

Review of Customer Care

**Report of the Scrutiny (Performance)
Committee**

July 2004

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Section 1: Foreword by the Chairman and Project Team Controlling Group Spokesperson

*An introduction to the review on behalf of the Scrutiny
(Performance) Committee by the Chairman, Councillor
J A Cronk and Project Team Controlling Group Spokesperson,
Councillor S C Manion*

Foreword



Councillor J A Cronk

Chairman of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee

"The review looked at the Council's current practices and processes regarding customer care and determined how these can be made more economic, efficient, and effective. This in particular covered:

- Policies, procedures and training associated with customer care across all Departments.*
- The complaints system.*
- The management of processes that are in place eg telephone systems, charter of standards, progress chasing and tracking systems that are used in terms of responses to letters, emails and telephone calls.*

By encompassing the above objectives the following outcomes would be achieved:

- Increased customer satisfaction.*
- Uniformity across the whole of the Council in customer care.*
- Improved efficiency when contact is made with the Council.*

There were five key stages to the review:

- **Scoping of the review** – deciding what is to be included in the review and what is not.*
- **Challenge** – identifying why we provide customer care, what are our strengths and areas for improvement.*
- **Consultation** – seeking feedback through from our customers and staff.*
- **Compare** – comparing how customer care is provided with other local authorities.*
- **Findings and Recommendations** - reporting on the key findings and recommendations of the review.*

It was found that customers generally receive a courteous and helpful service, but the quality of customer care varies across the Council.

With the detailed recommendations as part of this review it is believed the Council will have a clear view about what it wants to achieve and a clear ambition to improve customer care, both in the short term and in the longer term for example through the development of a Contact Centre. This should lead to a more efficient and helpful service for the people of the District of Dover.

I would like to thank my other member colleagues of the project team: Councillor Wendy Hansell, Councillor Stephen Manion and Councillor David

Lloyd-Jones for all their work in bringing this Customer Care Review to a successful conclusion.

I must give a special mention to Councillor Bob Little who sadly passed away while researching this report, who contributed greatly in the early stages of this review.

I would also thank all the officers who helped greatly in the compiling of this report."



Councillor S C Manion

Controlling Group Spokesperson of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee 2003/04

"I welcome the publishing of this document. Customer service is an increasingly important aspect of the Council's operations.

In order to meet the Council's corporate goal of "delivering, within our means, the best customer focused services and support to all communities so that every resident can have pride in our District's heritage and its future" the Council needs to have a clear strategy on customer service.

This review has looked at a variety of factors as well as looking at authorities around the United Kingdom as well as overseas to find best practice in customer service. The result of this review is this document, which seeks to give modern direction to planning customer service in the twenty first century.

The fruits of this review will help the Council to delivery its services in a manner, which will deliver the Council's corporate goal of providing services to its residents in a manner which they rightly expect."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. A. Cook". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Chairman of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Manion". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Controlling Group Spokesperson of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee

Section 2: Scope and Process Report

Overview of the process adopted in conducting the review

Scope and Process Report

Introduction

- 2.1.1 The Scrutiny (Performance) Committee identified the Customer Care and Service Standards review as the first topic for inclusion in its work programme for the year 2003/04. The review would examine the present standard of Customer Care offered by the Council to its customers and determine the Council's aspirations for the future.
- 2.1.2 At the outset it was agreed that the terms of reference for the review should be as follows:
- "To focus primarily upon customer contact and customer standards with reference to customer complaints and be undertaken over a six month period commencing in September 2003."
- 2.1.3 It was intended that the review should be conducted in a manner which would ensure that the Committee had the greatest impact in reflecting the public perception of the Council and challenge the Council's performance. It was identified as a guiding principle that the Committee should act as a "champion" of the Council's customers.
- 2.1.4 The outcomes sought from the review were:
- (a) To achieve greater understanding of the services which the Council currently delivers.
 - (b) To undertake consultation with various parties on the Council's customer service standards
 - (c) To produce recommendations based on key findings to improve service delivery.

Process

- 2.1.5 A structured approach has been adopted in conducting the review as follows:

Stage 1: Methodology

- 2.1.6 A Project Plan was approved by the Committee identifying the scope and proposed time scale of the review as well as the consultation to be undertaken.
- 2.1.7 The Committee agreed to set-up a Project Team to provide direction for the Review. The Project Team comprised of the following Members and Officers:

Chairman of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee
Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee
Spokesperson of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee
Deputy Spokesperson of the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee

Strategic Director (Resources)
Head of Property Services
Revenues Manager

Human Resources Officer
Technical Support Analyst

2.1.8 At its first meeting the Project Team identified that the processes to be examined for achieving the terms of reference should be:

- The interaction with other Councils, Government Offices, Town and Parish Councils and other partners of the Council.
- The interaction between departments within the Council.
- The interaction with the public of the Council, through the Main Reception, the Area Offices and customer complaints procedure.

These should be considered in relation to telephone, e-mail, letter and voicemail.

2.1.9 The Project Team then undertook research to investigate the above.

Stage 2: Research

2.1.10 Initially, Internet based research was undertaken by the Democratic Services Team and Members of the Project Team.

2.1.11 The Project Team then visited three local authorities to examine their approaches to customer care which were Aylesbury Vale District Council, Gravesham Borough Council, and Swale Borough Council.

2.1.12 Local residents within the District were engaged through a survey on customer care, which was conducted using the Citizen's Panel. Ward Councillors were also invited to participate by surveying their constituents using a structured questionnaire. A consultancy, Snap SurveyShop, was then commissioned to provide data entry, analysis and produce a full report on the survey findings.

2.1.13 Reports have been submitted throughout the review by the Strategic Director (Resources) and Head of Property Services and significant contributions have been made by all the members of the Project Team in seeking to benchmark the Council's performance and develop a strategic overview of the Council's customer approach to service delivery.

Stage 3: Final Analysis

2.1.14 The final report on the review was presented to the Committee at its meeting on Thursday 22 July 2004 and the Committee has made a number of recommendations to the Council, which are set out on page 31.

Section 3: Research Report

***Details of the issues examined by the Scrutiny (Performance)
Committee Project Team***

Research Report

Introduction

- 3.1.1 In considering the Council's approach to Customer Care the aim has been to review the current approach taken across the Council with regard to this issue, to consider the effectiveness of existing policies and to make recommendations regarding the development of Customer Care within the Council. To be consistent with the scrutiny role the Committee has sought to focus on those aspects of Customer Care, which directly impact upon the customer such as standards of service and the ease of contact between the customer and the Council. The Committee has recognised that the mechanisms and methods of delivery are matters for the Council's senior management and has not sought to pass comment on these issues.
- 3.1.2 Effective Customer Care standards are an essential element of delivering quality services to customers. This is recognised at all levels of society and all corporate organisations within both the private and public sector strive to achieve high standards of customer care with varying degrees of success.
- 3.1.3 Before reviewing the issues for the Council it is important to define what we mean by "customer". The Committee considered that the term embraced all those who had a need to engage with the Council which could include individuals, stakeholders, Parish Councils, businesses and so on.
- 3.1.4 In order to inform the review the Committee undertake a comprehensive programme of research as set out in the following paragraphs. This included:
- Reviewing existing customer care practice within the Council to assess the success of current customer care standards and determine issues for consideration by the Council.
 - Undertaking site visits to Aylesbury Vale, Swale, Gravesham to review the approach taken to Customer Care by other authorities and identify examples of good practice for consideration by the Council.
 - Carrying out a wide ranging Customer Survey using both the Citizens Panel and face to face techniques to assess the views of customers regarding the Council's approach to Customer Care.

Review of Existing Practice

- 3.1.5 This review seeks to identify where the Council is placed in respect of setting customer care standards and the monitoring performance against them and how this can be improved. What is apparent is that whilst there are already pockets of good practice within the Council there is no clearly defined corporate approach to the capture or recording of performance. It has therefore been difficult to undertake any real analysis regarding performance due to the lack of meaningful consistent data.
- 3.1.6 As part of the process of assessing existing practice information has been drawn from across the Council as to the approach taken within each division with regard to the promotion of customer care standards and the monitoring of performance. Detail

of the information received is set out in the following paragraphs and is summarised in Appendix A.

Corporate Monitoring Standards and Procedures

- 3.1.7 Support for the development of a consistent and effective approach to customer care has been provided at corporate level by the introduction of clear Customer Care standards. Copies of these have been widely published and are included at Appendix B. These were developed ahead of the consideration of Customer care by the Scrutiny Committee so that they could be commented upon as part of the process. However, no corporate arrangements are in place to monitor performance against these standards across the Council and heavy reliance is placed on each Division to take a lead in this regard.
- 3.1.8 Some Information is available centrally to assist in this task. With regard to telephone calls data is available within the current telephone software as shown below. Interpretation of the data is not easy and there is clear scope for improvement in this area.
- 3.1.9 As an example of the inadequacy of the data currently available a sample of information for a random week (20 October 2003) produces the following table of results.
- 3.1.10 In summary only 57% of calls are being answered within the 5-second target and around 13% of all calls are unanswered. Weaknesses within the software do not allow for detailed analysis. The high proportion of 0 second calls seriously undermines the usefulness of the information.

Summary of Statistics:	Answered calls	15127
	Unanswered calls	2245
Ring Time	Answered	Unanswered
0 seconds	1277	983
1 to 5 seconds	7458	407
6 to 10 seconds	2901	74
11 to 15 seconds	1029	75
16 to 20 seconds	571	110
21 to 30 seconds	1123	232
31 to 45 seconds	510	112
45 seconds to 1 minute	120	77
1 to 1½ minutes	82	94
1½ to 2 minutes	28	42
2 to 2½ minutes	13	20
2½ to 3 minutes	8	9
3 to 4 minutes	7	10
	15127	2245

Table 1: Telephone Call Analysis, Oct 2003.

- 3.1.11 In summary only 57% of calls are being answered within the 5-second target and around 13% of all calls are unanswered. Weaknesses within the software do not allow for detailed analysis. The high proportion of 0 second calls seriously undermines the usefulness of the information.

3.1.12 With regard to e-mails the Council does not have any clear protocols for how e-mail is to be treated and no clear approach to the recording, storing and or destruction of this form of communication. Base data on the number of e-mails received or sent is not available nor is there any understanding, on a corporate basis, of the range of content.

Divisional Monitoring Standards and Procedures

Introduction

3.1.13 To get a picture of the approach taken across the Council with regard to the development of a consistent approach to customer care each Divisional Head was invited to prepare a short statement on the actions being taken within their service area on this issue. There are inevitable variations in the approach across the Council particularly between front and back office services, which is to be expected. However there is also evidence of varying standards of service across the Council as can be seen from the following paragraphs, which is a concern.

Accountancy

3.1.14 Correspondence mainly takes the form of returns that are completed by the Accountancy Section on behalf of all services. An officer within the Section is responsible for the co-ordination and monitoring of such returns, and great emphasis is placed upon meeting deadlines as far as resources allow. Priority is given to those where late returns could result in financial loss or breach of statutory regulations. Other correspondence is mainly associated with timetabled procedures, for example revenue grants applications and the revenue grants timetable, so that performance is largely assured by the need to meet deadlines. No formal procedures exist to monitor e-mails, telephone calls or general correspondence on other matters.

Community Leisure and Cultural Services

3.1.15 Staff are aware of the Council's ten-day response target for mail and emails and some procedures are in place to record incoming correspondence and monitor performance against standards but this is largely self policing and not monitored centrally.

3.1.16 Within Dover Museum incoming enquiries are recorded in a ledger and the letters date stamped. Letters are generally answered within a month at present. Although this is expected to improve dramatically with the filling of a new admin post this month.

3.1.17 In addition enquiries are also received in the form of object identifications. These are recorded in an entry book and again the aim is to answer within a month.

Corporate Support

3.1.18 Corporate Support responds to the majority of correspondence received by letter or e-mail within the 10 working day Council customer care standard. There is no monitoring in place to support this. The Professional Standards Unit forming part of Corporate Support deal with complaints received regarding the Council and the guidelines for responding to correspondence is also 10 working days. The Respond database, which captures formal complaint information, stipulates the time allowed at each stage. Ten working days is the time allowed at Departmental level and the

Professional Standards Unit aim to complete an enquiry within a further 20 working days.

Democratic Services

3.1.19 Service Charters have been developed for Members' Services, Electoral Services and Land Charges. Service delivery is monitored against these standards and performance is measured against key targets. There are targets in place for providing access to records, responding to enquiries and processing applications. The dates/times of receipt of the above are not formally logged (other than for property searches), however, the existence of clear service standards ensures that staff deal with matters within appropriate timescales.

Environmental Health

3.1.20 Currently a letter book is retained by Pollution and Waste Management team, which enables the tracking of all information.

3.1.21 A new computer system for the team has recently been procured and is expected to be available and in use by June 2004. It is expected opportunities will then be available to either scan, or otherwise track more correspondence.

Financial Services

3.1.22 No procedures are in place for recording incoming correspondence to the Division although each section within the Division is satisfied that corporate targets are being met. Some areas, for instance Insurance have statutory timescales imposed that are always met and records are maintained within each individual file.

Highways

3.1.23 Within the Highways Division, all correspondence is recorded on the Excel Spreadsheet system also used by Property Services with performance monitored on a quarterly basis. Kent County Council are purchasing a new computer software package, which the Highways Division may use. In addition performance against the following indicators is monitored each quarter:

- Percentage of insurance claims investigated within 18 days.
- Number of letters received.
- Number of appreciative comments received.
- Number of complaints.
- Percentage of letters answered within 10 working days.

3.1.24 As regards telephone calls there are no formal procedures for monitoring or recording calls. Copies of data analysis from the Council's telephone system are used to undertake rudimentary checks on performance as regards answering of calls on a monthly basis. Within the Parking services are letters are scanned to enable them to be attached to the PCN as a complete file. This feature is being developed to allow the file to be securely viewed through the Internet.

Housing

3.1.25 Performance standards have been set for dealing with complaints, correspondence, answering telephone calls and seeing callers to the office. There are also standards

for processing applications for the Housing Register and for giving decisions on Homelessness Applications (a national BV Indicator).

- 3.1.26 The performance standards have been incorporated in the targets in the PPRs of team members. The Housing Management section has a robust means of recording and monitoring performance and a monthly spreadsheet is produced how the performance standards for complaints and correspondence has been met. Print outs are also produced to monitor the speed of telephone answering by individual extension. There is currently no system for monitoring the response times for e-mail enquiries.
- 3.1.27 Monitoring systems are not as well developed in the Lettings team.
- 3.1.28 It is anticipated that the new IT system for housing that should be in place by the end of the year, will improve ability to monitor performance against the standards.
- 3.1.29 The recent Audit Commission inspection of the housing service thought that the council responded quickly to all enquires, letters, telephones and e mails but felt that the quality of response was not always as good as it could have been. This is the real challenge in terms of monitoring customer care standards within the housing service.

Human Resources

- 3.1.30 No systems are in place to record or monitor telephone calls, e-mails or letters. Staff are satisfied that these are dealt with promptly in line with complexity or detail required. Letters and faxes are retained on file and where appropriate e-mails are printed off and notes of telephone calls are made and kept on file.

ICT

- 3.1.31 The IT section has no formal systems to record or monitor telephone calls, e-mails and correspondence, as contact with the public is limited. When emails are received from citizens (eg queries sent via the website), we always respond within 24 hours.
- 3.1.32 Public use of the Council's website is monitored, and detailed records kept of traffic, including an analysis of access by subject and topic.
- 3.1.33 We aim to keep the web site up to date. New material is published using timescales agreed with the press officer and user management, and old material is removed as it becomes obsolete. When errors or inconsistencies are identified on the website, these are resolved immediately.
- 3.1.34 Response to internal communications is orientated towards resolving problems within a timescale agreed with user management, and determined by the severity of the problem and its impact on Council services. There are no formal procedures for managing these calls and the time taken to resolve them. This could be addressed by the adoption of automated logging procedures, using either a dedicated IT Helpdesk system, or through a corporate call centre.

Legal Services

- 3.1.35 The Legal Division has published a Statement of Principles on Client Care (Appendix C) which sets out the basis for the provision of services to it's customers.

Performance against these standards is assessed; periodically by Internal Audit, annually by Lexcel and annually by means of a customer satisfaction survey.

Planning

- 3.1.36 Letters received in connection with a planning application are not acknowledged but customers are advised if the application is going to Committee (and therefore given details of public speaking) and of the eventual outcome.
- 3.1.37 Priority is given to work for which a fee has been paid and letters relating to informal enquiries are recognised by the Division as being a problem area with the customer care standard almost certainly not being met. However the planning process is such that the nature of such enquiries varies significantly from simply forwarding a set of forms to information requiring half-a-days research. All such enquiries are booked in and copies placed on relevant files but no mechanisms are in place for charting progress. Similarly Building Control has recently introduced monitoring of general correspondence but this is of lesser priority than the fee paid work. As such the target is 20 working days, (which cannot be guaranteed to be met) - 10 days is unrealistic. Standard acknowledgements are not what the customer wants - the Council needs to relate response times to the complexity and volume of work rather than one broad brush standard. Divisional standards may well be developed.
- 3.1.38 With regard to telephone calls no formal records are kept of conversations except where they are directly relevant to a formal enquiry or live planning application in which case a note is kept on the file. A Duty Officer system is operated at peak times to provide planning advice with queries on specific applications being recorded and the caller being offered a call-back option from the relevant officer at set times. Staffing levels mean this cover cannot always be provided. The Division is considering moving to a reception based filtering system for all calls.
- 3.1.39 E-mails are causing difficulties given that letters on live applications are not replied to. Investigations are in-hand for the introduction of an automated acknowledgement system to deal with this. There are no monitoring arrangements in place for e-mails.
- 3.1.40 The Division is currently reviewing its activities and future customer care considerations form an important area of consideration.

Property Services

- 3.1.41 Incoming mail is logged on an Excel spreadsheet based mail recording system developed within the team. This records information about the correspondence such as date of letter, sender and recipient and staff then add details to the spreadsheet as to date of reply which enables monitoring of response times to be undertaken routinely. The target response time is 7 working days although this target is not being achieved. E-Mails fall outside this system and are not recorded in the same way. Hard copies are taken of key documents for inclusion within correspondence files but no monitoring of performance is undertaken. Faxes are dealt with in the same way as items of post and are printed on yellow paper to distinguish them from photocopies.
- 3.1.42 As regards telephone calls there are no formal procedures for monitoring or recording calls. Copies of data analysis from the Council's telephone system are used to undertake rudimentary checks on performance as regards answering of calls on a monthly basis. The Division has its own set of customer standards, which have been subject to consultation and are included at Appendix D.

Revenues & Benefits

3.1.43 Detailed procedures are in place with regard to a number of key customer care issues and are available to customers (Appendix E). E-Mails are monitored daily with response times allocated according to risk. Some are treated as letters whilst the more urgent are processed either by return or within 7 days and generally given priority over letters. Telephone calls are handled through the call centre using a hunt group approach with calls being stacked before answering. Answer times are good but the monitoring of performance is hampered by the current telephone technology. Procedures for handling calls are clear and thorough. Procedures have also recently been introduced for the booking of appointments.

Site Visits

Introduction

3.1.44 As part of the review a number of visits have been undertaken by members of the Project Team to both review existing practice within the Council and gain knowledge of alternative options from other Councils.

Area Offices

3.1.45 Each of the four Area Offices was visited by the Project Team, with Aylesham and Dover being visited on the afternoon of 15 December 2003, and Sandwich and Deal on the afternoon of 18 December 2003. As part of the Dover visit, the customer care facilities at the Visitor Information Centre and the Parking Services Offices at Dover Town Hall were also reviewed.

3.1.46 Before passing comment on the visits to these offices it should be noted that in all cases staff were doing their utmost to deliver a quality service to the public and from anecdotal evidence during the visits it was clear that many customers valued and appreciated the service which they were receiving. That said it is also clear that in many instances this was being carried out despite fundamental flaws in the service arrangements or in the fabric of the building and the facilities available.

3.1.47 Dealing with the four Area Offices first, they are each currently operated as part of the Revenues and Benefits Division and as such have tended to operate primarily as a means of accepting payments for rents, council tax etc. Other services are available although there is a tendency to rely upon the Whitfield offices with regard to any complex enquiry. This brings its own problems as area office staff then run into difficulties in contacting individual staff at Whitfield to enable them to fully answer queries from customers. This has been compounded by the organisational changes, which have taken place over recent years, which has resulted in some uncertainty within the area offices as to who does what at Whitfield. There is limited IT provision within the four offices although this does allow staff to use the Intranet. There is some multi-agency working taking place at each office at Divisions such as Housing management hold "surgeries" at the office on a routine basis.

3.1.48 As regards accommodation issues:

- Aylesham Area Office is located within one section of the former police station in fairly cramped accommodation comprising a small cash office, one interview room, a single reception desk and a rear office. In addition, the

office is not particularly easy to find and although it is reasonably centrally located it therefore does not really provide adequate facilities for our customers.

- The Dover Area Office is housed in buildings to one side of Maison Dieu Car Park and is therefore well located and reasonably spacious although the staff facilities are inadequate and the building is in need of substantial refurbishment. There is a separate interview room and a large cash office.
- In Deal, the Area Office is located within the Town Hall in accommodation which although well appointed is tight for space. There is a small cash office and a separate interview room is available but staff facilities are cramped and storage space is at a premium.
- Finally, the Sandwich Area Office is situated on the southern side of the Guildhall in a small office, which again offers limited accommodation. There is a small cash office and interview room but again staff facilities are limited and the service to the customer is compromised to some extent by the quality of the accommodation.

3.1.49 To summarise with regard to the Area Offices the overall perception was that the services provided to the customer were surprisingly good considering the lack of support provided to the staff with regard to accommodation, facilities available and the training support provided.

3.1.50 As noted above the opportunity was also taken to visit the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and the Parking Services Offices at Dover Town Hall. The VIC is housed in the entrance area to the former Town Gaol and although small is an attractive office which provides a wide range of information to residents and visitors alike. There were no particular issues noted with regard to the service offered which appeared to be professional and informed. In contrast the Parking Services Offices are located in totally inappropriate accommodation in the basement and ground floor areas of the Town Hall. The reception area is cramped and offers minimal security to staff whilst some of the office accommodation lacks natural daylight and suffers from poor temperature control. Customer services were limited to service specific matters and the Committee questioned whether this office would not be better if integrated into the Area Office.

Whitfield Office

3.1.51 Members of the Project Team undertook a tour of the Whitfield Offices as part of its meeting on 16 February 2004. The visit provided an opportunity to review the approach taken within each Division in relation to Customer care with reference made to the information provided earlier in the report regarding existing arrangements within the Council. From this tour it was quite clear that the approach taken by individual divisions with regard to customer care varies significantly even within the Whitfield offices. Some teams have reasonably well developed office procedures for dealing with customers and monitoring performance against the Council's standards whereas others have a much less developed approach. It would be wrong to judge individual Divisions but it was apparent that best practice tended to be found in those areas of the Council which had been or which continued to be subject to external scrutiny such as Housing, Highways and Property Services.

3.1.52 Equally, it was also clear that a major contributory factor in this varied approach to customer care is the lack of any clear corporate direction on this issue. The Council does have a set of Customer Standards but these are in the main simply setting out basic principles and there is no corporate direction with regard to the monitoring of performance against these standards or any requirement placed upon individual divisions to collect data on their performance.

Aylesbury Vale District Council

3.1.53 On 19 March 2004 members of the Project Team visited Aylesbury Vale District Council to review their recently established Customer Service Centre.

3.1.54 Aylesbury Vale District Council is in the county of Buckinghamshire between London and the Midlands. The District covers a large part of rural Buckinghamshire. It borders with Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes in the north of the District, Oxfordshire to the west and Bedfordshire to the east. The District is over 350 square miles in area and has a large population of approximately 166,000, which is sparsely distributed. There are two major towns in the District, Buckingham in the north and Aylesbury, the county town in the south. The towns are very different in terms of the make up of the population and outlook. Buckingham has a population of 10,500, whilst Aylesbury has a population of 63,000 and is therefore the main urban center within the District. The Council is based in Aylesbury and the majority of its services are delivered from one central office.

3.1.55 The Contact Centre was opened in February 2001 and is still well regarded as an example of good practice. The Centre takes up the whole of the ground floor of the Council offices with customers being greeted on entering the building at a security desk. Those who are visiting professional staff within the offices are given security badges and directed to a small waiting area whilst the majority are directed though to the main body of the reception where they are received at a reception desk and details of their query are taken. Simple requests are dealt with immediately whilst the remainder are allocated a number and directed to a large airy waiting area which has TV screens, drinks facilities etc. Customers are called forward in turn to be dealt with by a series of Customer Service Advisors who are trained to be able to deal with a wide range of queries. Full IT support is provided which enables the vast majority of transactions to be dealt with at a single point of contact. Statistics provided indicate that the centre handles some 45,000 enquiries each year with average waiting times being around 5 minutes. In addition to the above arrangements a separate planning reception is provided enabling expert professional advice to be given on request and a number of interview rooms are available to allow more private discussion. There is some sharing of the facilities with other agencies with the Pension Service holding surgeries there twice weekly although arrangements with Job Centre Plus have ceased due to a low take-up and staffing issues. A banking hall sited to the rear of the ground floor area where payments can be made complements the facilities. This is laid out in a modern style similar to many banks and building societies without the use of security screens. The telephone exchange is kept entirely separate from the Customer Service Centre and is located to the rear of the security desk.

3.1.56 The Committee was impressed with the centre, which clearly offered a highly integrated approach to the delivery of services to the customer. Equally it was evident that the "triage" approach of sifting calls at the "meet and greet" desk has the potential to delay relatively straightforward enquiries. It was also obvious that the center was not being utilised to its design capacity and staff confirmed that they were considering reducing the number of customer service points, as they were not all required. The office is located centrally within Aylesbury and is accessible to a good

proportion of the population but is not directly comparable to Dover as the balance of population and office locations are clearly very different. As such developing a direct copy of the approach taken by Aylesbury within the Whitfield offices would not seem to be a viable option. The numbers of customer enquiries received by the centre is much greater than would be the case at Whitfield and having a reasonable volume of customers enables Aylesbury to maintain staff numbers at an efficient level and still maintain an effective service. Even so it was acknowledged that balancing staffing levels to demand to ensure that Customer Service Advisors were kept busy without affecting waiting times was a challenge.

Gravesham Borough Council

3.1.57 Following on from the visit to Aylesbury Vale a visit was made to the offices of Gravesham BC on the afternoon of 19 March. Members of the Project Team were given a presentation on their new Customer Contact Centre and then given a brief tour of the facilities. The centre offers a telephone-based service handling calls from an expanding number of services across the Council. It is located within one of the upper floors of the main Council offices but appeared to have no direct linkage with the Reception facilities within the building. The integration of the IT software with other software packages was impressive and the use of CRM technology enabled staff to offer customers an individual service. The service is closely modelled on the approach taken by Swale Borough Council visited more recently by the Project Team and uses the same software.

3.1.58 The Council has clearly made a major investment in developing the facility and costs to date of in excess of £200k were suggested. However their use of the technology appeared to be relatively limited and with regard to some of the services the centre was acting as little more than a message taking service. If the potential of such technology is to be maximised it would seem essential that there should be a more robust approach to redesigning office management processes across the whole Council to ensure that efficiencies are delivered.

Swale Borough Council

3.1.59 Following on from the visits undertaken earlier in the year members of the Project Team undertook a visit to the Customer Care Centre at Swale Borough Council, Sittingbourne on 8 June 2004.

3.1.60 The Customer Care Centre, which was awarded an e-government innovation award in February 2003, is often referred to as a best practice case study. Chris Edwards, the Council's Chief Executive gave the Project Team an overview of the customer service centre project and how the Council are seeking to use this approach to completely transform the quality of its service delivery. This initiative has enabled customers to contact the council using the most convenient channel for them - whether telephone, Internet, Walk-in, mail or email - and to have most of their enquiries resolved at the first point of contact. The customer service centre itself is housed on an upper floor within the main Council offices in Sittingbourne and makes extensive use of CRM software to offer a wide range of services to the customer. Staff deal with all aspects of the particular service not just telephone enquiries and this enables staff to be kept fully occupied even when the telephones are quiet.

3.1.61 In parallel with its technology investment, the council has put significant effort into changing its organisation culture to ensure effective use of the technology and to therefore improve overall operational efficiency. To date, this effort has involved

investigating and re-engineering more than 60 business processes. Swale claim that the project has resulted in a radical improvement in the quality of service offered stating that before work commenced, ratings stood at 78 per cent - a figure that has since climbed to 98 per cent.

3.1.62 The facility shows what can be achieved with significant financial investment and high-level management commitment. The project has clearly been the key corporate ambition for the Council for a number of years and as a consequence of this level of support much has been achieved. The only concern noted was that much of the input appeared to seek to simply maximise the use of the technology and there was little reference during the presentation to how customer views were taken account of in the development of the service.

Customer Care Survey

Introduction

3.1.63 As part of the research undertaken to inform this review two specific customer care surveys were undertaken. The first, a face-to-face survey, was carried out by every Councillor who undertook 10 separate interviews with members of the public within their respective wards. A total of 300 face-to-face interviews were completed.

3.1.64 The second survey was undertaken using the Citizen's Panel. Both surveys sought to establish current opinion on the quality of customer care within the Council and to determine key issues for development. A total of 1469 questionnaires were issued in carrying out this postal based survey and 803 completed questionnaires were returned which is a response rate of 55%.

3.1.65 Copies of the questionnaire used in the surveys are included at Appendix F.

3.1.66 The main findings of the surveys carried out was as follows:

- **OVERALL SATISFACTION:** 56% of respondents were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the way Dover Council provides its services.
- **AMOUNT OF DIRECT CONTACT:** 57% of respondents said they had had direct dealings with the Council in the last 12 months, although this is higher among the Citizens Panel respondents (63%) than the Members Survey respondents (42%).
- **SERVICES CONTACTED:** Respondents who had been in contact with the Council in the last 12 months were most likely to have dealt with the Planning department (15%), followed by Highways (12%), Environmental Health (11%) and Council Tax (10%).
- **CONTACT METHODS:** The most common methods of contacting the Council are: switchboard telephone (45%), direct dial telephone (26%) and visiting the Council offices (19%). However, when respondents were asked how they would prefer to ask the Council for advice, the most common answer given was "In person/face-to-face" (47%).
- **COUNCIL STAFF:** Attitudes towards Council staff were very positive, with the vast majority of respondents who had contacted the Council finding staff

friendly (91%), helpful (84%) and efficient (80%). However, almost a third (30%) said that staff were unable to deal with their query.

- **FINDING RIGHT PERSON:** Of those who had contacted the Council, 83% said it was easy to identify the right person to talk to, although slightly fewer (76%) found it easy to get hold of the right person.
- **OVERALL RATING OF CONTACT:** Around two thirds (64%) of residents who had been in contact with the Council in the last 12 months were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the way the Council dealt with them.
- **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED:** The most common area for improvement highlighted was "Responding quickly to an enquiry" (40%), followed by "Departments working with one another when they need to" (35%) and "Making it easy to get in touch when you have an enquiry" (34%).

3.1.67 A full copy of the report prepared by Snap Software Services is included at Appendix G.

Identification of Key Issues

Introduction

3.1.68 Having reviewed existing practice within the Council and enjoyed the benefit of considering the approaches taken by Aylesbury Vale and Gravesham the Scrutiny Committee has been able to form a view as to how it believes the Council should develop its approach to customer care. It is quite clear that the primary aim must be to ensure that the customer is provided with every opportunity to engage with the Council by a variety of media and that the Council is seen to respond to modern day expectations regarding accessibility.

3.1.69 Key issues for review in developing a new modern approach to engaging with our customers include:

- Corporate Standards
- Location
- Opening Hours
- Reception Service & Facilities
- Telephone Answering
- Security Issues
- Complaints

Corporate Standards

3.1.70 The current corporate standards (included at Appendix B) set out clearly the Council's expectations of its staff with regard to customer care in a document, which is widely available across the Council. These standards set are written in a customer focused style and seek to provide assurance to individual customers as to how they will be dealt with irrespective of the nature or form of their contact with the Council.

3.1.71 Specific response times are set for responding to correspondence, dealing with visitors and answering telephone calls within these standards, which are considered in principle to be both appropriate and sufficiently challenging. There are issues though with regard to the approach taken with regards to responding to

correspondence as the approach taken within each Division does vary and some queries will inevitably take far longer than the set response time of 10 days to research and respond to.

- 3.1.72 Setting standards is however only part of the process and the Committee was concerned, following its review of existing practice, at the wide variation across the Council in the monitoring of performance against the set standards. The Committee believes that the Council needs to establish clear guidelines as to the level of monitoring to be undertaken with regard to these standards taking account of the differing needs of back and front office teams and ensuring that any monitoring undertaken is focused on what matters to the customer.

Location

- 3.1.73 The Council has been based at Whitfield since 1983 but it is acknowledged that this site remains inaccessible to many of our customers and that even with the wider use of e-government options the Area Offices have an important role to play in ensuring that the Council engages with its customers. The Committee has given consideration to the geographic spread of the offices as part of the programme of visits but has accepted that given the substantial existing investment in the site that the Council should continue to be predominantly based at Whitfield.
- 3.1.74 As regards the Area Offices the existing sites at Aylesham, Dover, Deal and Sandwich each have constraints regarding accessibility and spatial issues, which inhibit to some extent the quality of the service offered to customers. The Committee understood that plans were being developed for a number of the sites that offered and opportunity to improve the situation and supported the approach being taken.
- 3.1.75 In particular, the relocation of the Dover Town Council offices from Castle Street to Maison Dieu House was providing an opportunity to relocate the Dover Area Office to more suitable premises potentially enabling the car parking offices to move out its current inadequate accommodation in the Town Hall basement.
- 3.1.76 In Aylesham discussions are progressing regarding the inclusion of an Area Office within the proposed new Health Centre which would be an improvement on the existing cramped facilities whilst at Deal discussions were being held with Deal Town Council which sought to consider whether there would be benefit if developing a joint reception facility amongst other changes to the building layout.
- 3.1.77 Each of these proposals has the potential to improve facilities for customers and the range of services offered at the Area Offices. This was considered to be a particular issue for action given that historically the role of Area Offices had been essentially to operate as payment collection facilities. There was considered to be a clear need to widen the range of services available at each of these offices preferably to a point where the services offered matched as far as possible the services available at Whitfield. This could lead to the re-badging our Area Offices as customer contact centres. Such a change would clearly be a major shift in service provision.

Opening Hours

3.1.78 Currently the opening hours for the various service centres are as follows:

Office	Days	Hours
Whitfield Offices	Monday to Friday	0845 to 1700
Main Switchboard	Monday to Friday	0845 to 1710
Repairs Call Centre	Monday to Friday	0845 to 1700
Dover Area Office	Monday to Friday	0900-1230 & 1330-1630
Deal Area Office	Monday to Friday	0900-1230 & 1330-1630
Sandwich Area Office	Tuesday/Thursday and Friday	0900-1230 & 1330-1630
Aylesham Area Office	Monday & Wednesday	0900-1230 & 1330-1630
Dover Visitor Information Centre	Monday to Friday Saturday & Sunday	0900 to 1730 1000 to 1600
Parking Services Office	Monday to Friday	0845ish to 1700

3.1.79 As can be seen this a wide disparity in the approach taken and thus in the ability of the Council to engage with it's customers. Particular concerns include the Parking Services office, which has apparently no set opening time simply opening between 8.30 and 9.00 depending upon staffing and the closure of the Area Offices at lunchtime. Only the Dover VIC provides a weekend service although it is obviously serving a different customer base.

3.1.80 As regards telephone contact, the introduction of direct dialling to extensions has improved the accessibility of professional staff but there is clearly potential to improve services in this area.

3.1.81 In summary this was an area of concern for the Committee, which agreed that the Council should be seeking to modernise its pattern of opening hours. The key issue is that the Council's opening hours need to match public expectations regarding accessibility and that consideration needs to be given to both extending working hours and ending the current lunch time closures. The Council needs to ensure that it is available to be contacted by its customers whenever they need to contact us.

Reception Service and Facilities

3.1.82 The delivery of effective customer services relies to a major extent on having properly trained frontline staff whom area able to deal with the majority of customers at the first point of contact. The Committee believes that the Council currently falls some way short of this aim despite the best efforts of the existing staff who it has been recognised do a fantastic job despite a number of major constraints. The approach commonly being taken by other Councils is to develop customer contact centres whose staff are trained to deal with a wide range of enquiries and provided with a high level of IT support to assist them in this task. This clearly works best for those Councils who have a town centre, single office location that receives the majority of their customers. For DDC the situation is different given the location of the offices and the numbers of customers who attend our offices.

3.1.83 Considering firstly the Whitfield offices figures for the past 6 months show the following split in customer queries:

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Totals	%
Planning	182	157	121	221	213	198	1092	5.7
Visitors/ Contractors	326	454	315	408	648	569	2720	14.3
Housing	287	337	213	514	444	492	2287	12.0
Repairs	95	103	56	116	95	107	572	3.0
Highways	72	74	49	90	93	77	455	2.4
Finance	263	339	196	373	289	322	1782	9.4
Refuse/ Waste	50	27	15	62	25	67	246	1.3
Housing Benefits	991	647	545	814	833	1071	4901	25.8
Other Queries/ Departments	991	830	563	807	868	901	4960	26.1
Total	3257	2968	2073	3405	3508	3804	19015	100

Table 2: Analysis of Visitors to the Council Offices, Whitfield, October 2003 to March 2004.

(The source of these figures are manual records maintained by staff and they do not include those customers who make their own way to either the Planning Reception or the Cash Desk.)

3.1.84 It can be seen that although there is a wide spread of customer queries with Housing and Housing Benefits making up on average at least 10th of our custom.

3.1.85 The general perception of the reception area at Whitfield is that our approach does not meet current standards or expectations. This statement is however difficult to substantiate because attempts to obtain customer feedback have been unsuccessful as visitors either do not wish to fill in questionnaires or to be openly critical of the services provided by our current staff. Certainly the décor within the Reception area is looking tired and dated and there are issues regarding its non-compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Therefore the Committee considered that if we accept that we need to learn from other authorities then we should be looking to both upgrade the appearance of the area, ensure compliance with the requirements of DDA and perhaps most importantly seek significant improvement in the standard of the services offered at our main offices.

3.1.86 The Committee considered that following the approach taken by Aylesbury Vale, which is broadly similar to the recently improved Customer Contact Centre at Ashford, would transform the quality of the service to customers. It was recognised equally that the staffing arrangements would need to be tailored to suit the differing numbers of visitors relative to those offices visited. There is therefore a need to develop a solution which whilst embracing the opportunities offered by new technology and new methods of working also suits the needs of this Council.

Telephone Answering

3.1.87 The approach taken within the Council to the answering of telephone calls has progressed in tandem with the introduction of new technology. In particular as direct dialling to extensions has become more widespread the volume of calls being received via the main switchboard (01304 821199) has reduced significantly. At all of the sites visited telephone answering was undertaken entirely separately from Reception. This offers major advantages in terms of serving the customer as

currently the reception staff at Whitfield are trying to both receive visitors and answer calls, which is far from ideal. The Committee believe that removing the telephone answering function from the reception desk would a significant step towards achieving improvements in customer care at the Whitfield Offices.

Security Issues

3.1.88 The approach taken to the management of security reception areas was noted to vary between the various sites visited. At Ashford all visitors to the Council offices are first directed to a Reception desk where they take details of queries and issue customer numbers, issue forms when possible, or provide security badges if needed for visitors to the building. This can cause delays and result in those attending meetings being kept waiting in a queue of customers. At Aylesbury they had introduced a front desk security presence to register visitors, take parcels, monitor CCTV etc, which appeared to work although combining this with deliveries was a distraction. The use of security screens of the type used at all our offices establishes a barrier between the customer and the member of staff and can cause difficulties in dealing effectively with particular queries. This is essentially an Health & Safety matter and given the approach taken at Aylesbury where they have stripped these away and have an open desk approach, the Committee considers that this would be more welcoming to visitors than our existing arrangements.

3.1.89 It is accepted that we will need to continue to provide separate interview rooms to allow private interviews to be held.

Future Considerations

3.1.90 The development of a new approach to customer care across the Council will draw on resources across the Council and will only work with support from staff in all key service areas. It is also likely to have significant staffing implications the detail of which will need to be developed in parallel with establishing feasible working arrangements and layouts.

Section 4: Recommendations

***Summary of the recommendations of the Scrutiny
(Performance) Committee to Cabinet and Council***

Recommendations

Corporate Standards

4.1.1 The Committee supports the corporate standards for customer care but is concerned that these are not being applied effectively across the Council. It is therefore recommended:

1. That clear guidelines should be developed to ensure that a single central philosophy is maintained for the application of customer care standards across the Council and for the effective monitoring of performance.
2. That standards be developed for responding to all types of communication.
3. That all letters/faxes and e-mails received by the Council should be acknowledged.
4. That facilities for the monitoring of telephone answering performance should be improved.
5. That the corporate standards be extended to cover issues concerning the involvement of ward councillors in decisions affecting their respective wards.
6. A Management Interface Software should be put in place, to inter-act with all ICT systems across the Council.
7. A complaints database should be set-up so that all complaints can be analysed to detect any failing Customer Service across the Council. This resource should be placed with Policy and Performance Department.

Location

4.1.2 The Committee agrees that Whitfield should continue to be the main operational base for the Council. The Committee does however recommend:

8. That the use of Area Offices should be extended to a comprehensive Customer walk-in Council interfaced services and the skills and expertise of staff within Area Offices should be maximised to achieve this.
9. That the Council needs to ensure that it provides a range of interfaces, which ensures that the customer can engage with the Council by whichever means, is most advantageous to the customer.
10. That the Aylesham office to be moved to larger premises within Aylesham. This being indicated on the Aylesham Masterplan.

Opening Hours

4.1.3 The Committee notes that the current opening hours will potentially place a barrier between the Council and its customers.

- 4.1.4 Therefore it recommends that the Council should consult with ward councillors and parish/town councillors on extending opening hours, eliminate lunchtime closures and provide more effective service to Aylesham and Sandwich.

Reception Service and Facilities

- 4.1.5 The Committee has been impressed with the alternative approaches developed within other Councils to the management with face-to-face customer enquiries. Therefore it recommends:

11. That the Council should develop a new approach to handling customers within the Whitfield Offices based on a One-Stop-Shop concept of the model seen at Aylesbury Vale.
12. That the Council should seek to extend this approach to the Area Offices.
13. That the Council should move its telephone exchange operations to a dedicated call centre.

Telephone Answering

- 4.1.6 The Committee recognises the benefits that can be provided by the use of modern telephony and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software. It considers that the Council needs to improve its accessibility to customers by telephone. Therefore it recommends:

14. That the Council should develop clear proposals for the introduction of a call centre to improve customer service.
15. This to be achieved with a phased implication approach on what Council Services to be resourced in this manner.

Security Issues

- 4.1.7 The Committee has been particularly impressed by the provision by other authorities of any overt security presence although it equally notes that the removal of security screens could potentially improve contacts with customers. Therefore it recommends:

16. That the Council should review its arrangements for the management of security focusing especially on the Whitfield and Dover offices.
17. That consideration is given to the provision of an overt security presence at the Whitfield offices.
18. That the Council consider the removal of security screens where it can be demonstrated that this would not increase security risks for staff or customers.

Project Management

- 4.1.8
19. That a Project Manager to be appointed to over-see the project, reporting to Resources Director,
 20. That an Action Plan to be developed with a time-scale of 2 years.
 21. That quarterly reviews be reported to the Scrutiny (Performance) Committee.

Section 5: Appendices

- Appendix A: Summary of Existing Customer Care Practice***
- Appendix B: Current Corporate Customer Care Standards***
- Appendix C: Legal Services Statement of Principles on Client Care***
- Appendix D: Property Services Division Customer Care Standards***
- Appendix E: Revenues and Benefits Customer Care Procedures***
- Appendix F: Customer Care Survey Questionnaire***
- Appendix G: Customer Care Survey, copy of Snap Surveys Report, June 2004***

Summary of Existing Customer Care Practice

Division	Customer Standards	Mail	Telephone Calls	E-Mails	Faxes
Accountancy	None in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Community, Leisure and Culture	None in place	Some procedures in place	Calls logged in some areas	No set procedures	No set procedures
Corporate Support	Council standard followed	Mail logged but no monitoring in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Democratic Services	Service Charters produced	No formal procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Environmental Health	None in place	Mail logged but no monitoring in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Financial Services	None in place	No procedures in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Highways	KCC standards applied	Formal procedures for recording and monitoring mail	No set procedures	No set procedures	Dealt with as mail
Housing	Service standards established	Formal procedures for recording and monitoring mail	Some procedures in place	Some procedures in place	Dealt with as mail
Human Resources	None in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
ICT	None in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Legal	Service standards established	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Planning	None in place	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures	No set procedures
Property Services	Service standards established	Formal procedures for recording and monitoring mail	No set procedures	No set procedures	Dealt with as mail
Revenues and Benefits	Service standards established	No set procedures	No set procedures	Monitored daily	No set procedures

CORPORATE CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

Dover District Council believe its customers have a right to the best possible service from the Council and its staff and has established a series of Customer Care Standards to support this aim;

These are our standards, but we are always willing to listen to your comments and suggestions

What can you expect from us

Contact with us – when you contact us, we will:

- Treat you with respect and courtesy
- Give clear information about our services without using jargon
- Only ask for relevant information and explain why it is needed
- Say when we can and can't help and why, and what action we will take
- If we can't help, we will say who can. If we don't know, we will try to find out
- Respect your right to confidentiality, privacy and safety where this is expected
- Where we agree something significant with you we will confirm in writing within 10 working days
- The Council operate an Equal Opportunities Policy and we will not discriminate against you
- Where an appointment has been pre-arranged we will see you within 10 minutes of that time
- If you come to our offices without an appointment you are attended to within 30 minutes of arrival
- Arrange interpretation, translation and or signing when requested
- Welcome your views and criticisms and respond to them
- Wherever possible provide private interview facilities on request

Telephone Answering – when you telephone us, we will

- Be here to answer your calls within 6 rings during office hours
- State clearly the name of the service when answering
- Give our own name
- Offer to call back if we can't deal with your query immediately
- If we need to transfer the call we will tell you the name and number of the person we are transferring you to and check that the person is available before putting the call through

Telephone Answering – when we are unable to answer the phone we will:-

- Use Voicemail to allow you to leave a message
- When you leave a message we will respond to your enquiry by the end of the next working day
- Provide facilities for you to report Council emergencies 'out of hours' and at weekends

Letter and E-Mail Answering – when you write to us we will:

- Answer all enquiries within 10 working days of receiving it.
- Where we cannot give you a detailed answer within 10 days we will advise you why and when a full reply will be sent
- Use language that is easy to read and understand in accordance with the Plain English Campaign
- Give you a named contact and a direct-dial phone number in our reply

Visits to your Home or Property– when we meet with you we will:

- Show you our Dover District Council identification card
- Wherever possible make an appointment at a time to suit you

In return

- We expect you to treat us with courtesy and politeness
- We will support our staff should they experience discrimination, abuse or threats

Complaints Procedure

If you feel we are not meeting these standards or are unhappy with other aspects of the service you receive please contact the department concerned who will endeavour to resolve your concerns

We will

- Deal with problems or issues raised within 10 working days
- Listen to your suggestions and seek to improve our services

If you are still unhappy with the service received from the department, the Council have a Professional Standards Unit who will investigate your complaint. For further information please ask at Reception for a 'How to Complain' booklet or alternatively ask to speak to the Professional Standards Officer.

Legal Division Statement of Principles on Client Care

The following principles have been agreed by the Legal Division and will operate in all dealings with Client Departments, Members, the public and outside agencies and organisations as applicable:

1. **Commitment**

Legal staff will be fully committed at all times to –

- (a) offering a Best Value service to all of its Clients and others with whom it has dealings;
- (b) acting in the best interests of the Council;
- (c) seeking to fulfil the objectives of the Client Department (subject to any overriding duties to the Council or the Court);
- (d) securing a continuous improvement in the quality of the service through training, investment and the enhancement of good client relations.

2. **Communication**

- (a) Save where a client agrees other specific arrangements for routine transactions, all new instructions/incoming correspondence shall be acknowledged upon receipt and the name of the case officer dealing with the matter identified.
- (b) Target response times for all written correspondence shall be (unless otherwise agreed and subject to any other requisite deadlines):

Internal Advice	– Acknowledgement within 5 working days – Detailed response within 10 working days
Members	– Full written response within 3 working days
Public and Outside Agencies and Organisations	– Acknowledgement within 5 working days – Full written response within 10 working days
- (c) Where detailed drafting or research is required, clients or third parties shall be advised of and kept informed of an estimated timetable at every appropriate opportunity.
- (d) Clients will be kept fully informed of progress on all on-going matters as necessary and in accordance with any terms agreed in Service Level Agreements etc.
- (e) Clients may if requested be provided with itemised accounts on a monthly basis which shall include breakdowns of the fee-earner, time spent, hourly charge out rate, cost code and total costs recharged.

- (f) In the event that delays are unavoidable eg by reason of staff absences or unexpected workload pressure, Clients will be advised and agreement sought on the most efficient use of external resources and/or prioritisation of work as appropriate.
- (g) All relevant Client Departments will be advised on the completion of a transaction and relevant records/registers noted as required.
- (h) Clear instructions before action will be sought and recorded on all matters where that is necessary; this will either be in writing or verbally and confirmed by written file note.
- (i) All advice will as far as possible be clear, concise and practicable and suggest either (i) a course of action or (ii) options which the Client should consider.
- (j) Whilst the Legal Division cannot monitor all of the actions of Departments throughout the Council, the Division will draw to the notice of another Department (i) any action which is considered to be unlawful or improper (ii) any action which may place the Department or the Council at risk (iii) any relevant change in the law which it is considered should be notified to another Department.
- (k) As part of the Legal Division's Service Plan, Clients will be invited to offer their views on the level and standard of service and any future improvements by way of (i) regular customer perception surveys (ii) annual user meetings (iii) meetings with the Head of Legal Services (or his deputy) upon request.

3. **Courtesy**

The Legal Division values its reputation with Clients, the public and outside agencies for adopting and maintaining high standards of professional conduct within the public service. This necessitates that all dealings with Client Departments, Members, the public and outside agencies will be undertaken in a manner which is (a) courteous (b) shows respect for others and (c) upholds the good name and reputation of the Council at all times.

4. **Confidentiality**

In accordance with the normal solicitor/client relationship, Legal Officers will maintain confidentiality in all dealings between the Council and third parties insofar as such confidentiality is permitted within the law.

In dealings with individual officers or Members, the Legal Officer must owe an overriding duty at all times to the whole Council and cannot be compromised in the proper exercise of that duty by any confidential information given by an individual officer/Member. Where there could be any misunderstanding about the duty of disclosure, the Legal Officer is entitled to draw the attention of the Member or officer to this overriding duty in order to save any future embarrassment.

PROPERTY SERVICES : STANDARDS

We will:

- **Plain English Campaign** Write all major publications and customer letters in accordance with the Plain English campaign.
- **Dealing with Complaints** Deal with problems urgently to avoid them becoming a complaint.
Monitor complaints.
Reply in writing within 10 working days.
- **Telephones** Give name and department when answering telephone.
Answer the phone promptly or divert to answer-phone if not available.
Update answer-phone message daily.
Deal with answer-phone messages daily.
- **Holiday Cover** Make sure work is supervised even when on holiday.
- **Correspondence** Answer letters within 7 working days.
Keep a record of letters received.
- **Appointments** Provide out of hours appointments if required.
Make special arrangements for shift workers.
- **Identity** Wear identification cards.
Carry business cards.
- **Customer Information** Issue information leaflets for major works.
Publish information in the "Tenants News Letter".
Issue questionnaires on work carried out.
Publish customer satisfaction results.
Produce a Property Services booklet to be held in Reception and Council Offices.
- **Consultation with Councillors, Tenant Groups and Customers** Business Planning and Asset Management.
Specification of materials to be used and the standards expected.
Setting standards expected of staff.
Programming works.
Customer choice.
Response times for day to day maintenance.
Identify areas for improvement.
- **Monitor** Customer satisfaction levels.
Appointments made by contractors.
Completion dates on inspection and jobs.
Cleaning by contractor during and after work.
Budgets, complaints, compliments, and customer views.
Letters are answered within the timescales.

- **Contractors** Make sure that contractors are correctly qualified and are suitable for the work they have to do.
- **Benchmark** Compare our standards with other local and national organisations.
- **Contract Meetings** Hold regular contract meetings inviting customers to attend.
- **Value for Money** Make sure that work carried out gives value for money.

We will make sure that our Contractors will:

- **Appointments** Make appointments to suit our customers.
- **Identity** Wear Identification Cards and are smartly dressed.
- **Quality Control** Carry out the work correctly and in a clean and tidy manner.

Revenues and Benefits: Customer Care Standards

The Revenues and Benefits (R&B) Service covers a wide range of functions and in all of these we will endeavour to provide excellent customer care.

Telephone Contact

- We will provide a dedicated call-centre to answer customer enquiries for Council Tax and Housing Benefits. This will be monitored to ensure waiting times are minimised and the quality of advice and information given is of the highest standard. Enquiries for Housing Rents, Housing Benefit Overpayment recovery, Sundry Invoices and Non-Domestic Rates are dealt with directly by these sections.
- We will provide the facility for you to make payments for all of the above .

Personal Visit

- We will ensure that all office opening times are well publicised and provide a full enquiry and payment facility.
- Private interview facilities are available at all offices should these be required.

Letters and Documents

- We will endeavour to answer all letters within 10 days.
- We will aspire to bring all of our letters and documents up to the standards of the Plain English Campaign.
- All documents covering our service will be available from all Council Offices

Home Visits

- Where it is not possible for you to visit the local office, we will arrange for you to be visited at home if a personal visit is needed.
- If we need to visit you we will try to do this at a time that is convenient.
- All officers will carry formal identification cards and have a contact number for you to confirm their identity and purpose of visit if required.

Security

- All documentation provided will be stored safely and securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act
- You will have access to all information held about you in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act
- We will not divulge information about you to any other person or organisation without your permission unless legislation allows that we can.

Appeals and Complaints

- If we make a decision that carries a right of appeal, we will deal with your appeal within the timescales allowed.
- We will provide responses that are easy to understand and clearly highlight any further action you may take.
- If you are dissatisfied with the way you have been dealt with, you may raise this directly to the Head of Revenues and Benefits or formally through the Council's complaints procedures

Listening to our customers

- We will liaise and consult with relevant groups and individuals to obtain feedback about our service and how this affects you.
- We will have Revenues and Benefits experts available for community organisations to provide advice and assistance in specific areas of our work.



Citizens Panel

Customer Care Survey

CUSTOMER CARE SURVEY

The Council provides a range of services including Benefits, Building Control, Community Liaison, Concessionary Fares, Conservation, Environmental Health, Housing, Lettings, Licensing, Recreation, Planning and the White Cliffs Care Line.

We are committed to customer focused service delivery. To ensure we are achieving this the Council's Scrutiny Committee is conducting a wide ranging review of how we interact with our customers. Part of this process is to engage with our residents through survey work. The results of this survey will help the Committee form a view on how well we deliver our services and where we need to improve,

It should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete this survey. A post paid envelope is included for your use and I should be grateful if you would return the questionnaire before 23 April 2004.

Many thanks.

Q1 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Dover District Council provides its services?

Very Satisfied.....

Satisfied.....

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Very Dissatisfied

Don't Know.....

If you wish, could you tell us why? _____

Q2 Have you had any direct dealings with the Council over the last 12 months?
Yes (Goto Q3)
No (Goto Q9)

Q3 Which service have you most recently had contact with in the last 12 months?

Q4 How was contact first made with the Council?
Switchboard Telephone.....
Direct Dial Telephone.....
Letter.....
E-mail.....
Visit to the Offices
Visit from an Officer of the Council.....
Fax
Through a Councillor.....
Other (Please Specify) _____

Q5 When you contacted the Council did you find the staff there to be	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Efficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interested in your problem / query	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Able to deal with your problem / query	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Q6 Was identifying the right person to talk to**
Easy.....
Difficult.....
- Q7 Was getting hold of the right person**
Easy.....
Difficult.....
- Q8 Overall, how would you rate the way the Council generally dealt with you**
Very Satisfied.....
Satisfied.....
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Very Dissatisfied
Don't Know.....

Dover District Council are looking at new ways of delivering information and services. We would now like to ask you about how you would prefer to access a range of information and services.

- Q9 How would you prefer to ask the Council for specific advice relating to you or a member of your family**
In person / face to face.....
By letter / post
By telephone.....
By E-mail.....
Through the Council's website
Through a touchscreen in a public area
Don't Know.....

Other (Please Specify)

Q10 If this method was not available, what would be your second choice for asking for specific advice relating to your or a member of your family

- In person / face to face*.....
- By letter / post*
- By telephone*.....
- By E-mail*.....
- Through the Council's website*
- Through a touchscreen in a public area*
- Don't Know*.....

Q11 From the following list there are a number of possible areas for the improvement of Council services. Which in your opinion are the aspects that are most in need of improvement. Please choose no more than three.

- Friendly and helpful staff*.....
- Getting it right first time*.....
- Making it easy to get in touch when you have an enquiry*.....
- Responding quickly to an enquiry*.....
- Keeping you informed about the services we provide*.....
- Being able to contact the Council in the evening / at weekends*.....
- Making sure the services are available to all those who need them*.....
- Departments working with one another when they need to*.....
- Different public sector organisations working better together*.....
- Other*.....
- Don't Know*.....

*Other (Please
Specify)*

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire.

We will be reporting the findings of this questionnaire in May 2004. You will be able to view the results at this time on our website (www.dover.gov.uk) or later in the Dover District Newsletter.



DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL CUSTOMER CARE SURVEY

**Final Report
June 2004**

Prepared by Snap SurveyShop

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Introduction

Background

Dover District Council carried out a Customer Care Survey among local residents and commissioned Snap SurveyShop to carry out data entry and analysis and write a full report of the research findings.

Methodology

Dover District Council conducted two separate surveys, both using the same questionnaire. The first was a postal survey, sent to the whole Citizens Panel (1469 people). 803 completed questionnaires were returned - a response rate of 55%.

The second survey consisted of face-to-face interviews with a random sample of residents from the ward, carried out by Council Members. A total of 300 face-to-face interviews were completed.

Analysis of results

All figures in this report are based on everyone answering each particular question, excluding those coded as 'No Reply'. Throughout the report, results are shown for the Citizens Panel and Members Survey both separately and combined.

Structure of this report

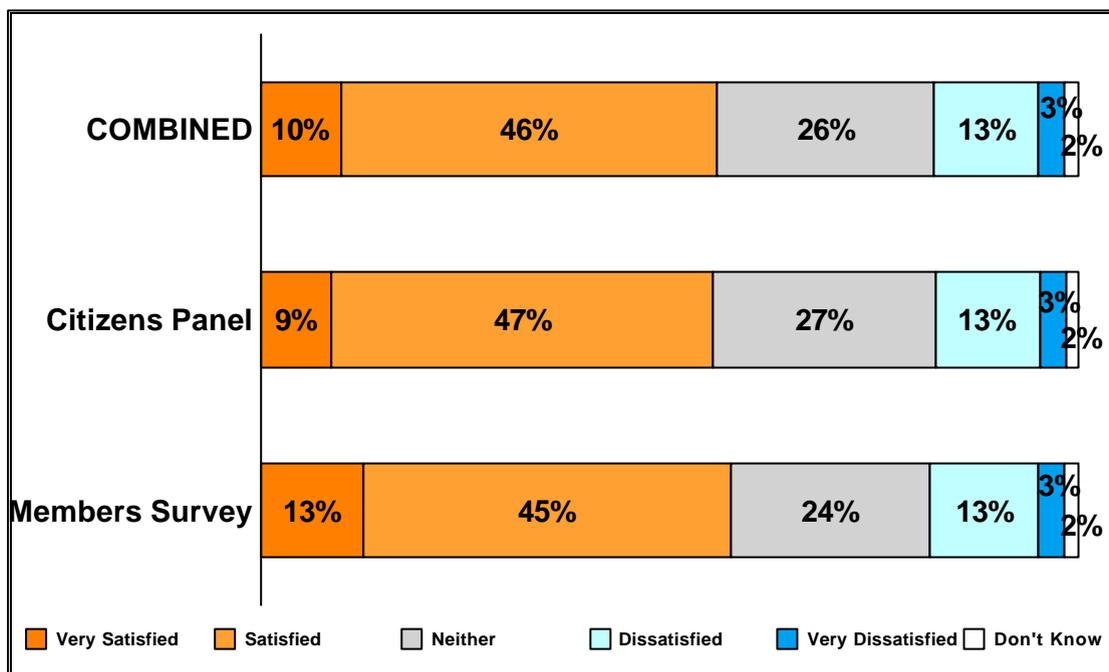
The main body of the report looks at results to each question in turn.

The appendices contain listings of tenants' verbatim comments and a full set of data tabulations.

Summary of main findings

- ◆ **OVERALL SATISFACTION:** 56% of respondents were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the way Dover Council provides its services.
- ◆ **AMOUNT OF DIRECT CONTACT:** 57% of respondents said they had had direct dealings with the Council in the last 12 months, although this is higher among the Citizens Panel respondents (63%) than the Members Survey respondents (42%).
- ◆ **SERVICES CONTACTED:** Respondents who had been in contact with the Council in the last 12 months were most likely to have dealt with the Planning department (15%), followed by Highways (12%), Environmental Health (11%) and Council Tax (10%).
- ◆ **CONTACT METHODS:** The most common methods of contacting the Council are: switchboard telephone (45%), direct dial telephone (26%) and visiting the Council offices (19%). However, when respondents were asked how they would prefer to ask the Council for advice, the most common answer given was "In person/face-to-face" (47%).
- ◆ **COUNCIL STAFF:** Attitudes towards Council staff were very positive, with the vast majority of respondents who had contacted the Council finding staff friendly (91%), helpful (84%) and efficient (80%). However, almost a third (30%) said that staff were unable to deal with their query.
- ◆ **FINDING RIGHT PERSON:** Of those who had contacted the Council, 83% said it was easy to identify the right person to talk to, although slightly fewer (76%) found it easy to get hold of the right person.
- ◆ **OVERALL RATING OF CONTACT:** Around two thirds (64%) of residents who had been in contact with the Council in the last 12 months were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the way the Council dealt with them.
- ◆ **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED:** The most common area for improvement highlighted was "Responding quickly to an enquiry" (40%), followed by "Departments working with one another when they need to" (35%) and "Making it easy to get in touch when you have an enquiry" (34%).

Q1. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Dover District Council provides its services?



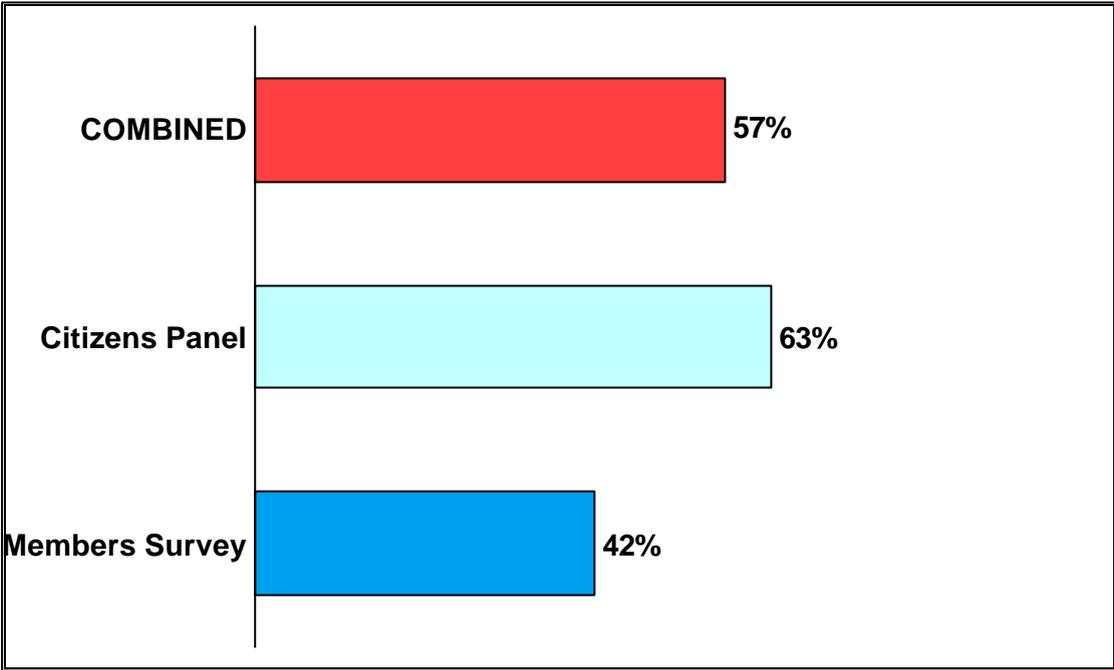
Base: All respondents

10% of respondents said they were "Very satisfied" with the way Dover District Council provides its services, with a further 46% "Satisfied". There was no significant difference between the responses given by the Citizens Panel and those from the Members Survey.

Although most residents are satisfied with the way the Council provides its services, a sizeable minority (16%) are either "Dissatisfied" or "Very dissatisfied".

After giving a rating, respondents were then asked why they had answered in the way they had. A wide range of reasons were given, depending on residents' personal experiences and priorities; all the comments can be found in Appendix 1 (p23-38).

Q2. Have you had any direct dealings with the Council over the last 12 months? (% answering 'Yes')

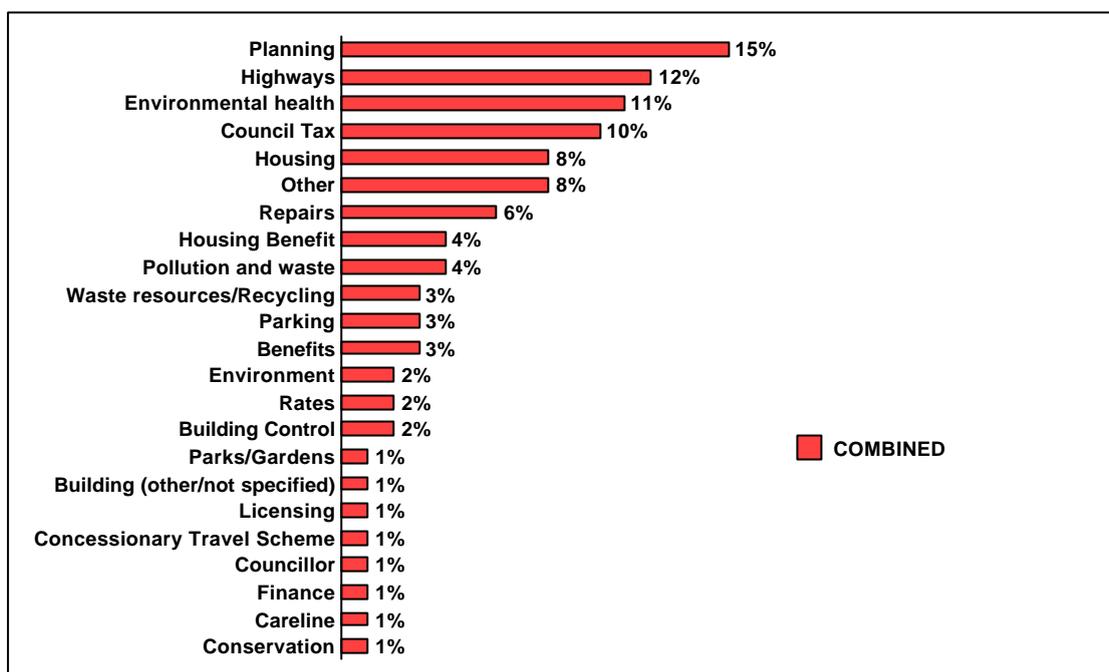


Base: All respondents

Overall, 57% of respondents said that they had had direct dealings with the Council in the last 12 months.

This was higher among the Citizens Panel sample (63%) than among the Members Survey respondents (42%).

Q3. Which service have you most recently had contact with in the last 12 months?



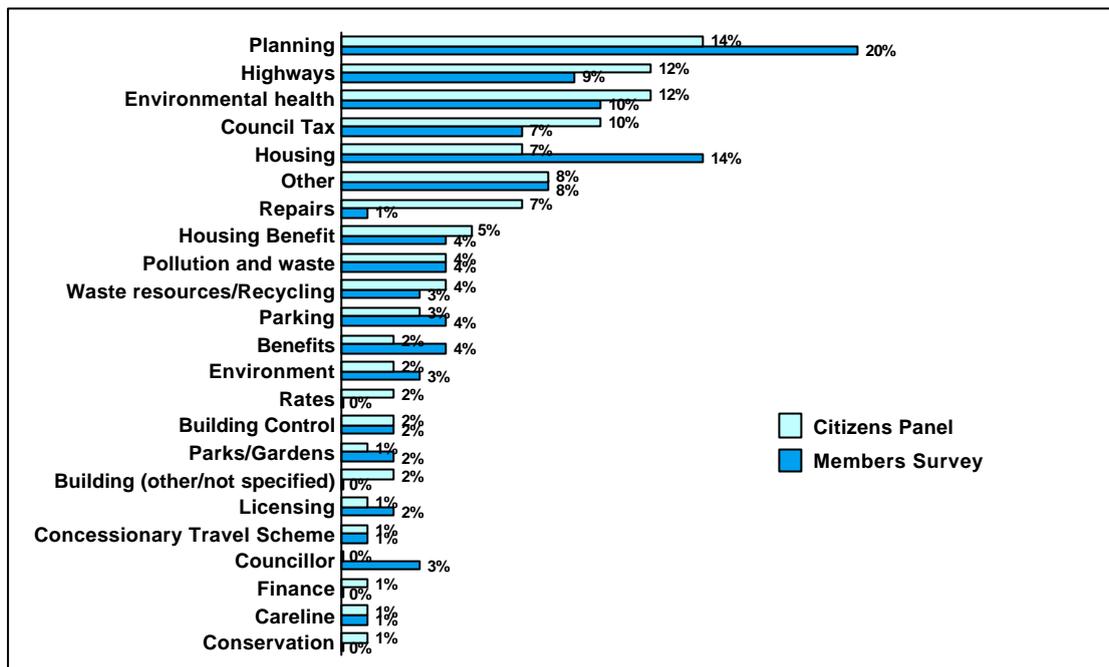
Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

Respondents who had had direct dealings with the Council in the last 12 months were asked which service they had most recently had contact with. Answers were recorded verbatim and were later coded into the categories shown in the chart above.

The most commonly mentioned service was the Planning department (15%), followed by Highways (12%), Environmental Health (11%) and Council Tax (10%).

The chart on the next page shows results analysed by sample type (Citizens Panel/Members Survey).

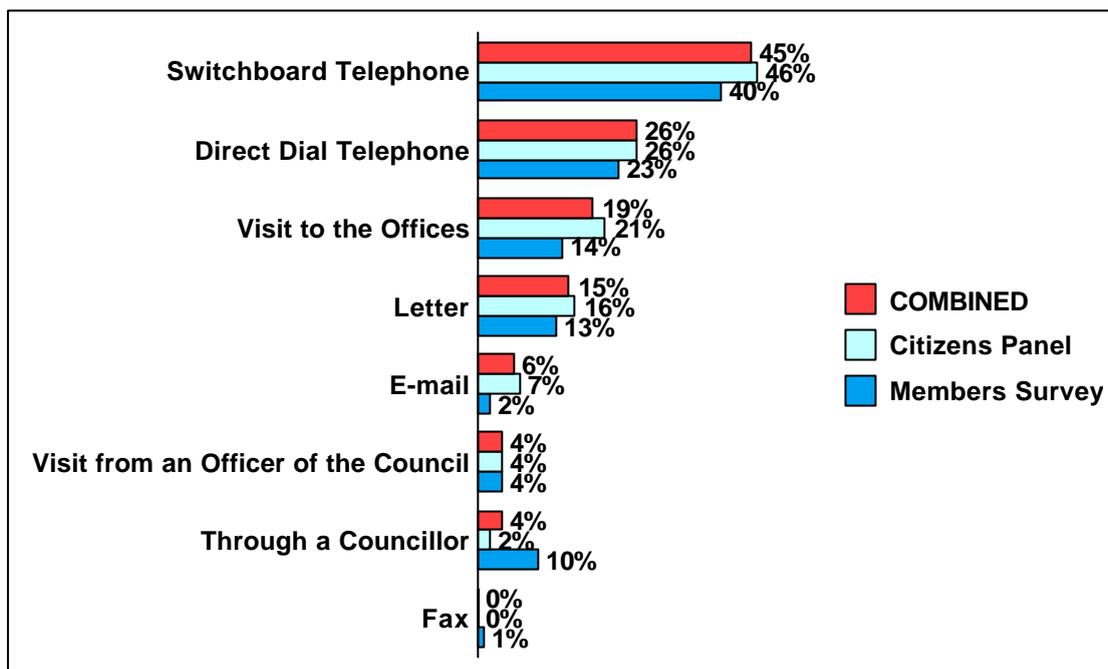
Q3. Which service have you most recently had contact with in the last 12 months? (continued)



Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

Members Survey respondents were more likely than those on the Citizens Panel to have contacted the Planning or Housing services, and less likely to have contacted the Repairs service.

Q4. How was contact first made with the Council?



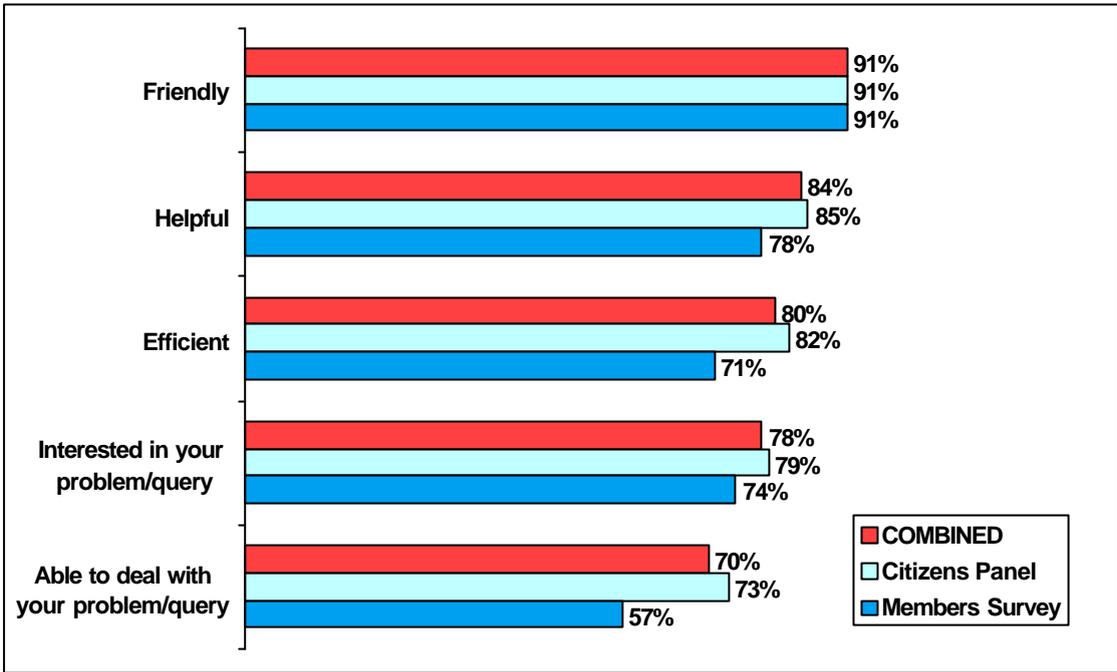
Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

The most common way of contacting the Council is by telephone, either via the switchboard (45%) or by using a direct dial number (26%). The next most common means of contact is visiting the office in person (19%), followed by sending a letter (15%) or an email (6%).

There is little difference in results between the two samples, although residents interviewed via the Members Survey appear to be more likely to make contact through a Councillor (10%, compared to 2% among the Citizens Panel).

Space was also provided on the questionnaire for people to state any other ways they had contacted the Council. These answers can be found in Appendix 1 (page 39). Other methods of contact included via a third party such as a warden or MP, through the Council website, or through a Community meeting. Three people mentioned that they had got through to an answer phone when attempting to contact the Council.

Q5. When you contacted the Council did you find the staff there to be...? (% answering 'Yes')

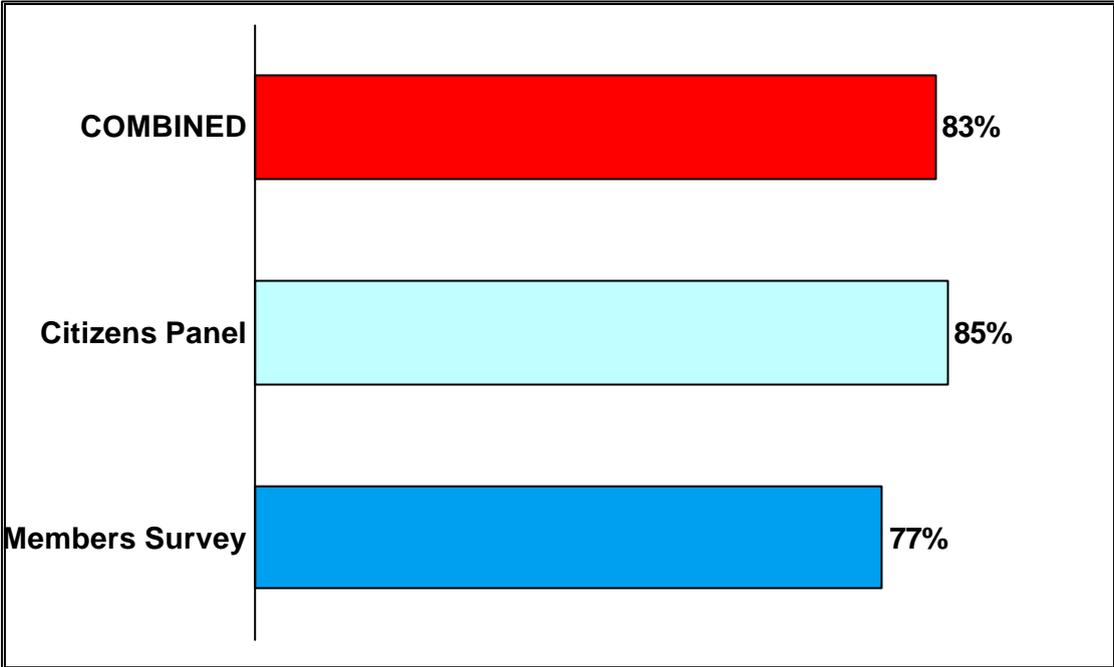


Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

The vast majority (91%) of respondents who had had direct dealings with the Council over the last 12 months found the staff to be friendly, and there was no difference in this result between the two samples.

Although most residents had a positive opinion of the Council staff who dealt with them across all of the statements, those interviewed as part of the Members Survey were generally less positive than those on the Citizens Panel. Only 57% of the Members Survey respondents said that staff were able to deal with their problem or query.

Q6. Was identifying the right person to talk to easy or difficult? (% answering 'Easy')

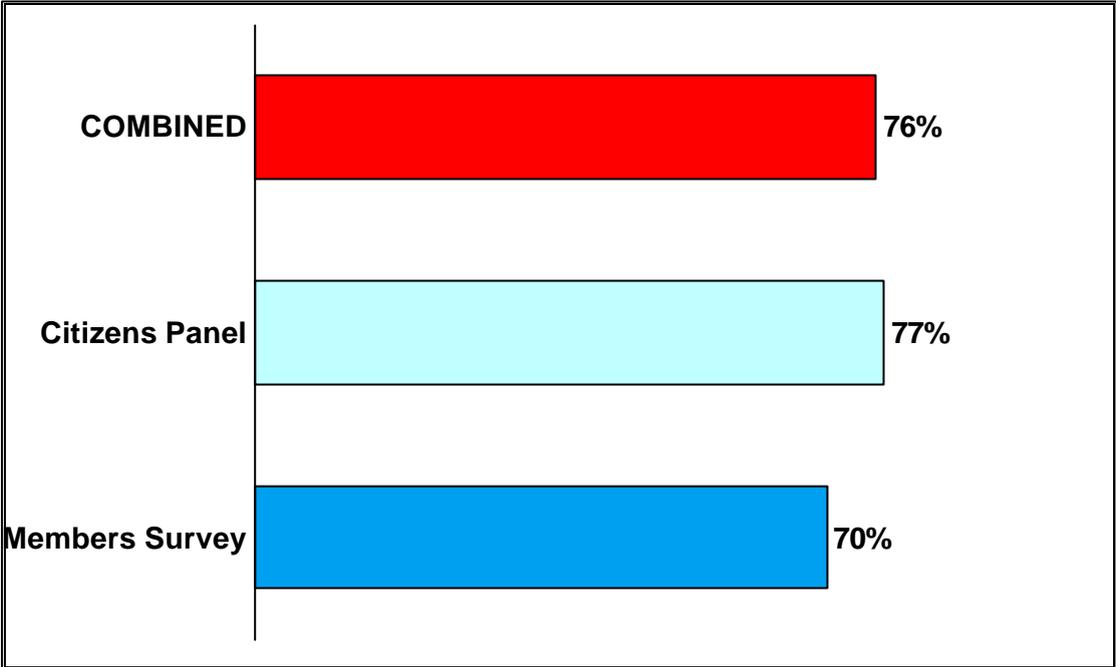


Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

83% of those who have been in contact with Council over the last 12 months said it was easy to identify the right person to talk to. However, those on the Citizens Panel were again more positive than the Members Survey respondents.

Q7. Was getting hold of the right person easy or difficult?

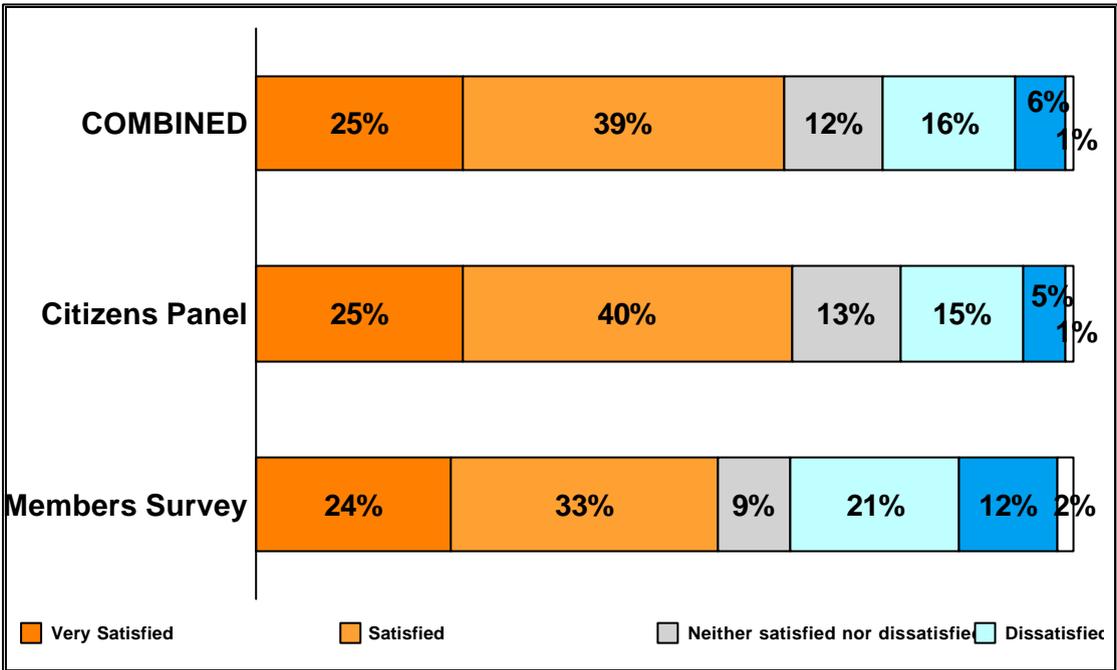
(% answering 'Easy')



Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

Around three quarters (76%) of those who have had direct dealings with the Council over the last 12 months said it was easy to get hold of the right person. Citizens Panel respondents were more positive (77%) than Members Survey respondents (70%).

Q8. Overall, how would you rate the way the Council generally dealt with you?

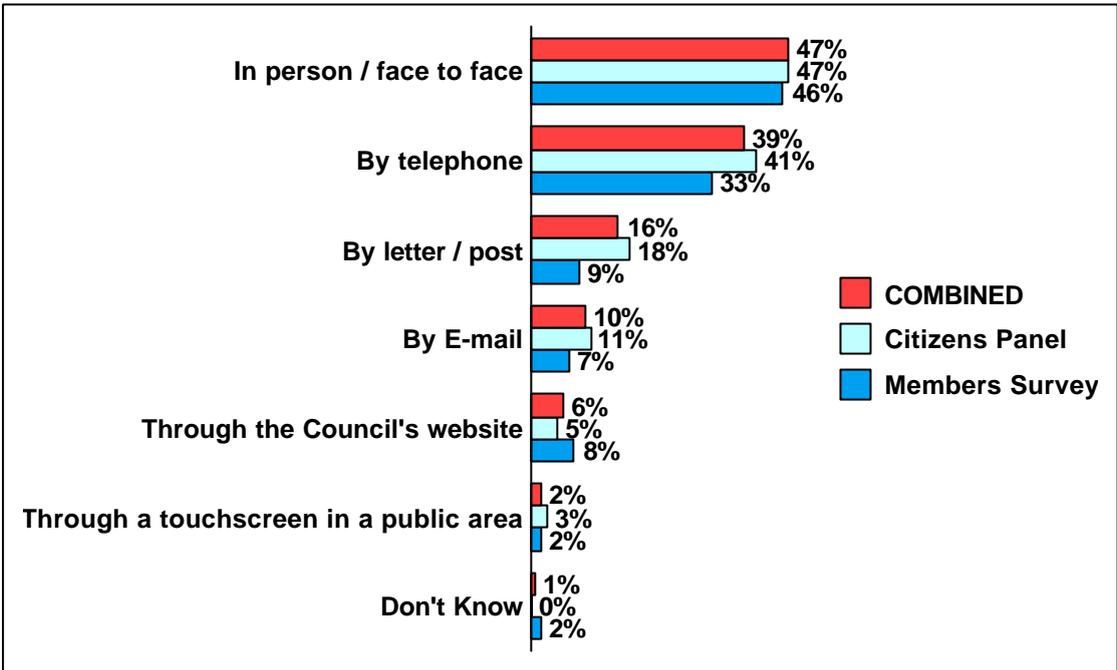


Base: All who have had direct dealings with the Council in last 12 months

Two thirds (66%) of the Citizens Panel respondents were either "Very satisfied" or "Satisfied" with the way the Council dealt with them, compared to 57% of those interviewed via the Members Survey.

12% of the Members Survey sample were "Very dissatisfied" with the way they were dealt with, which is more than double the level among the Citizens Panel respondents (5%).

Q9. How would you prefer to ask the Council for specific advice relating to you or a member of your family?



Base: All respondents

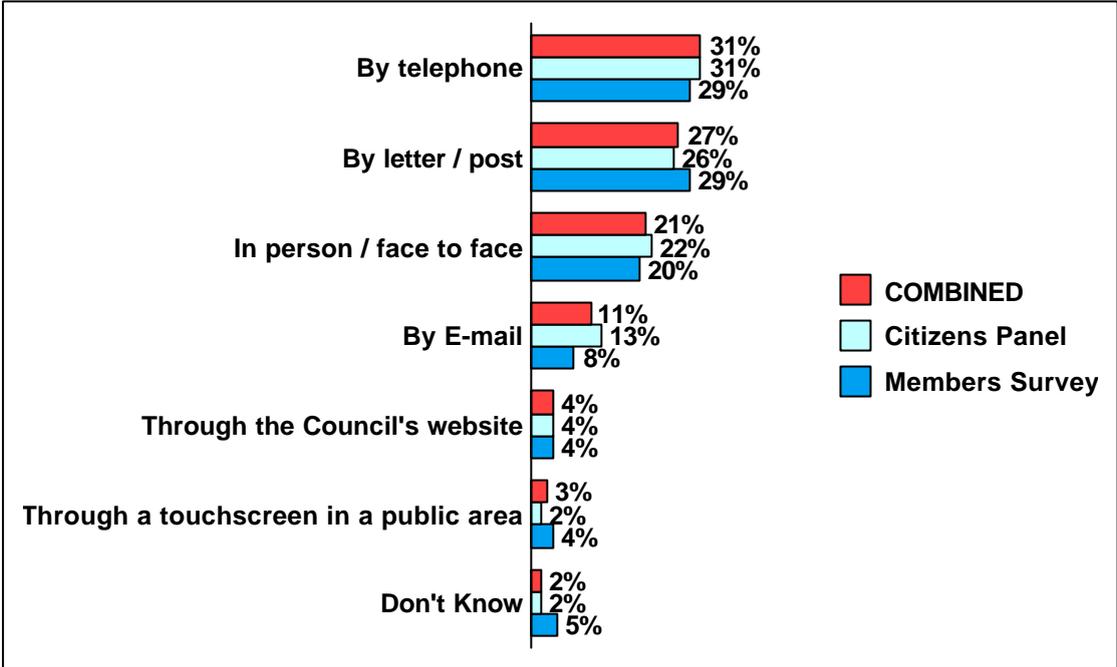
Respondents were asked how they would prefer to contact the Council in order to ask for advice relating to themselves or their family. The preferred method of contact was face-to-face, mentioned by almost half (47%) of respondents, followed by telephone (39%) and letter (16%).

Online methods were favoured by some, with 10% saying they would prefer to use email, and 6% saying they would ask for advice via the Council's website.

Only 2% stated that using a touchscreen in a public area would be their preferred means of contact.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to suggest other methods of contact they would prefer to use. Many respondents said they would use a variety of methods, depending on the nature of the query. A full list of the verbatim responses can be found in Appendix 1 (p40-42).

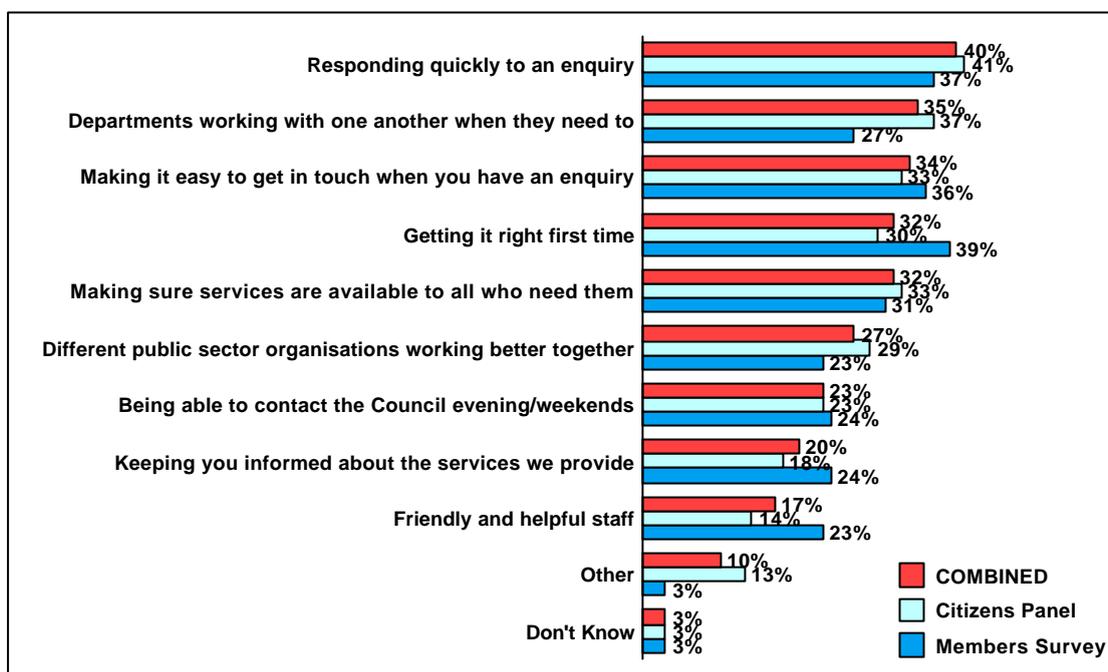
Q10. If this method was not available, what would be your second choice for asking for specific advice relating to you or a member of your family?



Base: All respondents

Respondents were then asked what their second choice of contact method would be if their preferred method was not available. This confirmed that, after face-to-face contact (the most common first choice), people generally prefer telephone or postal contact.

Q11. Which of the following in your opinion are the three areas that are most in need of improvement at the Council?



Base: All respondents

Respondents were asked to choose from a list the three areas they felt were most in need of improvement at the Council.

The main improvement suggested was "Responding quickly to an enquiry", mentioned by two fifths (40%) of respondents. This was followed by "Departments working with one another when they need to" (35%), "Making it easy to get in touch when you have an enquiry" (34%) and "Getting it right first time" (32%).

Only 17% selected "Friendly and helpful" staff as an area needing improvement, reflecting the fact that the majority of residents have a positive opinion of Council staff, as seen in the results to Question 5.

A variety of other potential improvements were suggested, which are listed in Appendix 1 (p43-49). There were a number of complaints about the Council's use of answer phones and voicemail instead of having someone available to answer the telephone. Parking problems, recycling and planning issues also received several mentions each.

APPENDIX 1

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Very satisfied"

"Had speedy and helpful response from Council Tax enquiry section."

"I had an unfortunate meeting with a lady at your office regarding 'rates'. I had excellent service from your tree people, also from your parks man."

"When contacting the DDC by phone, you ask to speak to the department and get the exact department required. Pronto, that's good."

"Most of the staff are helpful and bright."

"I do think this is a 'down to earth' Council, that cares over basic issues, i.e. street cleaning, refuse collection, cleanliness, tidiness and parking. As well as more complex issues."

"I have not had much contact with the Council, but what I have had has been satisfactory."

"I have found staff extremely helpful and pleasant."

"Staff always helpful and understanding."

"I am lucky as I need only basics, i.e. Refuse, etc. So have no idea how the housing dept benefits, etc. operate."

"On the whole, very satisfied, but I think doorstep recycling should be available across the council area."

"Especially from an environmental point of view, the streets are kept realistically clean despite the high number of people who behave irresponsibly in this respect."

"Never had any problems."

"Got job done."

"Good on property allocation. Helpful Housing Service."

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Satisfied"

"Some departments are helpful and efficient, others tend to be 'Jobsworths' with little or no concern for 'customers'."

"Recycling and dustbin collection excellent."

"I have only had to approach the council twice in the past year and have been satisfied with them."

"There does seem to be a greater effort on the part of DDC to communicate and reach out to residents; poster campaigns in town centre, etc., and the newsletter that comes door to door."

"I would like to see more regular and efficient cleaning of our street, not just a man pushing a barrow and not cleaning up. What are we paying for?"

"All aspects of waste disposal and recycling seem excellent. Parks not so good, money spent on good planting and then wasted because plants are not looked after properly."

"My dealings with various departments has been very good. But it is no more than it should be in view of the large rise in Council Tax."

"Prompt action with regards to rat infestation."

"The recycling system/refuse collection and Council Tip are excellent."

"The service is generally good, unless you're disabled and need a bungalow in Dover, then you have no chance despite points/circumstances."

"Prompt action whenever required."

"Refuse and salvage collection excellent. Street clearing very good. Road maintenance poor."

"Not sure if it is within your remit to review community policing, particularly in respect of anti-social behaviour during weekend evenings in Sandwich. I understand the constraints of budget."

"Could you put pressure on the highways to clean up the rubbish on roads and eradicate ragwort on roadside."

"Waste collection services excellent. State of pavements, especially dangerously lifted slabs in Walmer Street, appalling, very dissatisfied."

"Advice on services is available."

"To be very satisfied, I think you need more staff and funds."

"Have had help with rehousing and recovery both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit."

"I have not had a problem."

"Not an easy job to please everybody & get things right every time! But dead easy to moan about things that go wrong."

"Point 1 - Environmental Health = 10/10 Very good. Point 2 - Council Tax -10 as attitude was non compassionate BEFORE knowing what the problem was!"

"Staff appear to take "more interest" if you have a local problem. Service better than a few years ago."

"I think you have a very difficult job and things are getting better. It is a pity there are so many low grade people in Dover."

"Have not met my case officer yet, but am receiving home care services used by you. The girls are excellent."

"There are services that I would like you to do better but I am conscious of the increased costs that HMG has pushed on you already."

"Dissatisfied by the lack of street cleaning in my rural area - Sutton."

"We really want the Council to do something about the speeding on our road or at least put up "SLOW" "NO LORRIES" "30" signs. Because it has been a struggle to get this seen as a serious issue, I cannot say I am totally satisfied with customer care - Even though all contact with DDC are always handled very well by DDC staff."

"It would have been "very satisfied" but I have not yet received a response to an e-mail sent three years ago (thought its receipt was acknowledged after six months)!"

"Query whether Poll Tax paid by direct debit was for me or between myself and my son. I was asked for his address, I take it you were not aware that he existed. Still not sure whether we share payment of Poll Tax or whether his is separate, please clarify. This matter should have been clarified but no definite answer was given."

"Any problems have been seen to immediately."

"Each member of the working council staff I have met, have been cheerful and helpful."

"My only query as a senior citizen is on recycling as we live in a flat it is difficult to separate household waste. We do papers, cardboard and plastic bottles which we manage to get to outlets, but we would find it a great help if special bins were left for glass/tins to be collected by specialised council lorries."

"My only concern is that this letter was addressed to Mr Redworth, who hasn't been a council tenant for nine years. Do you know what you are doing really?"

"Any time I have had dealing with Council Offices I have found people very helpful."

"Individuals in the departments are always helpful and polite. Restructuring has resulted in a 'team' approach. However, the contract system still lacks quality control in some areas."

"In Eastry I am satisfied with the community liaison officer. He walks round the village and is very friendly with people and children. Conservation is very important as the Council are now removing rubbish which has been dumped in the surrounding woods and by the roadside."

"I rarely contact Council on my own behalf but often do during the course of my work, my answers are based on this."

"The services are quite good on the whole but wish the parking, especially in Sandwich could be sorted out."

"Recreation and planning do appear to be somewhat confused and inconsistent."

"I am satisfied that the Council are providing as many services as they are able to within the bounds of finance available."

"Generally satisfied overall, but a couple of particular areas not so satisfied."

"In the main the Council do a good job but some areas of the town still need a clean up."

"You could provide recycling refuse collection like Canterbury City Council, they provide collection for glass, plastic and cardboard, this would help those that do not have cars and just generally."

"In most instances, all staff have been courteous and helpful, except planning department, not very helpful."

"Extra clearing of leaves was excellent when requested, you sent 3 good blokes."

"I am currently receiving benefits, and my claim has always gone through the system quickly and smoothly. Also, any repairs that have needed to be done have been carried out very promptly."

"I have never encountered a problem with the way staff deal with my enquiries."

"Apart from parking, the charges are too high and this affects trade in Deal. People park for the minimum amount of time only. Places where it used to be free to park, you now have to pay. You could reduce charges to park long term on the seafront from The Royal Hotel towards North Deal. This would encourage people who were prepared to walk a little further to stay longer in Deal and spend more money."

"When I have visited your offices in Whitfield, I have been able to talk to persons concerned."

"Of course one can only comment on the services one may have used."

"Street cleaning in Elows Vale is very poor. Same rubbish left for weeks."

"Honest and sincere attitude to serving, really good."

"My contact recently with the Council have shown good improvement."

"Area office is very efficient regarding my community charge change over."

"As I am the Parish Clerk for Worth, I am in regular contact with the District Council."

"Require wheelie bins."

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied"

"Improvements to services can always be made. Interaction with residents is a very good thing, thank you."

"Very little concern for those living in rural villages."

"I think decisions made by Planning can generate a very negative perception of the Council as a whole, as there seems to be no logic behind some of the decisions made. In one instance, the Parish Council approved a planning application on a private dwelling which the District Council later refused only to pass a few weeks later, with no material changes to the appeal. This resulted in weeks of unnecessary delay and a negative impression of the Council. A second example, of a business that has been operating without planning permission for over a year, has now been told to apply, but has been allowed to continue trading, which will not encourage other potential new businesses to go through the proper channels, and allows unfair competition for those businesses who play by the rules."

"Some things seem okay, others do not, e.g. refuse collection is good, but does not go far enough to help people recycle rubbish. The parks are kept fairly well, but not enough decoration is found in the town, by way of flowers, definitely not enough leisure provision."

"Sometimes very helpful and deal with problem. Sometimes, just given the 'run around' between departments, and I get the impression I am just being a nuisance, rather than my complaint being taken seriously."

"Council Tax - not value for money, some roads in need of repair. People affected by Planning Applications, should be leafleted by the Council."

"NO contact with DDC for quite a few years, okay in the past."

"Re: services mentioned, concerning taxes, elderly people not on public transport routes, concessions for cars (? pressure to government - car tax). Conservation, vandalising of hedgerows with flailing during flowering, fruiting and bird nesting. Building control, seems to favour commercial rather than private individuals."

"More could be done to control fly tipping, plus better footpaths, not just invalid ramps."

"In general, people in Local Council do a good job, but from time to time individuals let the particular division or department down."

"Would like to see Dover itself subject to regeneration, e.g. Snaregate and St. James Street area. Demolish tower block. London Road is an eyesore."

"I believe the 'hung' political nature of the Council leads to decisions being made for political reasons, regardless of their management or economic sense. For the most part Councillors are incompetent managers and inexperienced in Fiscal Control and facilities and estates management and procurement. This places a heavy burden on Council Officers whose ranks (and competence levels) were demonstrated by the previous council administration."

"The Lettings Department is excellent, polite, helpful. Benefits less helpful. Environmental Health, very limited service, curt, not helpful in solving problems."

"I think something should be done about village lanes. Also lane names in villages. Example, Denton Lane. People delivering to somebody in this lane haven't a clue where it is as it's not on any road map."

"Re dissatisfied with the contractors which you now use. Jobs never get finished off with them, they come and start, but never finish."

"Alleyways such as Harold Passage and the walk from there up the steps and pathway to the top of Castle Hill should be swept. Drop off points in Harold Street behind the St Paul's R C Church for the drug fraternity should be patrolled by the police."

"Would like more done with recycling."

"I have written twice to this department between Sept. 2002 and Sept. 2003. Nothing has been done. When it rains, I am unable to go out as the road is flooded."

"To my knowledge, we have not used any of these services in 16 years of living in area. Maybe it would be a good idea to have sort of ring binder booklet to show these. I only logged on to the DDC website after reading this survey and we have used Building Control."

"There are inconsistencies in service provision between departments, some being very good, others less so."

"Not knowing when or if our properties are having the work done. We seem to be always the last villages to have anything done being told things would be very nice. By the way we still don't know."

"I have little contact with the services, however I am concerned about the availability of leisure facilities to individual users and investment / care of these facilities."

"Not had to contact you recently so cannot accurately answer."

"Some services are better than others, the best service is at the recycling and tip area. Staff are always helpful and it is very well run. Areas that are poor are the general areas of rubbish around residential homes. The ridiculously high cost of parking and not being able to park anywhere free for short term, i.e 30 minutes."

"The Council little that effects me & I have little need of their services."

"Some roads need improvement. Long closure of children's playground in Foxborough Close, Woodnesborough. Public toilets - Too many closures (what about young children?)"

"Jobs not done which have been reported, about the outside walk on the front of the building (Fungia)."

"There appears to be little common sense or forward thinking or general communications."

"No dealings with Council recently."

"As a resident in a rural community I feel that we pay a high rate of tax compared to the town and our services are extremely limited. But I choose to live in a village."

"Recycle collection twice a month and one small box! My village "Wingham" needs a speed camera, are you waiting until someone dies!"

"People mostly contact DDC when a problem arise at the point people have a right to expect staff to respond in a efficient & helpful manner, I appreciate other people's problems seem

trivial, & at times perhaps child like, however your staff need to be mindful of the purpose & reason for their jobs."

"Delay in talking to different parties."

"Waste collection, very satisfied. I didn't come into direct contact with other services."

"No dealings with Council in past twelve months. However, ref. possible general planning and building matters in town, the area around Burlington House and Westwards in Townwall Street could do with redevelopment and being made better use of."

"General services are adequate. My particular complaint is the state of pavements in this area. They appear never to be cleaned. The same rubbish remains on them for months and weeding is never carried out. A call to the district council offices was dealt with by someone who said he would inform the appropriate officer but I could tell from his attitude that nothing would happen, and it didn't."

"Road repairs and surfacing are in poor repair."

"I do not know what community liaison is."

"The allotted times and cost of parking is deterring out of town shoppers and small traders can't afford to trade. My family used to come to Deal to shop for Christmas gifts. They loved our High Street."

"Apart from paying Council Tax, I have no interaction with DDC. Receipt of newsletters is not considered as 'interaction'."

"Sandwich is often out on limb and not considered for its uniqueness."

"Poor public street lighting in my area. Poor gritting leading to inability to get to work a few years ago."

"Pavements are not cleaned often enough. Police are rarely seen. Citizens Advice Office not open often enough."

"Not kept informed, requires me to follow up with phone calls or letters."

"The only times I have contacted Council in last year resulted in promises made to keep us informed of developments. This has not occurred! Otherwise, Cleansing and Highways are nearly only real services which affect me."

"Sometimes it is very difficult to get hold of the right person in the right department, however, once you do they are very helpful and professional."

"Too much litter still on streets as well as dog poo."

"Service good, but not convinced on "Value for Money", i.e. Council Tax for DDC."

"Poor quality of public toilets, negative attitude to the problem of dog fouling."

"The Council Tax charges are exorbitant for the level of services provided."

"Local officials should be locally accountable. More transparency, make the "customer" number one!"

"Have not had any need to directly use/approach mentioned services."

"Long standing dispute 2002/3 about excessive charges for maintenance of building in which I am a leaseholder."

"As an OAP with limited income, I find the Council Tax on property excessive, 6.5% increase. When my National Pension increase was 2.8%."

"I suppose that I do not make sufficient use of the services."

"We can always do better."

"Everyone you want is out."

"What's the point!"

"They don't change."

"We need black boxes across the district."

"Council Tax can't go up anymore."

"Need to do more for teenagers."

"We needed help with benefits."

"The concessionary fares for disabled not fairly distributed."

"Unhappy with the amount of Council Tax that is retained by DDC. Nearly all goes to KCC."

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Dissatisfied"

"Nothing done about complaint."

"Not able to receive adequate information on what is available. Inability to provide services where needed. (Priory Wood, safe play area)."

"Why do Council employees treat the public in a patronising manner, as if we do not understand anything."

"Street litter outside Town Centre area. Lack of leisure facilities and poor shopping centre."

"Reported door on lamp post broken open in December 2003. Placed rope round it to stop children touching it. Rang again in February 2004, now April and still not repaired. Rope around the base and door again open. Lamp post no. 24 in Elms Vale Road."

"The public areas from parks to toilets and including everything else, are less well maintained and cleaned than in the past. However, I must say that the public's attitude towards litter and vandalism means that the problems are worse than they should be."

"Too many benefits administered in overly complicated manner. Simplify the benefits to save admin. costs. Not enough investment in local transport, trains tatty/old/rubbish! No decent roads, A258, A256, etc. just more speed bumps. Fly tipping in the countryside. Barely one half decent higher education facility provided in the region."

"Too much politics and "points scoring" within DDC. Decisions should be taken with Dover's interests in mind, not blindly following Central Government mantra. Councillors must stand up for what they know/believe their constituents want. Government's (i.e. Central), don't know what is best for everyone countrywide."

"Money wasted building cycle path on Wellington Parade for a minority of people. Potholes appeared within weeks of it being finished. Road now too small for the residents to drive on, when there are parked cars, (many of the older houses do not have garages or driveways.) Money wasted on clearing natural fauna on beach. Streets dirty in Peal, shopkeepers, etc. should be encouraged to clean their patch! Parking around schools needs to be urgently addressed."

"Receive few services, only refuse and cesspool emptying. Refuse okay, but cesspool not. Mains drainage should be provided for everyone, people in rural areas have to pay twice as much."

"Reluctance of Building Services to deal with my correspondence regarding re-siting of gas meter. Obscure telephone calls on answer phone from "Tenant Participation Officer" seem pointless apart from mention of a prize being won for a recent survey! (I still have not received it)."

"I am fed up with asking when a 20 mph zone will be introduced in Barton Road, Dover."

"There is a lack of social housing for local needs, and the impression is given that foreign nationals are treated better than the indigenous population."

"Rural needs not catered for, all resources into urban areas, officers not trained for rural interpretation of the rules."

"Street cleaning in the Walmer area is spasmodic. Road maintenance should be monitored and K.C.C. informed."

"If the Council are doing their job why is it that the town committee hits a wall with the chairman."

"Wasting money on silly things."

"In Forelands the paths are a disgrace, on walks I have found Celtic and other backwaters are the same. Also fly tipping."

"As a Ringwould householder, I see little evidence of Dover's Customer Service. We have little street lighting, no bins or bin liners provided, no recycling collections, poor policing of Queen's Rise trouble tenants. In fact, I see little return on my extortionate Council Tax."

"Out of date system for refuse collection, no wheelie bin service and no waste segregation service, i.e. separate collection for paper, plastic, metal, etc."

"No apparent movement on Castle Street/Woolcumber Street development. Town centre (M&S area) disgraceful, M.T shops. A20 to docks property near seafront, near roundabout, Burlington House, ugh! Too many taxi parking slots where you never see a taxi waiting, Washington Street, Pencester."

"The case for objectors against planning decisions is not a balanced one, it is weighted in favour of the council and the applicant who can make appeals (many) and the objector who cannot."

"There should be more public consultation - The Pier Cafe. The council should not be giving licenses for public restaurants which are not accessible - The Astro Cafe. The Council should show awareness of the needs of the disabled."

"We asked our council reps. to look into things they say they will and don't, we don't see our council reps."

"When making contact it is important that the right person deals with the enquiry and is fully conversant with the council's responsibilities and makes every effort to get matters resolved promptly, also clearly especially for older people who get confused with bodies corporate."

"Difficulty in accessing staff either by telephone, in person or by mail."

"The district would appear to be run for the benefit of council officials and councillors in an atmosphere of political correctness and not for council tax payers."

"All talk little action."

"I do not have many dealings with the Council's services, so my views are gained from a visual assessment only and if one ignores our castle & seafront, we are sadly, left with a grubby, pot holed, run down town. I have spent most of my life in Dover & as a youngster my expectations were for an improved Dover. Unfortunately it has, under successive councils, deteriorated."

"With all the town centre shops' takings down, you have the great idea of increase parking charges."

"Wastage! Expensively produced stationery, too much of it generated by new 'initiatives' and political correctness."

"Recycling does not play a high priority, we are not given an opportunity to recycle, only by doing it ourselves."

"I consider that Sandwich is discriminated against in the provision of services."

"No one appears to work together on any issue. Meaning things have to be replaced many, many times before something is done."

"Councillors haven't a clue. Officers have too much power over Councillors."

"Wrong priorities."

"Two forms needed to be submitted for Building Control but only one was sent."

"1) Residential street cleaning. 2) Residential defective street lighting (reported twice), still to no effect. 3) Apparent lack of consideration given to the consequences of granting licences to night clubs and mobile burger vendors whose customers litter the pavements and hedges with food containers, broken glass, bottles and vomit. Snargette Street/York Street/ Town Wall Street are Dover's front door step. It could be our back yard."

"The street cleaning in this area is very erratic."

"In common with general trends in business, emphasis appears to be on presentation at the expense of action."

"Wasteful spending on improvement projects in Marke-Wood before vandalism has been dealt with. Traffic warden in Deal particularly rude and unhelpful to visitors and residents."

"Even where services are satisfactory, they are provided by staff in an offhand way, with little courtesy to customers."

"Dover District Council seems determined to close Dover down. We get less and less every year, whilst our Council Tax gets higher and higher. Dover offers nothing to visitors, except Dover Castle (and that is not run by the Council)."

"Speed limits, around Aycliffe. It is like a race track some times."

"The Housing Department would not respond to tenants of the Council giving a great amount of trouble. 18 Dryden Road."

"Litter appears to be a huge problem in this area, and must be addressed. Some places are disgusting."

"Roads are very poorly maintained. Streets are filthy, litter is dumped in country lanes. The town is squalid, no recycling service to local villages. Poorly run recycling system at Whitfield. The list is endless!"

"Lack of district wide recycling. Slow response."

"They should have more checks on work that has been completed."

"Recreational Planning seems to be low on the priorities."

"Main Council Offices difficult to get to unless you have a car. Other offices not open at lunchtimes, and close early, no good for most working people."

"1. Road maintenance need urgent attention. 2. Over zealous and rude parking meter attendants. 3. Vandalism and litter requires much more attention. More police needed on night duty than day duty, and rather than riding two to a car, they need to be on foot patrol."

"We only use phone. No swimming pool locally. No recycling refuse collection."

"Concessionary Fares - having to supply passport photo, I think is a waste of time, and I am very cross that only £15 of tokens have been given, you can use them up on one taxi journey to Canterbury, if you are confined to a wheelchair, as my husband is, fare to Canterbury £60 so £15 does not go far."

"Waste of money on road improvements. Ignore tourist attractions, such as museum, etc., which bring in revenue. Advertise historic attractions along the A2 with big posters, people may stop at Dover/Deal and spend money. You can then reduce my taxes!"

"Over zealous inspection from Environmental Health. Demise of Arts and Events Department. Poor road maintenance (I know this is KCC, but they have got a base with you."

"Too much work is carried out by 'outside' contractors, this work is not a very good standard."

"Should try much harder to improve 'Dover', i.e. more tree planting, more flower beds, etc., cleaner streets, improve the very poor roads and pavements. The railings alongside the road in London Road, Dover are a disgrace, and have never been painted in over 35 years. These are improvements which does not cost the earth, but local people can see and appreciate."

"Housing - Please use the empty houses fronting the old park barracks site for homeless/needly families. Recreation - Support and develop youth services in the area. Not relying totally on voluntary effort, i.e. Guides/ Scouts, Centre point. Environment/conservation - Need recycling bins at home for tins, plastics, paper, etc., and green wheelie bins. A thriving Dover Rugby (Cricket Club) should be helped to develop facilities at the Crabble site. This cannot be done on a voluntary basis. The cricket club has now apparently collapsed due to lack of financial input. The pavilion needs completely upgrading, facilities are verging on a health hazard. Langdon Cliffs needs to be open to the public not closed at sunset. Encourage people to shop in the town by reducing pay parking in streets."

"Slow to process things, very bureaucratic in a way that affects efficiency. Some depts. are better than others. Appears to be too much in-fighting for depts. to act effectively."

"Not interested in us (young people)."

"Lot of talk, nothing done."

"Parking."

"All talk!"

"Nothing for young people."

"You can't deal with real problems."

"In particular the manner in which the development of 37 houses at the rear of 7 to 13 Downlands and 6 to 8 Maltings. No provision in respect of overloading the use of the Dover Rd from "Downlands", suggest traffic lights and a roundabout. At present before this development, the access to the Dover Road is very difficult and dangerous. Does anyone care?"

"They contradict themselves."

"You don't do enough on concessionary fares or recycling."

"Tax too high."

"The planning views of locals are not listened to. Highways - money wasted on kerbs and humps. Parking control officers only check during the day in towns. Outside areas need evening checks, plus on pavement parking."

"More recreational for adults and children."

"They don't give you time to speak at the planning committee."

"There are lots of rats in the village."

"I have phone and got "I am in the office, but not at my desk" 3 times one morning and only when I said I would contact the director did the person phone back, (Environmental Health)."

"They don't let you know what is happening and you have to keep phoning."

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Very dissatisfied"

"Acceptance of mast at Walmer Nursery. Why no wheelie bin in Deal/Dover? Road narrowing schemes have made parking and getting around much worse. The A258 road is totally inadequate, wastes hundreds of hours in queuing every day. Should have a new road and cycle path. We seem to be constantly penalised for doing everyday things, like going to work and shopping."

"DDC either ignore letters and questions sent to them, or send postcard as receipt of letter, then can take months replying, if at all."

"Disorganised, waste money and resources. No tenant participation. Failure to meet deadlines."

"Not enough done to keep the district roads and town areas clean, too much talking done, telling what they are going to do and it does not get done."

"One department does not know what the other is doing."

"Streets not cleaned often enough. Footpaths on Folkestone Road need re-surfacing and have done so for the last 6 years. Too much dog mess on the streets. Ridiculous parking charges, should be free. Traffic wardens being paid to ticket at night, etc., etc."

"Young people are leaving the villages because there is no housing. Houses should be for people who live in the villages first. In West Stourmouth there is no recycling, why?"

"All I want from the Council are good street lights, repaired roads and rubbish disposal. The rest is irrelevant and expensive. If the above introduction is typical of Council literature, then heaven help us."

"Very unsatisfied with lack of planning for proposed brown field sites in Dover."

"I have called repeated times to 1. Request a street side recycling container. 2. To discuss why the council will not recycle plastic when Canterbury does. I leave messages and never get any response!"

"I am appalled that planning has been given to the Ward Homes Housing in Ash. No thought was given to existing residents in New Street. It is disgraceful, it is creating a slum area for the future."

"Granting planning permission without taking in to account the effect of the new construction on neighbouring property."

"Lack of accountability of offices and councillors. No point in complaining, individuals are important. Listen & Learn. Transparency like a block of granite."

"The planning department has allowed itself to have been completely over-ridden by developers in the matter of the extension of building in Ash."

"The footpath along New Street in Sandwich from Galliard Road to St Georges Road is so uneven that on one occasion my wife fell over and later I fell over. I wrote to the Council and was told that an inspector had examined the footpath and decided it was not due for repair."

Citizens Advice Bureau tell me, unless the paving stones are uneven by so many mm, no action is taken. I am not happy that a difference of 'x mm' is more important than having my arm in plaster for six weeks whilst I recovered from my fall. Leaves and winged seeds from sycamore tree not swept up. Contract for SITA sweeper who clears New Street does not include St Georges Road. Reported to Sandwich Office, very friendly, passed on to Whitfield. Nothing happened, eventually I wrote to the Environmental Health Department and received a most unsatisfactory reply. All I wanted was the leaves swept up from under the Council's tree, he decided to misunderstand and says the Council would not clear up my garden. See Quest."

"Nearly every decision made by the Council is another step backwards. When are positive moves going to be made to improve the plight of Dover."

"Various problems have had to be sorted out and the Council have been very slow, inefficient and lacked any enthusiasm to resolve the situation. High Council Tax is charged, and limited services are provided, and in some cases no services exist."

"Misleading statements over telephone, giving a false sense of what would occur."

"You waste tax payers money on crap like a monument of a queer MP. You talked about spending it on a clock we did not need, and you ask why! Reduce our Poll Tax by perhaps not sending a bunch of your idiots to Brussels for 3 weeks to discuss the crap I have just mentioned. How much do we pay out on your expenses? Do what local people want, not what you feel like. You are a bunch of poncing wasters."

"Does not help people who need it and does not listen to the little people. Streets and lighting are not kept 100%."

"Having claimed Housing Benefit, I found the 13 week delay unacceptable."

"Road cleanliness (precinct)."

"They messed about, changing their minds."

"No footpaths or lighting. No grass cutting."

"Never get a straight answer."

"With Planning."

"Favouritism."

Q1. Reasons for opinion of the way Dover District Council provides its service

Respondents answering "Don't know"

"Probably much of the way benefit is "invisible". If you don't receive benefits, have your own home, cannot see much public transport, etc., it is not easy to see what the council does."

"I have not the experience of trying to make use of all of these services."

"If we do not know the criteria you measure this by, how can we give you a knowledgeable and honest answer."

"I have had no contact with Dover District Council."

"Have not had cause to use any Council Services for a number of years."

"Five applications needed for double glazing? Conservation area but if that mattered, why build modern flats on bomb site instead of in keeping with surrounds? I have changed my mind now anyway about the double glazing."

"Insufficient knowledge to make any judgement."

"I know very little about the services that the council offers, or how they might improve things for my village or me."

"We do not have much occasion to use DDC's services."

Q4. How was contact first made with the Council?

'Other' answers

"Answer line but no number/name left to leave message after uncertainty of sight. We work from 6.15 a.m. to 8 p.m. out of your office hours."

"I objected to a planning application by a neighbour."

"Found I needed to involve MP to get a response at times."

"Through warden."

"Recorded message in December as offices shut."

"Have been put through to right department, but always it is a machine that answers!"

"I was put through to another phone which was an answer phone telling me they were off sick."

"Through local (village) warden who was very helpful."

"I spoke to Rodent Control Officer about rats living in bank opposite church at Ham. They cannot deal with these, could there be some arrangement with farmer to destroy."

"Postal submission of building plans."

"Complaint about planning decisions."

"Letter to R Walton, letter to CLLR Edwards - Re: Missing road signs & Sea Defences."

"Using council book to call the right number. Also in response to a letter from the council."

"Initial service was hopeless and unsympathetic. A subsequent email via DDC complaints process completely resolved the issue. It remains to be seen if the other constructive feedback will be acted upon"

"Careline Alarm."

"A St Radigunds Community meeting at St Radigunds School."

"Phone book."

"Approximately four weeks ago requested my chimney breast be replastered after having back boiler removed, work not yet done."

"Followed by letter/councillor contact/visit to offices and a petition signed by majority of local residents."

"Application for loft conversion."

"Could have gone to direct line if had up to date A-Z by my telephone. Too long winded via internet."

"Rubbish in street when paying Council Tax."

"Through the website."

Q9. How would you prefer to ask the Council for specific advice relating to you or a member of your family?

'Other' answers

"For disabled like myself, face to face home visit, as impossible to visit offices of DDC."

"Firstly by telephone, then communicating in person, letter/post, E-mail."

"Some problems can be clarified by contacting the Parish Council."

"As indicated initially followed by face to face if necessary."

"For very important matters - face to face. Routine - telephone."

"Touchscreen is a good idea, depending on where it is sited. Why not use the local press and media?"

"In the past, when I enquired to the Planning Office in relation to a neighbours building work."

"Maybe better use of town centre offices. It is not always easy to get to Whitfield."

"Open sessions/surgeries held at suitable venues e.g. village halls."

"Letter/post so the correspondence is evidenced. Phone calls have no record of what is said, or the advice given."

"1. Phone. 2. e-mail."

"There must be more than one person who can deal with simple enquiries."

"At different times each may be necessary."

"I was trying to find ways of getting money to decorate streets of Deal at Christmas time. The lights displayed I felt were scarce. Deal is a lovely town and more lights are needed. I feel if everyone in Deal were to donate just £1 for Christmas decorations, our town would not only stand out, but possibly if we even had a "Christmas Market" like they do in Lincoln, it would also attract more tourists. But who do I contact about this for next Christmas? Please tell me who to talk to about this, thank you. I also have other ideas for Deal. Lois Webb, 2 Douglas Road, Mile Hill, Deal, CT14 9HT. Tele 01304 367514."

"Better face to face as never able to speak to the right person by phone, if at all!"

"Advertising in the local newspapers."

"Personal contact very important."

"Originally by telephone then if required by letter/person."

"Don't really mind, usually use telephone or face to face at the town office."

"Depends on the type of enquiry or service required."

"In person if necessary by appointment."

"For those unable to "travel" to your office."

"1. Do not waste money e.g on pointless surveys like this."

"Any of these provided right person (accountable) Handles and reports back / see through matter."

"Phone calls followed by letter."

"I feel council officials and head of their departments should put themselves more at public disposal"

"It is better to keep it personal so that confidence in the council can be fostered."

"All areas should be covered and information given should be correct."

"If I am really concerned, face to face and I would do so."

"Method depends on the nature of the particular topic."

"Staff member to give identification, i.e. name and contact number."

"In person or letter depending on circumstances."

"Depending on the nature of the enquiry."

"It would depend on the nature of the information received!"

"With a name and/or reference number as you can guarantee one phone call is not going to be enough!"

"After face to face, a letter confirming correct conversation."

"Direct contact, best way for all parties to discuss/solve most problems. Proved this in the past."

"Make website easy to use, as Thanet District Council."

"In first instance a phone call would be most satisfactory, but with option of face to face if necessary."

"There needs to be some face to face to personalize, and otherwise faceless machine, but first contact should be other means such as the touchscreen."

"All I have ticked are useful, but in person is the best, so the others should be used, with an opt out to find the correct person to contact on a one to one basis, if further help is needed."

"Tried top three plus Councillor, but there was no result as when we were leaving the office we seemed to be forgotten."

"In a way that the contact is recorded and logged."

"Always need to put information in writing, which is a good way to deter people pursuing a service. More avenues needed to seek help."

"Depending on the enquiry."

"If the advice was more of a personal nature then face to face."

"Telephone first to establish contact name and correct point of contact, and then letter of confirmation."

"More contact with the public, perhaps as RTH Mr G Prosser does, shopping precincts on a weekend. As a first contact point , thereafter, face to face!"

"I think it is important for the Council to understand that the elderly are not familiar and are unwilling to have to confront modern technology, contact by telephone and mail are better for them and this must be retained."

"I would like to know the Council is at the end of the telephone."

"As you must know a person to person or telephone conversation is far superior to any other. The impersonal answering service is the private utility, insurance companies and others, causes much frustration and anger."

"This would depend on the nature of the enquiry, telephone first then face to face."

"Although written communication does provide a record when needed."

"Councillor first."

"Councillor first"

"1. If urgent."

"Wouldn't waste time with offices."

"Councillor arrange it."

"Councillor."

"Councillor."

"In writing maintains a record."

"Depending on how sensitive the problem is."

"Depends on the issue."

"And then a visit."

"Through my district councillor."

Q11. Which of the following in your opinion are the three areas that are most in need of improvement at the Council?

'Other' answers

"My husband left a message on a DDC answerphone, regarding cars for sale parked in Dover Road, Walmer. He never had any response to this, cars for sale are still parked in the streets in Deal and Walmer."

"Ref. my own experiences. Details go to one department, but if involves another department you have to repeat details; same copies of evidence, etc., so more postage costs, photocopy costs, to me, all because one department in same office block will not work together by copying information already there."

"Ensuring that council staff dealing with the general public have a working knowledge of the subjects they are dealing with and a certain sympathy!"

"Seeing that complaints are dealt with successfully and checked to make sure that results are adhered to."

"The officers of the Council already give good service."

"I live in a conservation area, grants are advertised as available, but when I last enquired there were no funds. Please advise the current situation April '04 to Linda Warren, Holm Cottage, The Street, Northbourne, Deal, Kent, CT14 0LF"

"Tick box questionnaires are less than useless in gaining information council provide, as the outcome of problems we may possibly face would depend and how we feel about the council would depend on how successful we were with that problem."

"I do not want a reply to the effect that the DC carries no weight with the police."

"When asking for your Neighbourhood Watch sign back when the old lightport is replaced, when asked they do it, which they did not."

"In sheltered accommodation, money could be saved by just one letter to the warden to give to each tenant. I have no complaints."

"Progress forward is obtained by (unity), not:- I will, I will, but WE will."

"More recycling done from residences, with boxes for different kinds of products that can be recycled."

"Not responding to neighbourhood problems, to help residents lead a better life."

"Just do things they say they are going to do."

"By and large things run well. Considering the ramifications of the information between departments, seems at times difficult."

"Too many answerphones. A lot of people do not feel comfortable with them. Especially older people. Someone may have gone to a lot of trouble to phone and be inconvenienced and incurred telephone costs because of answerphones."

"Making it easier for citizens to know the correct person to deal with e.g., Dover or Deal Council, i.e., speeding cars and motor bikes and dog dirt on pavements."

"Improve and interrogate the public transport system in the Dover/Deal area, (including villages)."

"I personally do not have contact with Council. What services do you provide for me? I do have contact through my profession. What is happening to our town centre? Why are we wasting money on the town centre manager?"

"Decisions need to be corporate, not personal."

"Something should be done about transport in villages. We have a post bus once a day going to Canterbury, it's a godsend, if you don't drive. We could do with one going to Folkestone and or Dover."

"That the distribution of mail into and out of the Council is actioned on a daily basis."

"I do not wish to be a member of the citizen's panel."

"Feedback on specific enquiries."

"Streets not cleaned often enough. Footpaths on Folkestone Road need re-surfacing and have done so for the last 6 years. Too much dog mess on streets. Ridiculous parking charges, should be free. Traffic wardens being paid to ticket at night, etc."

"Less admin./pen pushing and more productive decision making. Be seen to be doing something. This entire questionnaire is about "soft-skills" HR admin. People want action and results, not simply more forms or government waste. What are you doing and how do you intend to improve things! This form is costing thousands and producing nothing tangible. Use my money for my benefit."

"Please provide a human being to field enquiries. I always have to leave a message on voice-mail. I am not always here when message comes back to me on 1571, so I have to ring again and leave another message..., and so it goes on, eventually I give up."

"Reduce costs. Free car parking."

"General tidying up of the streets, police on the beat. I have always found the DDC most helpful and friendly."

"I do not want to contact the Council at all. Just empty my dustbins, repair roads and street lights, dispense with all political correct nonsense."

"A quick check of out going correspondence. Your correctness would prevent silly mistakes as highlighted on page one. It may have saved us £1,000 in Post Office - Council Tax charge information, "it does not take long to double check!"

"Recycling collections."

"Value for money. The public do compare the performance of different councils."

"Only praise for all staff."

"Making information understandable or if not listing local accredited advisors."

"Planning Officers being more flexible and living in the real world, not the world where they dictate!"

"Pot hole filling took place recently in Hay Lane, Ham. They filled in the holes with painted lines around them and ignored a large hole without the lines, this is now getting bigger and bigger."

"Finishing off jobs."

"Elderly people need simple advice and more time to react to advice or instructions (imagine how young and old react to computer instructions)."

"Ensure that information is sent to, or neighbours informed of planning applications that are close to their property, rather than save money by making numerous assumptions, consider mobility of the elderly and their physical condition. Not everyone can walk to the lamp post or get the local paper. This is important as the resulting construction is permanent."

"When there is a complaint about a planning decision that the work on that project should be held up until the complaint has gone its full rounds (complaints officer and ombudsman, etc.) before allowing work to continue in case the decision was wrong!"

"Try to overcome the 'us and them' attitude."

"The Councillors not blaming their officers who often are working under pressure."

"Website."

"Listen, listen, listen! / sort out the complaints procedure / introduce accountability from top down. Public job description of Director of Service Delivery - to whom does he report?"

"This is probably not the correct opportunity but I don't understand why DDC doesn't recycle plastic which is now one of the biggest waste items."

"Not had any problems so cannot answer this one."

"Not able to answer as I have not had the need to contact the council this year."

"Not treating council tax payers as nuisances and somebody that intrudes into an officials charmed lifestyle."

"Please, please can we have wheelie bins, this would stop all the rubbish being opened by cats, etc. and blown all over the place on Dustman day."

"Making sure that young people and British residents in the area that are working are given the ability to be housed properly or be able to purchase a reasonable property given the immigrants in the area and the rising price of property. Our tax and housing are placing local people at a disadvantage at present."

"No free hand outs! If assistance is required then one does a weeks work for a weeks benefit. Then life long rates payers will get better quality services."

"Asking residents what they want, eg. speed camera; more frequent recycle collections; not spending 20 grand on a feasibility study... Only to be told there is a lack of money."

"Consulting the public more so as this survey does, for example, we have concern over our road and can't get anyone locally to get attention of the Council. The last visit by DDC led to the official saying someone would have to DIE before anything would be done. Please see survey."

"Reply to e-mails."

"Unable to judge which areas are in need of improvement due to my lack of contact with council services."

"DDC should concentrate on services for the tax payers of the district and should campaign for more outside assistance for dealing with asylum seekers."

"Traffic Wardens: I see plenty in the town region, but illegal parking is rife in my area (Co-op region Mill Hill), especially at weekends."

"Reducing waste. Effective (not long winded) communications."

"Not needing to report to Sandwich Office and then still needing to write a letter."

"Receiving feedback from responses I have made to surveys (Citizens Panel). I always respond, but never hear the outcome."

"Flexibility and integrated services linked with quality."

"A commitment to improving landscape areas, e.g. more flower beds on council estates and Pencaster Gardens."

"I reported no/faulty road signing during Open Golf. Rang DDC helpline, switchboard, K.C.C., Canterbury, back to Dover. I then gave up, i.e. if 38 tonne lorries a) caused traffic jam turning back, b) broke law and went over weight, restricted bridge, c) just didn't bother delivering them - so what!"

"District, Town or County Council, who is responsible for different services."

"Only hard pressed services to allow more quality time for staff to deal, also with backlogs."

"Deal traffic warden needs retraining in interaction with visitors who ask advice."

"Having a visible master list of free planning/guidance leaflets, e.g. conservation areas, so that if 'out of stock' further enquiries can be made, especially of DDC publications/leaflets."

"Less time lost on political debate. We look to our elected members to work together for the general good of our town."

"Promote Dover to get more commercial and retail. At present listed in top worst 30 towns in UK. Dover needs more private investment."

"I would like the Council to promote Dover and its business/tourism opportunities. Do not close everything down, or people will go elsewhere."

"Adequate enforcement of "No Parking" zones for lorries and caravans on the seafront."

"There should always be information available on all aspects at the Councils Services produced through all media to maintain the upmost data bank available, accessible on all levels. With manned helpers. All media means website, local papers, Dover district Newsletter, touchscreens, etc."

"Annual inspection of mobile/park home/holiday sites, in particularly electrical inspection certificates, at present non existent at Capel Court Park. May we please have copies of newsletter at Capel Court Park Residential and 11 month permanent Council Tax paying homes."

"Let you know what happened, outcome of event."

"Keeping to agreed terms! Doing what was agreed."

"Making sure different departments give same advice. It can happen that there is a conflict of reply."

"Having a proper strategy for recycling (for all of us). Refuse sites open when people can use them. Encourage local aviation/air sports."

"Okay as they are."

"Make sure that any statements are factual, and not misleading so that the right course of action can be followed by members of the public."

"Nothing has been done about the flood areas, the Coop in Sandwich, it smells."

"Checking on the workmens work."

"Particularly in the Housing Department, between the various sections within the department."

"Team work, from Councillors, Chief Executives, staff and all employees putting aside their political differences and working for the community and its interests, instead of their own pet hates or likes."

"General public are unaware what the District, County, Parish Councils are responsible for."

"Recycling, pick ups from houses, bins provided, rubbish sacks provided, as in Folkestone."

"Taking a more positive attitude to Environmental Health Legislation. Lobbying the Government for stronger rules on dog fouling, both in public places and gardens."

"I have no problems."

"Friendliness is great, but sound advice and in-depth knowledge allowing prompt and accurate answers to queries is all important (without being pompous)."

"Quality of information received. I felt that I had been 'fobbed off' with the usual excuses and no real answers."

"Sorry, but I simply have not had occasion to ask council staff for anything, so far."

"At this postcode, we do not receive the Dover District News, yet we are in the Dover District, we do however receive the CCC publication, can this be rectified?"

"Inter/department knowledge. When I enquired on fly tipping, there seemed to be some hesitation in who deals with it, and I still do not know."

"Not able to suggest "need of improvement" as I have not had any direct dealing with the Council in the last 12 months."

"When phoning Dover District Council, it is very difficult to speak to the right person. To be transferred to three people seems to be the norm. When one becomes exasperated and asks to speak to the 'manager' that person is always out of the office or on holiday."

"Doorstep recycling collection in Capel-le-Ferne!"

"Office telephonist and staff being told to pass on telephone messages to other department. I telephoned repair department to have outside stairs light bulb changed, no action taken yet, OAP flats."

"Planning Department - I think planning permission requested by anyone for anything involves everyone in that vicinity, so people should be informed by letter individually, so that any objections can be made before it is too late. I have already had a neighbour take advantage, more than once, because I was too busy at work to realise what was happening. Not everyone realises that in Dover we have to look at a telegraph post and a paper."

"Seeing where the money goes by actually viewing improvements."

"Used to have more sports and activities for children in summer. Any possibility of increasing provision throughout summer and the year?"

"Have not had a problem requiring improvement in any of the above."

"Better liaison/ and support for voluntary sector. Improve policing in village areas at key times in towns, and at end of pub/club emptying times, and to support local discos in managing anti social elements and behaviour."

"Parking space for meetings - advising where to go if lot is full, Tesco's or what?"

"Following up."

"Recycling boxes to be introduced."

"Getting something done."

"Coming to see."

"Special people for youth affairs."

"Get off their seats."

"No comment."

"Not interested."

"All areas in Q11 need improvement if all the above worked together the service would be vastly improved."

"Really all the above must keep working together to make sure things flow smoothly."

"Accepting views of Town Councils and Parish Councils, which would raise your standards, plus people would feel involved and interested in local decisions. This type of document is another loss of finance, as Town and Parish Councils can always advise, due to having more contact."

"Ensuring services like benefits are run in a financially viable way."

"Finding out who is responsible e.g. allotments."

"Duty Officer's number should be more prominent."

"Get rid of rubbish from next door."

"Not a clue."

"Not to waste money on surveys! Use perennial flowers not annuals."

"Why have you only asked for 3. You must reach a high standard in all of these issues."

"No comment."

"Regular newsletters/adverts in local press. More dog patrols, heavier fines, more dog bins and regular emptying."

"DDC are on such a limited budget, therefore unable to fulfil duties."

APPENDIX 2

DATA TABULATIONS

Notes on reading tables

- Each table is based on all respondents, unless stated otherwise.
- Respondents who do not answer a particular question are excluded from the base.
- Results are shown both as raw numbers and as column percentages.
- Percentages in a particular column will not always add up to 100%. This may be due to rounding, or because each respondent is allowed to give more than one answer to the question.
- The base size of each sub-group is shown along the top of each table; please interpret results with caution when the base size is less than 100.
- '-' denotes zero.
- '% Satisfied' means the proportion of those giving an opinion who answered Very satisfied/Satisfied.
- '95% Confidence Interval' is an indication of the statistical reliability of the '% Satisfied' result. For example, a 95% confidence interval of $\pm 4\%$ means we are 95% certain that the true figure lies within 4 percentage points of the survey result.