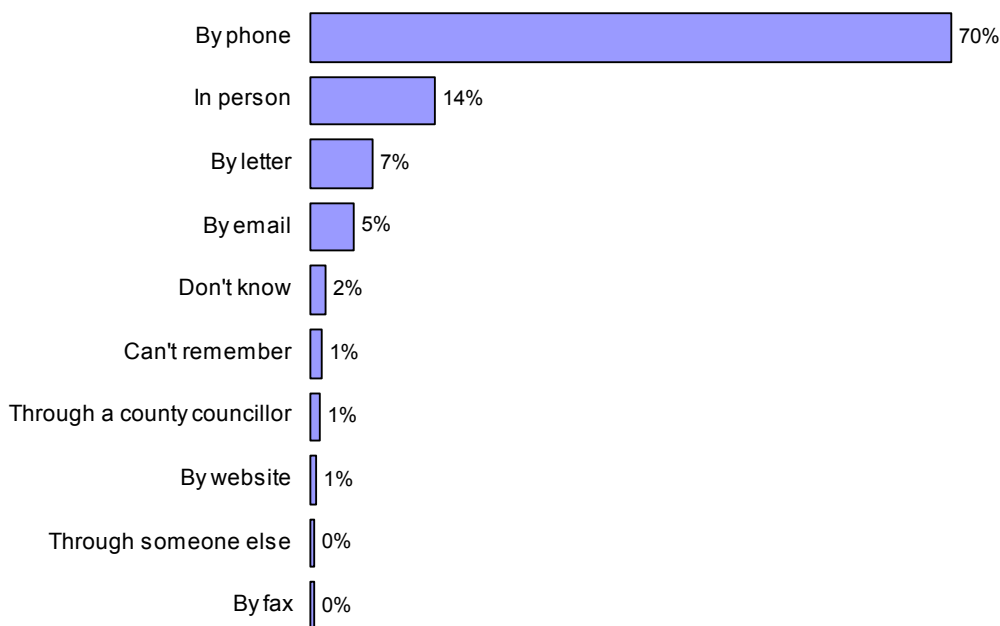
People contacting were most likely to do so to ask for information or help and advice (36% and 34%), or to report a problem (30%).

Chart 3 - Now, thinking about the last time you contacted Lancashire County Council, why did you contact them?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

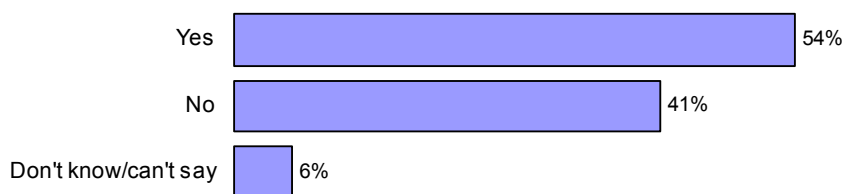
Chart 4 - How did you last get in contact with Lancashire County Council?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

The majority of contact with the council was by the telephone (70%), though one in seven (14%) went in person.

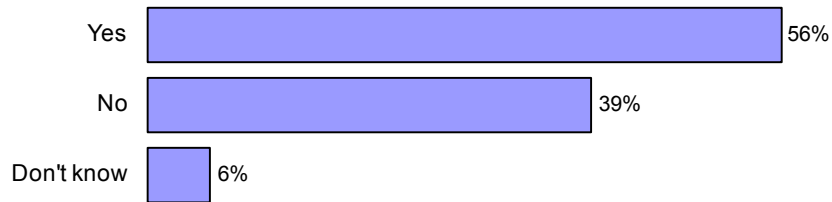
Chart 5 - Still thinking about the last time you dealt with the council, was your query or problem resolved by the first person you discussed it with?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

Two in five people (41%) did not have their problem resolved by the first person they spoke to (apart from the secretary). These people are only half as likely to be satisfied with the service they receive than those whose query was resolved by the first person they spoke to, (41% satisfied compared with 87%). Forty-five people said they had to speak to three or more people, (22% of people who said they have contacted the council in the last year).

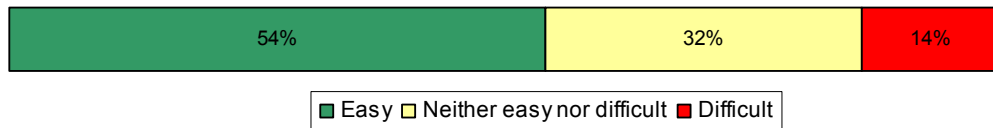
Chart 6 - Was your query or problem resolved eventually during this first call/visit?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

Similarly, about two in five of the contacting the council did not have their query resolved during their first contact. An even smaller proportion said their query was not handled satisfactorily (31%) and one in three (34%) said it was still not resolved. People who were contacting the council to report a problem or make a complaint were most likely to not have their problem resolved in the first contact (57% and 68% respectively). Men were less likely to say their problem was resolved (50%) than women (63%)

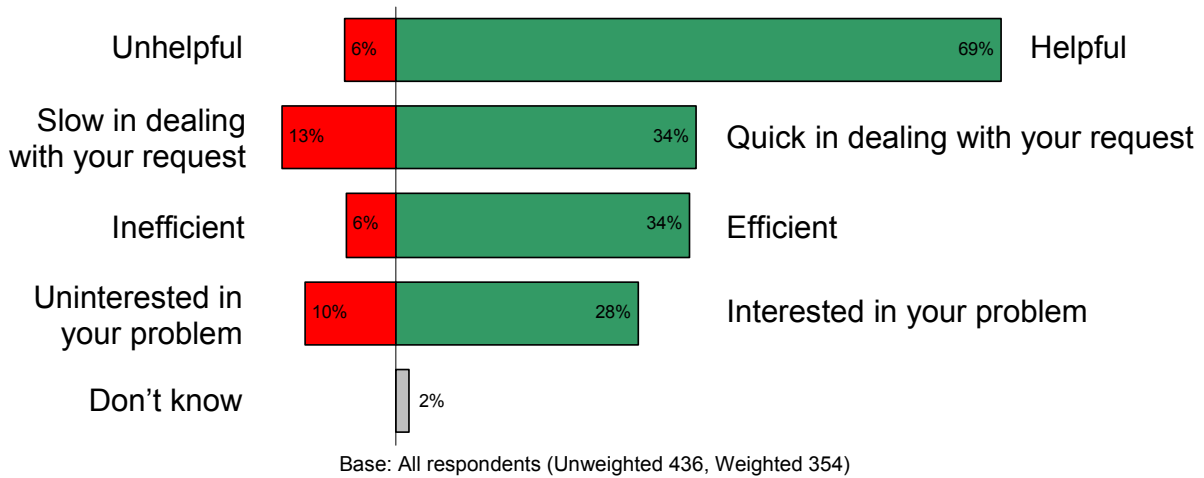
Chart 7 - And, was getting hold of the right person...?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

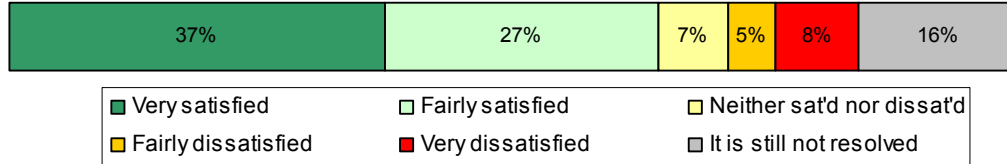
Over half of people though getting hold of the right person was easy (54%), though one in seven said that it was difficult (14%). Respondents were next given eight different descriptions of the standards of staff service, which are displayed in the chart below. The four positive attributes take the top four places on the list. Seven in ten (69%) said that staff were helpful, compared to only 6% saying they were unhelpful.

Chart 8 - And, thinking of the last time you contacted Lancashire County Council, did you find the staff...?



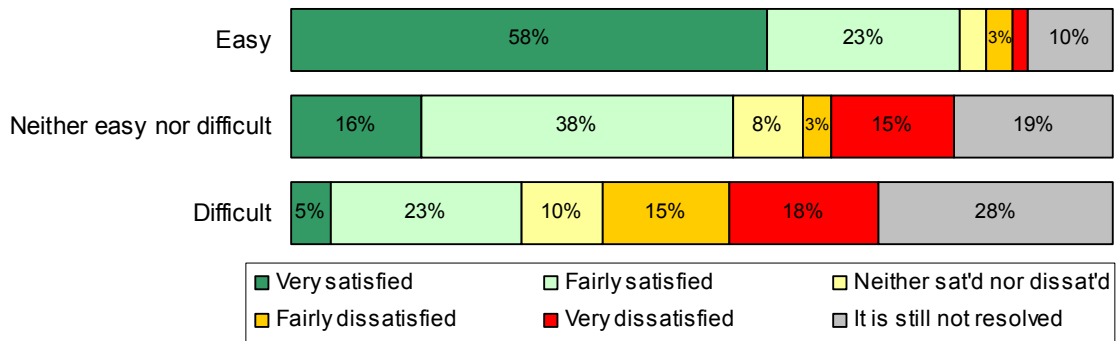
The majority of respondents were satisfied with the final outcome of their call or visit (64%), though one in six said their query was still not resolved (16%).

Chart 9 - Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome of contacting Lancashire County Council?



Respondents who contacted the council to complain were the least satisfied with the final outcome, (with 34% dissatisfied and 26% saying their complaint is still not resolved). As mentioned previously, respondents who had their contact resolved by the first person they spoke to were twice as likely to be satisfied with their outcome. Similarly people who said that finding the right person was easy were much more satisfied (81%) than those who described it as difficult (28%), as shown in the chart below. Clearly then, dealing with complaints effectively and quickly must be a priority for the authority. (It should be noted however that people contacting the council to report a problem or make a complaint are more likely to have made it to an 'other' department to those on the list, usually highways or waste and recycling. It is possible that these are more difficult queries, and therefore requiring more resources to resolve).

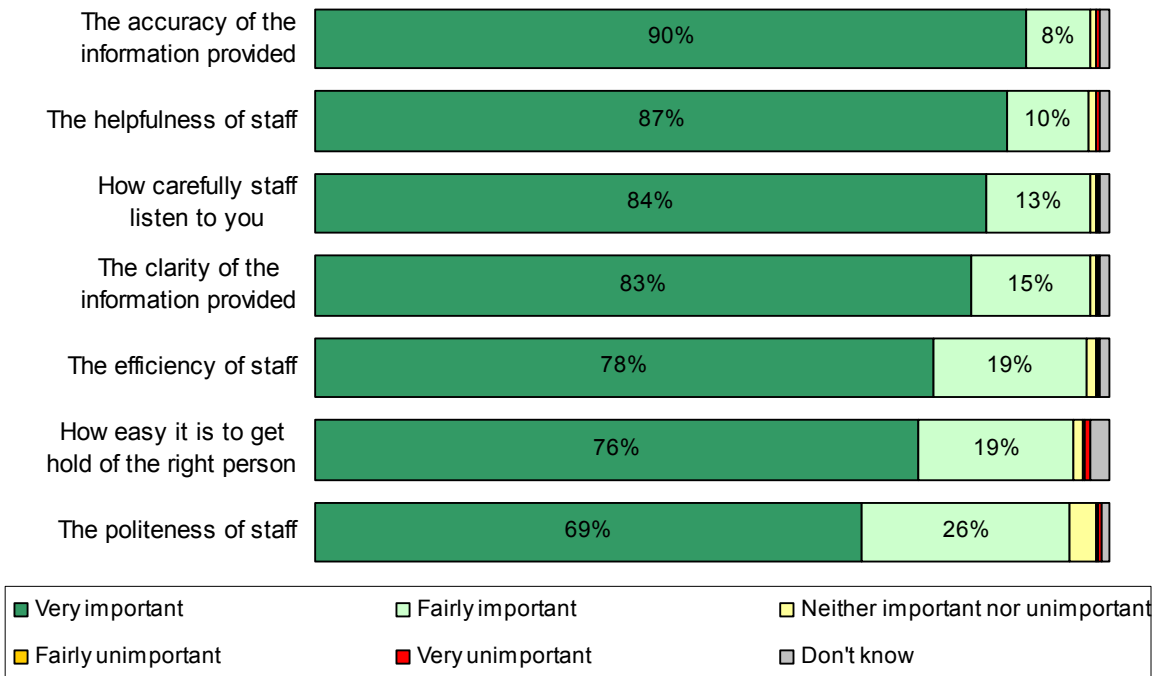
**Chart 10 - And, was getting hold of the right person... vs
Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the final outcome of
contacting Lancashire County Council?**



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 436, Weighted 354)

All panel members, whether they had contacted the county council or not, were then asked their opinion of the importance of a number of different service attributes when they contact the council.

**Chart 11 - How important, if at all, is each of the following to you when you
contact the council...?**

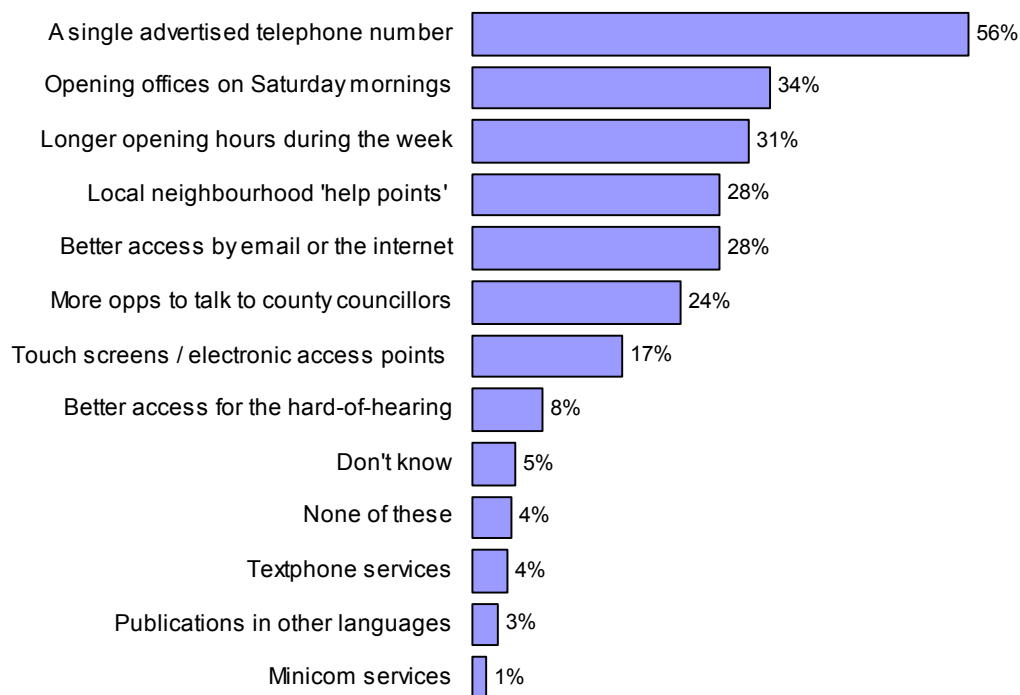


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

All factors were seen as important, though there were some differences by demographics. People from an ethnic minority were less likely to rate

helpfulness (76%), listening (67%), clarity (63%) and accuracy (69%) as very important compared to the panel overall and did not rate any aspect as more important. Men were less likely to regard politeness as very important (62%) compared to women (75%).

Chart 12 - Which, if any, of the following would make it easier for you to get in touch with Lancashire County Council?



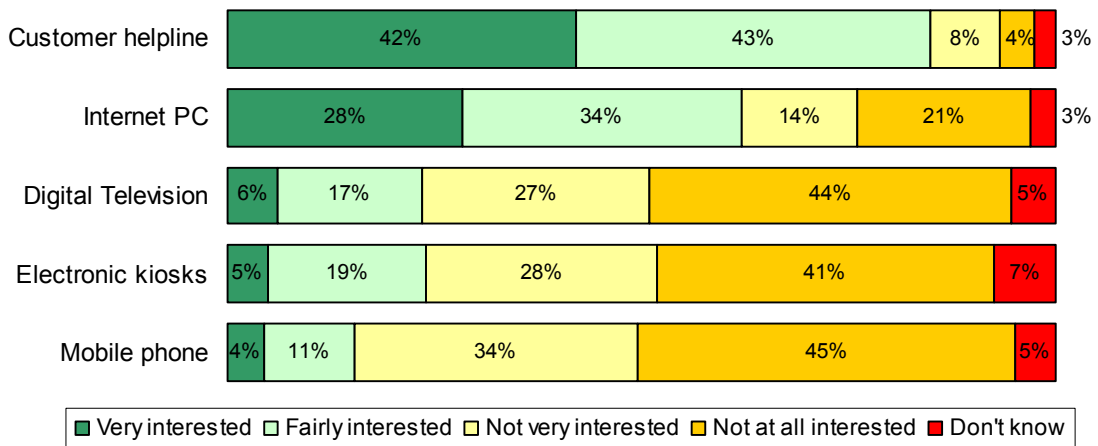
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

A single telephone number for the county council is seen as the highest priority for getting in touch easier, especially by respondents aged sixty or over (67%).

The same question as above was asked on the Life in Lancashire 2003 survey, which was a face-to-face survey of over 2000 adults in Lancashire. Since this used a different methodology it is not directly comparable to this survey, however it may be useful to note that the order of priorities for ways to get in touch with the county council remains broadly similar to that of 2003

When the panel were asked how interested they would be in a range of communications options (as shown below), a customer helpline is again the most preferred, particularly for people from an ethnic minority and people with a disability (both 51% very interested). The more technological options were not seen as interesting by the over 60s, with at least two in five not at all interested in all of the other possibilities.

Chart 13 - How interested, if at all, are you in using the following devices to access Lancashire County Council information and services?

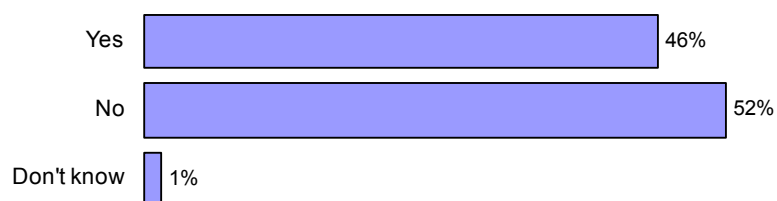


The same questions as displayed in the above chart were again asked in on the Life in Lancashire 2003 survey. The interest in different communications channels is similar but for a great increase in the interest in using the internet as a medium, 34% very or fairly interested in 2003 to 64% on this survey.

5.2 Contacting your district, borough or city council

The second main section of the questionnaire dealt with contacting the district council. Panel members were about half as likely again to contact their district council as the county council, with nearly half answering that they had contacted in the last year (46%).

Chart 14 - Have you contacted your district, borough or city council in the last 12 months with a problem, query or request for information?

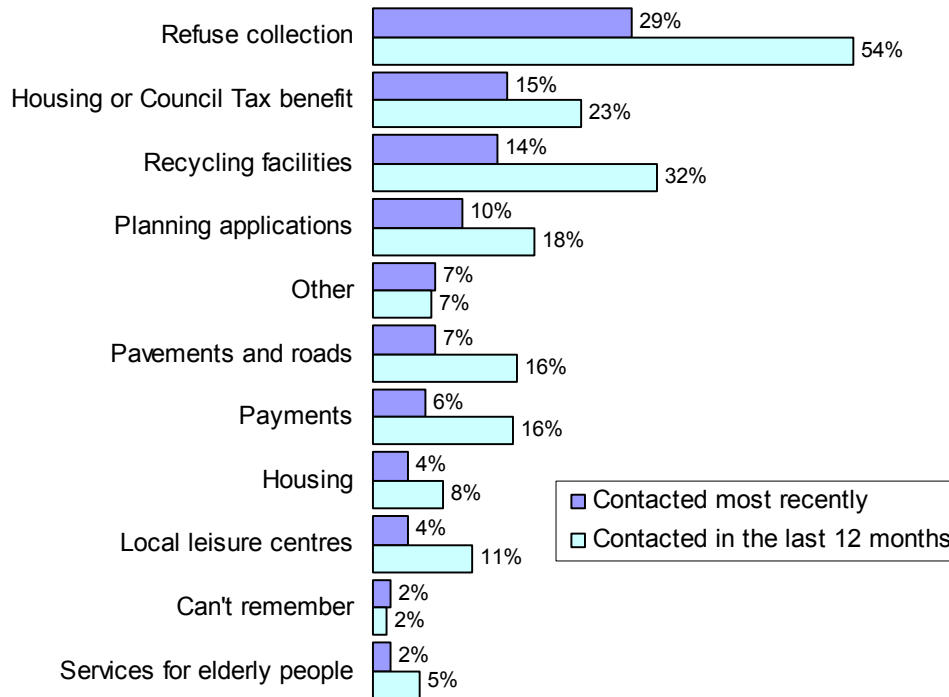


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

As for the county council, the most recent contact was between three and four months ago on average.

The service contacted is shown in the chart below.

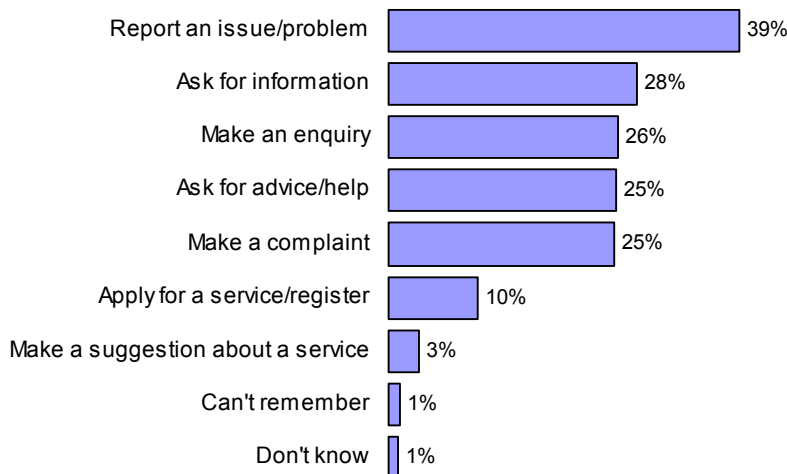
**Chart 15 - a) Which services or departments have you contacted in the last 12 months?
b) And which one service or department did you contact most recently?**



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 748, Weighted 603)

Refuse collection is the highest reason for contacting the district council (54% in the last 12 months). About one in seven people contacting the district council did so about housing or council tax benefit (15%) and recycling (14%).

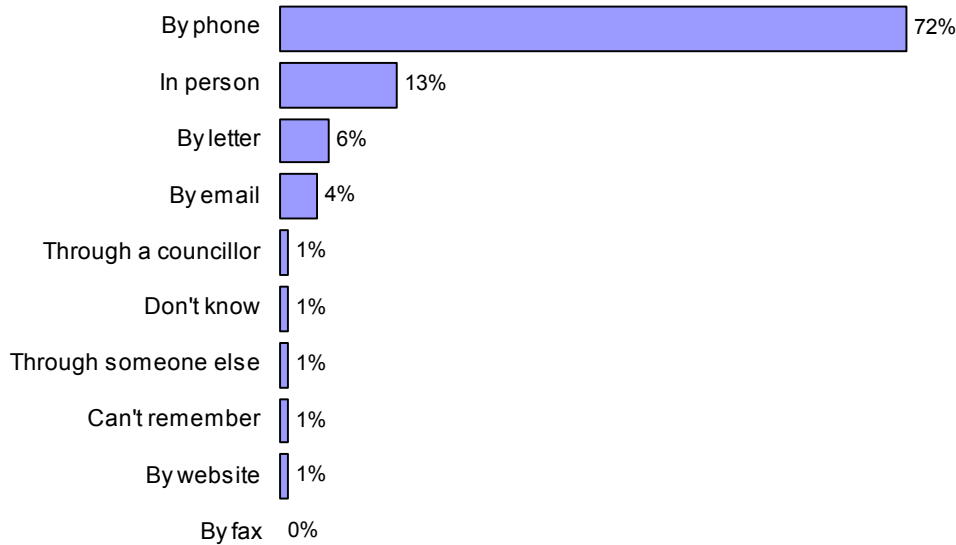
Chart 16 - Now, thinking about the last time you contacted your district, borough or city council, why did you contact them?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 748, Weighted 603)

In contrast to the county council queries, people contacting the district council are most likely to be reporting an issue or problem (39%). This is a result of the high numbers of contacts for the refuse collection service, of which about half were problems and complaints (52%). For the next highest reason for contact, housing and council tax benefits, about half are to ask for advice (48%).

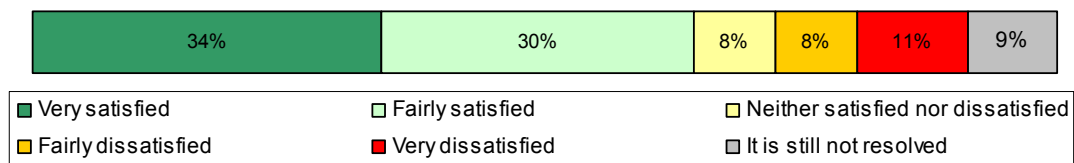
Chart 17 - How did you last get in contact with your district, borough or city council?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 748, Weighted 603)

The proportions contacting the district council by each method are very similar to that for the county council, with again about seven in ten using the phone (72%).

Chart 18 - And overall how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the final outcome of contacting your district, borough or city council?



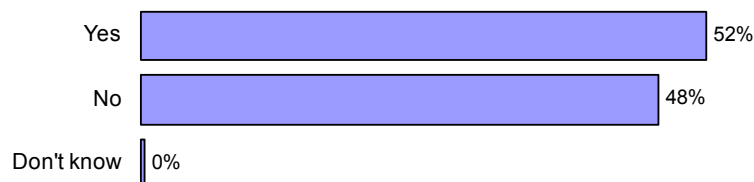
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 748, Weighted 603)

A similar proportion of people were satisfied with the outcome of their query to the district, borough or city council as for the county council (both 64% satisfied). Respondents who complained were again less likely to be satisfied, (51% satisfied), but were less dissatisfied than those complaining to the county council and were more likely to have their problem resolved, (only 13% not resolved compared to 26% for the county council). Men were less likely to be satisfied (57%) than women (70%).

5.3 Buying goods and services online

The next section of the questionnaire asked how familiar members of the citizens' panel were with paying for goods and services over the internet. About half of respondents have made payments online (52%). The familiarity of this was heavily dependent on age, ranging from three-quarters (76%) of respondents aged 16-24 years to only a third of those over 60 years (31%). There was also less use amongst people from lower socio-economic groups C2* (42%) and DE (37%). Only one person in four living in a council or housing association home had done so (25%). Respondents with children in their household are significantly more likely to have done so (63%).

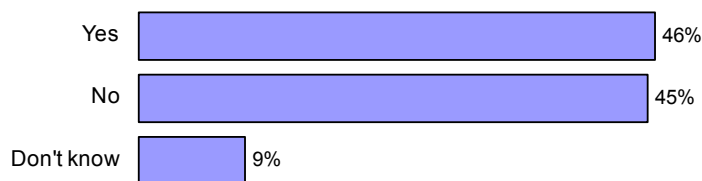
Chart 19 - Have you ever made a payment online using your debit or credit card details? This can be for any goods or services you have ever purchased.



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

When asked whether they would make online payments for council services, about the same proportions say they would and would not as have and have not made online payments. About one in ten is unsure (9%).

Chart 20 - If you needed to pay for goods or services by Lancashire County Council, would you make a payment online using your debit or credit card?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 1640, Weighted 1328)

People aged over 60 are more reluctant to make payments over the internet (66% answering no), as are people from socio-economic backgrounds DE or living in a council or housing association background (58% and 74% saying no respectively). This is a reminder that while internet use is increasingly common, many people are not yet familiar and comfortable with it, particularly people from a more deprived background. An option to make online payments may make it easier and faster for certain sections of the community, but there need to be other methods available for people who are unable or unwilling to do so.

*See appendix 8.1 for socio-economic group definitions

6 Summary

6.1 Contacting the county council

- Three in ten of the citizens' panel have contacted Lancashire County Council in the last 12 months (30%).
- Respondents were most likely to have made a contact about a service not listed as an option on the questionnaire, (which may be because the service is one provided by the district or borough council). The majority of contacts to the 'other' category were concerns with highways (54 replies) and recycling or waste (41).
- People contacting were most likely to do so to ask for information or help and advice (36% and 34%), or to report a problem (30%). The majority did so by telephone (70%).
- Two in five people (41%) did not have their problem resolved by the first person they spoke to (apart from the secretary). These people are only half as likely to be satisfied with the service they receive than those whose query was resolved by the first person they spoke to.
- Over half of people though getting hold of the right person was easy (54%), though one in seven said that it was difficult (14%). Seven in ten (69%) said that staff were helpful, compared to only 6% saying they were unhelpful.
- The majority of respondents were satisfied with the final outcome of their call or visit (64%), though one in six said their query was still not resolved (16%).
- Respondents who contacted the council to complain were the least satisfied with the final outcome of their query, (with 34% dissatisfied and 26% saying their complaint is still not resolved). People who said that finding the right person was easy were much more satisfied (81%) than those who described it as difficult (28%).
- All factors of customer service were seen as important, especially the accuracy of information and the helpfulness of staff (90% and 87% definitely agree respectively).
- A single telephone number for the county council is seen as the highest priority for getting in touch easier (56%), especially by respondents aged sixty or over (67%).

6.2 Contacting your district, borough or city council

- Panel members were about half as likely again to contact their district council as the county council, with nearly half answering that they had contacted in the last year (46%).
- Those contacting the district council were most likely to do so about refuse collection (29%). They were also more likely to report an issue or problem compared to the county council (39% against 30%).
- About seven in ten use the phone to contact the district council (72%).
- The total proportion satisfied was the same as for the county council (64%).
- Respondents who complained were again less likely to be satisfied, (51% satisfied), but were less dissatisfied than those complaining to the county council and were more likely to have their problem resolved.

6.3 Buying goods and services online

- About half of respondents have made payments online using a credit or debit card (52%).
- Panel members aged 60 years or over (31%), from socio-economic groups C2 (42%) and DE (37%) or living in a council or housing association home (25%) are significantly less likely to have done so.
- About half would pay for goods or services from the county council using their card. People aged over 60 are more reluctant to make payments over the internet (66% answering no), as are people from socio-economic backgrounds DE or living in a council or housing association background (58% and 74% saying no respectively).

7 Conclusions

7.1 Contacting the council

Over half of respondents have contacted either their local district council or the county council in the last year (54%). The majority of people contacting both the county council and district council are satisfied with the outcome of their query, though for both tiers at least one person in ten felt that their contact had not been resolved. The contact was mainly by phone, and the most preferred means of contact was by a single customer helpline.

Clearly making finding the correct person as easy as possible is a priority, since this is strongly related to the customer satisfaction. One problem that has been identified in other research is the strong confusion between district and county council services and it may well be that many unresolved calls have gone to the wrong council. The new contact centre must make a particular effort to deal with this problem, and passing people across directly to the correct place is a priority.

The county council also has a lower rate of resolution to problems than the district councils. This makes people dissatisfied and affects the county council as a brand. It is important to investigate the reasons why we aren't resolving these problems.

Some of the customer service aspects are not as highly rated as might be expected, such as only seven in ten say the politeness of staff is very important. This may well be because factors such as this are assumed and therefore not seen as a priority.

Despite the wider use of the internet and mobile phones, there is still greatest preference for a single helpline telephone number for the county council. This particularly true for those aged over 60 years, people from an ethnic minority and people with a disability.

7.2 Buying goods and services online

About half of respondents have made payments online (52%). The usage was heavily dependent on age, ranging from three-quarters (76%) of respondents aged 16-24 years to only a third of those over 60 years (31%).

Again about half of respondents say they would pay for goods and services from the county council online (46%). People aged over 60 are more reluctant to make payments over the internet (66% answering no), as are people from socio-economic backgrounds DE or living in a council or housing association background (58% and 74% saying no respectively).

Allowing online payments may well make paying for services easier and faster for certain sections of the community. However there still need to be other methods available for people who are unable or unwilling to make payments over the internet.

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