

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING BENEFIT
APPLICANTS BEST VALUE SURVEY 2003/04**

SURVEY PERIOD

**June - July 2003
November - December 2003**

Prepared for

BILL MCAFFERTY

HEAD OF REVENUES
Financial and Support Services

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Tunbridge Wells
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ORIGIN OF RESPONDENT

Key:

- ☺ - Services improved
- ☹ - Services stayed the same
- ☹ - Services got worse

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH TELLING US

- Generally, it is evident from the results that there have been significant improvements to the service(s) provided by the benefits department compared with three years ago. However:
- Compared with the 2000/01 survey 11 facilities/service areas got worse/higher levels of dissatisfaction compared to satisfaction. These are listed in descending order of dissatisfaction - ☹
 1. Unable to sort claim out over the phone
 2. Being transferred between several different people
 3. Not enough seating
 4. Lack of staff knowledge
 5. Forms taking long time to complete
 6. Inconvenient opening hours
 7. Unable to get hold of named contacts
 8. Difficult forms
 9. Long waiting times
 10. Unable to ask questions
 11. Unfriendly staff
- The telephone appears to be the least favoured means of contact. Visiting the office is most favoured.
- One in ten more benefit applicants are visiting their local office.
- Applicants were not always confident that what staff were saying was correct.
- Almost half (48%) of people were not given the names of members of staff when getting in touch with the benefits office.
- Compared with the 2000/01 survey 11 facilities/service areas improved/higher satisfaction compared with dissatisfaction. These are listed in descending order of satisfaction - ☺
 1. Talking in a private place
 2. Staff not in a rush
 3. Answering calls quickly
 4. Customer respect
 5. Staff contact
 6. Query dealt with swiftly
 7. Explanations
 8. Letters are easier to understand
 9. Clean and tidy office
 10. Office location
 11. Helpful supporting information
- The office being kept clean and tidy received the highest level of satisfaction (95.5%).
- All overall-rating statements for services provided by the benefits office increased compared with three years ago: The phone service +7.5%, In the office +7.1%, The staff +6.2%, The forms +5.9% and Getting in touch +2.9%.

- Although the number of users of the phone fell significantly, satisfaction with the service on the phone saw the biggest increase of 7.5% over the three-year period. This could be attributable simply to the fact that fewer people are making contact via this method, placing fewer demands on staff.
- There appears to be a gap in service delivery expectations between respondents of a younger profile compared to those of an older profile.
- Respondents are predominantly of an older age profile and retired. A fifth are permanently sick and 15% are looking after the home and 19.2% employed.
- Throughout the survey, male respondents are more satisfied than females by a ratio of 2:1 with services provided compared with females.

WHAT SHOULD WE TO DO NEXT?

- Ensure staff are wearing their name badges at all times and readily provide contact details. All letters should include contact names and direct telephone numbers in an attempt to improve telephone communications, reduce the time waiting on the phone and prevent callers being passed between members of staff and departments. Improvements mentioned above could potentially increase the number of applicants telephoning their local office
- Ensure all staff take part in regular customer service training programmes and possibly consider NVQ's in customer service. The development of staff training programmes should continue with a view to achieving increased satisfaction ratings amongst customers. It would appear to be more of an issue in terms of applicants having low confidence in staff knowledge.
- Resolve issues related to contact over the phone, to reduce the negative impact of the in-office experience.
- As an alternative consideration could be given to encourage more online transactions and perhaps customer training workshops would overcome a barrier to using the Internet. Improvements here could reduce the negative impact that the opening hours inconvenient.
- The telephone is sometimes considered the most appropriate method of communication to obtain a quick answer to a short question. It is also the most popular choice for contacting the Council (*source: TWBC Borough-wide survey, 1999, and 2004*). Improvements to the telephone system, disclosing direct telephone numbers, and providing named contacts could all benefit the service provided on the phone. Improvements here could see more people use this means of contact.
- Identify whether customer information can be pre-printed on application forms when issued to enable a speedier and simpler process of completion.
- Consider customer/officer teams to ensure the same officer deals with the same claimant throughout the process. This is obviously dependent upon customers knowing staff names and availability of staff.
- Identify a means to monitor queue times in the office and/or on the phone.
- Priorities improvements in the areas of highest dissatisfaction.

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE BENEFITS OFFICE

TABLE 1: COMPARATIVE RATINGS GIVEN FOR GETTING IN TOUCH

The local authority benefits office is somewhere that is easy for me to get to - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	75	81.3
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	12	12.8

The local authority benefits office's opening hours are inconvenient for me - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	26	34.4
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	52	50

Staff tried to sort out my claim on the phone so I didn't have to go into the office - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	60	38.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	21	39

I was given the name of a person at the local authority benefits office to contact about my claim - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	42	34
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	42	48

Overall, I am satisfied with the ways in which I can contact the local authority benefits office - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	80	82.9
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	9	9

* Please note that the above statements were revised for the 2003/04 survey and differ to those asked in 2000/01. The statements used in the 2000/01 survey are provided below for reference and comparison.

*My Office is in a convenient place
 The opening hours are Not convenient
 They try to sort things out on the phone so that you don't have to go to the office
 I was given the name of the person to contact about my claim
 Overall, I am satisfied with the facilities to get in touch with the benefits office*

1.2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR IN THE OFFICE

TABLE 2: RATINGS GIVEN FOR SERVICE IN THE OFFICE

I had to wait a long time before I saw the person I needed to - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	25	26.9
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	59	58.2

I could talk with this person in a private place if I wanted to - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	27	52.7
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	58	29.8

The local authority benefits office was clean and tidy - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	89	95.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	3	1.6

More seats are needed in my local authority benefits office - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	44	56.4
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	34	25.6

Overall, I am satisfied with the local authority benefits office - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	75	82.1
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	11	9.8

- *Please note that the above statements were revised for the 2003/04 survey and differ to those asked in 2000/01. The statements used in the 2000/01 survey are provided below for reference and comparison.*

*I waited a long time before I saw the person dealing with my claim
 I was able to talk with the person in a private place
 The office was clean and tidy
 There are NOT enough seats
 Overall, I am satisfied with the service in the actual office*

1.3 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR ON THE PHONE

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF RATINGS GIVEN FOR SERVICE ON THE PHONE

The telephone call I made to the local authority benefits office was answered quickly - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	68	80.6
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	21	15

When I made a call to the local authority benefits office I was transferred between several people - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	22	34.7
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	62	55.6

Once the call to my local authority benefits office had been answered, my query was dealt with swiftly - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	64	73.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	23	20.7

When I called the local authority benefits office it was difficult to speak to the right member of staff - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	29	24
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	52	62

Overall I am satisfied with the telephone service provided by my local authority benefits office - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	67	74.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	17	16.6

* Please note that the above statements were revised for the 2003/04 survey and differ to those asked in 2000/01. The statements used in the 2000/01 survey are provided below for reference and comparison.

*It did NOT take long to be answered
 I was passed around from one member of the staff to another
 I did NOT wait long on the phone whilst my query was being dealt with
 It was difficult to contact the right member of staff by telephone
 Overall, I am satisfied with the telephone service*

1.4 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR THE STAFF

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF RATINGS GIVEN FOR THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY THE STAFF

Staff in the local authority benefits office were friendly - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	86	85.7
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	4	5.7

I wasn't always confident that what the staff said was correct - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	23	34.4
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	59	49.7

Things were explained in a way I could understand - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	70	78.6
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	13	11.3

I felt unable to ask questions I wanted to - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	12	13.9
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	70	70.5

Staff were in a rush - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	20	13.9
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	58	73.4

Staff treated me with respect - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	69	81.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	15	8

Overall, I am satisfied with the service provided by staff in my local authority benefits office - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	78	84.2
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	7	8.7

* Please note that the above statements were revised for the 2003/04 survey and differ to those asked in 2000/01. The statements used in the 2000/01 survey are provided below for reference and comparison.

*Staff were polite and friendly to me
 Staff did NOT always seem to know what they were talking about
 Things were explained clearly in a way I could understand
 I felt I could NOT ask questions
 Staff always seemed to be in a rush
 Staff did treat me with respect
 Overall, I am satisfied with the staff in the benefits office*

1.5 SUMMARY OF RESULTS FOR THE FORMS

TABLE 5: SUMMARY RATINGS GIVEN FOR THE FORMS

The Housing/Council Tax benefits form was difficult to fill in - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	38	39.5
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	42	44.8

I could fill the form in quickly - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	48	40.6
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	37	46.9

The information that came with the form was helpful - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	67	70.2
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	10	11.7

The letter sent about my claim were difficult to understand - ☹		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	37	34.1
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	45	52.2

Overall, I am satisfied with the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form - ☺		
	2000/2001	2003/2004*
% Agree/Strongly Agree	58	63.9
% Disagree / Strongly Disagree	20	19.4

* Please note that the above statements were revised for the 2003/04 survey and differ to those asked in 2000/01. The statements used in the 2000/01 survey are provided below for reference and comparison.

*The form itself was difficult to fill in
 It did NOT take long to fill in this form
 The notes and / or leaflets, which came with the form, were helpful
 The letters they send you about your claim are difficult to understand
 Overall, I am satisfied with the clarity, and understandability of the forms, leaflets and letters*

1.6 GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE BENEFITS OFFICE - (page 6-9)

- Overall over four fifths (82.9%) of respondents are happy with getting in touch with the benefits office.
- 48% indicated that they weren't given the name of the person to contact.
- 34.4% of respondents found the opening hours inconvenient.

1.7 DID YOU GO TO YOUR LOCAL OFFICE WHEN YOU MADE YOUR MOST RECENT CLAIM? - (page 10-15)

- Almost three-quarters (72.7%) of respondents visited their local office when making their most recent claim. Of this proportion:
 - Overall, over four-in-five (82.1%) of respondents are satisfied with the service in the actual office.
 - Over half (56.4%) of respondents felt more seats are required.
 - Over a quarter (26.9%) had to wait a long time before seeing the person dealing with their claim.
 - 29.8% felt they could not talk in a private place.
 - 95.5% of respondents find the benefits office clean and tidy.

1.8 DID YOU TELEPHONE YOUR LOCAL OFFICE WHEN MAKING YOUR MOST RECENT CLAIM? - (page 16-21)

- Less than a third (27.9%) of respondents telephoned their local office when making their recent claim. Of this proportion:
 - Overall, 74.5% are satisfied with the telephone service, with less than a fifth (16.6%) being dissatisfied.
 - Phone calls were answered promptly for 80.6% of respondents, 15% experienced a delay.
 - Calls were transferred between several different members of staff for 34.7% of respondents.
 - Once their call was answered, 20.7% felt their query was not dealt with swiftly, whilst almost three-quarters (73.5%) indicated theirs was.
 - 62% of respondents found it easy to speak to the right member of staff.

1.9 SERVICE PROVIDED BY THE STAFF - (page 22-28)

- Overall, over four fifths (84.2%) of respondents are satisfied with the staff in the benefits office.
- Over four fifths (85.7%) of respondents indicated that staff were friendly.
- A third (34.4%) indicated staff didn't know what they were talking about; 49.7% felt staff did know.
- One in ten (11%) didn't understand the way things were explained. However, 78.6% found things to be explained in a way they could understand.
- 13.9% could not ask questions, 70.5% felt they could.
- 13.9% of respondents found staff to be in a rush. 73.4% didn't.
- 81.5% felt staff treated them with respect.

1.10 THE FORMS - (page 29-33)

- Overall, one in five respondents are not satisfied with the claim forms, with over three-fifths (63.9%) of respondents being satisfied.
- Almost two fifths (39.5%) indicated the benefits form was difficult to fill in; 44.8% didn't find them difficult.
- 40.6% believe the forms take a long time to fill in; 46.9% found them quick to complete.
- Supporting notes and or leaflets were helpful for 70.2%.
- The letter sent out was difficult to understand for 34.1%; 52.2% understood the letter.

1.11 TIME TAKEN FOR OUTCOME OF CLAIM - (page 34)

- 79.3% are satisfied with the amount of time taken to tell whether the claim was successful.

1.12 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE - (page 35)

- 83.7% of respondents are satisfied with the overall service provided.

1.13 WHAT NEEDS IMPROVING - (page 36)

- 29.7% of respondents indicated that the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form needs improving, rising to 54.1% when excluding respondents that answered nothing and don't know. 27.8% indicated nothing needed improving.

1.14 ABOUT THE RESPONDENT - (page 3)

- The response sample is made up of 39% male and 61.1% female.
- 68.4% of the respondents live in urban areas of the borough and 31.6% live in rural areas, (fig 1, page 2).
- Respondents aged 16-24 represent 7.0% of the sample, with those aged 25-44 representing 36.8%, 45-74 representing 38.9% and those aged over 75 years representing almost a fifth (17.6%), (fig 2, page 3).
- The vast majority of respondents describe themselves as White - European (95.9%), with 4.1% as Non White - European Background, (page 3).
- Almost half (49.2%) - 415 respondents - consider they have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. Of this proportion 88.8% (356) respondents consider this limits their activities in some way, (page 3).
- The highest proportion of respondents (27.4%) are wholly retired from work, 22.7% are permanently sick and disabled and 14.7% are looking after their home. Those employed full-time, part-time or self-employed represent 19.2%, (page 3).

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In June 2003, Corporate Marketing and Communications undertook the second Best Value Council Tax and Housing Benefit Applicants Survey (BVPI 80). In April 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and ATP Ltd published its guidance on methods of data collection for the User Satisfaction Performance Indicators.

Under existing government legislation Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has a mandatory duty to conduct research to establish the levels of satisfaction with the service and facilities provided by the Benefits Office.

The survey was carried out in two phases to Council Tax and Housing Benefit applicants who pursued a new or renewal claim for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit during the periods June-July and November-December 2003 for which the authority has made and notified a determination. The work was carried out in-house by Corporate Marketing and Communications.

The objectives of this project were to:

- identify perceptions for getting in touch with the benefits office
- identify perceptions for the level of service in the office
- identify perceptions for the level of service on the phone
- identify perceptions for the level of service provided by the staff
- identify perceptions of the benefit forms
- identify overall perceptions with the speed of service

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) set minimum requirements that each authority should achieve for the survey. In order for the survey to be representative of the target population, a probability sampling methodology was adopted and to meet the requirement for a margin of error of +/- 4% and a minimum of 650 responses should be received in total from the survey period.

The ODPM requirements were for the survey to be undertaken by post or telephone. We opted for a postal survey, as this method is generally cheaper to administer.

1,391 applicants between June-July and 724 between November-December 2003 were targeted, totalling 2,115. Phase 1 survey forms were posted week commencing 4 August 2003 and phase 2 in week commencing 12 January 2004. Where necessary, reminder mailings were sent after four weeks had elapsed.

The survey form was prescribed by the ODPM. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix I.

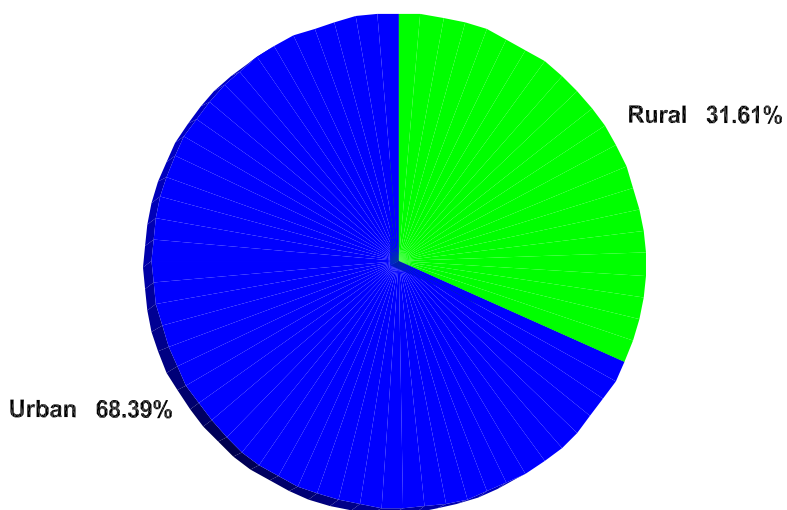
4.0 RESPONSES

2,115, questionnaires were mailed, 831 usable completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 39.2%. A sample size of 831 is subject to a maximum standard error of +/- 3.4% at the 95% level of confidence.

Response rates for phase 1 were 486 (34.9%), and for phase 2 were, 345 (47.6).

Analysis by respondents' postcode reveals that just over two thirds (68.4%) of respondents live in urban areas, with almost a third (31.6%) living in rural areas of the borough. (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: ORIGIN OF RESPONDENT

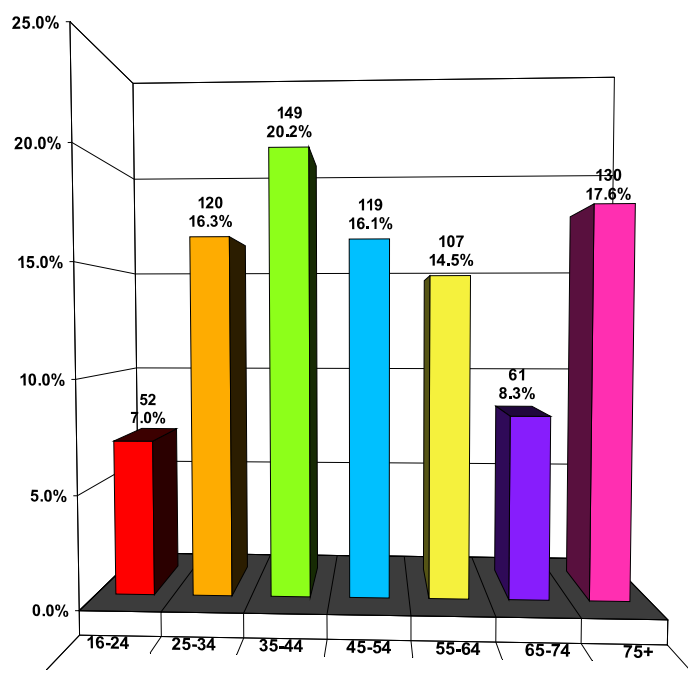


- The origin of respondents is available in Appendix II, plotted on to a map using their postcode.

5.0 PROFILE INFORMATION

- The response sample is made up of 38.9% male and 61.1% female.

FIGURE 2: RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

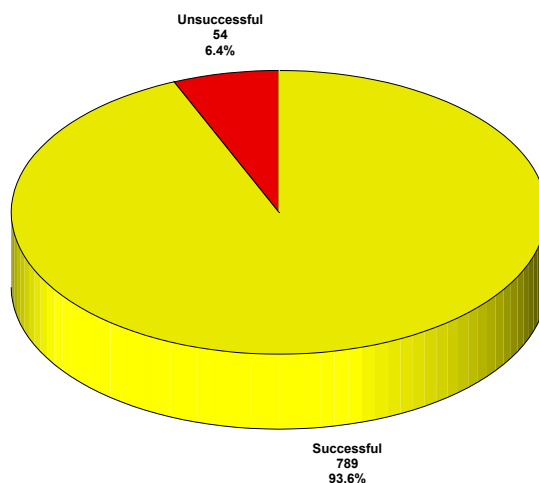


- A fifth (20.2%) of respondents were aged between 35 and 44 years old, the highest proportion. Almost a fifth (17.6%) were aged over 75 years, with a further 16.3% aged between 25-34. Respondents aged between 16-24 represented 7% of the sample. The average age of respondents is 50.9 years.
- Two fifths (40.6%) of respondents have been living in their current accommodation for up to three years, with 31.1% living there for up to ten years. One in six (16.4%) have been living there for over 21 years.
- Just under a fifth (18.9%) of respondents have been living in this area for up to three years, with 21.3% living here for up to ten years. Over two fifths however, (43.2%) have been living in this area for over 21 years.
- Just over half (53.4%) of respondents rent their property from a Housing Association/Trust, 24.3% rent from a private landlord,. 6.8% of respondents own their property outright and 5.1% have a mortgage. Compared to the borough profile these figures are: 15.8%, 9.5%, 30.6%, and 40% respectively.
- The vast majority of respondents describe themselves as White - European (95.9%) and 4.1% as Non White -European background.
- Almost half (49.2%) or 415 respondents consider they have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. Of this proportion 88.8% (356) respondents consider this limits their activities in some way.
- Respondents were asked to describe their current situation from a list of definitions. The results show that less than one fifth (19.2%) of respondents are employed, full-time, part-time or self-employed. The majority are therefore wholly retired from work (27.4%), permanently sick and disabled (22.7%) and 14.7% looking after the home. Just under one-in-ten (9.1%) are unemployed and available for work. Compared to the borough profile these figures are: 66.5%, 13.2%, 2.9%, and 7.3% respectively.

6.0 ABOUT YOUR CLAIM

- Claims were successful for 93.6% of respondents, with 6.4% (54) unsuccessful, (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: SUCCESS OF YOUR CLAIM



- Providing comparisons with the previous Best Value Survey conducted in 2000/01. 3.4% fewer benefit/Council Tax claims were successful, (Table 1).

TABLE 1: SUCCESS OF YOUR CLAIM

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Successful	97%	93.6%	-3.4%
Sample Base	907	843	
Confidence Interval	+/- 1.2	+/-1.6	
% Unsuccessful	3	6.4%	+3.4%

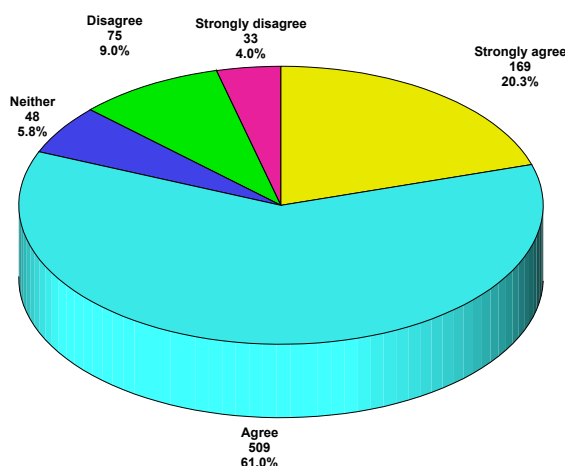
- The majority of claims were successful for all applicants across all age bands, in particular respondents aged 16-24 (96.2%) and those aged 75+ (97.6%).
- The following table in section 6 provides the overall ratings given for **'Getting in Touch'** with the benefits office, where respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the specific statements relating to the service provided by the benefits office.
- Respondents were asked to identify to what extent they agree with specific statements relating of the service provided by the benefits department, using a 1-5 rating score.
- NOTE: Some statements were written in a negative format so some caution may be required on their interpretation as a negative score could read positively.**
- Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify whether respondents were referring to Cranbrook or the Town Hall offices.

7.0 GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE BENEFITS OFFICE - ☺

7.1 OFFICE LOCATION

- Four in five (81.3%) respondents agree that the local authority benefits office is somewhere that is easy for them to get to, of which 20.2% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.15 out of 5.00, (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE IS SOMEWHERE THAT IS EASY FOR ME TO GET TO



- Respondents aged 16-24 and over 75 years are more likely to find it difficult to get to the benefits office, which could indicate these groups have transport or other mobility barriers.
- Almost a quarter (24.2%) of respondents that have a disability, long term illness or infirmity do not find the benefits office easy for them to get to.
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas (85.5%) appear to agree more than respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas (69.3%) that the benefits office is somewhere easy for them to get to.

TABLE 2: OFFICE LOCATION COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	75%	81.3%	+6.3%
Sample Base	899	834	
Confidence Interval	+/-2.9%	+/- 2.6%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	12%	12.8%	+0.8%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 6.3% over a three-year period, with a marginal increase in those disagreeing. The positive shift appears to be from those who were undecided.

7.2 OPENING HOURS - ☹

- The opening hours for the benefits office are from 8.30am-4.30pm Monday to Friday.
- The opening hours are convenient for half (50%) of respondents, giving a mean rating of 3.14 out of 5.00. However, just over a third (34.4%) of respondents found them to be inconvenient, (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE OPENING HOURS ARE INCONVENIENT FOR ME



- Respondents aged 35-44 and 55-64 were most likely to find the opening hours inconvenient, whilst those aged 16-24, 65-74, and over 75 years found the hours convenient.
- Marginally more respondents from Tunbridge Wells rural areas (51.3%) compared with urban areas (50.3%) find the opening hours convenient.

TABLE 4: OFFICE OPENING HOURS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

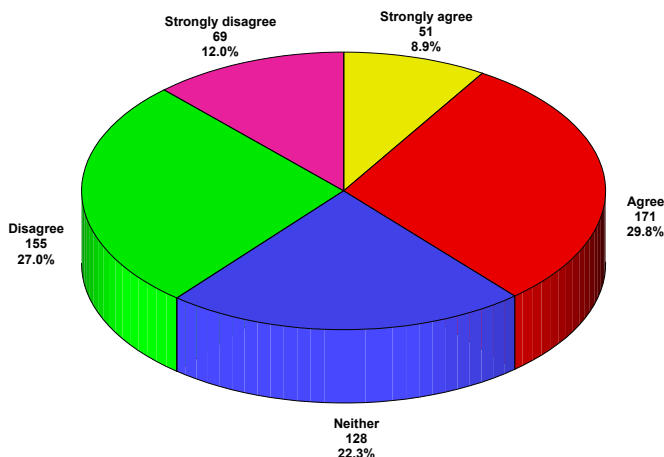
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	26%	34.4%	+8.4%
Sample Base	821	770	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.0%	+/- 3.4%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	52%	50%	-2%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 8.4% over a three-year period, which actually means more respondents agree that opening hours are inconvenient, than those who think they are convenient, which fell by 2% over the same period.

7.3 ON THE PHONE - ☺

- Respondents appear to have mixed opinions as to whether their claim was sorted out over the phone so they didn't have to go into the office. Almost two-fifths (38.5%) agree and a further 39.0% disagree with the statement. Just over a fifth (22.2%) were undecided on this issue, giving a mean rating of 3.03 out of 5.00, (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: STAFF TRIED TO SORT OUT MY CLAIM ON THE PHONE SO I DIDN'T HAVE TO GO INTO THE OFFICE



- Male respondents (41%) agree more that staff tried to sort their claim out over the phone compared with female respondents (36.8%).
- Over two-fifths (43.6%) of respondents aged 25-34 and 54% of those aged over 75 years were more likely to agree that staff tried to sort their claim out over the phone. However, in contrast, respondents of a younger profile found staff could not sort their claim out over the phone, 59% and 46.1% of respondents aged 16-24 and 35-44 respectively. This indicates particular groups need to visit the office.
- More claims are sorted out over the phone for respondents from Tunbridge Wells rural areas (39.1%) compared with respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas (34%). Again, potentially more respondents from urban areas need to visit the office.

TABLE 5: SORTING CLAIM OVER THE PHONE COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

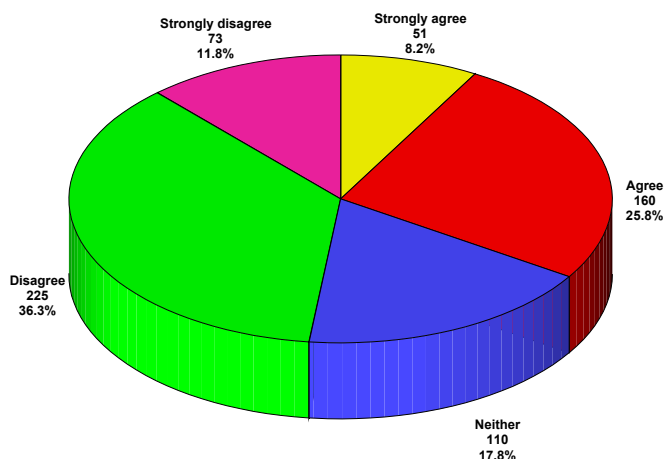
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	60%	38.5%	-21.5%
Sample Base	766	574	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.5%	+/- 4.0	
% disagree/strongly disagree	21%	39.0%	+18%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by a significant 21.5% over a three-year period. Of this proportion there were 18% more respondents in disagreement with the statement and 3.5% more who were undecided, resulting in more people having to visit the office, in particular more so from urban areas.

7.4 NAME OF CONTACT - ☹

- Just over a third (34%) of respondents were given the name of a person at the local authority benefits office to contact about their claim, of which less than one in ten (8.2%) strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 3.17 out of 5.00. Almost half (48%) disagreed, (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: I WAS GIVEN THE NAME OF THE PERSON AT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE TO CONTACT ABOUT MY CLAIM



- Almost half of respondents from both Tunbridge Wells urban and rural 46.7% and 49.6% respectively weren't given the name of a person at the local authority benefits office to contact about their claim. However, more respondents from Tunbridge Wells rural did agree (38.3%) with this statement compared with those in urban areas (31.2%).

TABLE 6: NAME OF CONTACT COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

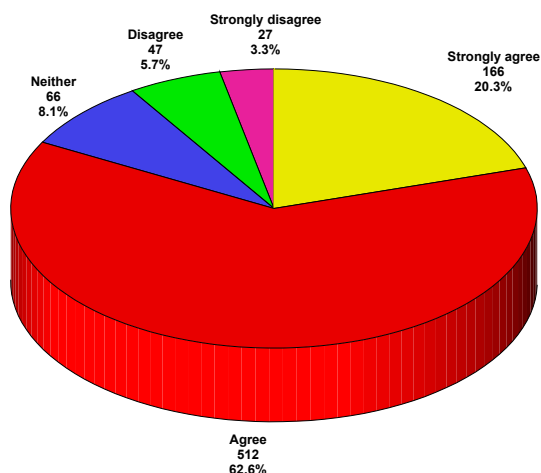
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	42%	34%	-8%
Sample Base	719	619	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.6%	+/- 3.7	
% disagree/strongly disagree	42%	48%	+6%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by 8% over a three-year period. The results suggest that this proportion has shifted directly from a positive to a negative score.

7.5 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH FACILITIES TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THE BENEFITS OFFICE - 😊

- Taking everything into account over four-fifths (82.9%) of respondents are satisfied with the ways in which they can contact the local authority benefits office, of which 20.3% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.09 out of 5.00, (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH THE WAYS IN WHICH I CAN CONTACT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE



- Male respondents tend to be more satisfied with the overall service than female respondents, 86.6% compared with 80.2%.
- Over four-fifths of respondents across all age bands are satisfied with the overall ways in which they can contact the local authority benefits office, in particular respondents aged 55-64 and 65-74, 86.2% and 89.8% respectively.
- Respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas (83.6%) are marginally more satisfied with the overall service, compared with their rural counterparts (80.3%).
- There appears to be a significant difference between respondents whose claim was successful compared with those whose claim was unsuccessful, insofar that 84.6% of respondents whose claim was successful are satisfied, compared with 58.8% of respondents whose claim was unsuccessful.

TABLE 7: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH GETTING IN TOUCH COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

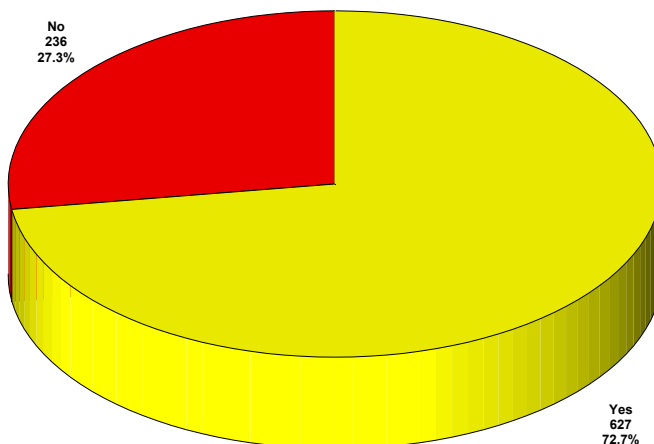
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	80%	82.9%	+2.9%
Sample Base	907	818	
Confidence Interval	+/- 2.7%	+/- 2.66%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	9%	9%	-

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 2.9% over a three-year period, with the level of overall satisfaction remaining high. The number of respondents that disagreed remained the same, indicating the shift was from a neutral to a positive score.

8.0 VISIT TO LOCAL OFFICE

- Almost three-quarters of respondents, (72.7%) visited their local office when making their most recent claim. The remaining proportion, 27.3% of respondents, made contact via other means of communication, (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: DID YOU GO TO YOUR LOCAL OFFICE WHEN YOU MADE YOUR MOST RECENT CLAIM?



- Respondents visiting the office tend to be of a younger age profile, of which 80% of those are 25-34, 73.2% of age 35-44, 79.5% of age 45-54, and 73.8% of age 55-64.
- Over two-thirds (69.9%) of respondents that have a disability, long term illness or infirmity visited their local authority benefits office. However, 30.1% didn't, which could indicate some mobility issues.
- Four fifths (80.1%) of respondents visiting their local office are from Tunbridge Wells urban areas, whereas only three fifths (59.8%) are from rural areas.
- Claims were successful for the vast majority of respondents (93.9%) of those who visited their local office when making their most recent claim.

TABLE 8: VISIT OFFICE COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

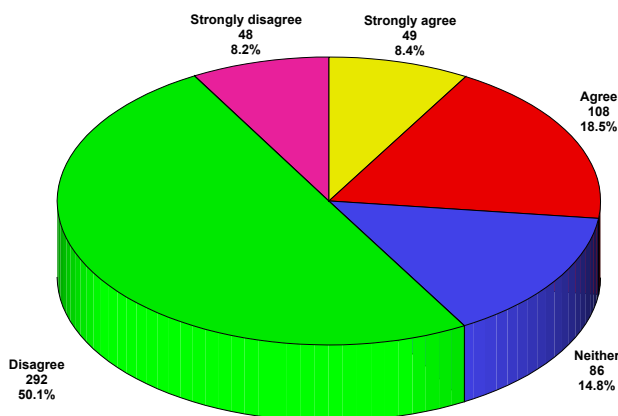
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
Yes	63%	72.7%	+9.7%
Sample	940	863	
Confidence	+/- 3.1%	+/- 3%	

- The proportion of respondents visiting their local office when making their most recent claim increased by 9.7% over a three year period.
- Respondents that did not visit their local authority benefits office when making their most recent claim (27.3% or 236 people) were not eligible to answer the next five questions and therefore have been excluded from the analysis.

8.1 WAITING TIME - Ⓢ

- Almost three fifths (58.2%) did not have to wait a long time before seeing the person they needed to, giving a mean rating of 3.31 out of 5.00, (Figure 10).
- However, just over a quarter (26.9%) appeared to have to wait a long time.

FIGURE 10: I HAD TO WAIT A LONG TIME BEFORE I SAW THE PERSON I NEEDED TO



- More respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas disagreed with the statement (61.7%) compared with their urban counterparts (57.5%). However, Tunbridge Wells urban area respondents were also likely to agree with the statement than their rural counterparts, 28.8% and 22.8% respectively.

TABLE 10: WAITING TIMES COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

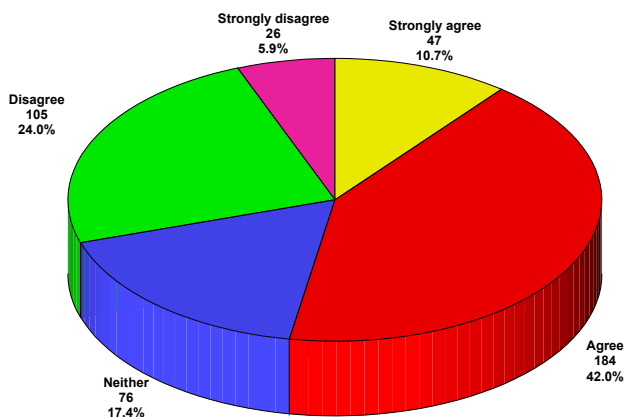
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	25%	26.9%	+1.9%
Sample Base	543	583	
Confidence Interval	+/- 4.1%	+/- 3.6%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	59%	58.2%	-0.8%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 1.9% over a three year period, with the proportion disagreeing falling by 0.8%. Nonetheless, there appears to be a shift from both a positive and neutral to a negative score.

8.2 TALK IN PRIVATE - ☺

- Just over half (52.7%) agree that they could talk with this person in a private place if they wanted to, of which 10.7% strongly agree which results in a mean rating of 2.73 out of 5.00, (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: I COULD TALK WITH THIS PERSON IN A PRIVATE PLACE IF I WANTED TO



- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas are more likely to agree that they could talk to a member of staff in a private place (56.5%) compared with respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas (51.2%).

TABLE 11: TALK IN A PRIVATE PLACE COMPARISON (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

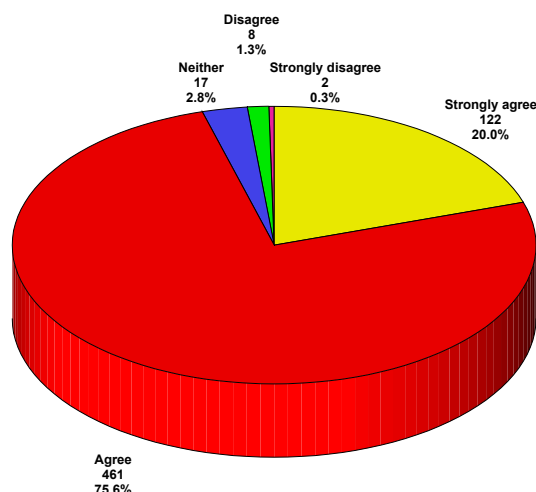
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	27%	52.7%	+25.7%
Sample Base	470	438	
Confidence Interval	+/- 4.5%	+/- 4.7%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	58%	29.8%	-28.2%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased significantly by 25.7% over a three year period from 27% on 2000/01 to 52.7% in 2003/04. This demonstrates that there are 28.2% fewer people disagreeing that this facility is not available, with a slight increase in those who were undecided (2.5%). Nonetheless, this shows a shift from negative to a positive score.

8.3 CLEAN AND TIDY - ☺

- The vast majority (95.5%) of respondents who visited their local office when making their most recent claim agreed that the local authority benefits office was clean and tidy, of which 20% strongly agreed, giving a mean rating of 1.86 out of 5.00, (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12: THE OFFICE WAS CLEAN AND TIDY



- The proportion agreeing that the offices are clean and tidy is highest amongst respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas (97.1%) compared with urban areas (94.7%).

TABLE 12: CLEAN AND TIDY COMPARISON (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

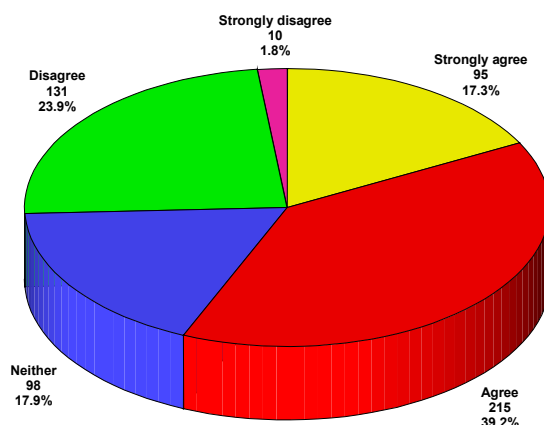
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	89%	95.5%	+6.5%
Sample Base	530	610	
Confidence Interval	+/- 2.85%	+/- 1.6%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	3%	1.6%	-1.4%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 6.5% over a three year period. Fewer respondents thought the office was untidy, with the positive shift appearing to be those that were previously undecided.

8.4 SEATING - 😊

- Almost three fifths (56.4%) of respondents agree that more seating is required in their local authority benefits office, of which 17.3% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.53 out of 5.00, (Figure 13). However, just over a quarter (25.6%) of respondents found the seating capacity adequate.
- Nonetheless seating availability is dependent upon the time of day respondents were visiting the office, and subject to the length of time taken to deal with each claimant.

FIGURE 13: MORE SEATS ARE NEEDED IN MY LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE



- More female respondents agreed that more seating is required (61.5%) compared to males (48%).
- The results demonstrate that according to respondent age profile 61.7% of those aged 16-24 agree more seating is required, along with 66.7% of those aged 65-74 and 59.6% aged over 75 years.
- Over half (51.2%) of respondents that have a disability, long term illness or infirmity agree that more seats are required in the local authority benefits office.
- More respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas tend to agree that more seating is required (58.8%) than those living in rural areas (48.3%).

TABLE 13: MORE SEATS COMPARISON (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

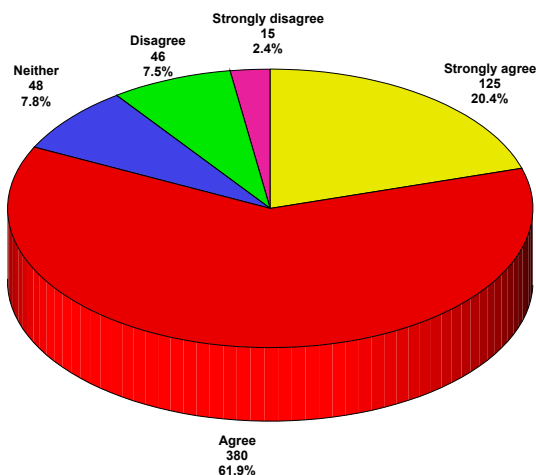
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	44%	56.4%	12.4%
Sample Base	521	549	
Confidence Interval	+/- 4.3%	+/- 4.1%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	34%	25.6%	-8.4%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 12.4% over a three-year period, with 8.4% less disagreeing on the issue that more seating is required.

8.5 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE IN THE ACTUAL OFFICE - ☺

- Over four fifths (82.1%) of respondents agree that overall they are satisfied with the experience of visiting the local authority benefits office, of which 20.3% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.09 out of 5.00. Less than one-in-ten were not satisfied, (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14: OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF VISITING THE LOCAL BENEFITS OFFICE



- Male respondents appear to be more satisfied with the overall experience of visiting the local authority benefits office (86.6%) compared with female respondents (79.1%).
- Overall satisfaction is highest amongst respondents of an older age profile, in particular those aged 45+; (45-54) 82.6%, (55-64) 86.8%, (65-74) 87.9% and those aged over 75 years 89%.
- 83.3% of respondents whose claim was successful are satisfied with the overall experience of visiting the local office. This compares with 51.3% of respondents whose claim was unsuccessful.

TABLE 14: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE IN THE ACTUAL OFFICE COMPARISON (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

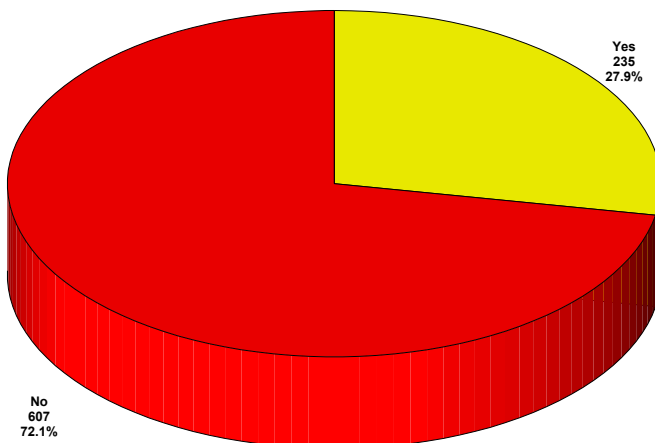
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	75%	82.1%	+7.1%
Sample Base	562	614	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.6%	+/- 3.12%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	11%	9.8%	-1.2%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 7.1% over a three-year period, with the overall level of satisfaction remaining high. 1.2% less are disagreeing.
- The next section looks at the service provided when respondents telephoned the benefits department when making their most recent claim. The analysis in this section will exclude respondents who did not telephone their local office.

9.0 TELEPHONING YOUR LOCAL OFFICE

- Less than three in ten (27.9%) telephoned the local authority benefits office when making their most recent claim. The remaining proportion (72.1%) made contact via other means of communication, (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15: DID YOU TELEPHONE YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE WHEN YOU MADE YOUR MOST RECENT CLAIM?



- Female respondents tend to telephone their local authority benefits office more so than males, 30.0% and 24.8% respectively.
- According to age profile, respondents aged 35-44 (33.6%) and 45-54 (22.1%) tend to telephone their local office.
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas are most likely to use the telephone to make contact with the benefits office (35.4%), compared with respondents in urban areas (23.6%).
- Claims were successful for the vast majority of respondents (92%) of those who telephoned their local office.

TABLE 15: TELEPHONING YOUR LOCAL OFFICE COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
Yes	40%	27.9%	-23.9%
Sample	897	842	
Confidence	+/- 3.3%	+/- 3.1%	

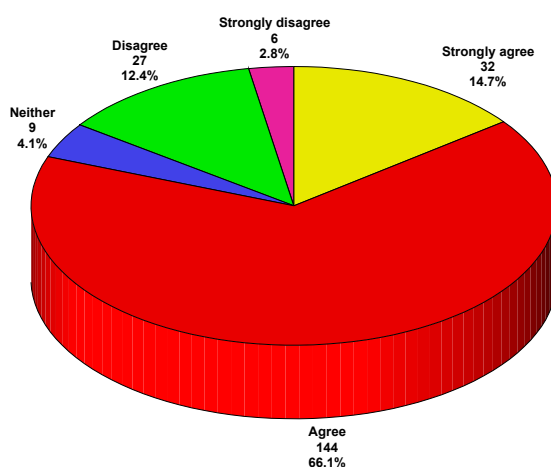
- The proportion of respondents telephoning their local office when making their most recent claim has fallen significantly from 40% in 2000/2001 down to 27.9% in 2003/2004 over a three year period.
- This could be attributable to a number of factors previously identified such as: 39% of respondents not being able to sort their claim out over the phone (pg 7). 48% of respondents not always being given a contact name (pg 8) and recognition that 52.7% are aware that facilities exist where people can talk in a private place if required here at the Town Hall (pg 12).

- Respondents that didn't telephone their local authority benefits office when making their most recent claim (72.1% or 607 people) were not eligible to answer the next five questions and therefore have been excluded from the analysis.

9.1 ANSWERING CALLS - ☺

- Just over four fifths (80.6%) of respondents agree that the telephone call they made to the local authority benefits office was answered quickly, of which 14.6% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.21 out of 5.00, (Figure 16).

FIGURE 16: THE TELEPHONE CALL I MADE TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE WAS ANSWERED QUICKLY



- Over four in five (84.2%) male respondents agree with this statement, compared to just over three quarters (78.4%) of female respondents.
- Over four fifths (84.2%) of respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas indicated their call was answered quickly, compared to 80.6% of those living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas.

TABLE 17: ANSWERING CALLS COMPARISON (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

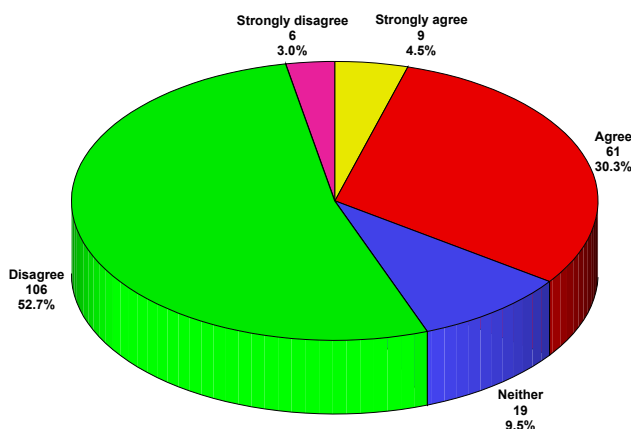
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	68%	80.6%	+12.6%
Sample Base	333	218	
Confidence Interval	+/- 5%	+/- 5.3%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	21%	15%	-6%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 12.6% over a three-year period, with 6.0% less disagreeing, indicating a shift from negative to a positive score.

9.2 TRANSFERRED BETWEEN SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS - Ⓢ

- Just over a third (34.7%) of respondents were transferred between several different people when making a call to their local benefits office.
- Almost three fifths (55.6%) of respondents were not transferred between several different people when they made a call to the local authority benefits office, giving a mean rating of 3.19 out of 5.00, (Figure 17).

FIGURE 17: WHEN I MADE A CALL TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE I WAS TRANSFERRED BETWEEN SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS



- Over three fifths (62.8%) of respondents from Tunbridge Wells rural areas disagree that they were transferred between several departments, compared with 50.4% of those living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas.

TABLE 17: TRANSFERRED BETWEEN SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

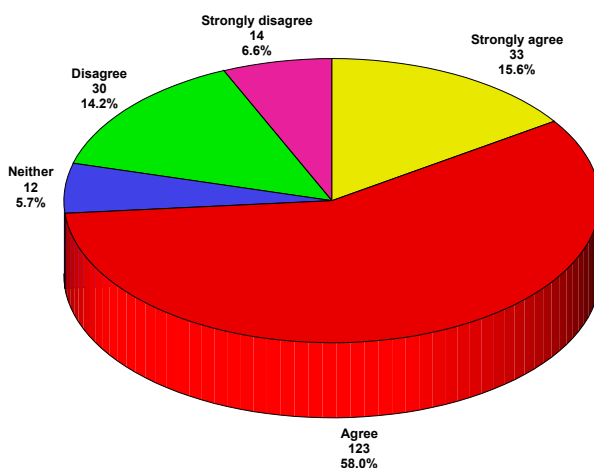
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	22%	34.7%	+12.7%
Sample Base	312	201	
Confidence Interval	+/- 4.6%	+/- 6.6%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	62%	55.6%	-6.4%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 12.7% over a three year period, with 6.4% less disagreeing, indicating a shift from a positive to a negative score.

9.3 QUERY WAS DEALT WITH SWIFTLY - 😊

- The majority, almost three-quarters (73.5%), agree that when their call was answered their query was dealt with swiftly, of which 15.5% strongly agree giving a mean rating of 2.38 out of 5.00. Just over a further fifth (20.7%) disagree, (Figure 18).

FIGURE 18: ONCE THE CALL TO MY LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE HAD BEEN ANSWERED, MY QUERY WAS DEALT WITH SWIFTLY



- Respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas are less likely to agree than their rural counterparts, 70.9% and 78.1% respectively.

TABLE 18: QUERY WAS DEALT WITH SWIFTLY COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

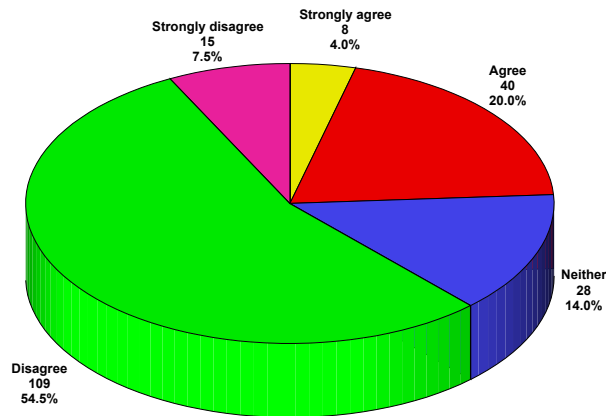
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	64%	73.5%	+9.5%
Sample Base	319	212	
Confidence Interval	+/- 5.3%	+/- 5.9%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	23%	20.7%	-2.3%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 9.5% over a three-year period, with 2.3% less disagreeing. Furthermore this indicates a shift from both a negative and neutral position to a positive score.

9.4 STAFF CONTACT - ☺

- The majority of respondents (62%) found it easy to speak to the right member of staff, giving a mean rating of 3.41 out of 5.00. 24% found it difficult to speak to the right member of staff, (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: WHEN I CALLED THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE IT WAS DIFFICULT TO SPEAK TO THE RIGHT MEMBER OF STAFF



- More male respondents disagree (69.4%), compared to 57.2% of female respondents.
- Respondents calling the offices from Tunbridge Wells rural areas were more likely than those living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas to disagree with this statement, 65.7% and 55.9% respectively.

TABLE 20: STAFF CONTACT COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

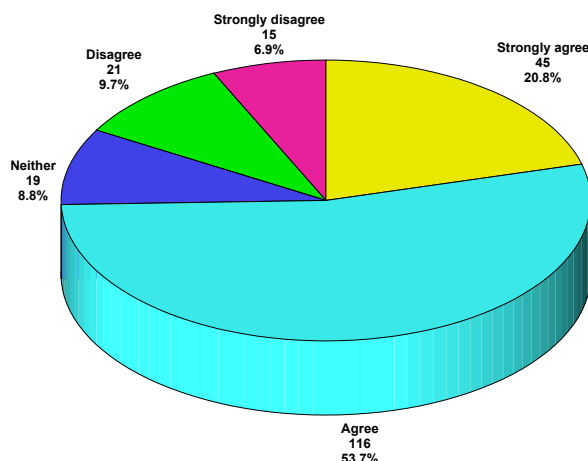
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	29%	24%	-5%
Sample Base	304	200	
Confidence Interval	+/- 5.2%	+/- 6.0%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	52%	62%	+10%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by 5% over a three year period, indicating a shift from a negative to a positive score, with 10% more disagreeing. There is further indication that 5% of respondents that were undecided three years ago are now in agreement.

9.5 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE TELEPHONE SERVICE - ☺

- Almost three quarters (74.5%) of respondents agree that overall, they are satisfied with the telephone service provided by the local authority benefits office, of which 20.8% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.28 out of 5.00, (Figure 20).

FIGURE 20: OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH THE TELEPHONE SERVICE PROVIDED BY MY LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE



- Overall satisfaction is marginally higher amongst male respondents (75.7%) compared with females (73.4%), with satisfaction highest amongst respondents aged over 75 years (84.4%), with an equal proportion of respondents aged 35-44 and 55-64 (73.3%).
- 75.7% of respondents whose claim was successful are satisfied overall with the telephone service provided. This compares with 58.8% whose claim was unsuccessful.

TABLE 20: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE TELEPHONE SERVICE COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	67%	74.5%	+7.5%
Sample Base	340	216	
Confidence Interval	+/- 5.0%	+/- 5.94%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	17%	16.6%	-0.4%

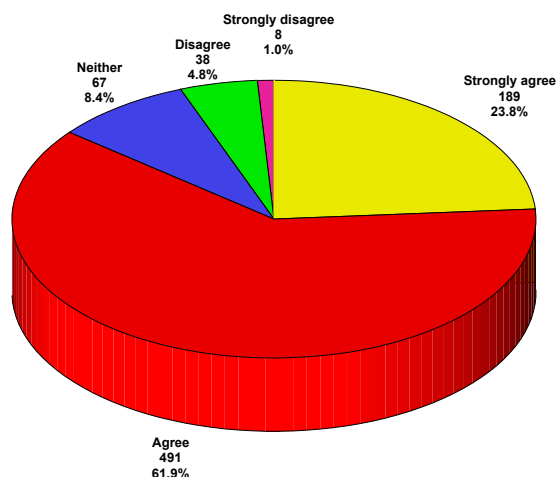
- The proportion of respondents satisfied with the overall telephone service increased by 7.5% over a three year period, with the overall level of satisfaction remaining high. With little difference in the proportion disagreeing, it is evident that the increase in those satisfied has shifted from a neutral to positive score.
- The next section looks at the service provided by the staff in the benefits department. All respondents were eligible to answer the next seven questions, therefore analysis in this section will be based on the higher sample.

10.0 THE STAFF

10.1 STAFF FRIENDLINESS - ☹

- Almost nine in ten respondents (85.7%) agree that staff in the local authority benefits office were friendly, of which 23.8% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 1.97 out of 5.00, (Figure 21).

FIGURE 21: STAFF IN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE WERE FRIENDLY



- Male respondents (88.7%) tend to agree more than females (83.7%) that staff in the local authority benefits office were friendly.
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas were most likely to say staff were friendly (86.8%) compared to respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas (82.9%).

TABLE 21: STAFF FRIENDLINESS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

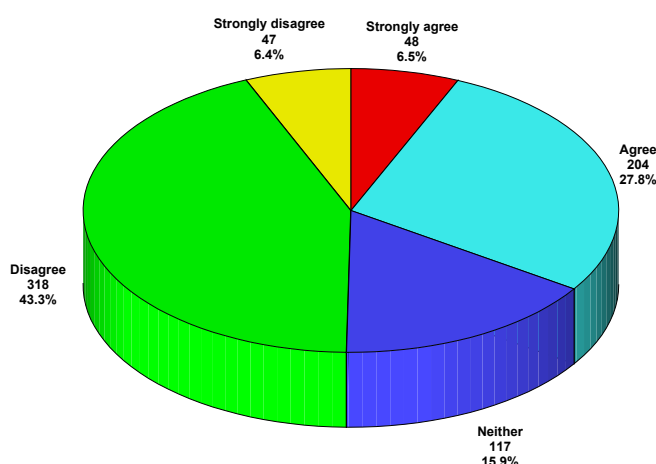
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	86%	85.7%	-0.3%
Sample Base	850	793	
Confidence Interval	+/- 2.4%	+/- 2.4%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	4%	5.7%	+1.7%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell very slightly by 0.3% over a three-year period, with 1.7% more disagreeing. It is evident that there has been a shift from the neutral to negative score, more so than to a positive one.

10.2 STAFF KNOWLEDGE - ☹

- Just under half (49.7%) had confidence in staff knowledge, giving a mean rating of 3.15 out of 5.00, (Figure 22).
- In comparison, over a third, however, agreed that they weren't always confident about the knowledge of staff (34.4%).

FIGURE 22 I WASN'T ALWAYS CONFIDENT THAT STAFF KNEW WHAT THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT



- There is little significant difference between perceptions from male and female respondents on this issue, albeit marginally more females disagree (50.6%) compared to males (48.5%).
- Just over half of respondents aged 55+ were more likely to be confident that what staff said was correct, by disagreeing on this issue. However, for those not as confident, 43.2% were aged 16-24 years.
- A third (33.3%) of respondents whose claim was successful were not always confident staff knew what they were doing, rising to almost half (49.1%) of those whose claim was unsuccessful.
- Just over half (51.5%) whose claim was successful had confidence in staff, but falling to 23.6% for those whose claim was unsuccessful.

TABLE 22: STAFF KNOWLEDGE COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

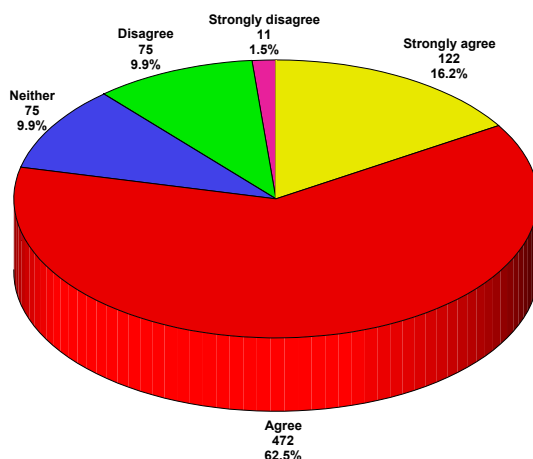
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	23%	34.4%	+11.4%
Sample Base	770	734	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3%	+/- 3.5%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	59%	49.7%	-9.3%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 7.5% over a three-year period, with 9.3% less disagreeing. It is evident that there has been a shift from a positive to negative score.

10.3 EXPLANATIONS - ☺

- Over three quarters (78.6%) of respondents agree that things were clearly explained in a way they could understand, of which 16.1% strongly agree giving a mean rating of 2.18 out of 5.00, (Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: THINGS WERE EXPLAINED CLEARLY IN A WAY I COULD UNDERSTAND



- Male respondents tend to agree more with the statement than female respondents 81.2% and 77.2% respectively.
- Respondents aged 55-64 were most likely to indicate that things were explained in a way they could understand (89.6%), followed by those aged over 75 years (84.2%) and those aged 25-34 (82.2%).
- Almost four in five (79.1%) of respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban agree with this statement, compared with three quarters (75.9%) from Tunbridge Wells rural areas.

TABLE 23: EXPLANATION COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

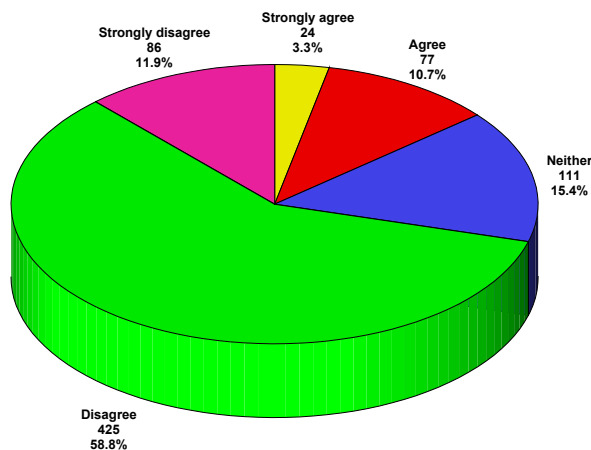
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	70%	78.6%	+8.6%
Sample Base	796	755	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.2%	+/- 2.9%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	13%	11.3%	-1.7%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 8.6% over a three year period, with 2.3% less disagreeing. It is evident that there has been more of a shift from a neutral to positive score.

10.4 ASKING QUESTIONS - ☹

- Seventy percent (70.5%) of respondents felt they could ask questions, giving a mean rating of 3.65 out of 5.00, (Figure 24).

FIGURE 24: I FELT UNABLE TO ASK THE QUESTIONS I WANTED TO



- There is little significant difference between perceptions from male and female respondents on this issue, albeit marginally more females felt able to ask questions (71.3%) compared to males (69.8%).
- Marginally more respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas (71.6%) felt able to ask questions they wanted compared with 70.1% of those living in Tunbridge Wells rural.

TABLE 24: ASKING QUESTIONS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

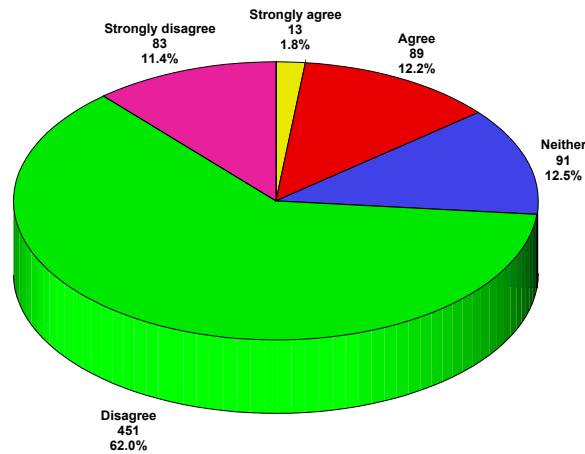
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	12%	13.9%	+1.9%
Sample Base	761	723	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.5%	+/- 2.4%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	70%	70.5%	+0.5%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 1.9% over a three-year period, with 0.5% less disagreeing. It is evident that this resembles a slight shift from a positive and neutral to a negative score.

10.5 STAFF EFFICIENCY - ☺

- Almost three quarters (73.4%) indicated staff were not always in a rush, giving a mean rating of 3.69 out of 5.00. One in seven (13.7%) felt staff were in a rush, (Figure 25).

FIGURE 25: STAFF WERE IN A RUSH



- More male respondents (76.1%) compared to females (71.3%) disagreed that staff were in a rush.
- Three quarters of those who felt staff were in a rush were living in Tunbridge Wells rural areas, (75.8%), compared to 73% of respondents from Tunbridge Wells urban areas.

TABLE 25: STAFF EFFICIENCY COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

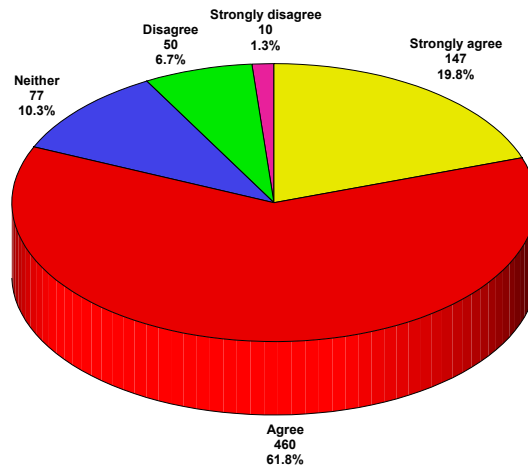
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	20%	13.9%	-6.1%
Sample Base	768	727	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.6%	+/- 2.5%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	58%	73.4%	+15.4%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by 6.1% over a three year period, with 15.4% more disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a shift from a negative and neutral to a positive score.

10.6 TREATING CUSTOMERS WITH RESPECT - ☺

- Just over four fifths (81.5%) of respondents agree that staff treated me with respect, of which 19.7% strongly agreed, giving a mean rating of 2.08 out of 5.00. Less than one in ten (8%) disagree, (Figure 26).

FIGURE 26: STAFF TREATED ME WITH RESPECT



- The proportion of respondents that agree with the statement rises to 86.7% for males, compared to 78.2% for females.

TABLE 26: TREATING CUSTOMERS WITH RESPECT COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

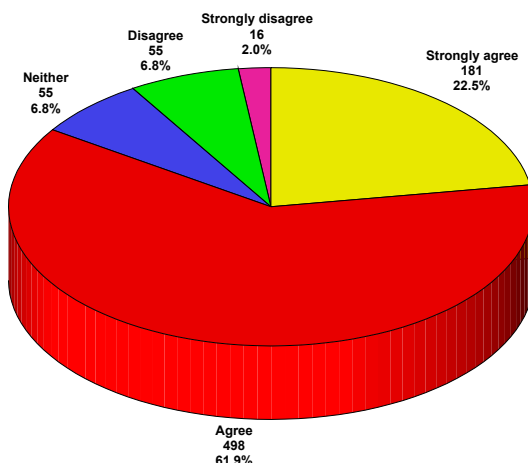
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	69%	81.5%	+12.5%
Sample Base	808	744	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.3%	+/- 2.7%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	15%	8%	-7%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 12.5% over a three year period, with 7% less disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a shift from a negative and neutral to a positive score.

10.7 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY STAFF - ☺

- Over four fifths (84.2%) of respondents agree with the statement overall I am satisfied with the service provided by the staff in my local authority benefits office, of which 22.4% strongly agree giving a mean rating of 2.03 out of 5.00. A further 8.7% disagreed.

FIGURE 27: OVERALL, I AM SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY STAFF IN MY LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE



- More male respondents than females are satisfied within staff in the benefits office, 88% compared to 82.4%.
- Over four fifths (86.8%) of respondents whose claim was successful agree with the statement. This however, compares with fewer respondents whose claim was unsuccessful with 54% agreeing.

TABLE 27: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY STAFF COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	78%	84.2%	+6.2%
Sample Base	860	805	
Confidence Interval	+/- 2.8%	+/- 2.58%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	7%	8.7%	+1.7%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 6.2% over a three year period. However, 1.7% more disagreed. It is evident from this that there is a shift from neutral to positive with a slight shift towards a negative score.

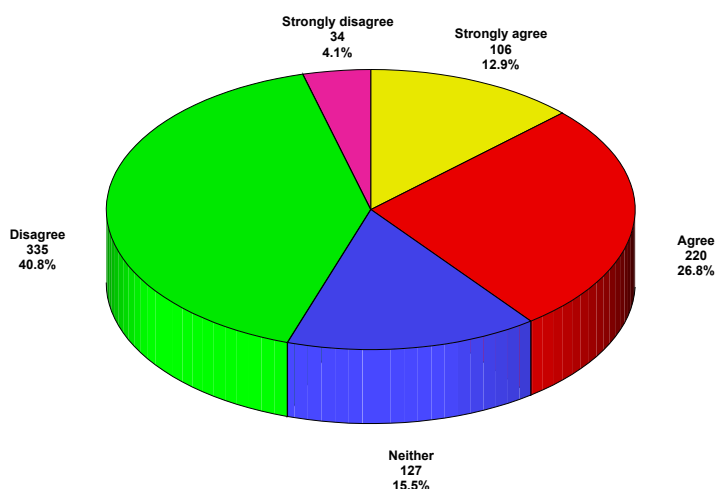
11.0 THE FORMS

- Respondents have mixed views about the forms they fill in. 5% percent represents the difference between those that find the forms easy or difficult to fill in.

11.1 COMPLETING THE FORMS - ☺

- Almost 40% agree that forms are difficult to fill in. Two in five (44.8%) disagree that the Housing/Council Tax benefits form was difficult to fill, of which 4.1% strongly disagree, giving a mean rating of 2.96 out of 5.00.

FIGURE 28: THE FORM ITSELF WAS DIFFICULT TO FILL IN



- 47% of female respondents found the form easier to fill in compared to 41.7% males. However, approximately one in six (15-16%) of both males and females were undecided with, 42% males and 37.8% females experiencing difficulties completing the form.
- Respondents of an older age profile are more likely to find the form difficult to fill in, almost half (46.4%) aged 45-54 and 44.3% aged over 75 years. Those least likely to say the form was difficult to fill in were aged 25-34 (51.7%) and those aged 55-64 (48.1%).
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas appear to find the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form easier to complete than their rural counterparts.

TABLE 28: COMPLETING THE FORMS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

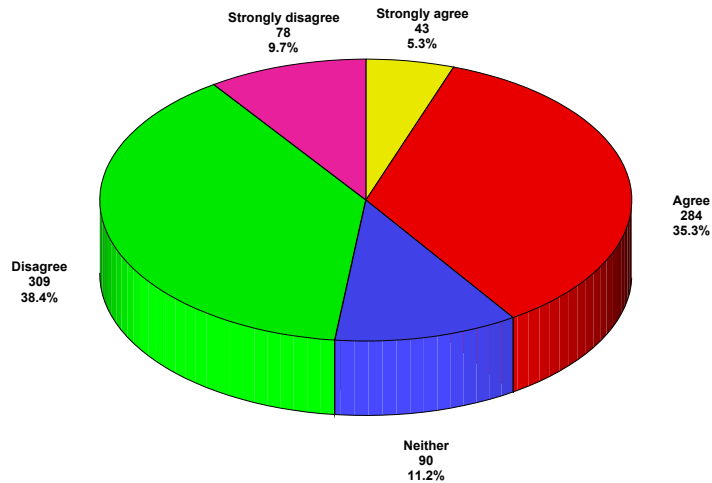
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	38%	39.5%	+1.5%
Sample Base	869	822	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.4%	+/- 3.3%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	42%	44.8%	+2.8%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 1.5% over a threeyear period, with 2.8% more disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a slight shift from both a negative and neutral to a positive score.

11.2 TIME TAKEN TO COMPLETE THE FORMS - ☹

- Two fifths (40.6%) of respondents indicated the form does not take long to complete, giving a mean rating of 3.11 out of 5.00. In contrast, however, a higher proportion, representing almost half, felt the form took a long time to complete.

FIGURE 29: IT DID NOT TAKE LONG TO FILL IN THIS FORM



- Marginally more female (41.9%) compared to male (38.8%) respondents agreed that the form does not take long to fill in.

TABLE 29: COMPLETING THE FORMS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

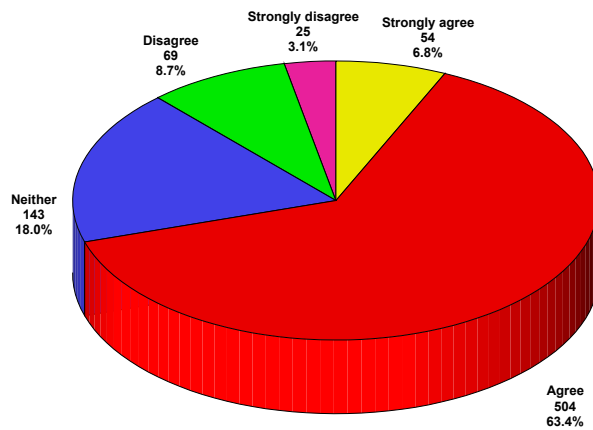
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	48%	40.6%	-7.4%
Sample Base	851	804	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.4%	+/- 3.4%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	37%	46.9%	-9.9%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by 7.4% over a three year period, with 9.9% more disagreeing. It is therefore evident from this that there is more of a shift to a negative score from positive and neutral.

11.3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION - ☺

- An encouraging proportion of over two thirds (70.2%) respondents agreed that the information that came with the form was helpful, of which 6.8% strongly agreed, giving a mean rating of 2.37 out of 5.00. Just over one in ten (11.7%) disagree with the statement.

FIGURE 30: THE INFORMATION THAT CAME WITH THE FORM WAS HELPFUL



- The proportion of respondents agreeing that the information that came with the form was helpful rises according to respondents' age profile. Two thirds (66%) are aged 16-24, rising to 79.4% of those aged over 75 years.

TABLE 30: SUPPORTING INFORMATION COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

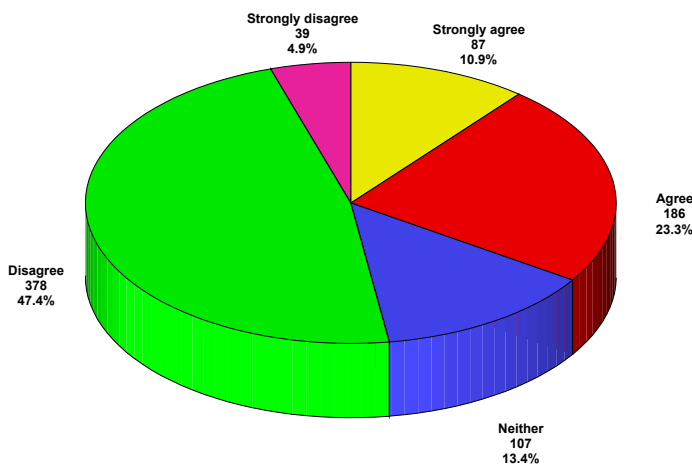
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	67%	70.2%	+3.2%
Sample Base	823	795	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.3%	+/- 3.1%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	10%	11.7%	+1.7%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 3.2% over a three-year period, with 1.7% more disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a slight shift from a negative and neutral to a positive score.

11.4 THE LETTERS - ☺

- Just over half (52.2%) of respondents indicated that the letters sent out about their claim are easy to understand, giving a mean rating of 3.12 out of 5.00.
- However, just over a third (34.1%) of respondents indicated they could not understand the information sent.

FIGURE 31: THE LETTERS SENT OUT ABOUT MY CLAIM WERE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND



- According to respondents' age profile, there appear to be slight variations insofar that respondents of a younger and older age profile tend to find the letters are easy to understand; over half aged 16-24 (54%), 25-34 (56%), 65-74 (58.9%) and over 75 years (52.8%). Therefore respondents of a middle-aged profile 35-64 tend to agree that the letters are difficult to understand.
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas (35.6%) tend to have more difficulty with understanding with the letters sent about the claim, compared to their rural counterparts (33.8%).

TABLE 31: THE LETTERS COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

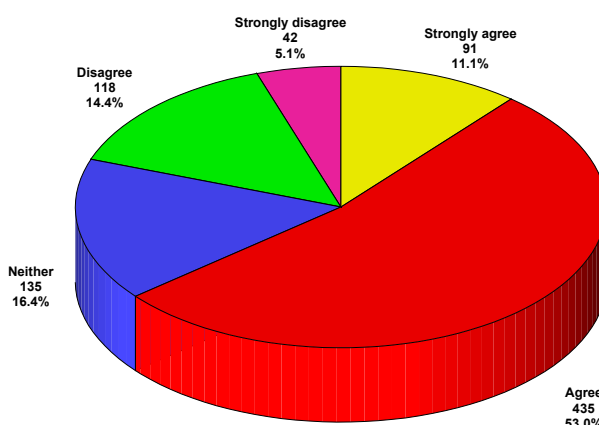
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	37%	34.1%	-2.9%
Sample Base	848	797	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.3%	+/- 3.3%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	45%	52.2%	+7.2%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement fell by 2.9% over a three-year period, with 7.2% more disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a shift from a negative and neutral to a positive score.

11.5 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE CLAIM FORM - ☺

- Almost two thirds (63.9%) of respondents are satisfied with the Housing/Council Tax Benefits claim form, of which 11.0% strongly agree, giving a mean rating of 2.49 out of 5.00, (Figure 32).
- Almost a fifth (19.4%) disagree with the statement, leaving a further 16.4% undecided.

FIGURE 32: OVERALL I AM SATISFIED WITH THE HOUSING/COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS CLAIM FORM



- More male respondents are overall satisfied with the forms than females, 66.2% compared with 62.4% respectively.
- Respondents of an older age profile; 55-64 and over 75 years are more likely to be satisfied overall with the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form (74.2%) and 73.2% respectively, than 24.5% aged 16-24 and 27.8% aged 45-54 disagreeing.
- Marginally more respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas (65.1%) compared with Tunbridge Wells rural (62.7%) are satisfied with the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form.
- Two thirds (65.9%) of respondents whose claim was successful are satisfied with the claim form. This, however, compares with fewer respondents whose claim was unsuccessful, 38% being satisfied.

TABLE 32: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE HOUSING/COUNCIL TAX BENEFITS CLAIM FORM COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

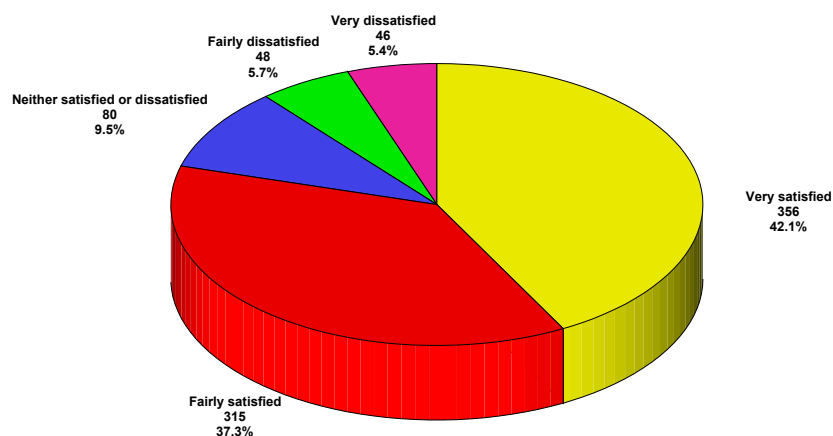
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Agree/strongly agree	58%	63.9%	+5.9%
Sample Base	880	821	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.3%	+/- 3.37%	
% disagree/strongly disagree	20%	19.4%	-0.6%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 5.9% over a three year period, with 0.6% less disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a shift from a neutral to a positive score.

12.0 OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH TIME TAKEN TO TELL WHETHER CLAIM WAS SUCCESSFUL - 😊

- Almost four fifths (79.3%) of respondents are satisfied with the amount of time taken to tell them whether their claim for Housing/Council Tax benefit was successful or not, of which 42.1% were very satisfied, giving a mean rating of 1.95 out of 5.00, (Figure 33).
- One in nine (11%) were dissatisfied, with a further one in ten (9.4%) undecided.

FIGURE 33: OVERALL I AM SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF TIME IT TOOK THEM TO TELL ME WHETHER MY CLAIM WAS SUCCESSFUL



- Female respondents tend to be more satisfied (80.7%) than males (77%).
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas tend to be more satisfied with the time taken than respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural, 81% and 76.5% respectively.
- The proportion of respondents satisfied rises to 81.5% of those whose claim was successful compared with 38.5% of those claims that weren't successful.

TABLE 33: OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE HOW QUICKLY THEIR CLAIM WAS SORTED OUT COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

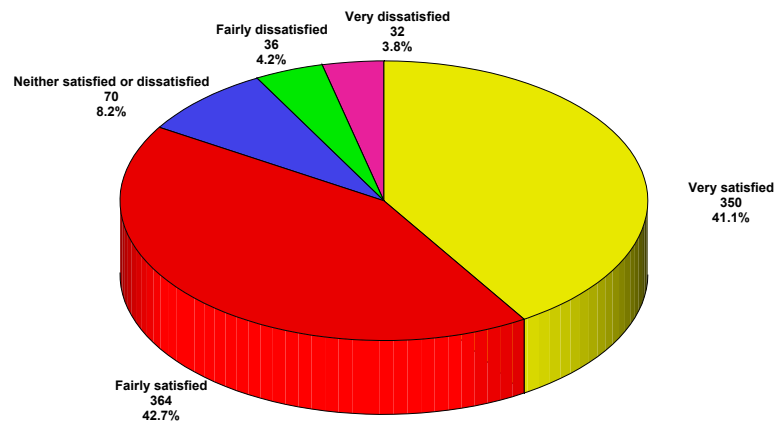
	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Satisfied/very satisfied	67%	79.3%	+12.3%
Sample Base	899	845	
Confidence Interval	+/- 3.1%	+/- 2.78%	
% Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied	23%	11%	-12%

- The proportion of respondents in agreement with the statement increased by 12.3% over a three year period, with 12% less disagreeing. It is evident from this that there is a shift from a negative to a positive score.

13.0 TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, OVERALL SATISFACTION

- Taking everything into account, over four fifths (83.7%) of respondents are satisfied with the service received from the local authority benefits office, of which 41% are very satisfied giving a mean rating of 1.86 out of 5.00, (Figure 34).
- Less than one in ten (8.2%) were undecided, with fewer (7.9%) dissatisfied.

FIGURE 34: TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE SERVICE RECEIVED FROM YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY BENEFITS OFFICE?



- Marginally more male respondents are satisfied (84.8%) than females (83.1%).
- Respondents living in Tunbridge Wells urban areas tend to be more satisfied than respondents living in Tunbridge Wells rural, 84.6% and 82.4% respectively.
- The proportion of respondents satisfied remains high for those whose claim was successful (86.9%) compared with 47.2% of those claims that weren't successful.

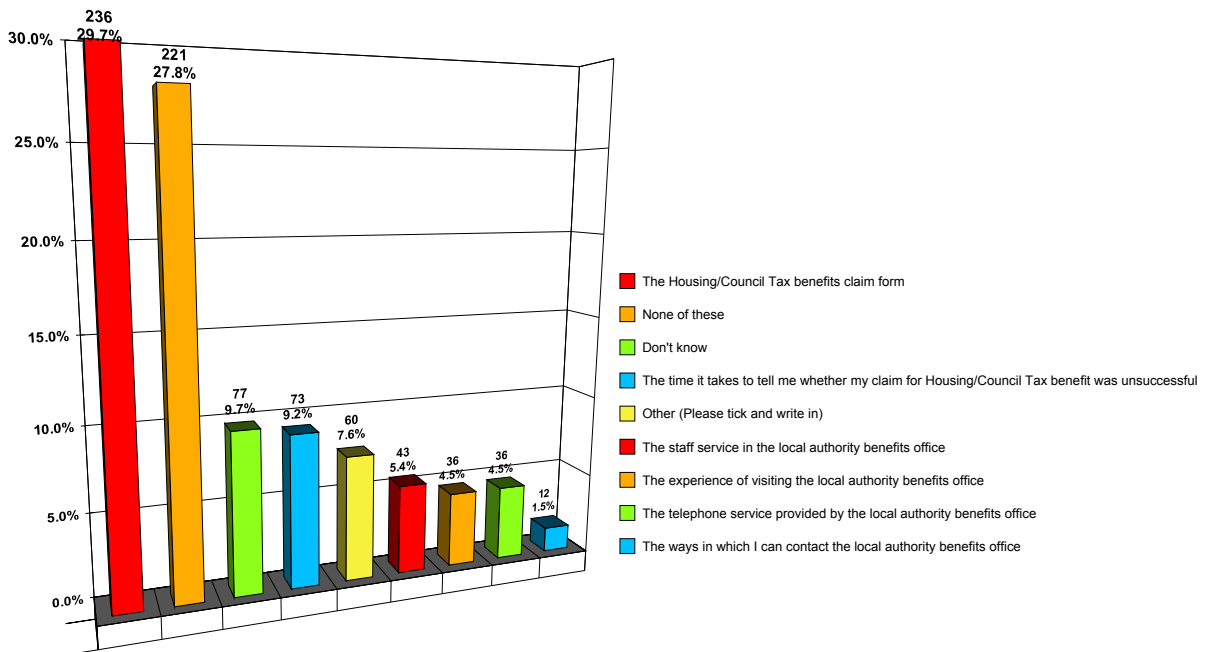
TABLE 34: TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, OVERALL SATISFACTION COMPARISONS (2000/01 WITH 2003/04)

	2000/01	2003/04	% Difference
% Satisfied/very satisfied	Not asked	83.7%	N/a
Sample Base	Not asked	852	
Confidence Interval	Not asked	+/- 2.53%	
% Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied	Not asked	7.6%	

14.0 WHAT NEEDS IMPROVING

- The final question asked on the survey was to identify from respondents which area of service, if any, needed improving. Respondents were able to select more than one option from a list. However, on collating the results, numerous respondents included more than one area of improvement and were therefore included in the analysis rather than omitted. Totals will be greater than 100%.
- The one aspect respondents indicated needed improving the most was the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form (29.7%). Second to that, 27.8% of respondents indicated nothing needed improving, followed by 9.7% who didn't know what needs improving.
- Recalculating the above proportions to exclude respondents stating nothing and don't know, the proportion of respondents indicating the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form needs improving increases significantly to 54.1%.

FIGURE 33: WHAT NEEDS IMPROVING THE MOST



- Female respondents were more likely to indicate that the Housing/Council Tax benefits claim form needed improving (30.3%), compared with males (28.8%).
- Respondents of an older age profile (55+) were least likely to mention anything specific.
- Male respondents were more likely to indicate nothing needed improving (30.7%) compared with females (25.9%), indicating males could generally be more satisfied with the services provided.

15.0 OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED

- On completion of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide any other comments regarding the service provided by the benefits staff / department. Comments received were then coded in a structure of alphabetical codes, to enable easier analysis. The table below identifies these comments ranking them in descending order.

TABLE 35: DETAILS OF OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED

Description	Number	Percent
Very good service	67	34.4%
Forms are difficult	36	18.5%
Very dissatisfied	26	13.3%
Waste of time each year, should be quicker	19	9.7%
Hard to get to offices	13	6.7%
Better customer service required	11	5.6%
Service acceptable	10	5.1%
Not enough staff on desk	8	4.1%
One person should deal with individuals	6	3.1%
Information not passed on	5	2.6%
Conflicting information / No straight information	4	2.1%
Disabled	4	2.1%
Private area / rooms	3	1.5%
Understand people as individuals	2	1.0%
Not enough help: i.e. jobs, money, checks	2	1.0%
Notify me quicker	1	0.5%
Over phone very acceptable	1	0.5%
Council Tax too high	1	0.5%
Claims take too long to be dealt with	1	0.5%
Total respondents providing comments	195	100.0%
Total number of comments	220	112.8%

- 195 respondents gave extra comments they felt relevant to the survey. As this was an open-ended question, more than one issue could be identified, therefore results are greater than 100%.
- In addition to all data presented in this report, benefit applicants remain satisfied with the service provided 34.4% stating very good service, whilst one in five (18.5%) mention the forms are difficult.

16.0 FURTHER RESEARCH

- Further research can be carried out on all data presented in this report to provide you with more detailed information, according to respondents' demographic profile, origin within the borough, and other characteristics such as ethnicity and disability/illness. It should be noted at this point that analysis by these sub groups could be less representative and not as statistically significant and therefore may not provide value, and/or require health warnings on their reported values. If this is required, please contact the Research Officer to discuss your requirements in more detail.
- Please note any additional analysis will have to be built into the work programme and may not be immediately available.
- During the Best Value Review of Revenues, small workshop/focus groups were established following the completion of an identical survey. These small groups discussed the results of the survey in more detail and were able to identify different issues related to the survey and services provided.
- Consideration should be given to formulating a new group of Council Tax, Housing Benefit Claimants to meet on a quarterly basis and discuss issues, improvements made and those planned. Research of this nature could identify and resolve:
 - Why can't people sort their claim out over the phone. What are the other barriers?
 - Why people find the forms so difficult. What are the problems and what can be done to improve them?
 - Why are the opening hours inconvenient? This could help promote other means of contact.
 - Why can't people ask questions. What are their barriers?