The Experience of
People Engaging with
Local Authorities

Results from focus groups and a national
survey conducted in 2024

LGMA
Local Government
Management Agency

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland

Foreword

This special report explores the experiences of almost 1,300 people who engaged with local authorities across the country. Most people reported having a positive experience but there were those who did not.

For those who had a positive experience, their view of staff engagement was most encouraging with almost everyone agreeing that local authority staff treated people well and were courteous and knowledgeable.

For the small group of people who were dissatisfied with their experience, they expressed frustrations about the number of staff they had to deal with, or the duration of their engagement. In other cases, they identified the lack of information about what was happening with their service request or information request, so they felt like they were in the dark. The consequence of this lack of transparency was that people felt more negatively about staff's capacity, no longer categorising them as knowledgeable.

The research also revealed that people were less upset about the duration of their engagement if they were kept informed about what was going on. Another important finding was that even those who had a positive experience told us local authorities could be better at providing contact details for relevant staff.

These are very important findings that can be addressed through changes in processes in how local authorities engage and communicate with people.

Implementing these changes will improve the service experience for the customer while also helping staff be more efficient. A win-win for everyone.

Kieran Kehoe
Chair
CCMA Corporate and Emergency Planning Committee

Executive Summary

What kind of experience did people have engaging with Local Authorities?

Survey Findings

- Most people were satisfied with their engagement, especially staff courtesy and knowledge and less satisfied with duration. As duration increased, satisfaction with staff knowledge decreased.

- Those expressing thanks, using a service or making an enquiry were more satisfied with their engagement than those reporting a fault, giving feedback or making a complaint.

- People were most satisfied when engaging with as few staff as necessary in as short a time as possible.

- Half of the respondents said they would not like any change to their experience. The most requested change was making it easier to find contact information for staff and fewer engagements with different staff.

Focus Groups

- Most people had a positive recent engagement with local authorities and were satisfied with the quality and duration of their engagement.

- What they valued most was a quick turnaround, and helpful and accommodating staff.

- What caused most frustration was unsure if emails or phone messages had been received, lack of clarity about the process they were engaging in, confusing websites and ineffective use of social media.

What people want when engaging with Local Authorities?

1 Clear and transparent engagement processes

- Confirmation that email/voicemail has been received
- Information about how long the queue/process will take
- Clear referral system if staff are out of the office
- Record of engagement so people give details only once

2 Multiple engagement channels

- Multiple channels to contact or get information from
- Improved websites and more consistency between local authority websites
- Dedicated time for older persons (in-person or on phone)

3 Good interpersonal skills

- Friendly, knowledgeable, responsive staff with good listening skills
- Clear simple verbal and written communication – no jargon
- Build a positive on-going relationship between service users and local authorities

Introduction

Since 2021, the LGMA has been commissioning surveys of the public to find out what people know about local authority services and what their views are on those services. In addition, each year, one topic relating to service delivery is explored in detail, through additional survey questions and focus groups.

In 2024, the research sought to explore the experiences of people engaging with local authorities in order to find out what was working well and what could be improved.

The survey element was conducted by Red C in May 2024 and 1,378 people answered questions about their last engagement with local authorities. They provided information about why they had contacted their local authorities, how they had contacted them, how long the engagement took and how many staff they dealt with. They also rated their engagement experience and identified what they would like to see changed to improve things.

The focus group participants discussed their experiences of engaging with local authorities and identified the positive and not so positive elements of their engagements.

While the majority of respondents from both groups had positive experiences, there were some areas identified that could be improved. These related to greater transparency of the engagement process, a greater variety of engagement channels and good interpersonal skills, which are detailed in this report.

Contents

Survey Findings

What happened during
the engagement?

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Who answered the survey?

Participants representative of general population

Of the 1,378 people who responded to the survey questions, 707 were female and 671 were male.

There were 137 respondents aged between 18-24, 208 aged between 25-34, 308 between 35-44, 249 between 45-54, 205 between 55-64 and 271 who were aged 65+.

The regions were broken down to capture as similar a number of respondents in each area as possible. There were 382 respondents in the Dublin region, 366 in the Rest of Leinster, 374 in Munster and 256 in Connacht/Ulster.

The survey asked participants about:

1. The reason for engaging with local authorities
2. The number of staff they engaged with
3. Time taken to conclude their engagement
4. How satisfied they were with their engagement
5. What they would like to see change

GENDER

51% Female

49% Male

AGE

Age	
18-24	10%
25-34	15%
35-44	22%
45-54	18%
55-64	15%
65+	20%

REGION

19% Connacht/Ulster

28% Dublin

27% Munster

27% Rest of Leinster
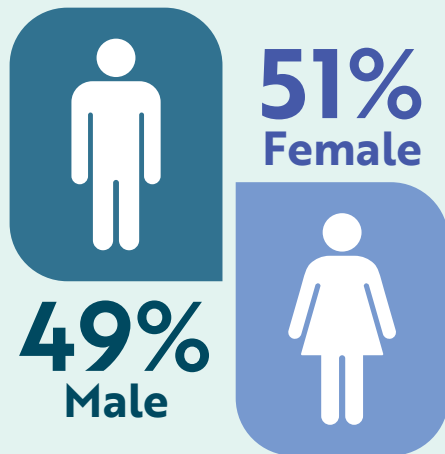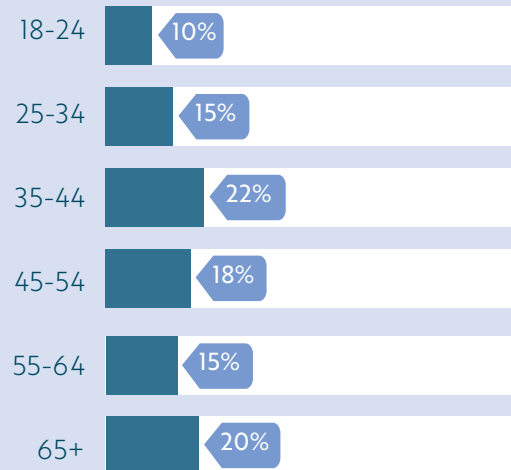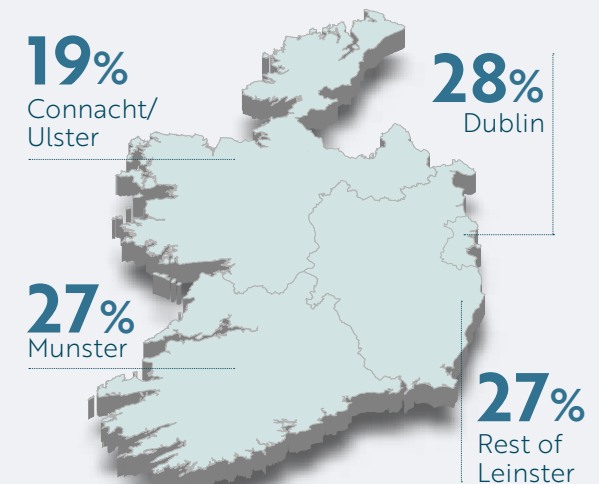
What channels were used to engage?

Phone and **email** were the most popular channels used to engage with local authorities.

Channel used to engage with local authorities

- Instant Messaging — **1%**
- Public Meeting — **3%**
- Letter/correspondence — **5%**
- Social Media — **6%**
- Online — **15%**
- In Person — **18%**
- Email — **23%**
- Over the Phone — **23%**
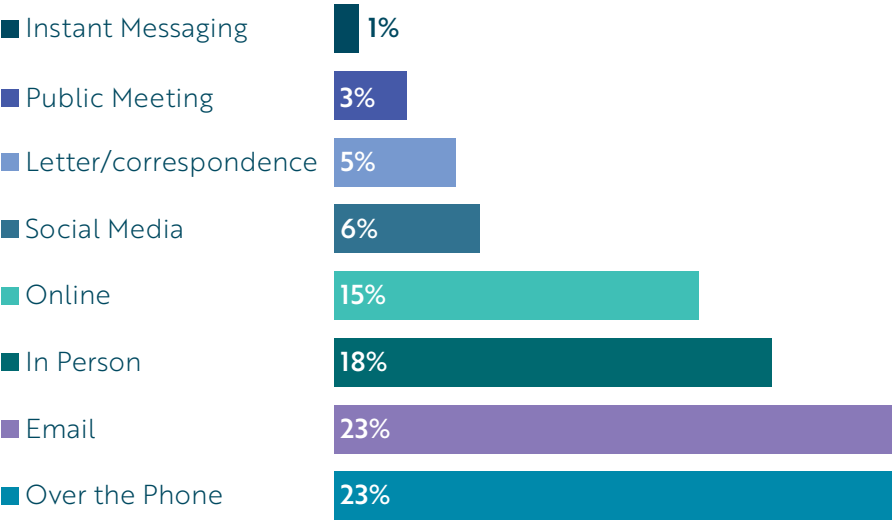
GENDER

Men were more likely to engage in person and by email. Women were more likely to engage by phone or social media.

REGION

People in Connacht/Ulster and Munster were more likely to engage in person.

People in Dublin and the Rest of Leinster were more likely to use email.

AGE

People aged 55+ primarily used the phone. Phone use increased with age.

People aged 25-34 engaged using social media and online more than other age groups and were least likely to engage in-person. However, in-person engagement increased steadily after age 35 and was also popular with the youngest age group, those aged 18-24.

Email was the preferred option for those aged 35-44.

How people engaged by AGE

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
None of these	12%	5%	9%	5%	2%	6%
Instant Messaging		3%			3%	4%
Public Meeting	4%	5%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Letter/correspondence	11%	6%	5%	3%	3%	3%
Social Media		13%	3%	6%		
Online	9%		4%		16%	14%
In Person	18%	20%	16%	15%	21%	22%
Email	24%	22%	14%	20%	20%	21%
Over the Phone	12%	14%	27%	23%	32%	30%

Why were people engaging with local authorities?

1 Making an enquiry 35%

2 Using a service 24%

3 Reporting a fault 19%

4 Making a complaint 10%

5 Giving feedback 6%

6 Saying thanks 3%

Reason for engagement by AGE

Age	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Other	4%	5%	4%	3%	5%	2%
Expressing thanks or positive feedback	7%	6%	3%	—	—	2%
Providing feedback or suggestions for improvement	10%	7%	6%	3%	3%	7%
Making a complaint	4%	10%	12%	10%	13%	10%
Reporting a fault or an issue	9%	12%	14%	25%	21%	26%
Using a service	18%	28%	26%	25%	24%	21%
An inquiry or seeking information	48%	34%	36%	33%	35%	33%

Legend:
- An inquiry or seeking information
- Using a service
- Reporting a fault or an issue
- Making a complaint
- Providing feedback or suggestions for improvement
- Expressing thanks or positive feedback
- Other

AGE

Those age 18-24 were most likely to be making an inquiry and expressing thanks and the least likely to use a service or make a complaint.

Those aged 45+ reported a fault more than younger people.

Those aged 55-64 made the most complaints.

Why were people engaging with local authorities?

GENDER

Women were more likely to **make an inquiry** or report a **fault.**

Men were more likely to **use a service.**

REGION

More people in Connacht/Ulster than any other region engaged with their local authority to make an inquiry and to use a service.

In the Dublin region, people were most likely to provide feedback and least likely to have engaged to use a service.

People in Munster were most likely to make a complaint and least likely to express thanks.

Reasons for engagement by REGION
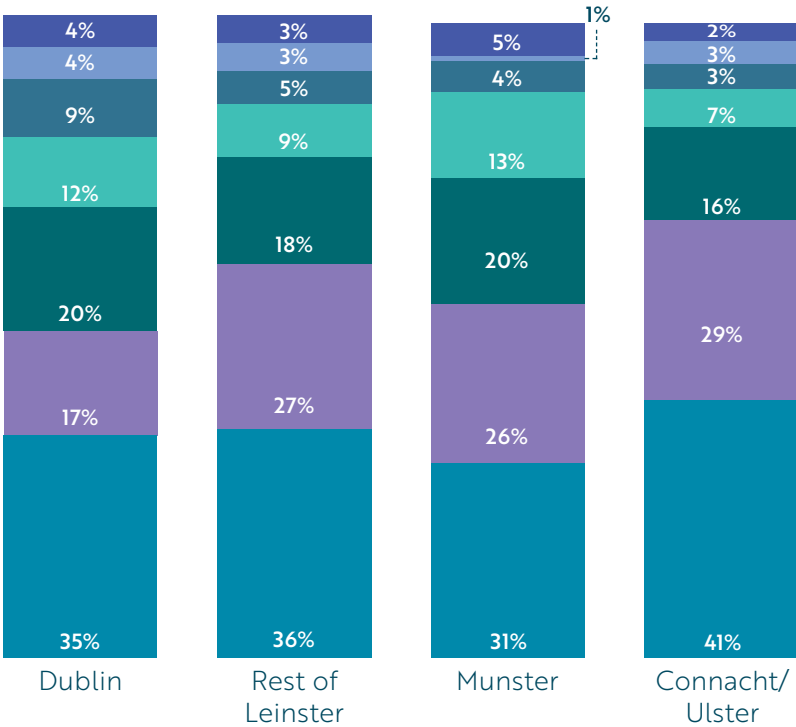
Reason	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
Other	4%	3%	5%	2%
Expressing thanks or positive feedback	4%	3%	1%	3%
Providing feedback or suggestions for improvement	9%	5%	4%	3%
Making a complaint	12%	9%	13%	7%
Reporting a fault or an issue	20%	18%	20%	16%
Using a service	17%	27%	26%	29%
An inquiry or seeking information	35%	36%	31%	41%

Legend:
- An inquiry or seeking information
- Using a service
- Reporting a fault or an issue
- Making a complaint
- Providing feedback or suggestions for improvement
- Expressing thanks or positive feedback
- Other

What happened during the engagement?

Number of Staff

> **More than half of the respondents dealt with one local authority staff member throughout their engagement.**

Almost one fifth had contact with two staff members to complete their engagement. Just over one in ten had no direct contact with local authority staff, as they used an indirect communication channel, i.e., online, email, social media.

Number of staff contacted

- **No staff contact** — 11%
- **1 Staff** — 55%
- **2 Staff** — 19%
- **3+ Staff** — 5%
- **4+ Staff** — 3%
- **Don't Know** — 7%
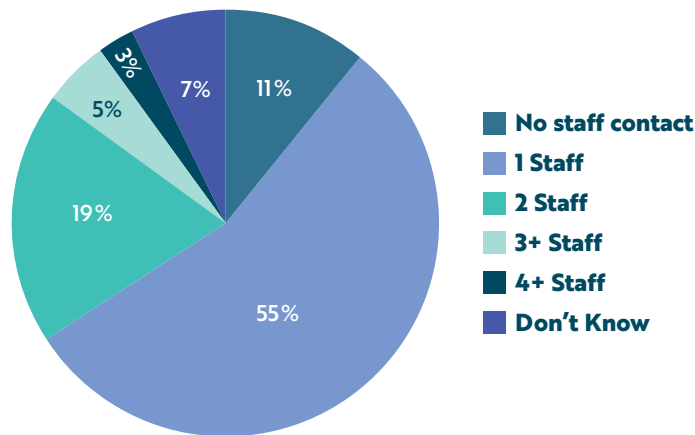
GENDER
Slightly more women than men dealt with no staff (12% and 9% respectively).

AGE
Those aged 25-35 were most likely to deal with no staff and 3+ staff.

REGION

In Connacht/Ulster people were more likely to engage with one staff member relative to other regions.

Munster had a higher proportion of respondents engaging with two staff members relative to other regions.

Contact with three or more staff members was low across all regions but highest in the Dublin region.

Contact with 4 or more staff was low in all regions.

Number of staff contacted by REGION

	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
Don't know	7%	8%	8%	4%
4+ Staff	3%	3%	—	3%
3 Staff	8%	4%	5%	4%
2 Staff	16%	20%	25%	15%
1 Staff	57%	55%	49%	61%
No staff contact	9%	10%	12%	12%

(Munster "4+ Staff" labelled 1%)
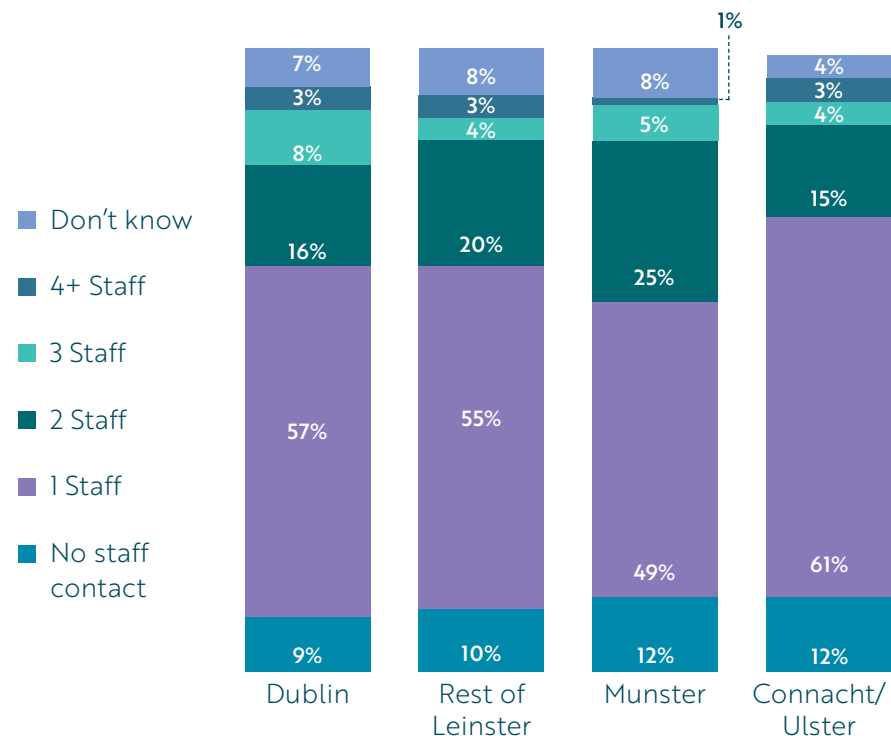
What happened during the engagement?

Duration of 'direct' engagement

When reporting on duration, the results were broken down into two types of engagement channels:

- Direct Channels: 600+ people engaged with staff directly (phone, in-person, public meeting)
- Indirect Channels: 700+ engaged indirectly (email, online, social media, instant messaging, letter) and may or may not have engaged with staff.

GENDER

Slightly more women than men concluded their engagement in less than 30 minutes.

> **Most people concluded their direct* engagement in less than 30 minutes.**

Time take to conclude 'direct' engagement by GENDER

	Less than 30 minutes	30 minutes to an hour	1-2 hours	2+ hours
Male	64%	24%	5%	7%
Female	70%	18%	9%	2%
Total	67%	21%	7%	5%

Legend:
- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2+ hours
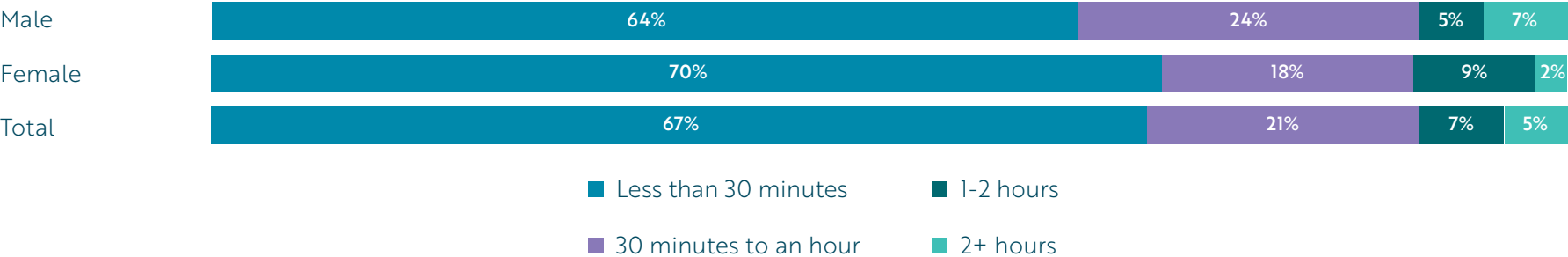
* Direct engagement = phone, in-person and public meeting

What happened during the engagement?

AGE

The 18-24 and 65+ were most likely to conclude their engagement in less than 30 minutes.

Length of 'direct' engagement by AGE

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
2+ hours	7%	3%		7%	10%	3%
1-2 hours		11%	4%	7%	6%	8%
30 minutes to an hour	14%	25%	24%	26%	25%	14%
Less than 30 minutes	79%	61%	72%	60%	58%	75%

Legend:
- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2+ hours
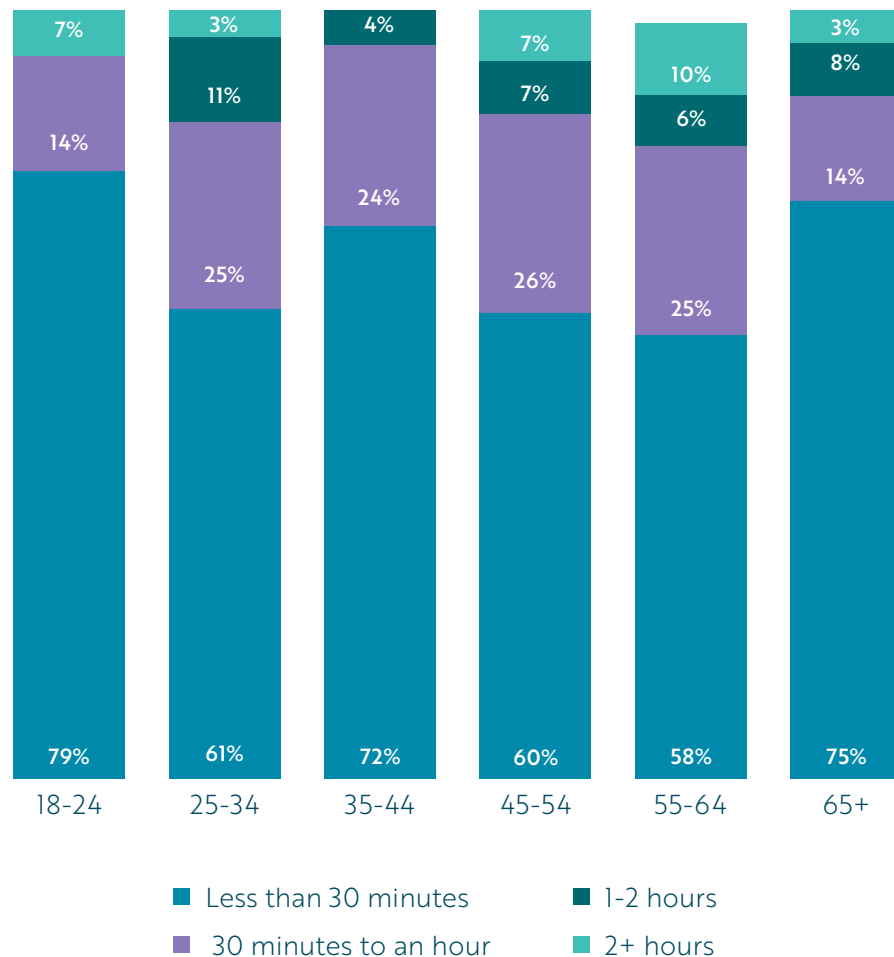
REGION

People in the Rest of Leinster were most likely to conclude their engagement in less than 30 minutes.

Length of 'direct' engagement by REGION

	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
2+ hours	3%	5%	7%	4%
1-2 hours	10%	3%	6%	7%
30 minutes to an hour	19%	20%	18%	29%
Less than 30 minutes	68%	72%	69%	60%

Legend:
- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to an hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2+ hours

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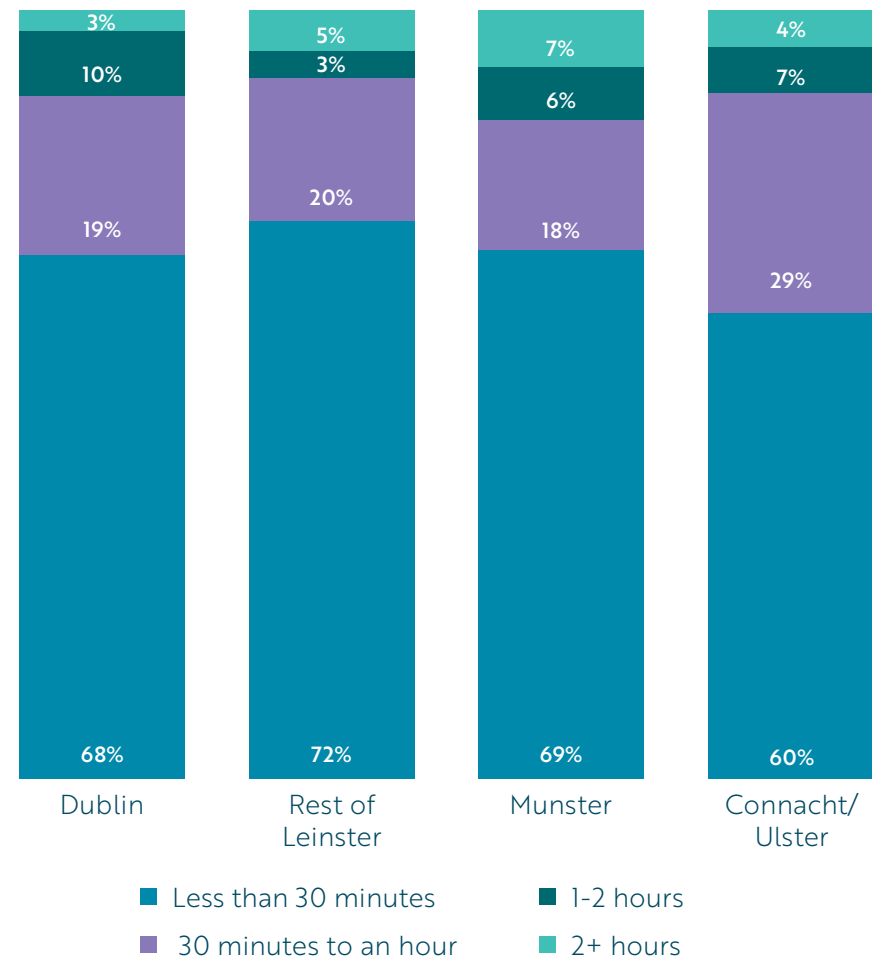
What happened during the engagement?

Duration of 'indirect*' engagement

> ### Duration of 'indirect*' engagement
> **Just under half of all indirect engagements concluded immediately or within the same day.**

Time taken to conclude Indirect Engagements

- 18% Immediately
- 27% Same day
- 19% 2-3 business days
- 10% 4-5 business days
- 11% 2-4 weeks
- 4% 1-2 months
- 9% 3 months+

Legend:
- ■ Immediately
- ■ Same day
- ■ 2-3 business days
- ■ 4-5 business days
- ■ 2-4 weeks
- ■ 1-2 months
- ■ 3 months+

GENDER

Men's engagements were more likely to conclude immediately or the same day.

Time taken to conclude 'indirect' engagements by GENDER
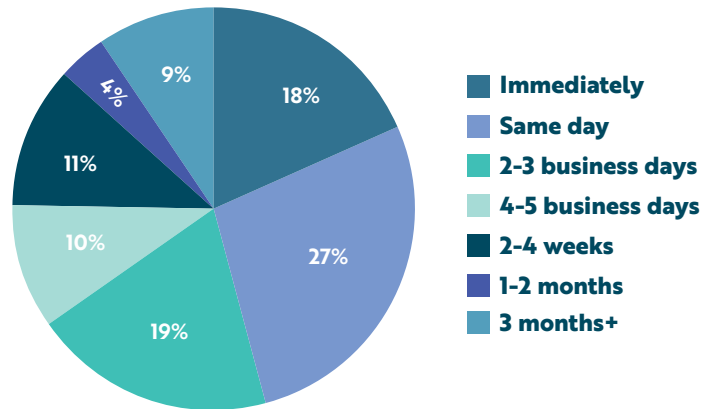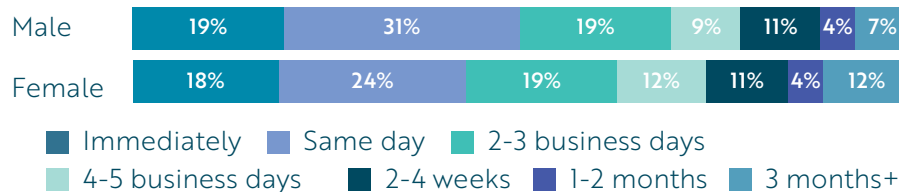
	Immediately	Same day	2-3 business days	4-5 business days	2-4 weeks	1-2 months	3 months+
Male	19%	31%	19%	9%	11%	4%	7%
Female	18%	24%	19%	12%	11%	4%	12%

Legend:
- ■ Immediately
- ■ Same day
- ■ 2-3 business days
- ■ 4-5 business days
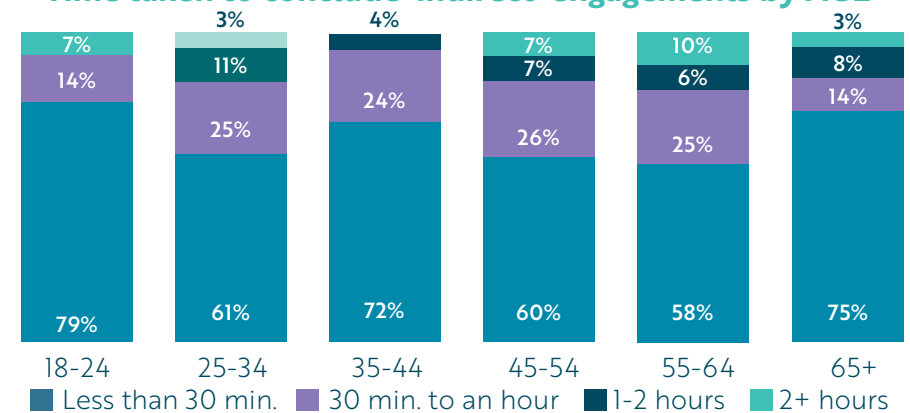- ■ 2-4 weeks
- ■ 1-2 months
- ■ 3 months+

Indirect engagement = email, online, social media, letter, Instant Messaging

AGE

Respondents aged 65+ were more likely to conclude their engagement immediately or same day.

Time taken to conclude 'indirect' engagements by AGE

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
2+ hours	7%	3%		7%	10%	3%
1-2 hours		11%	4%	7%	6%	8%
30 min. to an hour	14%	25%	24%	26%	25%	14%
Less than 30 min.	79%	61%	72%	60%	58%	75%

Legend:
- ■ Less than 30 min.
- ■ 30 min. to an hour
- ■ 1-2 hours
- ■ 2+ hours

REGION

More respondents in the Rest of Leinster reported that their engagements concluded on the same day.

Time taken to conclude 'indirect' engagements by REGION
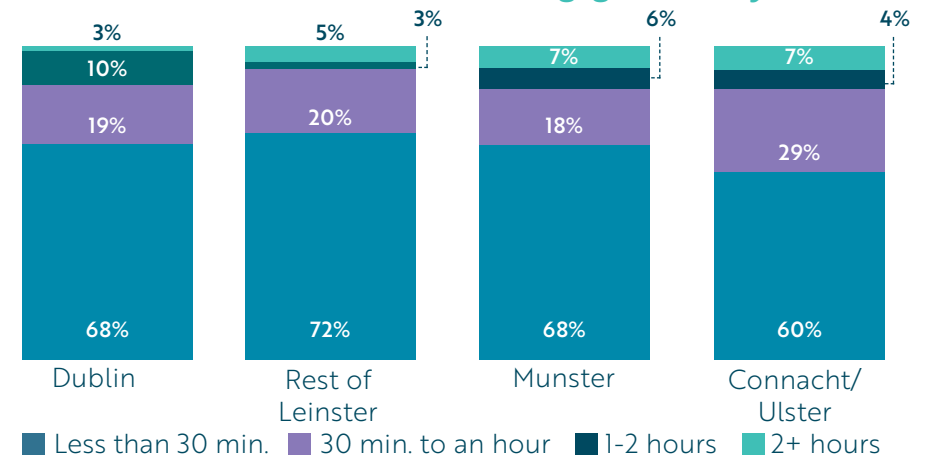
	Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
2+ hours	3%	5%	6%	4%
1-2 hours	10%	3%	7%	7%
30 min. to an hour	19%	20%	18%	29%
Less than 30 min.	68%	72%	68%	60%

Legend:
- ■ Less than 30 min.
- ■ 30 min. to an hour
- ■ 1-2 hours
- ■ 2+ hours

Survey Results

Satisfaction with direct engagement?

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

Most people were satisfied that staff were knowledgeable and courteous, and they were happy with duration of their 'direct*' engagement.

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement

Staff were courteous	Staff were knowledgeable	Duration of engagement
79%	68%	60%

Staff were knowledgeable

GENDER

Men were slightly more agreeable that staff were knowledgeable.

Agreed staff were knowledgeable by Gender

Female	67%
Male	69%

* Direct engagement = phone, in-person and public meeting
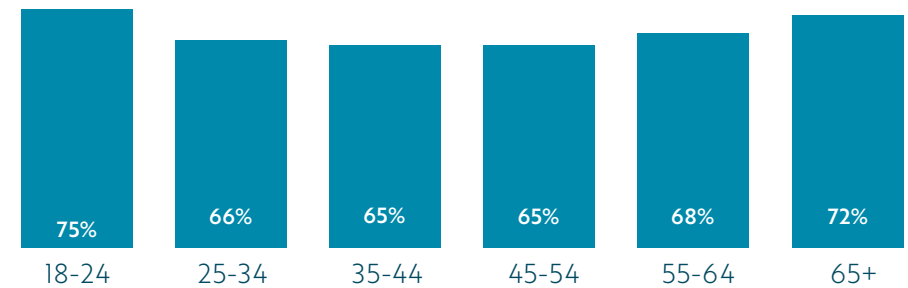
AGE

The youngest (18-24) and oldest (65+) age cohorts had the highest levels of satisfaction that the staff were knowledgeable.

Agreed staff were knowledgeable by AGE

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
75%	66%	65%	65%	68%	72%

REGION

Respondents in Rest of Leinster had the highest level of satisfaction with staff knowledge.
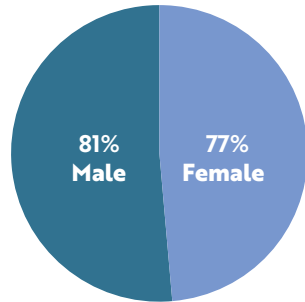
Agreed staff were knowledgeable by REGION
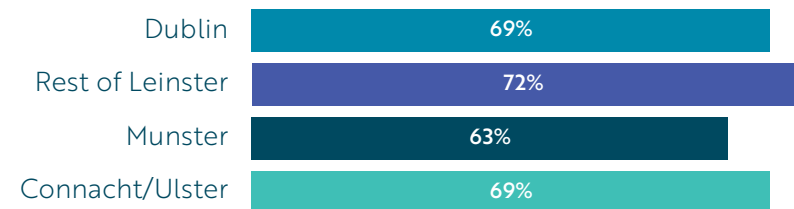
Dublin	69%
Rest of Leinster	72%
Munster	63%
Connacht/Ulster	69%

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

Staff Courteousness

Agree that staff were courteous by GENDER

81% Male **77% Female**

GENDER

Women were more likely to agree that staff were courteous.

Agreed that staff were courteous by AGE

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
79%	58%	79%	78%	77%	92%
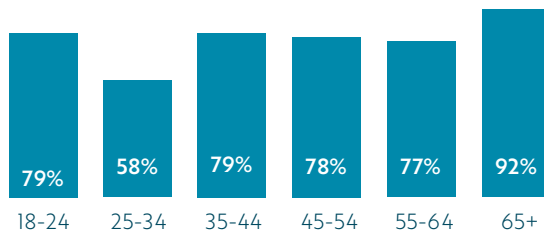
AGE

Those aged 65+ were most satisfied with staff courteousness.
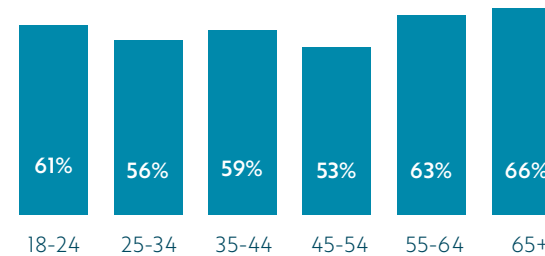
Agreed staff were courteous by REGION

Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
81%	81%	80%	74%
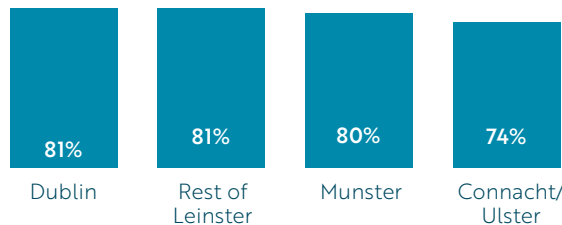
REGION

Connacht/Ulster least satisfied with staff courteousness.

* Direct engagement = phone, in-person and public meeting

Length of Engagement

Satisfied with duration of 'direct' engagement by GENDER

| Female | 59% |
| Male | 61% |

GENDER

Men more satisfied with duration of engagement than women.

Satisfied with duration of 'direct' engagement by AGE

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
61%	56%	59%	53%	63%	66%

AGE

55+ most satisfied with duration of their engagement.

Satisfied with duration of 'direct' engagement by REGION

Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
67%	61%	60%	50%
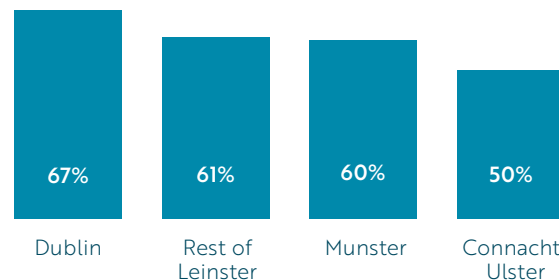
REGION

Dublin region most satisfied with duration of the engagement.

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Survey Results

Factors impacting satisfaction with 'direct' engagement

(i) reason for engagement,

(ii) number of staff engagements and

(iii) duration of engagement

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Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

Impact of 'reasons for engagement' on satisfaction

Satisfaction with staff courteousness was highest across all reasons for engaging with local authorities.
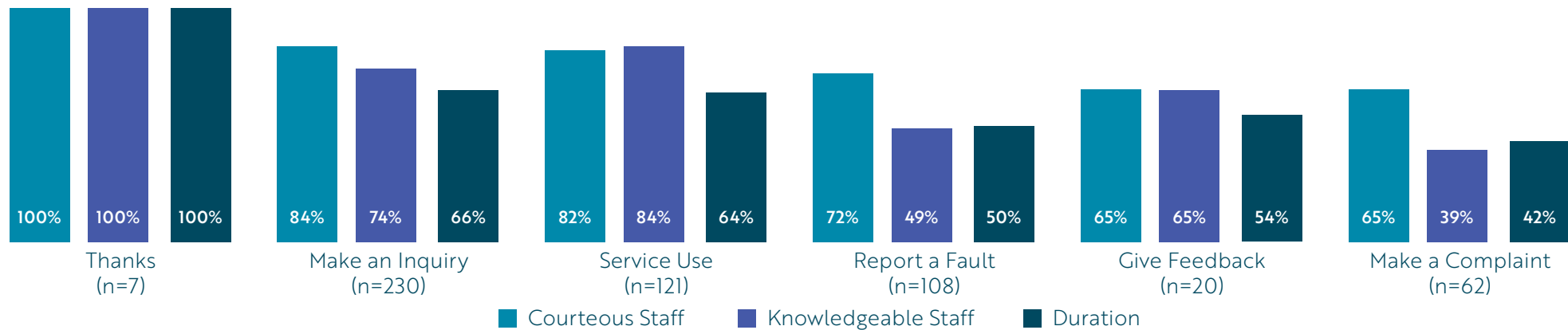
Satisfaction with staff knowledge was in excess of 70% for service use and making an enquiry and 100% for passing on thanks, although number of respondents was low.

Satisfaction with duration was lowest across all reasons, except for making a complaint .and thanking local authorities.

People engaging with staff to make an inquiry, use a service or to thank local authorities were the most satisfied with their 'direct *' engagement.

Satisfaction with engagements in-person, phone and at public meetings based on REASON FOR ENGAGEMENT

	Thanks (n=7)			Make an Inquiry (n=230)			Service Use (n=121)			Report a Fault (n=108)			Give Feedback (n=20)			Make a Complaint (n=62)		
Courteous Staff	100%			84%			82%			72%			65%			65%		
Knowledgeable Staff		100%			74%			84%			49%			65%			39%	
Duration			100%			66%			64%			50%			54%			42%

Legend: ■ Courteous Staff ■ Knowledgeable Staff ■ Duration

* Direct engagement = phone, in-person and public meeting

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

Impact of 'staff numbers' on satisfaction

Satisfaction highest when 'direct*' engagement was with one staff member.

The more staff members a person engaged with, the more satisfaction decreased across all three elements.

However, the drop in satisfaction was most significant for staff knowledge.

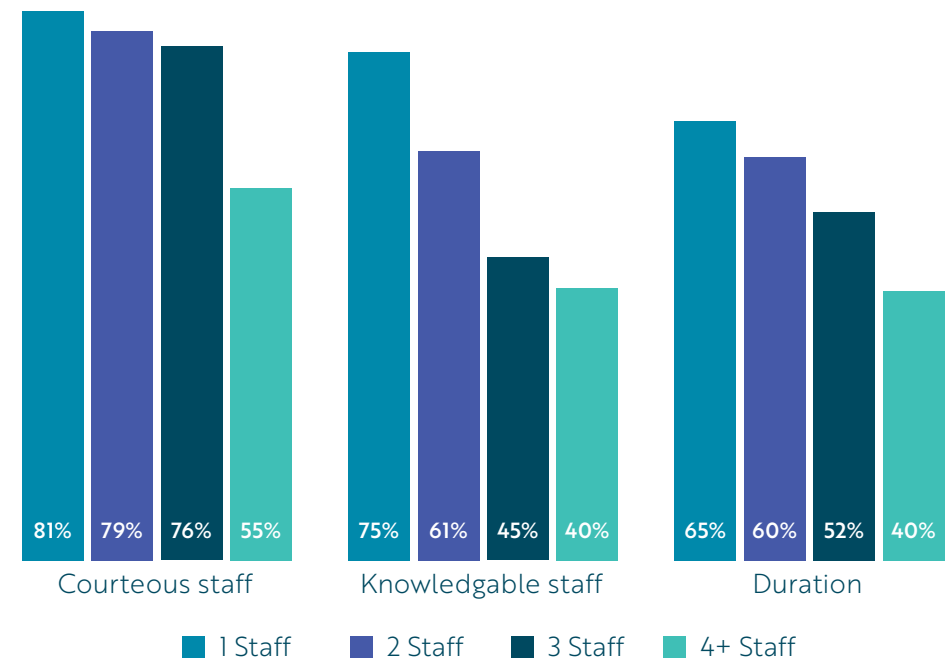Of those who engaged with only 1 staff member:

81% of people were satisfied that staff were **courteous**

75% were satisfied that staff were **knowledgeable**

65% were satisfied with the **duration** of the engagement

Satisfaction levels with staff knowledge and duration decreased when three or more staff members were involved. Staff courteousness remained high relative to the other elements even when staff numbers increased.

Impact of STAFF NUMBERS on satisfaction

	Courteous staff	Knowledgable staff	Duration
1 Staff	81%	75%	65%
2 Staff	79%	61%	60%
3 Staff	76%	45%	52%
4+ Staff	55%	40%	40%

■ 1 Staff   ■ 2 Staff   ■ 3 Staff   ■ 4+ Staff

Direct engagement = phone, in-person and public meeting

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

Impact of 'duration of engagement' on satisfaction

Direct engagements were broken down into two categories:
(i) in-person and public meeting (or face to face engagements) and (ii) phone engagements, as duration expectations were different for both groups.
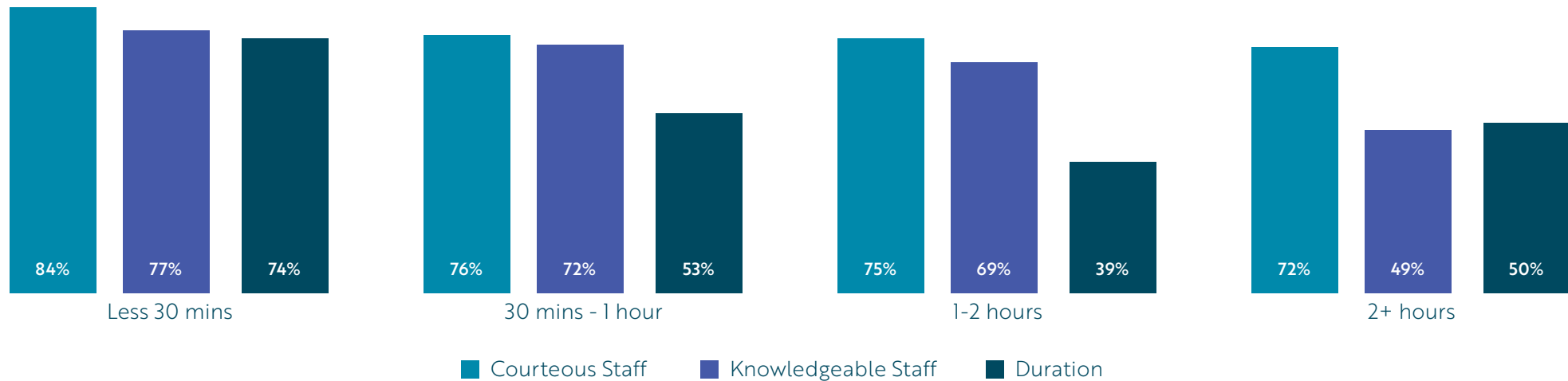
In person and public meetings

The duration of face-to-face engagements had a much bigger impact on satisfaction levels compared to the reasons for engagement or number of staff engaged with.

> **Longer durations impacted most negatively on satisfaction with staff knowledge.**

Satisfaction with staff courteousness and knowledge as well as duration were highest when engagements last less than 30 minutes.

Satisfaction declines as engagement time increases, with a notable drop for engagements lasting 1-2 hours.

Impact of DURATION OF ENGAGEMENT on satisfaction with IN-PERSON AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

	Less 30 mins	30 mins - 1 hour	1-2 hours	2+ hours
Courteous Staff	84%	76%	75%	72%
Knowledgeable Staff	77%	72%	69%	49%
Duration	74%	53%	39%	50%

Legend: ■ Courteous Staff ■ Knowledgeable Staff ■ Duration

The Experience of People Engaging with Local Authorities Results from focus groups and a national survey conducted in 2024

Satisfaction with 'direct' engagement?

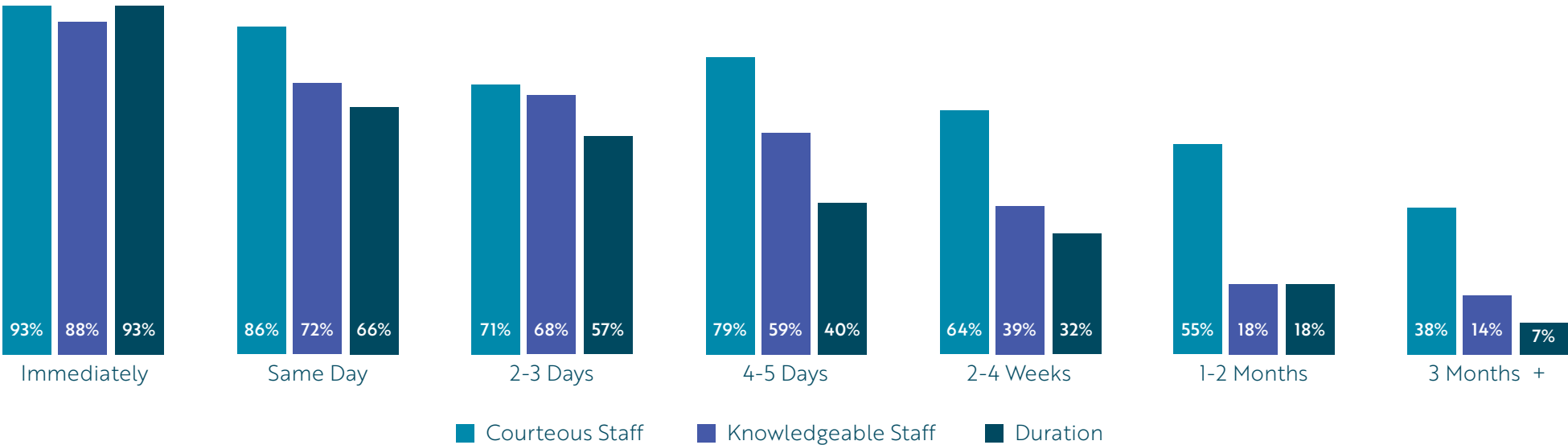**Impact of 'duration of engagement' on satisfaction**

PHONE

Satisfaction was highest for those who had immediate responses to their engagements. People also expressed high levels of satisfaction with the duration of the engagement, as well as knowledgeable and courteous staff.

Longer lasting engagements showed the lowest satisfaction, particularly in relation to the knowledge of staff they were engaging with.

> People lost **confidence in staff knowledge** when duration of engagement was **lengthy.**

> As the duration of engagement increased, **satisfaction levels declined.**

Impact of DURATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT on satisfaction with PHONE

	Immediately	Same Day	2-3 Days	4-5 Days	2-4 Weeks	1-2 Months	3 Months +
Courteous Staff	93%	86%	71%	79%	64%	55%	38%
Knowledgeable Staff	88%	72%	68%	59%	39%	18%	14%
Duration	93%	66%	57%	40%	32%	18%	7%

■ Courteous Staff   ■ Knowledgeable Staff   ■ Duration

Survey Results

Satisfaction with indirect engagement?

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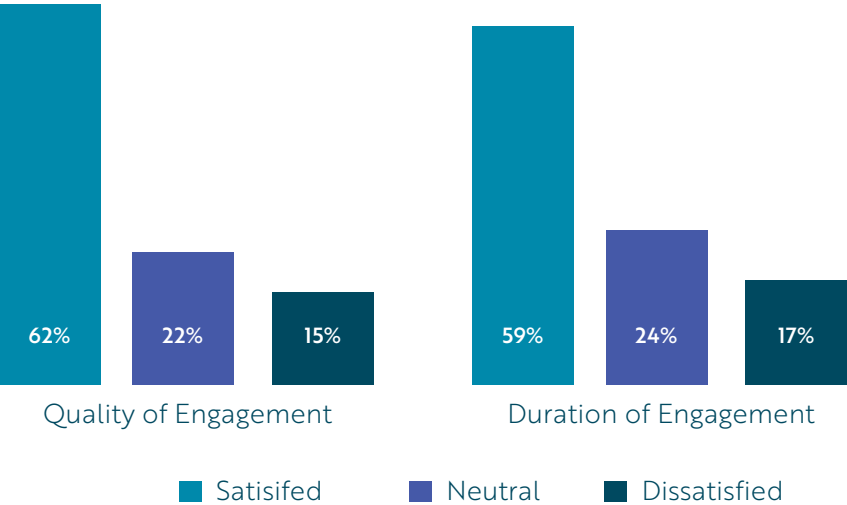
Satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement?

As there was no direct engagement with staff, the features explored were the quality and the duration of each person's most recent indirect engagement.

Satisfaction with duration of 'indirect*' engagement with staff was similar to 'direct' engagement with staff.

> The majority of respondents were satisfied with the **quality** and the **duration** of their most recent indirect engagement.

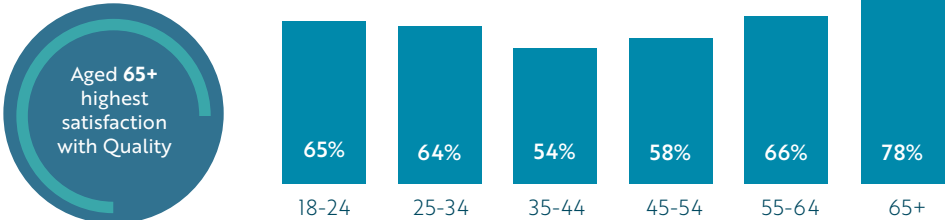## Satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement

	Quality of Engagement	Duration of Engagement
Satisfied	62%	59%
Neutral	22%	24%
Dissatisfied	15%	17%

■ Satisfied ■ Neutral ■ Dissatisfied

* Indirect engagement = email, online, social media, letter, Instant Messaging

Quality of 'Indirect' Engagement

GENDER
Female respondents (66%) were more satisfied than males (60%) with the quality of their most recent engagement
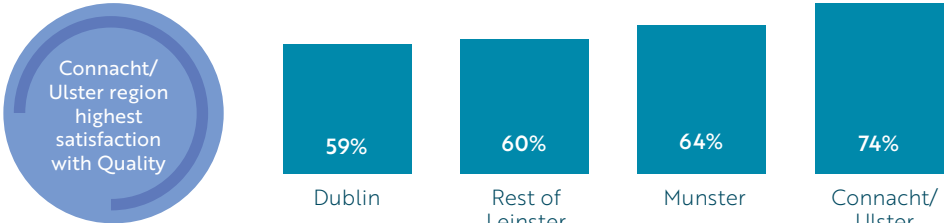
AGE

Satisfaction with quality of 'indirect' engagement by AGE

Aged **65+** highest satisfaction with Quality

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
65%	64%	54%	58%	66%	78%

REGION

Satisfaction with quality of 'indirect' engagement by REGION

Connacht/ Ulster region highest satisfaction with Quality

Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/ Ulster
59%	60%	64%	74%

Satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement?

Duration of 'indirect*' engagement

GENDER

Females (63%) reported higher satisfaction compared to males (55%) with the duration of their indirect engagement.
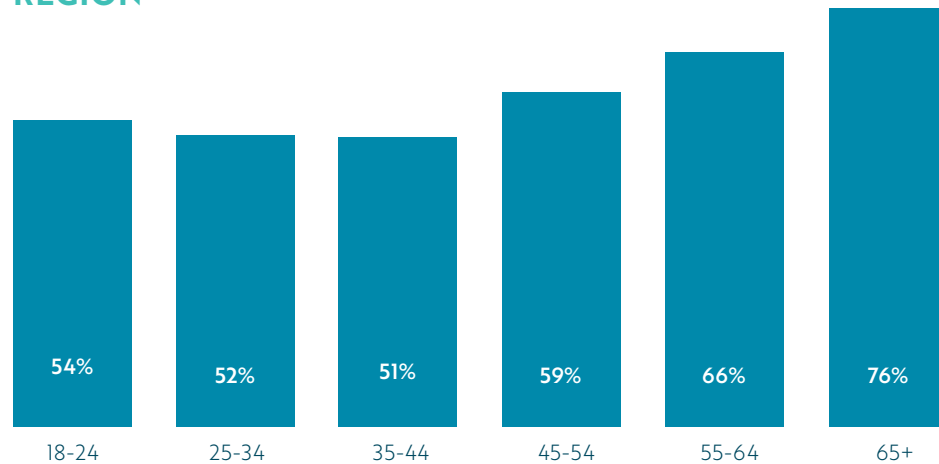
Satisfaction was highest in Connacht/Ulster (66%) and lowest in the Dublin region (56%).

58% of people in the Rest of Leinster and Munster were satisfied with the duration of their indirect engagement.
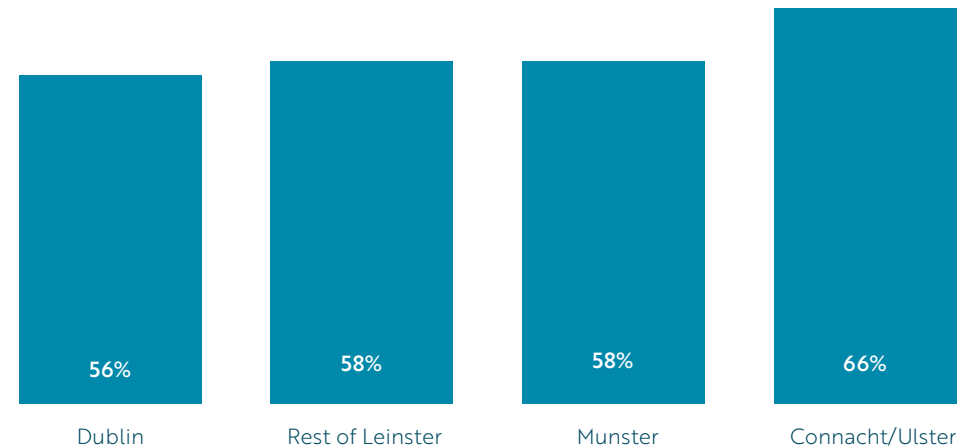
AGE
Satisfaction with duration of 'indirect' engagement by AGE

REGION

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
54%	52%	51%	59%	66%	76%

Satisfaction with duration of 'indirect' engagement by REGION

Dublin	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht/Ulster
56%	58%	58%	66%

Satisfaction with duration of engagement increases steadily for people **aged 45+**

* Indirect engagement = email, online, social media, letter, Instant Messaging

Survey Results

Factors impacting satisfaction with 'indirect' engagements

(i) reason for engagement,

(ii) number of staff engagements and

(iii) duration of engagement
     on satisfaction

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Satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement?

Impact of 'reason for engagement' on satisfaction

> Satisfaction with **quality** and **duration** of indirect* engagement was **highest for those using a service.**
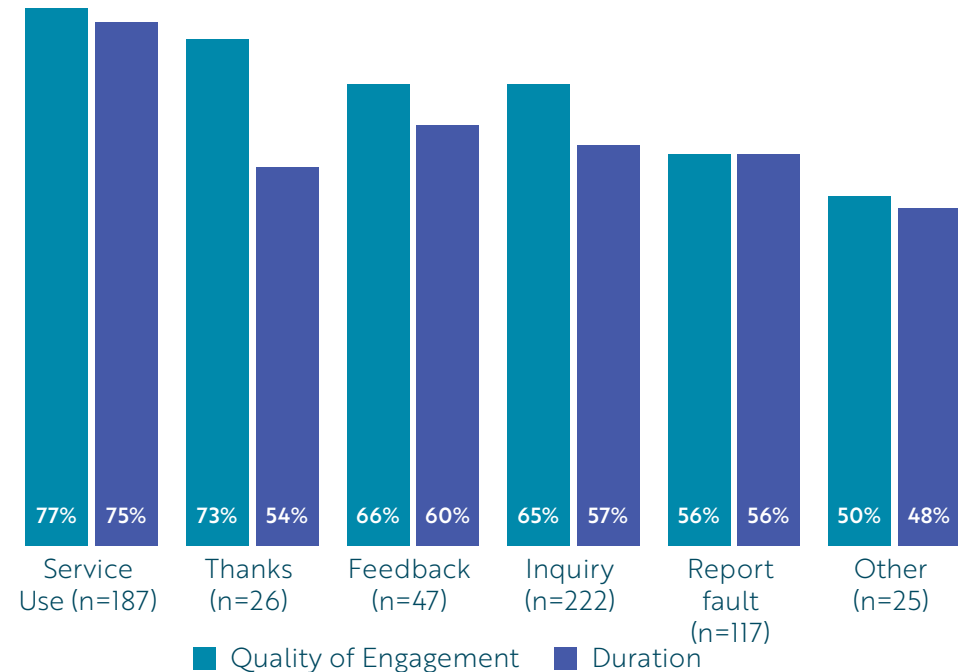
> The **least satisfied** with both the quality and duration of their indirect engagement were those making a complaint.

People contacting local authorities to thank them, were very satisfied with the quality of engagement but less so the duration of the engagement.

Those giving feedback or making an inquiry had an average satisfaction level (between 56% and 66%).

More than half of the people reporting a fault were satisfied with the quality and duration of their engagement.

Impact of REASON FOR ENGAGEMENT on satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement

Category	Quality of Engagement	Duration
Service Use (n=187)	77%	75%
Thanks (n=26)	73%	54%
Feedback (n=47)	66%	60%
Inquiry (n=222)	65%	57%
Report fault (n=117)	56%	56%
Other (n=25)	50%	48%

■ Quality of Engagement   ■ Duration

Indirect engagement = email, online, social media, letter, Instant Messaging

Satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement?

Impact of 'staff numbers' on satisfaction

> Satisfaction with quality was high with **no staff engagement** or when engaged with one staff member.

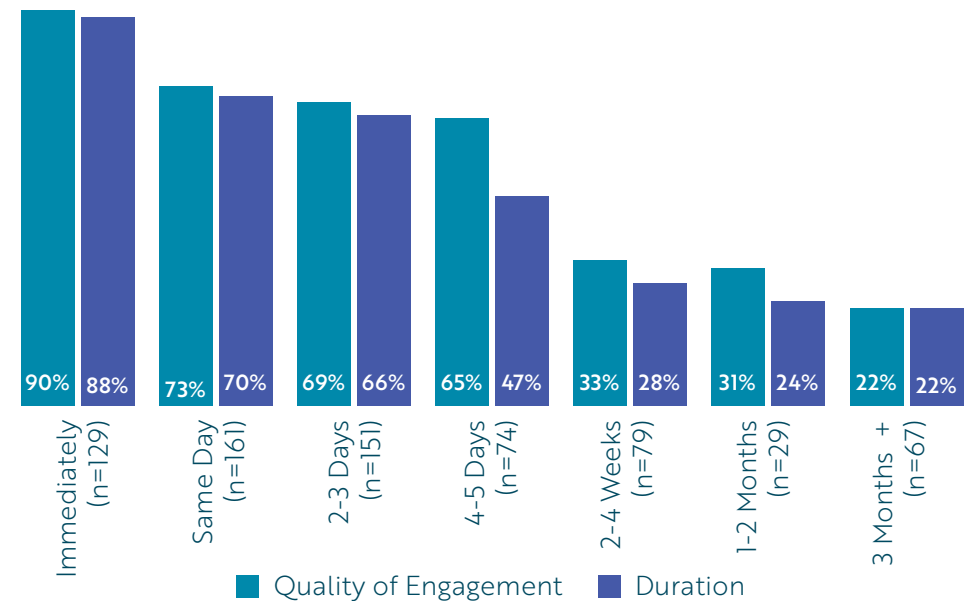### Impact of NUMBER OF STAFF on 'indirect' engagement

	No staff (n=135)	1 Staff (n=353)	2 staff (n=91)	3 staff (n=32)	4+ staff (n=13)
Quality of Engagement	71%	70%	45%	28%	38%
Duration	69%	61%	45%	28%	33%

■ Quality of Engagement ■ Duration

> Satisfaction with duration and quality was low **once 2 or more staff** were required for engagement.

Impact of 'time taken' on satisfaction

> Satisfaction with quality and duration was **high** for engagements that **concluded within 3 days.**

Impact of DURATION on satisfaction with 'indirect' engagement

	Immediately (n=129)	Same Day (n=161)	2-3 Days (n=151)	4-5 Days (n=74)	2-4 Weeks (n=79)	1-2 Months (n=29)	3 Months + (n=67)
Quality of Engagement	90%	73%	69%	65%	33%	31%	22%
Duration	88%	70%	66%	47%	28%	24%	22%

■ Quality of Engagement ■ Duration

> Those dealt with immediately were **most satisfied. Satisfaction drops** considerably after 4-5 days.

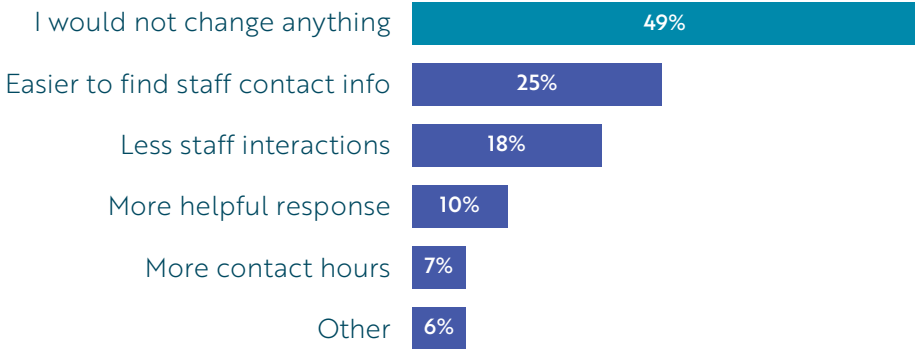*Indirect engagement = email, online, social media, letter, Instant Messaging*

Survey Results

What should change?

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What should change to improve the engagement?

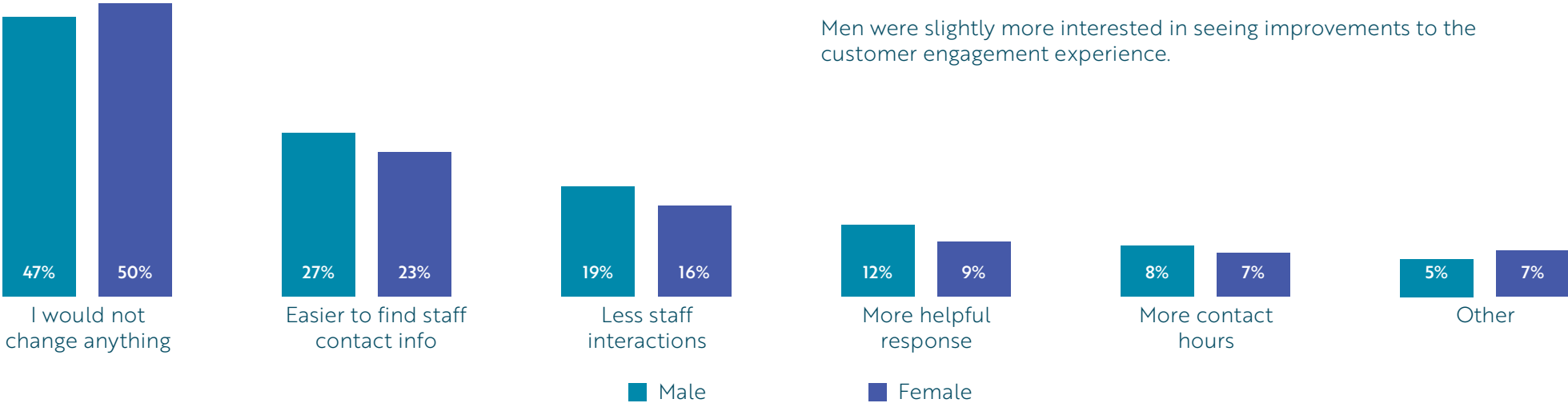**49%**

of survey respondents would not change anything about their engagement experience.

Changes to engagement experience

I would not change anything	49%
Easier to find staff contact info	25%
Less staff interactions	18%
More helpful response	10%
More contact hours	7%
Other	6%

Changes to engagement experience by GENDER

Women were slightly more inclined to be satisfied with their engagement, 50% did not want any change.

Men were slightly more interested in seeing improvements to the customer engagement experience.

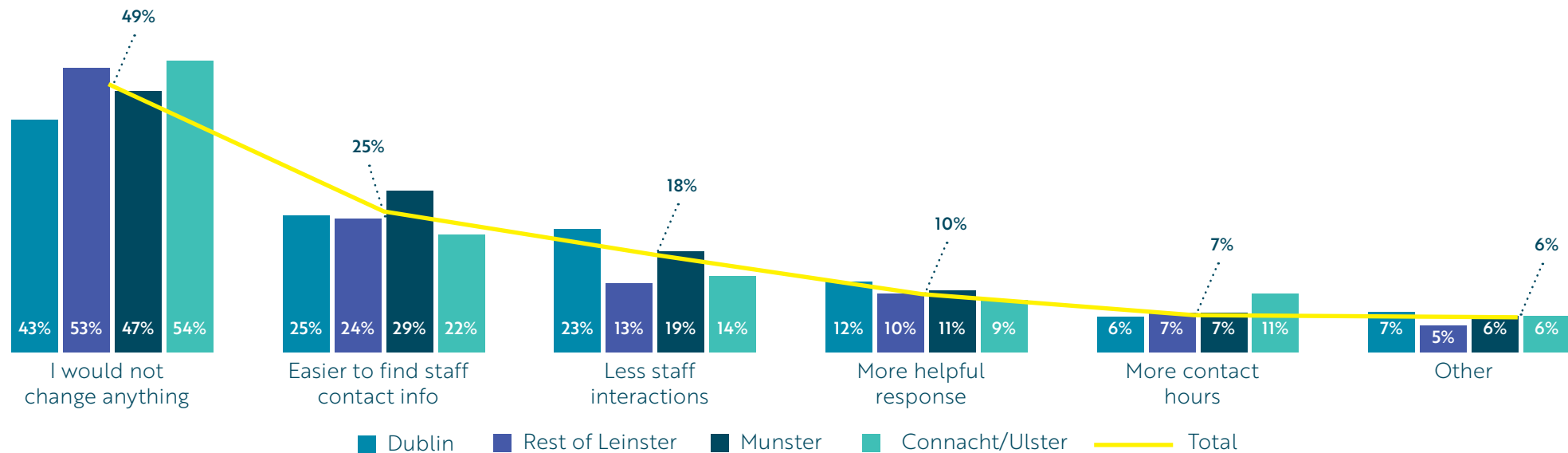|	Male	Female
I would not change anything	47%	50%
Easier to find staff contact info	27%	23%
Less staff interactions	19%	16%
More helpful response	12%	9%
More contact hours	8%	7%
Other	5%	7%

■ Male   ■ Female

What should change to improve the engagement?

More than half of the respondents in Connacht/Ulster (54%) and the Rest of Leinster (53%), would not change any aspect of their most recent engagement. This figure was lower in the Dublin region, where 43% felt this way. The Dublin region had the highest percentage of respondents (23%) suggesting a reduction in the number of interactions with staff during engagements.

Ease of finding staff contact information was a more prominent issue in Munster (29%) relative to other regions, and least prominent in the Connacht/Ulster (22%) region.

Changes to the engagement experience by REGION

	I would not change anything	Easier to find staff contact info	Less staff interactions	More helpful response	More contact hours	Other
Dublin	43%	25%	23%	12%	6%	7%
Rest of Leinster	53%	24%	13%	10%	7%	5%
Munster	47%	29%	19%	11%	7%	6%
Connacht/Ulster	54%	22%	14%	9%	11%	6%
Total	49%	25%	18%	10%	7%	6%

What should change to improve the engagement?

When looking at aspects that could be changed to improve the engagement experience by age, those aged between 18-24 were most content (54%) and would not change anything.
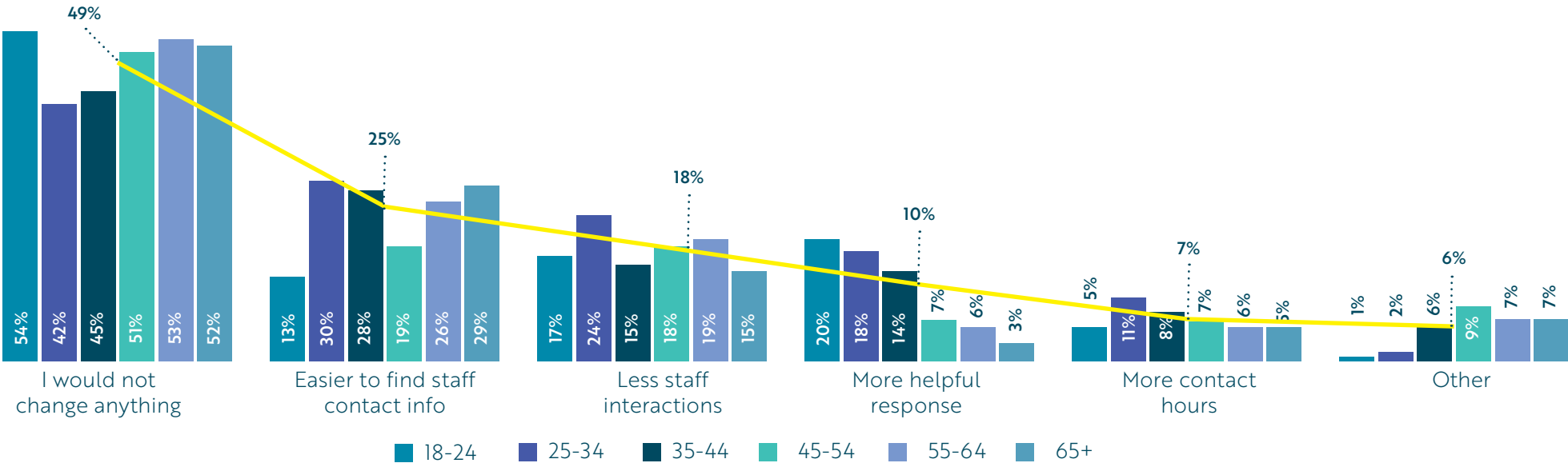
They were followed by the 55-64 age group (53%) and then the 65+ age group (52%).

Those aged between 25-34 were the least satisfied, with only 42% indicating no changes needed.

Ease of finding staff contact information was more important to respondents aged 25-34 (30%), 35-44 (28%) and 65+ (29%).

Helpfulness of the response was a key improvement identified by younger respondents, particularly those aged 18-24 (20%) and 25-34 (18%).
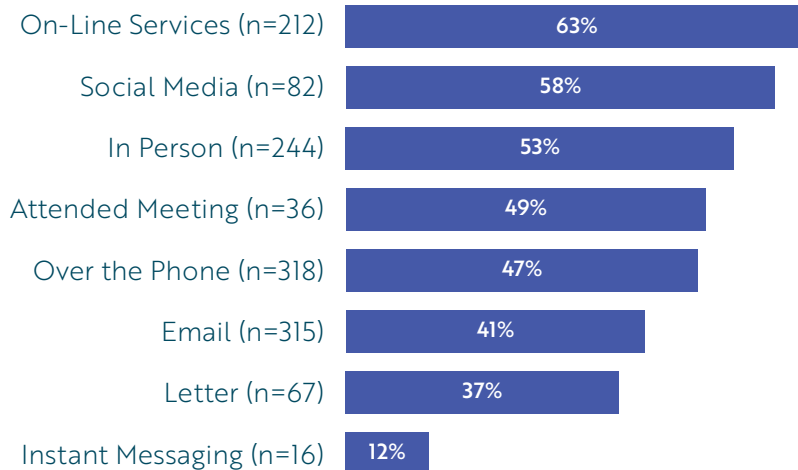
Changes to the engagement experience by AGE

Legend: 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65+

I would not change anything: 54%, 42%, 45%, 51%, 53%, 52% (49%)
Easier to find staff contact info: 13%, 30%, 28%, 19%, 26%, 29% (25%)
Less staff interactions: 17%, 24%, 15%, 18%, 19%, 15% (18%)
More helpful response: 20%, 18%, 14%, 7%, 6%, 3% (10%)
More contact hours: 5%, 11%, 8%, 7%, 6%, 5% (7%)
Other: 1%, 2%, 6%, 9%, 7%, 7% (6%)

Survey Results

Factors impacting what should change

(i) channel of engagement,

(ii) reason for engagement,

(iii) number of staff and

(iv) duration on the desire for change?

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Desire for change impact of channel of engagement?

I would not change anything

Channel	%
On-Line Services (n=212)	63%
Social Media (n=82)	58%
In Person (n=244)	53%
Attended Meeting (n=36)	49%
Over the Phone (n=318)	47%
Email (n=315)	41%
Letter (n=67)	37%
Instant Messaging (n=16)	12%

Online service users were least likely to want a change to their engagement experience.

Those using instant messaging* were most likely to seek change.

* It should be noted that the number of respondents using Instant Messaging was very small (n=16)

> The change most requested by all channels was **ease of finding staff contact information** apart from social media users who wanted more helpful responses.

People who engaged directly with staff via phone, meetings or in-person were most satisfied with the response they received from local authorities as nobody in this category requested a more helpful response.
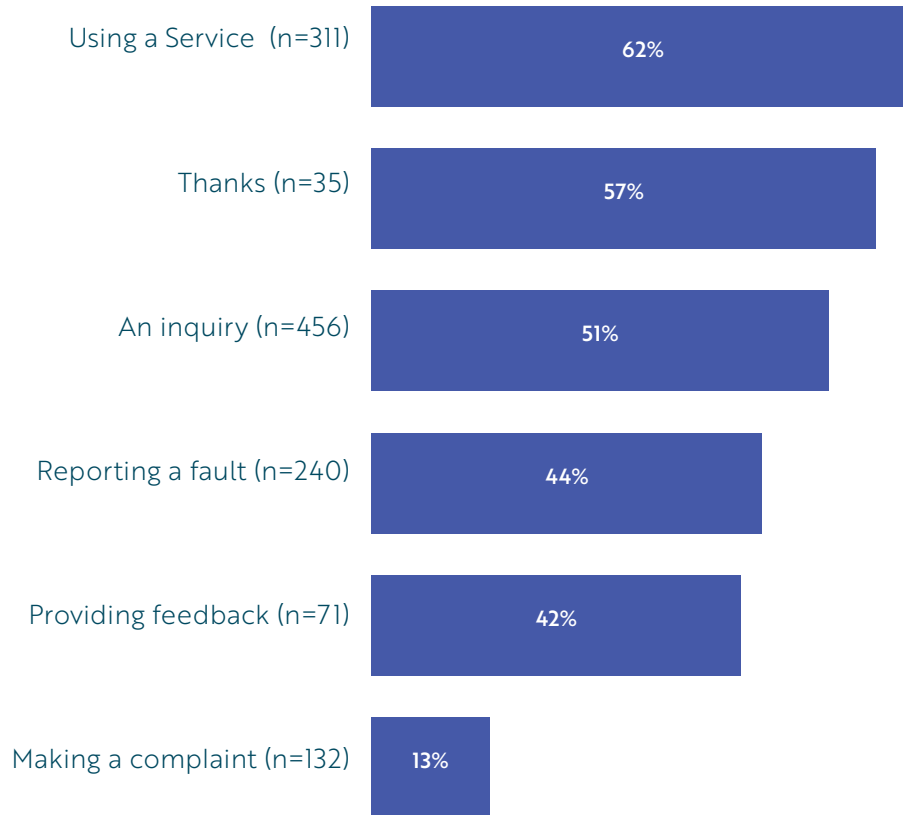
Those seeking a reduction in the number of interactions were more likely to be using instant messaging, letter or engaging over the phone. Instant messaging were most likely to seek staff contact information.

Those seeking more contact hours were those engaging in-person, on the phone or attending meetings.

	On-Line Services (n=212)	Social Media (n=82)	In Person (n=244)	Attended Meeting (n=36)	Over the Phone (n=318)	Email (n=315)	Letter (n=67)	Instant Messaging (n=16)
I would not change anything	63%	58%	53%	49%	47%	41%	37%	12%
Ease of finding contact info	21%	19%	25%	23%	27%	27%	27%	48%
Number of interactions	9%	13%	16%	17%	22%	18%	24%	43%
Helpfulness of the response	9%	21%	0%	0%	0%	23%	28%	38%
Contact Hours	0%	0%	17%	0%	16%	0%	0%	0%
Meeting Time/ Contact Hours	0%	0%	0%	16%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Desire for change impact of purpose of engagement?

I would not change anything

Using a Service (n=311) — 62%

Thanks (n=35) — 57%

An inquiry (n=456) — 51%

Reporting a fault (n=240) — 44%

Providing feedback (n=71) — 42%

Making a complaint (n=132) — 13%

Service users were least likely to want a change to their engagement experience.

Those making a complaint were most likely to seek change.

> The change most requested by all channels was **ease of finding staff contact information** apart from those thanking local authorities and those who wanted more helpful responses.

Those using a service or making an inquiry were more interested in ease of accessing contact information for staff than reducing the number of interactions.

People making a complaint were most likely to want a reduction in the number of interactions and to be able to find contact information more easily.

	Using a Service (n=311)	Thanks (n=35)	An inquiry (n=456)	Reporting a fault (n=240)	Providing feedback (n=71)	Making a complaint (n=132)
I would not change anything	62%	57%	51%	44%	42%	13%
Ease of finding contact info	20%	14%	26%	25%	24%	41%
Number of interactions	10%	19%	13%	22%	29%	39%
Helpfulness of the response	8%	17%	11%	8%	7%	19%
Contact Hours	8%	4%	8%	6%	4%	11%

Desire for change impact of number of staff?

I would not change anything

No Staff (n=140) — 70%

1 Staff (n=708) — 54%

2 Staff (n=251) — 32%

3 Staff (n=66) — 28%

4 Staff (n=32) — 29%

Those least likely to want change were those who did not engage directly with staff. Desire for change remains low for those engaging with one staff member and increases once more than two staff were engaged.

The change most requested by those dealing with **two staff or less** was ease of **finding staff contact information**, while those who engaged with **3 or more staff** members wanted a **reduction in the number of interactions.**

A desire for more contact hours was highest amongst those engaging with two or more staff members.

Number of staff engaged with to conclude engagement	No Staff (n=140)	1 Staff (n=708)	2 Staff (n=251)	3 Staff (n=66)	4 Staff (n=32)
I would not change anything	70%	54%	32%	28%	29%
Ease of finding contact info	13%	23%	32%	34%	37%
Number of interactions	5%	14%	26%	39%	42%
Helpfulness of the response	5%	10%	14%	17%	5%
Contact Hours	0%	6%	13%	11%	19%

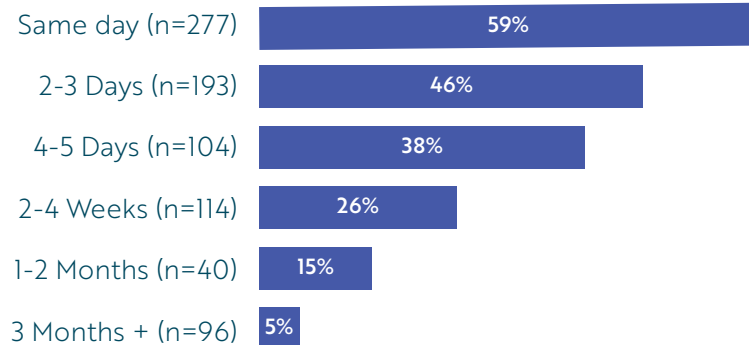# Desire for change impact of duration of engagement?

I would not change anything

Face-to-face engagements (in-person and meeting)

Duration	Percentage
Less 30 mins (n=189)	63%
30 min - 1 hour (n=60)	37%
1-2 hours (n=19)	29%
2+ hours (n=13)	1%

Online, phone, email, letter, social media, Instant Messaging

Duration	Percentage
Same day (n=277)	59%
2-3 Days (n=193)	46%
4-5 Days (n=104)	38%
2-4 Weeks (n=114)	26%
1-2 Months (n=40)	15%
3 Months + (n=96)	5%
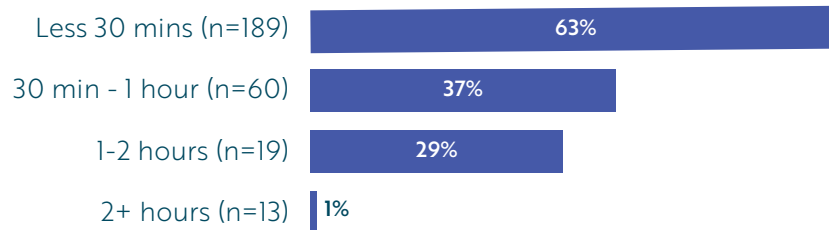
> People who completed their engagements quickly were the least likely to want change, regardless of whether the engagement was direct or indirect.

For people engaging face to face, almost all wanted to see change once the engagement exceeded 2 hours, and the change most requested was a reduction in the number of interactions.

Ease of finding contact information the most requested change for both direct and indirect engagements.

Time taken to complete engagement (In Person, Attended a Meeting)	Less 30 mins (n=189)	30 min - 1 hour (n=60)	1-2 hours (n=19)	2+ hours (n=13)
I would not change anything	63%	37%	29%	1%
Ease of finding contact info	22%	36%	24%	22%
Number of interactions	8%	24%	34%	75%
Contact Hours	15%	20%	9%	6%
Helpfulness of the response	0%	3%	7%	18%

Time to took to complete engagement (Online, Phone, Email, Letter, Social Media, IM)	Same day (n=277)	2-3 Days (n=193)	4-5 Days (n=104)	2-4 Weeks (n=114)	1-2 Months (n=40)	3 Months + (n=96)
I would not change anything	59%	46%	38%	26%	15%	5%
Ease of finding contact info	25%	22%	30%	36%	49%	42%
Number of interactions	10%	17%	23%	26%	56%	40%
Helpfulness of the response	10%	18%	9%	31%	22%	15%
Contact Hours	5%	3%	5%	5%	13%	9%

Focus Group Findings

What was the

engagement like?

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Who attended the Focus Groups?

MAY 2024

36 people attended 7 online focus groups from across 13 counties, representing 15 Local Authority Areas in May 2024
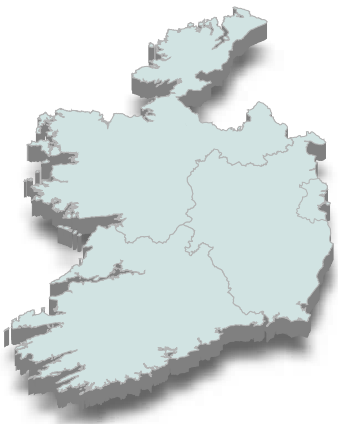
15 Local Authority Areas

15 Local Authority Areas

Clare

Cork County

Dublin City

Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown

Donegal

Fingal

Galway City

Kilkenny

Kildare

Laois

Mayo

Monaghan

Sligo

Tipperary

Wexford

36 Attendees

23 Female, 13 Male
70% aged 55 or older

7 Online Focus Groups

led by an Independent Consultant

Why and how did people engage with their Local Authority?

THEMES DISCUSSED AT FOCUS GROUPS

The **purpose** of their engagement with local authority

The **channel/s** they used e.g. phone, email, etc.

A **description of their engagement** and how they **rated** the engagement

The **most** and **least appealing** features of dealing with their local authority

What they considered important when delivering **good customer care**

Examples of other companies that offer good customer care

Why and how did people engage with their Local Authority?

PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

There were multiple reasons why people contacted their local authority including:

8 Making a complaint/reporting a fault

8 Making an inquiry

5 Using a service

4 Using a service (motor tax)

4 Community groups/grants

4 Work related

**2** Using a service (library)

1 Other

CHANNEL OF MOST RECENT ENGAGEMENT

The majority had engaged with their local authority in person or by phone:

13 In person

13 By phone

6 Email

1 Social media

1 Online

1 Consultation

1 WhatsApp

Describing the quality of most recent engagement?

Quality of most recent engagement

Excellent (n=16)	Very Good (n=14)	Good (n=2)	Fair (n=2)	Poor (n=2)
44%	39%	6%	6%	6%
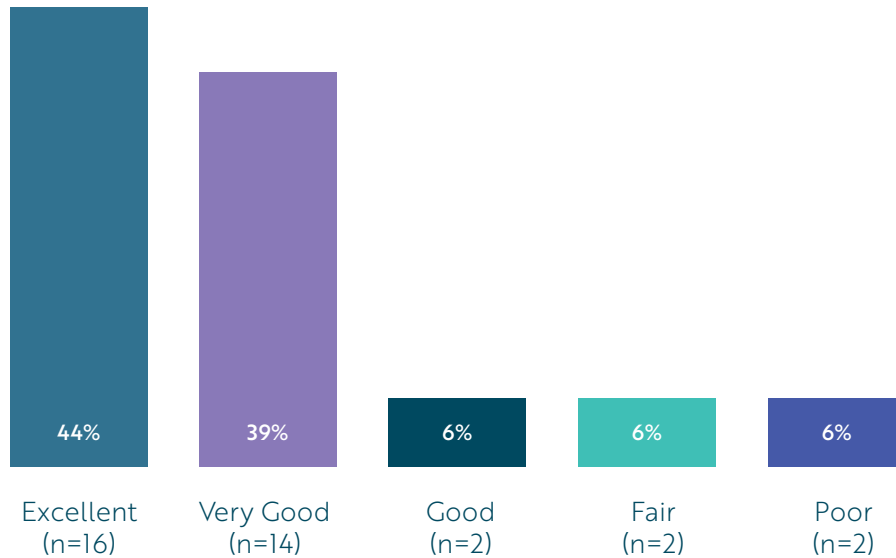
Notably, a combined total of 83% of participants rated the quality of their recent engagement as excellent or very good

Participants with positive experiences were most satisfied with the quick turnaround.

Overall, most people had **positive recent engagement experiences** with their Local Authority

The words people used to describe their experience:
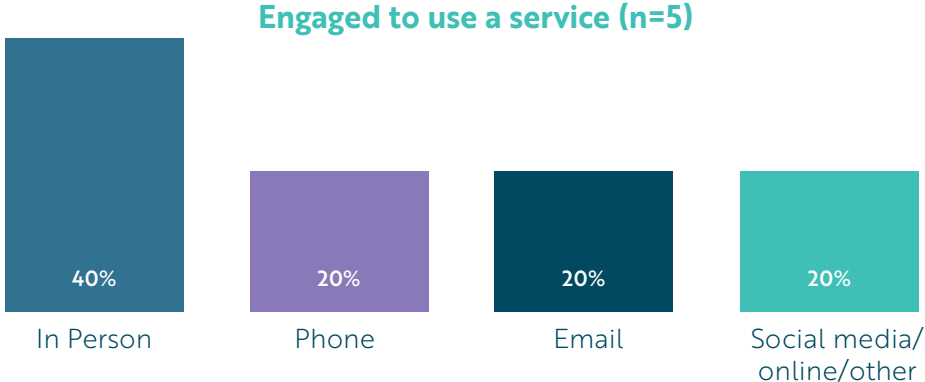
Helpful

Accommodating

Friendly

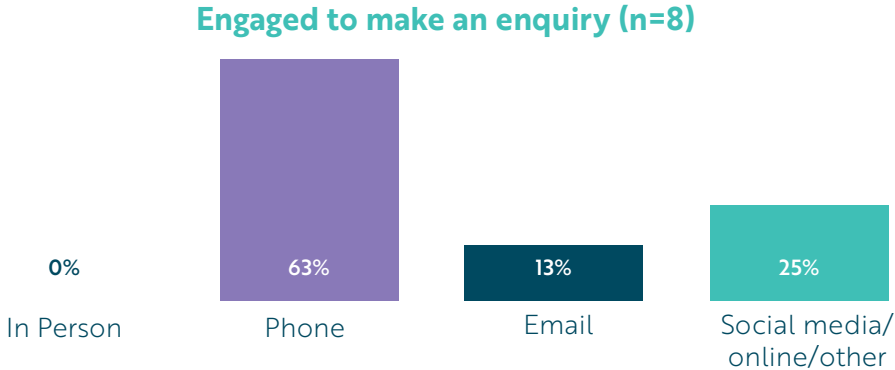Directing customer to correct channel

Attentive

Quick turnaround
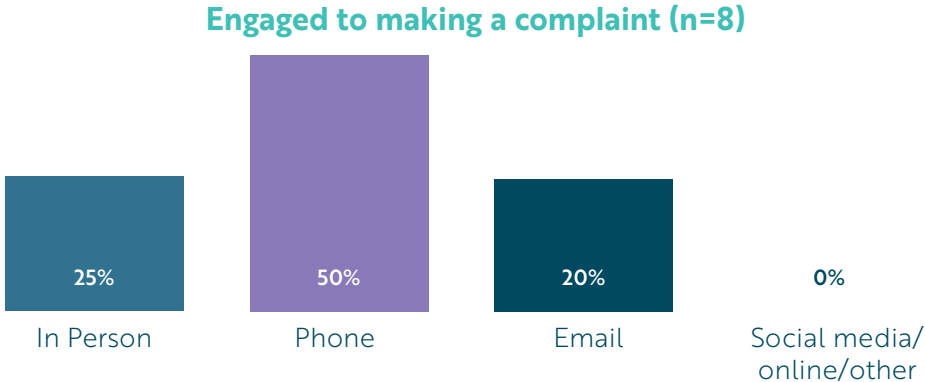
Purpose of engagement by channel used

More people engaged with their local authority in person compared with other engagement channels.

When making an inquiry most people used the phone (63%), followed by social media or online.

When making a complaint most people used the phone (50%), followed by in person and by email.

Engaged to use a service (n=5)

In Person	Phone	Email	Social media/online/other
40%	20%	20%	20%

Engaged to make an enquiry (n=8)

In Person	Phone	Email	Social media/online/other
0%	63%	13%	25%

Engaged to making a complaint (n=8)

In Person	Phone	Email	Social media/online/other
25%	50%	20%	0%

The Experience of People Engaging with Local Authorities Results from focus groups and a national survey conducted in 2024

Describing the quality of most recent engagement?

Satisfaction with duration of engagement

Very Good (n=8)	Good (n=11)	Neutral (n=7)	Poor (n=3)	Very Poor (n=7)
22%	31%	19%	8%	19%
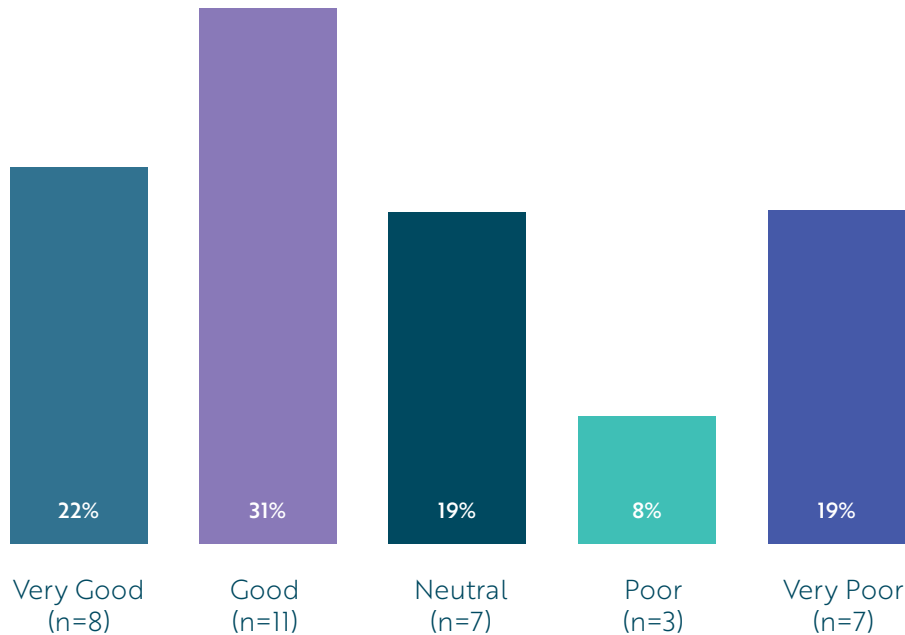
Over **half** of participants were happy with the duration of their engagement (53%), and almost one quarter (27%) were unhappy with the time taken to conclude their engagement.

People felt that duration was less important if they could see **progress being made** and they had **information about how long the process should take.**

People were most satisfied when their engagement happened efficiently and did not take longer than expected. Participants were understanding of delays when the cause was clear but frustrated if they were not aware of the reason.

Participants with poor experiences mentioned

Lengthy protracted/complicated engagement

Need to follow up/chase emails and phone calls

Lack of response to emails/messages

Security and privacy concerns in public office

Concerns about most recent engagement

1. Concerns (when engaging In-person)

Security of customer and staff because of behaviour of a minority of other customers
Privacy in public office and public counters when services were busy
Older people feeling a bit rushed

2. Concerns (Email)

Unsure if email had been received as no acknowledgment sent
Unsure if email went to right person as no reply to indicate it had been received and was being processed
Felt the need to follow up, sometimes using another channel, due to lack of feedback

3. Concerns (Phone)

Needed to follow-up or chase as unsure if messages were passed on
Difficultly getting through to the right person

4. Concerns (Lack of transparency about process)

Dissatisfied when not knowing the status of their query as had no way to track progress of query or service

Common themes arising in 2024 and 2022 research

The Special Theme for the *Focus Groups in 2022* was *Communication and Engagement*

Some of the issues raised in 2024 align with those made in 2022. Below is a snapshot of some of these issues.

CONCERNS RAISED IN 2022 RESEARCH

Seventy-four per cent of people in 2022 said that there was room to improve with regards to communication and engagement. Key issues can be summarised under the following three headings:

- **Engagement process not clear:** The lack of clear engagement routes was raised throughout the 2022 focus groups. People felt the engagement was not straightforward. Many people reported a lack of clarity about who was responsible for what. They did not know who the relevant person was to raise their concerns with or how to go about contacting them or finding their contact details.

- **Issues with websites:** People found many of the websites difficult to navigate. They also found the inconsistent design across the different local authority websites made things more difficult. People were often unclear about the headings on the website, and which departments were responsible for what. Once again, the departmental responsibilities seemed to be different across local authorities.

- **Ineffective use of social media:** The key feedback was that social media was used as a one-way channel to get messages out to people, rather than as a method of engagement i.e., two-way communication. The local authority was often slow to respond or did not respond to question or queries.

https://www.lgma.ie/en/publications/local-authority-sector-reports/2022-local-government-customer-services-report.pdf

Feedback on 2024 customer engagement experience

1. Ease of engagement

'The communication was easy; it was a good experience.'

'My interactions are almost exclusively very, very good. I'm probably ringing every week about something, and probably because I know my way around as well…'

2. Polite and helpful staff

'The team behind the desk were lovely, they're all very friendly, very helpful, very accommodating.'

'…I have found all local authorities at that first point of contact to be very polite'

'I find that once you get through, staff are extremely helpful. And will go above and beyond to sort you out.'

3. Efficient service

'There's nothing that I can think of that they could have done to improve my experience, it was excellent.'

'The service was really good, really quick. When I rang them, they directed me straight away as to what to do…'

4. Less positive engagements

'It took ages to find out who was the right person to deal with my query"

'You have to repeatedly chase anything with emails.'

'There are always problems with making calls and it dropping out or being transferred….'

'When I sent the first email I didn't get an acknowledgment, and nothing happened for months…'

5. Room to improve

'I think a dedicated phone line maybe for a couple of hours each day would be a winner for older people'.

'It's very important to get feedback about your request, how long it will take etc. Having a name to follow up with helps'.

'The acknowledgment of the emails and prompt replies and follow ups are important'.

Focus Group Findings

What could be improved?

LGMA
Local Government
Management Agency

What people want when engaging with Local Authorities

1 Features that appealed to people during their recent engagement largely centered on friendly responsive staff, with good listening skills.

2 Clear diction and good verbal communication skills were emphasized by those whose hearing may be impaired, older people, and those for whom English is not their first language.

3 People spoke about building relationships with the council through regular engagement, noting that this works well in terms of positive outcomes and ease of engagement. This was particularly evident amongst those who engaged in a professional capacity, or through community-based involvement.

4 People wanted to know that emails had been received, and how long one should expect to wait for a response. Information on how long the process would take was important to respondents - *being able to say that they are working on the issue and will be in touch in a defined number of days/weeks* - would help manage expectations.

5 Interest in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System, that keeps record of their details, so they don't have to repeat themselves every time they make contact.

6 Referral system - some concern that if staff are out of the office, for whatever reason, that this is not always communicated, and emails may get lost or ignored in the interim.

7 Interest in a webchat - particularly one which allows you to see where you are in the queue, and where the transcript of the conversation could be saved for record keeping purposes

8 Difficulties navigating websites and finding the information you're looking for.

9 Several people suggested that local authorities should have a dedicated time for older people to engage with them for age-friendly support, either by phone or in person, similar to other organisations who allocate age-friendly time each week.