
STIRLING SOUNDING BOARD

Report

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** Stirling Council established a Citizens' Panel, Stirling Sounding Board, in the first half of the year 2000 in partnership with Scottish Enterprise: Forth Valley. The panel is representative of the wider community by such factors as age, gender, working status, tenure, urban/rural settlement, etc.

The Council has conducted the first postal survey with the Panel, which repeated a number of questions from the Household Survey conducted by MORI in 1998.

T.L. Dempster Strategy and Research were commissioned by Stirling Council to conduct the data processing and analysis of the results, and subsequently to produce this report of the findings.

- 1.2** The panel consists of 1,300 members who were each sent a copy of the questionnaire. Stirling Council sent out the questionnaires direct to the Panel members, then followed this up with a reminder letter to all non-respondents after a two week deadline for return of questionnaires. The survey was conducted in June and July 2000.

A total of 958 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 74%. It is TLD's opinion that this response rate is at least as good, and probably better, than that achieved by the majority of other Citizens' Panel Surveys conducted to date.

- 1.3** The detailed profile of respondents is set out in Section 4.

- 1.4** A graphical overview of findings is detailed in Section 5 covering the following headings:

- Satisfaction with Stirling Council Services
- Communication and Information
- Customer Service and Public Contact
- Talkback
- Local Office
- Stirling Assembly
- Area Forums
- Community Councils
- Stirling Council – General Issues

Where relevant, comparisons have been drawn with the work undertaken by MORI in 1998. Where responses have varied significantly by key demographic criteria then this has been noted.

1.5 Summary of Results

- 1.6** There is general satisfaction with the services the Council provide, although this shows a drop since the Household Survey of 1998 and should be monitored carefully.

With respect to specific services, satisfaction levels are highest for libraries, refuse collection, maintenance of cemeteries, open spaces & parks, and primary education. Dissatisfaction is highest for road maintenance, planning services and public transport provision.

- 1.7** Again, there is broad satisfaction with both the police and fire services, although in the case of the former, a significant number are dissatisfied (13%) or do not express an opinion.

- 1.8** Almost half of survey respondents perceive that the Council gives out only a limited amount of information about its activities.

The Council newspaper is currently the most popular source of information on Council activities, with other popular sources being the local press and libraries. As well as being the most popular sources of information, these are also the preferred sources of individuals receiving information in the future.

In general, the majority of respondents would like to see a Council Newspaper published four times per year and either mailed directly to their homes or disseminated via a local newspaper.

- 1.9** Areas on which people feel they would like more information include:

- information on what is happening in the local community
- information on how effectively the Council spends its money
- information on whom to contact in the Council with different problems
- information on planning developments
- information on local leisure activities and entertainment.

In terms of the Council making it easier to have contact with them, the following methods would be seen as particularly helpful:

- direct line telephone numbers on specific services
- a local office
- extended hours telephone service.

1.10 A significant proportion of respondents (39%) have access to the internet at home, with 14% of those who have access having logged on to the Stirling Council website which is generally favourably received. There is some awareness that the public can use the internet at the local library (59%) and 27% would consider internet access in this way. Other potential access points included Shopping Centres and the Post Office.

1.11 Individuals have cause to contact the Council for a wide diversity of reasons including; complaints, payment of council tax, seeking information or making general enquiries. The majority of people contact the Council by telephone, generally accessing the number either from the BT Phone Book, the Council's own directory or from a specific Council letterheading. The majority of respondents find it easy to get hold of the right person and find staff to be helpful and able to deal with their query. A total of 64% were satisfied with the treatment they received during their most recent contact with the Council. Although this represents a majority, it still leaves a significant minority (25%) expressing some level of dissatisfaction and therefore, there remains room for improvement.

The main reasons cited for dissatisfaction with treatment received included:

- the problem still not sorted out
- being passed from one person to another.

1.12 Only 7% of respondents were aware of the Talkback scheme. Such awareness as existed was generally created through leaflets.

1.13 Just under half of respondents have been to their local Council office. A significant proportion (15%) may be classified as frequent visitors who have visited the local office more than 5 times.

For those who do not use the local office when contacting Stirling Council the main reasons are:

- prefer to use the telephone
- prefer to go the centre / main office
- don't know where it is.

1.14 There remains a low level of awareness of the Stirling Assembly with only 1% claiming that they know “a great deal about it” and a further 5% stating that they know “a fair amount about it”. The overwhelming majority have never been to a Stirling Assembly meeting. The ostensible reasons for this relate to a lack of awareness, although it is possible that were the awareness issue to be overcome then a further set of barriers to participation would emerge. Again, there is little public knowledge of Area Forums, with only 2% claiming to know “a great deal”. Again, the vast majority of respondents have never been to an Area Forum meeting for broadly similar reasons to those identified with regard to the Stirling Assembly.

1.15 There is somewhat greater awareness of Community Councils, with 28% claiming to know both “a great deal”, and “a fair amount” about them, with this knowledge coming from local newspaper coverage and word of mouth contact from friends and neighbours. A total of 28% of respondents claim to have attended at least once community council meeting with 6% having attended more than five meetings. Attendance levels are higher amongst those living in rural areas. The most apparent reason for non attendance is “don’t know when they are on” although other barriers may emerge were this awareness issue to be addressed. There is a greater knowledge of community councils (43% knowing a great deal or fair amount) in the rural area than the urban area (22%). This may account for higher attendance in rural areas.

Satisfaction with community councils is encouraging. 32% are either “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied”, although 60% of respondents either gave a “don’t know” or a “neither/ nor” response to this question, with just under 10% expressing some degree of dissatisfaction. Reasons for dissatisfaction included a perception that Community Councils were unrepresentative, and had limited powers.

1.16 Encouragingly, respondents perceive that Stirling Council compares favourably to other councils. 26% of respondents perceive it to be better than other councils compared to 8% who perceive it to be worse than other councils.

The priorities identified for Stirling Council to improve the quality of life in the area revolved around the following themes:

- roads and infrastructure
- public transport
- cleaning / environmental issues
- housing
- sports and leisure facilities
- facilities for young people

2.0 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Stirling Council established a Citizens' Panel, Stirling Sounding Board, in the first half of the year 2000 in partnership with Scottish Enterprise: Forth Valley. The panel is representative of the wider community by such factors as age, gender, working status, tenure, urban/rural settlement, etc.

The Council has conducted a first postal survey with the Panel, which was a repeat of a survey conducted by MORI on a face-to-face basis in 1998. The survey focused on:

- customer satisfaction with Council services;
- communication and information;
- contact with the Council;
- local democracy (Stirling Assembly, Area Forums and Community Councils);
- priorities for the future; and
- feedback on the length/nature of the questionnaire to inform future Sounding Board surveys.

T.L. Dempster Strategy and Research were commissioned by Stirling Council to conduct the data processing and analysis of the results, and subsequently to produce this report of the findings.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This is the first survey of the Stirling Sounding Board Panel which was conducted as a postal survey.

The panel consists of 1,300 members who were each sent a copy of the questionnaire. Stirling Council sent out the questionnaires direct to the Panel members, then followed this up with a reminder letter to all non-respondents after a two week deadline for return of questionnaires.

The survey was conducted in June and July 2000.

A total of 958 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 74%. It is TLD's opinion that this response rate is at least as good, and probably better, than that achieved by the majority of other Citizens' Panel Surveys conducted to date.

Where relevant, this report compares the research findings to MORI's previous study and shows the change over this period. The MORI research was conducted face-to-face in the respondents' home and involved interviews with 776 respondents, during February and March 1998.

4.0 RESPONDENT AND PANEL PROFILES

The table below shows the profile of those who responded to this survey, and compares this with the profile of the Panel. The Panel was established to be representative of Stirling Council residents.

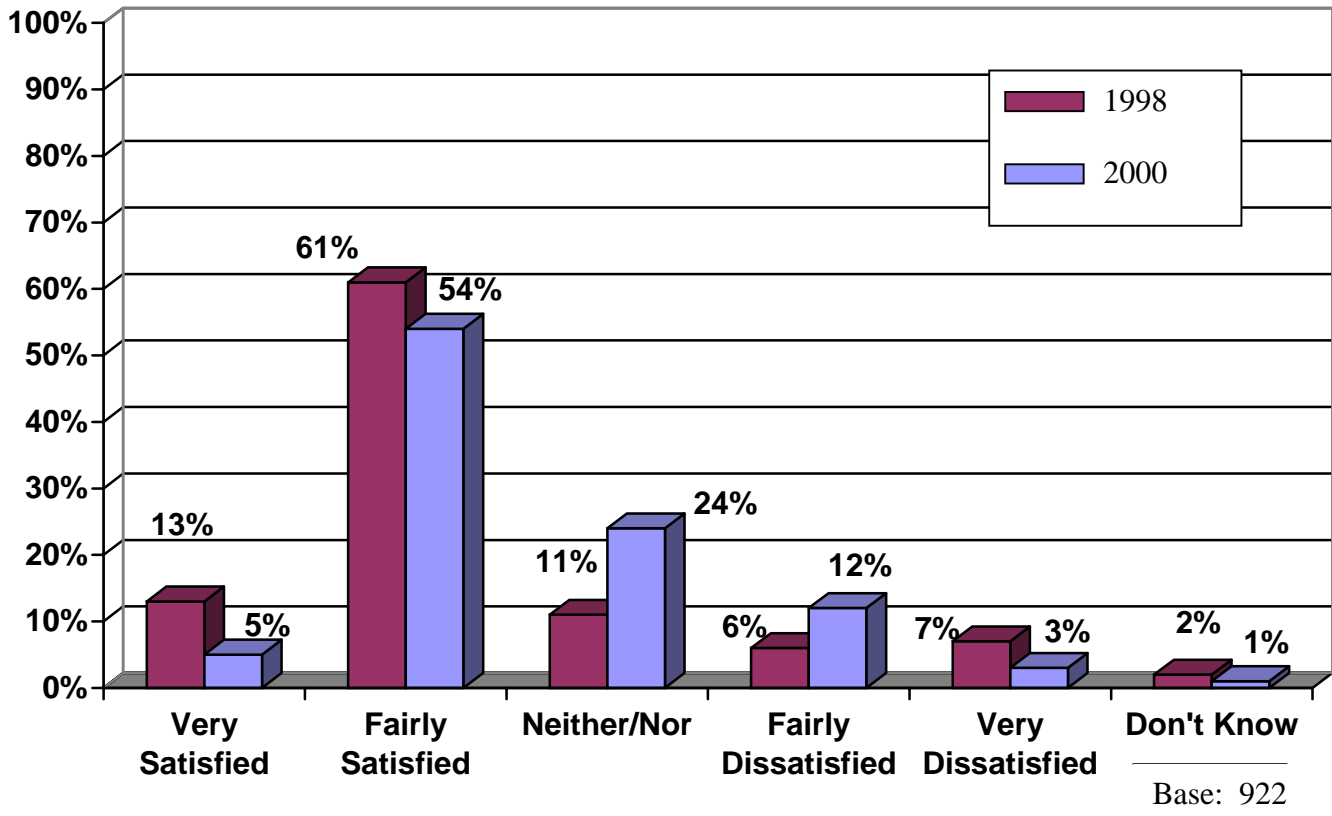
As the table shows, the respondent profile is a very close match to the Panel, and therefore to Stirling Council residents.

		Respondent	Panel
Gender:	Male	46%	47%
	Female	54%	53%
Age:	16-24	7%	16%
	25-44	39%	35%
	45-64	34%	30%
	65+	20%	19%
Employment Status:	Unemployed	4%	4%
	Government training	0%	0%
	Self employed	4%	4%
	Full time employee	41%	39%
	Part time employee	11%	11%
	Looking after home and family	11%	9%
	Retired	21%	21%
	Temporary contract worker	0%	0%
	Not working due to long term sickness	4%	5%
	Informal Carer	0%	0%
	Student	4%	7%
Occupation:	Managerial	13%	11%
	Professional / technical	23%	20%
	Clerical / secretarial / admin.	7%	7%
	Craft/skilled worker	2%	3%
	Plant / machinery operator	2%	2%
	Other unskilled	4%	5%
	Personal service	6%	6%
	Sales	4%	4%
	Not applicable	41%	42%
Tenure:	Privately owned by you or a member of your family	71%	65%
	Rented from the Council	22%	25%
	Rented from a Housing Association	2%	3%
	Rented from a Private Landlord	4%	6%
	A residential care / nursing home	0%	0%
	Tied accommodation	1%	1%
Quota Area:	Urban	72%	72%
	Rural	28%	28%

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.1 Satisfaction With Stirling Council Services

5.1.1 Figure 1: How satisfied are you with the services Stirling Council provides in the area?



There is a general satisfaction with the services the Council provide. However, whilst 59% of residents are satisfied with the services the Council provides, this shows a drop in satisfaction from the 1998 level of 74%. Satisfaction levels are broadly similar among the various sub-groups.

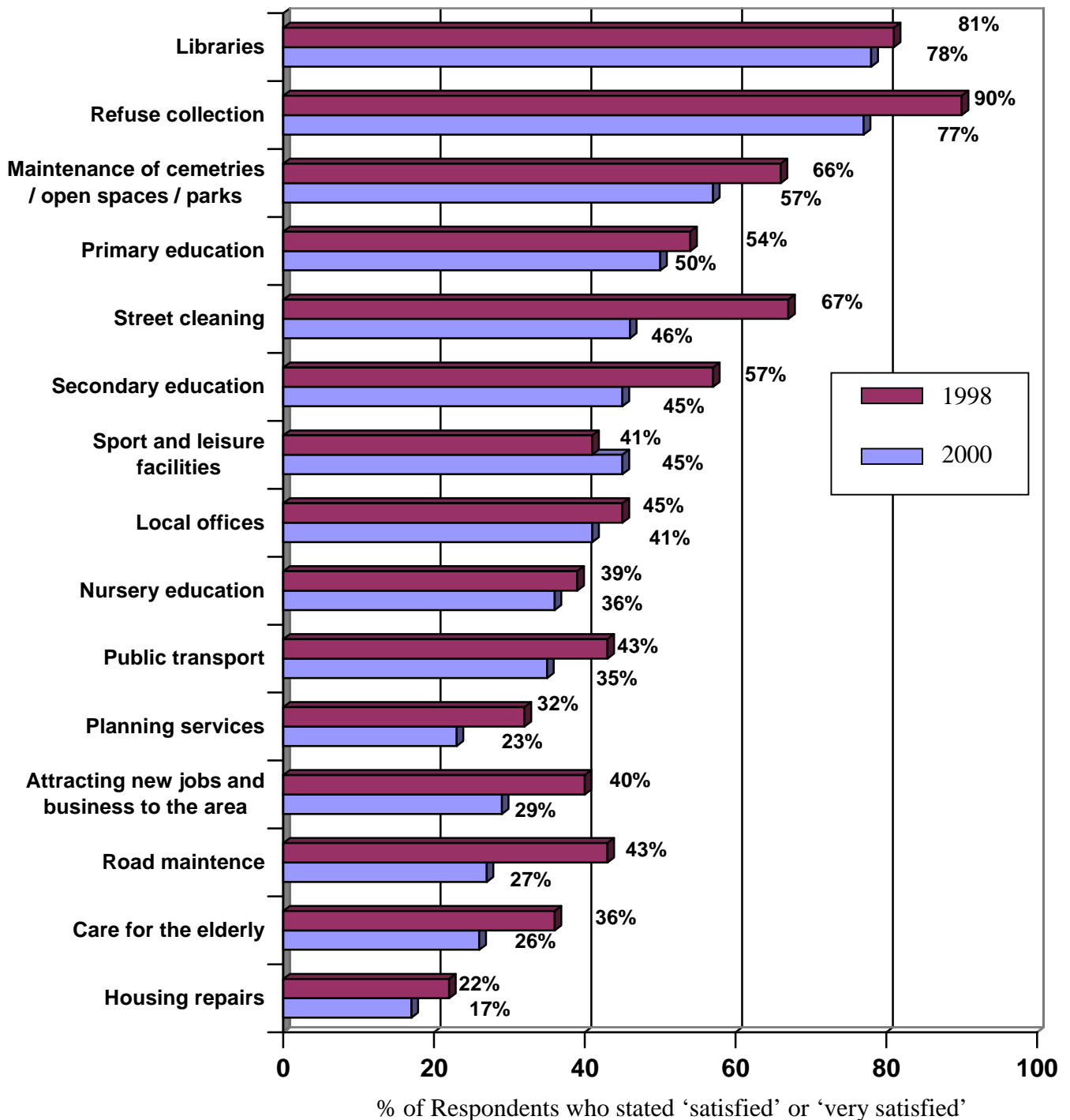
Whilst this study and the one in 1998 have adopted different methodologies, each has a sample size which is large enough to provide confidence in the figures. This drop in satisfaction levels between the two surveys is therefore significant.

However, it is important to put these satisfaction ratings in context. Those satisfied outnumber those dissatisfied by four to one. In addition, satisfaction with Local Government services have dropped for Scotland as a whole. A MORI survey conducted in 1998 showed that average satisfaction ratings for local government in Scotland were 48%¹. A more recent MORI poll in May 2000 now puts the Scottish average at 40%², well below Stirling's current level of 59%.

¹ "Confronting the Challenge of Public Opinion" – Simon Braunholtz, MORI Scotland 1998

² Local Government Chronicle – 30 June 2000, p21

5.1.2 Figure 2: How satisfied are you with the following services / activities in your local area?



Base: 918

As this shows, satisfaction levels are highest for libraries and refuse collection. On the other hand, dissatisfaction is highest for road maintenance, followed by planning services and public transport.

5.1.3 The only service which has shown an improvement from the last survey is sport and leisure facilities. All other services have shown a decrease in levels of satisfaction, with the following showing the greatest decline:-

- street cleaning - 21%
- road maintenance - 16%
- refuse collection - 13%
- attracting new jobs and business to the area - 11%
- Care for elderly - 10%

For most services, the levels of satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) are broadly similar across the various sub-groups, including those in rural and urban areas. Those services which show a tendency for higher levels amongst certain sub-groups are outlined below.

In **care for the elderly**, there is higher dissatisfaction amongst those not working due to long term sickness (24%) and the elderly (16%) compared with the total dissatisfaction level of 13%. There is also higher dissatisfaction levels amongst those in urban areas (15%) against those in rural areas (8%).

Younger people aged 16-24 are more dissatisfied with **sport and leisure services** (32%), with unemployed people showing the highest levels in 'very dissatisfied' (19%). Those in rural areas are more dissatisfied (27%) than those in urban areas (21%).

With **nursery education**, there are higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst those aged 25-44 than any other age group. Also, those living in rural areas show higher dissatisfaction (10%) compared with urban areas (5%).

There are higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst those not working due to illness (46%) and the unemployed (33%) in relation to the Council **attracting new jobs and business to the area**. There is also higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst those living in rural areas (28%) as opposed to urban areas (18%).

For **planning services** there is higher dissatisfaction amongst those who are self-employed (41%).

In relation to **housing repairs**, there is higher dissatisfaction amongst those who rent from the Council (34%). Dissatisfaction is also higher amongst those not working due to long term sickness (32%) and amongst young people aged 16-24 (27%).

There is higher levels of dissatisfaction amongst those living in urban areas (21%) in relation to the **maintenance of cemeteries and open spaces/parks**, compared with 13% dissatisfied in rural areas.

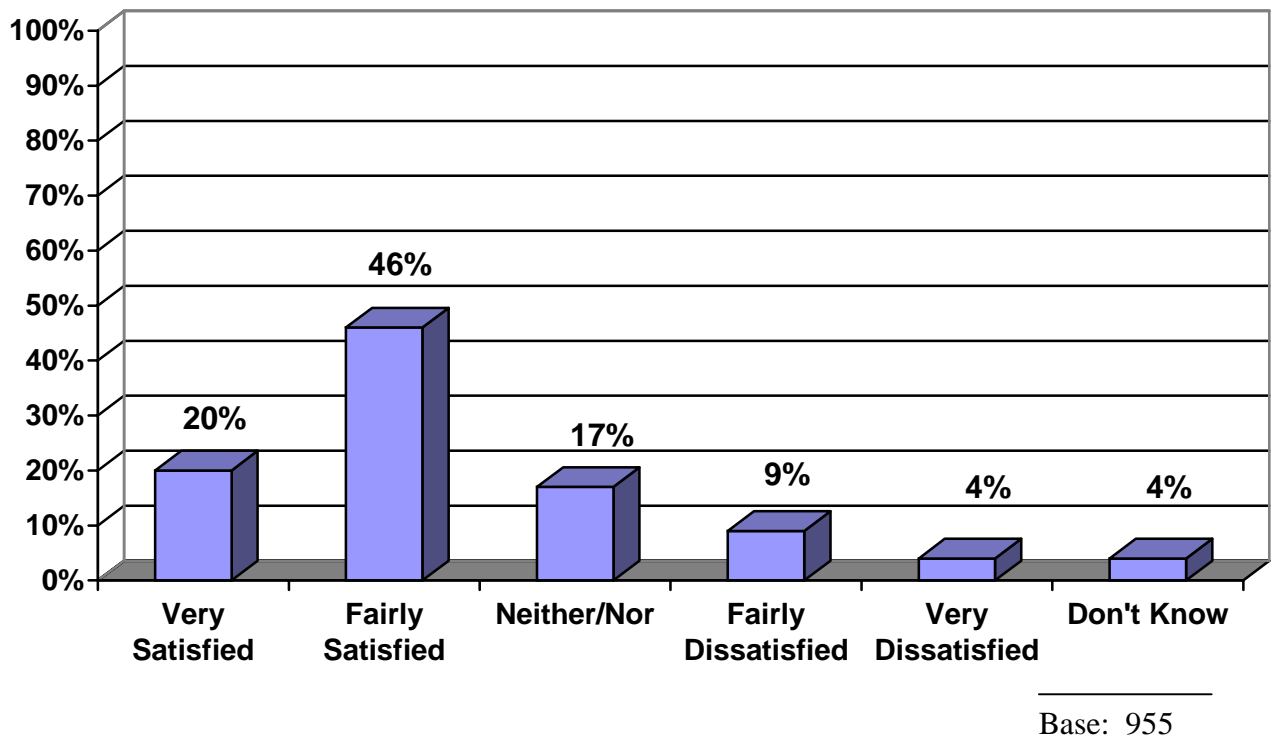
Public transport receives higher levels of dissatisfaction from students (51%), young people aged 16-24 (47%) and those living in rural areas (46%).

There are higher levels of satisfaction on **refuse collection** amongst those renting from the Council.

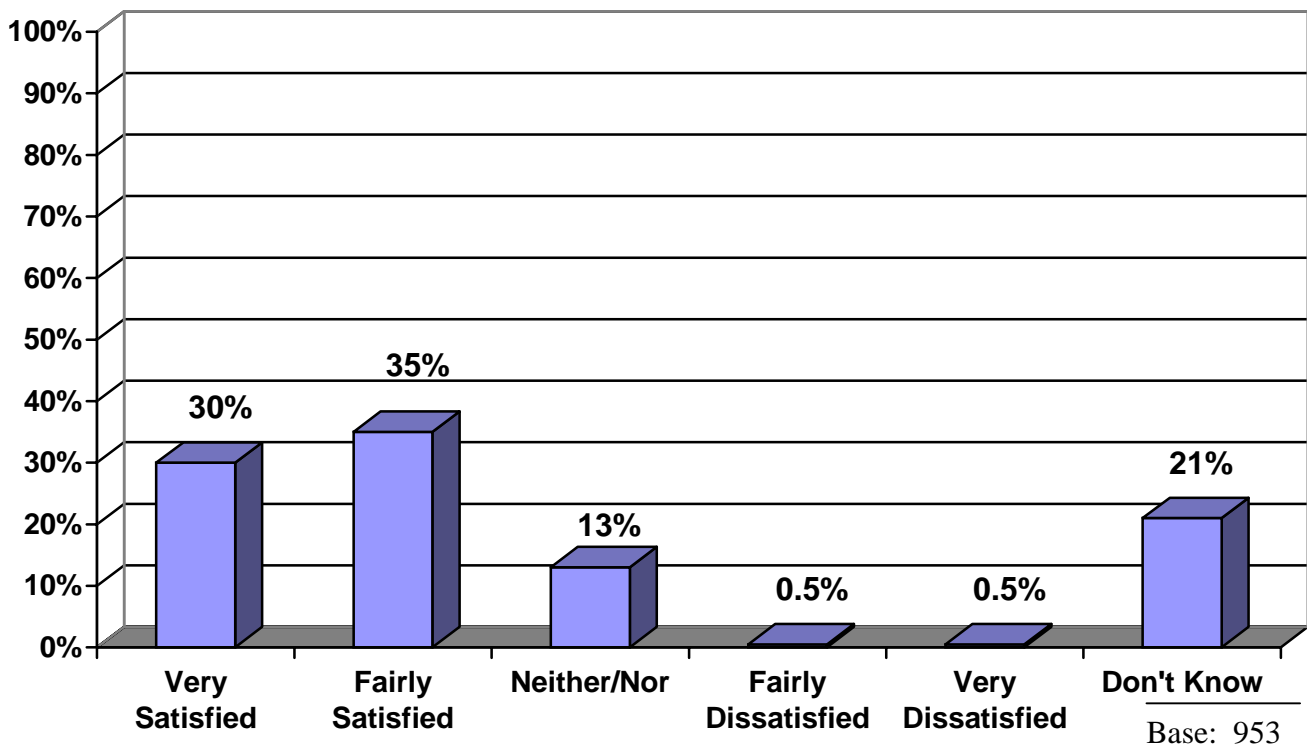
Road maintenance shows higher dissatisfaction amongst those living in rural areas (64%) rather than urban areas (50%).

Street cleaning on the other hand shows higher dissatisfaction amongst those living in urban areas (39%) as opposed to rural areas (23%).

5.1.4 Figure 3: How satisfied are you with the police service in your area?



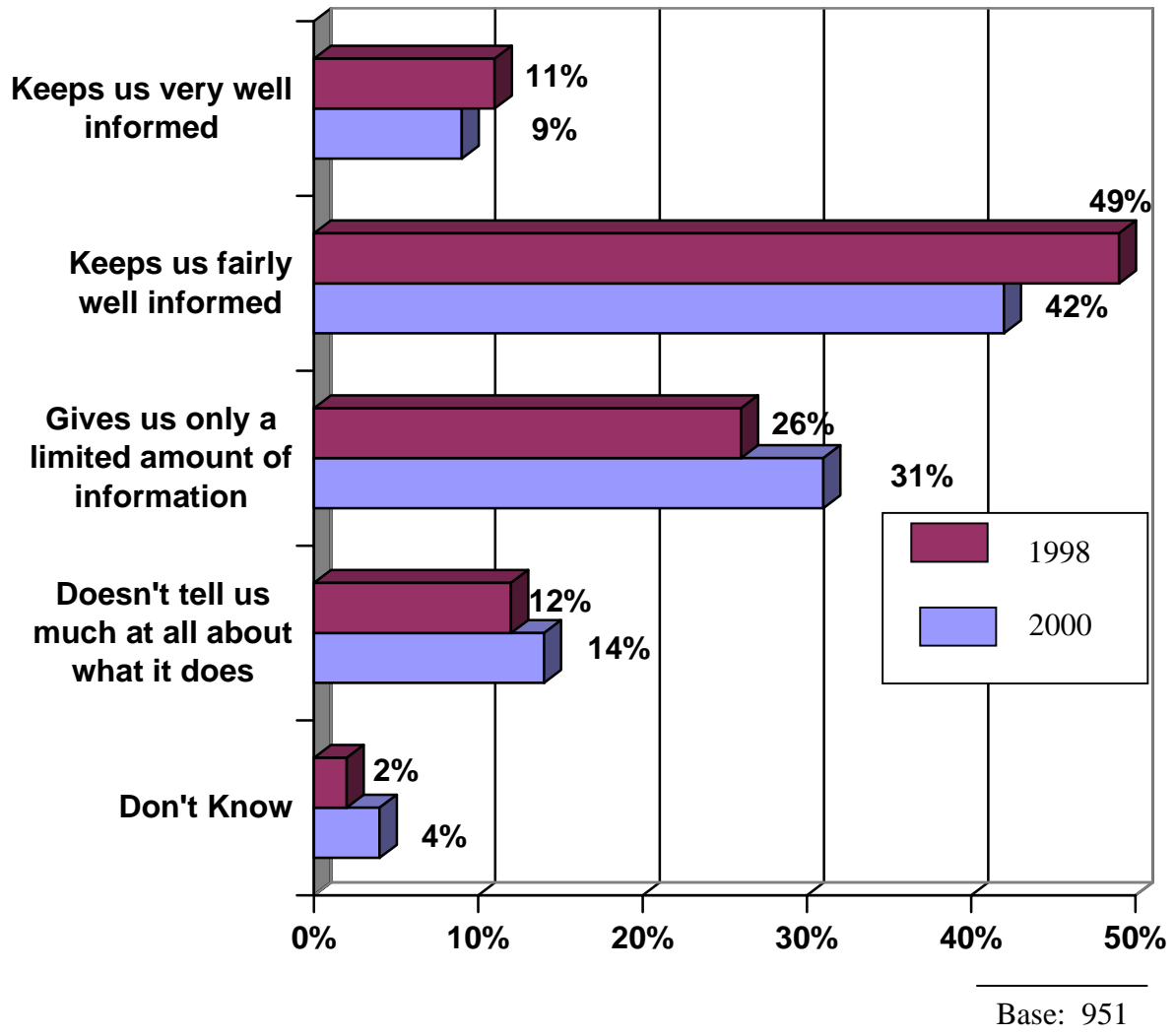
5.1.5 Figure 4: How satisfied are you with the fire service in your area?



Slightly higher dissatisfaction levels are apparent amongst those living in rural areas (2.6%) compared with urban areas (0.4%).

5.2 Communication and Information

5.2.1 Figure 5: How well do you feel Stirling Council keeps you informed about the services and benefits it provides?

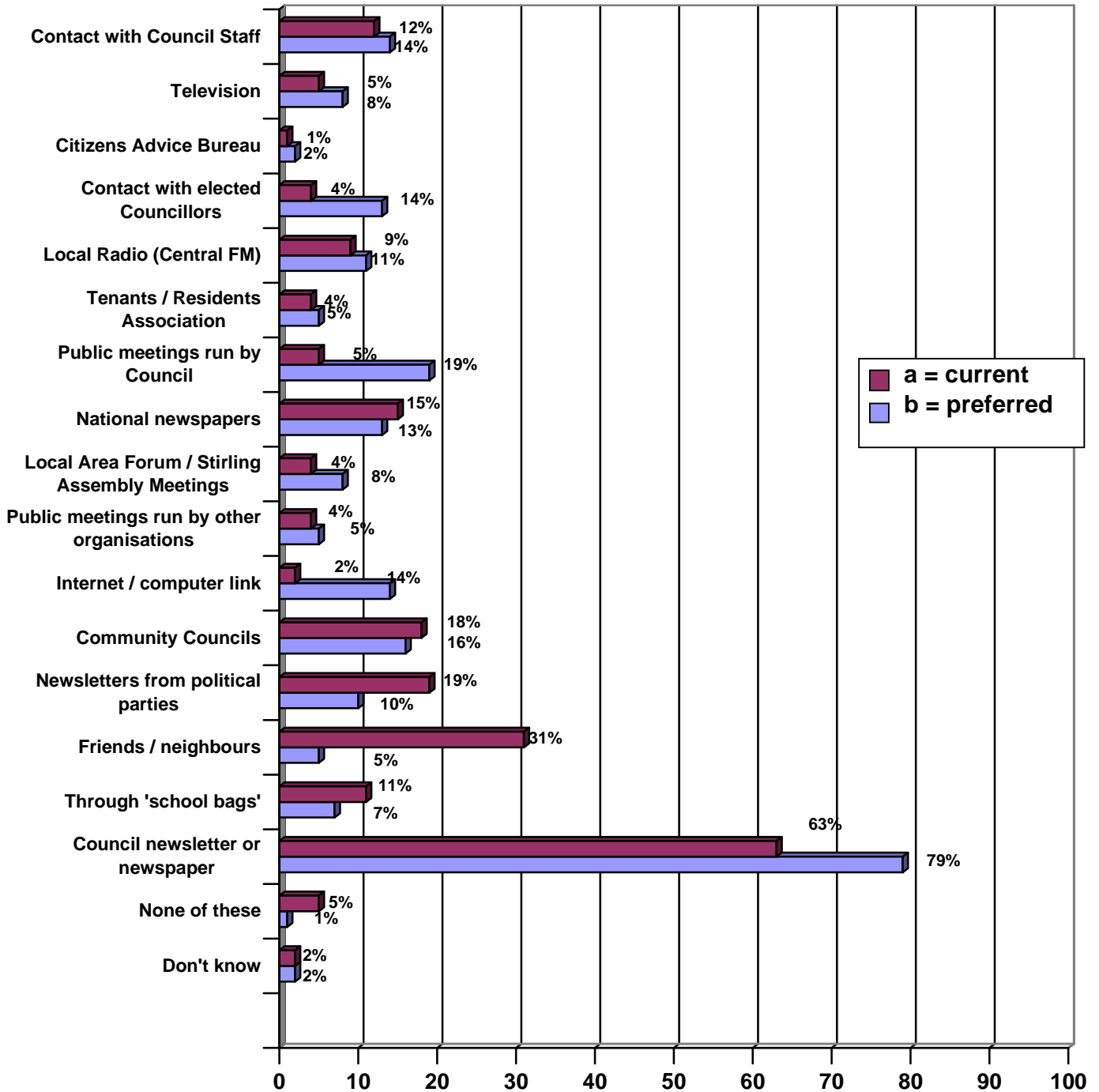


It is concerning that almost half of respondents express concerns about a perceived lack of information dissemination. Younger people aged 16-24 (21.4%) and the self-employed (27%) are more likely to state that the Council doesn't tell them much at all about what it does.

5.2.2 Figure 6: a) How do you currently receive most of your information about what Stirling Council is doing and the services it provides?

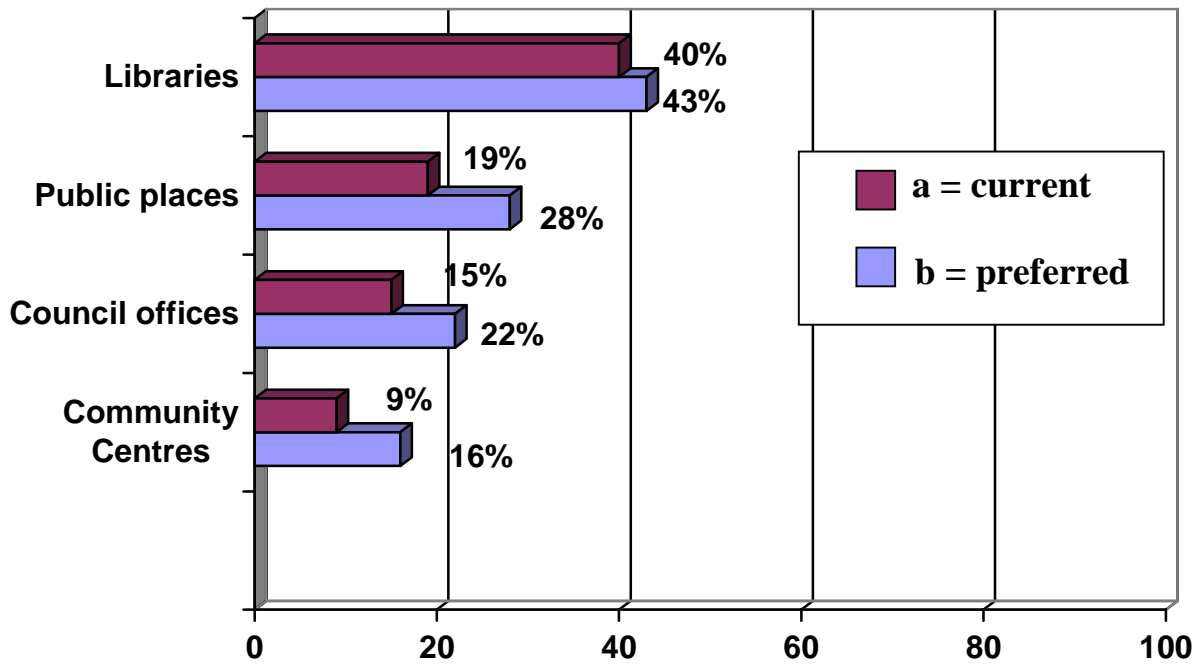
b) How would you like to receive this information?

(i) General Sources

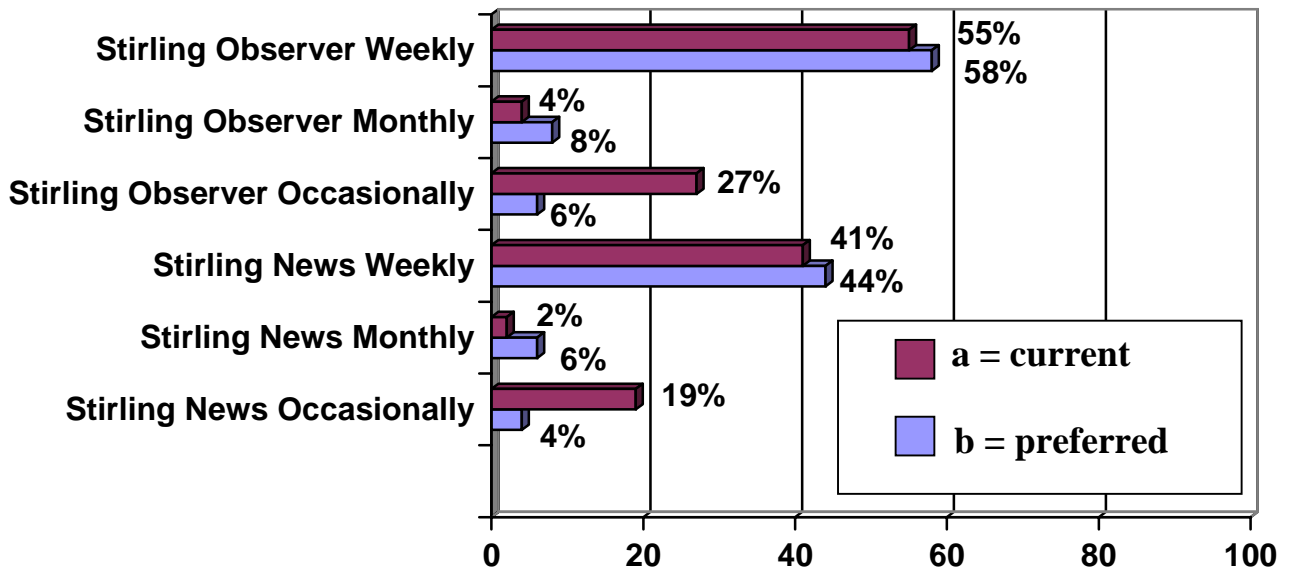


Base: 944

(ii) Leaflets and Posters from:



(iii) Local Newspapers

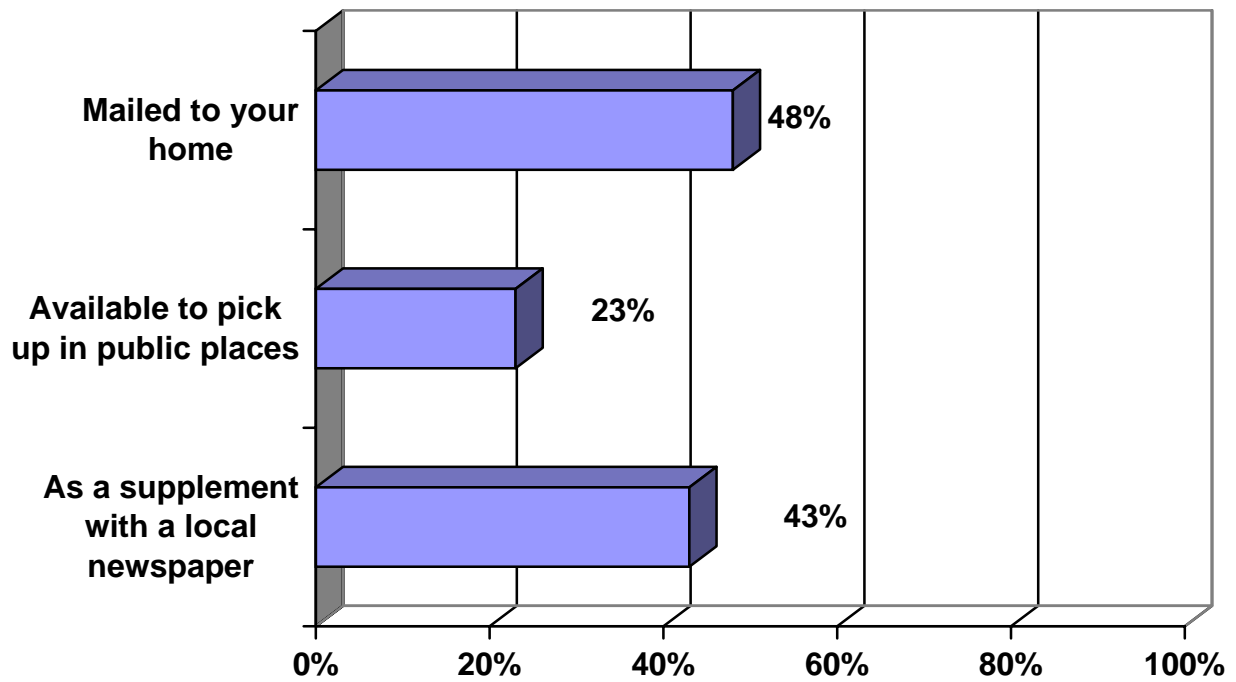


The Council Newsletter or Newspaper is currently the most popular source of information on what the Council is doing and the services it provides. Other popular sources are Stirling Observer, Stirling News and the libraries.

Respondents would like to receive information primarily from these sources. Leaflets are also a popular method of informing the public.

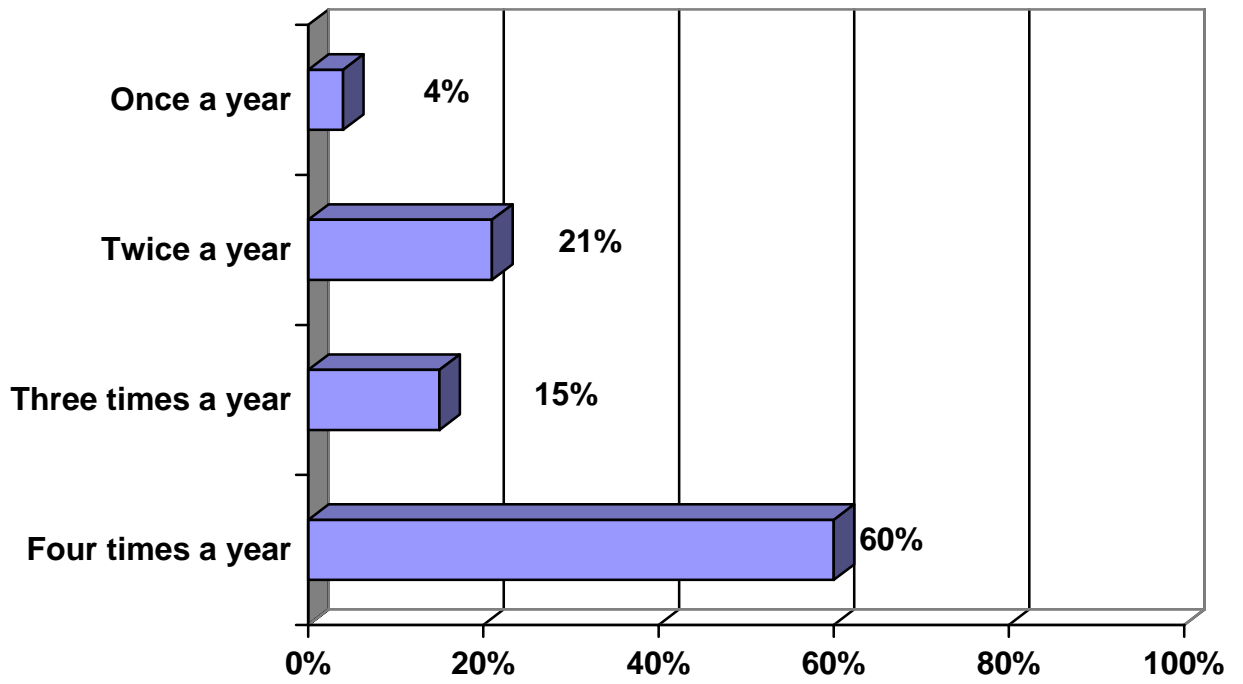
5.2.3 Council Newsletter or Newspaper

Figure 7: If you stated Council Newsletter or Newspaper, how would you prefer this information?



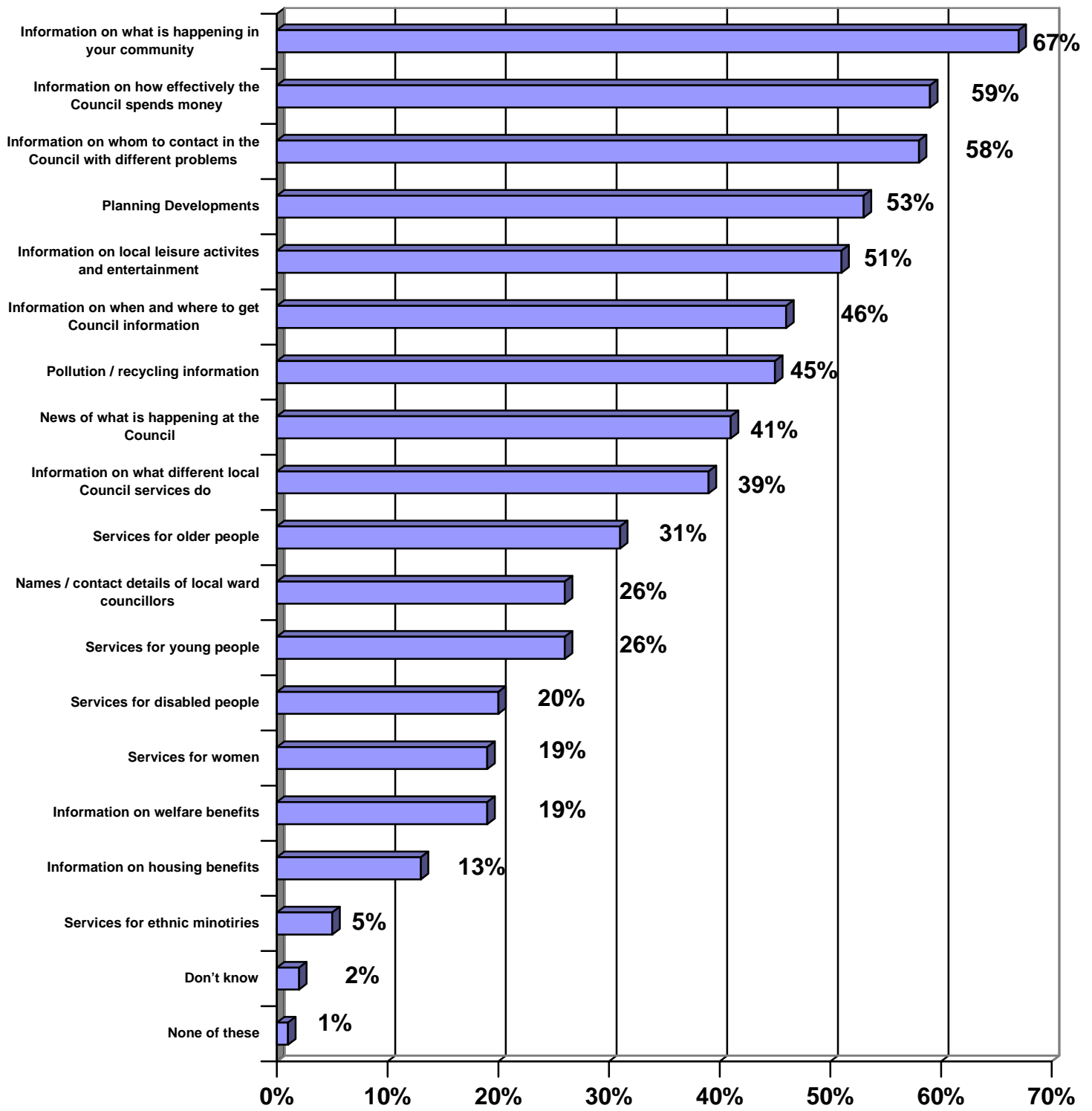
Base: 861

Figure 8: How often would you like this information to be available?



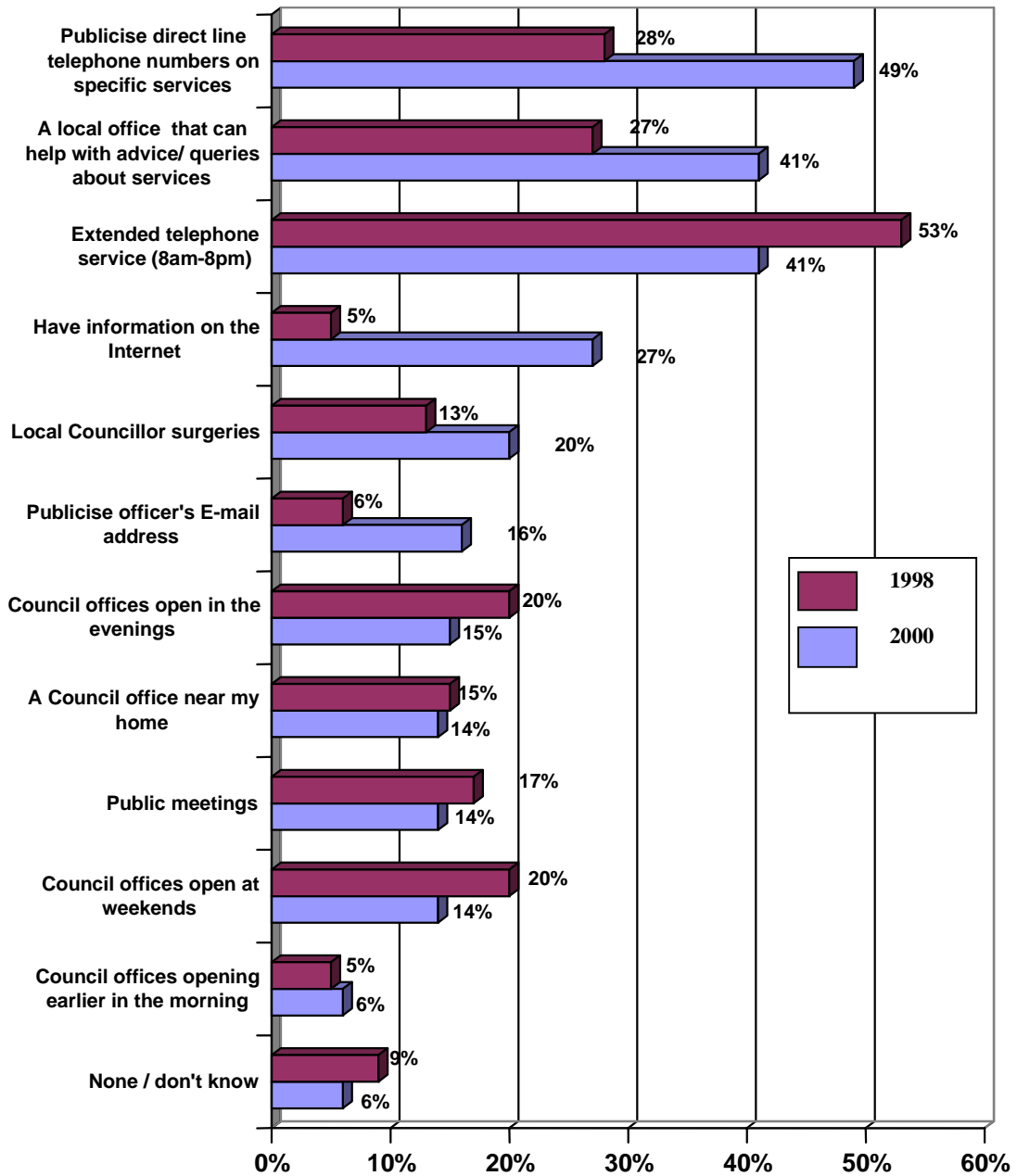
Base: 951

5.2.4 Figure 9: Which, if any, of the following items would you like more information on?



Base:945

5.2.5 Figure 10: The Council wants to make it easier for people to have contact with them, and to give their views. Which of the following would you find particularly helpful?

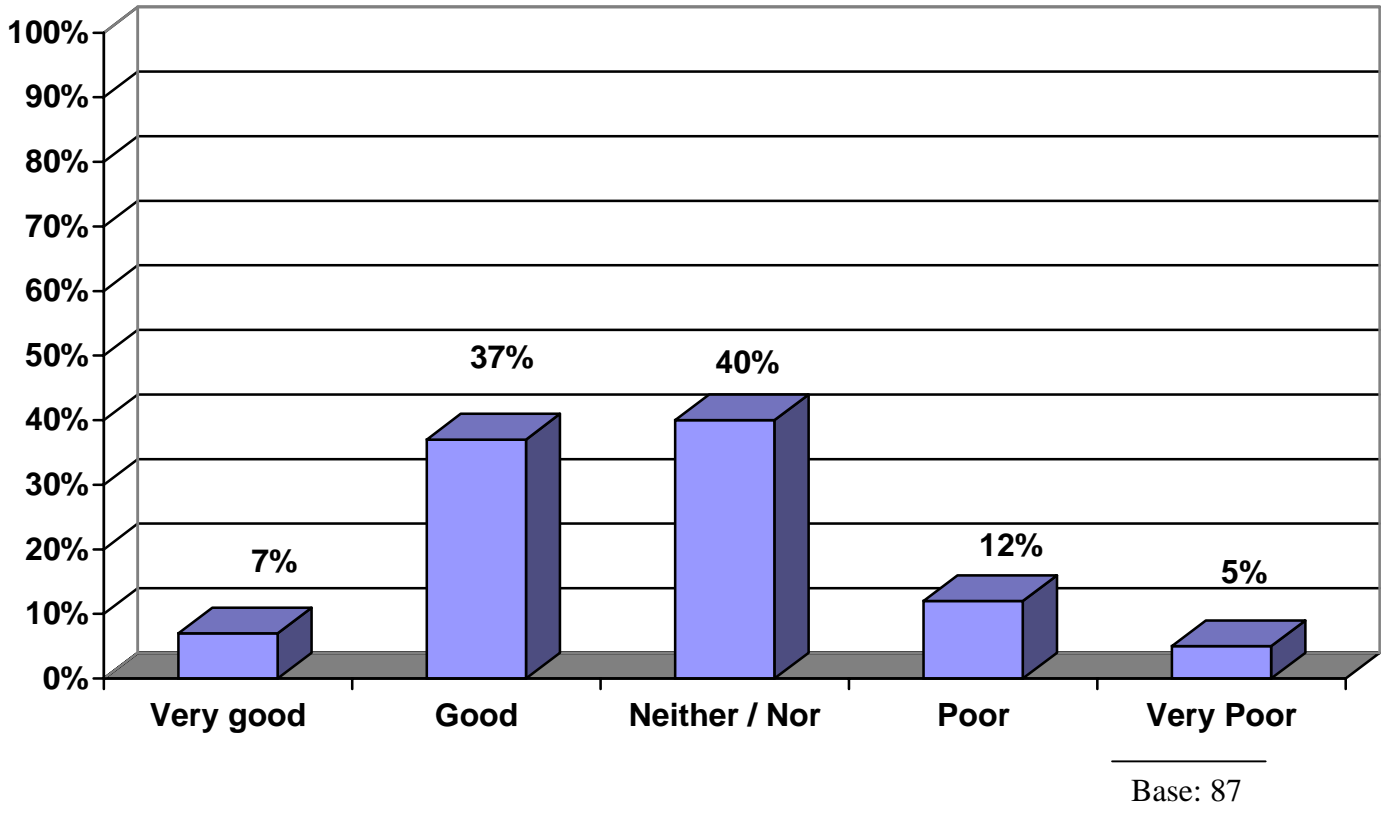


Base: 943

5.2.6 Internet Access

39% of respondents have access to the internet at home, and 40% at work/college. Of those who have access, 14% have logged on to the Stirling Council website. The ratings they accord to the site are set out below.

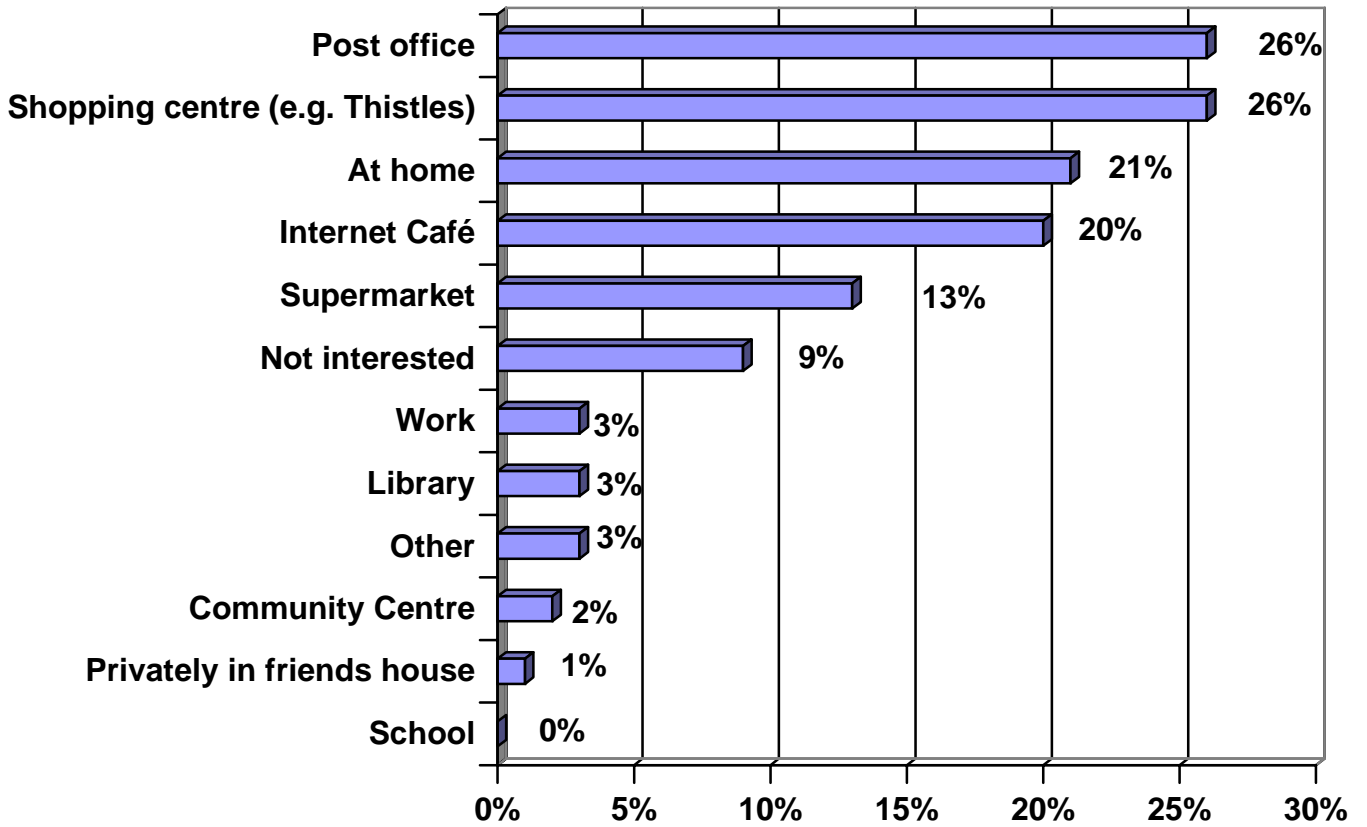
Figure 11: If you have visited, how would you rate the website?



59% of respondents were aware that the public can use the internet at their local library, and 27% would consider using the library to use the internet. A further 37% stated that would they 'maybe' consider using it.

For those who would not use the library for internet access, the preferred sources of access are detailed below.

Figure 12: If no, or maybe, where would you prefer to access the internet?

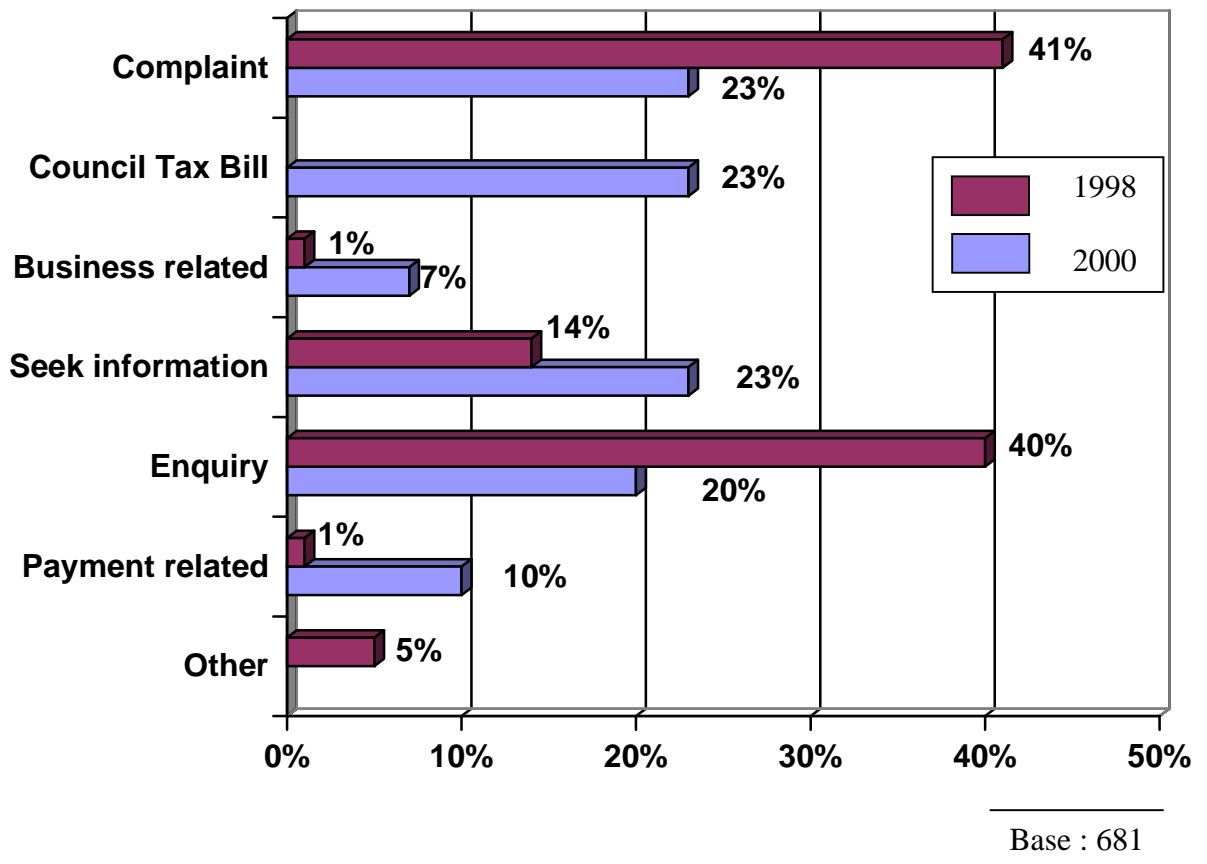


Base: 924

* relates to a % which is greater than zero, but less than 1%.

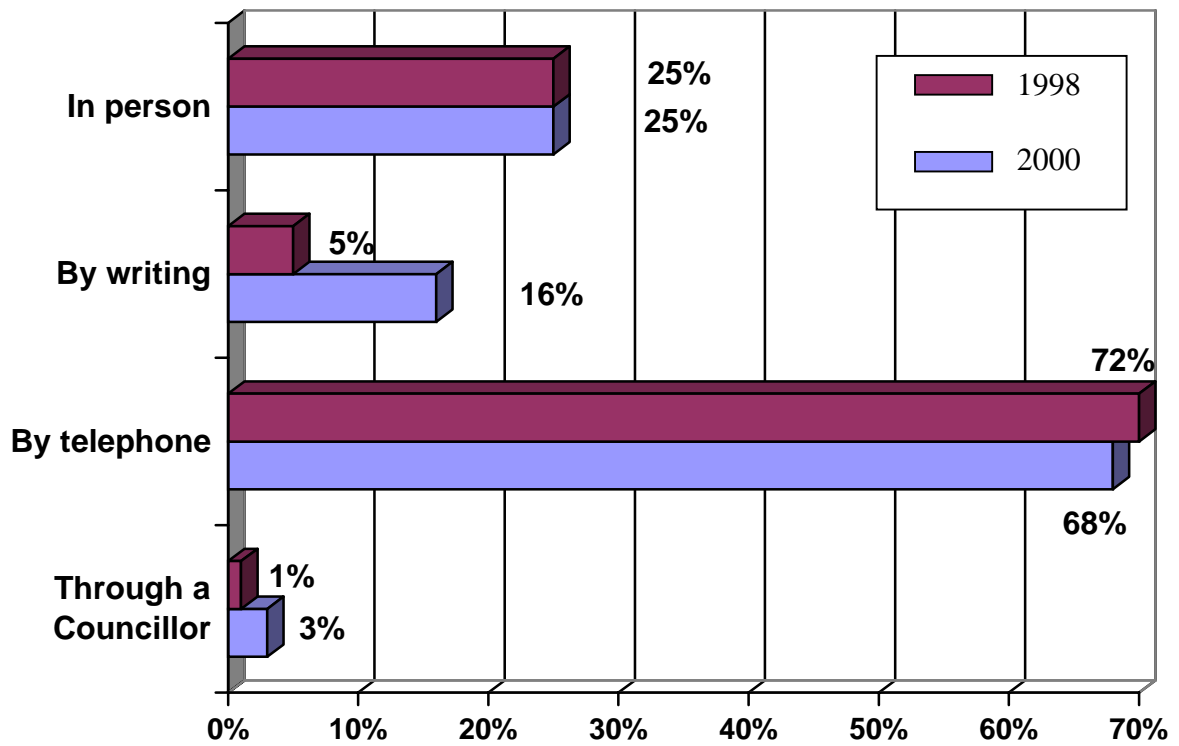
5.3 Customer Service and Public Contact

5.3.1 Figure 13: What was the nature of your most recent contact with the Council?



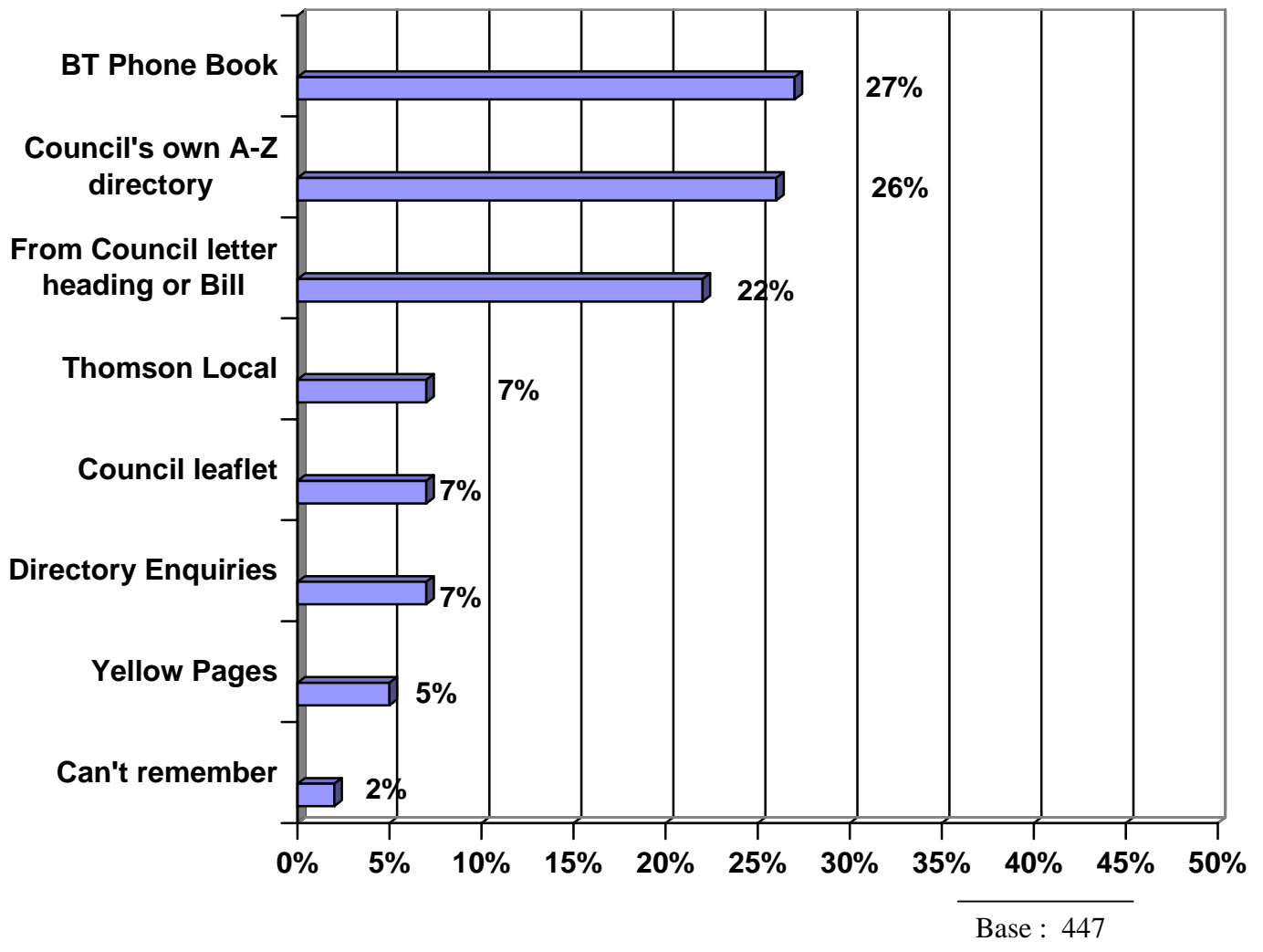
Contact in this survey shows an increase from the previous survey in bill and payment related contact, seeking information and business related contact. Contact for reasons of complaint and enquiry have both significantly reduced.

5.3.2 Figure 14: How did you contact the Council?



Those living in rural areas are less inclined to contact the Council in person. Methods of contact have changed little since the last survey, with the biggest difference being a reduction in those writing to the Council.

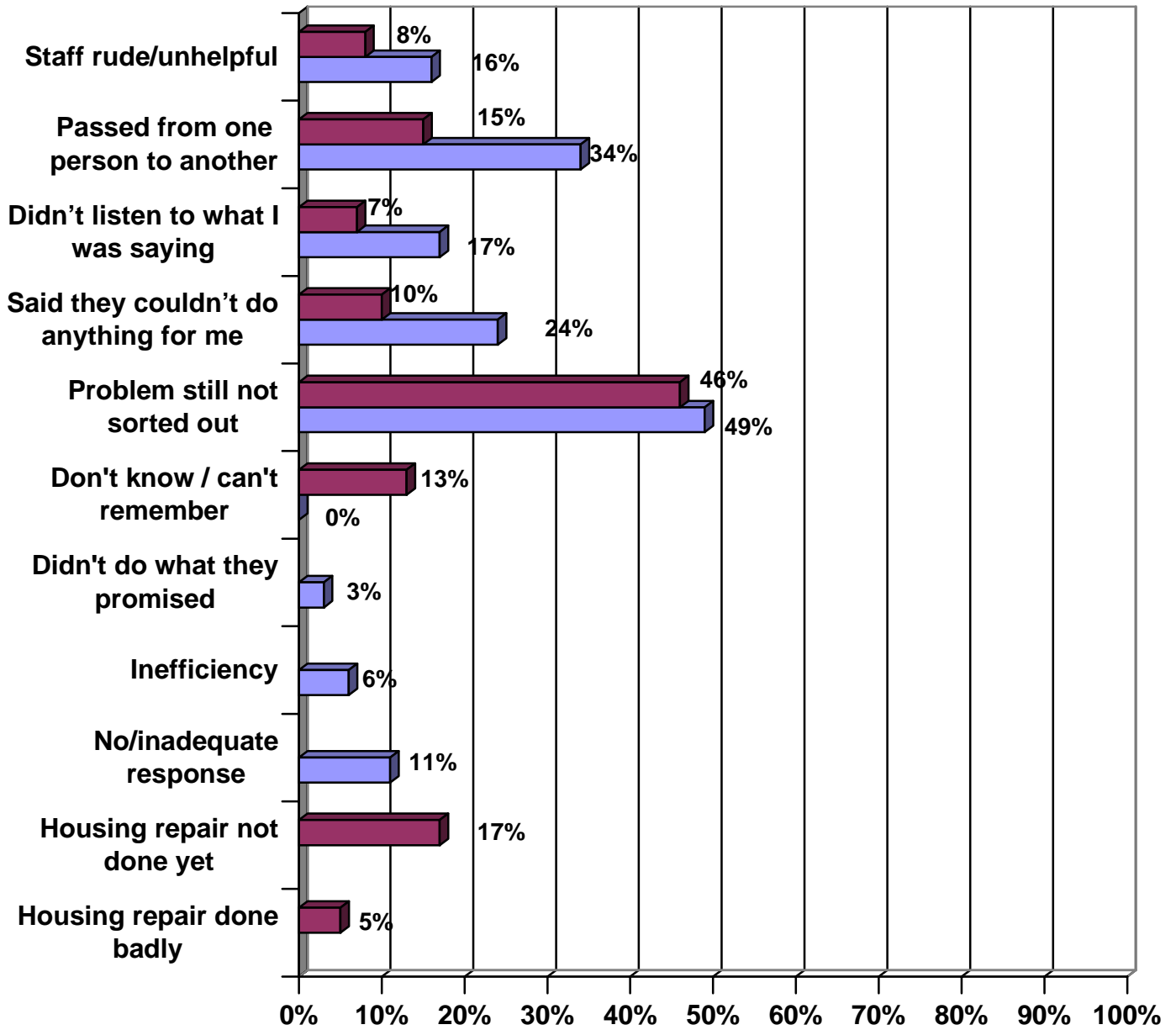
5.3.3 Figure 15: How did you get the Council's number?



62% of respondents found it easy getting hold of the right person, and subsequently 74% found the staff they spoke to helpful. In most cases (71%), the person they spoke to was able to deal with their problem/query.

Overall, 64% were satisfied with the treatment they received during their most recent contact with the Council, compared with 70% in 1998.

5.3.6 Figure 16: If you were dissatisfied with the treatment you received, why was this the case?

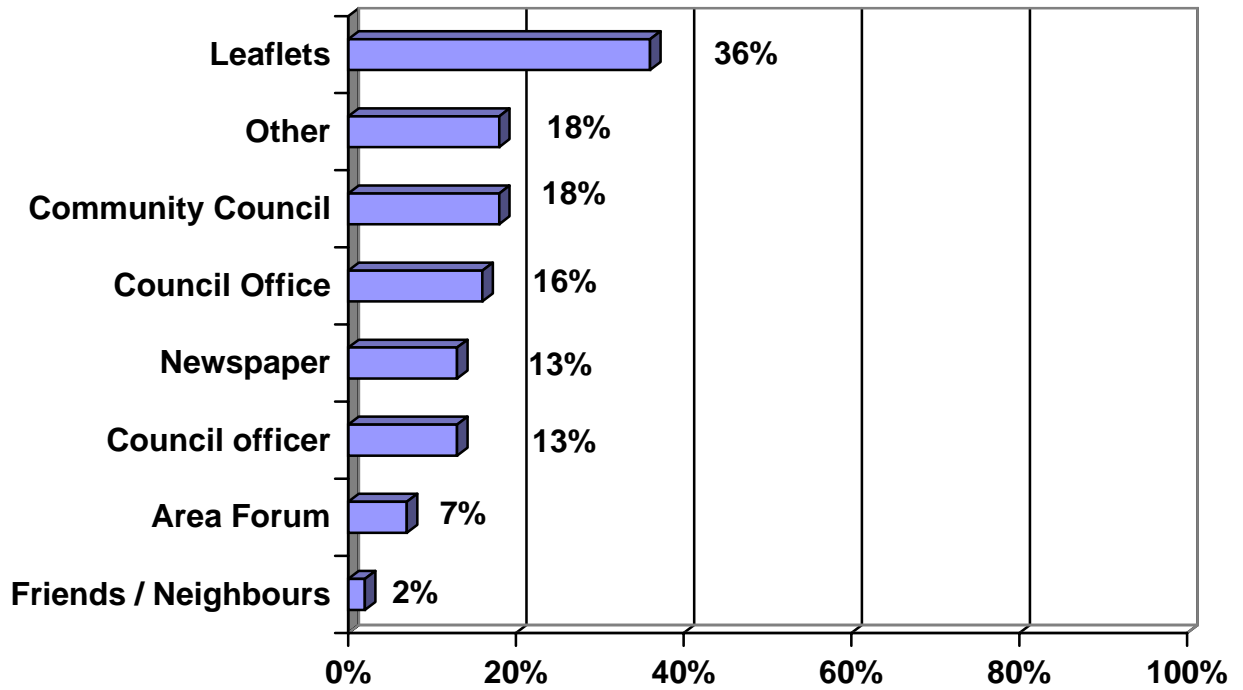


Base: 171

5.4 Talkback

5.4.1 Only 7% of respondents are aware of the Talkback scheme. The chart below shows where they found out about Talkback.

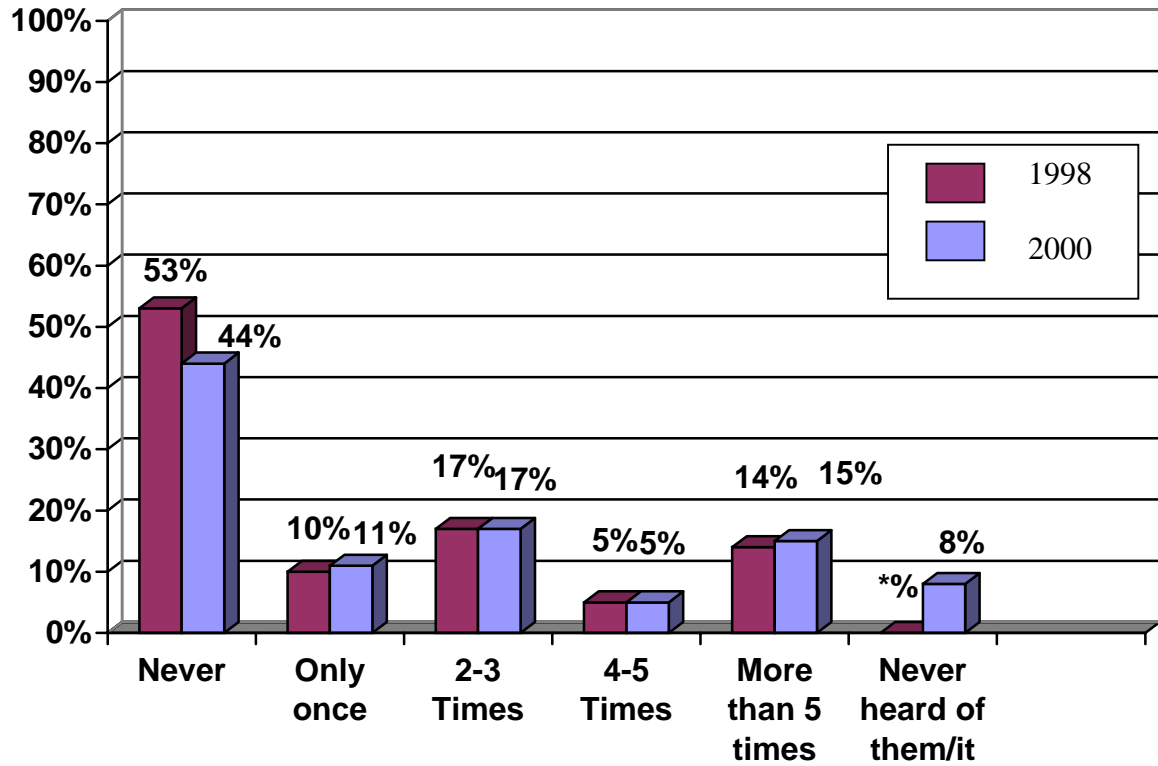
5.4.2 Figure 17: Where did you find out about Talkback?



Base: 55

5.5 Local Office

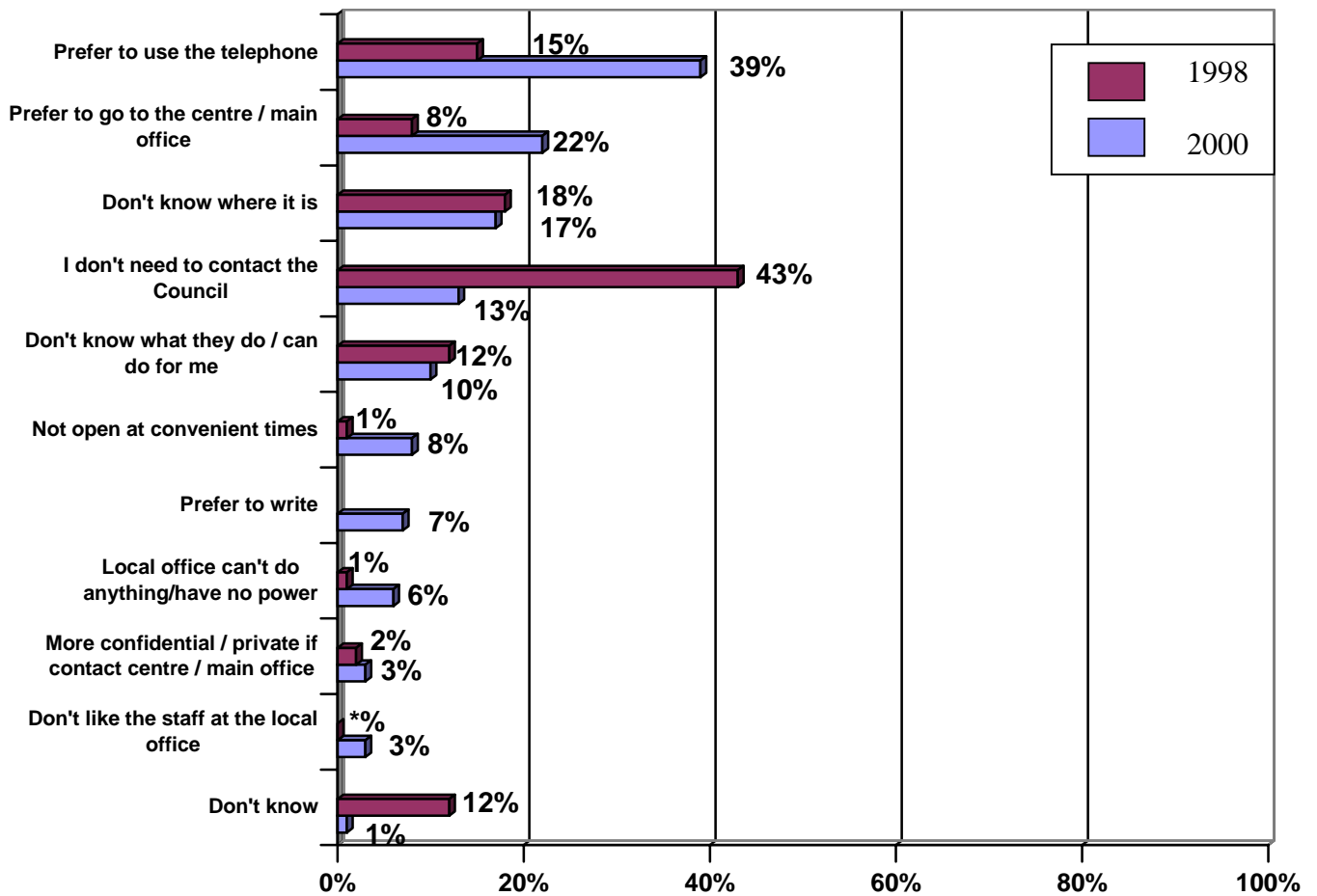
5.5.1 Figure 18: How, often, if ever, have you been to the local Council office for this area?



Base: 709

* relates to a % which is greater than zero, and less than 1%.

5.5.2 Figure 19: Which of the following, if any, best describes the reasons why you do not use the local office when you contact Stirling Council?



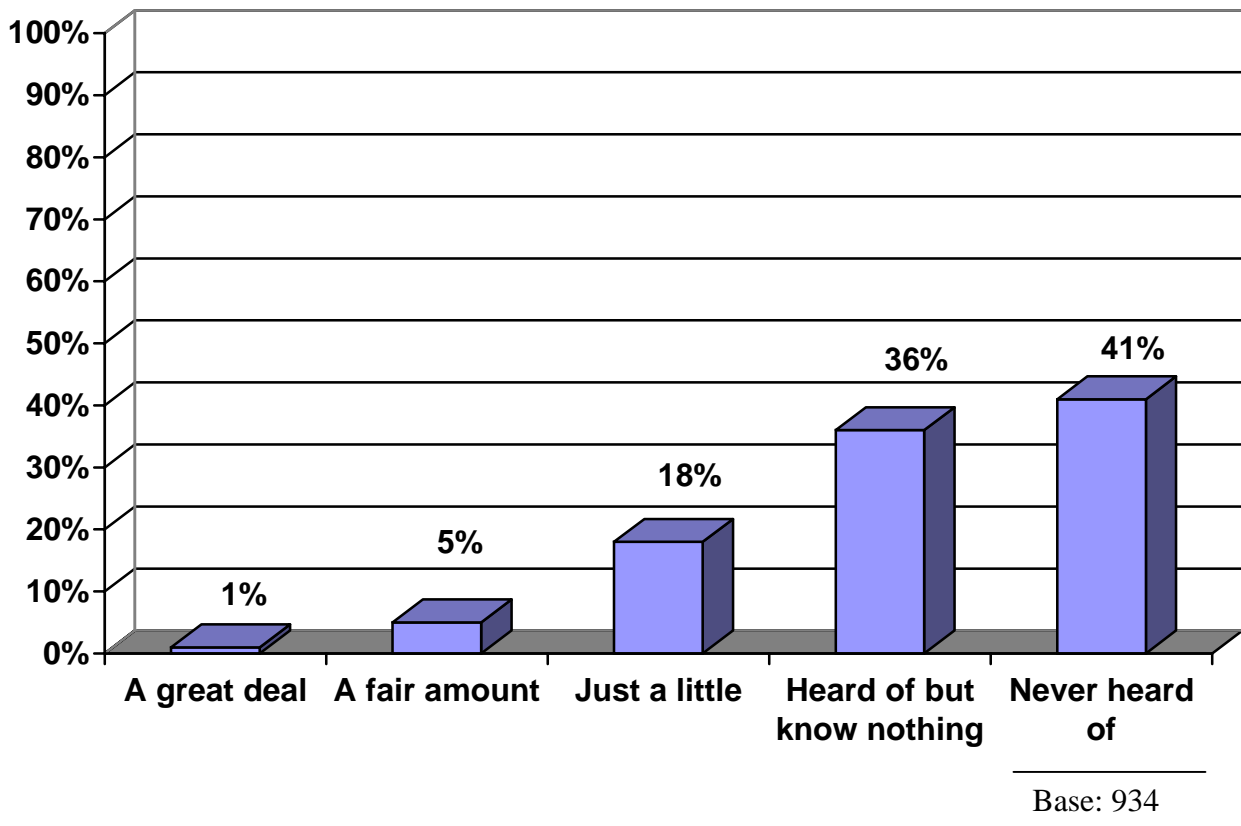
Base: 620

* relates to a % which is greater than zero, and less than 1%.

More urban respondents 'prefer to go to the centre/main office' than rural ones, whilst more rural ones 'don't know where it is'.

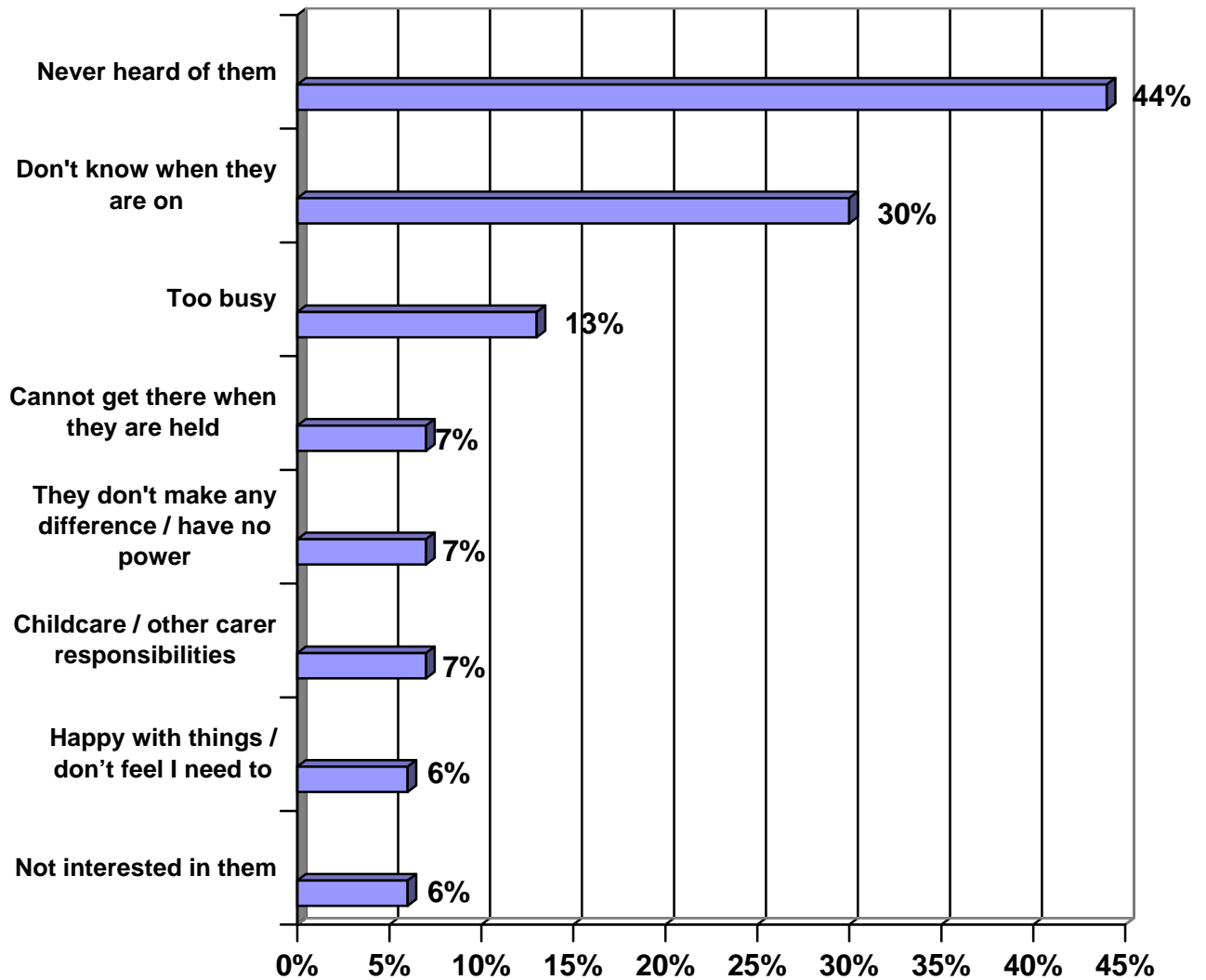
5.6 Stirling Assembly

5.6.1 Figure 20: How much do you know about the Stirling Assembly?



A large majority (96%) have never been to a Stirling Assembly meeting.

5.6.2 Figure 21: If you have never been to a Stirling Assembly meeting, why not?

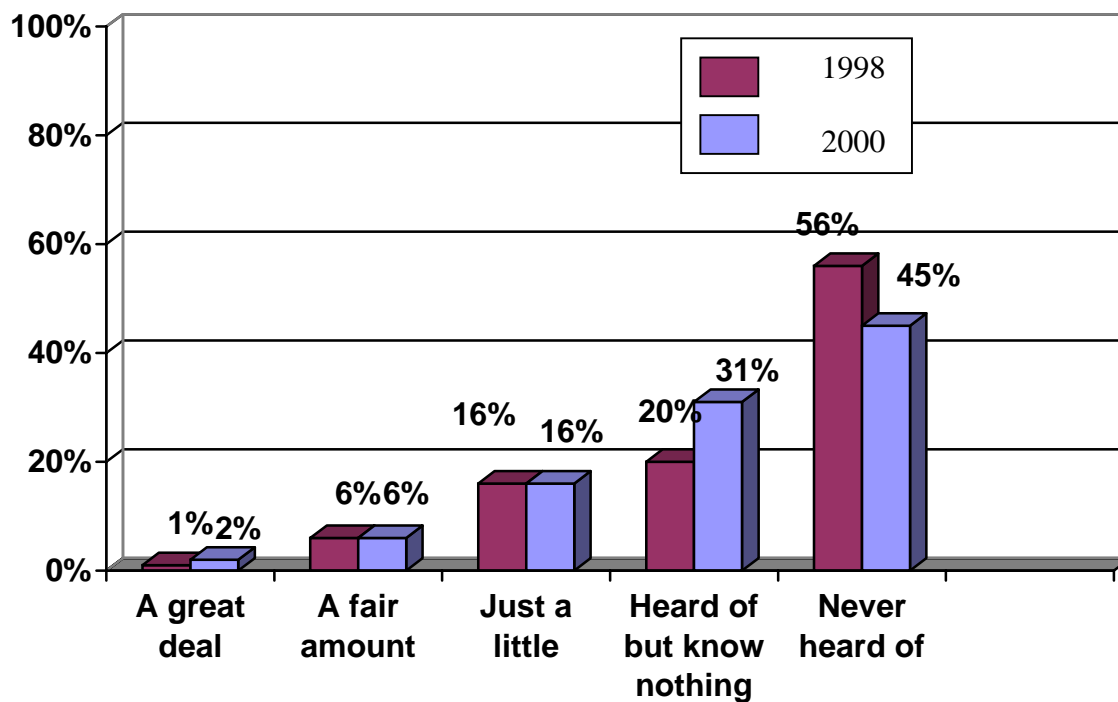


Base: 872

74% of respondents either do not know when Stirling Assembly meetings are on, or have never heard of them.

5.7 Area Forums

5.7.1 Figure 22: How much do you know about Stirling Council's Area Forums?

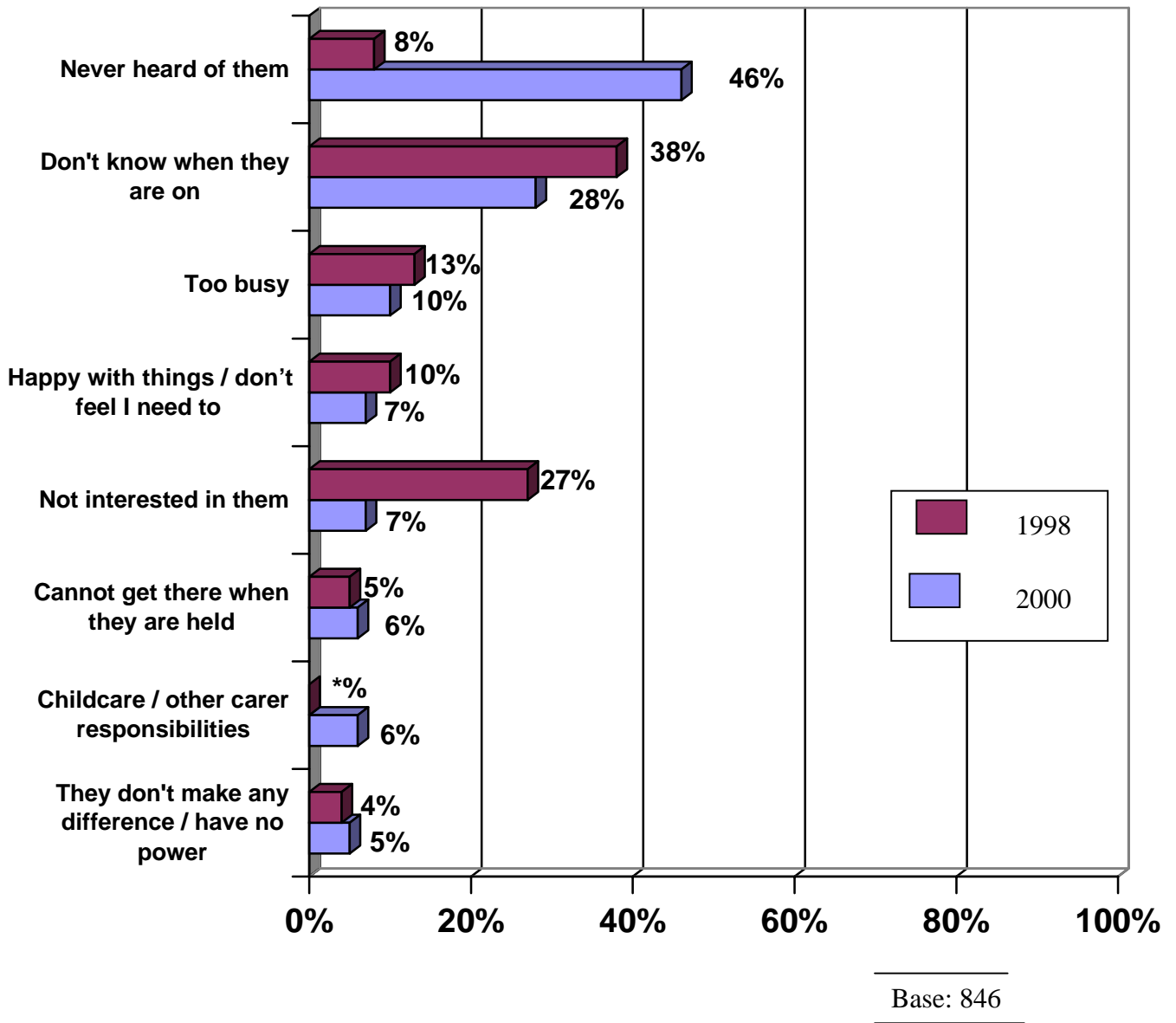


Base: 933

Almost half (45%) have never heard of Area Forums whilst only 2% know 'a great deal'. The figures have shown little change in those who know about the Area Forum from the last survey. There has, however been a shift of around 10% who have moved from 'never heard of' in the previous survey to currently 'heard of but know nothing'.

93% of respondents have never been to an Area Forum, compared with 94% in 1998.

5.7.2 Figure 23: If you have never been to an Area Forum, why not?

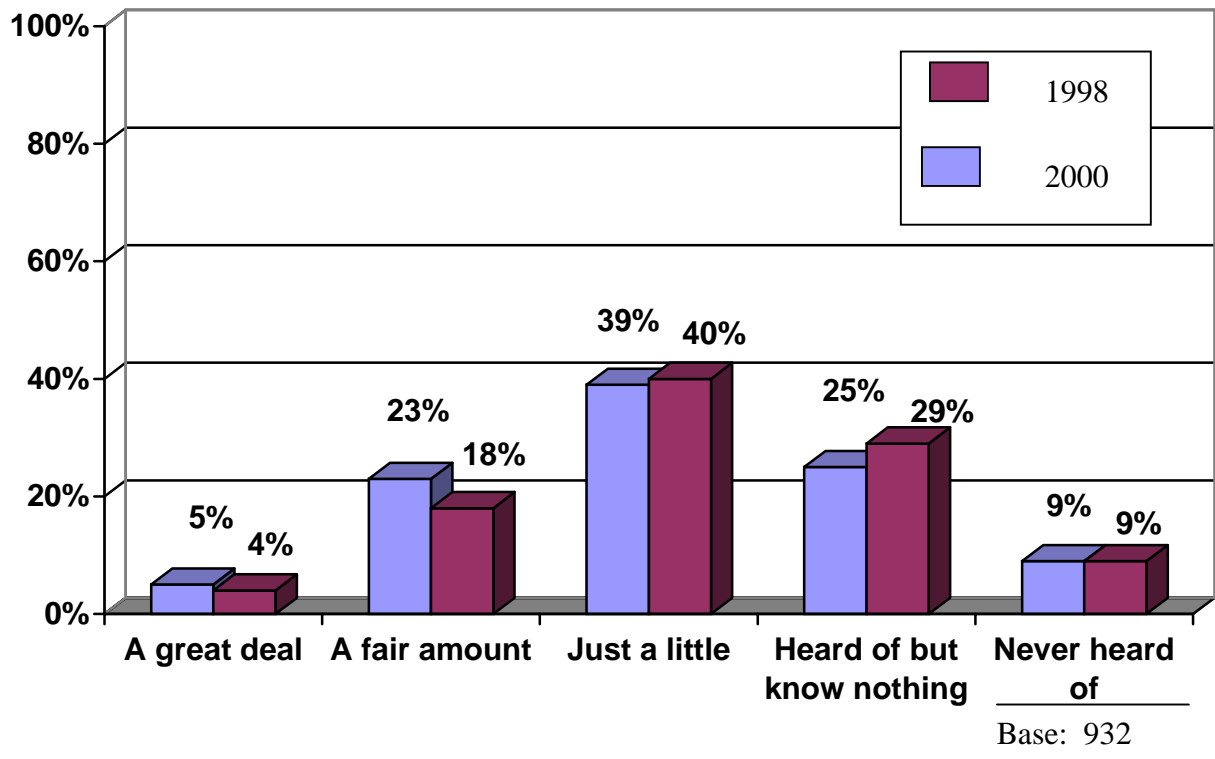


* relates to a % which is greater than zero, and less than 1%.

74% of respondents have either never heard of Area Forums or do not know when they are on.

5.8 Community Councils

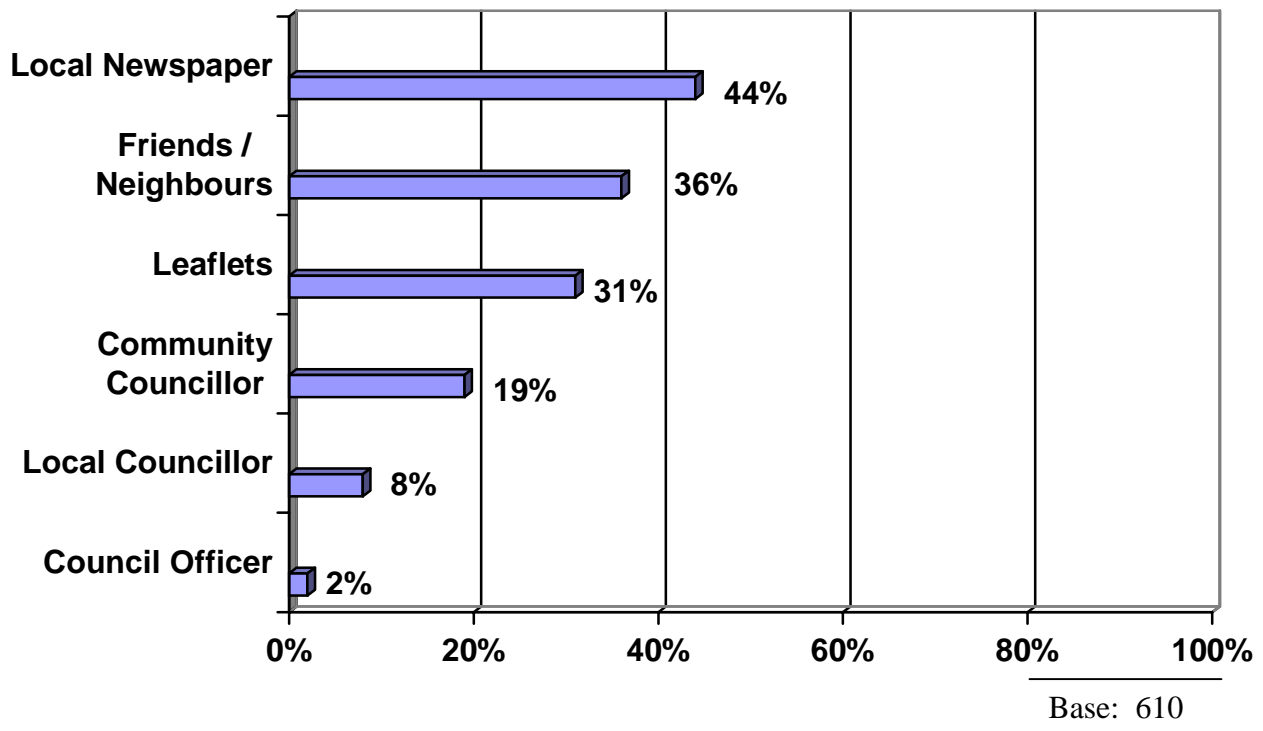
5.8.1 Figure 24: How much do you know about your local Community Council?



More encouragingly there has been an increase in awareness of Community Councils. 28% of respondents know either a fair amount or a great deal about their community council compared to 22% in 1998. Young people aged 16-24 tend to know less about their local Community Council.

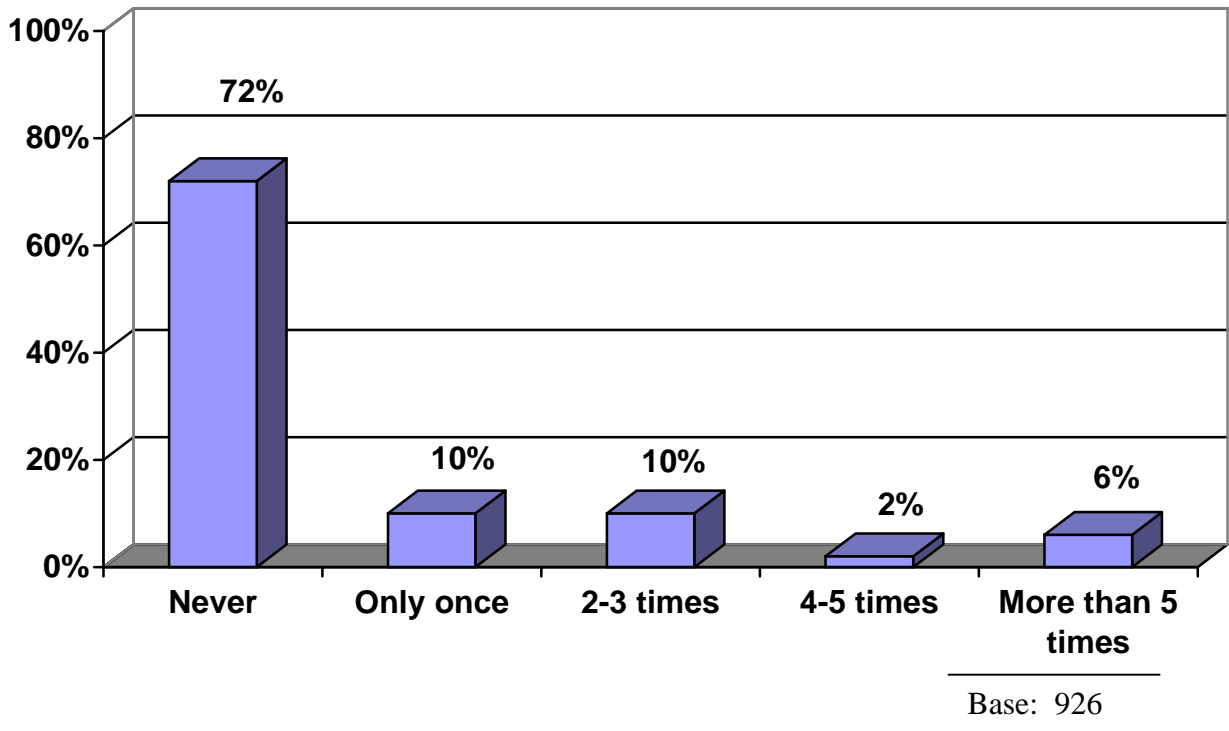
Those living in rural areas have more knowledge of Community Council's, with 43% knowing a great deal or fair amount compared with 22% in urban areas.

5.8.2 Figure 25: If you do know about your Community Council, how did you find out about it?



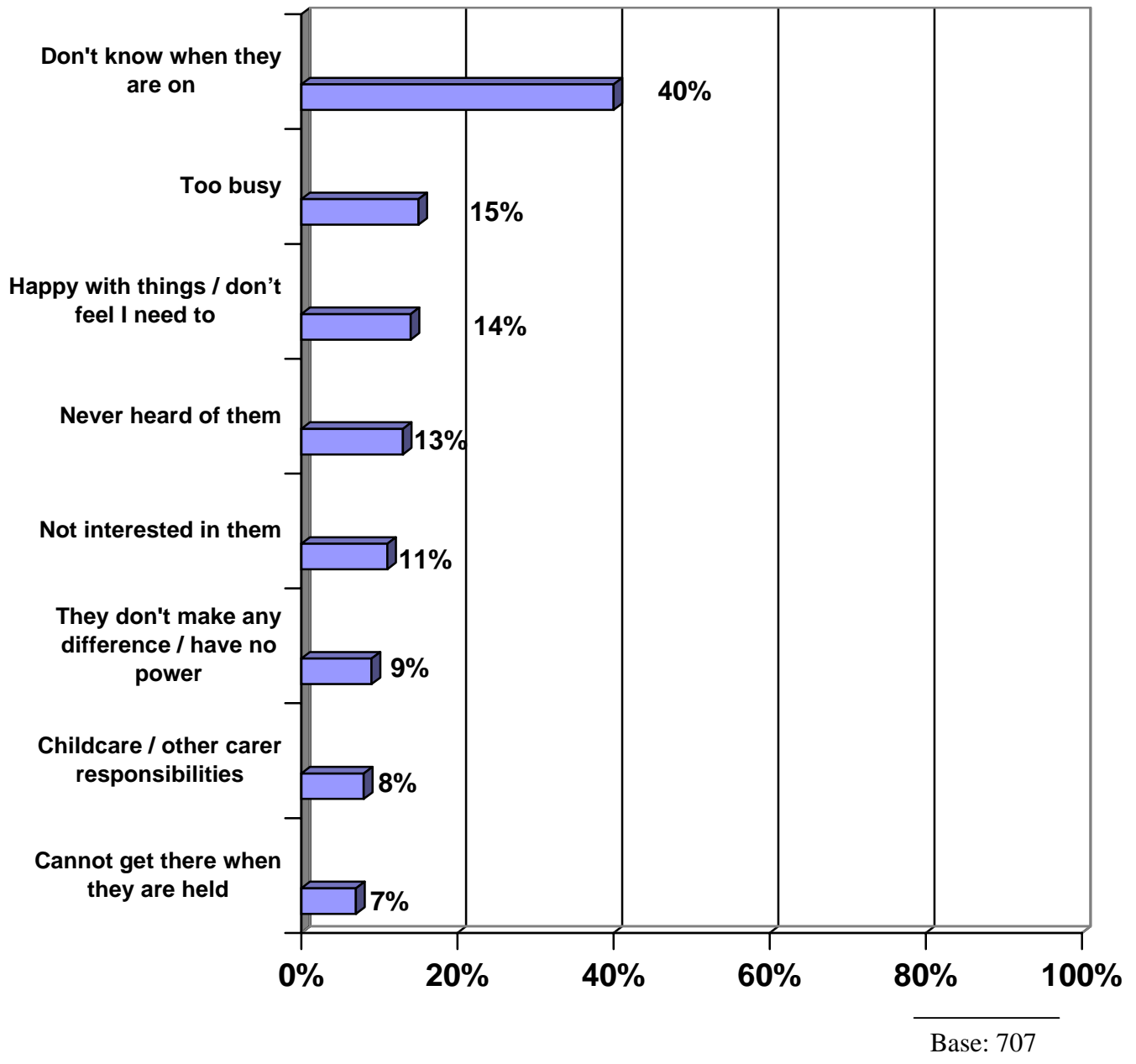
Other ways of finding out about their local Community Council include the Post Office and Village noticeboard amongst others.

5.8.3 Figure 26: How often, if ever, have you been to a Community Council meeting?

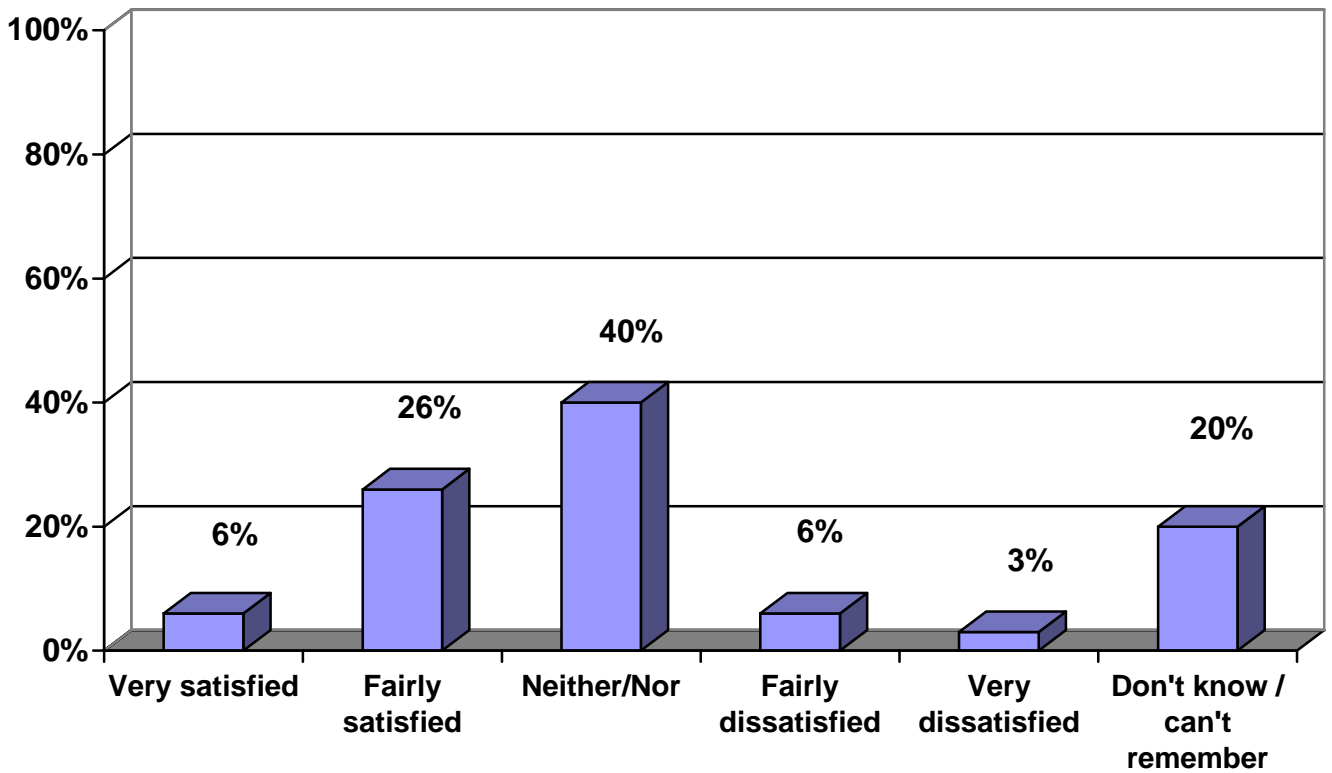


Frequency levels are higher amongst those living in rural areas with 11% having attended 'more than 5 times' compared with 4% in Urban areas.

5.8.4 Figure 27: If you have never attended a Community Council meeting, why is this?



5.8.5 Figure 28: How satisfied are you with your Community Council?



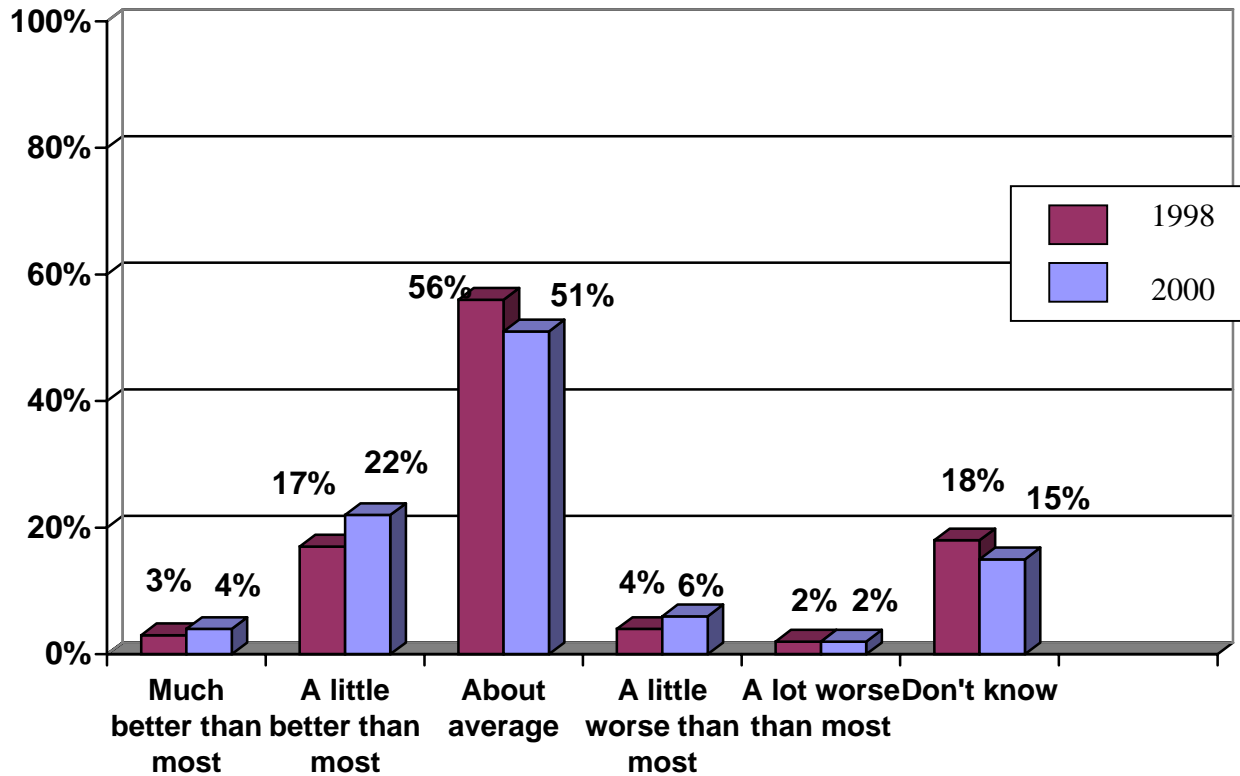
Base: 872

As the chart shows over three times as many people (32%) are satisfied with the Community Council compared with those (9%) who are dissatisfied. Reasons for dissatisfaction include:

- unrepresentative
- don't do much
- powerless.

5.9 Stirling Council – General Issues

5.9.1 Figure 29: From what you know or have heard, how do you think Stirling Council compares with most other Councils?



Base: 890

5.9.2 Priorities for Stirling Council to Improve Life in the Area

The following were the most popular responses for Priority 1:

- Roads 14.9%
- Public transport 8.2%
- Cleaning 7.4%
- Housing 5.9%
- Sports/leisure facilities 5.9%
- Facilities for young people 5.6%

The following were the most popular responses for Priority 2:

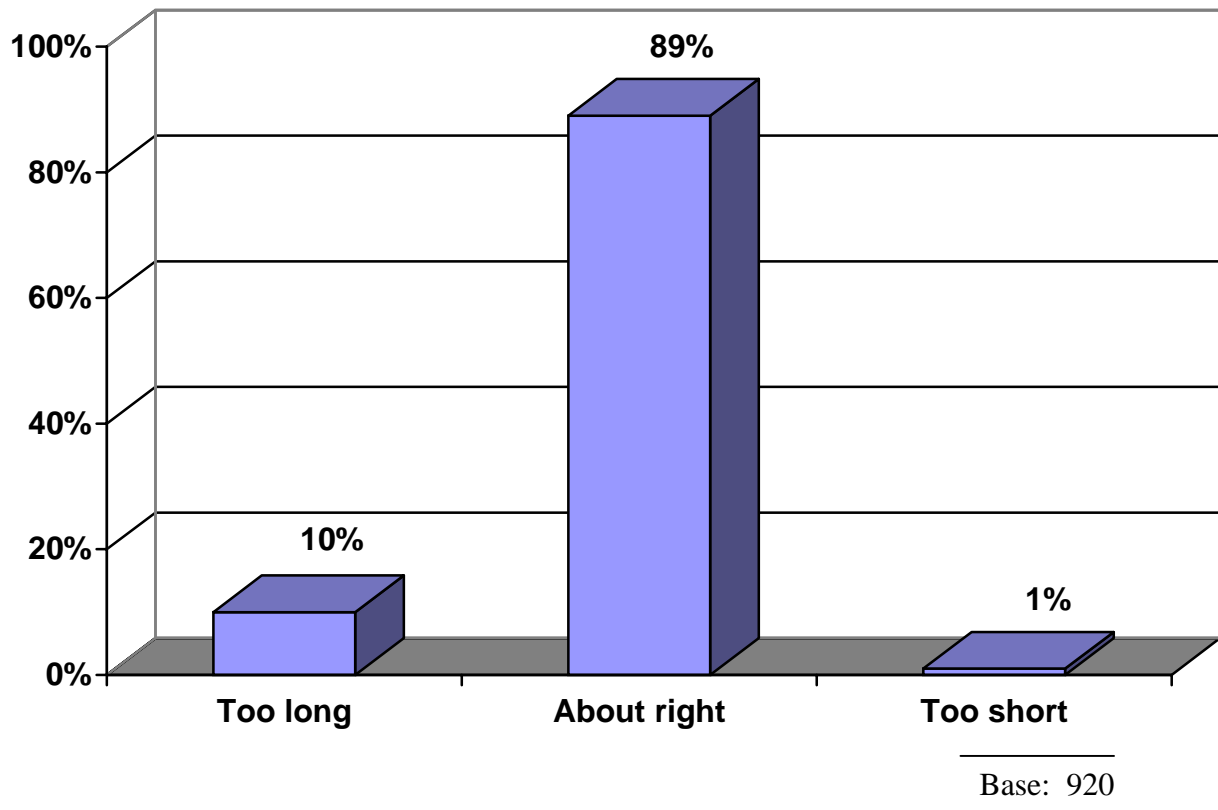
- Infrastructure 16.3%
- Cleaning 7.3%
- Sport/leisure facilities 6.9%
- Public transport 6.7%
- Facilities for young people 6.7%
- Housing 5.2%

The following were the most popular responses for Priority 3:

- Roads 7.9%
- Cleaning 7.3%
- Public transport 6.7%
- Housing 5.3%
- Sport/leisure facilities 5.2%

5.10 Sounding Board Questionnaire

5.10.1 Do you think that the questionnaire is...?



5.10.2 Issues in future Sounding Board questionnaires

The most popular issues respondents would like to see covered in future questionnaires are:

- environmental issues 13.7%
- housing 12.6%
- education 12.2%
- roads 10.6%
- planning 9.7%
- public transport 9.5%
- elderly/disabled facilities 7.4%
- facilities for young people 7.2%
- leisure 6.3%
- health 5.6%
- recycling 5.6%
- questions on specifics 5.2%
- service level/quality 5.2%
- Council Tax 5.2%