

Living in Lancashire Wave 32 survey

Customer service

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1 Executive summary

This wave of the Living in Lancashire panel looked at people's views on the customer service provided by the county council. The survey was sent by email or by post to all 3,974 members of the panel on 18 February and the fieldwork ended on 25 March 2011. In total 2,742 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 69%.

1.1 Key findings

- Three in ten respondents have contacted Lancashire County Council in the past 12 months (30%).
- The most commonly contacted departments are highways (18%), libraries (17%) and social services (16%).
- The most common reason for contacting the council was to report an issue or problem (36%) followed by asking for information (29%) and asking for help or advice (28%).
- The most common way of contacting the council is by phone (59%). One in ten respondents have been in contact with the council in person (10%) or by email (9%).
- Just under half of respondents say their query or problem was resolved by the first person they discussed it with (47%) while two fifths say it wasn't (40%).
- Three quarters of respondents spoke to only one or two people about their query or problem (75%). Only 13% had to speak to more than two people.
- Half of respondents say their query or problem was resolved eventually during their first call or visit (50%). Respondents who had only spoken to one person during their call or visit are more likely to say their query or problem was resolved (68%).
- Respondents whose query wasn't resolved by the first person they spoke to are more likely to say their query wasn't resolved in the first call / visit (79%).
- Three quarters of respondents thought that it was easy to contact the county council (78%) and that they were treated with fairness and respect (75%). Fewest people agreed that it was easy to speak to the person they needed (60%).
- Four fifths of respondents agreed that the staff were polite and friendly (78%). Around half agreed that staff delivered what they promised (54%).
- Two thirds of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from Lancashire County Council (64%). A fifth were dissatisfied with the service they received (21%).

- Respondents whose query was resolved by the first person they discussed it with are much more likely to be satisfied than those whose query wasn't resolved by the first person they discussed it with.
- Respondents who contacted the council to make a complaint are more likely to be very dissatisfied with the service received (28% very dissatisfied).
- The vast majority of respondents think that all aspects of customer service are important. The accuracy of the information provided and the helpfulness of staff are seen as the most important aspects.

1.2 Recommendations

Although two thirds of respondents were satisfied with the service they received, there are clear ways that this proportion could be improved.

Work should be done to increase the number of calls and visits that are resolved by the first person the customer speaks to. The results show that if the query is not resolved by the first person it is unlikely to be resolved in the first call or visit and that only three fifths of respondents thought it was easy to speak to the person they needed. Respondents whose query or problem was resolved by the first person they spoke to are more likely to be satisfied. This was also found in wave 15.

Respondents who contacted the council to complain are more likely to be dissatisfied with the service they received. Work should be done to investigate why this is, eg is the customer service delivery different when dealing with a complaint, is the fact that the customer is complaining affecting their view of the process, does it depend on whether the complaint is resolved to the customer's satisfaction.

Only half of respondents agreed that staff had delivered what they promised. This is backed up by the open comments provided by some respondents. A number of respondents said that the council could improve its customer service by ensuring that something was done about calls and emails received.

Another comment received from a number of respondents is that staff need to be more informed. This would help to improve the number of calls that could be dealt with at first contact.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Living in Lancashire regularly since August 2001 (formerly known as Life in Lancashire). 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 wave of Living in Lancashire 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 i.e. the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be representative of the population as a whole.

3 Research objectives

The objective of this survey is to look at people's views on the customer service provided by the county council. Questions looked specifically at:

- how people contact the council;
- whether their problem/issue was resolved; and
- how satisfied they were with the customer service received from the county council.

4 Methodology

This wave of Living in Lancashire research was sent to 3,974 members of the panel on 18 February. A reminder was sent on 11 March, with a final closing date of 25 March 2011.

The survey was conducted through a postal questionnaire, and an online version of the same questionnaire being emailed to members who had previously requested to take part online. The postal questionnaire was sent to 3,155 members and the online questionnaire was sent to 819 members. Where members didn't respond to the online questionnaire they were sent a paper reminder.

In total 2,742 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 69%.

All data are weighted by 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 to match the effective response of 1,983, 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%
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 chances 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.

The following table shows what the percentage differences between two samples on a statistic must be greater than, to be statistically significant.

Size of sample A	Size of sample B	50/50	70/30	90/10
100	100	14%	13%	8%
100	200	12%	11%	7%
500	1000	5%	5%	3%
2000	2000	3%	3%	2%

(Confidence interval at 95% certainty for a comparison of two samples)

For example, where the size of sample A and sample B is 2,000 responses in each and the percentage result in each group you are comparing is around 50% in each category, the difference in the results needs to be more than 3% to be statistically significant. This is to say that the difference in the results of the two groups of people is not due to chance alone and is a statistically valid difference (eg of opinion, service usage).

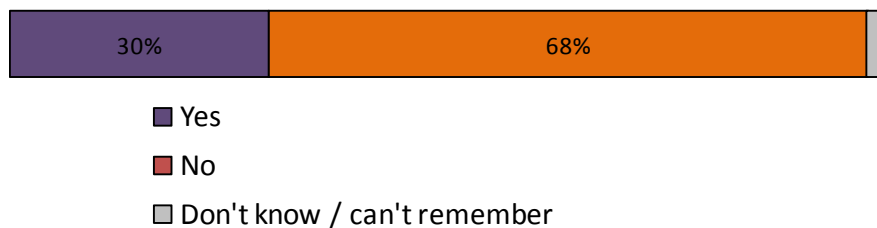
For each question in the survey, comparisons have been made between different sub-groups of respondents (eg age, gender, disability, ethnicity, geographic area) to look for statistically significant differences in opinion. Statistically valid differences between sub-groups are described in the main body of the report.

In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

5 Main research findings

Panel members were asked whether they had contacted Lancashire County Council in the past 12 months. Three in ten respondents have contacted the council in the past 12 months (30%).

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



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2655, weighted 2022)

Males and respondents aged 60 or over are less likely to have contacted the council in the last 12 months (24% and 23% respectively).

The following questions (unless otherwise stated) were only asked to respondents who contacted the council in the past 12 months.

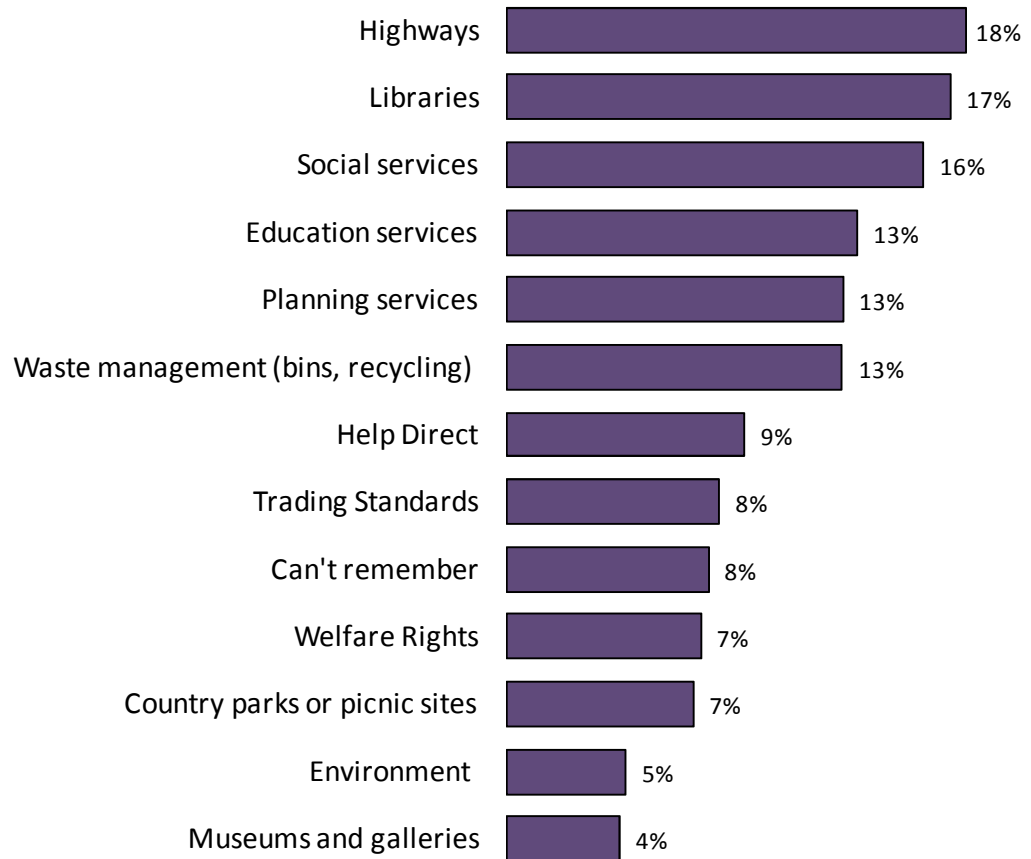
Respondents who have contacted the council were asked which services or departments they have been in touch with over the past 12 months. A list of departments to choose from was provided and also an open comment box for any other departments they may have contacted.

The most commonly contacted department was highways (18%). This was not one of the provided options. The next most contacted departments were libraries (17%) and social services (16%).

Around one in eight respondents said they had contacted waste management services (eg bin collections, recycling). Many of these services are the responsibility of the district councils but household waste recycling centres are run by the county council. As it is not possible to determine which aspect of waste management the respondents are referring to, these respondents are included in the following analysis.

This question was also asked in wave 15 of Living in Lancashire (February 2006). Compared to then, the proportion of respondents contacting libraries has dropped (from 30% to 17%).

Chart 2 - Which services or departments have you contacted within the last 12 months?

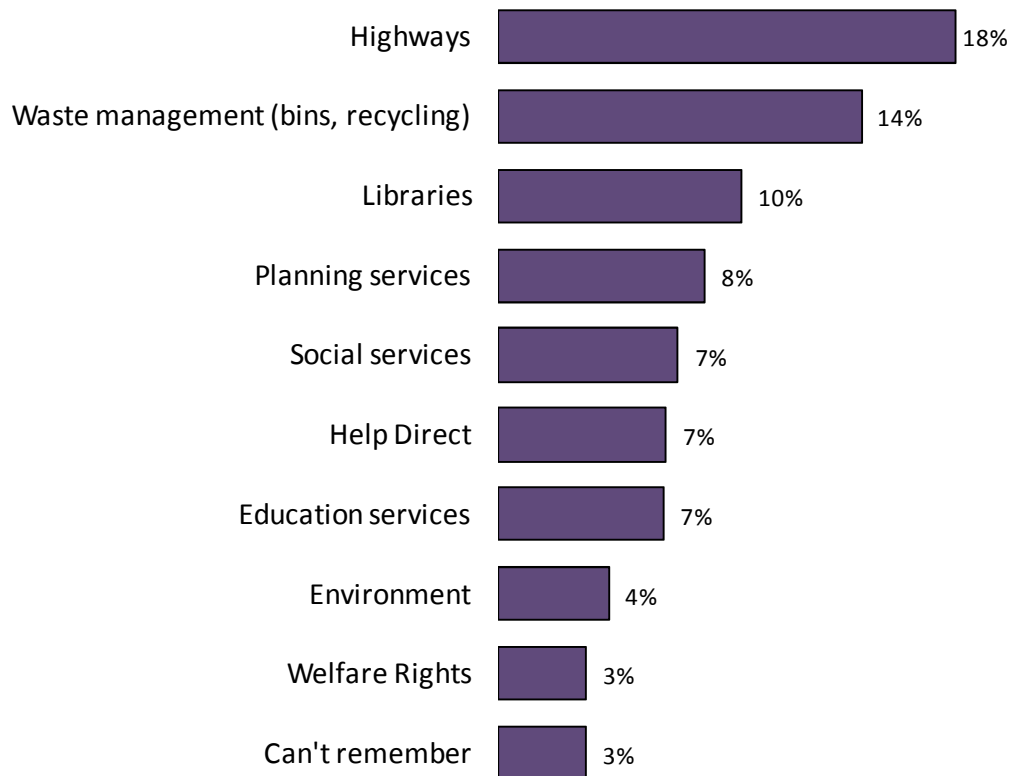


Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 790, weighted 646)

Disabled respondents are more likely to have contacted social services (22%) and Welfare Rights (13%) in the past 12 months.

Respondents who have contacted the council were then asked which service they had contacted most recently. Again, highways was the most contacted department (18%) followed by waste management (14%).

Chart 3 - Which one service or department did you contact most recently?

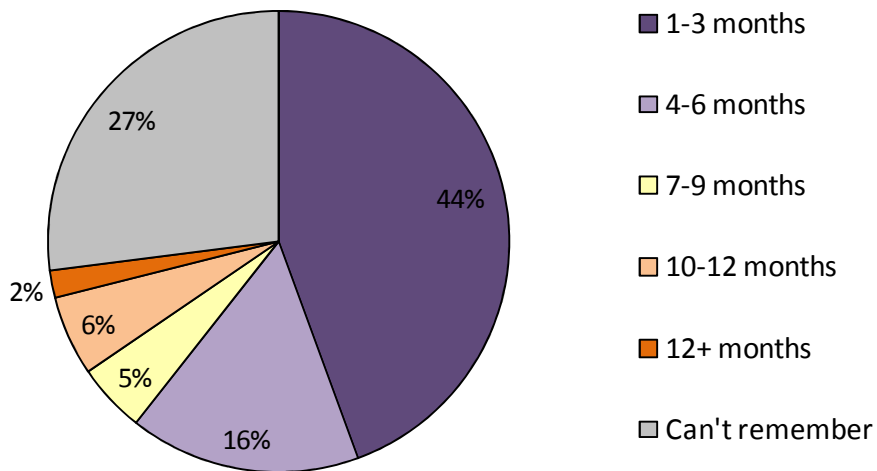


Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 600, weighted 500)

Disabled respondents are more likely to have contacted Welfare Rights most recently (8%). Respondents who work part-time are more likely to have contacted education services (17%). Male respondents are less likely to have contacted Help Direct (3%) and education services (3%).

Over two fifths of respondents who have contacted Lancashire County Council did so within the last three months (44%). A quarter of respondents can't remember how long ago they contacted the council (27%).

Chart 4 - How many months ago did you last contact Lancashire County Council?

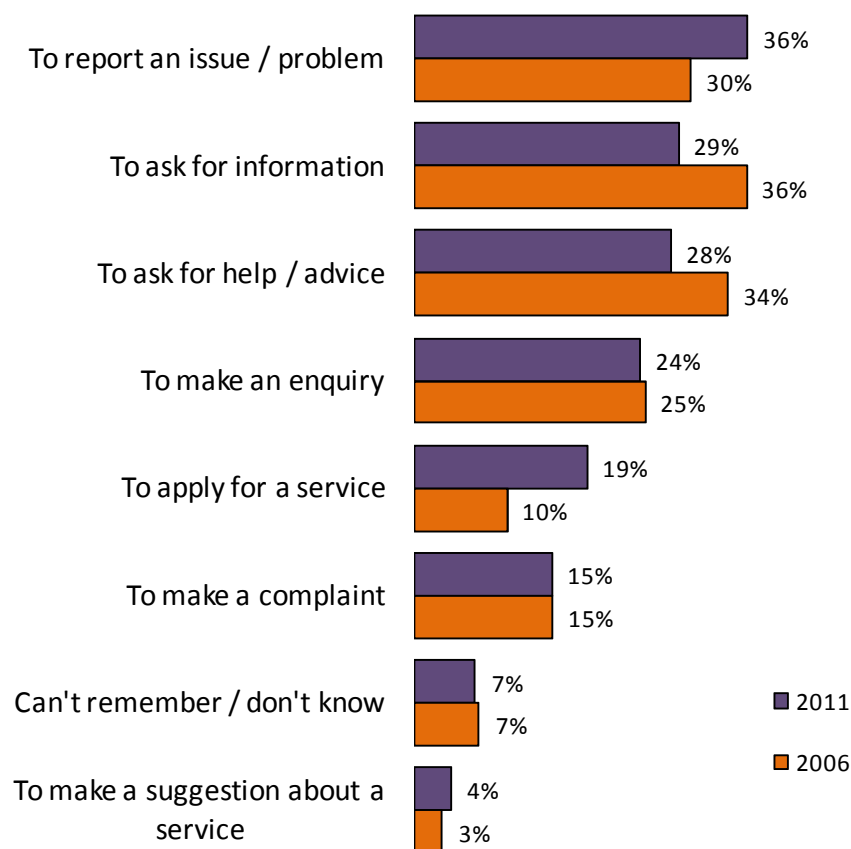


Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 829, weighted 672)

The most common reason for contacting the council was to report an issue or problem (36%) followed by asking for information (29%) and asking for help or advice (28%).

The proportion of respondents contacting the council to report an issue or problem has increased since 2006 (from 30% to 36%) while the proportion contacting the council to ask for information or for help / advice has decreased (from 36% to 29% and from 34% to 28% respectively).

Chart 5 - Thinking about the last time you contacted Lancashire County Council, why did you contact it?



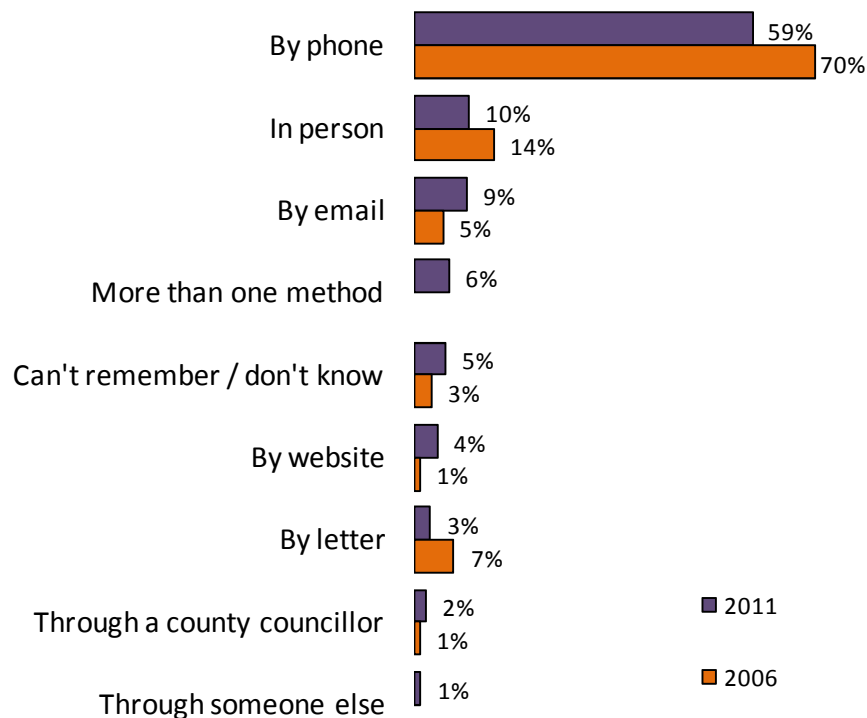
Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC: 2011 (unweighted 898, weighted 724), 2006 (unweighted 519, weighted 427)

Male respondents are less likely to have contacted the council for help or advice (22%). Disabled respondents are more likely to have contacted the council for help or advice (36%) or to apply for a service (24%). Respondents who contacted the highways department most recently are more likely to have reported an issue or problem (68%).

By far the most common way of contacting the council is by phone (59%). One in ten respondents have been in contact with the council in person (10%) or by email (9%).

The proportion of respondents contacting the council by phone has decreased from 2006 (from 70% to 59%).

Chart 6 - How did you last get in contact with Lancashire County Council?



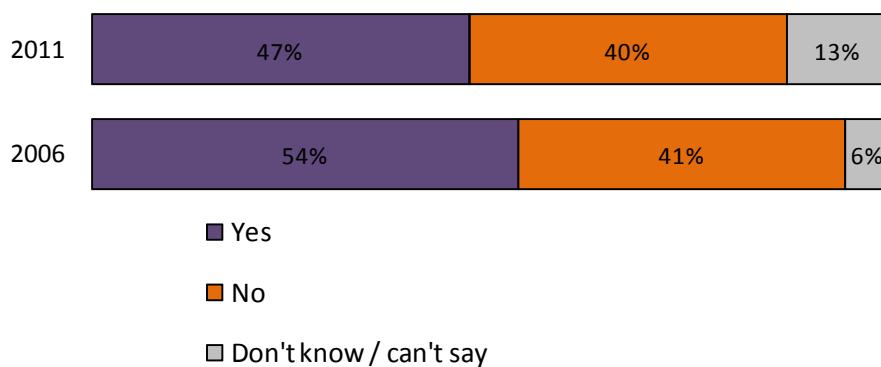
Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC: 2011 (unweighted 883, weighted 714), 2006 (unweighted 514, weighted 423)

Female respondents are more likely to have contacted the council by phone (66%) while male respondents are more likely to have been in contact in person (14%). Respondents who work full-time are more likely to have used email to contact the council (15%).

Just under half of respondents say their query or problem was resolved by the first person they discussed it with (47%) while two fifths say it wasn't (40%).

The proportion of respondents whose query was resolved by the first person they discussed it with has decreased since 2006 (54% down to 47%).

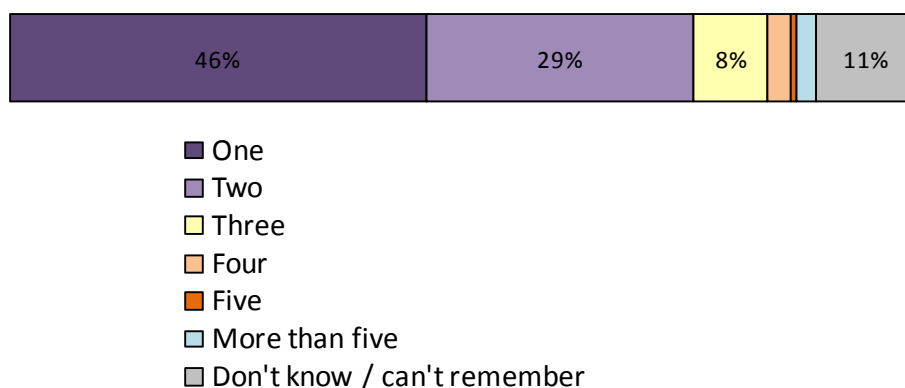
Chart 7 - Still thinking about the last time you dealt with the council, was your query or problem resolved by the first person you discussed it with?



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC: 2011 (unweighted 877, weighted 712), 2006 (unweighted 480, weighted 395)

Three quarters of respondents spoke to only one or two people about their query or problem (75%). Only 13% had to speak to more than two people.

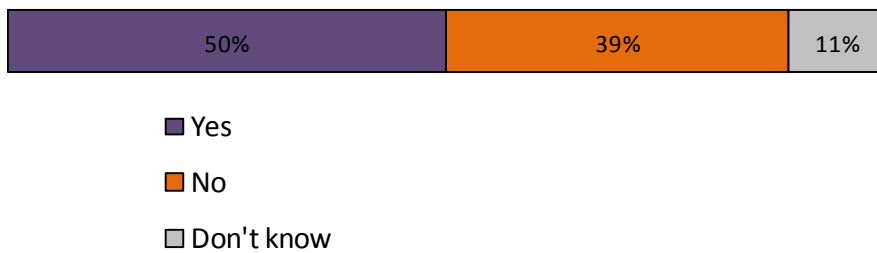
Chart 8 - How many different people did you speak to about your query or problem during your call / visit?



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 850, weighted 695)

Half of respondents say their query or problem was resolved eventually during their first call or visit (50%).

Chart 9 - Was your query or problem resolved eventually during this first call / visit?

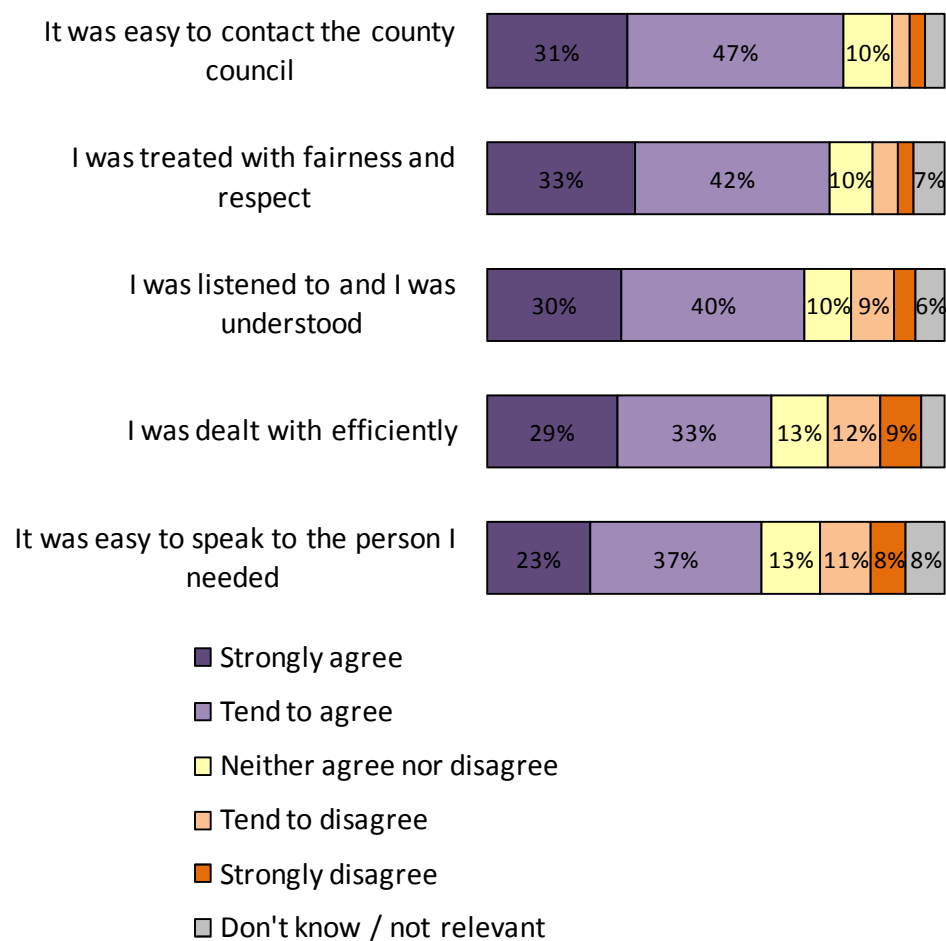


Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 857, weighted 704)

Respondents who had only spoken to one person during their call or visit are more likely to say their query or problem was resolved (68%). Respondents who said their problem or query was not resolved by the first person they spoke to are more likely to say that it wasn't resolved during the first call / visit (79% say no).

Respondents were then asked a series of questions about dealing with Lancashire County Council. At least three fifths of respondents agree with all of the statements. Three quarters of respondents thought that it was easy to contact the county council (78%) and that they were treated with fairness and respect (75%). Fewest people agreed that it was easy to speak to the person they needed (60%).

Chart 10 - How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about dealing with Lancashire County Council?

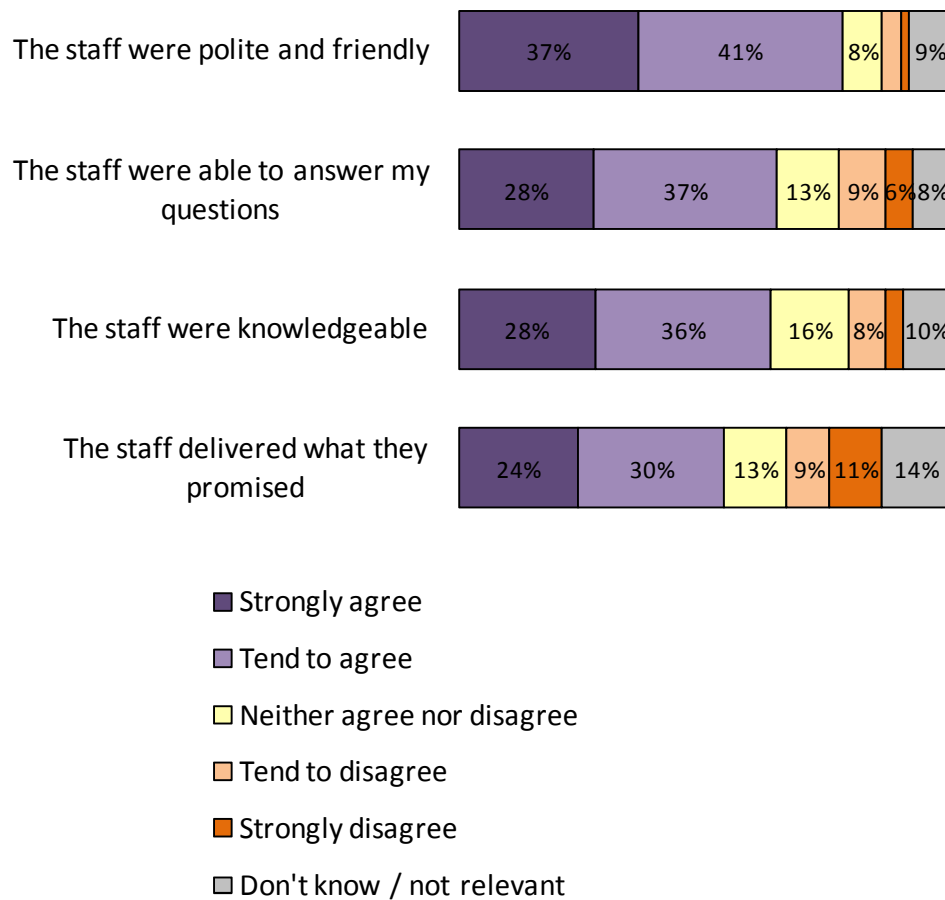


Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 808, weighted 662)

Male respondents are less likely to agree that it was easy to contact the council (74% agree) and that they were dealt with efficiently (55%).

Respondents were then asked questions about the staff at Lancashire County Council. While four fifths of respondents agreed that the staff were polite and friendly (78%), only around half agreed that staff delivered what they promised (54%).

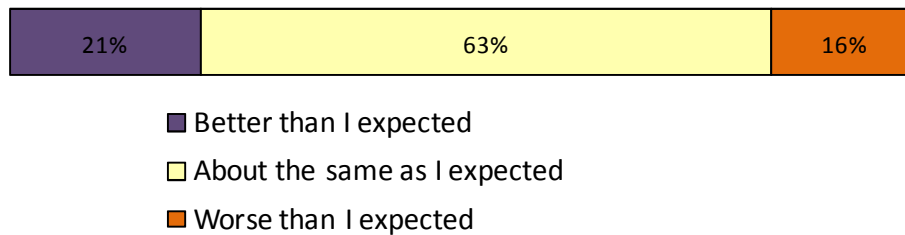
Chart 11 - How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the staff at Lancashire County Council?



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 817, weighted 673)

Three fifths of respondents thought the service given to them by the county council was about the same as they expected (63%). Around one in six respondents felt the service was worse than they expected (16%).

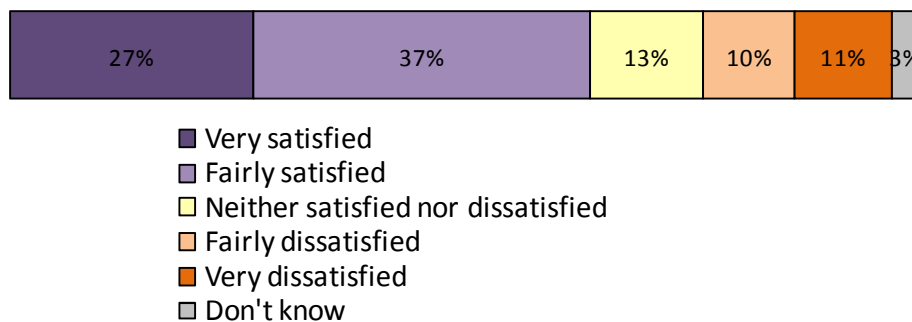
Chart 12 - Would you say the service given to you by the county council was...?



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 853, weighted 696)

Two thirds of respondents were satisfied with the service they received from Lancashire County Council (64%). A fifth were dissatisfied with the service they received (21%).

Chart 13 - Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from Lancashire County Council?



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 882, weighted 714)

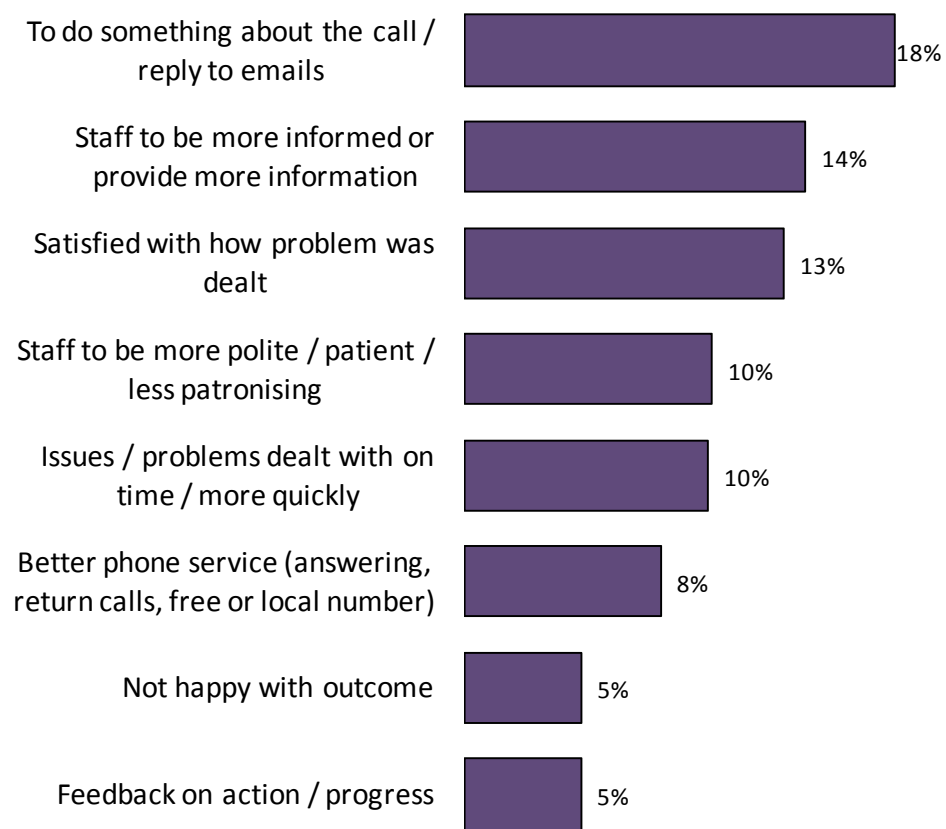
Respondents whose query was resolved by the first person they discussed it with are much more likely to be satisfied than those whose query wasn't resolved by the first person they discussed it with (92% satisfied compared to 34% satisfied). This was also found in wave 15. Respondents who contacted the council to make a complaint are more likely to be very dissatisfied with the service received (28% very dissatisfied).

Respondents who strongly agreed with each of the statements about dealing with Lancashire County Council and the staff at Lancashire County Council are more likely to be very satisfied with the service they received particularly respondents who strongly agreed that staff delivered what they promised

(73% very satisfied) and those who strongly agreed that they were dealt with efficiently (73% very satisfied).

Respondents were asked an open question about how the council could improve its service. Around two fifths of respondents who had contacted the council gave a response to this question. The most common responses involved ensuring that something was done about calls that were made and that emails were replied to (18%) followed by wanting staff to be more informed (14%).

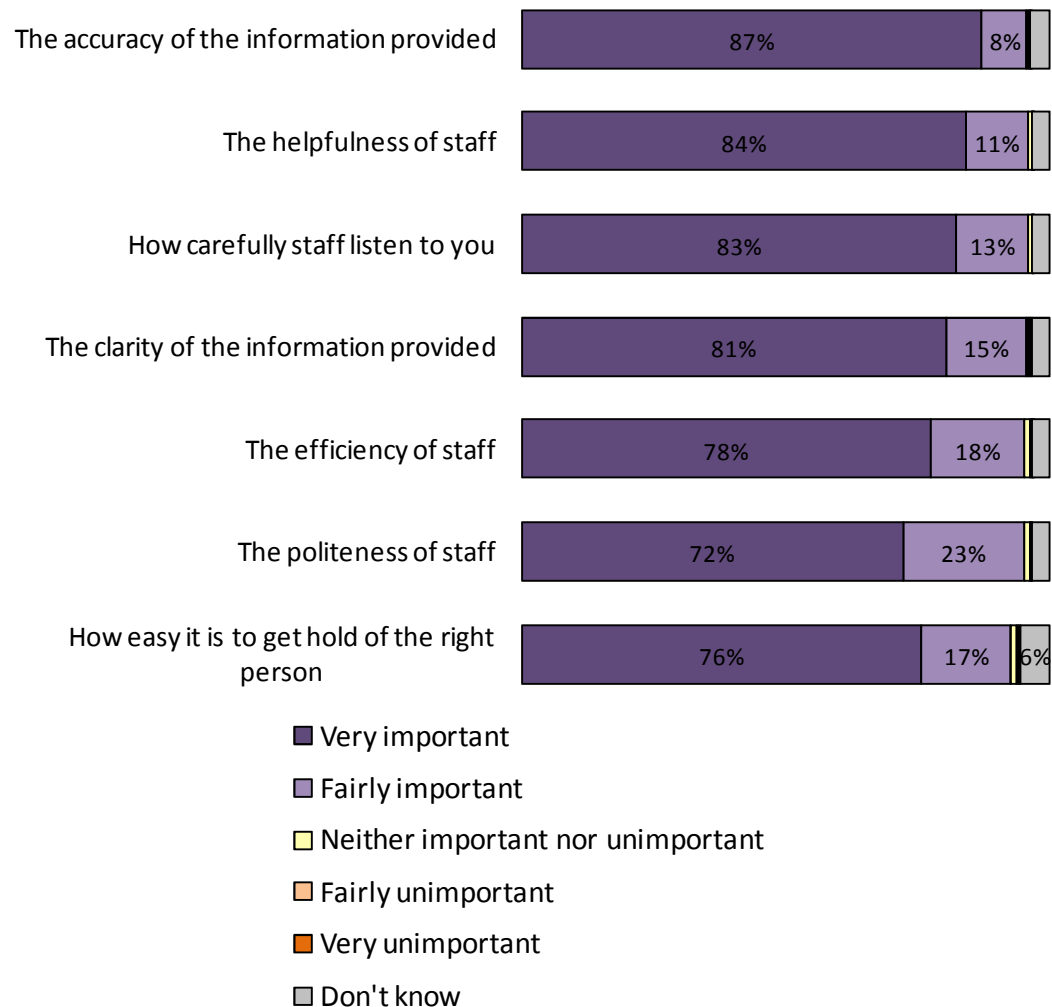
Chart 14 - Please tell us how we can improve the service you received



Base: Respondents who have contacted LCC (unweighted 333, weighted 280)

Finally, all panel members (including those who hadn't contacted the council in the last 12 months) were asked how important a variety of aspects of customer service are to them when they contact the council. The vast majority of respondents think that all aspects are important. The accuracy of the information provided and the helpfulness of staff are seen as the most important aspects (87% and 84% very important respectively).

Chart 15 - How important, if at all, is each of the following to you when you contact the council?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2519, weighted 1942)

With the exception of politeness of staff, BME respondents are less likely than white respondents to feel that each aspect is very important. Male respondents are less likely to feel that efficiency of staff, politeness of staff and how easy it is to get hold of the right person are very important (70%, 64% and 69% respectively).

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Although two thirds of respondents were satisfied with the service they received, there are clear ways that this proportion could be improved.

Work should be done to increase the number of calls and visits that are resolved by the first person the customer speaks to. The results show that if the query is not resolved by the first person it is unlikely to be resolved in the first call or visit and that only three fifths of respondents thought it was easy to speak to the person they needed. Respondents whose query or problem was resolved by the first person they spoke to are more likely to be satisfied. This was also found in wave 15.

Respondents who contacted the council to complain are more likely to be dissatisfied with the service they received. Work should be done to investigate why this is, eg is the customer service delivery different when dealing with a complaint, is the fact that the customer is complaining affecting their view of the process, does it depend on whether the complaint is resolved to the customer's satisfaction.

Only half of respondents agreed that staff had delivered what they promised. This is backed up by the open comments provided by some respondents. A number of respondents said that the council could improve its customer service by ensuring that something was done about calls and emails received.

Another comment received from a number of respondents is that staff need to be more informed. This would help to improve the number of calls that could be dealt with at first contact.

7 Appendix

7.1 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 with 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 dependent 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