Local Government Services

Awareness, Engagement and Sentiment

A journey towards measuring and improving the public's awareness of, and satisfaction with, their local government services

LGMA
Local Government
Management Agency

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland

Local government services: awareness, engagement, and sentiment

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LGMA Research

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Foreword

Local authorities are committed to providing quality services and meeting the needs of the public, as expressed through the various published Customer Service Action Plans, Charters and policies. In order to make an assessment about whether this is being achieved, NOAC commenced a process of engaging with the public in 2018 to explore levels of awareness, engagement and satisfaction with services. Over a three-year period, NOAC commissioned surveys to gather this data, and explore general views about local authority service delivery.

The LGMA, with the support of the CCMA, are building upon the work of NOAC by developing a system of on-going data collection that enables us to systematically track progress and explore how to keep improving services. The process also provides local authorities with the opportunity to increase awareness about the investments being made in services on behalf of the public, services that are for the public good.

In approaching this research, we sought to ensure we collected valuable, reliable data that could inform our actions. To this end, establishing a robust research methodology was a key consideration. An IPA literature review was carried out, which informed the development of a nationally representative survey as a keystone in the research project, that was supplemented with data from focus groups in this initial year.

Learnings from this valuable research are presented in this report and will be provided to all local authorities to inform their actions going forward.

It is encouraging to see awareness of services is high in many cases. However, a worrying number of respondents were unaware that any of the services mentioned in the survey were provided by local authorities. While it is understandable that the public would not be aware of the full range of 1,000+ services provided by local authorities, we must examine the reasons behind this awareness gap.

The survey results also show us that the public want to be more informed about what is happening in their area and about the work being done by their local authority. Equally, we want to ensure the public is informed. This research will provide valuable evidence and recommendations towards achieving that and targeting the appropriate information through the appropriate channels.

The shift towards electronic methods of communication is a key finding, and it is encouraging to see that those who engage with local authority websites and social media feel more informed. Digital communication and online service provision is an area the sector is already focused on, and this research will allow us to further explore digital opportunities in an evidence-informed way.

It is positive to note that more respondents agree with positive statements about local authorities, than disagree, but a significant proportion of the public display neutral sentiments. While this warrants further exploration, it is interesting and encouraging to know that those who report using local authority services are more likely to have a positive view of local authorities.

The IPA research and the survey results make a strong case for seeking the views of the public at a time as close to engagement as possible. On foot of this, we are developing a Voice of the Customer (VOC) tool. This will allow people to give their views on services while they are engaging with services and the experience is fresh in their minds. This will not only provide an important customer feedback opportunity to the public but will allow local authorities to react and adapt quickly to the feedback.

Overall, the research will help us to make evidence-informed decisions about how we can increase public awareness of the services we provide, address particular barriers to awareness, improve information provision and provide a better experience for the public.

Lar Power
Chair
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CCMA

Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association

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Executive Summary

Awareness of Services

Respondents were presented with 30 service areas and asked whether they were aware that their local authority provided these services.

- For 27 of the 30 services highlighted, more than half of respondents were aware that the service was provided by their local authority. Awareness was above 70% for 12 of these services.

- While awareness levels were quite high for many of the services mentioned, 13% of respondents were not aware that their local authority provided any of the services mentioned.

- Levels of awareness about services provided by local authorities are highest among the older age categories and lower among the younger age cohorts.

- Those aged between 25-34 are most likely to be unaware that local authorities provide any of the services listed, scoring 27% compared with only 3% of those aged 65+.

- Geographically, the lowest levels of awareness appear to be in the Dublin region, scoring lowest in 18 of the 30 categories, while Connacht/Ulster score highest in 15 of the 30 categories.

Reported Service Use

The survey sought to identify how many respondents reported having used services over the previous 12 months.

- More than 90% of respondents said they had engaged with some of the services provided by local authorities in the previous year.

- The two most frequently used services were litter bins and recycling, with almost two-thirds of all respondents using these services. Half of respondents reported using public parking and 43% using motor tax. One-third used local leisure amenities such as parks, playgrounds, sport fields, open spaces, etc. and 31% used libraries services. Seventeen percent used local sports/leisure facilities and 11% reported engaging with the register of electors.

- Levels of utilisation are spread across the age groups with no one group dominating across all services. However, utilisation of recycling centres, motor tax, and planning services all increase as people get older. In contrast, younger people aged between 18-24 are more likely to use community/youth and sports/leisure centres, business supports, services for new housing developments, and local authority supported tourism initiatives.

- There is quite an even balance between male and female use across most services. However, women are more likely to use outdoor amenities such as parks, playgrounds, open spaces, etc. with 38% of females responding that they use these services compared with 29% of

males. In contrast, the male respondents were more frequent users of sports/leisure facilities and community/youth centres as 22% reported using these services compared with 15% for female respondents.

- Dublin and the Rest of Leinster are the regions with the highest reported levels of service utilisation across all services except tourism.

Awareness and Usage

The data from both awareness and usage was combined to assess the influence of information versus service use on levels of awareness.

- The research found that services such as recycling, litter bins, parking, and motor tax have high levels of both awareness and utilisation.

- Outdoor amenities and libraries have high levels of awareness but moderate levels of engagement.

- Housing, planning, and community and voluntary supports/initiatives are three services where there are high levels of awareness but relatively low levels of engagement over the past year. In these services, awareness is likely the result of exposure to information relating to services. These three services are topics that receive quite a lot of media attention from both national and local media.

Contact with Local Authorities

The survey asked whether people had contacted their local authority about services during the previous year.

- In total, 35% of respondents had contacted their local authority in relation to a service provided in the past 12 months.

- The most common reason was in relation to roads (10%), followed by motor tax (9%), street lighting (8%), footpaths (5%), litter bins (4%), and recycling services (4%).

- A review of the data by age cohort reveals that most engagement was by people aged 65+ across 10 of the 11 services listed. The only service where engagement was not highest among those aged 65+ relates to planning.

Channels of Contact

The survey sought to identify the channels used by customers to contact the local authorities and found an increased reliance on electronic modes of engagement compared to face-to-face interactions.

- 46% of respondents used a website to contact local authorities, making it the most popular channel of choice during the previous year.

- This is followed by email and phone at 24% and letter or bringing/using a third party or intermediary to engage with local authorities, both at 13%.

- The remaining three categories, (in person contacts, staff engagement, and attending public meetings) are the least popular scoring 12%, 5% and 4% respectively.

- However, it should be noted that the period in question was during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently, access to staff and public meetings was significantly restricted.

The survey also explored the channels used by respondents over a five-year period in order to identify trends in relation to the use of channels of contact.

- The data clearly reveals a shift away from using face-to-face methods of engagement in favour of electronic methods of communication.

Sources of Information

The various sources of information about local authority services were identified by respondents.

- Local authority websites are the primary source of information for most respondents, with 51% relying on them for information.

- Those aged between 18-24 use friends and neighbours, Facebook, posters/leaflets, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn more than other age groups.

- Those aged 65 and over are more reliant on newspapers, radio, staff contact, phone apps, and magazines for their information.

Sentiment

In order to assess whether people feel local authorities are meeting the needs of customers, 15 positive statements were presented to interviewees and, using a scale, they were asked to agree or disagree with each statement. A significant level of neutral sentiment was evident in relation to local authorities; more than one in four respondents had no opinion or neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements presented.

- Overall, of those who expressed an opinion, 55% agreed with the positive statements about local authorities while 45% disagreed.

- There are higher rates of agreement rather than disagreement in 12 of the 15 statements, this is especially true in relation to statements that focus on direct engagement with local authorities.

- The most positive sentiment is reflected in relation to statements on areas such as improving access to services and decision making for people with disabilities and minorities, dealing with people in a fair and equal way, handling enquiries, and responding to COVID-19.

- The statements where there are low levels of agreement focus on dissatisfaction with access to information about what is going on in their local area and what the local authority does, and in relation to trust.

In order to understand how service engagement impacts on sentiment, crossbreak analysis was conducted which revealed:

- those who use local authority services have a more positive view about the services.

- levels of satisfaction are likely to be higher when engagement with services was recent.

- those engaging with websites and social media feel more informed than average (e.g., 36% and 48% respectively compared with 28% nationally), and considerably more informed than those that do not use websites or social media (who score 15% and 22% respectively).

COVID-19 focus

The survey sought to assess levels of awareness about key initiatives that were put in place by local authorities during COVID-19, and explored whether those who knew about the service, knew it was the local authorities that were responsible for the service.

- 72% of respondents were aware of the COVID-19 services provided by local authorities, however only 60% were aware that these services were provided by local authorities. One-third of respondents reported using the COVID-19 services.

Pilot – VOC research

The Literature Review carried out by the IPA to inform this research as well as the results of the survey indicate that data gathered as close to the point of service engagement as possible is likely to be most reliable.

As a result, a Voice of Customer' (VOC) tool is being piloted at the time of publication. The VOC allows the public to give their views on services directly at the point where they are engaging with the service.

The data from this pilot is not yet available but will be used to supplement the national survey in future.

Introduction

Background and Context

The LGMA was given responsibility for reporting on customer satisfaction, engagement and attitudes by the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC) in 2021 (NOAC, 2019).

Previously, NOAC had conducted a national survey to establish levels of engagement with local authority services, levels of satisfaction with services, and attitudes towards local authorities. The survey was carried out over a three-year period and targeted 100 people in each local authority area between 2018-2020 (NOAC, 2020).

To effectively build upon this work, the LGMA set up a Research Advisory Group with representatives of the County and City Management Association (CCMA). The RAG commissioned the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) to carry out research to identify the key features that should be in place when setting up a system to capture information on customer engagement, satisfaction, and attitudes in a public sector context.

It was agreed that a national survey would remain the key feature of the work in the initial years, but that it would be supplemented with case studies that could illustrate how services were being developed to meet the needs of customers. Focus Groups would be used after results from the survey were analysed to explore the reasons behind some of the findings. In addition, a programme or work would commence to

develop 'feedback loops' at the end of the customer engagement process to capture information about customer experiences across key services nationally at the point of service engagement through a Voice of the Customer (VOC) system.

REDC were commissioned to carry out a national survey and to assist with the development of a VOC system. The VOC is an embedded online customer survey link that is incorporated across various 'touchpoints' or 'points of engagement/ interaction' between customers and their local authority. In the initial year, the focus is on piloting the VOC across a range of difference services and channels, so no data is available for inclusion in the 2021 report.

The RAG also identified key policies to inform the focus of the attitudinal element of the national survey. The first relates to Our Public Service 2020 as this highlights the need for the public sector to focus improvement of customer service through innovation and digitisation of services. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty was the second area identified. Under this framework, public sector organisations are required to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect the human rights of staff and people availing of their services (Irish Human Right and Equality Commission, 2021).

This 2021 report contains findings from the national survey that sought to identify the levels and channels of engagement of customers and their attitudes towards

the services being provided by local authorities. Given the significant impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on services, a section was introduced to explore this topic too.

Summary results from a series of focus groups are also presented. These focus groups sought to explore a variance in levels of service engagement with libraries between different age groups.

Finally, case-studies are included to illustrate examples where local authorities have adapted services to meet the needs of customers. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these relate to how libraries adapted services to facilitate service engagement through lockdown.

Methodology

Research Objectives

While the focus of the previous NOAC survey was to gather data about customer satisfaction, engagement and sentiment, the LGMA sought to build upon this and produce findings that would assist the sector to improve service delivery and equality of access.

The LGMA agreed objectives with the CCMA in which a methodology would be developed to:
a. Determine the levels of customer satisfaction, engagement, and awareness in relation to services provided by local authorities as well as sentiments about service delivery
b. Explore the reason for these responses
c. Assist the sector to improve and enhance services and staff training in local authorities
d. Assess whether improvements were being made overtime (i.e., trend analysis)

Research Design and Methods

A literature review was commissioned to explore how best to capture information about customer experiences in a public sector environment. Several features were identified that informed the methodological approach adopted (Boyle, 2020).

- As the customer is defined as being the direct recipient of local authority services, data collection should be targeted directly at service users.

- Data should be gathered as close to the time of engagement with services as possible to ensure an accurate a view of the service delivery experience is captured. The data should be gathered after a period of no more than 12 months..

- An exploration of the drivers of satisfaction needs to be undertaken as they are not similar for all services (i.e., acceptable response times vary depending on the service being accessed).

Overall, a mixed methods approach was identified consisting of four elements:
- National Survey
  An annual national survey would continue to be used to gather baseline information in relation to local authority services. This facilitates the development of trend data over time. A key advantage of the national survey is that large representative samples of customers can be engaged with at a single point in time. However, they are not an appropriate tool to explore detailed or complex 'why' questions.

- Service Engagement Survey
  A Voice of the Customer (VOC) system should be developed to capture information from customers who engage directly with local authority staff or online services via an instant survey at the end of their customer engagement experience.

- Focus Groups
  Given the limits of the survey tools, it is often necessary to supplement them with qualitative tools that can explore

'why' questions more effectively. Focus groups also facilitate the provision of additional information to participants so that their views are informed rather than instinctive.

In addition, the literature points out that views about public services are often influenced by pre-existing perceptions and negative bias rather than the performance or quality of the services being provided, so focus group can assist in revealing some of these underlying narratives (Boyle, 2020).

- Case studies
  When attempting to illustrate ways in which local authorities are seeking to improve how they respond to customer needs, case studies provide a vehicle to describe and illustrate services and customer engagements.

They are the final tool in a suite that seeks to provide a comprehensive and accurate view of customer experiences and illustrate the efforts of local authorities in meeting the needs of customers.

A Mixed Methods Approach

An incremental approach to developing the various tools was adopted for practical reasons. The following issues were addressed under each heading in 2021:

2021 National Survey

The survey was designed to answer key questions including, whether those responding were customers as defined in the literature, whether responses were influenced by length of time since service engagement, and whether the attitudes of people who actively engaged with services differed to those who did not. In 2021, the survey also included a section in relation to levels of awareness and utilisation of COVID-19 related services, but this will not be a regular feature of future surveys.

REDC were commissioned to undertake a national survey in July 2021. One thousand, seven hundred and forty-four people were surveyed and results were captured under gender, age groups and across four regions. The number of participants was sufficient to ensure a statistically reliable error margin at a national and regional level.

It was also decided to survey all local authority areas in a single year rather than spreading the collection over three years, as had been the practice in the past. The primary reason for this was to be able to give feedback to the sector annually, maximising the potential to improve customer service experiences, which was a key aim of the project.

Voice of the Customer - Service Engagement Survey

REDC were engaged to assist in the development the Voice of the Customer (VOC) embedded survey link, that customers access and complete at the end point of their service engagement.

In year one, the objective was to develop a standardised survey that could be administered across multiple service areas and to pilot the survey through several different engagement channels (e.g., embedded email link, SMS embedded link, QR Code, kiosk, hard copy survey, etc.). Results from this pilot phase are not included in this report, as work is still underway at the time of publication.

In year two, the focus will move to identifying the criteria for selection of target services and planning a structured roll-out of the embedded survey across the sector.

Focus Groups

The focus in year one is on piloting the approach to determine how to successfully recruit participants, develop appropriate agendas, and how to analyse and utilise findings. The topic selected for year one was identified after analysis of the national survey findings. It related to an exploration of why people aged between 25-55 had lower levels of library engagement that younger and older age cohorts.

Case Studies

In this initial year, it was agreed to focus on collecting examples of how services were adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic with one additional case study that focused on improving services for people through sign language and an example of how an out-of-hours service was developed.

Findings

REDC, a research consultancy, were commissioned by the LGMA, on behalf of the CCMA Corporate Committee, to conduct a national customer awareness survey in July 2021. The research was conducted using REDC's online omnibus survey, the REDC Line.

Quota controls were used to ensure a nationally representative sample of Republic of Ireland adults aged 18+, with interlocking quotas to provide extra confidence in sample profile. To improve the sample sizes within each county area, 744 boost interviews were conducted. The data was then subsequently weighted across gender, age, region, and social class to ensure a nationally representative sample based on latest CSO projections.

Respondent Profile

In total, 1,744 respondents participated in the survey during the period 1st– 6th of July 2021. Of the total respondents, 51% were female and 49% were male. As illustrated in Figure 1, those aged between 35-44 represented 21% of the sample, with the 65+ cohort representing 19%, the 45-54 cohort representing 18%, those aged 25-34 representing 17%, those aged 55-64 representing 14% and the lowest representation being those aged between 18 and 24 at 11%.

Under each topic area, the results of the data findings in this report are presented at a national level, a breakdown is then provided by age and gender in order to determine whether there is a difference in the responses based on any of these variables. The results are also collated across four regions of similar population size: Dublin region, Rest of Leinster, Munster, and Connacht/Ulster, where the margin of error ranges between 4.5% to 5.6%, meaning the results are statistically reliable[1].
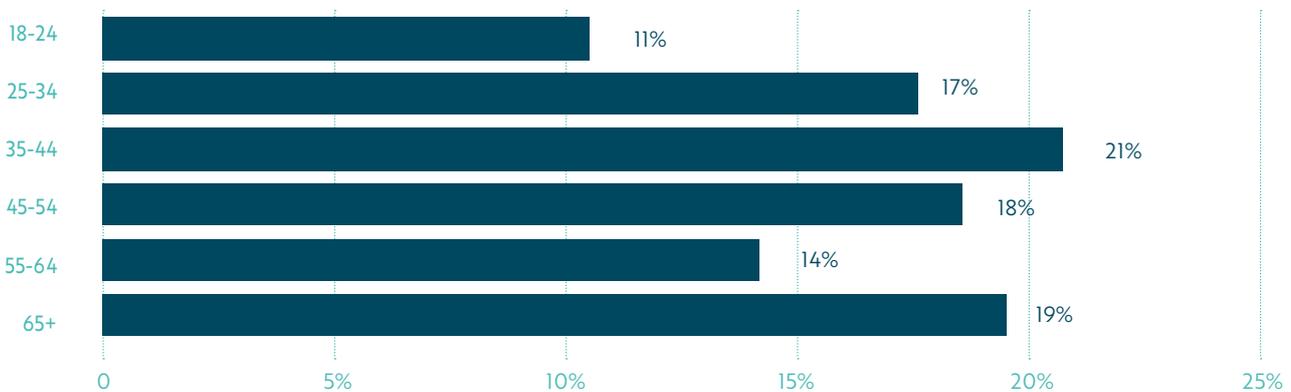

Figure 1: Age profile of respondents

[1] A review by local authority area yields error margins up to 9.8% but any rate above 8% is not statistically reliable.

Awareness

Overall awareness levels

Local authorities provide approximately 1,100 services to the public, with around 600 services common to all local authorities (as not all services are relevant in all areas). It is not feasible, nor would it yield any useful data, to explore awareness about all services.

Instead, key services were identified, and respondents were asked whether they were aware that local authorities provided these services[2].

At a national level, awareness about local authority services is quite high for many of the services. Of the 30 services highlighted, 12 are classified in the 'high awareness' category (i.e., more than 70% respondents are aware that local authorities provide the service).

As 13% of respondents were not aware that the local authority provided any of the services mentioned, the maximum level of awareness under any service heading is 87%, and this is achieved for footpaths. This is followed by street cleaning, streetlights, litter control, social housing, local outdoor amenities (i.e., parks, playgrounds, sports grounds, bathing areas, open spaces), library services, community and voluntary services, road maintenance and improvements, planning and development, recycling, and water/roadside drainage.

There are more 'moderate' levels of awareness (i.e., between 50% and 69% of people are aware local authorities provide the services) in relation to the following 15 services: service for new housing development, planning and environment enforcement, dog warden service, road safety and parking, facilities and centres (i.e., community, youth, sport, leisure), arts and heritage, register of electors/elections, traveller accommodation, promoting development of the county, cemeteries and burial grounds, environment/controlling pollution, fire services, business services and supports, motor tax collection, and the urban and village renewal scheme.

Finally, there are 'low' levels of awareness (i.e., less than 50%) in relation to the final three services, environmental information and awareness, tourism, and monitoring lakes, rivers, waterways, and streams.

Results are difficult to compare with the previous survey commissioned by NOAC. Their findings illustrate much lower levels of awareness of services. Later in the report, we focus on levels of engagement, and it becomes clear that a much higher percentage of respondents to the 2021 survey are 'customers' and users of local authority services, than in the previous surveys (2018-2020). Also, the list of services is not identical, but most services listed are similar (NOAC, 2020).

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[2] Merged services: The original survey contained 36 categories but in four areas, data was merged where services were deemed to be similar so that the final list contains 30 categories. 1. Net community and voluntary combines: (i) Supporting and hosting events, (ii) Supporting community and voluntary organisations and (iii) Promoting the interests of the local community. 2. Net arts and heritage: (i) Support for the arts and (ii) Heritage service. 3. Net business services combines: (i) Local Enterprise Office, (ii) Enterprise centres / hubs and (iii) Business/enterprise support and development. 4. Net Facilities/Centres combines: (i) Sports and leisure and (ii) Community and youth.

Of note, however, is that in both surveys, footpaths, street lighting, road maintenance and road safety, street cleaning, social housing, parks/playgrounds, recycling, and libraries are at the top end of the awareness scale while business-related supports are at the lower end of the scale.

Overall awareness levels of local authority services

Service	Awareness
Footpaths	87%
Street Cleaning	86%
Street Lighting	82%
Litter Control	81%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	79%
Library Services	78%
Local outdoor amenities (Parks, playgrounds, etc.)	78%
Net Community & Voluntary Supports	77%
Road Maintenance Improvement of Road Network	76%
Planning Applications and Development	74%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	74%
Water/Roadside drainage	72%
Service for new housing development	67%
Enforcement of Planning and Environment Issues	66%
Dog Warden Service	65%
Road Safety and Parking	63%
Net Community/youth, Sports/leisure Centres	61%
Net Arts/Heritage	60%
Register of Electors/Elections	59%
Traveller Accommodation	58%
Promoting Development of the County	58%
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	58%
Protecting the Environment/Controlling Pollution	54%
Fire Services	53%
Net Business Support Services	52%
Motor Tax Collection	52%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	52%
Environmental Information and Awareness	48%
Control and Monitoring Lakes, Waterways, Rivers, Streams,	45%
Tourism - Assisting and Attracting Tourism	45%
None of these	13%

Low awareness 49% + lower   Moderate awareness 50-69%   High awareness 70% +

Figure 2: Awareness of local authority services 2021

Figure 3: 2020 Awareness of local authority services: IPSOS MRBI Survey for NOAC

Awareness by age category

The data clearly reveals that levels of awareness about services provided by local authorities are highest among the older age categories and lower among the younger age cohorts.

Those aged 55-64 and 65+ have the highest levels of awareness in relation to 28 of the 30 services (the exceptions being business supports and tourism). In contrast, those aged between 18-24 and 25-34 have the lowest levels of awareness across all services except business support services, tourism, and monitoring lakes.

However, of particular interest is that those aged between 25-34 are most likely to be unaware that local authorities provide any of the services listed, scoring 27% compared with only 3% of those aged 65+.

Services	Age						
	Overall n 1744	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Footpaths	87%	74%	80%	86%	89%	93%	95%
Street Cleaning	86%	73%	79%	84%	92%	91%	92%
Street Lighting	82%	74%	77%	82%	86%	84%	88%
Litter Control	81%	72%	73%	79%	85%	86%	87%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	79%	52%	70%	79%	82%	90%	90%
Library Services	78%	64%	65%	73%	81%	85%	94%
Local Outdoor Amenities (Parks, Playgrounds)	78%	67%	67%	77%	82%	86%	85%
Net Community & Voluntary	77%	76%	69%	76%	74%	85%	86%
Road Maintenance Improve Road Network	76%	64%	72%	73%	78%	84%	83%
Planning Applications and Development	74%	49%	65%	71%	76%	86%	92%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	74%	72%	70%	70%	72%	82%	80%
Water/Roadside drainage	72%	68%	66%	70%	77%	72%	78%
Service For New Housing Development	67%	54%	57%	64%	71%	75%	79%
Planning and Environment Enforcement	66%	48%	54%	61%	72%	79%	80%
Dog Warden Service	65%	37%	55%	59%	73%	77%	82%
Road Safety and Parking	63%	56%	58%	58%	68%	65%	72%
Net Facilities/Centres: Community/Youth, Sport	61%	64%	54%	58%	57%	62%	69%
Net Arts/Heritage	60%	58%	51%	54%	58%	69%	73%
Register of Electors/Elections	59%	47%	45%	58%	59%	69%	74%
Traveller Accommodation	58%	31%	46%	53%	59%	72%	81%
Promoting Development of the County	58%	54%	48%	53%	58%	65%	70%
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	58%	36%	43%	54%	65%	70%	72%
Environment/Controlling Pollution	54%	53%	46%	49%	55%	59%	63%
Fire Services	53%	35%	43%	43%	52%	65%	74%
Net Business Services/Supports	52%	51%	50%	53%	55%	49%	54%
Motor Tax Collection	52%	36%	40%	50%	55%	65%	64%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	52%	36%	45%	52%	53%	59%	62%
Environmental Information and Awareness	48%	45%	39%	42%	50%	54%	58%
Tourism - Assisting and Attracting Tourism	45%	54%	40%	42%	45%	39%	53%
Monitoring Lakes, Waterways, Rivers, Streams	45%	44%	45%	42%	47%	47%	44%
None of these	13%	13%	27%	17%	15%	5%	3%

Legend	Highest point			Lowest point			
	High awareness 70% +		Moderate awareness 50-69%		Low awareness 49% + lower		

Table 1: Awareness of local authority services by age 2021

Awareness by region

The pattern between highest and lowest is not as defined across regions as it is across age categories. Overall, the lowest levels of awareness appear to be in the Dublin region, scoring lowest in 18 of the 30 categories, while Connacht/Ulster score highest in 15 of the 30 categories. However, many of the variances between highest and lowest are not very wide (relative to the age categories).

Where there are large variances between the highest and lowest levels of awareness between regions, this may be explained when the service utilisation figures are explored later in the report. For instance, the Dublin region has much higher levels of awareness in relation to Sport and Leisure Facilities/Community and Youth Centres, coming in at 72% compared to between 54-58% in other regions. This may be explained in part by higher levels of engagement with these services in the Dublin region compared to the other regions.

A similar pattern emerges in relation to motor tax. The regions outside Dublin range between 57%-64% in terms of awareness that local authorities provide this service compared with only 29% awareness in the Dublin region. A review of data later in report reveals that more people in the Dublin region use online services while those outside the Dublin region are more likely to attend their local office and carry out services in person. Given that the Department of Transport is identified as the service provider on the online motor tax website, this may partially explain the low levels of awareness in the Dublin region.

Therefore, we can conclude that levels of direct engagement with services and branding of online services may have a direct influence on levels of awareness about the role of local authorities in providing services.

Services	Region				
	Overall	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/ Ulster
Footpaths	87%	85%	88%	86%	91%
Street Cleaning	86%	87%	85%	85%	86%
Street Lighting	82%	86%	82%	76%	86%
Litter Control	81%	81%	83%	77%	84%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	79%	75%	80%	77%	83%
Library Services	78%	81%	80%	75%	73%
Local Outdoor Amenities (Parks, Playground)	78%	78%	78%	75%	81%
Net Community & Voluntary Supports	77%	78%	80%	74%	77%
Road Maintenance Improve Road Network	76%	71%	78%	75%	81%
Planning Applications and Development	74%	70%	77%	74%	79%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	74%	73%	72%	78%	73%
Water/Roadside drainage	72%	74%	72%	68%	75%
Service For New Housing Development	67%	62%	70%	67%	72%
Planning and Environment Enforcement	66%	61%	70%	66%	71%
Dog Warden Service	65%	61%	67%	66%	69%
Road Safety and Parking	63%	62%	67%	61%	65%
Net Community/Youth, Sports/Leisure Centres	61%	72%	54%	58%	56%
Net Arts/Heritage	60%	57%	63%	61%	61%
Register of Electors/Elections	59%	50%	65%	60%	66%
Traveller Accommodation	58%	53%	62%	59%	60%
Promoting Development of the County	58%	49%	62%	61%	62%
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	58%	53%	56%	65%	56%
Environment/Controlling Pollution	54%	47%	57%	55%	60%
Fire Services	53%	41%	59%	55%	56%
Net Business Support Services	52%	53%	53%	53%	49%
Motor Tax Collection	52%	29%	64%	57%	63%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	52%	41%	57%	56%	56%
Environmental Information and Awareness	48%	45%	50%	47%	51%
Tourism – Assisting and Attracting Tourism	45%	35%	50%	51%	46%
Monitoring Lakes, Waterways, Rivers, etc.	45%	41%	45%	44%	51%
None of these	13%	12%	11%	17%	14%

Legend	Highest point		Lowest point	
	High awareness 70% +	Moderate awareness 50-69%	Low awareness 49% + lower	

Table 2: Awareness of local authority services by region 2021

Service Use

Overall service use

The 2021 survey sought to identify how many respondents had used services over the previous 12 months. In total, 93% had engaged with some of the services provided by local authorities in the previous year. This confirms that they are 'customers' as defined in the literature review commissioned (i.e., a direct recipient of local authority services).

The two most frequently used services were litter bins and recycling with almost two-thirds of all respondents using these services. This is followed by half using public parking and 43% using motor tax. One-third used local leisure amenities such as parks, playgrounds, sport fields, open spaces, etc. and 31% used library

services. Seventeen percent used local sports/leisure facilities and 11% reported engaging with the register of electors.

There were six services where 5% to 10% of respondents utilised the service: heritage and the arts services, community and voluntary services, local authority housing, planning, business support services, and environmental information and awareness services.

The nine services with less than 5% reported usage are: environmental protection and pollution control, services for new housing developments, dog warden services, promoting the development of the county, urban and village renewal scheme, local authority tourism, planning and environmental enforcement, fire services and traveller accommodation.
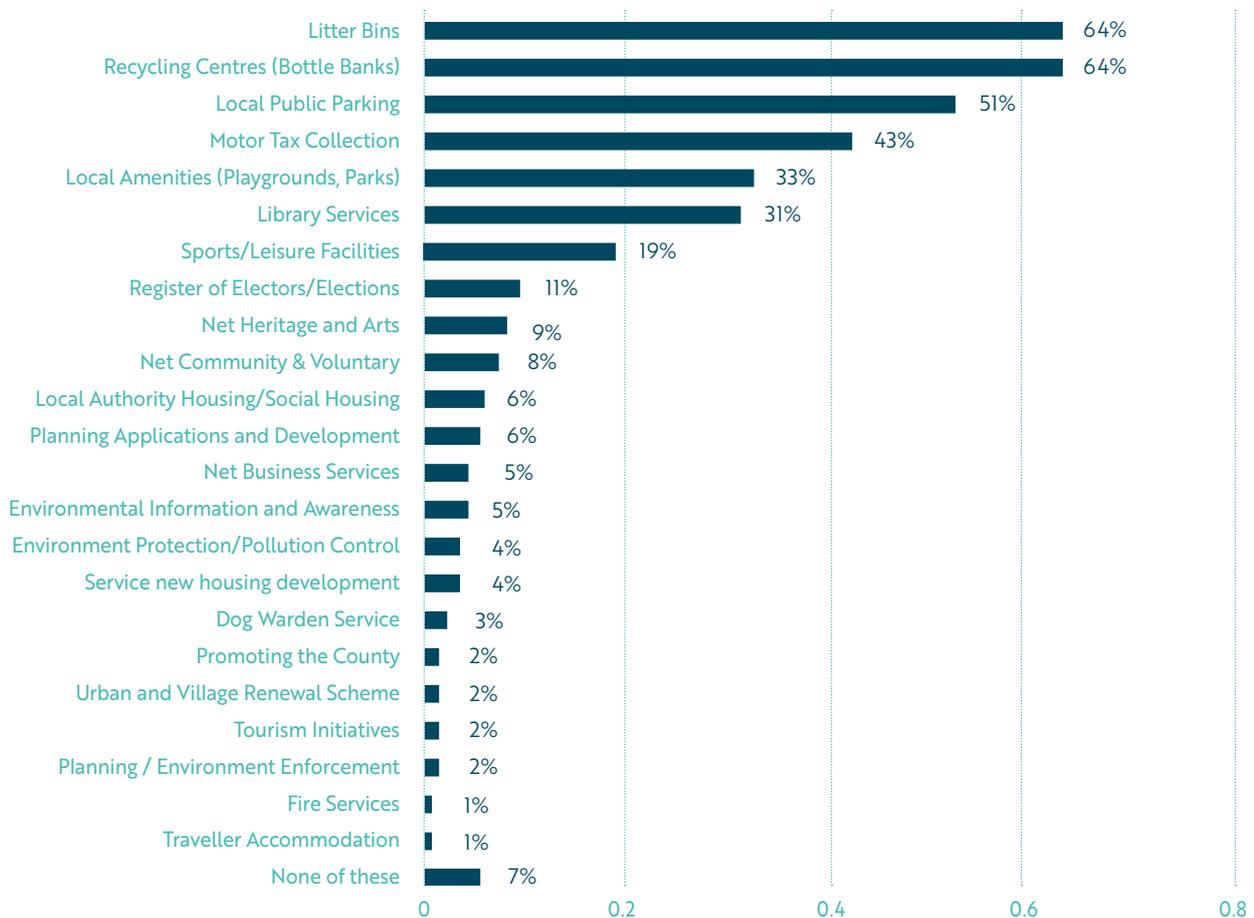
Service	%
Litter Bins	64%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	64%
Local Public Parking	51%
Motor Tax Collection	43%
Local Amenities (Playgrounds, Parks)	33%
Library Services	31%
Sports/Leisure Facilities	19%
Register of Electors/Elections	11%
Net Heritage and Arts	9%
Net Community & Voluntary	8%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	6%
Planning Applications and Development	6%
Net Business Services	5%
Environmental Information and Awareness	5%
Environment Protection/Pollution Control	4%
Service new housing development	4%
Dog Warden Service	3%
Promoting the County	2%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	2%
Tourism Initiatives	2%
Planning / Environment Enforcement	2%
Fire Services	1%
Traveller Accommodation	1%
None of these	7%

Figure 4: Local authority services used in past 12 months

Services used in past 12 months	Age						
	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	64%	50%	51%	63%	61%	80%	78%
Litter Bins	64%	66%	57%	67%	63%	63%	66%
Local Public Parking	51%	48%	45%	56%	52%	50%	49%
Motor Tax Collection	43%	18%	33%	43%	49%	57%	52%
Outdoor Leisure Amenities such as Playgrounds/Parks	33%	30%	30%	38%	34%	32%	34%
Library Services	31%	37%	23%	27%	30%	34%	40%
Net Facilities/Centres (Community, Youth, Sports, etc	19%	40%	22%	20%	15%	12%	10%
Register of Electors/Elections	11%	17%	8%	9%	9%	11%	15%
Net Arts & Heritage	9%	9%	11%	8%	9%	8%	11%
Net Community & Voluntary Supports	8%	7%	7%	7%	6%	7%	10%
Planning Applications and Development	6%	5%	4%	7%	6%	7%	7%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	6%	3%	10%	9%	6%	4%	3%
Net Business Support Services	5%	8%	7%	5%	5%	2%	4%
Environmental Information and Awareness	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%	7%	7%
Service For New Housing Developments	4%	14%	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Protecting the Environment/Controlling Pollution	4%	6%	3%	3%	4%	2%	6%
Dog Warden Service	3%	3%	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%
Enforcement of Planning and Environment Issues	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Local Authority Supported Tourism Initiatives	2%	4%	3%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	2%	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Promoting the Development of the County	2%	1%	3%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Traveller Accommodation	1%	1%	4%	1%	0%	2%	1%
Fire Services	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%
None of these	7%	5%	13%	7%	8%	4%	4%

Legend	Highest point	Lowest point

Table 3: Services used over the past 12 months by age

Service use by age category

Levels of utilisation are spread across the age groups with no one group dominating across all services.

Utilisation of recycling centres, motor tax, and planning services all increase as people get older. In contrast, younger people aged between 18-24 are more likely to use community/youth and sports/leisure centres, business supports, services for new housing developments, and local authority supported tourism initiatives.

The respondents aged between 25-34 are more likely to use fire services, traveller accommodation, and be involved in promoting the county. Both the younger and older age cohorts are more likely to utilise library services, the register of electors, environmental information and awareness services, and environmental and pollution control services.

Service use by gender

There is quite an even balance between male and female use across most services with only a few noticeable exceptions[3]. Women are more likely to use outdoor amenities such as parks, playgrounds, open spaces, etc. with 38% of females responding that they use these services compared with 29% of males. In contrast, the male respondents were more frequent users of sports/leisure facilities and community/youth centres as 22% reported using these services compared with 15% for female respondents.

Service use by region

Dublin and the Rest of Leinster are the regions with the highest reported levels of service utilisation across all services except tourism. In many cases the variances between the regions are very small but there are some exceptions.

As discussed previously, those engaging directly with local authorities in relation to motor tax are higher outside the Dublin region. Thirty-five percent of respondents reported using local authorities for their motor tax in the Dublin region compared with between 46%-47% in the other three regions. Conversely, between 49% to 55% of respondents used public parking in the three regions outside Dublin compared to 44% in the Dublin region. Respondents in the Dublin region are also more likely to use outdoor amenities (parks, playgrounds, open spaces, etc.) than their counterparts in the other regions (39% compared with between 29% and 34% in the other regions).

Use of sports/leisure facilities and community/youth centres is higher in the Dublin and Munster regions (at 22% and 21% respectively) compared with 15% in the rest of Leinster and 16% in the Connacht/Ulster region. Respondents are also more likely to use library services in the Dublin and the Rest of Lenister region (33% and 34% respectively) compared with Munster and Connacht/Ulster (at 29% and 30% respectively).

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[3] Only variance of 5% or more identified for discussion.

Services used in past 12 months	Total	Male	Female	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht /Ulster
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	64%	63%	66%	68%	61%	63%	67%
Litter Bins	64%	62%	65%	65%	61%	65%	63%
Local Public Parking	51%	49%	52%	44%	55%	54%	49%
Motor Tax Collection	43%	42%	45%	35%	47%	47%	46%
Outdoor Amenities such as Playgrounds/Parks	33%	29%	38%	39%	29%	34%	30%
Library Services	31%	32%	31%	33%	34%	29%	30%
Net Facilities/Centres (Community/Youth, Sports/ Leisure)	19%	22%	15%	22%	15%	21%	16%
Register of Electors/Elections	11%	12%	11%	13%	11%	9%	11%
Net Arts & Heritage	9%	9%	9%	11%	10%	8%	9%
Net Community & Voluntary Supports	8%	7%	8%	9%	8%	6%	5%
Planning Applications and Development	6%	8%	4%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Local Authority Housing/ Social Housing	6%	5%	7%	5%	8%	6%	5%
Net Business Support Services	5%	6%	4%	7%	5%	4%	5%
Environmental Information and Awareness	5%	5%	6%	6%	6%	4%	5%
Services New Housing Development (Roads, Lighting, etc.)	4%	5%	3%	6%	4%	3%	3%
Protecting the Environment/ Controlling Pollution	4%	4%	3%	5%	2%	5%	3%
Dog Warden Service	3%	4%	2%	3%	3%	3%	5%
Enforcement of Planning and Environment Issues	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Local Authority Supported Tourism Initiatives	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	3%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	2%	2%	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Promoting the Development of the County	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Traveller Accommodation	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Fire Services	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
None of these	7%	7%	6%	7%	7%	8%	6%

Legend	Highest point	Lowest point

Table 4: Services used over the past 12 months by gender and region

Awareness Gap

By comparing the levels of service awareness with the levels of utilisation, it is possible to determine whether awareness levels are being influenced by level of use or by exposure to information relating to the service (e.g., media reports, marketing, word-of-mouth, etc.). As illustrated in Figure 5, services such as recycling, litter bins, parking and motor tax have high levels of awareness and utilisation. In this scenario, we can contend that most awareness is as a result of service use.

Outdoor amenities (i.e., parks, playgrounds) and libraries have high levels of awareness but moderate levels of engagement. This is evidence of a mix where awareness is most likely informed by some usage but also by information about the services.

However, the focus groups carried out to explore how people use libraries allows a look behind the figures. The discussions revealed that the majority of those aged between 25 and 55 who do not use libraries at the moment, had used libraries when they were younger. Therefore, it is more likely that awareness in this instance is influenced by usage rather than information, even though usage was in the past, and therefore not captured in the survey.

Housing, planning, and community and voluntary supports/initiatives are three services where there are high levels of awareness but relatively low levels of engagement over the past year. Therefore, awareness is probably as a result of exposure to information relating to services. These three services are topics that receive quite a lot of media attention from both national and local media.
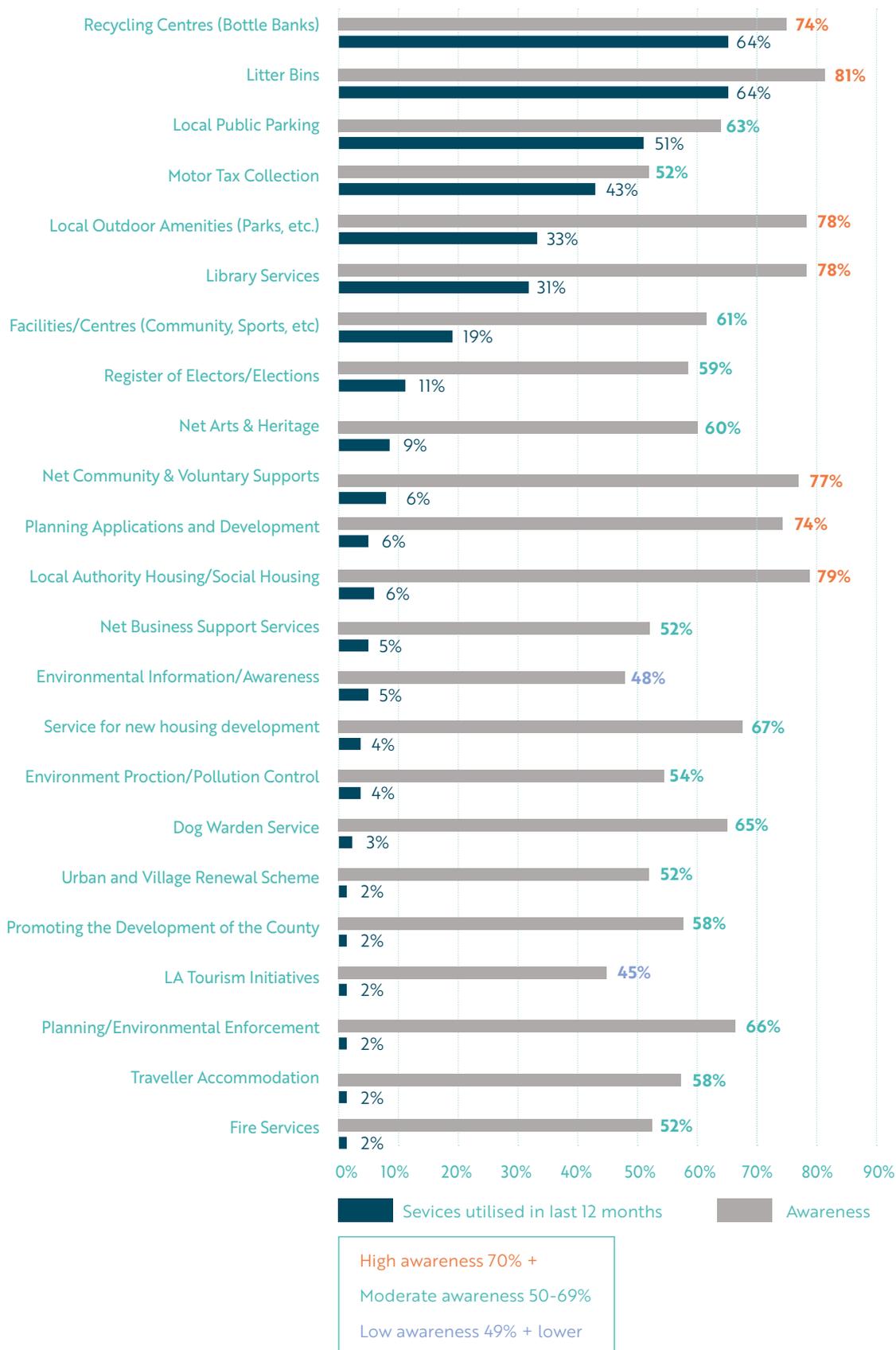
Service	Services utilised in last 12 months	Awareness
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	64%	74%
Litter Bins	64%	81%
Local Public Parking	51%	63%
Motor Tax Collection	43%	52%
Local Outdoor Amenities (Parks, etc.)	33%	78%
Library Services	31%	78%
Facilities/Centres (Community, Sports, etc)	19%	61%
Register of Electors/Elections	11%	59%
Net Arts & Heritage	9%	60%
Net Community & Voluntary Supports	6%	77%
Planning Applications and Development	6%	74%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	6%	79%
Net Business Support Services	5%	52%
Environmental Information/Awareness	5%	48%
Service for new housing development	4%	67%
Environment Proction/Pollution Control	4%	54%
Dog Warden Service	3%	65%
Urban and Village Renewal Scheme	2%	52%
Promoting the Development of the County	2%	58%
LA Tourism Initiatives	2%	45%
Planning/Environmental Enforcement	2%	66%
Traveller Accommodation	2%	58%
Fire Services	2%	52%

Sevices utilised in last 12 months   Awareness

High awareness 70% +

Moderate awareness 50-69%

Low awareness 49% + lower

Figure 5: Awareness and use of local authority services 2021

Service Engagement

Overall service engagement

The survey asked about the reasons for contacting local authorities over the previous 12 months.

In total, 35% of respondents had contacted their local authority in relation to a service provided. The most common reason was in relation to roads (10%), followed by motor tax (9%), street lighting (8%), footpaths (5%), litter bins (4%), and recycling services (4%).

Three percent of respondents made contact in relation to the Register of Electors, local authority housing, and planning while 2% made contact about library services and public parking[4].
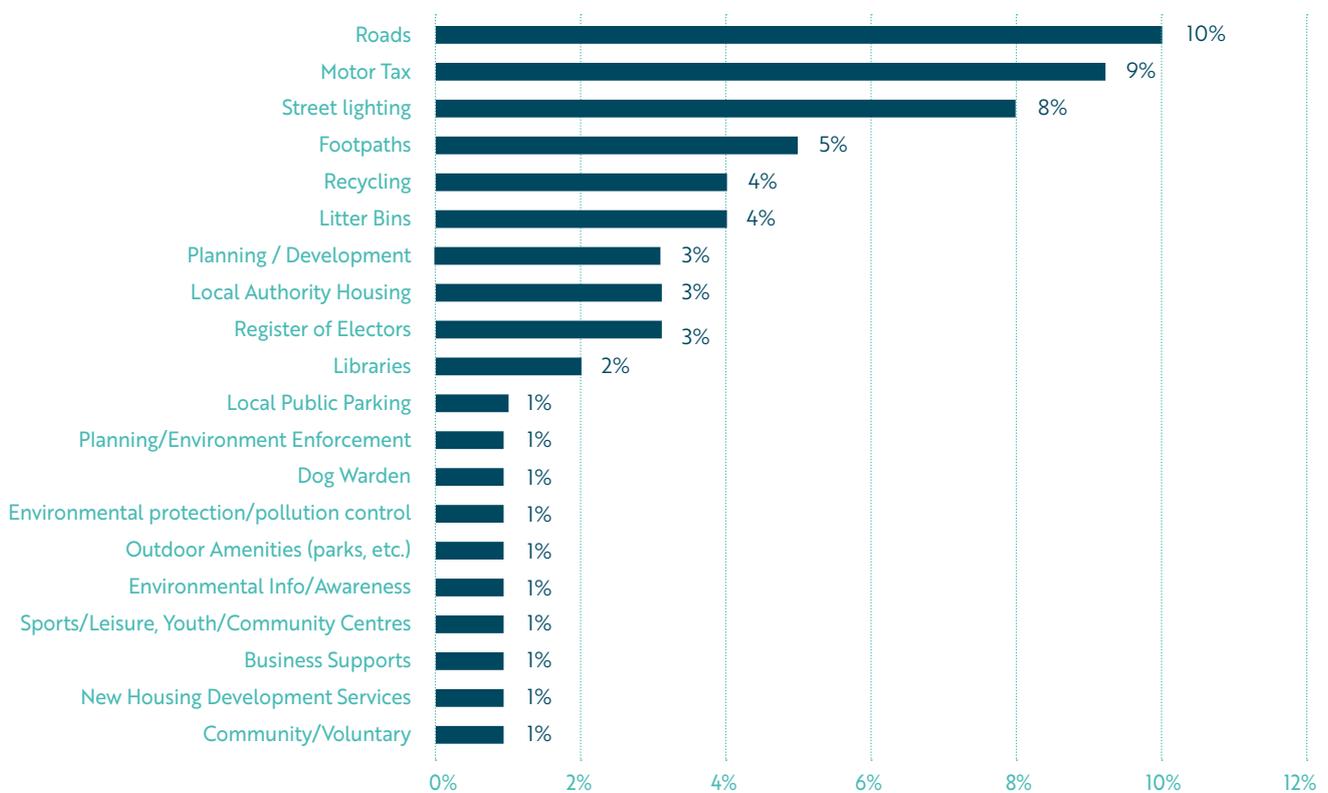
Figure 6: Reason for contacting the local authority in the past 12 months

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[4] There were additional services that were identified as being the reason for contacting the local authority, but the data is too small to carry out regional/age/gender comparisons that are meaningful. These services are community/voluntary services, services for new housing developments, business supports, community centres/sports facilities, environmental information/awareness, outdoor amenities (e.g., parks), environmental protection/pollution control, dog warden, and planning/environmental enforcement.

A similar question was asked in the previous NOAC survey, but it must be noted that the question posed in the survey related to contacts made over a five-year period whereas the 2021 survey focuses on the previous twelve-month period (the time period recommended in the literature review on the topic). There was also a difference in terms of the services listed between the two surveys[5]. In addition, the 2021 survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which would have had an impact on the services being used by customers. Given this, the two datasets are not comparable.

Despite these differences, there are certain services that have appeared on both lists, even though there is a variance in relation to the percentage in contact. These are local authority housing, planning/development, roads, litter, footpaths, and environmental enforcement/pollution control.

Service engagement by age category

A review of the data by age cohort reveals that most engagement was by people aged 65+ across 10 of the 11 services listed (although one of these, parking, has almost identical engagement levels across all age groups). The only service where engagement was not highest among those aged 65+ relates to planning. Those aged between 25-34 score highest in this category. The largest variance across the age cohorts relates to motor tax as only 5% of those aged between 18-34 made contact about this service compared with 15% of the 65+ age group.

Contacted local authority about services in past 12 months n1744	Age						
	Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Local Roads	10%	13%	9%	8%	10%	7%	13%
Motor Tax Collection	9%	5%	5%	8%	10%	12%	15%
Street Lighting	8%	5%	7%	9%	8%	9%	11%
Footpaths	5%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	8%
Litter Bins	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%	2%	6%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	4%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%	8%
Register of Electors/Elections	3%	5%	2%	2%	3%	3%	6%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	3%	2%	1%	4%	2%	3%	5%
Planning Applications and Development	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%
Library Services	2%	4%	1%	2%	3%	2%	4%
Local Public Parking	2%	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
None of these	65%	63%	70%	66%	67%	64%	60%
Legend	Highest point			Lowest point			

Table 5: Local authority services contacted in past 12 months: overall and age

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[5] Homeless services to be included in future surveys.

Service engagement by region

The variance across the regions is very insignificant with little more than a 1% or 2% difference evident in most cases. One exception is in relation to higher engagement about streetlights in Dublin and Rest of Leinster regions where the figures are 12% and 10% respectively compared with 5% for both Munster and Connacht/Ulster. Also, contact about the Register of Electors is only at 1% in Munster compared with 4% in the other regions.

Contact Channels

Overall channels of contact - past 12 months

The 2021 survey sought to identify the channels used by customers to contact the local authorities and a reliance on electronic modes of engagement is more evident compared to face-to-face interactions.

The data reveals that 46% of respondents used a website to contact local authorities, making it the most popular channel of choice during the previous year. This is followed by email and phone at 24% and letter or bringing/using a third party or intermediary to engage with local authorities, both at 13%. The remaining three categories, in person contacts, staff engagement and attending public meetings are the least popular scoring 12%, 5% and 4% respectively. However, it should be noted that the period in question was during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently, access to staff and public meetings was significantly restricted.

Source of Information	Region				
	Overall	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/ Ulster
Local Roads	10%	8%	10%	11%	11%
Motor Tax Collection	9%	7%	11%	11%	9%
Street Lighting	8%	12%	10%	5%	5%
Footpaths	5%	6%	5%	5%	5%
Litter Bins	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%
Recycling Centres (Bottle Banks)	4%	5%	3%	3%	5%
Register of Electors/Elections	3%	4%	4%	1%	4%
Local Authority Housing/Social Housing	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Planning Applications and Development	3%	2%	4%	2%	1%
Library Services	2%	4%	2%	1%	3%
Local Public Parking	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%
None of these	65%	62%	63%	67%	70%

Legend	Highest point	Lowest point

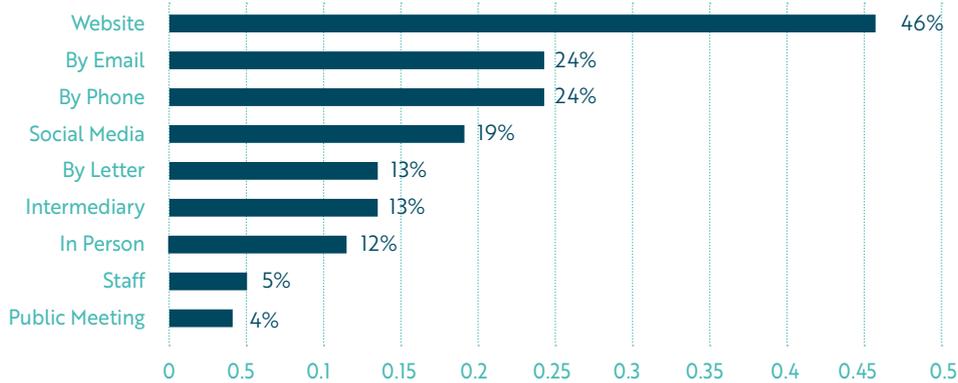Table 6: Local authority services contacted in past 12 months: region

Figure 7: Channel used to contact the local authority in the past 12 months

Overall channels of contact - past 5 years

The survey also explored the channels used by respondents over a five-year period in order to identify trends in relation to the use of channels of contact. The data clearly reveals a shift away from using face-to-face methods of engagement in favour of electronic methods of communication.

What is illustrated is that engagement via a website has steadily increased, particularly during the past twelve months (during the COVID-19 pandemic), whereas engagement in person, via public meeting and direct engagements with staff has decreased over the years. Contact via social media is also increasing as face-to-face contacts decrease. Engagement via email has increased but at a much lower rate than website or social media engagement, while phone engagement, letters, and use of an intermediary (e.g., councillor, agent, or advocate) have remained relatively stable over the five-year period.

	Website	Phone	Email	In-person	Social media	Intermed-iary	Letter	Public meeting	Staff
Past 6 months	29%	13%	13%	6%	12%	8%	8%	2%	2%
6-12 months	17%	11%	11%	6%	7%	5%	5%	2%	3%
Over 1-2 years ago	12%	12%	9%	13%	5%	8%	8%	5%	5%
Over 2-5 years ago	6%	9%	6%	10%	1%	5%	5%	6%	5%
5 years +	4%	10%	5%	14%	2%	9%	9%	9%	8%
Never	32%	45%	55%	51%	73%	66%	66%	75%	77%
Legend	Highest point				Lowest point				

Table 7: Last channel used to engage with local authorities over five years

Net 5 years	Gender			Age						Region			
	Total	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Dub	ROL	Mun	Con/Ul
Visited Website	64%	65%	63%	55%	62%	66%	62%	69%	66%	71%	63%	61%	59%
Over the phone	44%	46%	43%	25%	38%	47%	44%	53%	52%	43%	44%	46%	44%
E-mail	39%	42%	37%	35%	39%	46%	36%	40%	38%	46%	38%	37%	35%
In person	34%	40%	29%	26%	30%	40%	36%	38%	34%	28%	35%	41%	35%
Social Media	26%	25%	26%	36%	33%	32%	21%	18%	17%	31%	24%	24%	23%
Intermediary	25%	29%	22%	22%	21%	24%	24%	29%	29%	23%	23%	26%	29%
Letter	24%	25%	24%	18%	25%	31%	23%	25%	21%	24%	27%	22%	26%
Public Meeting	16%	18%	13%	11%	17%	16%	14%	20%	14%	20%	13%	15%	15%
Meet LA Staff	15%	18%	12%	9%	17%	18%	15%	12%	17%	15%	14%	16%	16%
None of these	22%	21%	24%	33%	26%	20%	24%	17%	17%	21%	21%	22%	26%
Legend	Highest point					Lowest point							

Table 8: Last channel of engagement used over the past five years - gender, age, and region

Channel of Contact by Gender

The data in Table 8 also illustrates that males are slightly more likely to contact local authorities than females and that males engage in face-to-face methods of contact more than females. For instance, 40% of males engaged in-person compared with 29% of females, 18% attended a public meeting compared with 13% of females and 18% arranged to meet local authority staff compared with 12% of females. Males were also more likely to use an intermediary (e.g., an agent or representative, or a family member or community support representative). Twenty-nine percent of males used an intermediary while 22% of females used one.

Channel of contact by age

Those aged between 18-24 are the highest users of social media and the least likely to use all other channels to contact local authorities, with the exception of using an intermediary or advocate. Almost two-thirds of all people aged 25 and above use local authority websites to engage with local authorities while phone contact is still very popular with older respondents (for example 53% of 55-64 year-olds and 52% of people aged 65+ use phone compared with 25% of 18-24 year olds and 38% of 25-34 year olds).

The age cohort 35-44 report higher levels of engagement through the use of emails, letter, in person and meetings with staff, while the highest levels of engagement for 55-64 age cohort are with website, phone, intermediary and public meeting.

Channel of contact by region

The Dublin region has the highest level of engagement across 4 of the 9 categories, website, attending public meetings, email communications and social media. Those in the Munster region have the highest level of in-person engagement at 41%, with Connacht/Ulster and the rest of Leinster recording 35% of contacts in person. The lowest level of in-person engagement is in the Dublin region at 28%.

Those most likely to use an intermediary (e.g., agents, councillor, family member) are in Connacht/Ulster, while communicating via letter/correspondence or arranging to meet a staff member are quite evenly distributed across all regions.

Sources of Information

The survey also gathered information in relation to where people got their information about local authorities. What is evident is that local authority websites are the primary source of information for most people, with 51% relying on them for information.

The previous survey explored the same topic, and those findings reveal that the primary source of information was word-of-mouth (identified by between 41% and 48% of respondents) compared with only 26% in 2021. However, it must be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the level of contact people had with friends and neighbours so this may have impacted on the results.

Overall, the comparison seems to indicate a very significant shift towards relying on local authority websites during the pandemic for information as opportunities to engage in-person (with family, neighbours or staff) were dramatically reduced during periods of lockdown or restricted movements. This was also a period where there were on-going adaptations being made to service delivery in response to national public health advice, so the demand for information was high.

Source	Percentage
Website	51%
Newspaper- Local/Nat'l	26%
Friends and neighbours	26%
Facebook	18%
Posters/Leaflets etc	16%
Contact La Staff	14%
Local/National Radio	14%
Apps For La Services	6%
Twitter	6%
Magazine – Local/Nat'l	5%
Instagram	4%
Other	2%
LinkedIn	2%
None of these	11%
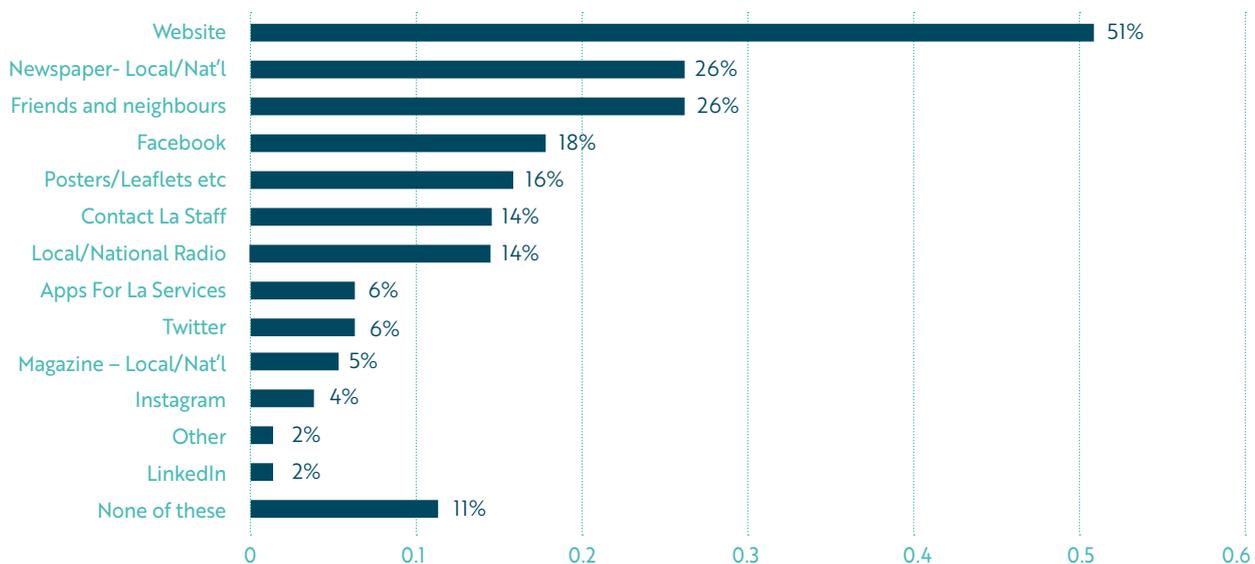
Figure 8: Source of information about local authority services 2021
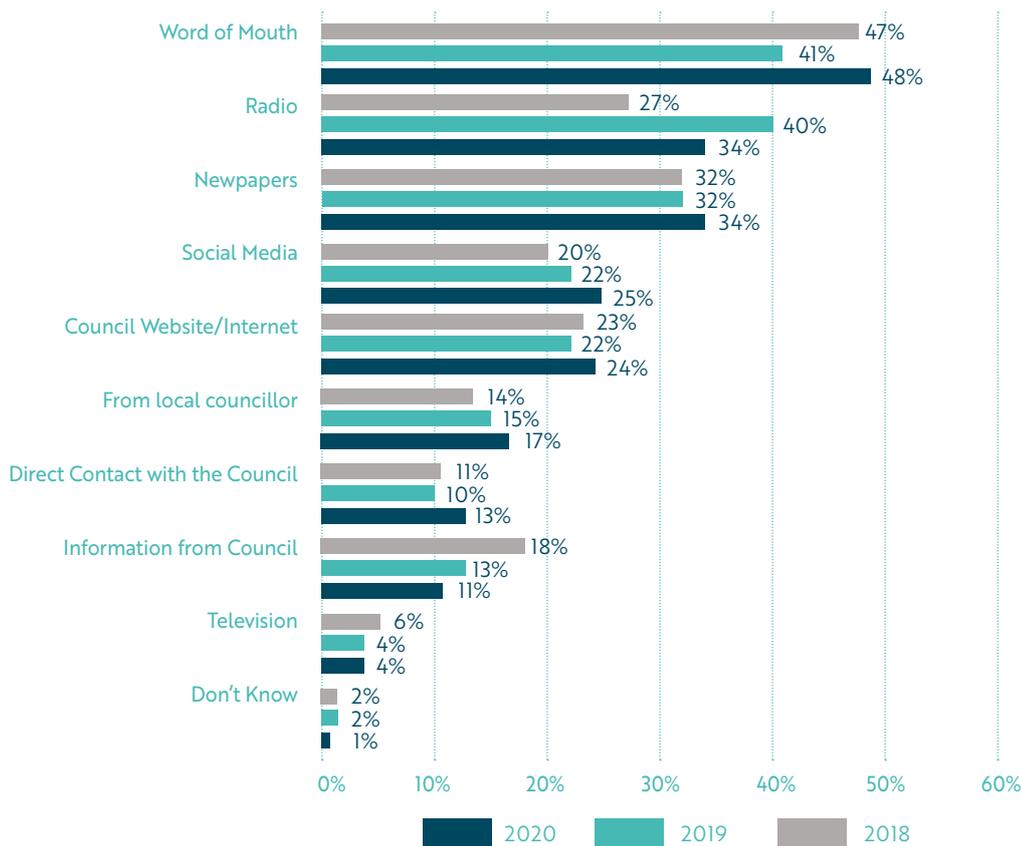
Figure 9: Sources of information about local authority services 2018-2020: IPSOS MRBI Survey for NOAC

Source of Information by Gender

There is little difference in the information sources selected by males and females. There is a slightly higher reliance on friends and neighbours and Facebook among females while males are slightly more inclined to use websites, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Source of information by age

Those aged between 18-24 use friends and neighbours, Facebook, posters/leaflets, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn more than other age groups. Those aged 65 and over are more reliant on newspapers, radio, staff contact, phone apps, and magazines for their information.

Source of information by region

People in the Dublin region have much higher usage rates of Twitter and Instagram compared with other regions, e.g., 11% Twitter users in Dublin compared with between 3% and 5% in the other regions, and 6% use of Instagram in Dublin compared with 4% in the Rest of Leinster, 3% in Ulster/Connacht and 1% in Munster. Interestingly, posters and leaflets are used by 23% of people in the Dublin region compared with 15% in the Rest of Leinster, 13% in Munster and 12% in Ulster/Connacht.

There is a higher reliance on radio in all regions outside of Dublin. Radio usage is at 21% in Ulster/Connacht, 19% in Munster and drops to 13% in the Rest of Leinster region and further again to 6% in the Dublin region. There is a similar pattern with newspapers, but it is not as dramatic with newspaper use at 21% in the Dublin region and between 27% and 28% in the other three regions.

Finally, contacting local authority staff to access information is highest in the Munster region - 18% compared with 15% in Connacht/Ulster, 12% in the Rest of Leinster and 11% in Dublin.

Source of Information n1744	Gender			Age						Region			
	Overall	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Dub	RofL	Mun	Con/Ul
Website	51%	53%	49%	38%	49%	56%	53%	59%	48%	52%	54%	48%	50%
Friends and Neighbours	26%	24%	28%	37%	23%	24%	23%	27%	30%	26%	26%	27%	27%
Newspaper-Local/Nat'l	26%	26%	25%	18%	20%	16%	24%	34%	43%	21%	27%	28%	28%
Facebook	18%	16%	20%	26%	21%	22%	17%	12%	11%	18%	17%	19%	16%
Posters/ Leaflets etc	16%	16%	16%	23%	19%	9%	14%	17%	19%	23%	15%	13%	12%
Local/ National Radio	14%	14%	14%	9%	7%	8%	14%	20%	26%	6%	13%	19%	21%
Contact LA Staff	14%	15%	13%	2%	6%	19%	15%	16%	20%	11%	12%	18%	15%
Twitter	6%	8%	4%	14%	10%	7%	5%	1%	2%	11%	3%	5%	5%
Apps for LA Services	6%	6%	5%	3%	4%	5%	4%	8%	8%	7%	5%	5%	4%
Magazine – Local/Nat'l	5%	6%	4%	6%	5%	3%	4%	7%	8%	5%	4%	7%	4%
Instagram	4%	4%	4%	11%	6%	4%	2%	0%	1%	6%	4%	1%	3%
LinkedIn	1%	2%	0%	4%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%
Other	2%	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	4%	2%	1%	3%	3%
None of these	11%	10%	13%	15%	16%	10%	13%	9%	8%	10%	11%	14%	12%
Legend	Highest point						Lowest point						

Table 9: Sources of information about local authorities

Sentiment

Local authorities are committed to the design and delivery of efficient and effective services and equitable access to services. In 2017 Our Public Service 2020 was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and it encourages the public service to improve access to services, particularly digital services, and to become more customer focused and innovative. In addition, there is an obligation on public bodies, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights of staff and service users (Our Public Service, 2020).

In order to assess whether people feel local authorities are meeting the needs of customers, 15 statements were presented to interviewees and, using a scale, they were asked to agree or disagree with each statement. More than one in four respondents selected a 'neutral' response, i.e., neither agree or disagree, or had no opinion. Of those that did respond, more agreed with the statements than disagreed (55%:45%).
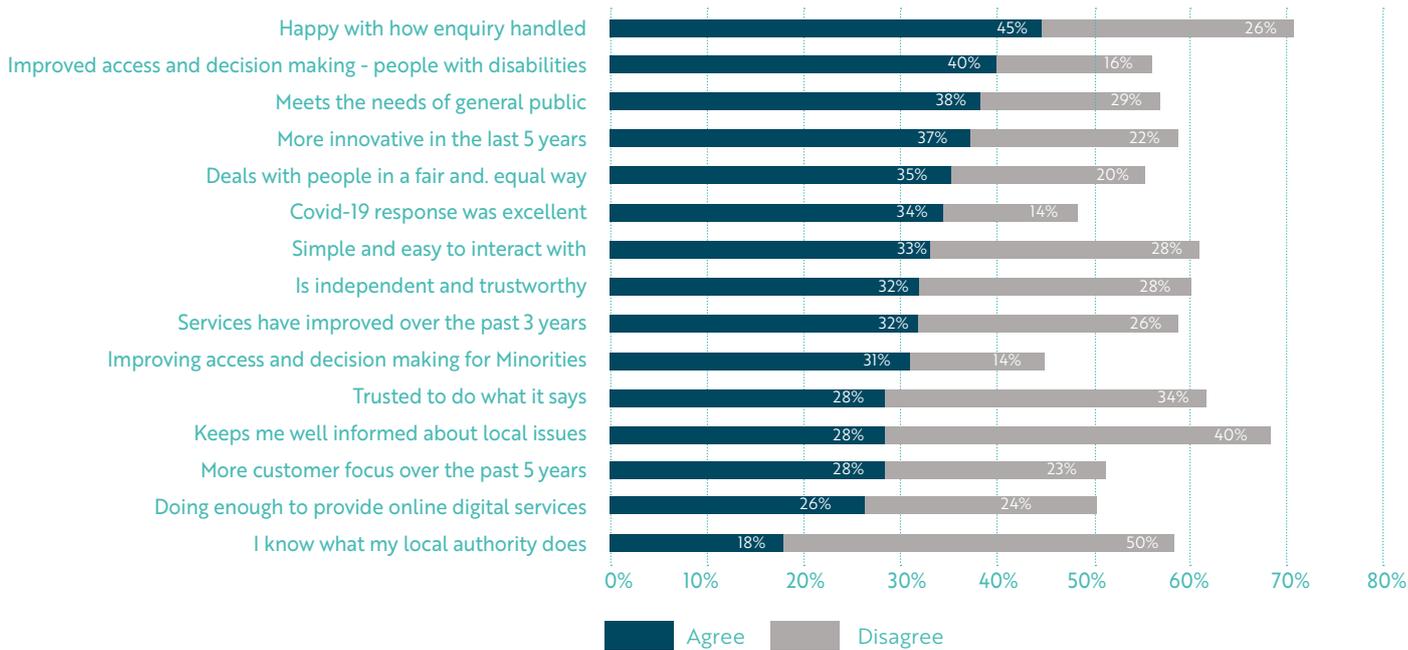
Figure 10: Sentiment survey responses 2021

There are higher rates of agreement rather than disagreement in 12 of the 15 statements, this is especially true in relation to statements that focus on direct engagement with local authorities.

When the six statements with the largest percentage difference between agreement and disagreement are considered, two themes emerge as rating highest. The first relates to themes relevant to the public sector duty such as improving access to services and decision making for people with disabilities (e.g., improved building access, parking spaces, paving, traffic signaling, representation on the Public Participation Network, consultations, etc.) and minorities (e.g., multilingual materials, Public Participation Network, Local Community Development Committee, Joint Policing Committee, etc.) as well as dealing with people in a fair and equal way (Irish Human Right and Equality Commission, 2021).

The second theme relates to satisfaction with how enquiries are handled and the service response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
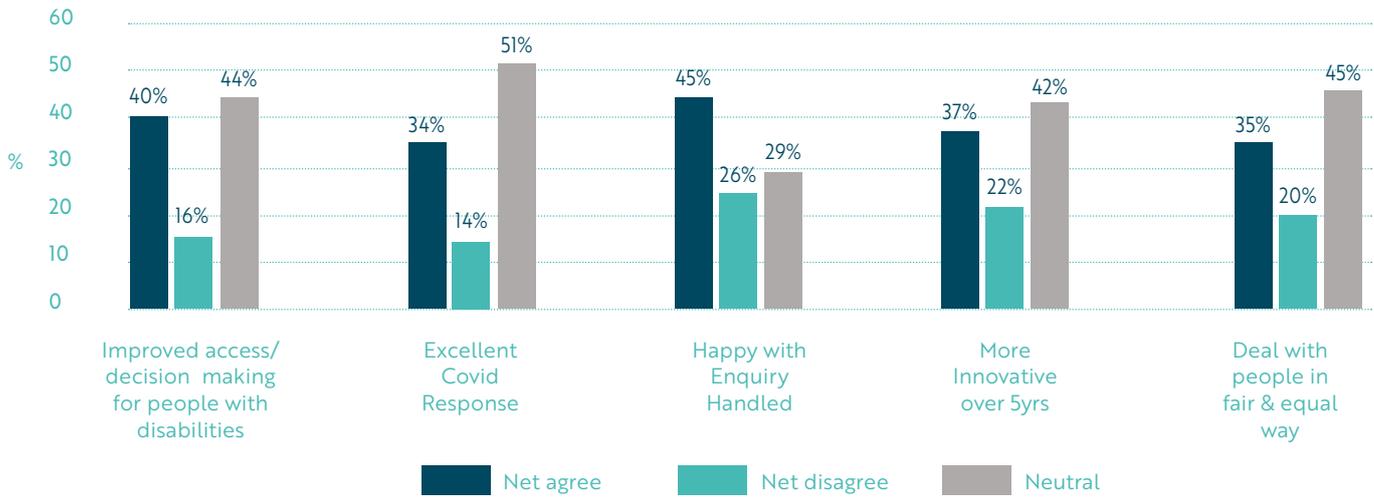
Figure 11: Highest levels of agreement 2021

The statements where there are low levels of agreement and high levels of disagreement focus on dissatisfaction with access to information about what is going on in their local area as well as information about what the local authority does. This is an area that local authorities can address through increasing the amount of information available and the channels through which information can be made available.

The second area where dissatisfaction is high relates to trust. This is a complex area for local authorities to address as most responses are likely informed by general opinions that the public hold in relation to elected members and public servants. Annually, IPSOS MRBI undertakes a survey and publishes a Veracity Index. The 2021 results show that 70% of people trust civil servants but only 44% trust local councillors and only 20% trust politicians. Richard Boyle also points out that "when people are asked to evaluate government services

in general, their opinion is more likely to be influenced by their biases and predispositions" (2020, p.8). Therefore, the results presented probably reflect broader opinions respondents hold in relation to the public service and pollical system than their engagements with local authority services.
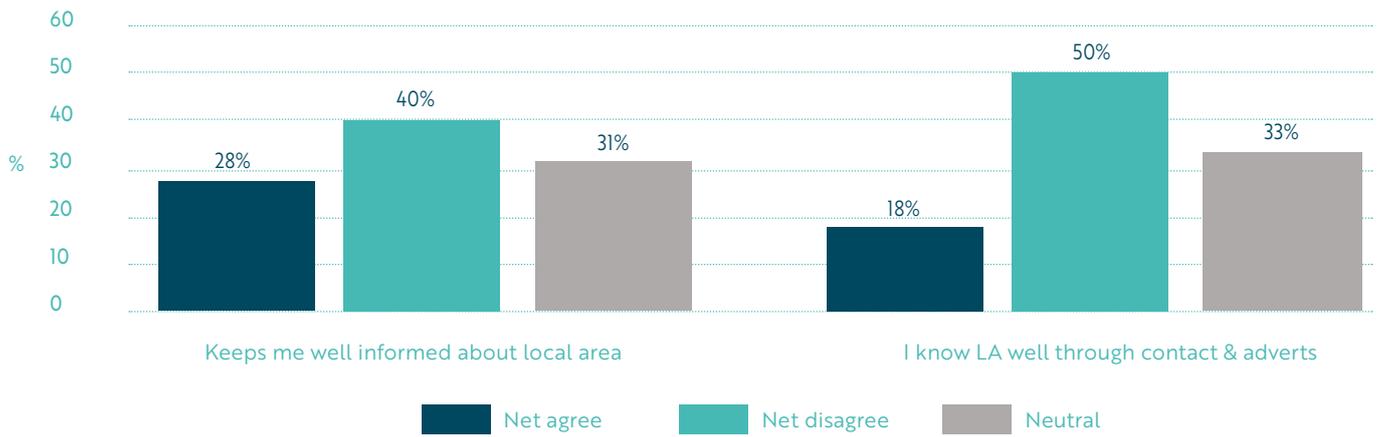
Figure 12: Low levels of agreement - information
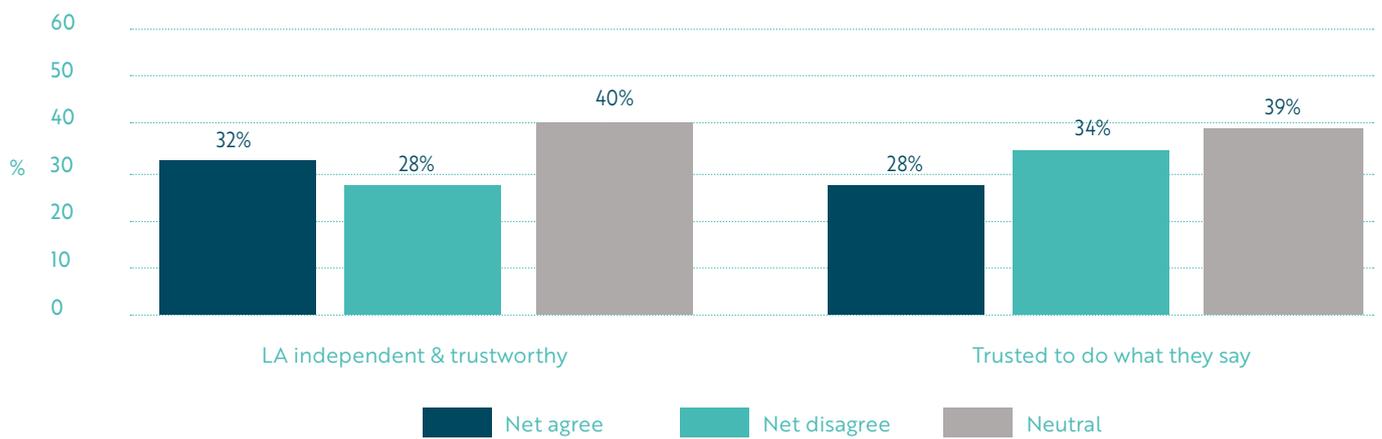
Figure 13: Low levels of agreement - trust

COVID-19 focus

Local authorities were required to make very significant adaptations to existing services and to deliver a range of new services while managing dramatically revised work practices across a workforce of 30,000 staff in order to respond to the government and public health advice relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey sought to assess levels of awareness about key initiatives that were put in place generally, and explored whether those who knew about the service, knew it was the local authorities that were responsible for the service. The survey also asked whether respondents had used any of the services, as this would help assess whether awareness was driven by utilisation or information.

The services assessed were:
· Maintenance/upgrade of parks, playground and outdoor spaces
· Public works: roads/cycle tracks/ outdoor dining
· Community Call initiative
· Providing existing and additional library services
· Administration of special grants
· Outreach and befriending services

Overall, 72% of respondents were aware of the COVID-19 services provided by local authorities, however only 60% were aware that these services were provided by local authorities. One-third of respondents reported using the COVID-19 services.

Similar to general services, the youngest age cohorts were least aware and the oldest cohort most aware of the services generally, and that local authorities provided these services. However, those aged 18-24 were most likely to use the services along with the older cohorts while those aged 25-44 were least likely to use services.

There is little difference between male and female awareness and utilisation rates but across the regions, those in the urbanised Dublin region were most aware of the service and most likely to use the services.

Engagement was highest with outdoor amenities and public works (17% and 16% respectively). These are also the areas with the highest levels of awareness (49% and 42% respectively), therefore it is likely a lot of the awareness was as a result of engagement with services.

Service		Age						
		Total	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
COVID-19 Services	*General Awareness*	72%	74%	61%	70%	73%	80%	74%
	Aware LA provide Service	60%	64%	49%	57%	64%	65%	63%
	Used the Service	33%	46%	27%	29%	34%	31%	37%
Legend		Highest point			Lowest point			

Table 10: Awareness and usage of COVID-19 related local authority services/initiatives - general and age

Service		Total	Gender		Region			
			M	F	Dub	RofI	Mun	Uls/Con
COVID-19 Services	*General Awareness*	72%	72%	71%	74%	70%	71%	70%
	Aware LA provide Service	60%	59%	61%	65%	61%	58%	54%
	Used the Service	33%	34%	33%	40%	31%	32%	28%
Legend	Highest point				Lowest point			

Table 11: Awareness and usage of COVID-19 related local authority services/initiatives: gender and region

This contrasts with the Community Call initiative where engagement rates are at 5% but general awareness about the initiative is at 42%. This seems to indicate that most awareness was as a result of information, and this is most likely because of the national advertisement campaign undertaken by the government and local authorities to raise awareness and about the initiative.
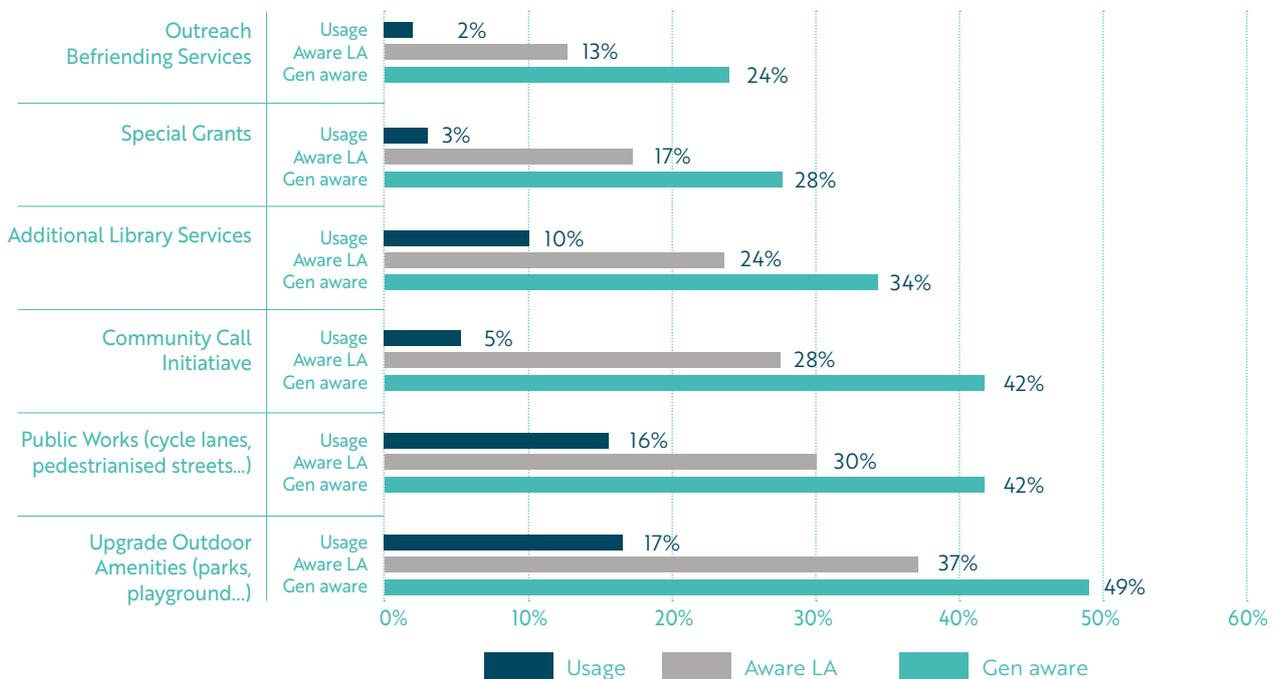
Figure 14: Awareness and usage of COVID-19 related local authority services

Further insights

Two additional exercises were undertaken to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the survey results.

Data Crosstabulation

In order to understand how service engagement impacts upon the attitudes of respondents, further analysis was undertaken to consider the following questions:

- Do people who used popular services have a more positive view of local authorities?

- Do people who have engaged with local authorities more recently have higher levels of satisfaction with ease of engagement and an improved customer focus?

- Does satisfaction with how queries are handled reduce over time?

- Do those who engage with social media and websites feel informed about what is going on in their area more than those who do not?

- Does engagement with services impact on levels of trust in local government?

Library Focus Groups

In recognition that a survey cannot adequately explore the reasons behind some of the findings, the LGMA commissioned a series of focus groups to explore one of the themes that emerged from this research. Participants in the focus groups were asked to consider why people aged between 25-55 years have lower levels of engagement with library services than those above and below this age range.

Key Findings

Data about service use and engagement was cross tabulated with sentiment data to explore whether results for people using services frequently and engaging with local authorities via electronic channels deviated from the average. Results for the five questions identified above are now presented.

People who used most popular services have a more positive view about ease of use and interaction

A review of five services that were used most frequently was undertaken to see how much agreement there was among these service users with the statement 'It is simple and easy to interact with the county/local council'.

Table 12 reveals that in all cases, there were higher levels of agreement to the statement than average. This was particularly true for libraries where 41% agreed, compared with the 33% average.

More accurate satisfaction responses when engagement with local authority is recent

Two statements were reviewed and compared with the channel of engagement that people used in Table 13. On average, 33% of respondents agreed that 'It is simple and easy to interact with the county/local council', but this increases to between 43% and 48% respectively for those who had engaged with local authorities over the past six months through a variety of different channels. Similarly, 28% of respondents agreed that local authorities have become more customer focused over the past five years, but this increases to between 32% and 39%

Agrement with the statment it is simple and easy to engage with local authorities – by those using services in past six months	
Service	*Net agree*
Library services	*41%*
Local Leisure Amenities	*36%*
Litter Bins	*35%*
Local Public Parking	*35%*
Recycling Centres	*35%*
National Average for 'simple and easy…'	**33%**

Table 12: Service use and satisfaction with engagement 2021

amongst those who have contacted the local authority in the past six months.

Satisfaction with how queries are handled is higher among those engaging most recently

When considering whether people felt queries were being dealt with well, in most cases those who had engaged with local authorities more recently were more positive about their experience than those who had engaged more than a year ago, as illustrated in Table 14. While there are several possible reasons for this increase over time, it is likely that the results are influenced more by respondents' perceptions about public services rather than their actual experience. This point is highlighted by Richard Boyle who states that "it is much more common in customer satisfaction surveys on public services to ask if there had been contact within the last 12 months. The reason for this is that the more recent the contact, the more accurate people's perceptions are likely to be, and the less influenced by general biases about government and public services in general" (2020, p. 15).

Channel of engagement in past six months	Agree it is simple and easy to interact with local authorities	Agree local authorities have become more customer focused over 5 years
Website	*43%*	*37%*
Phone	*47%*	*39%*
In person	*48%*	*32%*
Email	*43%*	*38%*
Social Media	*43%*	*39%*
Average agreement	**33%**	**28%**

Table 13: Channel of engagement and satisfaction with engagement and customer focus 2021

Agree that I am happy with the way the council handles my enquiries			
	Over Phone	*Email*	*In Person*
Past 6 months	*50%*	*46%*	*43%*
6-12 months	*48%*	*46%*	*53%*
Over 1-2 years ago	*42%*	*37%*	*48%*
Over 2-5 years ago	*36%*	*37%*	*40%*
5 years+	*28%*	*32%*	*32%*
Average agreement	**45%**		

Table 14: Recent contacts and satisfaction with services 2021

It is noted that in table 14, the in-person rate of positivity dropped in the past six months, which would have been January – June 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic when direct access to staff would have been reduced dramatically. In many instances, services were only accessible by appointment or virtually. This may partially explain the variance that appears here.

Those who engaged with local authority websites or social media feel more informed than those who do not

One of the two areas where sentiment was low relates to keeping people informed about what is going on in their local area. A review of the data reveals that those engaging with websites and social media feel more informed than average (e.g., 36% and 48% respectively compared with 28% nationally), and considerably more informed that those that do not use websites or social media (who score 15% and 22% respectively) as, detailed in Table 15.

Agree that my local authority keeps me well informed on what is going on in my area	
Used Website in past 12 months	*36%*
Used Social Media in past 12 months	*48%*
Never used Website	*15%*
Never used Social Media	*22%*
National Average	**28%**

Table 15: Website and social media keeps people well informed 2021

Agreement with statement the local authority can be trusted to do what it says it will	
Service	*Net agree*
Library services	*36%*
Local Leisure Amenities	*29%*
Local Public Parking	*28%*
Recycling Centres	*28%*
Motor Tax	*28%*
National Average for 'trusted to do what it says'	**28%**

Table 16: Levels of trust and service engagement

Levels of engagement with local authority services have little impact on levels of trust

The second area identified where sentiment was low related to trust. As can be seen in Table 16, apart from libraries, few of the people using the most popular services deviated from the national average level of agreement in relation to trusting local authorities to do what they say. This finding supports the point made by Boyle (2020) that levels of trust in relation to public service bodies are influenced less by service engagement and are more of a subjective assessment that do not necessarily reflect on the quality of the service.

Libraries Focus Groups

Libraries focus groups reveal reasons for lower levels of engagement for 25-55 year-olds

Twenty-two non-library users were recruited to participate in four virtual focus groups that were carried out by Diane Richmond, Unique insights, in January 2022. Participants were selected to ensure a geographic spread (i.e., Dublin, Donegal, Tipperary and Waterford), gender balance, and a spread across the targeted age cohort (i.e., aged between 25 – 55).

Discussion focused on the reasons for non-engagement with libraries, the participants' perceptions about what services were available compared with what services were actually available, and initiatives that might encourage users from this age cohort to re-engage with their library.

Overall, participants had very positive and fond memories of using libraries when they were younger, and many had used libraries very frequently with their children but had discontinued service use as they got older. Apart from the obvious reason of being busier, most reasons for non-engagement presented were informed by perceptions rather than first-hand experiences of using libraries. For instance, participants felt libraries had limited books available, that there were long waiting lists, limited

opening hours and so on. There was also a perception that libraries were designed and targeted at a younger demographic and, in some instances, the older service user but there was not much available for those in-between. A recurring issue related to convenience, i.e., books are relatively cheap, and readily available elsewhere, especially online, so it was quicker to source books themselves than go to the library for them. Technical and practical barriers were also identified in relation to issues such as library card renewal to use the BorrowBox app and issues with syncing eBooks to Kindle/ eReaders.

When presented with the extensive list of service available in libraries (Appendix 1) most participants agreed there were services they were not aware of but would be interested in using. They also highlighted the potential advantage to society from an environmental perspective of using libraries, such as borrowing rather than buying books.

On foot of these sessions, several recommendations were developed for consideration by the LGMA Libraries Development Committee that focused on marketing and service design for targeted groups.

Overall, the results from both investigations (i.e., the cross tabulation of survey data and focus groups) reveal that greater understandings are gained through this additional exploration that give a more nuanced picture of the customers' views and sentiments. They enable the development of recommendations for service improvements that are evidence-informed and more likely to make an impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In 2021, the LGMA began the process of developing an appropriate methodology to explore levels of satisfaction, awareness, and use of local authority services, as well as assessing how customers felt about progress that was being made towards increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of services and equality of access to services.

Following on from the work of NOAC in 2018, 2019 and 2020, the primary tool used to gather data in 2021 was a national survey of people who were demographically and geographically representative of the national population. Informed by research carried out by the IPA, the survey was adjusted to more explicitly assess whether respondents were service users and to focus in on activities and engagements over the past 12 months rather than the past 5 years. The data was then collected in a single year rather than over three years, as had been the process in the past.

When the data was collected, it was analysed and queried at a micro level to reveal findings that could be used by local authorities to improve existing services and inform the development of new services. The findings were presented to the CCMA Local Government Communications Working Group in December 2021 to support their work in promoting the services of local government.

Additionally, focus groups were used to explore in more depth the reasons behind the findings relating to libraries so that actions could be identified to increase utilisation of library services by targeted age cohort. Also, several brief case studies were gathered to illustrate the ways in which local authorities were adapting services to meet the needs of customers, information that cannot be captured through a survey.

Finally, the LGMA is working with REDC to explore the roll-out of a VOC embedded survey tool that can collect data about levels of satisfaction at the point of service engagement. Work commenced towards the end of 2021 and a dedicated Data Working Group has been established by the CCMA Corporate Committee to work with the LGMA to develop a long-term strategy for the ongoing collection of customer satisfaction data, at the point of service engagement. This work is supported by findings in this report as well as international research which confirms results about satisfaction are more reliable at the point of engagement.

Going forward, the increase in digitised services will support the collection of more rich data, which will give voice to customers and assist local authorities to match the design of services to the needs of customers. The development of a Central Data Unit (CDU) for local government by the LGMA, is also a key development that will support the ongoing collection and analysis of data centrally. In time, the CDU will be able to provide data to local authorities on a regular basis, rather than waiting for the production of an annual report.

Case Studies

In order to illustrate some of the initiatives in place across local authorities that illustrate the responsive and flexible approach to service delivery, seven case-studies are presented below. Five focus on the response of libraries to the pandemic and illustrates the innovations and customer focus driving service modifications. In addition, there is a case-study that looks at how revising services to better suit the needs of customers using emergency plumbing services, can have significant benefits to all stakeholders. Finally, there is a case-study that describes how sign-language services were developed to improve access to services for people who rely on sign language to communicate.

Case Study 1

Monaghan County Council
Provision of Library Services During Covid-19

Local Authority	MONAGHAN COUNTY COUNCIL
Title of challenge	**How to provide a library service to those cocooning or isolated during COVID-19 restrictions**
Brief description of the challenge	Before COVID-19, Monaghan County Libraries did not provide a home or delivery service to our community. Our service relied on the customer coming to our branches to browse, borrow and use other services. Then COVID-19 propelled us into closing our branches intermittently for 6 months of 2020, thus we immediately began the process of identifying how we could maintain our visibility within the community, maximise community engagement and customer access to library services, despite the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions throughout most of 2020. Our initial challenge was to efficiently investigate a safe method to provide a home delivery service to those either cocooning or isolated, within a short time frame and address the and logistical challenges. As we were involved in the development of the Community Call Initiative, we gained knowledge about our customer base and how to engage with them through our participation in this initiative. Having forged new partnerships through this work and having witnessed the benefits of harnessing technology to record, map and deliver support to the community, we sought to reconfigure the Community Call Dashboard and in order to develop a **Library Home Delivery Application** with the support of IT colleagues.
Identify the service area/s impacted by the challenge	**Leisure and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Libraries, Information Technology, and Community**
Proposed solution to challenge	We wanted to maintain visibility and contact with our customer base and indeed identify new communities to serve. Plus, we were also informed by (a) our own customers who were constantly contacting us desperately requiring access to a number of our services (borrowing, printing, engaging in activities) and (b) through key stakeholders who worked with those isolated or marginalised, who identified us as a much-needed service for their clients. The solution proposed was to harness the learnings of the Community Helpdesk and adapt a version for our new home delivery and outreach service, using GIS mapping. This involved a working group consisting of ICT personnel, senior library staff and our van driver with input from our frontline library staff. The system records the delivery requests, colour codes them to indicate their status and maps them across the county to assist the driver in route formulation. The system uses the Eircode information and links to Google Maps to assist in this process. The system also has a dashboard for statistical reports. It did require our frontline library staff to attend work during the highest levels of lock down in order to provide the service. Our library staff became like personal shoppers to users in terms of borrowing books and material. They conducted in-depth conversations with the users as to their needs, to which staff had to match to what was available in the branch to borrow. We adapted the information we required for the mapping system to work, training library staff, promoting the new service and working in partnership with other agencies to deliver same. It was initially piloted in our 3 main branches which equally geographically cover the county one day per week. We reviewed after weeks 1, 2 and 4; again after 2 months and at this stage the remaining branches were included with adaptions implemented at each review stage. We closely monitored the number of requests, type of requests and the geographical spread. Frontline staff were in constant contact with customers to gain feedback which assisted us in adapting the service. The service developed further by partnering with other council departments and agencies in the delivery of resources to those in need.

Results from solution implemented	The development of these new community-based services has encouraged us to rethink and expand our service delivery models. We have come to realise that, in addition to our existing branch library network and our mobile library service to Primary Schools and Early Learning Centres, a rural county such as ours benefits greatly from an agile, responsive Outreach Service, supported by an inexpensive small-scale delivery vehicle, delivering resources either to key community partners for distribution, or direct to customer homes. We have discovered new Community Partners who are helping us to reach reluctant library users. We have combined our extensive online outreach programme with the distribution of physical support resources to increase interest and engagement. We are currently procuring a small-scale delivery vehicle to develop the service further, going forward. This delivery service, supported by tailor made mapping software, has also identified gaps in service coverage across the county. Our new service can be used as a template for other sections of the local authority particularly in delivering educational, outreach and cultural services with the GIS mapping being adapted to suit each section requirements. This delivery mapping software has supported not only core book delivery services, but also a wide range of support resources and creative care packages to families, as part of our enhanced outreach programme.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	The initiative is relatively inexpensive. The key to its success is that we have taken established services and re-imagined how to reach customers to deliver them. We are harnessing the expertise and experience of community groups on the ground to point us to those communities most in need. We are blending our existing online programme offerings with physical resources to increase uptake. Due to COVID-19, customers were unable to come to us, we decided we must go to them. The first obstacle was how to do this efficiently and quickly using technology. As already mentioned, our experience on the Community Helpdesk provided us with the opportunity to harness the GIS mapping development and adapt to our needs. The GIS mapping of services requests has identified gaps in service coverage. The long-term impact of this is that we are actively seeking the procurement of a small-scale electric vehicle to ensure that we can further develop this outreach delivery model. The new vehicle will assist us in reaching every part of our community, regardless of location. Staff were key to the development of this new service – having them involved at each stage resulted in a creative, innovative, and enthusiastic environment with staff going beyond the call of duty to engage with our community.

Case Study 2

Wicklow County Council
Sign Language Interpretation Service

Local Authority	**WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL**
Title of challenge	**Sign Language Interpretation Service**
Brief description of the challenge	Setting up and implementing the roll out of a sign language interpretation facility in Wicklow County Council, to provide an inclusive service that is accessible to all citizens. The Sign Language Act 2016, which was passed by the Oireachtas in 2017, has given official recognition to sign language in Ireland. As part of the new customer Service Innovation Hub in Wicklow County Council, the local authority decided to provide a sign language interpretation service to any citizens that require it.
Identify the service area/s impacted by the challenge	**Governance and Administration, Housing, Planning, Information Technology, Roads and Transport, Environment, Business and Economy, and Community**
Proposed solution to challenge	The Customer Service Administrative Officer proposed the introduction of sign language interpretation service in Wicklow County Council in order make services more accessible to people who relied on sign language to communicate. The service was developed in conjunction with ISL. The procedure will be that ISL will provide a trained interpreter to facilitate meetings between the customer and local authority staff. The service would be on an appointment basis only. This service would be provided to citizens to assist them with appointments across a variety of service areas, such as Customer Service, Housing, and Planning, etc. A new policy is to be developed outlining the procedures for the service and staff training will then be provided. This service involves an investment in IT infrastructure, which has been put in place. As there is a cost to all appointments booked, which is borne by the local authority, the local authority's budget is directly impacted by the initiative.
Results from solution implemented	The result and benefits of this initiative will be to provide an inclusive and accessible service for all citizens. It will assist any members of the public who are hard of hearing or rely on sign language to communicate to avail of services themselves, without having to bring someone along with them. This means, they can privately, and independently engage with services, with the assistance of a professional, sign language interpreter. This service requires buy in from staff members across multi directorates, it does have an impact on resources with time spent and training as well as payment for the service to ISL. Wexford County Council provide a Sign Language Interpretation Service for their Customers.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	It is important to have appropriate IT support to roll out this service. Training staff and getting buy in is important and can take time.

Case Study 3

Dublin City Council
Out of Hours Mobile Plumbing Service

Local Authority	DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL
Title of challenge	**Providing an afterhours emergency mobile plumbing service to Dublin City Council tenants**
Brief description of the challenge	Dublin City Council manages a social housing stock of over 26,000 properties across the city and receives over 60,000 maintenance requests every year. There are seven housing maintenance depots to support this work each staffed by supervisors and appropriate trades people. When a tenant has an emergency issue afterhours, they ring our emergency number which is staffed 24/7 by customer services and the traffic control room. The maintenance afterhours service was provided through an on-call system and when the call came from a tenant the after-hours operator had to triage the call, identify the relevant depot and relevant skillset required. Each depot had a foreman, plumber, and carpenter on call. This led to delays in responding to tenants and because the afterhours operator was not from housing maintenance this could lead to the wrong tradesperson being sent out to deal with the call. In some cases, the call might not be an emergency which meant the tradesperson was not available to deal with other emergencies. In addition, the service cost over €6m to provide.
Identify the service area/s impacted by the challenge	**Housing, Community (particularly senior citizens)**
Proposed solution to challenge	A review of the service was carried out from a value for money, efficiency, and customer service perspective. Following an analysis of calls it was identified that the majority of calls related to plumbing and the call came in between 5-8.30pm Monday to Friday and 8-5:00pm Saturday and Sunday. It was also clear from a Housing Maintenance perspective that the only real emergency calls were plumbing calls as the potential for damage to the Council property was significantly greater with a plumbing emergency. A further consideration was that the plumbing emergencies in the Council's Apartment or Flat Complexes could potentially cause damage to other apartments and the impact on other tenants had to be factored into the response times.

A six-month pilot was undertaken where 2 mobile plumbing teams were created working on a citywide basis on shifts to deal with emergency calls. The mobile teams operated from a City Centre Depot between the hours of 5pm to 9:00pm.

The procedure is that when a call is received, the on-call Foreman is contacted immediately by the emergency operator on a dedicated line and the first thing they do is ring the tenant and talk through the problem. The benefit of this is that it is reassuring for the tenant, but it also quickly establishes the nature of the emergency or if indeed it is an emergency.

By calling the tenant, the Foreman can ascertain the exact nature of the problem, the skillset required to fix the problem e.g., if the roof is leaking a roofer is required rather than a plumber, and also if it is something that requires urgent attention. This allows for a more dedicated and appropriate use of resources.

For the pilot, an expression of interest was circulated to all plumbers in the Housing Maintenance Section and from that list the teams were set up. Each team worked an after-hours shift and continued with their normal duties; however, their working week start, and finish times altered to reflect the after-hours duties.
The calls and response times were logged as normal on the system and monitored by the Area Maintenance Officer and a senior member of staff in the Housing Maintenance Section.

Emergency calls from the Senior Citizens Complexes were always prioritised. While the emergencies dealt with were solely plumbing emergencies, calls from the Senior Citizens Complexes were responded too in a slightly different way. Albeit that the call was not a plumbing emergency, the calls were from elderly, vulnerable tenants and the "main trade makes good" principle came into effect. |

|	
Results from solution implemented	The pilot was extremely successful and the new work practices have been implemented. In addition to providing a significantly improved customer service, the cost of providing the service significantly reduced from €6m to €1m. It has led to a far more focussed service and improved response times to customers as crews were available and, on the road, already. By talking to the tenant first the Foreman can identify what the problem is, and this ensures that the right tradesperson is going on the call and also the Foreman can tell the customer when the tradesperson will arrive. Apart from providing reassurance, it also means that emergencies are dealt with faster as the crews are not used for non-emergency calls. As the teams became familiar with properties all over the city, they became very experienced in dealing with issues which again provided an improved service. The tenants also understand the remit of the after-hours emergency mobile plumbing service and the number of non-emergency calls continue to fall.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	This was a new way of doing business for both the staff and the tenants of Dublin City Council. The obstacles initially related to the number of non-emergency calls coming in. In some cases, the initial call to the after-hours service indicated a serious emergency, but when further probed by the Foreman in charge, it became clear that not all calls were crisis. The willingness of the staff involved in the pilot to ensure that it was a success was also a key driver in the effective rollout once the pilot had been completed.

Case Study 4

Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
Book Drop Service

Local Authority	DUN LAOGHAIRE-RATHDOWN
Title of challenge	**Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Book Drop Service as part of the Community Call service: developing an innovative library home delivery service during the COVID-19 lockdown**
Brief description of the challenge	**Community Call Book Drop Service** On 17 April 2020, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's Libraries launched a home delivery service of library material for cocooners and vulnerable citizens. The Book Drop Service operated via the Community Call Helpline and was developed in response to needs identified. While online usage of library digital resources grew significantly during this period, the lack of access to physical books was an issue. For some who were cocooning, their families organised the book drop service for them, with contacts from Ireland, UK and USA delighted to be able to organise reading material for their family members. But it was decided to use the Community Call number and email as a point of contact, as this service was widely advertised, in order to develop the local authority response to supplying books to those cocooning. Also, the objective was to include care package along with books in order to provide a wide range of supports to older and vulnerable people cocooning. To manage query volumes and to ensure no call went unanswered, Microsoft Dynamics was employed with a system designed by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown's IT department, which would work in tandem with the Community Call system. Local volunteers were used to deliver the service. The initiative was supported through the Community Forum and all stakeholders promoted the service.
Identify the service area/s impacted by the challenge	**Libraries, Information Technology, Community, Arts & Culture**
Proposed solution to challenge	Following a request from central government, the Community Call helpline was established to provide information and support to cocooning citizens and DLR was one of the first in the country to be activated. Displaying exceptional resilience in a time of turmoil, library staff joined with our colleagues and local volunteers to support the most vulnerable in our communities. Phone lines were manned by staff from Community Services, Libraries and Arts. An innovative system for logging these calls using Microsoft Dynamics was developed by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's IT services. **The Innovation** Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's Libraries had the innovative idea to provide a Book Drop Service for citizens who were cocooning. The idea involved delivering some of the 80,000 stock items from the Lexicon library to citizens who were housebound as a result of Government Guidelines. Included in the offer were 'care packs' with information leaflets, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown's Directory of Activities and Services for older people, some wildflower seeds, locally sourced soap, a commissioned artwork and even a bar of chocolate for the person cocooning. A special system was designed by our colleagues in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's IT Services which worked in tandem with the system already being used by the Community Call to deal with the volume of requests. Library staff partnered with the IT Department to Process Map the flow from initial phone call to delivering the book stock to the customer. A 5-stage process was defined (summary below) which included having books in "Safe Storage" which required each delivery to be stored for 72 hours before delivery to comply with Public Health Guidelines operating at the time. Drivers from Municipal Services volunteered to assist with deliveries and local volunteers from the voluntary organisation Serve the City also supported the initiative.

Proposed solution to challenge
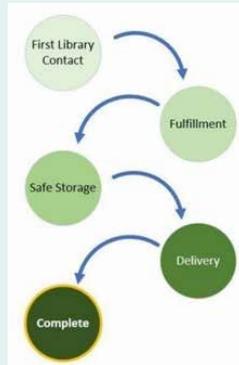
Once we had the process defined, the main piece of technology used was Microsoft CRM Dynamics. This allowed IT to very quickly deliver a robust and flexible solution to address the challenges presented with ramping up a service such as this. This solution was put together in a very short timeframe and gave the staff working on the "Book Drop Service" the ability to track every call, at every stage, at any time. This ensured that calls would not slip through the cracks given the high volumes and ensured that each package did indeed spend the minimum required time in "Safe Storage" to comply with Public Health Guidelines. It also allowed us to manage the delivery of the service in adherence to guidelines too.

What's the Result?

The end result of this initiative was an extremely lean and well-run process which has dealt with over 1,961 calls and delivered 11,700 stock items to people all over the County. There is now a flexible system in place to allow the Library Service to evolve this service as the COVID-19 situation evolves going forward. There is also significant governance as well as reporting for this process.

The system has made the process very simple and easy to administer. As each initial request enters the system automatically and can be dealt with in a systematic way. Statistics show that 100% of the callers are being reached.

Once contact is made with the library patrons the process moves along through the system and deliveries are complete within a few days. With different teams working on the Community Call Book Drop Service each day there was a potential for requests to slip through the net. Given the profile of those using the service, it was very important that we responded to every call. Training for the roll-out of the dynamics system was delivered via video on MS Teams.

Results from solution implemented	The results from the implementation of this service included the following: · Promoting the initiative allowed us to reach new users; · Increased awareness of our library services for Council staff; · Increased networking and co-operation with other Council units; · A built system for reaching customers in a delivery service; · Feedback from service users has been very positive. People are delighted that they can organise a delivery either for themselves or for an older relative; recipients have contacted to say thank you to all involved on the Community Call; · Network links with Community Forum members developed; · Service accessed through one point of contact which minimised the amount of contact points we had to maintain during response.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	· Importance of having a system that is scalable · Working with staff from other Council departments highlighted our interdependencies and provided library staff with an enhanced understanding of the operational challenges faced by colleagues. · The resilience and engagement of the community partners have been key and is testament to the work that can be achieved when agencies work in a user focussed, co-operative way to meet emerging needs during most difficult times. · Challenge of developing the system in a pandemic particularly training staff very quickly on a new system remotely, with no previous experience of online learning and tight deadlines. · Sustainability – difficulties of running a Community Call service whilst also adjusting to delivering core services. · Working with volunteers to deliver the service meant another level of protocols had to be developed and ensuring recognition for Volunteers with very limited resources.

Case Study 5

Kilkenny County Council
Personalised Service for Older, Vulnerable and Marginalised Library Users During Covid-19

Local Authority	**KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL**
Title of challenge	**Maintain connections with older, vulnerable, marginalised library users by engaging directly with them via a personalised service during COVID-19**
Brief description of the challenge	The pandemic exacerbated existing issues such as digital exclusion and social isolation. While libraries adapted quickly, reprioritised resources by making a successful switch to online services, we recognised that many would still be excluded, isolated and marginalised. The challenge presented was how could the library service maintain and enhance the vital connection it had developed to those who were vulnerable and highly impacted by lockdown? How could the service feasibly reach these users in a real and meaningful way using current resources while adhering to strict public health guidelines? What was the most equitable way of identifying and providing a service to those who needed it most?
Identify the service area/s impacted by the challenge	**Community, Libraries, Leisure and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Information Technology**
Proposed solution to challenge	Once we recognised the longevity of lockdown we moved quickly and on 24th April 2020 Kilkenny County Council's Library Service commenced a door-to-door delivery service to its library members who were 70 years and over and "cocooning". This was a new service prompted by the awareness of library staff that older, more vulnerable, isolated members would benefit greatly from a personalised service and it would support continued communication and contact with these users. This service was more than just offering physical books and reading supports, it was a vital means to maintain connections to users, providing opportunities for social connection, mitigating against rural isolation as well as balancing continuity of service and maintaining safety. With 70% of the county of Kilkenny being classified as rural, the focus was on how the library service could reach out to those users who not only lived in remote rural places but also were "cocooned" and had no access to services. Senior library staff identified the model of service delivery where each branch would have staff members feeding into the service by preparing the stock for the users identified in their catchment area. The library delivery van and driver were available to support the service. The target service user was identified by using lists generated by the library management system database to identify those 70 years and older with contact numbers. Staff knowledge at branch level of their communities was used to identify those who may not be members but might also benefit and they actively encouraged those who were not already members to join the library and avail of the service. Knowledge of the demographics of the county was also an element of planning.

Proposed solution to challenge	Calls were made by library staff to all users. It is important to reiterate that at the start of the first lockdown when there were high levels of anxiety around COVID-19 the library staff did not hesitate to return to their branches to support this service. User data analysis around the reading patterns and user preferences both from the Library Management System and staff knowledge of their users allowed staff to tailor book selection to match user needs.

All public health guidelines were adhered to throughout the process of choosing, packaging, and delivering the book parcels.

As the Community Call helpline was also being manned and managed by library staff, they used this as an opportunity to inform callers about the library drop-off service and encourage engagement.

Local media – radio and print - were also used to promote, advertise and encourage people to utilise the service.

Metrics were developed to assess the usage and value of the service. Over time we developed a suite of metrics and by October 2021 the following have been collated:

Users who have availed of the service	2,400
Items issued	11,454
Phone calls made	2,988*

Commenced collation of this metric in January 2021

Feedback was also collected from users and used as testimonials to reflect the value they placed on the service. A GIS mapping exercise was undertaken internally of Eircodes to provide a visual means of reflecting the length and breadth of service coverage as well as the geographic spread. This also served as a useful means of planning and streamlining efficient delivery schedules identifying gaps in coverage. As a result of engagement with the community resilience forum meetings, nursing homes were also included on the delivery schedule on advice from the HSE representative on the forum.

The door-to-door delivery service also served the purpose of being a valuable means of disseminating information to people directly by many other organisations and agencies e.g., care packages, wellbeing, and support information and COVID-19 support resources and information.

Finally, as part of the libraries role in supporting the community wellbeing element of the Government's Resilience and Recovery Plan, a range of initiatives were developed to reach people who needed supports and engagement and the door-to-door service served as a means of engaging directly and involving users in initiatives such as – delivery of stationary kits and postcards, radio book clubs and delivery of seeds and bulbs so they could grow their own produce.

Results from solution implemented	The positive outcome at a basic level was that the service delivered books and information resources to existing and new library users.
	It provided support and contact to those isolating and cocooning. It allowed for continued use of physical stock/collections and allowed for a level of continuity of service.
	It often served the dual function of a befriending service where phone calls with users often led to library staff signposting them to other services that they may have needed and benefitted from.
	The profile of the library service was raised within the local authority the broader community.
	The feedback from those who utilised the service was very positive, and we received countless emails, letters, thank you cards and photographs from people who were very grateful to us for this service provision. The human connection was no doubt the vital key to this.
	The positive feedback received from users and their families gave the library staff the connection and reassurance that the service played an important role to older users throughout COVID-19.
	Testimonials
	Customer One:
	I wish to express our sincere thanks to all responsible for organising the delivery of books, which we gratefully received today.
	A special thanks for including treats for all of us. That really made our day!! A service like this, in these dark and strange times, is greatly appreciated. God bless you all. ———
	Customer Two:
	Having been cocooned for 5 to 6 weeks the arrival at our gate of the library van with Tom, a bag full of books, a welcome packet of herb seeds and a little pot of marmalade was a ray of sunshine on a dark morning. A very sincere thanks to all concerned especially those who came up with this wonderful idea. ———
	Customer Three:
	Fantastic service. Really delighted by addition of information leaflets and especially the jam and seeds. When you are living alone these things mean so much.

Results from solution implemented	*Customer Four:* The excitement of getting a selection of books chosen for her especially and delivered to me, made me feel very special and looked after! _____ *Customer Five:* The delivery from the library was like Christmas morning. _____ The commitment of staff during a very challenging time for all, and their focus on maintaining service delivery to those who needed it most, cannot be underestimated. Because of the success of the service, it was scaled up in September 2020 as the eligibility criteria were expanded to include those who were 65 years and older and in September 2021 the mobile library service schedule was reconfigured to incorporate and maintain the door-to-door delivery service.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	The resilience of Kilkenny County Council Library Service and the depth of need that the community has for library services was very evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilising resources in a structured way, utilising user data to develop a service, as well as staff knowledge allowed for the development of a personalised vital service to those who needed it most. The challenge during and beyond the pandemic is to continue to fulfil the needs of those who are housebound, experiencing ill health, and socially isolated by bringing the library to them by extending the reach of libraries to meet people. We plan to carry out a survey to assess users' views on current and future service delivery of this nature. The main obstacle was trying to model a service based on available resources - with 1 vehicle and 1 driver there was no more capacity to extend the reach of the service to others who were also lonely, isolated, or vulnerable but who may not be in that age parameter. Identifying that group of users would also have been also very difficult from the LMS system. This service is one example of how Kilkenny County Council Library service converted a problem during an unprecedented crisis into an opportunity with the customer at the core of service delivery.

Case Study 6

Waterford County and City Council
Contacting, connecting, and collaborating on library service delivery during COVID-19

Local Authority	WATERFORD CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL
Title of challenge	**Waterford Libraries: Contacting, Connecting and Collaborating**
Brief description of the challenge	The challenge identified from day one was how to connect to as many people as possible in Waterford. The challenge was even more difficult because: 1. Library staff were seconded to working in rosters on the Community Call helpline and working remotely and some seconded to the HSE 2. Digital exclusion prevented access for many to basic services and information to meet their needs, to online services and online events and supports. 3. Physical library services were curtailed as branches closed With libraries closed, movement restricted and many people "cocooned" and socially isolated, connecting with the public, including library customers, was crucial. The establishment, management and staffing of the Community Call Helpline by library staff, supported by Community, HR and IS Departments provided a critical response to life changing/threatening situations where there was medical intervention required or basic life services such as food parcels or medical supplies provided. The secondment of two thirds of Waterford Library staff to the Community Call helpline requiREDConsiderable resilience, flexibility and commitment to the highest level of customer care and service which was provided by library staff at this time. The Community Call helpline was a major channel of communications and Library staff connected directly with many people through this helpline and used the connections and the learning to also build the library response to the challenge of connecting with the public including library customers. Technology and connectivity would play a critical role and through the support of IS Department, library staff were provided with the necessary tools to enable them to carry out their work and reach the public who were greatly impacted by the lockdown. The challenge was addressed through: 1. Teamwork, cross departmental collaboration and building partnerships with new agencies 2. Changes to work practices – remote working and managing staff remotely, in person deliveries to customers, flexible working hours/rosters, working weekends and evenings. Engaging in training on CRM and Data Analysis through mapping software, engaging in training from HSE in dealing with crisis and difficult psychological calls. Selection of stock and packing for delivery to customers. 3. Use of technology, social media, up-skilling in presenting online, training manuals produced, and training given to all library staff on supporting the public in accessing the internet and online services. Adapting new technologies (e.g., Zoom, Webinars) to reach the public including large webinars managed by library staff

Identify the service area/s impacted but the challenge	Libraries, Community, Arts, IS and Corporate
Proposed solution to challenge	The library's response to the challenge was multifaceted with teams working together to provide solutions on how to reach people once the library doors were closed. Some solutions involved technology and up-skilling, changes in working hours and practices, training, and the use of innovative and new ways to connect with people. In addition to staffing the 7-day week, 8am to 8pm Community Call helpline, library staff also worked on the on the data and content management for the COVID-19 mapping, Library staff:

1. Established, promoted, and staffed a dedicated phone line for people to get help using libraries e-services. The increase in demand for eBooks and other online services required professional and technical public support and this was supplied by library staff.

2. Staff up-skilled in producing videos and running events and webinars so there was a constant stream of in-house produced offerings being promoted to the public

3. Set up and manned a "Call to Chat" phone line for those who were socially isolated and referREDCallers to professional services when required.

4. A Library team was established to create a reporting structure and make calls out to hundreds of vulnerable clients on behalf of the HSE and referREDClients for additional supports when needed

5. Used in-house knowledge and customer data, as well as direct calls on reading preferences to customers, library staff set up a book delivery pilot scheme which later progressed to library staff using their own vehicles to deliver a highly personalised book delivery service to customers.

6. Library staff on Community Call upskilled on CRM and Mapping as well as undergoing training from HSE on dealing with difficult psychological issues on the calls.

7. A Subgroup on Digital Connectivity led by the Library Service was established under the Community Response Forum as a multi-agency working group to address people's needs around technology and digital access to services. Using the COVID-19 Map which included volunteer groups across the County and a survey prepared by the Subgroup and circulated to the public, the Subgroup was able to connect trainers with groups and individuals who needed help with their devices. This is ongoing and will be further developed through the library service, as physical spaces for events and training become available.

8. Website, social media, and connections with the media through interviews and supply of information were all critical and a dedicated team of library staff ensured that information was up to date and relevant.

9. All library activities are reported to Council Plenary meetings and statistics relating to events were recorded and published. Numbers of deliveries made, and calls received and made have all been recorded.

Results from solution implemented	The target stakeholders were the public in Waterford County. The solutions implemented had a huge impact on their ability to remain connected to the library services and access other services that helped during a time when so many services were not available.

The outcomes for partner agencies e.g., WW Education Training Board, the Older People's Council, the PPN, the HSE and other Council departments such as Community, Arts, IS and Corporate were that a dedicated team of library staff were working with them to find the most innovative and practical solutions to reach people.

Results included:
1. Staff up-skilled in use of technology, social media, managing and running events online, training people who need access to online services, sensitively dealing with people in need, finding innovative ways of getting stock and other items to people.

2. Strong collaboration between departments and external agencies. Staff experienced the value of this, initially through the Community Call helpline working with traffic wardens, council drivers, civil defence and the Gardai to get deliveries to people and working with the IS Department to be trained in utilising the mapping and CRM technologies

3. High level of promotion and communication through local radio, newspapers and many social media outlets – all ongoing.

4. Connections established and maintained with library customers and the Waterford public with a large increase in the use of the library's online services

5. Recognition of the role of libraries in bridging the digital divide, which will also be ongoing.

Statistics
- Number of Calls answered actioned by staff on the Helpline March 2020 to September 2020 – **1,158 calls**
- Number of Calls made to HSE Vulnerable Clients – **304 calls**
- Number of Calls made for the Call to Chat Service – **111 calls**
- Number of Events run in 2020 – **945 events in total in 2020 including pre-recorded events posted on social media**

Social media, website, borrow box, and homedelivery usage in 2020
- **Facebook: 5,017 followers (19% increase); 85% Reach growth**
- **Twitter: 5,323 followers (7% increase); 89% Reach growth**
- **Instagram: 1,668 followers (20% increase)**
- **Number of website views for 2020: 107,182 (34.84% increase on 2019)**
- **Borrow Box usage: increased by 98% with 53,506 downloads**
- **Home Deliveries Usage:** number of home deliveries made in first pilot amounted to **68 household deliveries of 400 items** and in the second round of deliveries organised by branches directly **340 deliveries of 5,330 items including teachers' resources** |

Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	1. The value of utilising skills from a range of Departments in addressing challenges and finding solutions.
	2. The flexibility and willingness to learn and to take on board initiatives proposed by library staff and staff from other Council Departments.
	3. The value of cross agency collaborations. Very important partnerships were strengthened and will form the basis for future working, which should be encouraged.
	4. The importance of technology and the support of IS Department for all Council staff is critical and ongoing training in a rapidly changing world will be essential for all Council staff.

Case Study 7

Tipperary County Council
Continuity of Local Enterprise Services during COVID-19

Local Authority	**TIPPERARY COUNTY COUNCIL**
Title of challenge	**To ensure continuity of Local Enterprise Office services during COVID-19 Lock-down**

Brief description of the challenge	With the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown from March 2019, the main challenges identified was the seamless transition and continuity of services within the LEO structure. In addition, to also ensure customer service was maintained to a high-quality standard and that needs of customer were fulfilled.
	
	Challenges:
	
	· Changing methods of engagement with clients as face-to-face engagement restricted
	
	· Supporting other business sectors outside general remit e.g., retail, local services, tourism
	
	· Developing most efficient method for dissemination of information on LEO supports
	
	· Increased workload due to delivery of variety of new grants
	
	· Identifying efficient and effective platforms and software
	
	· Respond efficiently and effectively to enquires, new start-ups and expanding businesses queries
	
	· Maximising training output for clients
	
	· Continuous assessment of well -being of team
	
	Impact of Challenges
	
	· Limited resources – time and people were stretched. Some had to support community COVID-19 response teams as well as day to day work
	
	· Stakeholder examples
	
	  · Internal Clients – Payments took longer due to less staff
	
	  · External Clients – longer process time for applications, etc.
	
	· Communication networks not properly working initially
	
	· Reduced collaboration and networking with other organisations, committees, etc.

Identify the service area/s impacted but the challenge	**Business and Economy, Tourism, Finance, Human Resources**

Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	The solution was prompted by the need to maintain service. LEO team brainstormed about feasible solutions. Adaptation of some systems was possible. Investment in technology such as laptops and other hardware for staff, access to software such as Zoom, development of an online grant application portal, etc. were key learnings. Appropriate training was also provided. This was a new learning experience for staff and clients. For instance, all training moved online, the setting up and monitoring of which took some time. GDPR was also an issue. Procedures were updated. Health & Safety training for staff working from home was also introduced. Services were monitored, evaluated, and assessed through regular contact with clients. Data was also officially captured by an annual survey where over 250 clients were asked questions about performance, employment changes, development strategy, and in particular challenges relating to Brexit and COVID-19. This was fed back to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as part of policy input. Grant & Mentor Applications: With the onset of COVID-19 pandemic there was a rapid response required for urgent Digital Transformation from the Local Enterprise Office to respond to clients' needs. We identified "submit.com" which is a cloud-based software solution that helps to streamline the collection, management, and evaluation of grant applications from clients online, allowing us to extend this further to other grant supports and soft business supports. Fortunately, we had spent some time pre COVID-19 looking at this platform and we had identified the cost and timelines to implement it. The system was adopted, and we very quickly moved from paper-based applications to online applications. Staff were trained up remotely and this allowed staff to continue to work remotely while continuing to provide a constant level of service to clients during the pandemic and ensured that our services were more streamlined and more efficient going forward. The system was set up, staff were trained, and we had our first online EVAC in April of 2020 using this platform and it worked very effectively.
Results from solution implemented	Outcomes were excellent. Workflow was managed more effectively and all relevant information relating to each application was held in one central location with restricted access. Overall, in 2020, a total of 59 grant applications were received which was a 34% increase on 2019 figures. Another great example of how effectively submit.com worked was in the management of Trading Online Voucher applications. A total of 419 TOV Grant applications were processed as opposed to 40 in 2019. The online solution has now been rolled out in order to support other business support initiatives including the Christmas Retail Support Scheme 2021 launched by Tipperary County Council along with the Commercial Vacancy Incentive Scheme. Outcomes were good but with limited resources, and a limited focus, there are questions about sustainability. For instance, face to face interaction is still vital, particularly at the initial stage of getting to know a client. This was a limiting factor with online engagement. Feedback from clients in quarter 4 2021, with regard to roll out of training programme is that they are not only "Zoomed" out but it is imperative that they and their employees now focus on business development and sustainability.
Key learnings and/or obstacles for the local authority in implementing the solution	The key learning is that LEO team is a flexible unit, and the local authority can adapt to challenges as presented. The structures and systems are now in place to meet any new scenario that may arise. Planning for the future will be to ensure that an effective and cohesive team continues, and that management supports the resource, development, and retention of staff. The unit will continuously base all decisions on needs of client and align with needs of local and regional development.

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Appendix 1: Library Services

1. General library services

- Joining the library (for yourselves/child(ren)
- Borrowing/returning physical items (books, audiobooks, magazines, etc)
- Requesting or reserving items
- Using public PCs
  - to access the internet, to practice for Driver Theory Test, to access databases available in the library branch (e.g. genealogy sites, newspaper archives, academic journals, etc)
- Reading a physical book/newspaper/magazine in the library
- Studying
- Printing or photocopying
  - In some libraries, services offered include: 3D printing, Maker Space facilities, coding classes, computer classes (for adults), and so on.
- Parents bringing toddlers to colour/read picture books, etc
  - Using sensory friendly toys/equipment, or using the Magic Table (usually for autism, dementia, etc)

2. Events and courses

- Attending events
  - A huge range of events, for example arts & crafts for children, health and wellbeing, baby book club, adult book club, craft fairs, job seeking, CV preparation, business start up, language exchange, author visits, festival events, local history events, etc)
- A wide variety of Courses and Workshops
- Looking for information
  - about jobs: Work Matters section,
  - health information: Healthy Ireland,
  - local events,
  - government services, etc.
  - 8 libraries have Europe Direct Information Centres, where people can find information about the EU
- Groups visit for tours of the library
  - e.g. primary school, secondary school groups, might be a general tour to introduce students to all of the facilities, and sometimes with a particular focus (e.g. on the genealogy resources for leaving cert history students, etc)

3. eLibrary Services

- eBooks/eAudiobooks (BorrowBox)
- eMagazines (Libby is provided by Overdrive)
- Online newspapers (PressReader)
- eLearning courses (There are over 400 courses available to you)
- Online language learning (provided for library users by Transparent Languages)
- Online events/workshops

4. Additional services

- Mobile libraries (17 library authorities offer a mobile library service)

- My Open Library
  - a service for the public that allows for additional opening hours for libraries over and above their scheduled staffed hours.
  - Members can access the library using their library card and pin from 8am every morning and from regular closing time until 10 pm daily. The library is also accessible to My Open Library members on Sundays from 8am until 10 pm.

  - During My Open Library hours, members can:
    - Borrow and return books and other items using self-service.
    - Use public computers and WIFI
    - Print and photocopy
    - Study or read in a quiet space
    - Hold meetings

  - My Open Library gives users and communities better choice in when they can visit their library. They can continue to seek the expert help of library staff during the staffed hours.