

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
22 MARCH 2016**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**DRAFT**

**13**

**TITLE OF REPORT: DISTRICT WIDE SURVEY 2015 – KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONS**

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR CUSTOMER SERVICES  
EXECUTIVE MEMBER – CLLR LYNDA NEEDHAM, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the key findings and action points arising from the 2015 District Wide Survey.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Cabinet note and comment on the key findings and observations from the District Wide Survey.
- 2.2 That Cabinet note how the results will be used by Heads of Service and Corporate Managers in conjunction with Executive Members to inform the service planning process and to update relevant performance measures.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 To ensure that Cabinet is aware of the results and any trends from previous surveys and how the results will be used to inform future service delivery.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 None

**5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1 The biennial District Wide Survey is one of the Council's key mechanisms for seeking the views and opinions of North Hertfordshire residents on a range of services and issues. The Leader of the Council with responsibility for consultation and the Senior Management Team have been briefed on the key findings from the report.

**6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 6 November 2015.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The 2015 District Wide Survey was carried out in line with the Council's agreed Consultation Strategy. The survey is carried out every two years in order to capture residents' views and perceptions of services and facilities provided by the Council.
- 7.2 BMG Research, an independent research agency, was commissioned by the Council to carry out the research on our behalf. They conducted 1002 telephone interviews of North Hertfordshire residents between September and November 2015. The results were weighted by area, age, gender, working status and ethnicity to ensure they were representative of the North Hertfordshire population.
- 7.3 The question set remains largely consistent from one survey exercise to the next to allow benchmarking from year to year. Comparisons with previous results are made at appropriate points in the survey. Prior to 2011 the survey was carried out face to face rather than on the telephone and therefore those results are not directly comparable.
- 7.4 The results of the survey will be used by Heads of Service and Corporate Managers in conjunction with Executive Members to inform service plans and action plans and to update relevant performance measures.
- 7.5 The figures and tables in the report are extracted directly from the full research report prepared by BMG Research. As only a selection of the figures and tables appear in this report, the numbering is not always in sequential order.

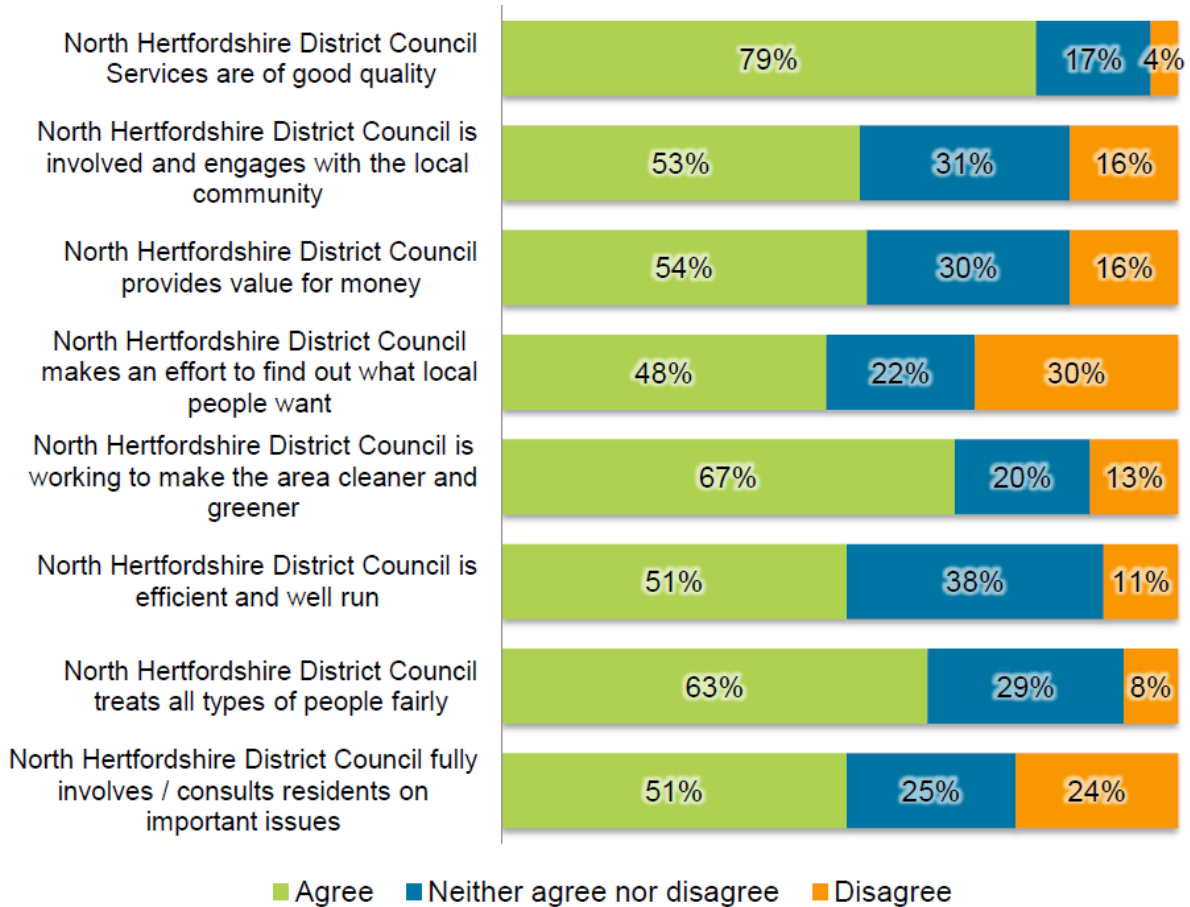
## **8. KEY FINDINGS**

### **8.1 Overall satisfaction and perceptions of the Council**

- 8.1.1 The vast majority of residents (96%) are satisfied with their area as a place to live and 67% are very satisfied. This compares favourably to a national survey by the Local Government Association (LGA) where the proportion expressing satisfaction with their local area was 82%, 14 percentage points lower than North Hertfordshire residents. Satisfaction among Royston residents is marginally lower at 89% and 8% of Royston residents express dissatisfaction with their local area, significantly higher than anywhere else in the district.
- 8.1.2 There has been a marginal drop in the proportion of residents who are satisfied with the way the Council runs things, down from 86% in 2013 to 83% in 2015. However this satisfaction level is still well above the latest LGA benchmark figure which is 67%. An interesting correlation is that those people who report that they have seen a copy of Outlook magazine (para 8.3.3) are significantly more likely to be satisfied with the Council overall than those who have not (85% cf. 77%).
- 8.1.3 Residents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with various perceptions of the Council. The highest proportion of residents agree that NHDC services are of good quality (79%). The lowest level of agreement is in relation to the statement NHDC makes an effort to find out what local people want. 30% of people disagree with this statement.

8.1.4 The figure below (Figure 4) gives agreement ratings across seven statements. There has been no significant change in agreement levels between 2013 and 2015 aside from a 5 percentage point decrease in agreement that NHDC is working to make the area cleaner and greener, although satisfaction is still high at 67%.

**Figure 4: Agreement with key statements about North Hertfordshire District Council (All valid responses)**



Unweighted sample bases vary

8.1.5 Table 4 below shows Letchworth residents hold a higher opinion of the Council than residents in other areas for involving and engaging with the local community, making an effort to find out what local people want, the Council being efficient and well run and fully involving / consulting residents on important issues.

**Table 4: Agreement with key statements| about North Hertfordshire District Council by area (All valid responses)**

	Baldock & District (117)	Hitchin (264)	Letchworth (260)	Royston (153)	Southern Rural (208)
Services are of good quality	79%	79%	79%	78%	77%
Is involved and engages with the local community	51%	53%	<u>59%</u>	46%	52%
Provides value for money	53%	57%	58%	49%	49%
Makes an effort to find out what local people want	47%	48%	<u>53%</u>	40%	45%
Is working to make the area cleaner and greener	69%	<u>68%</u>	<u>75%</u>	61%	59%
Is efficient and well run	51%	52%	<u>55%</u>	50%	44%
Treats all types of people fairly	68%	<u>67%</u>	65%	57%	57%
Fully involves / consults residents on important issues	47%	51%	<u>58%</u>	46%	49%

8.1.6 **Observations on overall satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction with the Council and with North Hertfordshire as a place to live remains very high, which could suggest that despite the Council having made savings of £12 million in the last 10 years, the impact of those savings have not been widely felt by residents. This is in direct contrast to some services such as the NHS which have seen marked decreases in satisfaction in recent years (according to the British Social Attitudes Survey) despite having ring-fenced budgets. In addition, several projects such as improvements to Hitchin Swimming Centre, redevelopment of play areas at Bush Springs, Walsworth Common and Ransoms Recreation ground and the splash-pad at Avenue Park in Baldock among others, have come to fruition in the last two years, which may positively impact on perceptions of the Council.

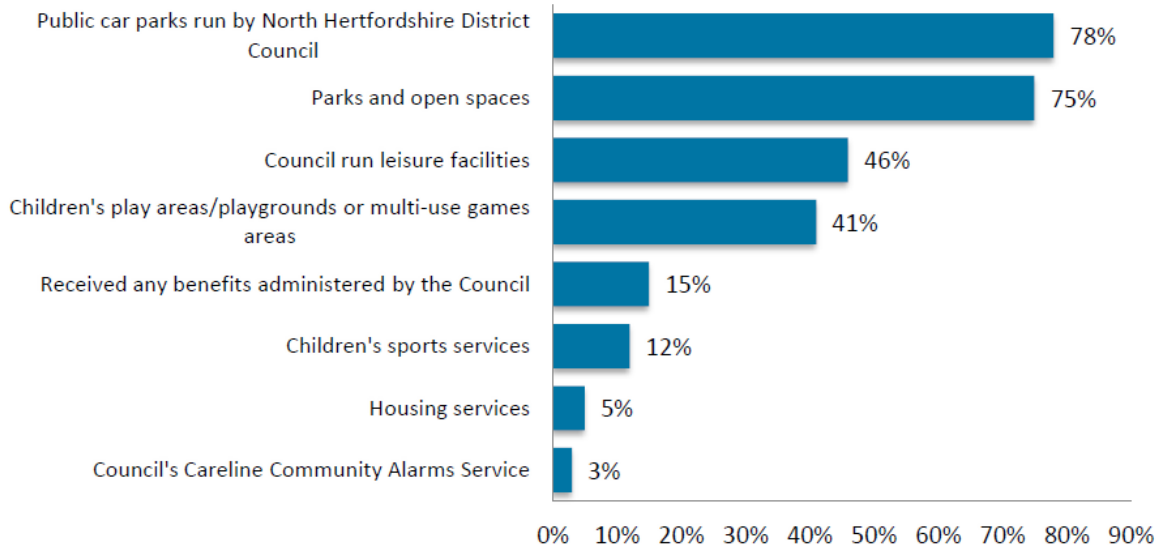
8.1.7 **Observations on perceptions of the Council:** With 30% of people disagreeing that the Council makes an effort to find out what local people want and 24% disagreeing that NHDC fully involves or consults residents on important issues, this has the potential to have a serious impact on the Council's reputation and on resident satisfaction with services. These issues were considered as part of the Council's Consultation Strategy 2016-2020, reported to Cabinet on 29 September 2015. The results do not necessarily mean the Council needs to increase the volume of consultation undertaken, but could mean that existing opportunities need to be publicised more widely or made more accessible using a range of methodologies. It could also mean that we need to publicise how we have utilised the feedback from consultations, including any suggestions or comments which are not adopted in the final policy or service change (You said we Did approach), so that residents understand how they have played a role in the process.

## 8.2 Council services

8.2.1 Universal services: Satisfaction with waste and recycling collection is high at 86% and is consistent with 2013 results when it was 85%. Similarly satisfaction with street cleaning remains high at 78% (also 78% in 2011 and 2013). 85% of people are satisfied with how Council Tax is administered (82% in 2013). There are no significant variations in satisfaction with street cleansing or waste and recycling by geographical area.

8.2.2 Usage of services: Residents were asked if they have used various services within the last year – see Figure 7 below. As per previous surveys, the most used services are public car parks and parks and open spaces.

**Figure 7: Can you tell me whether you have used any of the following within the last year? (All valid responses)**



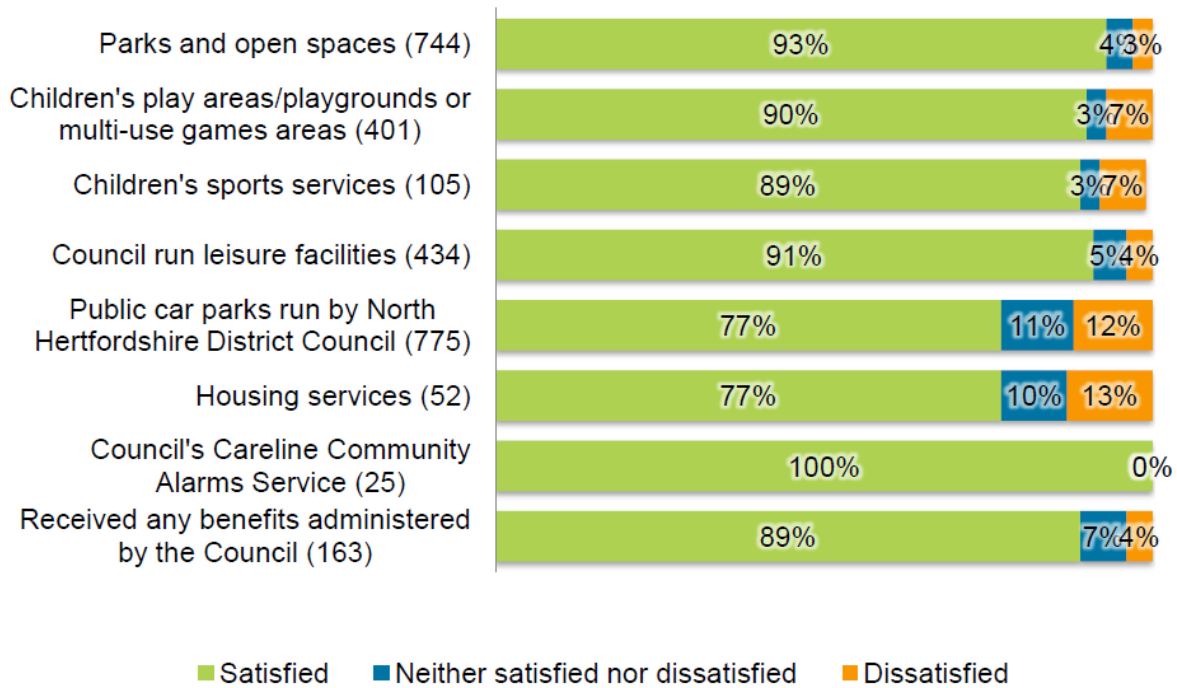
8.2.3 Geographically, parks and open spaces are most likely to be used by Letchworth and Royston residents, and also this group are most likely to use housing services. Hitchin and Letchworth residents are significantly more likely to use Council run leisure facilities than those in Royston and the Southern Rural area. Hitchin residents are also more likely than Southern Rural residents to use public car parks. (See Table 8).

**Table 8: Service use by area (All valid responses)**

	Baldock & District (117)	Hitchin (264)	Letchworth (260)	Royston (153)	Southern Rural (208)
Parks and open spaces	74%	70%	<u>79%</u>	<u>80%</u>	71%
Children's play areas/playgrounds or multi-use games areas	38%	37%	44%	44%	40%
Children's sports services	16%	11%	12%	8%	15%
Council run leisure facilities	48%	<u>49%</u>	<u>49%</u>	43%	38%
Public car parks run by North Hertfordshire District Council	77%	<u>81%</u>	77%	81%	73%
Housing services	5%	3%	<u>8%</u>	<u>7%</u>	3%
Council's Careline Community Alarms Service	2%	2%	3%	1%	3%
Received any benefits administered by the Council	15%	15%	18%	14%	13%

8.2.4 Those people who indicated they had used a service were then asked to indicate how satisfied they were with that service. See Figure 8 below. Satisfaction is generally very high and user satisfaction levels are broadly consistent with those recorded in 2013. In particular over 90% of users are satisfied with parks and open spaces, children’s play areas/playgrounds and Council run leisure facilities. 100% of users were satisfied with Careline’s community alarms service although this is based on a low sample of 25 respondents.

**Figure 8: Service satisfaction among users (Where used in the last year)**



Unweighted sample bases in parenthesis

8.2.5 The majority of residents (51%) feel that waste and recycling collection is the most important service the Council provides. 14% said that housing services were the most important, followed by 12% who said parks and open spaces. These were also the three services cited (in the same order of importance) in 2013.

8.2.6 **Observations on satisfaction with Council services:** Satisfaction with the waste and recycling service remains high at 86%, 7 percentage points higher than in 2011. This suggests that the enhanced recycling service which was introduced in 2013 has been embedded and well received by residents. This is also backed up by the Council’s own data on comments, compliments and complaints (3Cs), which shows that waste complaints have returned to pre-service change levels, after an increase at the time of the change. It is also worth noting that as a percentage of waste collections, the level of complaints is very low at 0.007% for April to September 2015.

8.2.7 Although 14% of residents are dissatisfied with the Council’s housing services, this could be partly anticipated. Due to the nature of the service, some residents may not be satisfied with the advice given or options available, rather than the quality of the service itself. It should also be noted that the sample size was only 52 respondents. Dissatisfaction with public car parks run by NHDC was at 12% of users, but this could be expected in part due to the enforcement activity associated with this service.

### 8.3 Information and Communication

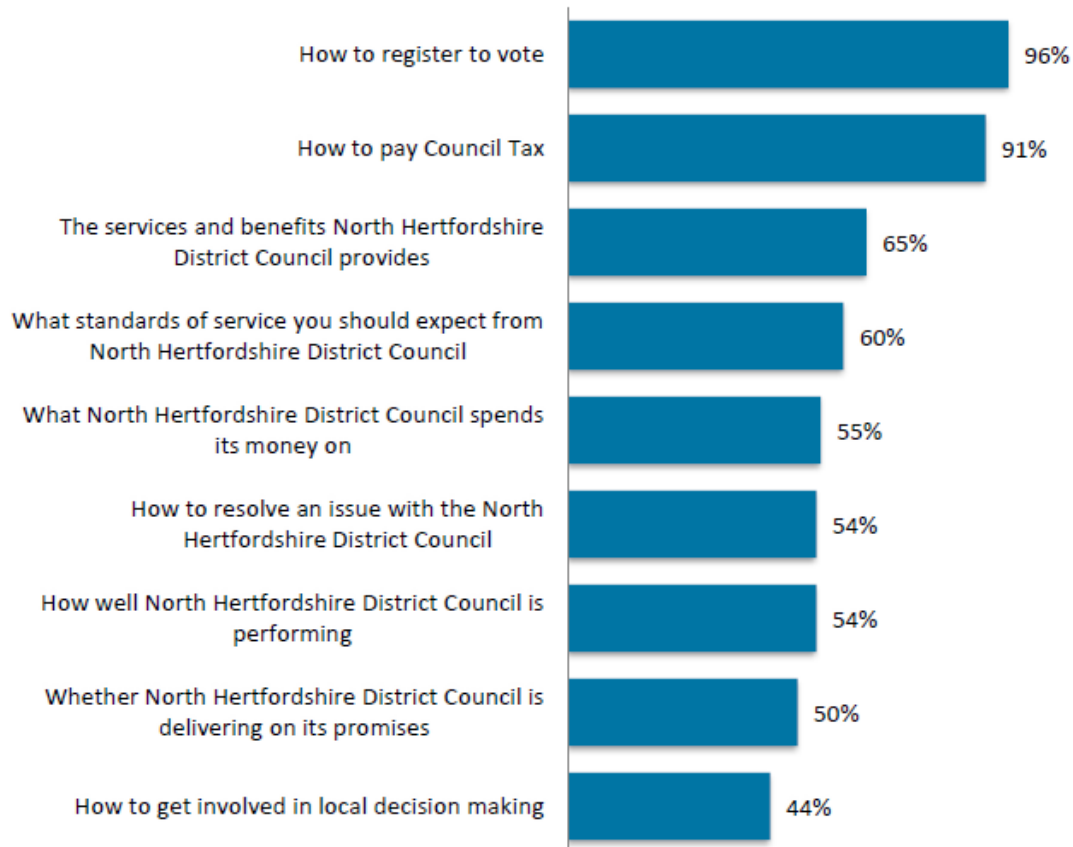
8.3.1 Respondents were asked how they normally obtain information about NHDC. The highest proportion of residents obtain information from the NHDC website (60%), followed by Outlook magazine (17%) and local newspapers (17%). The top three sources have consistently made the top three in 2011, 2013 and 2015 (see table 11 below). It should be noted that although there has been a shift since 2008 towards residents obtaining information online as you would expect, some of the shifts in information channels used from 2008 to 2011 are due to a change in the way the question was asked from using a prompted list of communications channels in 2008 to having an unprompted list from 2011 onwards.

**Table 11: Top 3 ways that residents obtain information 2008-2015 (All valid responses)**

2008 (990)	2011 (735)	2013 (996)	2015 (981)
Outlook (75%)	District Council website (56%)	District Council website (60%)	District Council website (60%)
Local newspapers (74%)	Outlook (23%)	Outlook (22%)	Outlook (17%)
Leaflets delivered to your door (44%)	Local newspapers (19%)	Local newspapers (16%)	Local newspapers (17%)

8.3.2 Residents were asked how well informed they feel about a range of issues, see Figure 10 below. Residents feel well informed about how to register to vote (96%) and how to pay Council Tax (91%), and 65% feel well informed about the services and benefits NHDC provides. This compares to the LGA national benchmark of 61% who feel well informed about the services and benefits their Council provides. However only 43% of residents feel well informed about how to get involved in local decision making and 50% on whether NHDC is delivering on its promises. There are minimal variations in these areas since 2013.

**Figure 10: To what extent do you feel well informed or not about the following...? – very or fairly well informed (All valid responses)**

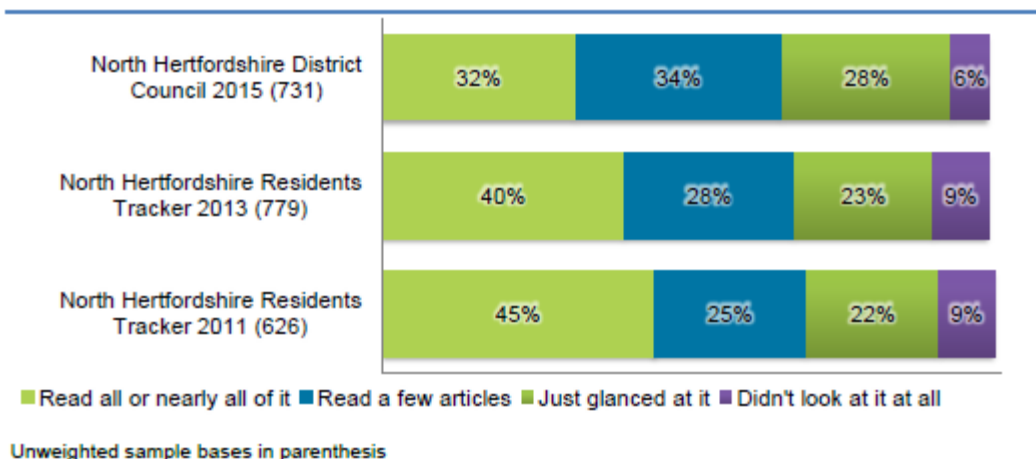


Unweighted valid sample bases vary

- 8.3.3 Residents were asked about their opinions of Outlook magazine. Outlook is delivered to all households in the area on a quarterly basis. When asked whether they have seen or had a copy of Outlook delivered to their door, 74% of residents said yes. This has dropped from 82% in 2011 and 78% in 2013.
- 8.3.4 Among those who have seen or received a copy of Outlook only 6% didn't look at it at all, compared to 9% in 2013 and 2011 (see Figure 12). However the proportion of residents who read all or nearly all of Outlook has fallen from 40% in 2013 to 32% in 2015. The most common response is that residents read a few articles from Outlook (34%).

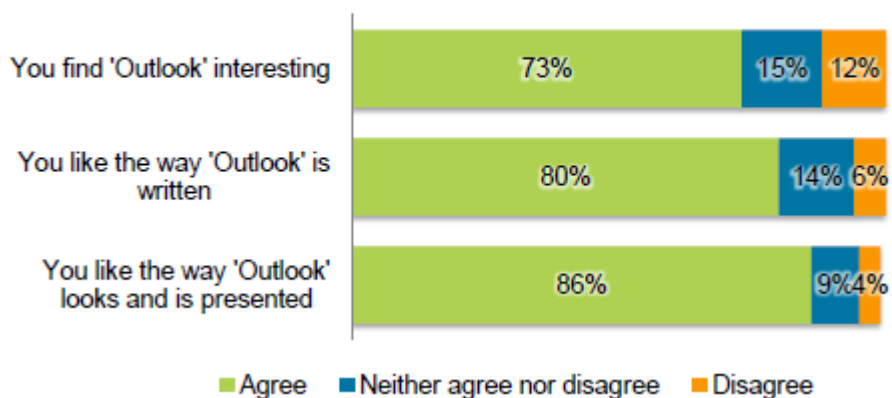


**Figure 12: Interaction with Outlook among recipients (Where seen a copy of Outlook or had a copy delivered)**



8.3.5 Feedback on the content and format of Outlook remains positive. See Figure 13 below. Agreement levels on whether residents like the way Outlook looks and is presented and on whether they like the way Outlook is written are unchanged since 2013. Agreement that Outlook is interesting at 73% is marginally below the 76% observed in 2013.

**Figure 13: Views on Outlook content and format (Where read/receive a copy of Outlook and read it to some extent)**



8.3.6 **Observations on Information and Communication:** As highlighted in paragraph 8.3.1 the Council's website has become an increasingly important communications tool in the past few years. To reflect this, the Council developed a new website strategy in 2014 and completely redeveloped the old website to ensure it is fit for purpose to meet customers expectations.

8.3.7 As stated in paragraph 8.3.2, only 43% of residents feel well informed about how to get involved in local decision making and 50% on whether NHDC is delivering on its promises. Interest in being involved in decision making was not recorded, but may be something to consider adding as a question for future years to understand whether this is an issue that needs to be addressed. The Council does regularly publish information in Outlook magazine, the website, press releases etc. on how well it is performing but some people may not be interested in this information and therefore will remain uninformed. Again, it may be useful to understand in future years how interested people are in receiving information on the Council's performance, how it spends money etc. to effectively gauge if this is a significant issue.

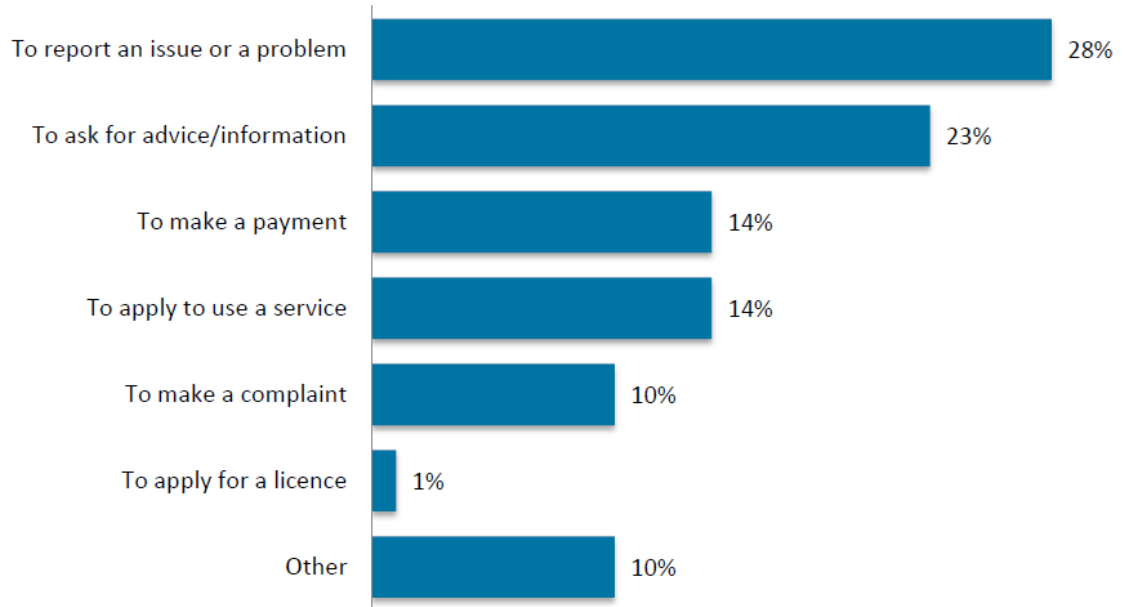
8.3.8 **Observations on Outlook magazine:** Although recall rates of residents who had seen Outlook magazine have dropped, they are still high and above industry standards. Recall rates also vary according to how frequently a magazine is distributed, for example a recent survey in a London Borough where the magazine was issued fortnightly achieved an 83% recall rate, compared to a recall rate for Outlook of 74% which is distributed quarterly. In recent years the Council has altered its method of distributing Outlook – from Royal Mail to door to door distribution. Unfortunately our suppliers advise this does usually have a small impact on distribution recall rates, however door to door distribution is significantly cheaper than Royal Mail. There are certain areas of the district (certain Royston wards and Codicote) with lower distribution recall than others and therefore for the latest spring 2016 edition of Outlook we have put in place additional telephone checking for those specific areas to establish if there are any particular issues. The results of this are awaited and will be used to establish if any 'problem delivery areas' need further investigation.

#### **8.4 Contact with the Council**

8.4.1 In the last 12 months, 53% of residents have contacted NHDC – slightly lower than the 58% in 2013. 19% of those who have contacted the Council have done so once, 13% twice and 20% have made contact three or more times.

8.4.2 Reporting an issue or problem is the most common reason for Council contact (28%), followed by to ask for advice / information (23%). These were also the most common reasons for contact in 2013. Figure 16 shows the reasons for contact.

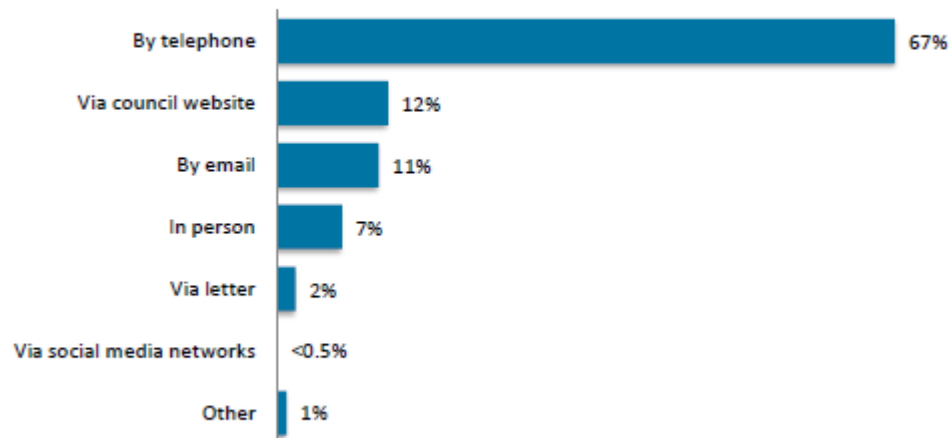
**Figure 16: Which of these describes the reason why you made your most recent contact with the Council? (Where contacted the Council in the last 12 months)**



Unweighted sample base: 523

8.4.3 The majority of residents contacted the Council by telephone (67%). While this has gone down since the 74% seen in 2013, this cannot by itself be seen as evidence of channel shift as the question asked in 2015 was a single response one, whereas more than one response was possible in previous years. Figure 17 shows methods of contact.

**Figure 17: How did you contact the Council? (Where contacted the Council in the last 12 months)**



Unweighted sample base: 524

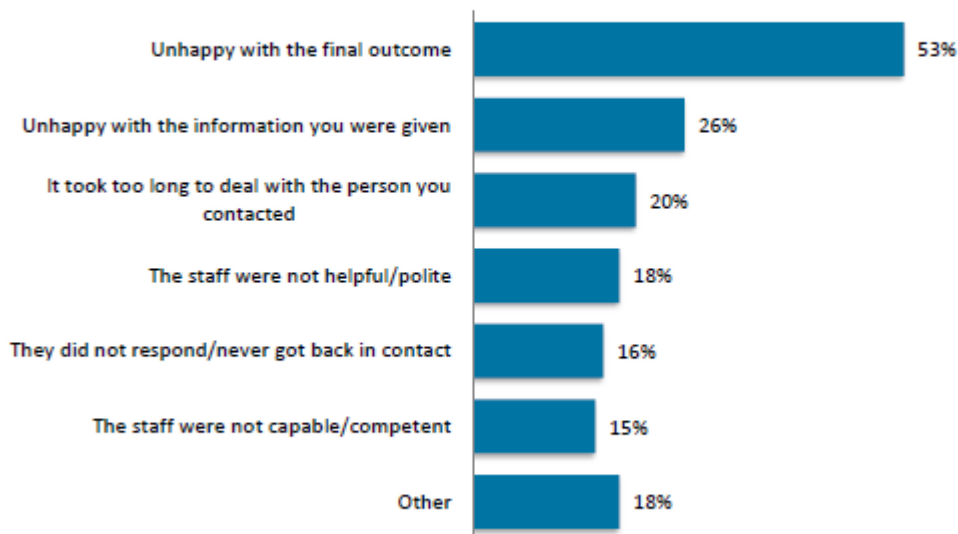
8.4.4 Table 16 shows the reason for contact by channel used. This shows that contact via the NHDC website is more commonly used for transactional activities such as making payments (21%). Telephone and email contact is most commonly used for reporting an issue or problem (32%) or to ask for advice / information (23%).

**Table 16: Reason for Council contact by channel used (where contact made in the last 12 months)**

	In person	Telephone	Email	Council website
To make a payment	15%	13%	6%	<u>21%</u>
To ask for advice/information	35%	23%	21%	18%
To report an issue or a problem	10%	<u>32%</u>	<u>28%</u>	18%
To make a complaint	3%	9%	14%	<u>19%</u>
To apply to use a service	13%	14%	18%	14%
To apply for a licence	0%	1%	1%	<u>5%</u>
Other	25%	8%	11%	4%
<b>Unweighted Bases</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>65</b>

8.4.5 Residents were asked how satisfied they were with the level of service they received the last time they contacted the Council. 75% of residents indicated they were satisfied, with 46% saying they were very satisfied. These figures are in line with the 2013 survey. Of the 21% who said they were dissatisfied, 53% were unhappy with the final outcome while 26% said they were unhappy with the information given. See Figure 19 below for the full responses. It should be noted that only a small base of 108 residents answered this question.

**Figure 19: Why were you dissatisfied with the service you received the last time you were in contact with the Council? (Where dissatisfied with the service they received)**

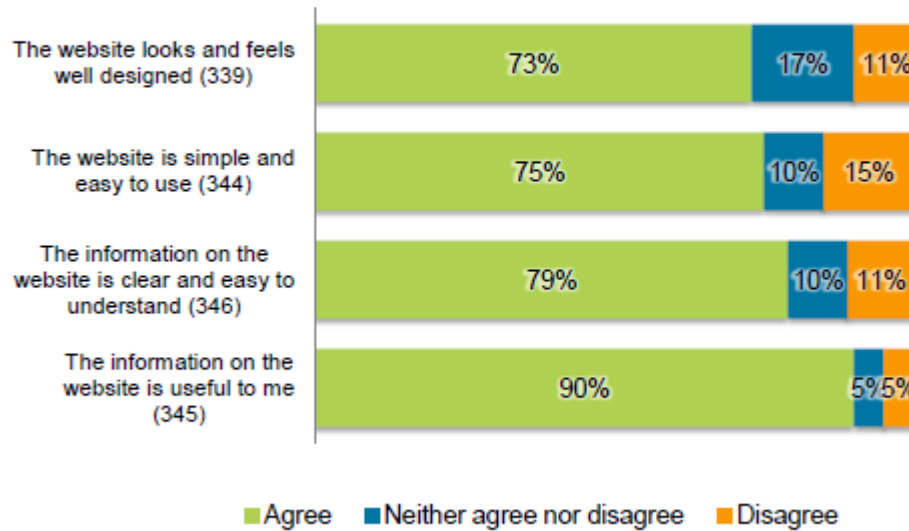


Unweighted sample base: 108

8.4.6 91% of residents indicated they had access to the internet. Analysis by age group shows that for all but two age groups this figure is exceeded, the exceptions being those aged 65 to 74 (81%) and 75 plus (46%).

8.4.7 We asked a series of new questions in 2015 regarding whether people had visited the new NHDC website launched in April 2015. 36% of respondents said that they had visited the website, with 49% of those aged 35 to 44 having visited it. Visitors to the website were then asked a series of questions about how they felt about different aspects of the site, with all questions receiving positive ratings. See Figure 22.

**Figure 22: Visitor views on Council website (Where visited North Hertfordshire District Council's website)**



Unweighted sample bases in parentheses

**8.4.8 Observations on contact with the Council:** Para 8.5.3 shows that telephone is by far the most popular form of contact with the Council, particularly for when people want to report an issue / problem or ask for advice and information. With the launch of the new website, alongside improved e-forms it is hoped that more people will start using this as a channel for reporting issues and for finding the information they require.

8.4.9 Figure 16 shows that 10% of those residents who had contacted the council in the last 12 months did so to make a complaint. This figure far exceeds the actual number of complaints recorded by the Council – for example in April to September 2015 there were 326 complaints. The difference is probably partly due to the perception by some people that when they contact us they are complaining, when actually their contact may be recorded as a comment rather than a complaint, or it may be a request for action, such as dealing with a noisy neighbour issue. Similarly Table 16 shows that 19% of those people who contacted the Council to make a complaint did so via the website. Our data on website contact does not match up with this and in fact is most likely that many of those people used the website to report an issue such as a missed bin, fly-tipping or dog fouling – which are not treated as complaints. It is also possible that people do not make the distinction between NHDC and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), so they may be referring to their contact with HCC when answering this particular question.

**8.4.10 Observations on Council website:** The results for the new website are encouraging as they are favourable overall. The main area for attention is the 15% of respondents who disagreed that the website is simple and easy to use. It may be worth some more research into this area – for example are there particular areas of the website which are less easy to use than others. The Council also subscribes to a Society of Information Technology Management (SOCITM) service which gives the website a rating based on how easy it is to complete various top tasks. The results of the latest exercise (the first for the new website) are due shortly. As part of this survey however, the Council has just received 4 out of 5 stars for its 'Report a missed bin' eform.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Cabinet has within its terms of reference to oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those reserved to the Council.
- 9.2 There are no legal implications arising from this report. If actions are identified as a result of the findings of the District Wide Survey then the legal implications of those will be considered at the time.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report. The cost of the research undertaken was funded from the existing budget provision for consultation.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The District Wide Survey is important for shaping the Council's Objectives. There is a risk however, that should this survey not be acted upon, that public satisfaction with the Council will reduce and this would have a negative impact on the Council's reputation. In order to reduce this risk, Heads of Service/Corporate Managers are prompted to address the outcome from the survey in their service planning.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The report usefully highlights a few areas where satisfaction levels could be improved. Broadly though, the services that NHDC provides to residents are well received. Any mitigating actions may be incorporated into the formulation of the relevant Service Plans to improve service provision. These will be proportionate and reflect the authority's duty under the public Sector Duty. Identified service improvements may require an analysis of equality impact prior to the point of implementation.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraphs 12.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

## 15. APPENDICES

15.1 None

## 16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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## 17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 The full report from BMG Research can be found under the 'publications and consultations' section of the NHDC website: <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/customer-services/publications-and-consultations/district-wide-survey>
- 17.2 NHDC Consultation Strategy 2016-2020: <http://web.north-herts.gov.uk/aksnherts/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=CAB&meet=91&arc=71>
- 17.3 Comments, Compliments and Complaints half year update 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015: <http://web.north-herts.gov.uk/aksnherts/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=OSC&meet=41&arc=71>