Brighton & Hove City Council

Customer Insight Report 2019/20

Getting things right first time, every time

Our Vision

Getting things right first time, every time

Contents

Version 1.0
22nd June 2020

Context

The purpose of this Customer Insight report is to bring together the information collected about the customer experience of using Brighton & Hove City Council services in 2019/20.

By customer we mean any user of council services, whether voluntary or involuntary. This includes residents and visitors to the city, businesses, students, service users and their representatives.

This report presents what we currently know about our customer services. Our aim is to ensure we better understand the needs of all our customers, and to learn and grow consistently from the feedback we receive, in order to improve the customer experience.

Customer Insight is one element of our Performance Management Framework that sets out how the council manages performance, to achieve our purpose as set out in the Corporate Plan.

Our Customer Promise

Our promise to you

Our vision of *Getting things right first time, every time* is the driving force behind our customer promise.

Initially developed in 2015, our promise sets out the standards and principles of how we deliver services to our customers, providing the council with a framework to monitor and measure our performance.

Our Customer Promise was recently refreshed in September 2019, to ensure that the services we deliver continue to be aligned to the needs of our customers, following engagement with customers through online and paper surveys and face to face interviews conducted in Customer Service Centres and Libraries across the city.

Customers were asked to identify what they valued most when interacting with council services from the below options:

1. That you receive quick responses but may not get all the information straight away
2. That you receive the right information first time, even if it takes longer to respond
3. That information is clear and easy to understand
4. That the council is open about what it can and can't deliver
5. That council services are easy to understand and clear to reach for everyone
6. That you are given all options and are involved in decisions that affect you
7. That the council is friendly, respectful and understanding

Of those engaged:

➢ 35% indicated they would rather receive the correct information first time, even if it takes longer
➢ 21% identified responsive communication as their priority
➢ 12% stated that information being clear and easy to understand was most important to them

Of those surveyed:

➢ 65% indicated they would prefer to communicate through digital channels (email 44%, website 18%, and social media 3%)
➢ 30% indicated they would prefer to communicate over the phone, 20%, or in person, 10%.
➢ 4% indicated they would prefer to communicate via post

In addition to the above information, we have reviewed feedback on our customer promise, provided by customers as part of the recent engagement, online customer satisfaction survey responses, customer complaints and compliments.

Our Customer Promise has been jointly developed, from these priorities, in collaboration with representatives from front line services.

The standards and principles within the promise do not only apply to staff who work directly with customers, but all staff who work for the council, including those in support services such as Human resources, IT & Digital, Finance, Business Operations, Health & Safety. This ensures a consistency of approach and provides staff who do deal directly with customers the appropriate infrastructure, tools and support to deliver the best customer experience.

Our Customer Experience Vision describes how we intend to deliver on the Customer Promise and has been similarly refreshed following customer feedback. These two documents are at the heart of our Customer Experience Strategy that was approved at the Policy & Resources Committee in December 2019.

Our customer promise to you

Brighton & Hove City Council

We will make it clear how you can contact or access our services

- Communicate with you online (email/website/social media) where possible and appropriate. This is often quicker and more convenient for you

- If you have specific access needs, work with you to find the best way to get the help you need

- Ensure our services are inclusive and responsive to your needs

We will be clear and treat you with respect

- Be honest and easy to understand in all our communication with you

- Keep your personal data secure

- Work together with other services across the council and city to meet your needs and make it easier for you to get the help you need

We will understand and get things done

- Aim to answer your query at first point of contact. When we can't do this, tell you clearly what will happen next so you know what to expect

- Make sure our staff have the skills, behaviours and tools to deliver the service you need

- Keep you informed with up to date information about the services you use

You can help us to keep our promise by

- Treating us, and other customers, with respect

- Letting us know if you have any specific needs

- Giving us all the information we require to help us meet your needs

- Giving us feedback on our service so we can learn and improve

Please tell us how we are doing

- We welcome all feedback, including when things don't go right. We are committed to using this information to improve our services

- Please tell us how satisfied you are with our service, this short survey should take you about two minutes

- If you would like to provide a detailed compliment or complaint please contact the Customer Feedback team

Checking our performance against this promise

- We check our performance through monitoring:
  -customer satisfaction and ease of access
  -compliments and complaints
  -information about how our customers contact us
  -survey of Brighton & Hove residents and service users

- The results will be published through our Customer Insight Report annually

Different ways to contact us

Brighton & Hove City Council

Website

We will:

- aim to have the council website available for 24 hours a day all year round
- continually improve our online services to meet your needs
- ensure our online services are accessible and simple to use
- let you know about other ways of contacting us

Written communication

We will:

- ensure all service email addresses have an 'automatic reply' which clearly explains what will happen next
- aim to keep average response times within 10 working days. At busier times, we will aim to let you know how long you may have to wait
- let you know about other ways of contacting us

Telephones

We will:

- aim to keep average waiting times under 10 minutes. At busier times, we will aim to let you know how long you may have to wait
- update voicemails and telephone messages regularly to hold accurate information
- aim to respond to voicemails within one working day
- let you know about other ways of contacting u

Face to face

We will:

- make sure our customer service buildings are welcoming, safe, fully accessible and designed to make it easy to get the help you need
- aim to greet you within five minutes of arrival and see you on average within 20 minutes. At busier times, we will aim to let you know how long you may have to wait
- let you know about other ways of contacting us

Social media

We will:

- be clear how we will respond to any queries received
- share relevant information and keep this up to date
- let you know about other ways of contacting us

We have listened to our customers and updated this promise using their suggestions and priorities.

September 2019

Our Customer Experience Vision:
Getting things right first time, every time

Efficiency

Services are available online, where possible and are easy to find

Council Information systems are joined up appropriately to make it easier for customers

It is clear to customers what the best way of contacting the council is, based on what they need

Staff are skilled and confident in delivering customer service, including being able to resolve customer dissatisfaction quickly and fairly

The Customer Promise is checked regularly to make sure it includes what is important for customers

All services are delivered to the standards set in the Customer Promise

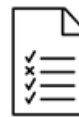Customers are confident that all services keep the Customer Promise

All services engage with everyone who may be affected before making changes

Improvements

Improving the customer experience is the top priority in everyone's day to day role

Customers are asked what they think about the services they receive and their feedback is acted upon

The council uses data and information to plan service improvements

Services work together for the benefit of the customer

Council Resources are used to meet customer needs through all contact methods

All services support each other positively to fulfil the Customer Promise

All staff are able to offer basic advice, support or signposting to other council services and external support

The council works with other public or private services, charities and community groups to resolve issues together
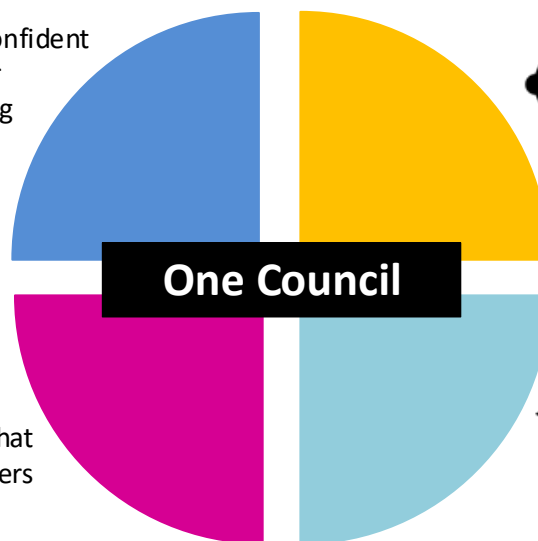
One Council

Consistency

Resilience

Customer Satisfaction: Results Summary

Customer Satisfaction: How was the standard of customer service you received from the council team or service?

Overall Satisfaction **65%**

Legend:
- 2019/2020 Results
- Overall Satisfaction level
- 2018/2019 Results

Service Accessibility: How easy or difficult was it for you to access or use the council service or team?
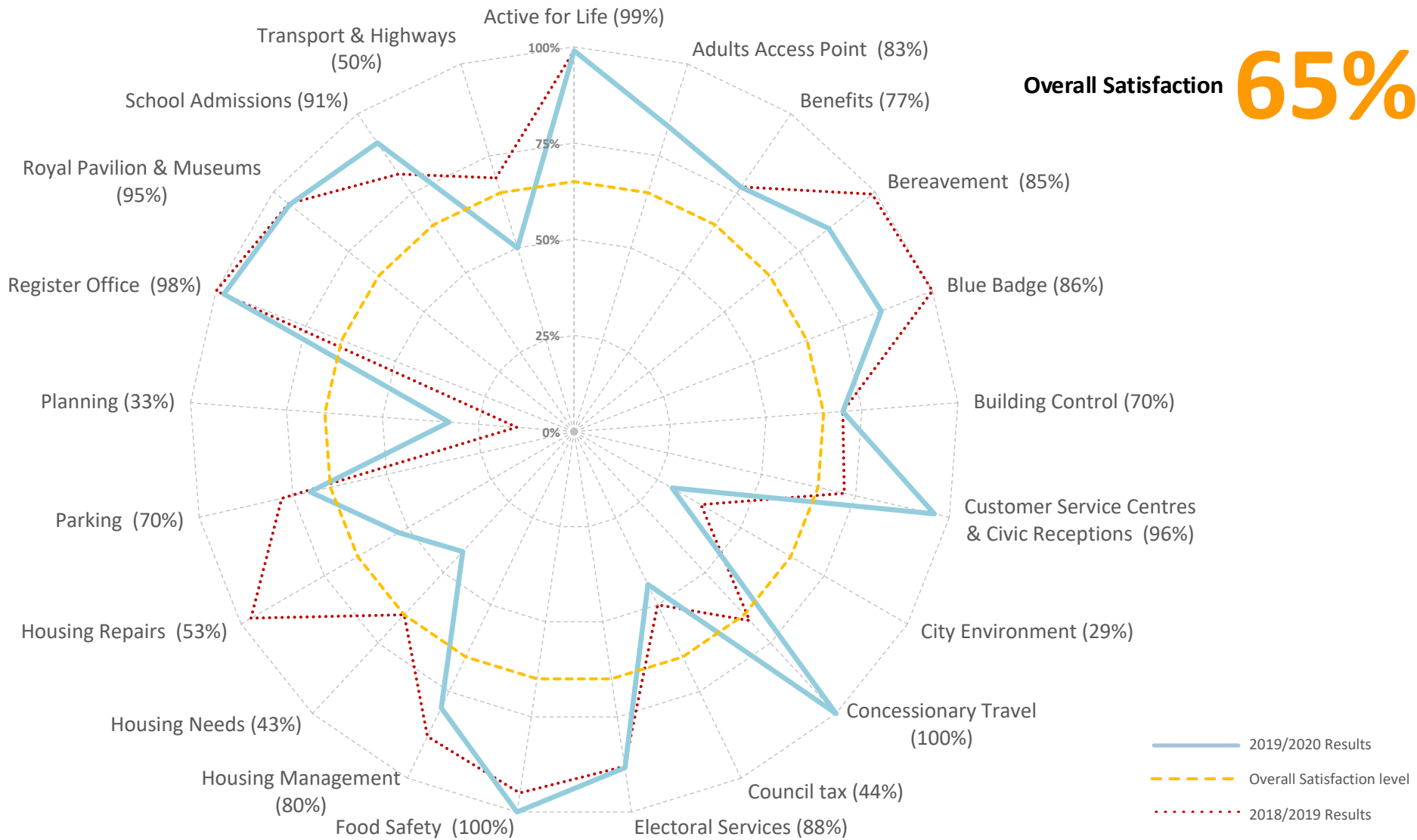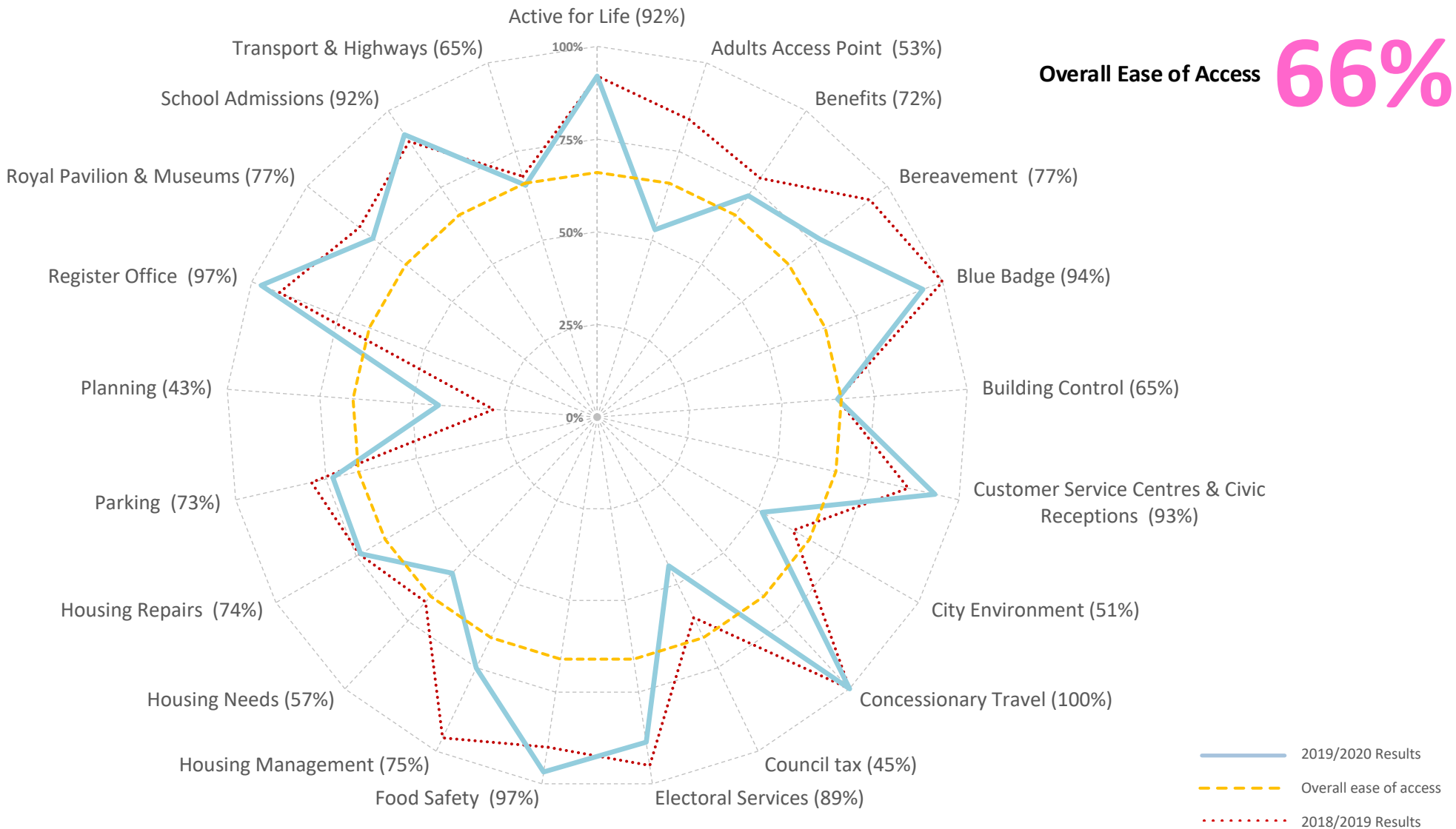
Overall Ease of Access 66%

- Active for Life (92%)
- Adults Access Point (53%)
- Benefits (72%)
- Bereavement (77%)
- Blue Badge (94%)
- Building Control (65%)
- Customer Service Centres & Civic Receptions (93%)
- City Environment (51%)
- Concessionary Travel (100%)
- Council tax (45%)
- Electoral Services (89%)
- Food Safety (97%)
- Housing Management (75%)
- Housing Needs (57%)
- Housing Repairs (74%)
- Parking (73%)
- Planning (43%)
- Register Office (97%)
- Royal Pavilion & Museums (77%)
- School Admissions (92%)
- Transport & Highways (65%)

Legend:
- 2019/2020 Results
- Overall ease of access
- 2018/2019 Results

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Results have been taken from the corporate Customer Experience Survey (from 2,556 respondents) carried out in December 2019 and January 2020 and combined, where possible, with surveys carried out by services or associated partners. Results are only included where a significant number of responses were returned to provide a confident score. Due to the varying methodologies used in collecting and compiling data, results shown can only be considered indicative of customer experience.

Planned Service Improvements

Access Point
- New service design places a greater focus on resolving customer needs at first point of contact
- Developing new tools focusing on prevention and early intervention aimed at making it easier and more intuitive for customers to find the support they need
- Working collaboratively with organisations across the city to provide more joined up approach to meeting customer needs and improving their overall experience

City Environmental Management
- Investment in technology to improve information flow, providing real-time feedback and a more responsive service to customers
- A fleet replacement programme to reduce service disruption due to vehicle breakdowns and associated issues
- A review of all rounds to provide a more efficient service delivery and increase recycling rates

Housing Needs
- Greater focus on prevention, intervention and sustainment through the adoption of the new Homelessness & Rough Sleepers Strategy
- Working collaboratively with community organisations and people with lived experience of homelessness to form the Homeless Operational Board
- Improved accessibility through the implementation of a Trauma Informed Approach to service delivery and development digital systems

Parking
- Improving accessibility to Parking Permit scheme information through an interactive map-based programme
- Integrating with MyAccount and the Customer Index to provide an intuitive and streamlined application process for customers
- Adopting the Contact Management System will provide enhanced control and efficiencies to customer contact
- Established a customer experience working group for Parking & Transport focusing on making improvements to the services directly for the benefit of customers

Planning

- Improved process for collecting customer feedback allowing more detailed analysis and focused insights that target specific areas of the planning service
- Increased management and monitoring of customer contact to ensure service delivery aligns with the standards set out in our policy and provide a more responsive service
- Working collaboratively with the Planning Agents Forum to address issues faced by Planning Agents using the service

Revenues & Benefits

- Further integration with MyAccount and Customer Index to streamline the digital customer journey
- Enhanced support for customers on self-service through MyAccount
- Exploring new contact models to enable easier access and more efficient transactions

Transport

- Reviewing the usability and accessibility of Transport & Parking Services through the council website with a focus on resolving customer needs
- Implementing a single point of contact for customers further enhancing access to the service and removing the requirement for customers to know who they need to contact
- Established a customer experience working group for Parking & Transport focusing on making improvements to the services directly for the benefit of customers

Customer Feedback: Data Summary

Complaints

9% reduction **in Stage 1 complaints**

1,588 Stage 1 complaints were received in 2019/20 compared to 1,740 received in 2018/19

Services with the highest reduction in complaints:

Children's Safeguarding & Care received **52%** (14) fewer complaints

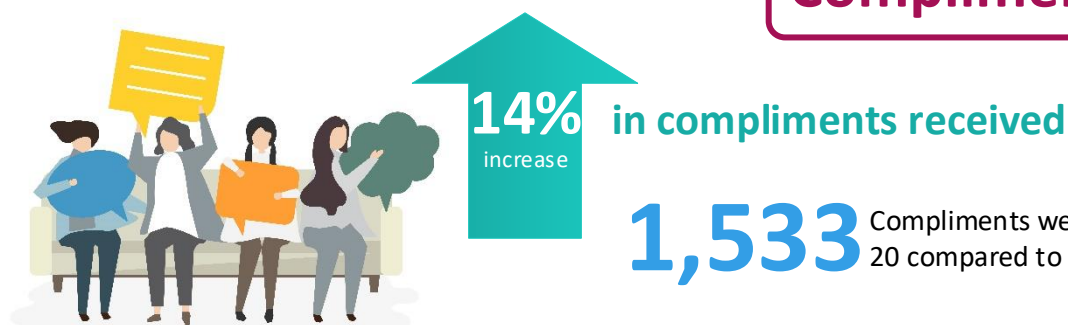City Transport received **31%** (187) fewer complaints

Services who received the most complaints:

City Environment account for **32%** of all complaints (509)

Housing Property & Investment (including Repairs) account for **19%** of all complaints (302)

Parking Services received **9%** of all complaints (139)

Compliments

14% increase **in compliments received**

1,533 Compliments were received in 2019/20 compared to 1,345 in 2018/19

Services with the largest increase in compliments:

Education & Skills received **115%** (75) more compliments

City Development & Regeneration received **115%** (31) more compliments

Services who received fewer compliments:

Housing Property & Investment (including Repairs) saw a reduction in compliments of **40%** (142)

Revenues & Benefits received **17%** (9) fewer compliments

Complaints by service can be seen in the appendices.

Complaint Handling

0.3% decrease

Escalation of complaints from Stage 1 to Stage 2 decreased from 10.8% in 2018/19 to **10.5%** in 2019/20

An improvement of 0.3% (4 complaints)

167 complaints were escalated to Stage 2

25.3% of Stage 2 complaints were upheld
An improvement of 0.6% when compared to 2018/19

3% decrease

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman upheld **54%** of complaints about Brighton & Hove City Council escalated to them in 2019/20, compared to 57% in 2018/19. An improvement of 3%

Similar authorities averaged 55% of complaints upheld by the ombudsman.

6% increase

4% reduction

The number of Stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days has increased, going from 63% in 2018/19 to **69%** in 2019/20
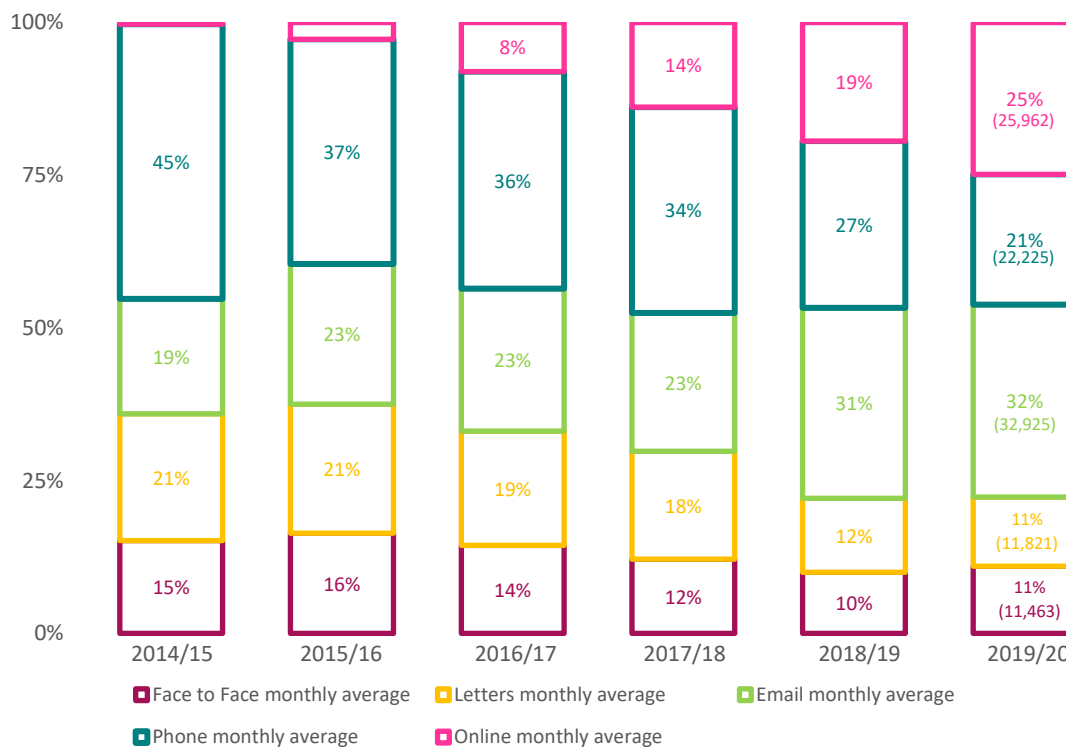An improvement of 6% (1096/1588)

The number of Stage 2 complaints responded to within 20 working days has reduced, going from 78% in 2018/19 to **74%** in 2019/20
A decline of 4% (124/167)

Stage 1 complaints are responded to within **9 working days** on average

Percentage of contact by channel
(*Based on the average contact per month for high volume services*)

Year	Online	Phone	Email	Letters	Face to Face
2014/15		45%	19%	21%	15%
2015/16		37%	23%	21%	16%
2016/17	8%	36%	23%	19%	14%
2017/18	14%	34%	23%	18%	12%
2018/19	19%	27%	31%	12%	10%
2019/20	25% (25,962)	21% (22,225)	32% (32,925)	11% (11,821)	11% (11,463)

■ Face to Face monthly average   ■ Letters monthly average   ■ Email monthly average
■ Phone monthly average   ■ Online monthly average

The chart above illustrates the continued trend of telephone contact reducing and digital contact channels increasing correspondingly. Each contact channel is shown as a proportion of the total contact volume for the respective year. Face to face and postal methods of contact have stabilised over the past 3 years.

Contact by channel: Data Summary

Online Forms

311,547 Online forms received in 2019/20

Council Tax account for **41%** of forms received with **127,104**

25% increase in online forms submitted

An average of **25,962** online forms per month

266,698 Phone calls received in 2019/20

Phone contact

11% reduction in calls received

Housing Benefits **27%** (12,368 calls) and Council Tax **18%** (14,845 calls) saw the highest proportional reduction in calls

The council received **22,225** phone calls on average per month

The average speed of answer in 2019/20 was **4 minutes, 35 seconds**

This is 3% (8 seconds) slower than 2018/19

Email contact

Approximately **395,925** emails were received in 2019/20

Email contact has decreased by **1%**

Housing Benefits **57%** (3,266 emails) and Access Points **22%** (703 emails) saw the highest proportional reduction in calls

Council Tax received the highest volume of emails with approximately **8,400** per month

With the exception of Council Tax and Housing Needs Assessments, high volume transactional services responded to the majority of emails **within 10 working days** , meeting the Customer Promise

Face to Face contact

139,000 Customers visited a council building in 2019/20

At **9,700** August saw the highest number of customers visit our Customer Service Centres

On average **11,600** customers visited council buildings per month

8% increase in visitors to council buildings

Website

Over 11 million unique page views

Accessed by **3.4 million** people over the past year

Top pages:

Check your bin and box collection days **236,537** views

Council Tax **175,626** views

Parking and Travel **133,106** views

Post

Approximately **141,800** pieces of post per month

Housing Benefits account for **65%** of all post

An average of **11,400** pieces of post received per month

9% reduction in post received

More information and analysis on customer contact can be found in the appendices.

Priority areas for focus

Whilst the data in this report reflects the experience and interactions of those who have contacted or used Brighton & Hove City Council services in the 2019/20 financial year, our future recommendations and plans take account of the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and learn from the experiences.

Within the considerable challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, there are also significant opportunities to make tangible improvements in the way that we deliver services.

Strengthen infrastructure

One of the most significant barriers to service continuity throughout the Covid-19 pandemic has been the inflexibility of the infrastructure and tools required to maintain customer service delivery (e.g. the telephone system which public phone lines rely on). Whilst services have found innovative ways to maintain essential customer contact channels, this has been challenging and resource intensive. Future consideration of available system upgrades should take account of the less tangible costs of failing to provide business continuity and the resource cost of finding and maintaining workarounds, where systems are inadequately flexible or no longer fit for purpose.

➤ Teams and services will need to be supported and monitored to ensure that there is a priority focus on customer service delivery within Business Continuity Plans, and that each service plan is joined up and considered as part of a whole council plan for customer contact in the event of any incident. Any identification of likely service failure due to inadequate infrastructure in any potential scenario will be highlighted and escalated for that risk to be either mitigated or accepted by the organisation.

➤ Implement system changes and upgrades, prioritising communication systems, to ensure teams can continue to offer a consistent standard of customer service, regardless of location or service delivery model.

Deliver services differently

The council's capacity to respond to the challenge of providing uninterrupted services during the Covid-19 pandemic identified areas of improvement, specifically our capability to deliver consistently high-quality services during a period of rapid change. We must continue to challenge ourselves to think about and do things differently, to have greater accountability to our customers and to be responsive to our customers' requests and needs. To enable this there needs to be clear oversight, control and understanding of service provision at a corporate level and concerted, consistent efforts to realise the investment in and benefits of digital tools and infrastructure, such as the customer index.

➤ Services to work closely with the Customer Experience Steering Group, which includes Digital Customer programme, on analysis of service delivery during Covid-19 – identifying simple transactions which could not be delivered without physical interaction or could only be delivered in a disproportionately resource intensive way, e.g. physical parking permits. Work with those teams and services to explore alternatives, or to implement safety measures should alternatives not be possible, for example the physical exchange of keys between tenants and housing teams.

- Teams and services will be supported and monitored to ensure they fully engage with the Digital Customer programme to ensure that their customers benefit from the capabilities that the technology has created, such as being able to anticipate and proactively respond to customer needs through joined up data sets – identifying customers who will be affected by a planned change to service delivery and contacting them directly in advance of that change.

- Build on the collaborative city and community foundations created during the Covid-19 lockdown period (joint working, shared systems, shared responsibility for delivery) by increasing joint working with charities and other third sector partners, through direct referral routes and shared services where appropriate.

Rebuild a better customer experience

A frequent theme in the customer feedback is frustration at the slow (or even non-existent) responses that customers receive to email contact from many teams or services within the council. Email is now the most used channel for residents to contact the council. The limitations of the current systems for managing and responding to email contact means that there is no consistent accountability or systematic method for ensuring that all email requests receive a timely, comprehensive response from the correct teams or services.

- Investigate further development of the contact management system (as used by the new Community Hub and PPE distribution services) to ensure accountability, responsiveness, consistency and flexibility in service delivery. New services providing support to residents and businesses because of the Covid-19 pandemic have been using a newly developed contact management system, which has facility to provide this management and oversight. This, or equivalent systems should be scoped and implemented across any council service which doesn't have an existing contact management tool, to improve the customer experience and reduce failure demand and repeat contact.

Contact Us

We welcome any suggestions, questions or other feedback about this report, please contact:
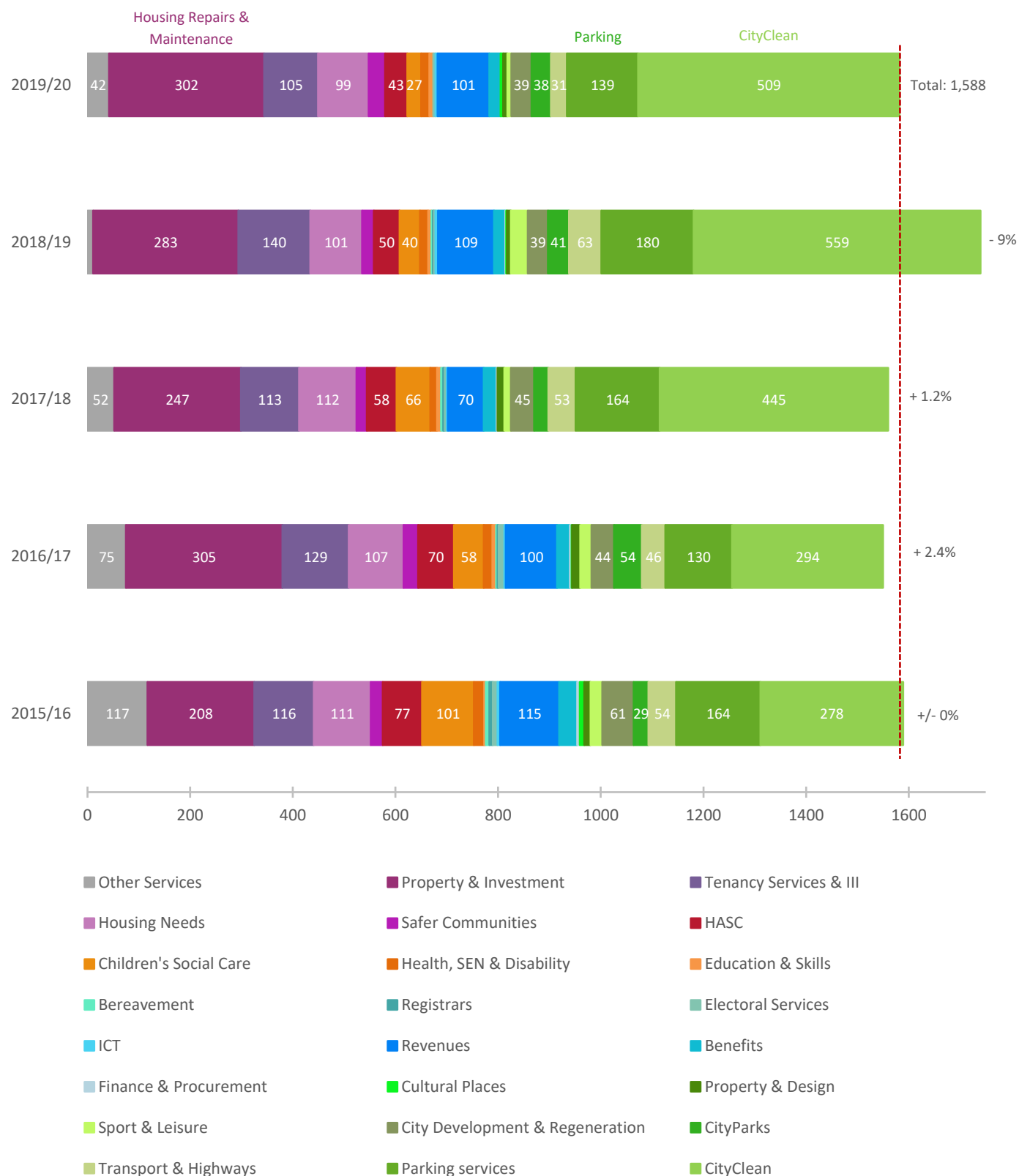
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Appendices

Stage 1 Complaints by Service

Year	Housing Repairs & Maintenance	Parking	CityClean	

2019/20 — 42, 302, 105, 99, 43, 27, 101, 39, 38, 31, 139 (Parking), 509 (CityClean) — Total: 1,588

2018/19 — 283, 140, 101, 50, 40, 109, 39, 41, 63, 180, 559 — − 9%

2017/18 — 52, 247, 113, 112, 58, 66, 70, 45, 53, 164, 445 — + 1.2%

2016/17 — 75, 305, 129, 107, 70, 58, 100, 44, 54, 46, 130, 294 — + 2.4%

2015/16 — 117, 208, 116, 111, 77, 101, 115, 61, 29, 54, 164, 278 — +/- 0%

Axis: 0 200 400 600 800 1000 1200 1400 1600

Legend

- ■ Other Services
- ■ Property & Investment
- ■ Tenancy Services & III
- ■ Housing Needs
- ■ Safer Communities
- ■ HASC
- ■ Children's Social Care
- ■ Health, SEN & Disability
- ■ Education & Skills
- ■ Bereavement
- ■ Registrars
- ■ Electoral Services
- ■ ICT
- ■ Revenues
- ■ Benefits
- ■ Finance & Procurement
- ■ Cultural Places
- ■ Property & Design
- ■ Sport & Leisure
- ■ City Development & Regeneration
- ■ CityParks
- ■ Transport & Highways
- ■ Parking services
- ■ CityClean

The chart above illustrates the number of stage 1 complaints received by services over the past five years, with the percentage difference indicated showing each year's figures in comparison to 2019/20.

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Learning from feedback

We receive feedback from customers in a variety of ways, such as comments on surveys, compliments and complaints. To improve the experience of our customers, it is essential that we are proactive in understanding and acting on this feedback.

To make sure that all staff are aware of what is important to customers, and the ways in which we can improve our service delivery, we create a monthly summary of information relating to customer contact referred to as the Customer Insight dashboard. This dashboard is shared across the organisation.
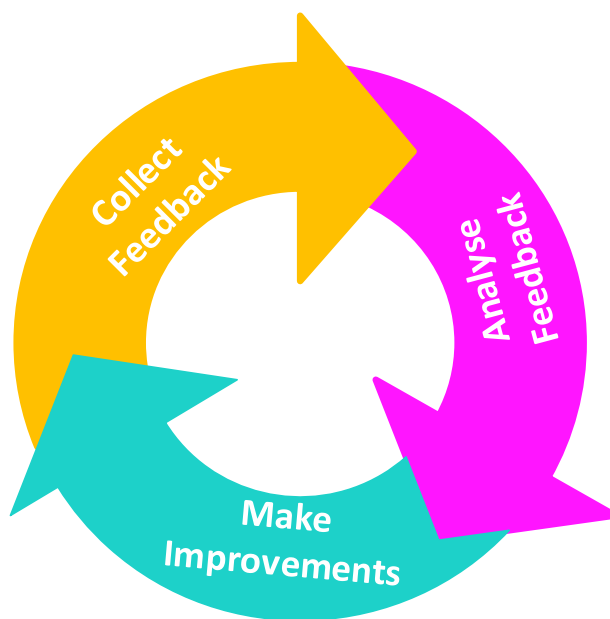
Key learning themes

➤ Ensure good practice in all correspondence; for example, send clear, timely responses that set appropriate expectations for the customer.

➤ Delivering joined up services for the benefit of the customer, particularly when dealing with customer contact.

➤ Being clear and easy to access; for example, keeping our webpages concise and up to date, or ensuring all correspondence includes accurate contact information for the service.

➤ Aim to resolve all matters raised during customer contact, rather than rushing to pick up the next enquiry, and so the customer doesn't need to make multiple contacts with the council.

➤ Implementing controlled and structured customer contact and communications channel to ensure consistency in experience and enable improved management capabilities.

➤ Do as we say by delivering what has been promised; for example, providing services to published service level agreements or contacting a customer at the time agreed, even if you don't have any new information for them.

➤ Understanding the wider impact of our work; for example, if you are unable to do something as agreed, make sure anyone who may be affected is informed, such as other service teams, customers or other professionals.

➤ Be proactive in providing services to customers; for example, if we have data that suggests a service improvement act upon it or when things go wrong tell affected parties what has happened as soon as possible, and what will be done to put it right and keep them informed throughout.

➤ Share data appropriately for the benefit of the customer and the city; for example, sharing identity verification with other services so the customer only has to provide it once.

How will we know we're improving?

To track our progress in improving the experience of interacting with the council for customers, we will use multiple sources of data and information, to assess whether things are improving.

Listening to our customers

The most important way for us to know that the work we are doing is making things better for customers, is to listen to the customers themselves. We will ask for, analyse and make recommendations from various sources of customer feedback, including:

- Results from the City Tracker annual survey, which measures resident satisfaction levels, these can be benchmarked against national results, through the Local Government Association's Resident survey
- Service specific satisfaction surveys
- Service user evaluation forms, some services which have a more intensive or complex relationship with their customers such as youth services and the Integrated Team for Families, ask for detailed feedback at the end of each intervention or interaction.
- Using complaints information

Listening to our staff

Our staff have a keen sense of what is and isn't working for our customers, so their feedback is an important part of measuring our improvements. We will regularly collect staff feedback in these, amongst other ways.

- Feedback from the Customer Experience Ambassador network
- Annual Internal customer satisfaction survey
- Annual staff survey

Listening to our councillors

The city's elected representatives are often made aware of issues that are important to their ward residents. A new case management system is being introduced to improve the way in which councillors can get assistance for their residents from the council. The system will provide an enhanced ability to identify themes or trends in these enquiries, both at ward level and city-wide, and enable us to identify areas of improvement which can be shared across the organisation as appropriate.

Making good use of our data

In the course of conducting our business, we gather a lot of data about our customer transactions and contact, in order to make best use of this data we will regularly measure and analyse metrics which relate to customer contact. These include:

- Volumes of complaints and compliments and analysis of themes and trends
- Phone, email and complaint response times - through the monthly dashboard
- Contact volumes by channel of communication – through the annual Customer insight report
- Customer journey mapping (both ideal states and current experiences)

Contact Data Analysis

Overall, customer contact increased by 1.8%, going from 1,231,134 contacts in 2018/19 to 1,225,750 in 2019/20. Email is the most frequently used contact channel, accounting for 32% (395,925) of all customer contact in 2019/20. Phone calls decreased by 11% from 299,124 in 2018/19 to 266,698 in 2019/20. Online forms saw a 25% increase, from 248,653 in 2018/19 to 311,547 in 2019/20. We received 9% (13,452) fewer letters in 2019/20 in comparison to 2018/19, however face to face contact had a marginal increase by 7% (8,968 more contacts).

This chart shows the shift in volume between the various contact channels from 2018/19 to 2019/20. The inner ring is contact made during 2018/19 and the outer ring is contact made during 2019/20.

The figures displayed are the total number of contacts per channel and the percentage figure shows the channel in proportion to all contact received during the respective periods. By viewing the volumes side by side, we can see the variance between the two years.

2018/19 to 2019/20 contact volume comparison

- Phone
- Online
- Email
- Letters
- Face to Face
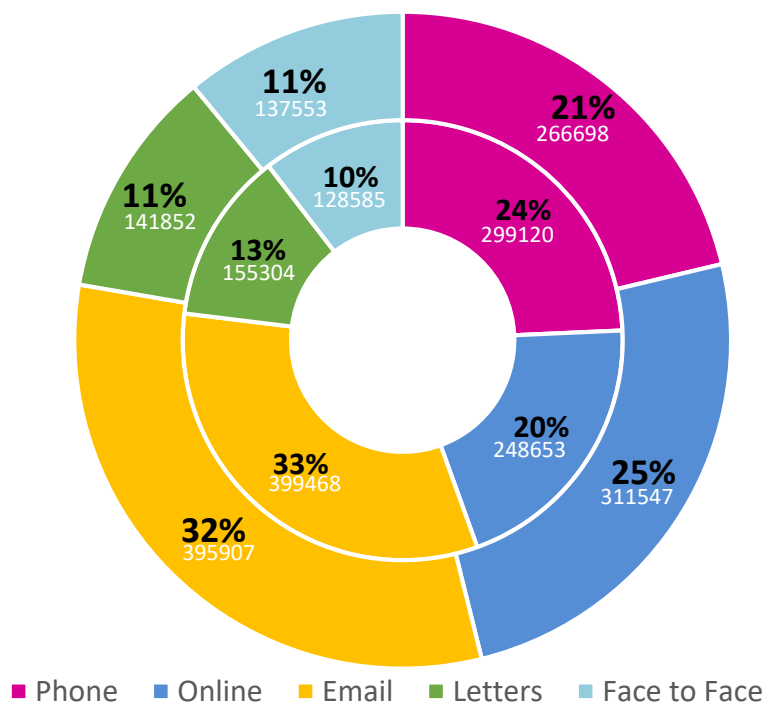
The below chart shows the average number of phone calls received per month between 2010/11 and 2019/20 for the nine highest volume services, with forecasted data up to 2025/26 based on the trend. We currently receive, on average, fewer than half the volume of calls we did in 2010/11.

Average monthly phone volume
2010/11 to 2019/20
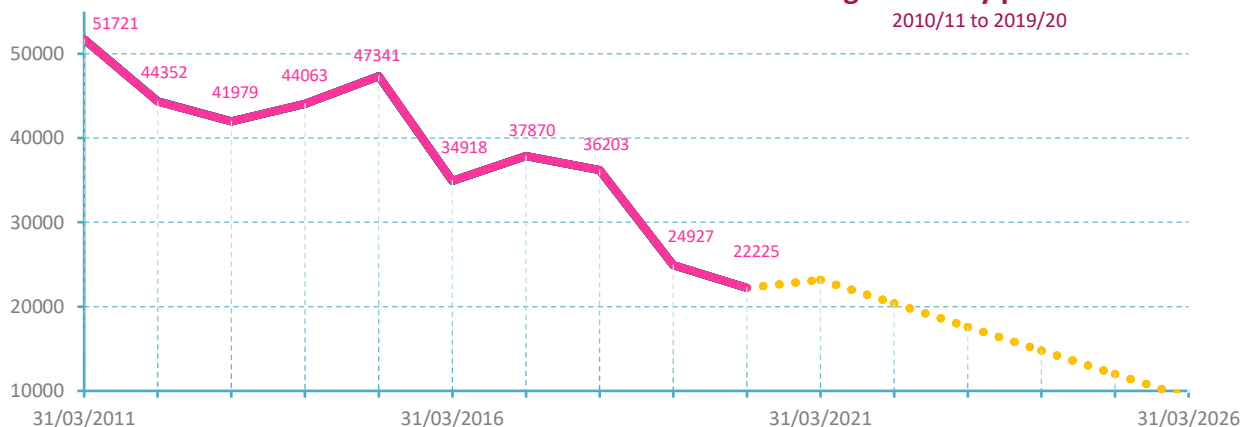
Based on this downward trend in calls received we can approximate that by 2025/26 we will receive an estimated 10,000 calls on average per month. This downward trend is largely the result of customers' using alternate means to contact the council, chiefly digital channels.

This chart displays the total volume of contact on average per month across all channels from 2014/15 to 2019/20. The overall contact volume has remained largely the same over the past six years, however customers are now preferring digital contact channels over non-digital channels.

Contact across all channels
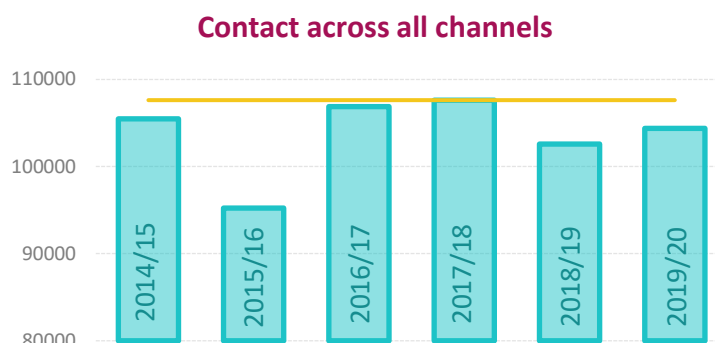
The yellow bar indicates our highest volume received in a year (107,625 contacts on average per month). The chart below displays the total volume of contact from all channels of the highest volume transactional services in the council, with all other services also included for reference. The vertical-axis shows the number of online forms received, the horizontal-axis is the number of emails received (the two largest channels of contact, accounting for 57% of all contact in 2019/20) and the size of the bubble indicates the total number of contacts.

Council Tax accounts for 26% of all contact across all channels receiving 316,705 contacts in 2019/20

Contact volume by service
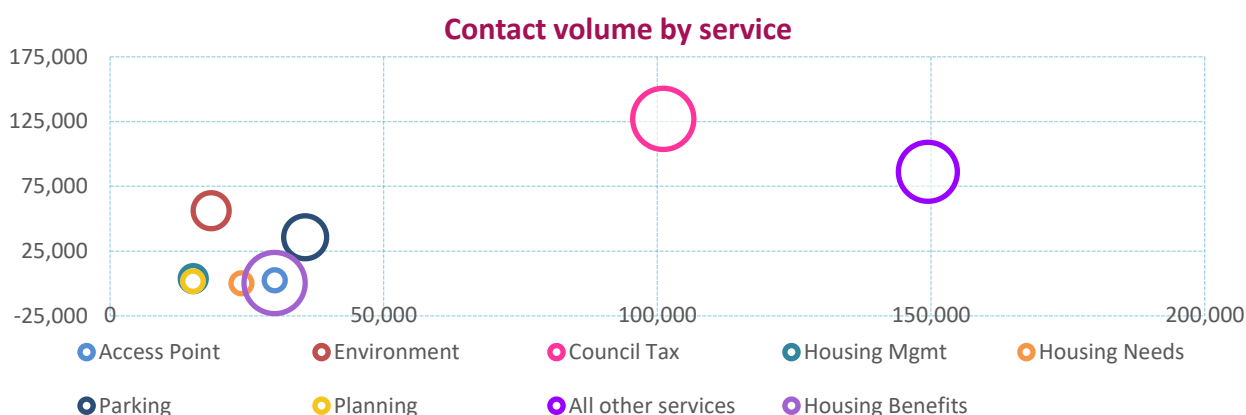
(from the 1,225,750 contacts received by the council as a whole)

Overall, contact across all communication channels has increased by 1.8% when compared to the same data set from 2018/19. The data from the previous six years provides an average of 103,701 contacts per month with marginal increases or decreases year to year but no major shift in volume.

The table below shows the monthly average of each contact by channel from 2014/15 to 2019/20.

	31/03/2015	31/03/2016	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	31/03/2019	31/03/2020
Phone	47433	35002	37970	36270	24927	22225
Online	287	2626	8595	14909	20721	25962
Email	19856	21902	24922	24383	33289	32925
Letters	21856	20082	20008	18969	12942	11821
Face to Face	16048	15632	15373	13095	10715	11463
Total	105480	95244	106868	107625	102595	104396
Phone %	45%	37%	36%	34%	24%	21%
Online %	0%	3%	8%	14%	20%	25%
Email %	19%	23%	23%	23%	33%	32%
Letters %	21%	21%	19%	18%	13%	11%
Face to Face %	15%	16%	14%	12%	10%	11%

What has changed over the past six years is the channel used by customers to contact the council, namely a large shift from phone contact to digital contact (email & online forms). What this data presents is a telling preference in customer contact methods; as phone contact decreases, digital contact volumes increase by comparable numbers.

Data collected on communications via post (letters etc.) and face to face contact indicates that these channels have stabilised over the past two years, following increased channel shifting. A high percentage of hard copy documents received by the council is verification and evidence documents.
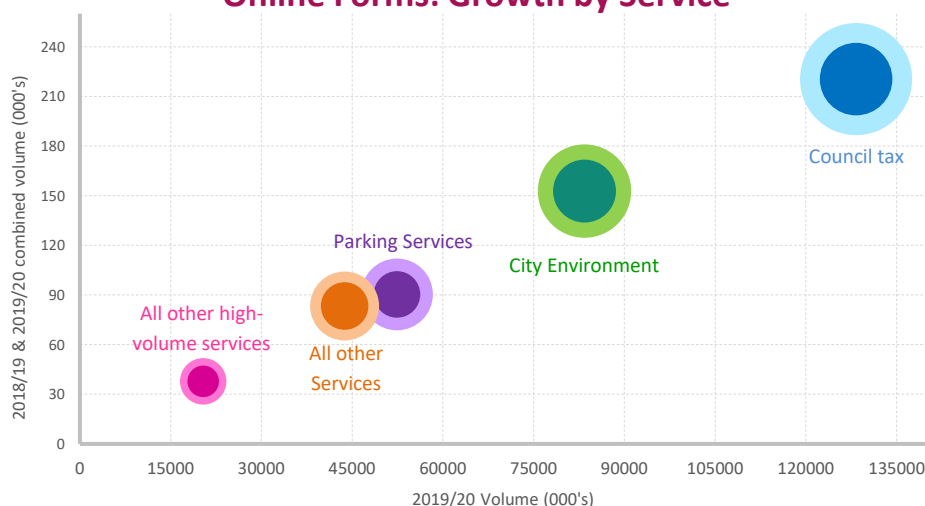
Online Forms: % Growth
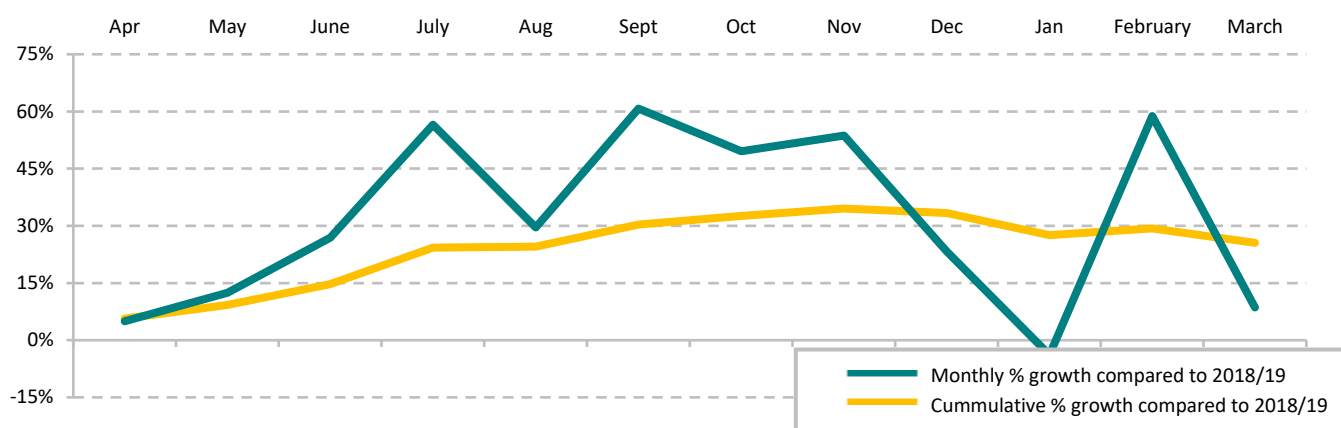
Comparing the volume of online forms received in 2018/19 with 2019/20 we can see the growth percentage through a cumulative comparison. Current data indicates a 26% growth in online forms. The variance between the month to month data and cumulatve data indentifies periods of increased or decreased demand for council services.

Interestingly, the growth of the online forms is largely within the functions who have alreaady established a digital service. (i.e. there were limited new functions offering digital services).

Online Forms: Growth by Service

This chart shows the volume of online forms received at service level. Looking at the volume of online forms received in 2018/19 (inner bubble) and 2019/20 (outer bubble) we can see the growth for each service. The horizontal-axis shows the number of forms received in the past 12 months and the vertical-axis shows the number of forms received during the past 24 months.

Viewing the data in this way allows us to understand the impact of channel shifting customers to online forms and how recent growth has, proportionately, reflected the size of the established offer, for example; Council Tax's growth is larger due to it already offering the majority of its service digitally. Understanding the data in this way provides insights into the rates at which customers will adopt to digital services.

A note on the data collected and used in this report:

Data has been collected and compiled using a variety of different methods (system reports, data extracts, manual counting etc.) and over a long period of time (six years). Therefore, it is expected that there will be some discrepancies in the actual figures presented (i.e. the numbers presented could be a few hundred over or under), however the data is still indicative of the volumes received and trends presented.

Issues faced when compiling data are largely due to the manual intervention still required and the limitations this puts on the activity. For example, manually counting contact data for emails or undertaking studies at various council buildings.

Moving forward, and based on the recommendations within this report, we are hopeful of collating and presenting a more clinical data set in future years.

Images used in this report were created by:
'Bank workers providing service', 'cartero dando paquete al cliente oficina correos', 'people using online apps': pch.vector
'Character illustration people holding speech bubbles', 'Character illustration people with internet message icons', 'Illustration of avatar communication concept': rawpixel.com
'illustration landing page with news icon', 'thumbs up sticker': freepik
'call center service illustration': studiogstock

Customer Experience Strategy Engagement

Introduction

In September 2019 we carried out engagement with our customers (by customer, we mean any user of council services, including; residents, visitors to the city, businesses, students, service users and their representatives) on their experience of using and contacting council services with the purpose of collecting insights on what they value (what is most important to them) and what they believe a good service is to inform the council's future strategy on Customer Experience.

The survey was publicised through the council website, the employee intranet, social media channels, at city libraries and through various community groups.

There were 304 respondents to the survey; 218 via the online consultation portal and 86 through face to face interviews conducted within Bartholomew House and Hove Town Hall Customer Service Centres and Jubilee Library.

The insights collected during this engagement will inform the development of our Customer Experience Strategy to be approved by Policy & Resources committee in December 19.

It is anticipated that this work will form a foundation for future customer engagement, supporting in the formation of optimal channels for feedback and enabling the council to collect, analyse and transform on an iterative basis aligned with the shifting customer needs of our demographic.
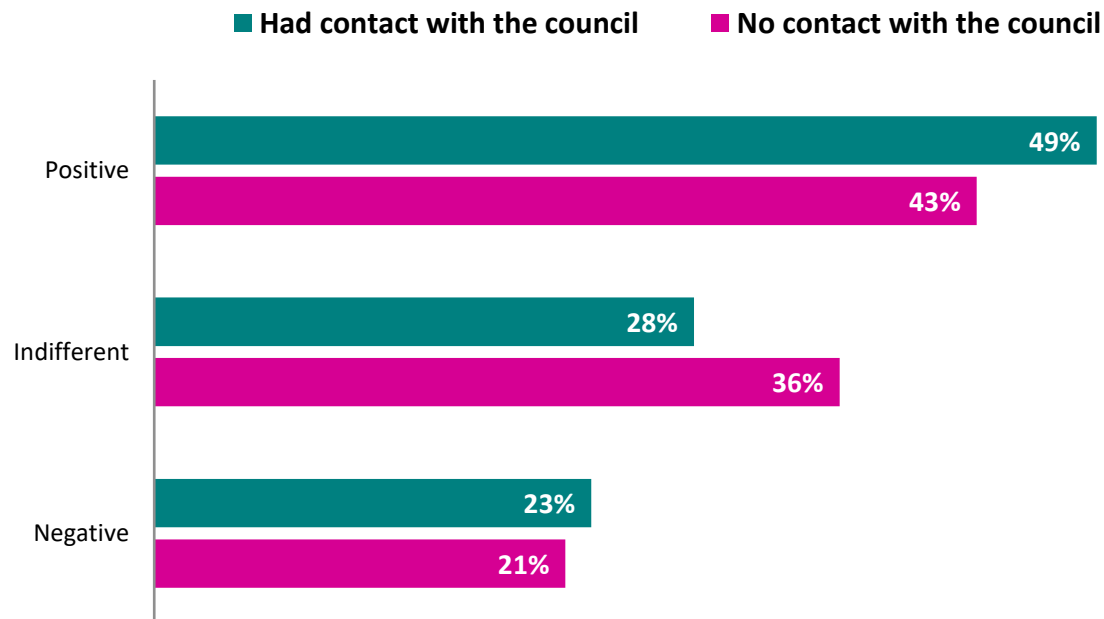
Recent Contact with the council

We are asked customers if they'd had contact with the council within the past 12 months through any method of communication, such as an email, in person or an online form.

■ Yes ■ No

73%	27%
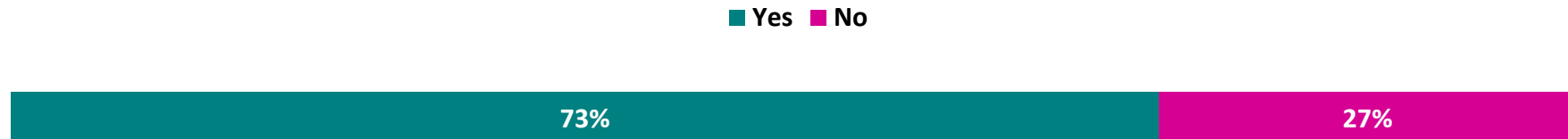
Your Customer Experience

Customers were asked what their experience of the council was, whether it was through a recent contact or more generally. They were able to select positive, indifferent or negative experience.

■ Had contact with the council ■ No contact with the council

Positive: 49% / 43%
Indifferent: 28% / 36%
Negative: 23% / 21%

Of the customers who'd had recent contact with the council only 22.8% had a negative experience with 49.1% indicating it had been positive.
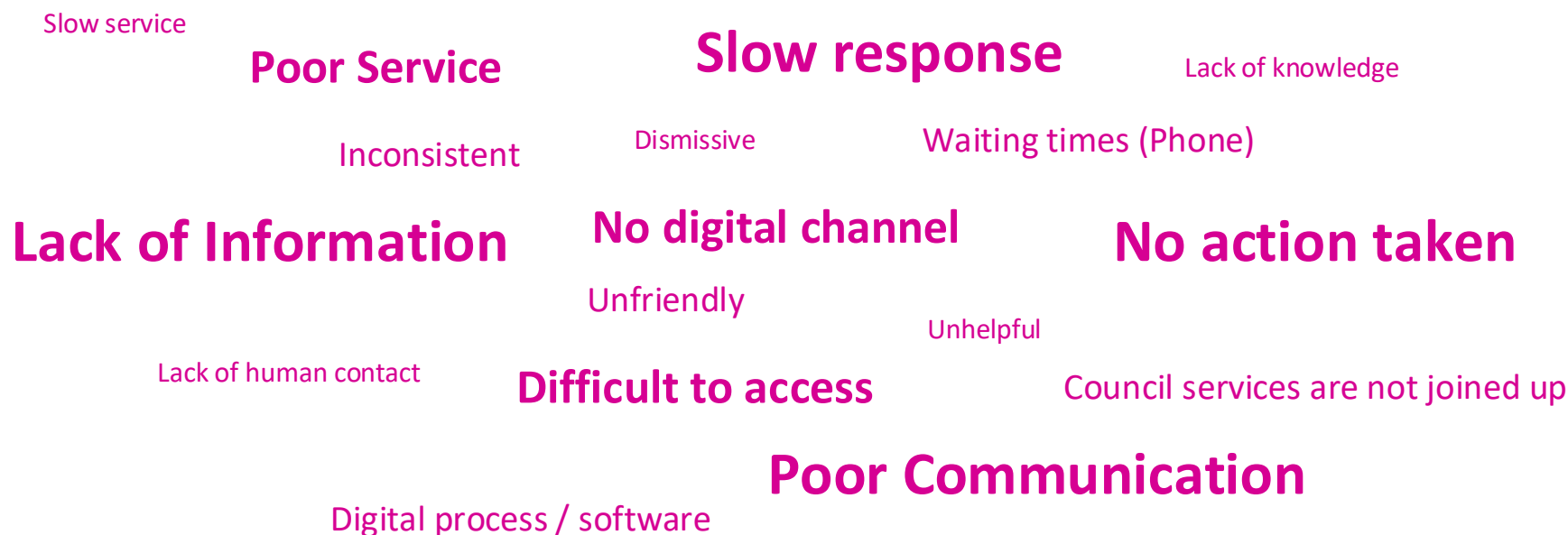
17.2% of respondents who indicated they had not contacted, or been contacted by, the council in the past 12 months provided feedback on their experience, with 42.9% having a positive experience and 21.4% having a negative experience.

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Customers were asked to provide a description of what they liked or disliked during their experience with the council. The below graphs represent a summary of those responses thematically, with the font size indicating the frequency.

What did you like

Clear information

Simple to use

Friendly

Professional

Efficient

Fair

Understanding

Informative

Good communication

Integrity

Digital access

Quick

Good Service

Polite

Supportive

Kind

Accessible

Helpful

Sympathetic

Effective

Easy to access

What did you dislike

Slow service

Poor Service

Slow response

Lack of knowledge

Inconsistent

Dismissive

Waiting times (Phone)

Lack of Information

No digital channel

No action taken

Unfriendly

Unhelpful

Lack of human contact

Difficult to access

Council services are not joined up

Poor Communication
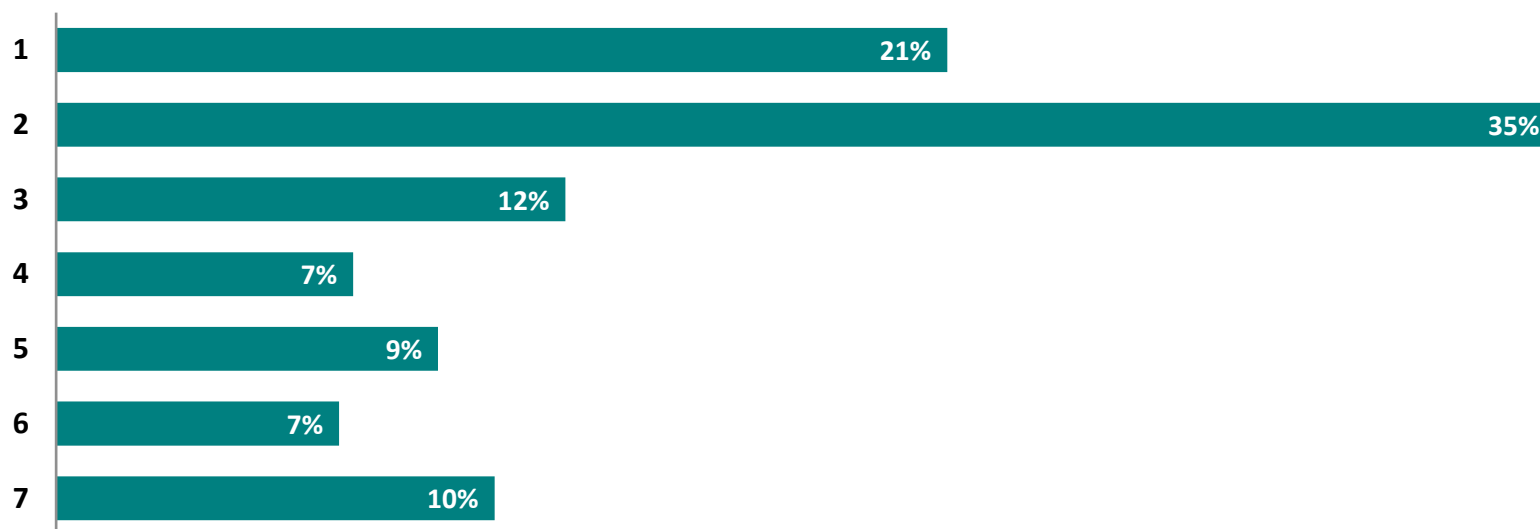
Digital process / software

What makes a good customer experience

We asked customers to identify what they valued most when interacting with council services. They were asked to select their top three priorities in order of most valued (i.e. with 1 being their most valued).

- 35% indicated they would rather receive the correct information first time, even if it takes longer

- 21% identified responsive communication as their priority

- 12% stated that information being clear and easy to understand was most important to them

- 10% see the council being friendly, respectful and understanding as their highest priority
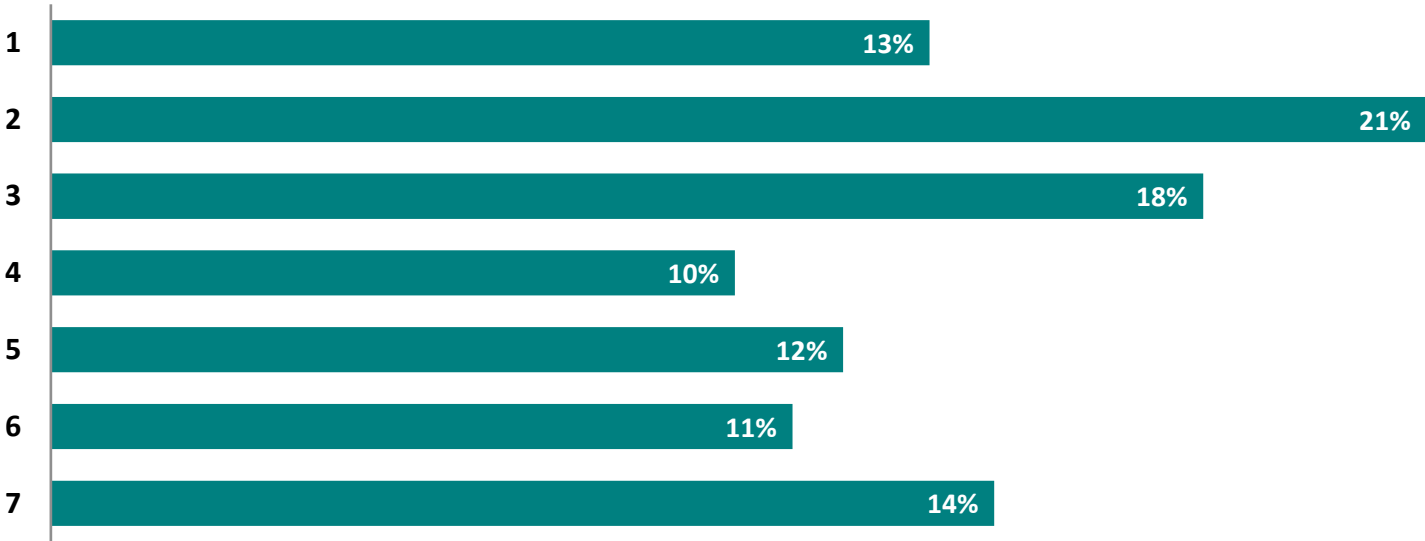
What our customers value most

1	21%
2	35%
3	12%
4	7%
5	9%
6	7%
7	10%

1 That you receive quick responses but may not get all the information straight away   **2** That you receive the right information first time, even if it takes longer to respond
3 That information is clear and easy to understand   **4** That the council is open about what it can and can't deliver
5 That council services are easy to understand and clear to reach for everyone   **6** That you are given all options and are involved in decisions that affect you
7 That the council is friendly, respectful and understanding

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When looking at all votes as equal (i.e. all three votes for each respondent), the results remain largely the same however there is more significance given to the council being friendly, respectful and understanding.

In both variations of the results, the council being open about what it can and cannot deliver and customers being given all options and being involved in decisions (4 & 6 respectively on the charts) received the fewest selections.

- 20.9% indicated they would rather receive the correct information first time, even if it takes longer
- 17.5% stated that information being clear and easy to understand was most important to them
- 13.4% identified responsive communication as their priority
- 14% see the council being friendly, respectful and understanding as their highest priority
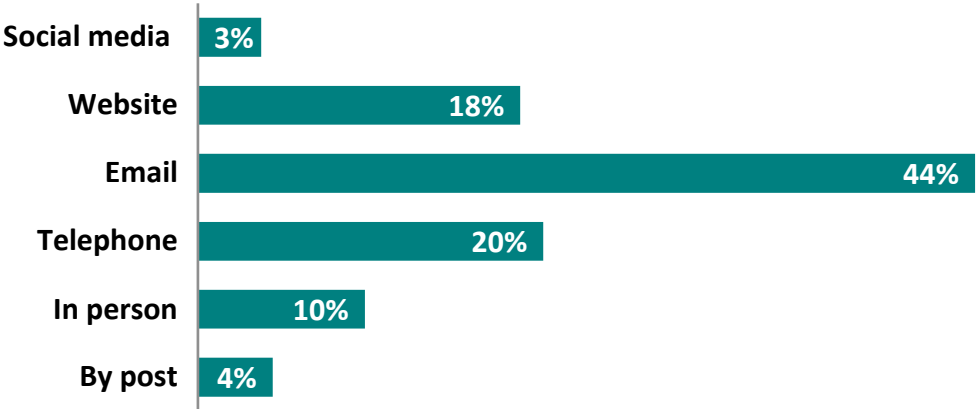
All selections given equal ranking

1	13%
2	21%
3	18%
4	10%
5	12%
6	11%
7	14%

1 That you receive quick responses but may not get all the information straight away **2** That you receive the right information first time, even if it takes longer to respond
3 That information is clear and easy to understand **4** That the council is open about what it can and can't deliver
5 That council services are easy to understand and clear to reach for everyone **6** That you are given all options and are involved in decisions that affect you
7 That the council is friendly, respectful and understanding

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Preferred communication channels

Communicating with the council

We asked customers to select their two preferred methods of contacting, or being contacted by, the council irrespective of why they are communicating the council.

Preferred Option

Channel	%
Social media	3%
Website	18%
Email	44%
Telephone	20%
In person	10%
By post	4%

65% stated they prefer digital communication (website, email & social media)

30% indicated they would prefer speak over the phone or face to face

All selections given equal ranking

Channel	%
Social media	4%
Website	16%
Email	37%
Telephone	24%
In person	11%
By post	8%
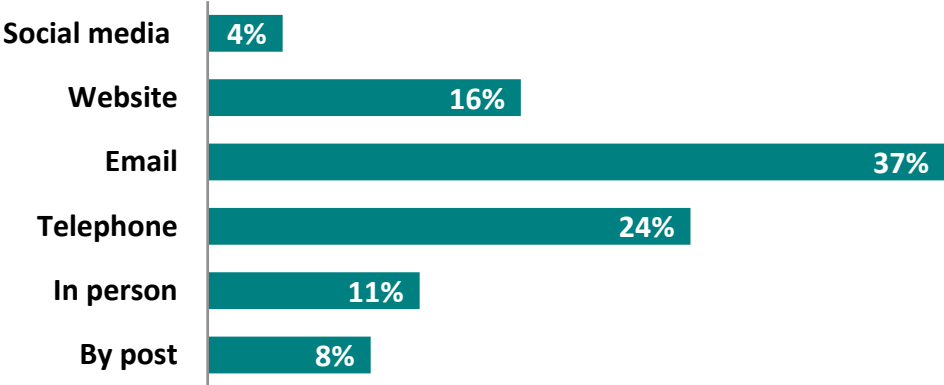
With all selections considered equal there is a slight shift toward communication over the phone or face to face

57% stated they prefer digital communication (website, email & social media)

35% indicated they would prefer speak over the phone or face to face

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Receiving news, information & service updates

We asked customers to select their two preferred methods of contacting, or being contacted by, the council irrespective of why they are communicating the council.
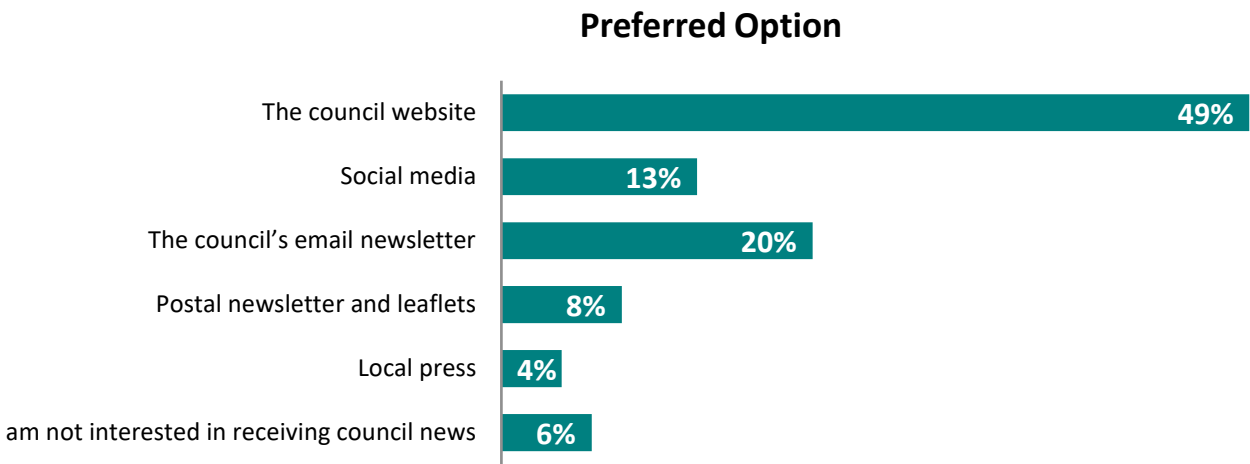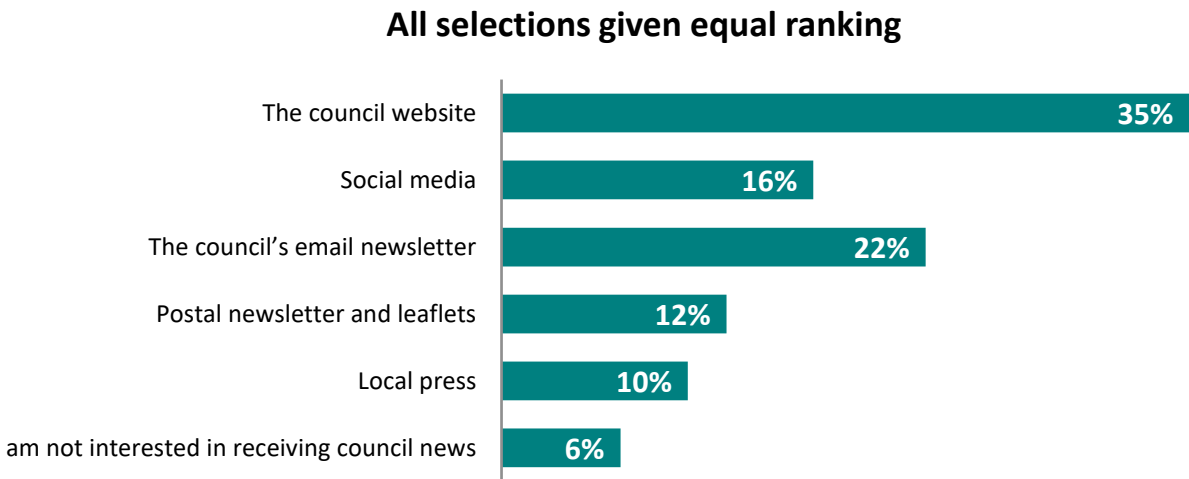
Preferred Option

Option	Percentage
The council website	49%
Social media	13%
The council's email newsletter	20%
Postal newsletter and leaflets	8%
Local press	4%
I am not interested in receiving council news	6%

83% specified they would prefer to receive council information & services updates through digital channels (website, email & social media)

Only 12% indicated that their preference would be to receive information & service updates via non-digital channels

All selections given equal ranking

Option	Percentage
The council website	35%
Social media	16%
The council's email newsletter	22%
Postal newsletter and leaflets	12%
Local press	10%
I am not interested in receiving council news	6%

When considering all selections with equal ranking there is a slight increase in preference for non-digital channels

73% specified they would prefer to receive council information & services updates through digital channels (website, email & social media)

22% indicated they would prefer to receive council information & services updates via postal newsletters and leaflets or the local press

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Our Customer Promise

We asked customers if our customer promise met their priorities and if not, what they would change. 57% of respondents had no suggestions for further improvement, 42% agreed in principle but provided suggestions and/or feedback on the promise and 1% explicitly said they disagree with promise but didn't say why.

Suggestions for improvement provided from the 42% who provided additional comments were mainly focused around four themes; Accessibility, Communication, Standards & Keep the Promise.

Can we improve our customer promise

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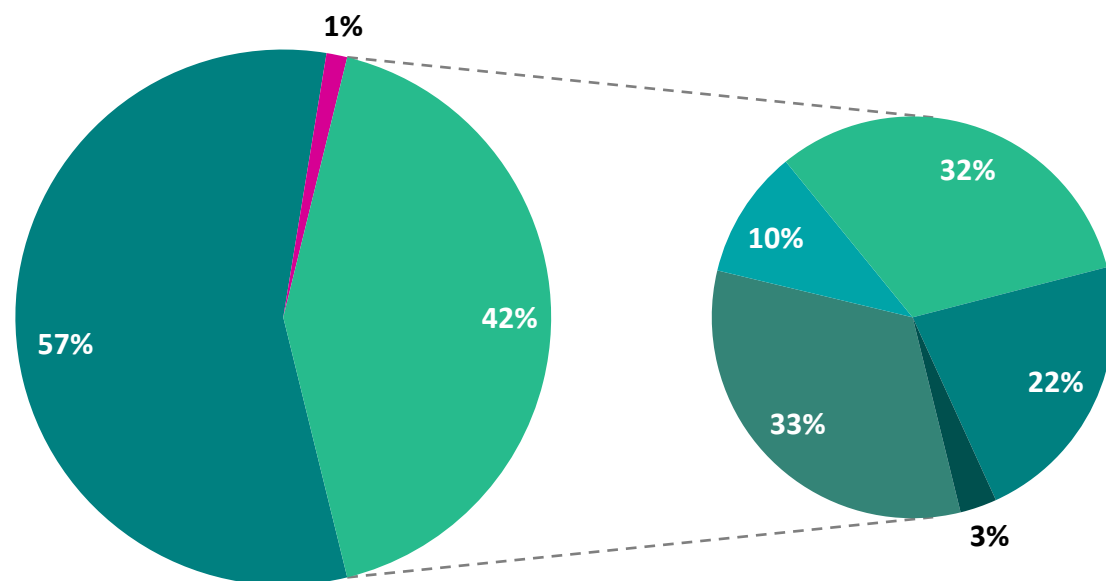
Legend (left pie chart):
- Agreed with no suggestion for improvement
- Disagreed with no suggestion for improvement
- Suggested improvements

Legend (right pie chart):
- Accessibility
- Communication
- Keep Promise
- Standards
- Other

Word cloud themes:

Be honest & easy to understand
Communication
Listen
Provide regular updates
Who to contact
Simple to use
Accessibility
Contact channels to meet customer needs
Collaboration
Keeping to agreed timeframes
Keep the Promise
Service performance
Being responsive
Consistency
Ownership
Standards
Empower Customers
Waiting times
Other
Call back service
Clarity of service offers

Further Information

This survey was carried out through the council's online consultation portal hosted on the council website and internal intranet site, face to face in Jubilee Library and Hove Town Hall and Bartholomew House Customer Service Centres and through paper forms provided to people without access to the internet.

The survey was conducted between Monday 26th August and Sunday 15th September 2019.

Contacts

Customer Experience Lead: Victoria.paling@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Customer Experience Manager: Luke.hamblin@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Glossary

Customer	For the purpose of this survey the term customer means any user of council services, including; residents, visitors to the city, businesses, students, service users and their representatives
Digital	Digital refers to contact methods through a digital channel, such as; online, email or social media
Equal Ranking	A number of the questions within the survey requested respondents to provide 2 or 3 answers. This allowed us to collect a preference of most valued as well as get a broader understanding of what is valued by our customers. Where results are displayed as equal ranking, this means we have counted each response and given it equal weight in the results.
Non-digital	Non-digital refers to contact methods that do not go through a digital channel, such as; telephone, face to face or postal letter.

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Our customer promise to you

We will make it clear how you can contact or access our services | We will understand and get things done | We will be clear and treat you with respect