ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

RESIDENTS SURVEY REPORT

August 2000

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL
Residents Survey

A Report

by

The Customer Management Consultancy Ltd

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RESIDENT SURVEY - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE RESEARCH

1. Six focus groups of residents were held to identify issues for research in the residents' survey.

2. The residents' survey was undertaken by telephone and by post: a total of 2,726 questionnaires were analysed. Respondents were fully representative of the population of Aberdeenshire.

AWARENESS

3. Nearly eight out of ten telephone interviewees (79%) spontaneously mentioned Aberdeenshire Council as the provider of local authority services in the area. Most of the remainder remembered the name, once prompted.

4. Awareness of the six local areas of Aberdeenshire was much lower. Fewer than a third (31%) correctly named the local area in which they lived. People in Banff and Buchan were the most aware of their local area (69%), followed by Kincardine and Mearns (49%). In the other four areas fewer than 20% could correctly identify their area. Nearly half of Buchan residents believed that they lived in Banff and Buchan.

CONTACTS WITH THE COUNCIL

5. The majority of residents taking part in the survey had been in touch with at least one council service over the past 12 months, many with more than one service.

SERVICES

6. When asked to name the <u>single</u> most important service they contacted the responses were as follows:

Finance	30%
Planning and Environmental Services	24%
Education and Recreation	17%
Housing and Social Work	14%
Roads and Infrastructure	7%
Other	7%

7. The majority of people made their most important contact to ask for a service, closely followed by requests for information. Two out of three got in touch by telephone - and most people got through first time.

8. Few contactors made appointments before visiting the council. Nevertheless, nearly all were seen on arrival or within 15 minutes.

PEOPLE

9. Contactors were generally satisfied with the Aberdeenshire Council employees with whom they were in contact. Satisfaction varied according to the various "people" attributes: here the "top box" very satisfied, is used.

	Very Satisfied
Friendliness	42%
Helpfulness	40%
Knowledge	35%
Understanding of my situation	34%
Capacity to deal with my problem	32%
Information/explanation given	28%
Updating information given	24%

RESOLUTION OF CONTACT

10. Around seven out of ten of the contact issues had been resolved at the time of the survey - and contactors expected a number of outstanding issues to be resolved.

SATISFACTION WITH HANDLING OF CONTACT

11. Contactors were asked how satisfied they were with the <u>handling</u> of the contact and also their satisfaction with the outcome.

12. On handling, education & recreation had the highest level of satisfaction amongst contactors (71%), followed by housing & social work (63%). Finance and planning & environmental services had lower levels of satisfaction with handling (56% and 54% respectively). (For roads and transportation satisfaction was lower still, though numbers were small.).

SATISFACTION WITH OUTCOME

13. Satisfaction with outcome was again highest for education & recreation. It was also high for housing & social work and for finance.

14. Finance therefore had modest levels of satisfaction with how contact was handled, but relatively high satisfaction with the final outcome.

DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION

15. The most powerful drivers of satisfaction for people contacting the council are set out below, demonstrating how different levels of service affect satisfaction with the overall handling of the contact.

Telephone access	Very satisfied
Got through first time	35%
Got through second time	13%
It took three or more attempts	4%
Once through on the telephone	
Attended to straight away	44%
Transferred/ring another number	13%
Visit to council	
Seen straight away on arrival	43%
(All those visiting)	36%

Speed of resolution	
Immediately/within 24 hours	59%
Within 2 weeks	35%
2 - 4 weeks	17%
4+ weeks	10%
Not yet resolved - but will be	10%
Not resolved - and no expectation	0%
Progress chasing by customer	
No progress chasing by customer	43%
Customer did make further contact	6%

VIEWS OF SPECIFIC SERVICES

16. Residents were asked if they or a member of their household used a number of specific council services. If so, they were asked how satisfied they were with that service. Non users views were not gathered.

17. The specific services were housing, schooling, libraries, sports & leisure and social work.

18. User satisfaction with these various services is set out here: the net score is positive if satisfaction exceeds dissatisfaction, and vice versa.

	Housing	Schooling	Libraries	Sports & leisure	Social work
Satisfied (very + fairly)	76%	80%	86%	70%	79%
Dissatisfied (very + fairly)	10%	11%	6%	16%	11%
Net score	+66	+69	+80	+54	+68

19. Libraries had the largest proportion of satisfied customers. Social work had the most "very satisfied" customers.

20. When compared with employees' guesses about how satisfied their customers were, which was asked in the employee survey, the actual levels of satisfaction were very close to employees' guesses.

	Satisfaction (very + fairly)		
	Employees' guesses	Residents' actual	
Schooling	83%	80%	Schooling
Recreation	75%	86%	Libraries
		70%	Sports & leisure
Housing & social work	79%	76%	Housing
		79%	Social work

21. Libraries also emerged as having the most improved services. Schooling was believed on balance by parents to have got worse over the past three or four years.

22. No fewer than 84% of parents believed that schools communicated effectively with them in writing. Some 67% of council tenants and 62% of social work service users saw written communications as effective.

VIEWS OF RESIDENTS ON GENERAL SERVICES

23. All residents were asked their views on a number of general services which benefit the general population.

24. These general services were winter gritting/snow clearing, road maintenance, street lighting, street cleansing and refuse collection.

25. Residents' satisfaction with these services is set out here.

	Winter gritting	Road maint.	Street lighting	Street cleansing	Refuse collection
Satisfied (very + fairly)	54%	38%	72%	63%	85%
Dissatisfied (very + fairly)	35%	45%	11%	20%	6%
Net score	+19	-7	+61	+3	+79

26. Refuse collection was the star performer here and was seen on balance to have improved in recent years. Street lighting also produced a high level of satisfaction. Overall, however, these services which are amongst the most visible run by Aberdeenshire Council attracted lower levels of satisfaction than services used by specific sections of the population.

27. Road maintenance had the lowest level of satisfaction of all services. Indeed more residents were dissatisfied with it than satisfied. Satisfaction with winter gritting was also relatively low. Residents believed both these services had deteriorated.

28. These levels of satisfaction were very much lower than the guesses of employees of transportation & infrastructure in the employee survey, who believed that 59% of residents would be satisfied and only 14% dissatisfied, with the balance neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. In fact, no fewer than 45% of residents were dissatisfied with road maintenance.

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

29. Residents were asked to identify the council's main strengths as a service provider - and its areas for improvement.

30. Residents priorities are set out below, with the views of employees given for comparison.

Main strengths	Residents	Employees
Local council facilities	35%	6%
Telephone enquiry handling	10%	*
Employees' local knowledge	10%	6%
Public service commitment	6%	25%

* = less than 1%

Main areas in need of improvement	Residents	Employees
Money badly spent on improving services	28%	16%
Value for money	19%	9%
Council facilities	10%	11%
Quality of management	6%	19%

31. Thus, on strengths residents focussed primarily on the visible, tangible council facilities in their locality - school buildings, libraries, swimming pools - and on the intangible convenience of efficient telephone handling. Employees, by contrast, gave priority to the strengths of themselves and their colleagues, and did not perceive the council's telephone handling as a main strength.

32. On areas for improvement, residents overwhelmingly focussed on money issues, including the need for the council to spend its money better on improving services, and on the need for Aberdeenshire Council to secure better value for money.

33. Residents also saw a need to improve local council facilities, and the quality of management. Employees' top priority was the need to improve the quality of management.

SATISFACTION WITH ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL: REPUTATION

34. Residents were invited to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with Aberdeen-shire Council as a provider of local services, based on their experience. When analysed the results appeared to be expressing views on the overall reputation of Aberdeenshire Council rather than its effectiveness as a service provider. For example, there was little difference in satisfaction with contact handling amongst people who had contacted the council in the six different local areas - but very different levels of satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider.

Area

Satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council by area	Satisfied (very + fairly)
Banff and Buchan	35%
Buchan	38%
Kincardine and Mearns	45%
Formartine	46%
Marr	55%
Garioch	58%

Age

35. Age is another significant factor. Satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council was lowest amongst the 35 to 44 age group, at 37%, and rose to 57% for those aged 65 to 74, and to 75% for those aged 75 and over.

Employment Status

36. Employment status is another key factor: the most economically active are the least satisfied with the Council.

Satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council by employment status	Satisfied (very +fairly)
Self employed	36%
Full-time employed	39%
Part-time employed	47%
Home and family	49%
Ill health/unemployment	52%
Retired	58%

Gender

37. Women were marginally more satisfied than men: 48% compared with 44%.

Countryside versus Town or village Dwellers

38. People who lived in towns or villages were somewhat more satisfied than people (one quarter of those surveyed) who lived in the countryside: 48% compared with 40%. This may be related to perceptions that council services are concentrated in towns.

BENCHMARKING ON CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

39. Residents were asked to compare Aberdeenshire Council with a range of other service providers:
    - public services: (the NHS and North of Scotland Water Authority [NOSWA]);
    - utilities and telecom providers;
    - banks; and
    - supermarkets.

Residents believed that all other service providers were more effective than the council in terms of delivering customer service. In the case of the NHS and NOSWA, this was marginal.

Tesco and Asda were identified by residents as the best service providers in Aberdeenshire: employees also shared this view and were even more impressed than residents with these two supermarket companies.

RESIDENTS' PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

40. Residents wanted to see action on:
    - Money issues
    - Local facilities
    - Improved service delivery

Money Issues

41. On money, residents wished to see better value for money being delivered. A common comment was "we are paying more for less service". Even well respected services, such as schooling, were seen as deteriorating.

42. Employees believed that good and improved value for money was being delivered in certain services. Residents appeared unaware of or unimpressed by the council's achievements. The council needs to be able to demonstrate value for money.

43. Moreover, where additional money was being spent, residents did not necessarily believe that this was effective, a concern shared by a number of employees. So "more money" is not sufficient in itself. Moreover, if spent locally on things which are not seen as a priority by residents, more spending will reduce the council's reputation for stewardship of public funds.

Local Facilities

44. Both in focus groups and in the survey, the importance of local facilities run by the council was emphasised by residents. They were less concerned with local council offices, than facilities designed primarily for use by the community. An efficiently handled telephone call to a distant council office could suffice for many purposes (and was better than a visit to an unhelpful local office) - but a visit to a distantly located swimming pool or library was less appealing.

45. Local facilities were seen both as a major strength and as an area for improve-ment. They were much more visible than many of the large spending services.

Improved Service Delivery

46. The main areas for action on service delivery were:

    Improving contact handling in:
    - Finance
    - Roads
    - Planning

    Improving customer processes through increasing:
    - first time telephone access by customers and reducing transfers; and
    - the incidence of pro-actively giving updating information to customers, thereby cutting down on numbers who feel the need to chase progress.

    Improving service provision on road maintenance.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

TWO RESIDENTS SURVEYS

1.1. Two surveys of Aberdeenshire Council residents, one telephone and one postal, were undertaken in parallel with a survey of council employees.

FOCUS GROUPS

1.2. A qualitative research programme was undertaken before the quantitative surveys of residents. This was to ensure that the issues in the questionnaire reflected the actual concerns of Aberdeenshire residents, rather than the assumptions of council employees involved with the surveys.

1.3. A series of six focus groups was undertaken, one in each of the six areas of Aberdeenshire. One of the groups comprised senior secondary pupils, another consisted largely of older people, with the rest consisted of people of working age.

1.4. People were willing to attend the groups and take part in discussions. Many issues raised were incorporated into the final questionnaires.

TELEPHONE SURVEY SAMPLING - AND ACHIEVED RESPONSE

1.5. The telephone survey was designed to achieve 400 interviews with residents across Aberdeenshire. A telephone sampling plan was drawn up to ensure that interviews achieved were representative of residents by gender, age, socio-economic grouping and by location, using the six administrative areas of Aberdeenshire.

1.6. The local telephone directory was used to draw a random sample, and then a sampling grid was used to select a person within the household for interview, rather than necessarily the person who answered the telephone. Thus, the final sample was completely random.

1.7. This survey was undertaken between 18 May and 10 June, and was relatively straight forward. There was no noticeable reluctance to participate, except to a minor extent amongst young males in the higher socio-economic groups who make little use of council services. As is usually the case, towards the end of the survey period a number of contacts had to be made with residents to find each interviewee who met the requirements of the sampling plan.

1.8. At the end of the process, a total of 405 interviews was completed with residents whose characteristics closely matched the sampling plan: see Section 2 for details

1.9. Residents were generally very pleased to participate and, equally important, to continue with the interview to the end of the schedule. This survey was undertaken before the initial publicity generated by some employees writing to the press, so there were no echoes of these criticisms from residents in the telephone survey.

1.10. Progressive Partnership undertook this research from their telephone bureau in Edinburgh.

POSTAL SAMPLE AND RESPONSE RATE

1.11. A random sample of 10,000 residents' names and addresses were drawn from the electoral register. Individually addressed envelopes were therefore sent out, containing a self-completion questionnaire, which incorporated a short covering letter from the chief executive of Aberdeenshire Council, and a business reply envelope. Residents were offered a free 0800 number to call if they needed any assistance in completing the questionnaire.

1.12. Questionnaires were issued from the 9th June, and the cut off date for replies was the 19th July, a response rate of 24% was achieved, which was in the expected range. (Further questionnaires continued to be received since that date). A total of 2,321 analysable responses were therefore available from the postal survey. A number of respondents to the postal survey wrote on the questionnaire that the survey was a waste of money at a time of financial stringency for the council.

1.13. The postal questionnaires were broadly representative of the characteristics of Aberdeenshire residents: see section 2 for details.

OVERALL RESPONSE

1.14. A total of 2,726 analysable questionnaires was therefore achieved by the two surveys: 405 from the telephone survey and 2,321 from the postal survey. This is a very good basis for detailed analysis of what aspects of services cause residents of Aberdeenshire to be satisfied or dissatisfied.

TOPICS COVERED BY TWO SURVEYS

1.15. The telephone survey asked unprompted awareness questions about the identity of the local authority and its six areas. These were not asked in the postal survey, not least because people could turn the page and find the answer.

1.16. Both surveys asked residents questions about any contact with council services over the past 12 months.

1.17. Both surveys asked about people's use of particular services - housing, schools, libraries, sports and leisure facilities and social work services - and their satisfaction with them. They also asked about a range of services which everybody uses - winter gritting, road maintenance, street lighting, street cleaning and refuse collection.

1.18. The postal survey alone asked about the council as a service provider, its strengths and its areas for improvement. This was an identical question to that asked of employees. So too was a question which asked residents to compare Aberdeenshire Council's performance in terms of customer service with a range of utilities and other companies: see table 1.

Table 1: Topics Covered by Surveys

	Telephone	Residents postal	Employees postal
Awareness	√		
Contact experience	√	√	
Customer satisfaction	√	√	√
Council as service provider		√	√
Benchmarking		√	√
Council as employer			√
Handling of budget crisis			√

2. PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS OF THE TWO SURVEYS

HOW REPRESENTATIVE WERE RESPONDENTS?

2.1. With any consumer research there is always a question about how "representative" interviewees or respondents are of the entire population being studied.

2.2. In the case of postal surveys, it is sometimes assumed that those who respond to a self-completion questionnaire will not have the same personal and household characteristics or the same views as those who do not respond.

2.3. It is not possible to know what the views of non-respondents are. However, where the characteristics of the whole population are known, it is possible to compare certain personal and household characteristics of respondents and non-respondents.

2.4. If people who reply to a postal questionnaire have broadly the same characteristics as non-respondents, it is reasonable to assume that their views are likely to be more closely aligned than if their characteristics vary significantly.

2.5. In the case of telephone or face to face in-home surveys, it is standard practice to have a "quota" drawn up to reflect the characteristics of the population. Interviewees are then selected to make up the quota.

2.6. Table 2 over sets out the main details of the sampling plan or "quota" for the telephone survey, based on the known characteristics of the whole population. It also compares the achieved telephone responses with the plan. And compares the postal responses with the age and location quotas. Socio-economic groupings were not identified in the self-completion questionnaire.

2.7. The two sets of respondents were almost precisely representative of the whole population by location: no area was significantly over or under represented.

2.8. On age, there was an under representation of people aged 34 and under in the telephone survey, which was even more pronounced on the postal survey. This is a common experience in postal research. In the case of this survey, however, where the numbers of overall respondents are high, it is possible to analyse the views of younger residents with confidence.

2.9. Telephone ownership levels are particularly high in more rural areas such as Aberdeenshire, and a good spread of socio-economic groups was achieved in the telephone survey.

Table 2: Location, age and socio economic characteristics of interviewees/ respondents against plan

	Plan	Telephone survey	Postal survey*
Location			
Banff and Buchan	16%	15%	15%
Buchan	18%	18%	15%
Formartine	16%	16%	17%
Garioch	18%	18%	19%
Kincardine and Mearns	17%	17%	19%
Marr	15%	15%	15%
Age			
18-24	11%	7%	5%
25-34	18%	15%	13%
35-44	21%	23%	22%
45-54	19%	20%	21%
55-64	13%	13%	17%
65+	18%	21%	21%
Socio-economic grouping			
AB	22%	20%	N/A
C1	26%	24%	N/A
C2	25%	26%	N/A
DE	27%	30%	N/A

* Postal questionnaires were precoded by area.

TELEPHONE OWNERSHIP LIMITATIONS TO RESEARCH

2.10. However, there are some groups in the population amongst whom telephone ownership is not universal: for example up to 10% of people in social rented housing across Scotland may not have a telephone, including very elderly people who have never had one, and many younger, non-working, lone mothers, who cannot afford one.

2.11. In this context it is worth noting that amongst telephone survey respondents, only 3.7% said that they or a member of the household received any social work services, compared with 7.2% in the postal survey. There are at least two possible explanations for this difference, both which may apply: one is that many social work clients are not on the telephone and another is that the greater perceived anonymity of a postal questionnaire encouraged a fuller response.

HOUSING TENURE

2.12. Housing tenure was not included in the telephone sampling plan. However, the results of the two surveys is compared to recent housing tenure information in table 3:

Table 3: Housing tenure of respondents

	Aberdeenshire stock profile*	Telephone survey	Postal survey
Owner occupied house	68%	79%	78%
Council house	17%	15%	13%
Housing association house	14%	2%	2%
House owned by private landlord		4%	5%
Somewhere else	N/A	**	2%

* The Directory of Scottish Local Government, January 2000

** less than 1%

2.13. The respondents' characteristics were nearly identical in both telephone and postal surveys. They were also close to the housing stock profile: it should be noted that a percentage of the population living in a form of housing tenure will not be identical to the percentage of the housing stock in that tenure, because household size varies. In particular, people living in council houses are significantly older than owner occupiers (58% aged 55 and over, compared with 35% of owners) and tend to have fewer adults living in the household.

CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD

2.14. Turning to households with children under the age of 18, the profiles of the two groups of respondents were almost identical: see table 4.

Table 4: Household with children aged under 18

Telephone survey	34.0%
Postal survey	34.6%

CHILDREN ATTENDING SCHOOL

2.15. The surveys revealed the following attendance level of children at council run schools.

Table 5: Attendance at council run nursery schools amongst under 5s

Telephone survey*	38%
Postal survey**	42%

* Base only 53: not statistically valid

** Base 248

Table 6: Children Aged 5 to 18 attending school

	Telephone survey	Postal survey
Council primary school	55%	58%
Council secondary school	61%	50%
Council special school	0	2%
Independent school	6%	4%
Base	110	549

2.16. The telephone survey had a higher proportional reported attendance at council secondary schools. Nobody interviewed by telephone said that they had a child attending a special school.

2.17. Around one in twenty overall had a child attending an independent school.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

2.18. On the employment status of respondents, a similar picture emerges from the two surveys, although in the postal survey an extra option "voluntary unpaid work" was added, and respondents were able to give more than one response. This meant that larger numbers in the postal survey indicated that they were "looking after home and family" and also "self-employed", as well as giving the "unpaid work" response. The figures are set out in table 7.

Table 7: Employment: status of respondents

	Telephone survey	Postal survey
Full employment	39%	38%
Part-time employment	16%	16%
Self-employed	4%	8%
Unemployed	3%	2%
Retired	27%	27%
Student	2%	3%
Not working due to ill health or disability	2%	4%
Looking after house & family	6%	11%
Voluntary unpaid work	N/A	4%
TOTAL	99%*	113%**

* Total may not add up to 100% due to rounding
** Multiple responses allowed, so total exceeds 100%

2.19. On most categories, the figures for both surveys are nearly identical.

GENDER

2.20. On gender, the telephone survey was designed to achieve a 50:50 male-female balance, rather than to reflect the population as a whole where there is a small majority of females. Amongst the telephone interviewees, 52% in fact were females and 48% males. In the postal survey the imbalance was more pronounced, with 58% of respondents female and 42% male. See table 8.

Table 8: Gender of respondents

	Telephone survey	Postal survey
Female	52%	58%
Male	48%	42%

2.21. Postal respondents were invited to say whether they lived in a town or village or in the countryside: three out of four gave the former response.

Table 9: Where residents lived: town/village or countryside

In a town or village	75%
In the country	25%
Base	2270

2.22. Finally, residents were invited to indicate from a presented list which town or village they lived in or lived closest to. The results, in both numbers and percentages are given in table 10.

Table 10: Residents' nearest town or village

	Number	%
Banff	94	4%
Macduff	49	2%
Fraserburgh	193	8%
Aberchirder	21	1%
Peterhead	162	7%
Mintlaw	104	5%
Cruden Bay	32	1%
Turriff	88	4%
Ellon	184	8%
Fyvie	37	2%
Newburgh	34	2%
Oldmeldrum	71	3%
Alford	63	3%
Ballater	50	2%
Banchory	149	7%
Huntly	66	3%
Rhynie	13	1%
Braemar	8	*
Inverurie	167	7%
Insch	52	2%
Westhill	115	5%
Kintore	48	2%
Kemnay	67	3%
Stonehaven	171	8%
Laurencekirk	53	2%
Portlethen	113	5%
Inverbervie	55	2%
Total	2259	100%

* Number less than 1%

OVERVIEW ON RESPONDENTS

2.23. Where the characteristics of the population of Aberdeenshire is known, both the telephone interviewees and postal respondents are a close match. More-over, postal respondents' characteristics closely matched those of the telephone respondents, which should be expected to match the general population, given the quota method of recruitment.

2.24. Thus the 2,724 respondents to the two surveys provide a representative view of the population of Aberdeenshire.

3. AWARENESS OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL AND ITS AREAS

RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1. Residents who were interviewed on the telephone were asked a series of questions to measure their awareness of Aberdeenshire Council and of its six local areas.

3.2. Awareness of Aberdeenshire Council was measured in two ways. First, unprompted or spontaneous awareness was measured. The question was asked "What is the name of the council which provides local authority services in this area?", and responses were noted.

3.3. Those who did not spontaneously say "Aberdeenshire Council" in response were then prompted with the correct name and asked if they had heard of it before.

3.4. Awareness of the local areas was measured only at that unprompted level. It was not possible to prompt interviewees with the correct answer during the interview, because only after the interview was the resident's post code able to be allocated to one of the six areas. However, the accuracy of the responses were assessed after the event, and the results are presented below.

UNPROMPTED AWARENESS OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

3.5. When asked the name of the council which provided each authority service for the area, nearly eight out of ten people interviewed spontaneously gave the name of Aberdeenshire Council. The various answers are set out in table 11.

Table 11: Spontaneous awareness of Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeenshire Council	79%
Grampian Regional Council	4%
Kincardine and Deeside District Council	2%
Gordon District Council	2%
Banff and Buchan District Council	4%
Aberdeen City/District Council	1%
Other	1%
Don't know/no idea	5%
Base	403 99%

3.6. There was little or no difference in awareness by age or gender of respondents, and the numbers for each of the six areas were too small to allow any valid comparison. However, there was a difference in unprompted awareness by social class. Amongst A B C1 interviewees, 84% could spontaneously name Aberdeenshire Council, compared with only 74% of C2 DE residents.

Prompted Awareness of Aberdeenshire Council

3.7. The 86 respondents who did not know or gave an out of date or wrong answer were then told the correct name. Seventy seven of them (89%), said that they had heard the name before, five of them had not, and four were not sure.

3.8. This brought overall awareness to 98%. See Table 12.

Table 12: Overall awareness of Aberdeenshire Council

Unprompted	79%
Prompted	19%
Overall awareness	98%

3.9. There is clearly some scope to increase unprompted awareness of Aberdeenshire Council, but little scope to increase overall awareness.

AWARENESS OF LOCAL AREAS

3.10. Interviewees were next told that Aberdeenshire is divided into six local areas, and were asked to name the local area in which they lived. Nearly a third had no idea, and just over one in five suggested a name which was not one of the names of the six areas of Aberdeenshire.

3.11. A total of 190 interviewees, or 47% spontaneously mentioned one of the six local areas by name. However, not all of these responses were accurate. For example, only half of those who claimed to live in the Banff and Buchan area actually did so. Thus, of the 47% who mentioned a name on the list, only 3% correctly identified the area they lived in, and 16% identified the wrong local area.

3.12. Some 53% had no idea or mentioned a name not on the list.

3.13. The level of claimed awareness of local area is compared with the actual area lived in in table 13 below. Table 14 shows the percentage of people living in each area who correctly identified their local area.

Table 13: Claimed Awareness of Local Area of Aberdeenshire

	Actual location by area %	Claimed awareness %
Kincardine and Mearns	17%	12%
Marr	15%	3%
Garioch	18%	4%
Formartine	16%	3%
Buchan	18%	4%
Banff and Buchan	15%	21%
Other		22%
Don't know/no idea		31%
Base	405	405

Table 14: Residents' actual awareness of local area

	Correctly identified local area
Banff and Buchan	69%
Kincardine and Mearns	49%
Garioch	19%
Buchan	18% (45% said Banff and Buchan)
Formartine	17%
Marr	17%
Base	Number of people living in each area

3.14. Of the 124 (or 31%) of interviewees who had unprompted and accurate awareness of the local area in which they lived, over a third of these came from an area with an identical name to a previous district council, Banff and Buchan, which was wrongly identified as the local area by an equal number of respondents.

3.15. Awareness of Marr, Garioch, Buchan and Formartine was particularly low, with fewer than one in five residents in these areas being aware of the area name.

3.16. Awareness of the six local areas of Aberdeenshire therefore remains low, four years after the creation of Aberdeenshire Council.

4. CONTACT WITH ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

CONTACTORS - THE MOST ACTIVE USERS OF COUNCIL SERVICES.

4.1. People who contact a council service with a query or a problem are the most active users of that service. They are well placed to comment on how easy it was to get in touch with the right part of the service, what the people were like whom they dealt with, what was the quality of any information or explanation, and how quickly any action was taken.

COMPARED WITH ROUTINE OR PASSIVE SERVICE USERS

4.2. The routine use of council services, such as the council housing service, libraries and sports and leisure facilities, and user satisfaction with these are covered in the next section (Section 5). Residents' views of services which everybody uses or benefits from, such as roads, lighting and refuse collection where the "use" may be largely passive and little considered - (until, for example, the refuse is not collected) are examined in the section after that (Section 6). Routine or passive service users tend to be more satisfied than contactors.

THE CONTACT EXPERIENCE

4.3. Customer contacts are usually generated by something out of the ordinary happening. Residents were asked about all contacts with the council they had made over the last 12 months, and then about the single most important contact. This "main" contact is usually the least routine of all the individual dealings with the Council.

"I have not had more than the most minimum of contacts with the council. Perhaps it is a strength that so little contact has been necessary over 10 year".

4.4. In the postal survey the first question asked was about contact with the council. Respondents were given a checklist of 31 different options. Some 40% of postal respondents said that they had not made contact with any of these services during the past year: 60% identified one or more service.

4.5. In the telephone survey, this question was asked in the middle of the interview. Because of the time taken to read things out over the telephone, a shorter list of 12 services was given, and the interviewee was given a final option of "another part of the council, such as those already mentioned earlier in the interview".

4.6. In the telephone survey, 51% of residents stated that there had been no contact at all over the previous year with the council, and 49% said that they had been in touch. This lower level of claimed contact in the telephone survey was consistent with the lower level of detail offered.

4.7. One advantage with postal surveys is that respondents can study a detailed questionnaire at leisure: there is no pressure to recall and respond quickly.

4.8. After the initial difference in the way the question was asked, the two questionnaires subsequently asked nearly identical questions.

THE SEQUENCE

4.9. Respondents were first asked about all the contacts they had made and then were invited to identify a single main contact. A series of subsequent questions were then asked about the main contact, including handling, the people, resolution and satisfaction with handling and outcome. This section goes through the sequence, giving information on how contactors' experiences varied according to the services contacted. At the end, satisfaction for all contactors is analysed by experience

ALL CONTACTS

4.10. First, respondents were asked about all the services they had contacted over the past year. Table 15 (over) sets out all the numbers of contacts made with the various services in one column, with a percentage figure (of all those making contact) in the second column.

SINGLE MAIN CONTACT

4.11. When invited to name the single main contact, a somewhat different order emerged. Finance remained the most frequently mentioned service. Libraries came lower in the list of priorities. Planning and development control rose to become the second most important contact, and housing repair was well behind in third place.

4.12. See table 16 (page 15) for the full list of the single most important contacts. Eight services were mentioned by 1% or fewer of respondents, and a further eight services by no more than 2% of respondents.

Table 15: All contacts

	No of contacts	% of all those making contact
Council tax/council tax benefit	684	46%
Other finance	105	7%
Planning/development control	297	20%
Building control	138	9%
Trading standards	40	3%
Licensing	32	2%
Environmental health	205	14%
Registration of births, deaths and marriages	149	10%
Chief executive's	11	*
Area manager's office	35	2%
Economic development	10	*
Law and administration	45	3%
Personnel/IT (Information technology)	17	1%
Housing benefit	163	11%
Housing repair	185	13%
Housing to apply for a house/transfer	53	4%
Housing: other	59	4%
Education - pre school/nursery	89	6%
Education - primary school	149	10%
Education - secondary school	115	8%
Education - special school	19	1%
Library	355	24%
Sports and leisure	182	12%
Social work - elderly Social work - child care Social work - community care Social work other	214	14%
Roads and lighting	185	13%
Other roads and transportation issues	71	5%
Refuse collection/cleansing	266	18%
Other council service	78	5%
No contact at all 41% of all postal respondents: 51% of telephone respondents		
Telephone and Postal Survey: Base	1,470 (excluding no contact)	

* Less than 1%

4.13. In subsequent reporting, the data for the postal survey is used for ease of analysis: the telephone survey respondents told a very similar story.

Table 16: Single most important contact

Finance - Council tax/council tax benefit	26%
Other finance	2%
Planning/development control	12%
Building control	2%
Trading standards	0.4%
Licensing	1%
Environmental health	5%
Registration of births, deaths and marriages	3%
Chief executive's	0.1%
Area manager's office	0.2%
Economic development	0.1%
Law and administration	1%
Personnel/IT (Information technology)	0.4%
Housing benefit	2%
Housing repair	7%
Housing to apply for a house/transfer	2%
Housing: other	1%
Education - pre school/nursery	2%
Education - primary school	3%
Education - secondary school	4%
Education - special school	0.2%
Library	6%
Sports and leisure	2%
Social work	5%
Roads and lighting	5%
Other roads and transportation issues	2%
Refuse collection/cleansing	4%
Other council service	2%
Postal Base	1,014

4.14. In table 17, the most important contacts are listed by service area.

Table 17: Most important contact by service area

Finance	30%
Planning and environmental services	24%
Education and recreation	17%
Housing and social work	14%
Transportation and infrastructure	7%
Other	7%

NATURE OF CONTACT

4.15. Respondents were asked what they were mainly looking for when they got in touch. Were they asking for information, or giving it? Were they requesting a service, that is asking for something to be done in a fairly routine manner? Were they making a complaint, which is also asking for something to be done (but sometimes not for the first time)?

4.16. Respondents could give more than one response, because sometimes a single contact will be used for more than one purpose (eg "My mother-in-law is now living with us, how does that affect our place on the transfer list" is both giving and asking for information). The responses are given in table 18.

Table 18: Nature of contact

Asking for information?	44%
Giving information?	17%
Asking for a service/something to be done?	52%
Making a complaint?	15%
Other?	6%
Base	1271

4.17. Those approaching education & recreation and planning & environmental services were most likely to be asking for information. Residents who approached housing & social work services and the transportation & infrastructure service and "other" services, were most likely to be asking for something be done.

METHOD OF CONTACT

4.18. Nearly two out of three respondents who made contact about a most important issue did so by telephone, with personal visits the next most common method. See table 19.

Table 19: Method of contact

Telephoned	66%
Visited	26%
Wrote a letter/faxed	8%
e-mailed	0.2%
Base	1623

4.19. Those contacting Education and Recreation were most likely to visit (58%) and least likely to telephone. People contacting planning & environmental services were most likely to write a letter or fax (25%). Housing & social work and road/transportation contacts were most likely to be made by telephone.

SPEED OF TELEPHONE ACCESS

4.20. Two out of three respondents who telephone got through first time: more than one in ten took three or more attempts. See table 20.

Table 20: Speed of telephone access: number of times called

Once	65%
Twice	20%
Three or more times	12%
Can't remember/no idea	3%
Base	919

4.21. First time telephone access was particularly impressive for Housing and Social Work, at 74% of 121 contacts. (Education & recreation appeared to perform equally well amongst the small number answering this question). Finance performed much less well with only 56% of the 189 contactors getting through first time: 16% had to make three or more attempts. (Planning & environmental services had a similar performance to finance, but numbers were low).

4.22. A similar story is told on handling of the telephone contact once through, with housing & social work attending to 49% of contacts straight away. See table 21 for the general picture.

Table 21: Telephone handling once through

Attended to straight away	42%
Transferred/call another number	45%
Telephone back/leave a message	10%
Can't remember	4%

VISITS

4.23. Only 13% of respondents made appointments prior to visits. Appointments appeared to be more common in education & recreation.

4.24. Despite the lack of appointments, some 77% of respondents were seen straight away, on arrival, and a further 20% were seen within 15 minutes of arrival. See table 22.

Table 22: Ease of access - visits

Straight away/on arrival	77%
After a wait of up to 15 minutes	20%
After a wait of 15-30 minutes	1%
After a wait of over 30 minutes	*
Can't remember	2%
Base	364

* = less than 1%

4.25. Again education & recreation appeared to have the best performance amongst all services, although based on a relatively small number of respondents.

THE ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL PEOPLE

4.26. Residents who had contacted the council were next asked about various attributes of the employees with whom they had dealt. These were:

- friendliness
- helpfulness
- knowledge
- understanding of my situation
- capacity to deal with my problem
- information/explanation given
- extent to which kept updated.

4.27. Nearly 1300 respondents were able to give views on friendliness and helpfulness, and somewhat fewer for other attributes. On updating, fewer than a 1,000 felt able to comment, not least because a number of contacts were dealt with there and then. The full set of finding are set out in Table 23.

Table 23: The Aberdeenshire Council people

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/ nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Friendliness	42%	38%	13%	3%	3%	1,293
Helpfulness	40%	36%	10%	8%	7%	1,287
Knowledge	35%	36%	15%	8%	6%	1,179
Understanding of my situation	34%	34%	14%	9%	9%	1,174
Capacity to deal with my problem	32%	31%	14%	11%	12%	1,128
The extent to which they kept me updated about what was happening	24%	27%	19%	12%	1%	977
Information/explanation they gave me	28%	32%	14%	9%	16%	1,148

4.28. Focusing on the "top box" of very satisfied, satisfaction declines steadily from very high levels for the courtesy attributes, 42% for friendliness and 40% for helpfulness to somewhat lower levels for the delivery of actions and explanations with 32% for capacity to deal with the problem and 28% for information and explanation.

4.29. Satisfaction was particularly low for the extent to which contactors were kept up to date by employees on what was happening, where only 24% were very satisfied with just over half satisfied at all. No fewer than 31% were dissatisfied, most of them very dissatisfied. Improvements in explanations and information, especially updating, should take priority.

Table 24: Net score for people attributes

	Satisfied (very + fairly)	Dissatisfied (very + fairly)	Net Score
Friendliness	80%	6%	+74
Helpfulness	76%	15%	+61
Knowledge	71%	14%	+57
Understanding	68%	18%	+50
Capacity	63%	23%	+40
Information/explanation	60%	25%	+35
Updating	51%	31%	+20

4.30. Table 24 combines satisfaction and dissatisfaction figures and presents net scores. When analysed by service area, education & recreation, housing & social work, and "other" services performed significantly and consistently better than finance, planning & environmental services (and transportation & infrastructure, though the numbers were small).

4.31. Education & recreation and "other" services performed particularly well on knowledge, capacity to deal with the problem, information and explanation, and on updating.

4.32. Housing & social work performed particularly well on understanding of the service users situation.

SERVICES' PERCEIVED ATTITUDE TO CUSTOMERS

4.33. Contactors were next asked about the perceived attitude of the service they contacted towards their customers. Just under half (47%) chose the neutral category of statement to the effect that the service "neither encourages nor discourages" their customers from giving their views.

4.34. Amongst those who gave an opinion either way slightly more were positive (39%) than negative (21%). The full findings are given in table 25.

Table 25: Contactors' views on service's attitude to customers

The service:	
actively goes out of their way to seek the views of their customers	10%
encourages their customers to give their views on the services they use	19%
neither encourages nor discourages their customers from giving their views	47%
does not make it obvious how and where customers can air their views	17%
avoids customers if they look like they are unhappy	7%

4.35. People who contacted Education and Recreation perceived it as a particularly positive service, with 46% perceiving it as encouraging customers to give their views, and only 16% seeing it as in a way negative.

RESOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

4.36. Contactors were asked if the issue they had got in touch about was resolved yet. For the telephone survey, only three options were given (Yes, No, Not Sure), while the postal questionnaire gave more detailed options which are, nevertheless, able to be combined for comparison. Table 26 sets out the comparable figures for the two surveys, and table 27 gives the detailed postal survey findings.

Table 26: Has the issue been resolved yet? Telephone and postal findings

	Postal	Telephone
Yes	68%	72%
No	27%	26%
Not sure	5%	3%

Table 27: Has the issue been resolved yet - and how fast?

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Postal</th><th>Tel</th></tr>
<tr><td>Yes, it was resolved immediately/within 24 hours</td><td>28%</td><td rowspan="4">72%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Yes, it was resolved within two weeks</td><td>18%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Yes, it was resolved between two weeks and a month</td><td>11%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Yes, it was resolved after a month or longer</td><td>11%</td></tr>
<tr><td>No, it has not been resolved yet - but it will be resolved</td><td>12%</td><td rowspan="2">26%</td></tr>
<tr><td>No, it has not been resolved yet - and I do not expect it to be resolved</td><td>15%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Not sure</td><td>5%</td><td>3%</td></tr>
</table>

4.37. On analysis of the detailed postal responses education & recreation had the highest percentage of issues resolved immediately or within 24 hours, at 44%. This is consistent with the high proportion of contacts with education & recreation being requests for information (nearly half).

4.38. "Other" services had a similar level of success as education & recreation dealing with issues cumulatively within two weeks, in spite of their relatively high proportion of contacts being requests for a service action (45%). Transportation & infrastructure had the highest percentage of contacts not being resolved yet (44%), although a number of these contactors still expected the issue to be resolved (16%) (again, caution on small numbers contacting roads/transportation).

CHASE UP CONTACTS

4.39. How many of the contactors felt it necessary to contact the service again to find out what was happening or to chase them up? Overall, 42% said that they had done so, and 58% had made no such contact.

4.40. This is an important matter because customers who make chase up contacts are usually dissatisfied: the action being taken may have turned out to be slower than promised or expected, or inadequately executed. Moreover, handling telephone enquiries from people asking what is happening about this service request can be time consuming and frustrating for staff, diverting their energies from dealing with the actual issue.

4.41. Chase-up contacts were less common for "other" services at 37%, and education & recreation at only 20%. All other services attracted high levels of chase up contacts:44% for finance, 49% for social work, 50% for planning and environmental services and 2 out of 3 for transportation & infrastructure.

SATISFACTION WITH HANDLING

4.42. Two separate satisfaction questions were asked of contactors: satisfaction with the handling of the contact and with the outcome. Different types of option were given for the two questions.

4.43. On handling, 61% were either very or fairly satisfied, and only 23% were very or fairly dissatisfied, with the remainder neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This is a fairly creditable performance, given that a number of contacts arise from problems which may not be easy to address (it compares favourably with a later question on general satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council as provider of local services).

Table 28: Satisfaction with handling of contact

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/ nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
28%	33%	16%	12%	12%

4.44. For individual services, most contactors were most likely to be very satisfied with "other" services, at 39%, compared with 31% very satisfied with education & recreation and also with housing & social work.

4.45. When the fairly satisfied is added to very satisfied, and the two dissatisfied categories are combined, the picture that emerges is set out in table 29.

Table 29: Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with handling of contact by service

	Overall	Education & recreation	Other	Housing & social work	Finance	Planning & Environment	Roads
Base	951	149	177	160	271	122	72*
Satisfied (very + fairly)	50%	71%	67%	63%	56%	54%	36%
Dissatisfied (very + fairly)	25%	11%	22%	23%	28%	30%	46%
Net score	+25	+60	+45	+40	+28	+24	-10

* Caution: small numbers

SATISFACTION WITH OUTCOME

4.46. On satisfaction by outcome, just under half, 49%, were completely satisfied, with a further 31% not completely satisfied but to some extent mollified. One in five contactors, 20% were not at all satisfied with the action taken or considered that no action had been taken. See table 30.

Table 30: Satisfaction with outcome

I was completely satisfied	49%
I was not completely satisfied, but the action taken was acceptable	21%
I was not completely satisfied, but some action was taken	10%
I was not at all satisfied with the action taken	8%
I was not at all satisfied and no action was taken	12%
Base	1166

4.47. Satisfaction with outcome was highest amongst education & recreation, other services, and housing & social work, and finance.

4.48. People contacting planning & environmental services and finance were particularly likely to be mollified.

4.49. Those contacting education & recreation, and finance were least likely to say "not at all satisfied" with the action.

4.50. See table 31 which compares "completely satisfied" and "not at all satisfied" by service. The service with the biggest difference in satisfaction between handling and outcome was finance, which seemed to provide the right, or at least acceptable, outcome to eighty three out of a hundred people, but left just over half satisfied with how their contact has been handled.

Table 31: Satisfaction with outcome by service

	Overall	Education & recreation	Other	Housing & social work	Finance	Planning & Environment	Roads
Base	905	146	174	151	257	110	67
Satisfied completely	48%	60%	55%	48%	27%	34%	30%
Dissatisfied (not at all satisfied)	20%	10%	18%	25%	17%	25%	37%
Net score	+28	+50	+37	+23	+30	+11	-7

* Caution small number

SATISFACTION DRIVERS FOR CONTACT EXPERIENCE

4.51. This section analyses satisfaction with the handling of various aspects of the contact experience, to identify the satisfaction drivers. For this purpose the analysis is by "top box", namely very satisfied.

4.52. There is no significant difference in satisfaction by nature of contact, except predictably amongst those making a complaint, where only 1% were very satisfied with how the contact was handled (and only 20% were fairly satisfied).

SATISFACTION BY METHOD OF CONTACT

4.53. On method of contact, those who visited had the highest level of satisfaction:

Table 32: Satisfaction by method of contact

	% Very satisfied
Visited	36%
Telephoned	26%
Letter/fax	16%
Overall	27%

SATISFACTION BY EASE OF ACCESS

4.54. Amongst those telephoning, however, if they got through at the first attempt their satisfaction was similar to those who visited.

Table 33: Satisfaction by speed of telephone access

Number of times to get through	% Very satisfied
One	35%
Twice	13%
Three or more times	4%

4.55. Amongst those who had to make contact a second time, a full 30% were dissatisfied with the whole handling of the contact, against 48% satisfied. However, amongst those who had to ring three or more times, a full 62% were dissatisfied overall and only 17% in any way satisfied.

4.56. Once through on the telephone, being attended to straight away had a major impact on satisfaction: see table 34.

Table 34: Satisfaction by telephone handling once through

	% Very satisfied
Attended to straight away	44%
Transferred/another number	13%
Phone back later/ can't remember	9%

4.57. Amongst those who were seen straightaway 43% were very satisfied with the handling of the contact, compared with 36% overall of those who visited. (Numbers for other individual options were too small for comparison, but overall satisfaction appeared to drop significantly after a wait of up to 15 minutes).

PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMER FRIENDLINESS AND SATISFACTION

4.58. Satisfaction with the handling of the contact is unsurprisingly closely linked with contactors' perceptions of the customer friendliness of the service. The link is unlikely to be a simple causal one, but the correlation is very strong and emphasises the need for services to appear receptive to customer views.

Table 35: Satisfaction and customer friendliness

Service	% Very satisfied
Actively seeks customers views	77%
Encourages customers to give views	47%
Neither encourages nor discourages	21%
Doesn't make it obvious to customers how to air their views	3%
Avoids unhappy customers	0%

SATISFACTION BY SPEED OF RESOLUTION

4.59. Speed of resolution is a key driver of satisfaction: see table 36. Interestingly, there is no difference in impact on satisfaction between resolution taking more than a month and not being resolved yet, but with an expectation that it would be resolved, which both scored 10% very satisfied, and a further third fairly satisfied.

Table 36: Satisfaction and speed of resolution

Speed	% Very satisfied
Yes, immediately within 24 hours	59%
Yes, within 2 weeks	35%
Yes, between 2 weeks and a month	17%
Yes, after a month or longer	10%
Not yet resolved, but it will be	10%
Not resolved - and no expectation of resolution	0%

4.60. For those who expected no resolution, a full 73% were dissatisfied with the handling of the contact. Thus, where no resolution at all is offered (because it is not capable of resolution, presumably) satisfaction with handling is unlikely to be high. There was indeed a high degree of correlation between satisfaction with handling and with outcome, especially at the two extremes.

SATISFACTION BY CUSTOMER CHASING PROGRESS

4.61. Related to speed of resolution is the issue of whether or not contactors felt the need to contact the service subsequently to chase progress. This is frequently the flip side of a service actively bringing a customer up to date with progress or lack of it: the person who is kept actively informed is less likely to initiate progress chasing contacts.

4.62. Those who felt the need to chase progress were significantly less satisfied than those who did not. A contact management strategy must, therefore, include guidelines on proactive updating, to reduce or eliminate customer initiated further contacts. Table 37 gives the impact on satisfaction.

Table 37: Satisfaction and progress chasing by customer

	% Very satisfied
No further customer initiated contact	43%
Customer did make further contact	6%

5. USERS' VIEWS ON SPECIFIC SERVICES

5.1. Residents were asked about the use of a number of specific council services by themselves or members of their household:

housing services

schools

libraries

sports and leisure

social work

5.2. The same questions were asked in both postal and telephone surveys. The purpose was to identify which service people used and then to ask them what they thought of these services.

5.3. The questions asked about each service in turn were:

- satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council as a provider of the service;
- views on whether that service got better or worse over the past three or four years (in the case of housing, the repairs services was singled out for comment);
- views on the effectiveness of written communications from that service.

5.4. The questions about changes in service standards over recent years and the effectiveness of written communications emerged from issues raised in focus groups.

HOW MANY PEOPLE USED THESE SERVICES?

Housing

5.5. On housing, a total of 367 council tenants were some 14% of the total respondents: (A further 182 respondents were tenants of private landlords or housing associations).

5.6. The numbers answering the subsequent questions were as follows:

Satisfaction	267
Better or worse	261
Effectiveness of communication	236

Education

5.7. A total of 123 respondents said that their children aged under 5 attended council run nursery schools (45% of pre-school age children).

5.8. A total of 435 respondents had children who attended a council run primary school, and 389 respondents had children who attended a council run secondary school. Some 14 parents had children attending a special school. there was, of course, some overlap amongst these parents.

5.9. The numbers answering the subsequent questions were as follows:

Satisfaction	708
Better or worse	659
Effectiveness of communication	677

5.10. The high numbers feeling able to comment on the effectiveness of written communications from schools or the education service was reflected in the focus groups, where parents also felt able to comment on communications.

Library Users

5.11. A total of 1,732 people said that they or a member of the household used the library, 48% of them at least once a month.

5.12. The numbers answering the subsequent questions were as follows:

Satisfaction	1,619
Better or worse	1,447
Effectiveness of communication	862

5.13. Evidently many library users did not feel able to judge the effectiveness of written communications.

Sports and Leisure

5.14. On sports and leisure, the following numbers of respondents said that they or a member of their household used one of the following leisure or sports facilities at least once every three months:

swimming pool	1,173
sports facility	583
park	1,062
playground	517

5.15. Again, there was some considerable overlap amongst these respondents. Relatively few felt able to assess the effectiveness of written communications.

5.16. The total number answering the subsequent questions were as follows:

Satisfaction	1,319
Better or worse	1,237
Effectiveness of communication	654

Social Work

5.17. Only 105 respondents said that they or a member of their household received any services from social work. (Interestingly, this compares with 214 people who reported earlier in the survey that they had contacted social work services: no doubt a number of these contacts were about third parties).

5.18. Despite this low response, 124 felt able to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with social work services, and 107 commented on the effectiveness of communication. In this case, because numbers were so small, these responses were analysed rather than being screened out.

5.19. The number of respondents answering the subsequent questions were as follows:

Satisfaction	124
Better or worse	82
Effectiveness of communication	107

FINDINGS FOR EACH SERVICE

5.20. The findings for each service are presented first in turn. Later in this section, comparable information on satisfaction etc for the range of services is presented.

Housing

5.21. Overall, three out of four council tenants are satisfied with Aberdeenshire Council as a provider of housing services, though most are only fairly satisfied. Ten percent are dissatisfied.

5.22. Tenants are somewhat more critical of the effectiveness of written communication, with 14% finding it ineffective. Most see the repairs service as no better and no worse: those who believed it has improved broadly equal those who believe it has got worse.

Table 38: Housing services

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	28%	Very much better	7%	Very effective	19%
Fairly satisfied	48%	Better	15%	Fairly effective	48%
Neither/nor	14%	Same	58%	Neither/nor	20%
Fairly dissatisfied	6%	Worse	16%	Fairly ineffective	8%
Very dissatisfied	4%	Very much worse	4%	Very ineffective	6%
Base	267	Base	261	Base	236

Education

5.23. A clear majority of parents, 70%, were satisfied with the schools service, though only 25% were very satisfied. Some 13% were dissatisfied. Parents of primary school children were more likely to be satisfied than parents of secondary school children, 83% against 74%. Parents of children in nursery schools and special schools were also more likely to be satisfied than secondary parents, although numbers were small.

5.24. Somewhat more parents thought that the schools had got worse, 29%, rather than better, 17%. However, there was a very strong commendation of the effectiveness of written communication to parents, with 84% finding it effective and only 9% ineffective.

Table 39: Schooling

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	25%	Very much better	3%	Very effective	32%
Fairly satisfied	55%	Better	14%	Fairly effective	52%
Neither/nor	7%	Same	54%	Neither/nor	8%
Fairly dissatisfied	9%	Worse	24%	Fairly ineffective	6%
Very dissatisfied	4%	Very much worse	5%	Very ineffective	3%
Base	708	Base	659	Base	677

Library Service

5.25. There were very high levels of satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council's libraries, with 86% satisfied, and only 6% dissatisfied. Regular library users were more satisfied than occasional users, 90% compared with 81% overall. Some 48% of regular users were very satisfied, compared with only 27% of occasional users.

5.26. While most thought the library service had remained the same, 25% thought that it was better than three or four years ago and only 8% thought it was worse.

5.27. Nearly half, 45%, saw written communication as effective, and only 15% saw it as ineffective.

Table 40: Library services

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	38%	Very much better	4%	Very effective	18%
Fairly satisfied	48%	Better	21%	Fairly effective	27%
Neither/nor	9%	Same	67%	Neither/nor	39%
Fairly dissatisfied	4%	Worse	8%	Fairly ineffective	6%
Very dissatisfied	2%	Very much worse	*	Very ineffective	9%
Base	1,619	Base	1,447	Base	862

* Less than 1%

Sports and Leisure

5.28. Most users were satisfied with sports and leisure services, 70%, though few were very satisfied (15%).

5.29. Equal numbers thought services had got better or worse. Half as many again thought written communication was ineffective, 33%, as thought it was effective, 22%.

Table 41: Sport and Leisure

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	15%	Very much better	2%	Very effective	5%
Fairly satisfied	55%	Better	19%	Fairly effective	17%
Neither/nor	14%	Same	57%	Neither/nor	45%
Fairly dissatisfied	11%	Worse	19%	Fairly ineffective	15%
Very dissatisfied	5%	Very much worse	3%	Very ineffective	18%
Base	1,319	Base	1,237	Base	654

Social Work

5.30. High levels of satisfaction were recorded, at 79%, with most of these very satisfied, 46%. Only 11% were dissatisfied.

5.31. Most people thought social work services had remained the same, and similar numbers thought they had got worse, 22%, or got better, 18%.

Table 42: Social work

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	46%	Very much better	7%	Very effective	19%
Fairly satisfied	33%	Better	11%	Fairly effective	43%
Neither/nor	10%	Same	60%	Neither/nor	18%
Fairly dissatisfied	4%	Worse	15%	Fairly ineffective	10%
Very dissatisfied	7%	Very much worse	7%	Very ineffective	10%
Base	124	Base	82	Base	107

OVERVIEW OF SPECIFIC SERVICES

5.32. Finally, the views of users on these specific services can be compared in terms of satisfaction, improvement or deterioration of the service, and effectiveness of written communications. In considering the tables below, it is important to remember that the people making these judgements differ from one service to another.

Satisfaction

5.33. First, satisfaction levels are presented in table 43, including a net score, where if satisfaction (very and fairly) exceeds dissatisfaction (very and fairly) a positive score is recorded: if the reverse is the case, a negative score is recorded.

Table 43: Satisfaction comparisons: specific services

	Housing	Schooling	Libraries	Sports & leisure	Social work
Satisfied (very & fairly)	76%	80%	86%	70%	79%
Dissatisfied (very & fairly)	10%	11%	6^	16%	11%
Net score	+66	+69	+80	+54	+68

5.34. Libraries emerged clearly as having the highest proportion of satisfied users, and the highest net score: this is frequently a finding in surveys of council customers. Social work has the highest number of **very** satisfied customers.

5.35. Sports and Leisure had the lowest level of satisfied users, particularly at the very satisfied level, and the lowest net score.

Better or Worse Than Three or Four Years Ago

5.36. Libraries also emerged as having the most improved services, in the views of users who perceived some change. Schooling was believed on balance to have got worse amongst those who expressed a view.

5.37. The findings are compared in table 44. For the net scores, the responses for all those who said "better" are combined and compared with all those who said "worse". A positive figure indicates perceived improvement, and a minus score indicates a perception of deterioration.

Table 44: "Better or worse" comparisons: specific services

	Housing	Schooling	Libraries	Sports & leisure	Social work
Better	22%	17%	25%	21%	18%
Worse	20%	29%	8%	22%	22%
Net score	+2	-12	+17	-1	-4

Effectiveness of Written Communications

5.38. Finally, the effectiveness of written communications can be compared by service. See table 45 which follows the same format as above, with a net score.

Table 45: Written communication comparisons: specific services

	Housing	Schooling	Libraries	Sports & leisure	Social work
Effective	67%	84%	45%	22%	62%
Ineffective	14%	9%	15%	33%	20%
Net score	+53	+75	+30	-11	+42

5.39. There were big variations by service, with schooling receiving near acclamation for its written communication. Housing & social work's communications were also seen as being effective.

5.40. Sports and leisure's written communications were seen as the least effective.

6. RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON GENERAL COUNCIL SERVICES

GENERAL COUNT

6.1. For general council services - those used by everybody or which all residents are affected by - there were no "screening" questions to establish the level of use. All residents were invited to give their views.

6.2. The services covered by this part of the survey were:

winter gritting/snow clearing
road maintenance
street lighting
street cleansing
refuse collection.

6.3. The results are presented in a similar fashion to those in the previous section. First, the findings for each service are presented in terms of satisfaction, residents' perceptions of whether services are better or worse than three or four years ago, and an assessment of the effectiveness of written communications. Later in this section, comparable information on satisfaction etc is presented for the range of general services.

6.4. A major difference with the previous section is that the great majority of all respondents felt able to comment on their satisfaction with these services and to give their perceptions of whether the services had improved or deteriorated in recent years. Only on the effectiveness of written communications did large numbers decline to comment, presumably because they had no recollection of such communications.

6.5. The responses to the satisfaction questions given in descending order in table 46 are an indication of how generally residents felt able to respond. The numbers of responses to other questions are given in the other tables overleaf. The overall response rate is most satisfactory.

Table 46: Responses to satisfaction questions about services everybody uses

Service	Number of respondents	Percentage of all respondents
Winter gritting	2,591	96%
Refuse collection	2,602	95%
Road maintenance	2,497	92%
Street cleansing	2,344	86%
Street lighting	2,286	84%
Base		2,726

WINTER GRITTING AND SNOW CLEARING

6.6. Only a bare majority of respondents were satisfied with Aberdeenshire Council's winter gritting and snow clearing service, 54%, with few of these very satisfied. Over a third were dissatisfied, 35%.

6.7. Moreover, while a majority believed that the service was much the same as before, nearly four out of ten, 39%, believed that the service had got worse over the past three or four years, and only one in ten, 9%, thought that it had got better.

6.8. The greatest level of unhappiness was with written information, which was seen by 52% to be ineffective, 41% of whom said it was very ineffective. Only 12% saw written communications at all effective. The issue here, based on comments in focus groups, may be residents' lack of understanding about the council's specific priorities on which roads, for example, are cleared of snow or ice first and which are cleared later when weather conditions are bad. People appeared to want very specific information about local roads and streets, and also more generally about how their local area fared compared with areas closer to depots.

Table 47: Winter gritting and snow clearing

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	12%	Very much better	2%	Very effective	3%
Fairly satisfied	42%	Better	7%	Fairly effective	9%
Neither/nor	11%	Same	52%	Neither/nor	36%
Fairly dissatisfied	21%	Worse	28%	Fairly ineffective	11%
Very dissatisfied	14%	Very much worse	11%	Very ineffective	41%
Base	2,609	Base	2,443	Base	776

ROAD MAINTENANCE

6.9. Levels of satisfaction with road maintenance were much lower than for winter gritting. Indeed more residents were dissatisfied with road maintenance, 45%, than were satisfied, 38%. Moreover, more residents thought that it had got worse, 49%, than remained the same, 46%. Very few indeed thought it had got better. A clear majority of those commenting found written communications ineffective, 55%, against only 10% who saw it as effective.

Table 48: Road maintenance

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	5%	Very much better	*	Very effective	1%
Fairly satisfied	33%	Better	4%	Fairly effective	9%
Neither/nor	17%	Same	48%	Neither/nor	35%
Fairly dissatisfied	27%	Worse	33%	Fairly ineffective	12%
Very dissatisfied	18%	Very much worse	16%	Very ineffective	43%
Base	2,497	Base	2,382	Base	790

* less than 1%

STREET LIGHTING

6.10. More positively, 72% of residents who responded were satisfied with street lighting, although only 22% of these were very satisfied. Only 11% were dissatisfied.

6.11. Overwhelmingly, residents thought the service had remained the same, 83%.

6.12. Written communication, however, was seen as ineffective by 45% of those who felt able to comment, with only 12% seeing it as effective.

Table 49: Street lighting

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	22%	Very much better	2%	Very effective	4%
Fairly satisfied	50%	Better	8%	Fairly effective	8%
Neither/nor	17%	Same	83%	Neither/nor	43%
Fairly dissatisfied	6%	Worse	5%	Fairly ineffective	9%
Very dissatisfied	5%	Very much worse	2%	Very ineffective	36%
Base	2,286	Base	2,153	Base	675

STREET CLEANSING

6.13. Some 63% of respondents were satisfied with street cleansing, but 29% were dissatisfied. Most, 68%, believed the service had remained the same, but more than twice as many judged it to have got worse, 23%, as better, 9%.

6.14. Again, written communications were seen as ineffective by a large proportion of respondents, 48%, against 12% who saw it as effective.

Table 50: Street cleansing

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	16%	Very much better	1%	Very effective	3%
Fairly satisfied	47%	Better	8%	Fairly effective	9%
Neither/nor	18%	Same	68%	Neither/nor	41%
Fairly dissatisfied	12%	Worse	16%	Fairly ineffective	10%
Very dissatisfied	8%	Very much worse	7%	Very ineffective	38%
Base	2,344	Base	2,219	Base	698

REFUSE COLLECTION

6.15. In sharp contrast with most of the other services in this section, refuse collection was highly regarded and was seen to be getting better. There were mixed views on written communications.

6.16. No fewer than 85% expressed satisfaction with the service, 40% very satisfied. Only 6% were at all dissatisfied.

6.17. Moreover, while 73% saw the service as the same, no fewer than 19% believed refuse collection had got better over the past three or four years, compared with only 8% who thought it had got worse.

6.18. On written communications, amongst the minority who felt able to comment, broadly equal numbers thought it was effective, 32%, as ineffective 35%, although most of the latter thought it was very ineffective.

Table 51: Refuse collection

	Satisfaction		Better/ worse		Written communication
Very satisfied	40%	Very much better	5%	Very effective	10%
Fairly satisfied	45%	Better	14%	Fairly effective	22%
Neither/nor	8%	Same	73%	Neither/nor	33%
Fairly dissatisfied	4%	Worse	6%	Fairly ineffective	10%
Very dissatisfied	2%	Very much worse	2%	Very ineffective	25%
Base	2,602	Base	2,447	Base	905

SATISFACTION ON SERVICES EVERYBODY USES

6.19. Finally, the views of residents on these general services can be compared in terms of satisfaction, improvement or deterioration of the service, and effectiveness of written communications.

Satisfaction

6.20. First, satisfaction levels are presented in Table 52, including a net score where satisfaction and dissatisfaction scores are set against each other.

Table 52: Satisfaction comparisons - services everybody uses

	Winter gritting	Road maintenance	Street lighting	Street cleansing	Refuse collection
Satisfied (very & fairly)	54%	38%	72%	63%	85%
Dissatisfied (very & fairly)	35%	45%	11%	20%	6%
Net score	+19	-7	+61	+43	+79

6.21. Refuse collection was clearly the "star" service here, with as good a performance as libraries in the previous section. There was a strong performance also by street lighting. Overall, perceptions were less positive than the views of users of specific services in Section 5.

6.22. Road maintenance had the lowest level of satisfaction. Satisfaction was exceeded by dissatisfaction for that service, creating a negative net score.

6.23. The performance of winter gritting and snow clearing was also capable of much improvement in terms of resident satisfaction. Employees focus groups commented on the improved levels of efficiency in gritting and snow clearing, the use of considerably better equipment, and indeed on the dedication of employees working very long hours to keep roads open and safe. This is not reflected in the public's perceptions.

Better or Worse than Three or Four Years Ago

6.24. The findings for the various services are compared in table 53, where the responses of all those who said "better" are combined and all those who said "worse". For the net score column, a positive figure indicates perceived net improvement and a negative score indicates a perception of deterioration.

Table 53: "Better or worse" comparisons - services everybody uses

	Winter gritting	Road maintenance	Street lighting	Street cleansing	Refuse collection
Better	9%	4%	10%	9%	19%
Worse	39%	49%	7%	23%	8%
Net score	-30	-45	+3	-14	+11

6.25. Refuse collection emerged with a modestly positive score, followed by street lighting.

6.26. All the other services were perceived on balance to have deteriorated, though this was relatively modest for street cleansing. The most negative perceptions were, again, about road maintenance, followed by winter gritting.

6.27. Again, the perceptions were considerably more negative than for the specific services in Section 5.

Effectiveness of Written Communication

6.28. Finally, the effectiveness of written communications were compared by service. Overall there was a negative assessment of these general services, which compares sharply with positive views of users of specific services in Section 5 (with the single exception of sports and leisure).

6.29. Table 54 presents comparable figures using the same format as before. Refuse collection was the only service which gets close to a positive net score.

Table 54: Written communications - services everybody uses

	Winter gritting	Road maintenance	Street lighting	Street cleansing	Refuse collection
Effective	12%	10%	12%	12%	32%
Ineffective	52%	55%	45%	48%	35%
Net score	-40	-45	-33	-36	-3

7. RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

7.1. Residents were next invited to comment on Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider, identifying both strengths and areas for improvement. Respondents were first invited to mention everything from a pre-prepared list that they saw as a strength or as an area for improvement. Next they were asked to identify a single main strength or a single main area for improvement.

7.2. A series of comparison could then be made. To what extent were issues mentioned by many respondents as a strength, or an area for improvement, also mentioned as the single most important one in that category? How many issues featured prominently both as strengths and as areas for improvement?

7.3. The same questions were also asked of Aberdeenshire Council employees in a parallel survey. A straight comparison can therefore be made of employees' and residents' views on Aberdeenshire Council's strengths and areas for improvements as a service provider. (Employees were also asked their views on Aberdeenshire Council as an employer).

7.4. Because identical lists of issues were used for both residents and employees, not all issues were necessarily easy for residents (or indeed employees) to respond to. On the section relating to "team working", for example, a number of residents commented along the lines "how on earth am I meant to know how effective team working is within a council service?". This is fair comment - although many members of the public did claim to be able to notice where there was a lack of co-operation or team working amongst colleagues.

7.5. This part of the questionnaire, however, was not looking for comments on every issue on the list. Respondents were indeed advised "Please skip anything you are not sure about."

7.6. Somewhat fewer respondents addressed this part of the questionnaire than did so in the previous section. Some 1,072 or 46% of all postal survey respondents indicated at least one strength in service provision. However, no fewer than 1,535 respondents or 66% felt able to indicate at least one area for improvement. An interesting picture emerged from the responses.

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S STRENGTH AS A SERVICE PROVIDER

7.7. First, residents were invited to identify all of Aberdeenshire Council's strengths as a service provider. Their views are set out in table 55 over, in descending order.

7.8. The most commonly mentioned strengths were local council facilities - schools, swimming pools, libraries - mentioned by over half of residents, telephone enquiry handling, mentioned by four out of ten, and employees' local knowledge, given by a third.

7.9. Other "people" issues received a number of mentions, as did some customer service issues. Not surprisingly, relatively few mentioned team working or management issues, since these were largely invisible to the general public.

7.10. A number commented on money issues, with nearly one in five believing that Aberdeenshire Council gave value for money services. (Other less positive views on value for money are given later).

7.11. Employees' views on the same issues are given in brackets.

Table 55: All strengths as a service provider: respondents' views on Aberdeenshire Council

All strengths	Residents' views	(Employees' views)
Council facilities	52%	(30%)
Telephone enquiry handling well managed	39%	(31%)
Employees' local knowledge	34%	(53%)
Employees' commitment to public service	23%	(53%)
Ability to respond to customer complaints	23%	(22%)
Employees' professional or technical expertise	22%	(50%)
Network of council offices	19%	(13%)
Employees' responsiveness to customer needs	19%	(44%)
Value for money services	18%	(22%)
Services tailored to local needs	16%	(24%)
Communication to customers	16%	(16%)
Employees' commitment to improving services	13%	(45%)
Team working with services	13%	(49%)
Money well spent on improving services	13%	(12%)
Employees' skills and training	12%	(22%)
Processes and Procedures	12%	(15%)
Ability to identify and correct service failures	12%	(10%)
Team working amongst council services	10%	(11%)
Team working amongst public bodies	10%	(12%)
Ability to manage customer expectations	10%	(11%)
Ability to focus efforts on priorities for improvements	8%	(8%)
Ability to address root cause of recurring problems	7%	(10%)
Quality of management	6%	(13%)
Management of workloads	5%	(8%)
Ability to meet or excel performance targets	4%	(10%)

Comparison Between Residents and Employees Views On "All" Strengths

7.12. The most notable point to emerge was that residents rated most strongly the physical council facilities in their local area. This confirms the way residents described the work of the council in the focus groups undertaken before the survey. Consistently they began by describing the tangible - facilities - and the visible - grass cutting, litter. Council employees rated this as much less important than residents: it only came eighth in employees' rankings.

7.13. Similarly, residents rated telephone enquiry handling as a strength more highly than employees.

7.14. Employees consistently ranked their own and their colleagues' qualities, and their ability to work as a team, above residents' priority issues.

7.15. Residents' and employees' views on the council's strengths as a service provider were similar on many issues.

7.16. On the council's ability to meet or exceed performance targets, one resident wrote: "How do we know what the target is?" (A number of employees were also unaware of targets).

Single Main Strength

7.17. When residents were asked to nominate a single main strength, the same issues came to the fore. These are set out in table 56 in descending order. Employees' views are in brackets.

Table 56: Single main strength of Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider: residents' views (compared with employees' views)

All strengths	Residents' views	(Employees' views)
Council facilities	35%	(6%)
Telephone enquiry handling well managed	10%	(*)
Employees' local knowledge	10%	(6%)
Employees' commitment to public service	6%	(25%)
Services tailored to local needs	5%	(3%)
Value for money services	5%	(8%)
Ability to respond to customer complaints	5%	(*)
Money well spent on improving services	4%	(*)
Network of Council offices	4%	(*)
Employees' professional or technical expertise	3%	(14%)
Employees' responsiveness to customer needs	3%	(8%)
Team working with other public bodies	2%	(*)
Base	662	846 (* = 2% or fewer mentions)

7.18. The contrasts between residents' and employees' priorities were sharp. Residents strongly perceived council facilities as <u>the</u> most important strength, followed by telephone handling and employees' local knowledge. Employees did register council facilities as a strength, but very few saw it as the most important. Telephone enquiry handling simply did not register on employees' scale of priorities.

7.19. Moreover, employees saw their own and their colleagues' commitment to public service (25%), professional or technical expertise (14%), team working within a service (9%), responsiveness to customers needs (8%) and commitment to improving services (7%) as all being more important than their local knowledge (6%). This last, however, was residents' top employee strength.

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL'S AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

7.20. When asked to identify areas where Aberdeenshire Council could improve its performance as a service provider, a different picture of residents' views emerged, not a simple reversal of the perceived strengths. Specifically, money issues emerged as the strongest area for criticism, followed by issues on responsiveness to customers, and management. Table 57 gives all the areas for improvement, with the residents' strengths in brackets.

Table 57: All areas for improvement as a service provider: residents' views of Aberdeenshire Council (compared with views of strengths)

	Areas for improvement	(Strengths)
Money not well spent improving services	70%	(13%)
Poor value for money services	50%	(18%)
Services not tailored to local needs	31%	(16%)
Processes and procedures	31%	(12%)
Network of council offices expensive and ineffective	25%	(19%)
Inability to manage customer expectations	25%	(10%)
Ineffective customer communications	24%	(16%)
Inability to focus efforts on priorities for improvement	24%	(8%)
Poor quality of management	23%	(6%)
Inability to identify and correct service failures	23%	(12%)
Inability to address root cause of recurring service problems	22%	(7%)
Council facilities	21%	(52%)
Employees' lack of responsiveness to customers needs	21%	(19%)
Poor management of workloads	21%	(5%)
Inability to respond to customer complaints	20%	(23%)
Ineffective team working amongst council services	20%	(10%)
Employees' lack of public service	20%	(23%)
Employees' lack of commitment to improving services	18%	(13%)
Ineffective team working amongst bodies	16%	(10%)
Inability to meet or exceed performance targets	14%	(4%)
Ineffective team working within a service	14%	(13%)
Telephone enquiry handling	14%	(31%)
Employees' lack of local knowledge	13%	(34%)
Employees' lack of professional or technical expertise	11%	(22%)
Employees' lack of skills or training	9%	(12%)
Base	1,535	1,072

7.21. By "netting" both positive and critical comments, issues that emerged most prominently as areas for improvement are presented in table 58.

Table 58: Net areas for improvement as a service provider

Money not spent on improving services	-57
Poor value for money services	-32
Processes and procedures	-19
Poor quality of management	-17
Poor management of workloads	-16
Inability to focus efforts on priorities for improvement	-16
Services not tailored to local needs	-15
Inability to manage customer expectations	-15
Inability to address root causes of recurring service problems	-15

7.22. Thus, money issues again predominated, even after the netting process. Customer service and management issues followed.

7.23. The same approach can be used to identify the net strengths of Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider, which are given in table 59.

Table 59: Net strengths as a service provider

Council facilities	+31
Telephone enquiry handling	+25
Employees' local knowledge	+21
Employees' professional and technical expertise	+11
Handling of customer complaints	+ 3

7.24. Council facilities lead the list of net strengths despite one in five mentioning them as an area for improvement. Indeed, no fewer than 60 individuals wrote in comments about the closure of public facilities in extremely critical terms ("it is disgusting that there are no toilet facilities" ..... "the non-provision of public toilets in the north east of Aberdeenshire area is a disgrace!").

7.25. Telephone enquiry handling aroused fewer strong comments. In the residents' focus groups, the prevailing opinion was that it was important to be able to find out quickly who to telephone and for issues to be resolved at the first contact. People disliked telephoning one office and being told to contact another, and they disliked intensely the need to make repeated contacts to have an issue resolved. Focus group members did not mind calling a central office or a single number if the service provided was efficient. Some expressed confusion about telephoning what they thought of as their local office or depot and being told that another facility was in fact their "local" one. (This may be related to the low levels of awareness about the six local areas). Refuse collection was mentioned in the focus groups as having an efficient telephone handling facility: council tax query handling arrangements were less commonly praised.

7.26. Returning to the responses to the questionnaire, residents saw employees' main strengths as being their local knowledge (+21), and their professional and technical expertise (+11), two attributes also highly rated by employees themselves. Residents were somewhat less impressed by council employees' commitment to improving services (-5), responsiveness to customers' needs (-2) and commitment to "public service" (+3).

Single Main Area for Improvement

7.27. When asked to nominate a single main area for improvement, almost half or residents' views related to money. The most commonly mentioned are presented, in descending order, in table 60. Money issues accounted for no fewer than 47% of the main issues.

Table 60: Single main areas for improvement as service provider (compared with all mentions)

	Single main area	(All)
Money not well spent on improving services to customers	28%	(70%)
Poor value for money services	19%	(50%)
Council facilities	10%	(21%)
Poor quality of management	(6%)	(23%)
Services not tailored to local needs	(5%)	(31%)
Inability to focus efforts on priorities for improvement	(4%)	(24%)
Network of Council offices expensive and ineffective	(4%)	(25%)
Processes and procedures	(3%)	(31%)
Other issues (mentioned by 2% or fewer)	(17%)	N/A

7.28. No single "people" issue emerged as a priority for improvement. When combined, they came to only 6% of single main issues. Team working issues scarcely registered. All the customer responsiveness issues were mentioned by at least 1% (telephone enquiry handling being least likely to be mentioned as needing improvement), coming to a total of 20% of all main issues. Facilities and management issues were equally mentioned.

7.29. Thus, looking at the single main issue by topic (eg, value for money, people) the following picture emerges in table 61.

Table 61: Main issues for improvement by topic

Value for money	47%
Customers	20%
Facilities	13%
Management	12%
People	6%
Team working	2%

8. SATISFACTION WITH ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL AS A PROVIDER OF LOCAL SERVICES: REPUTATION

8.1. There were three parts of the residents survey where satisfaction questions were asked:

- satisfaction with residents' main contact, both the handling and outcome (Section 4 above);
- satisfaction with a number of individuals of services, including those used by a specific section of the population and those used by everybody (Sections 5 and 6 above); and
- satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council as a provider of local services.

8.2. This last satisfaction question, the responses to which are analysed in this section, sought to identify an "overall" level of satisfaction with service provision. It asked respondents to think about all the services that the council provides and to give views based on their experience. In the event, there is evidence that this question was answered to an extent based on Aberdeenshire Council's wider reputation, and not simply as a service provider.

8.3. The various factors which contributed to residents being satisfied or dissatisfied with Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider are analysed below. To begin, how satisfied or dissatisfied were residents overall?

8.4. Only 47% of residents declared themselves to be very or fairly satisfied overall with Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider. This was a lower level of satisfaction than for any single service, with the exception of road maintenance. Particularly notable were the low numbers reporting themselves to be very satisfied, 6% (see table 62).

Table 62: Overall satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council as service provider

Very satisfied	6%
Fairly satisfied	41%
Neither/nor	22%
Fairly dissatisfied	21%
Very dissatisfied	10%
Base (excluding 58 don't knows)	2,141

8.5. One factor which had no impact on overall satisfaction was contact with the Council. Frequency of contact similarly had no impact on satisfaction.

8.6. However, how well that contact with the council was dealt with, both in terms of handling and outcome, did have an impact on overall satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council.

8.7. Amongst those who were very satisfied with how their contact had been handled, three times as many were very satisfied with Aberdeenshire Council as a service provider than all residents (18% compared with 6%). Amongst those very and fairly satisfied with how their contact was handled, some 62% were satisfied (very and fairly) with the council, compared with 47% overall.

8.8. Satisfaction with outcome was also correlated with satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council, but less powerfully than handling.

8.9. Residents satisfaction with individual services also had some degree of influence on their satisfaction with the council overall, but this was not very pronounced, especially in the case of services used by specific groups within the population.

DEMOGRAPHICS

8.10. How satisfied people were with Aberdeenshire Council varied considerably according to demographic factors. Age and employment status are likely to affect which services individual residents use and how they make use of them, and so they do have an impact on satisfaction.

SATISFACTION BY AGE

8.11. To take age first, older people generally tend to be more satisfied with services than younger people. This was the case with Aberdeenshire residents' views on the council, although the lowest level of satisfaction was seen amongst the 35 to 44 year olds. Satisfaction rose sharply over the age of 65. See Table 63.

Table 63: Satisfaction by age

Age	Very + fairly satisfied	Base
34 and under	46%	399
35 - 44	37%	488
45 - 54	47%	455
55 - 64	46%	360
65 - 74	57%	273
75+	75%	138
Overall	46%	2,113

SATISFACTION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

8.12. Age is to some extent related to employment status, and again retired people were the most satisfied group. There was clear trend in satisfaction by level of economic activity, with the most active, the self-employed and full-time employed being the least satisfied. See table 64.

Table 64: Satisfaction by employment status

Self-employed	36%
Full-time employed	39%
Part-time employed	47%
Home and family	49%
Ill health/unemployment	52%
Retired	58%

SATISFACTION BY GENDER

8.13. Women were marginally more satisfied with the council than men were: (there was a similar though more marked difference in employee satisfaction). See table 65.

Table 65: Satisfaction by gender

Male	44%
Female	48%

SATISFACTION BY AREA

8.14. Which area people live in should not in itself have a major impact on satisfaction with services, unless the services are provided in markedly different ways from area to area or the people living in different areas have different personal characteristics (eg more elderly people). Nevertheless, there were significant differences by local area.

8.15. Satisfaction by area was looked at in two ways: by the six local areas into which Aberdeenshire is divided, and by residents' perceptions whether they lived in a "town or village" or "in the countryside".

8.16. To take the last part first, residents who stated that they lived in the countryside, around a quarter of the total, were somewhat less satisfied than residents in towns or villages. This view may be illuminated by a number of respondents who wrote in comments to the affect that as country dwellers they received very few services (no streetlights, pavements, swimming pools etc) yet paid the same council tax.

Table 66: Satisfaction by town or countryside

Lived in town or village	48%
Lived in countryside	40%

8.17. Much more significant was the difference satisfaction by local area, where the lowest levels of satisfaction were recorded in Banff and Buchan areas, and the highest levels were in Marr and Garioch where satisfaction was one and a half times as great as in the northern part of Aberdeenshire.

8.18. The findings are presented in table 67.

Table 67: Satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council by area

Banff and Buchan	35%
Buchan	38%
Kincardine and Mearns	45%
Formartine	46%
Marr	55%
Garioch	58%

8.19. It is unlikely that the range of satisfaction reflected solely different service levels, or demographic differences in the population.

9. PERCEPTIONS OF COUNCIL'S CUSTOMER SERVICE COMPARED WITH UTILITIES AND COMPANIES

9.1. Finally, residents were asked to compare Aberdeenshire Council's customer service performance with a number of utilities and companies. This same question was asked in the employees survey. Comparisons are made below between employees' and residents' views on the council's relative performance.

ORGANISATIONS WITH WHICH ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL WAS COMPARED

9.2. In this list there were:

- two publicly owned services:
  - the National Health Service in Grampian
  - North of Scotland Water Authority (NOSWA)
- two privately owned utilities:
  - Scottish Hydro Electric
  - Scottish Gas
- three telecom/TV companies:
  - BT
  - Atlantic Telecom
  - Sky
- three banks
  - Bank of Scotland
  - Clydesdale Bank
  - Royal Bank of Scotland
- three supermarkets
  - Asda
  - Safeway
  - Tesco

9.3. Most respondents commented on some but not on other organisations. A clear majority of respondents (over two thirds) felt able to comment about the NHS, BT and Scottish Hydro Electric. Few (13% or 248 people) felt able to comment on Atlantic Telecom.

ORGANISATIONS WHICH RESIDENTS COULD NOT USE FOR COMPARISON

9.4. Residents who felt unable to make comparisons between each service provider and Aberdeenshire Council are shown, in descending order, in Table 68.

Table 68 Services which residents could not compare with Aberdeenshire Council

1	Atlantic Telecom	87%
2	Sky Television	68%
3	Royal Bank of Scotland	67%
4	Bank of Scotland	66%
5	Clydesdale Bank	59%
6	Scottish Gas	53%
7	Asda	48%
8	Tesco	47%
9	Safeway	44%
10	North of Scotland Water	43%
11	Scottish Hydro Electric	29%
12	BT	28%
13	NHS in Grampian	28%

RESIDENTS' VIEWS ON COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE - AND EMPLOYEES

9.5. Amongst residents who felt able to compare the performance of Aberdeenshire Council with other organisations, the largest number answered "about the same".

9.6. Looking at those who answered better or worse, residents thought that the Council provided consistently worse customer service than all the other bodies listed, although only marginally so in the case of North of Scotland Water Authority and the NHS in Grampian. In the case of these two other public services, residents were more critical of the council's comparative performance than employees were. At the other end of the scale, however, employees were less critical of the council's performance in comparison with the supermarkets.

9.7. Both residents and employees agreed that the best customer service providers in Aberdeenshire were Tesco and Asda. On the basis of this evidence, Tesco and Asda may be suitable benchmarking partners for Aberdeenshire council. (While the services provided by supermarkets is mainly face-to-face, Tesco's UK call centre is based in Dundee and has been visited by a number of local authorities.)

9.8. Table 69 sets out the net scores for residents, with employees scores in brackets. Table 70 gives the full, five point scale tabulations of residents' views.

Table 69: Net customer service performance of Aberdeenshire Council

		Residents' views	(Employees' views)
1	North of Scotland Water Authority	-6	+6
2	NHS in Grampian	-11	+3
3	Scottish Hydro Electric	-19	-15
4	Scottish Gas	-20	-22
5	Sky	-21	-32
6	BT	-21	-33
7	Clydesdale Bank	-24	-25
8	Atlantic Telecom	-26	-31
9	Safeway	-30	-46
10	Bank of Scotland	-30	-32
11	Royal Bank of Scotland	-33	-30
12	Asda	-39	-54
13	Tesco	-41	-56

Table 70: Comparative customer service performance of Aberdeenshire Council : residents' views

	Base	Very much better	Somewhat better	About the same	Somewhat worse	Very much worse
North of Scotland Water	1,177	4%	10%	66%	14%	6%
Scottish Hydro Electric	1,491	5%	8%	56%	24%	8%
Scottish Gas	935	4%	9%	54%	24%	9%
NHS in Grampian	1,451	3%	15%	53%	21%	8%
BT	1,494	5%	11%	47%	28%	9%
Atlantic Telecom	248	3%	8%	52%	25%	18%
Sky Television	604	6%	14%	39%	28%	13%
Bank of Scotland	653	4%	10%	43%	32%	18%
Clydesdale Bank	794	6%	10%	45%	30%	10%
Royal Bank of Scotland	633	5%	8%	41%	31%	15%
Asda	1,033	5%	9%	32%	35%	19%
Safeway	1,128	5%	11%	39%	34%	15%
Tesco	1,047	5%	8%	33%	35%	19%