



**Northern Ireland
Review of Public Administration**

**RESEARCH BULLETIN 1
SEPTEMBER NORTHERN IRELAND OMNIBUS SURVEY**

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GENERAL

This bulletin is based on information obtained from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, which was carried out over a 5-week period in September and October 2002 by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). In all, a total of 1,203 people were surveyed.

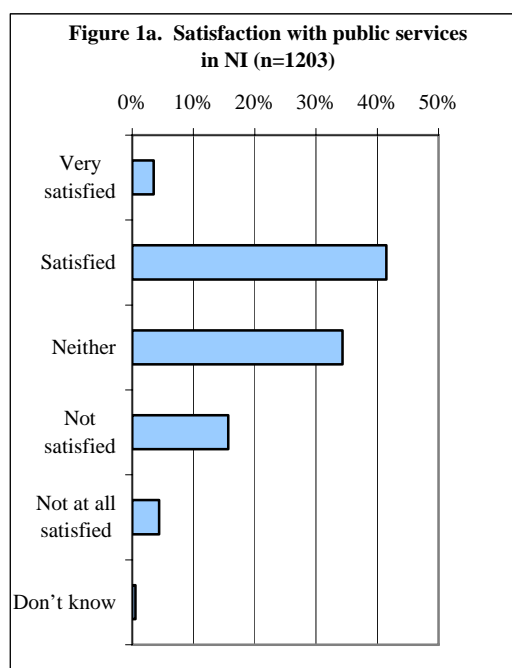
The Review of Public Administration team commissioned a series of questions to be included in this Survey, on the public's views and experience of public services in Northern Ireland (see Technical Notes).

KEY POINTS

- Overall, 45% of respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with public services in Northern Ireland. 49% of respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with public services in their own area.
- The majority of respondents (74%) felt that the public did not have enough of a say in how public services are provided in their own area.
- The majority of respondents (61%) were not confident that a complaint about public services would be dealt with satisfactorily.
- There is a degree of uncertainty among respondents about which bodies provide some public services. Understanding about particular services such as schools, social services, health services (which are the responsibility of central government) and leisure centres and dog control (which are the responsibility of local government) is very clear.
- Understanding about other services is less clear, such as road maintenance, where 57% of respondents incorrectly believed this to be the responsibility of local government. There is a similar lack of clarity about planning, housing, street lighting and water supply, all of which are the responsibility of central government.
- The most important factors to respondents when they use public services are that services are delivered on time, that they are delivered as efficiently as possible, that services are delivered which meet their needs and that services can be accessed when they are needed.

1. Overall satisfaction with public services in NI

Respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction with public services in Northern Ireland (Figure 1a).



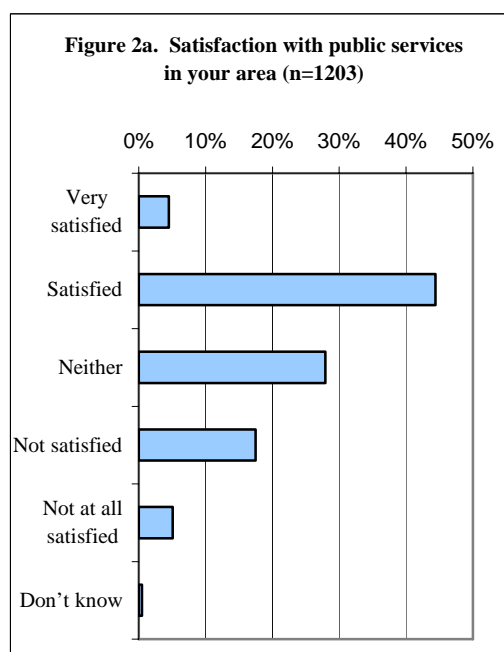
Forty-five percent of respondents stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with public services in NI, and this view was reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender or area of residence. A much smaller proportion (20%) stated that they were either not satisfied or not at all satisfied with public services in NI. A substantial proportion of respondents (34%) reported that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with public services.

There was a significant difference ⁽¹⁾ in levels of satisfaction with public services in NI among different socio-economic groups. Those respondents working in non-manual occupations (i.e. professional, managerial and skilled non-manual occupations) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with public services in NI than those working in skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled occupations.

(1) See Technical Notes point 8

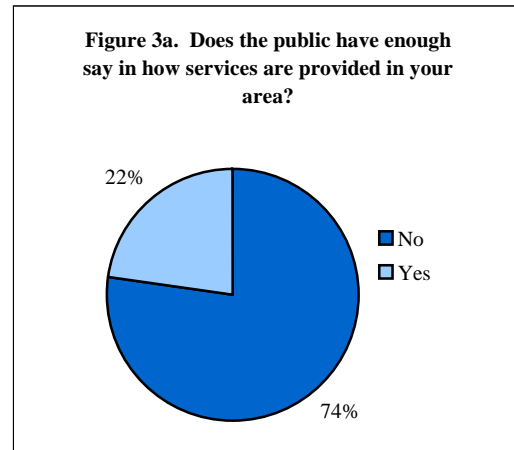
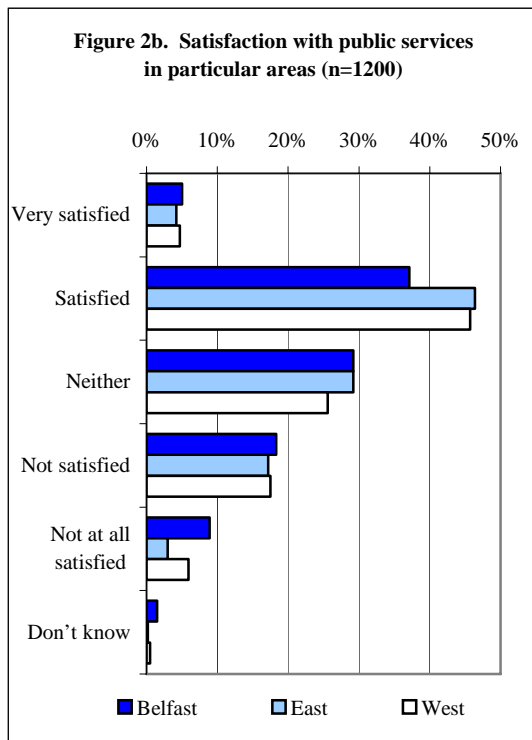
2. Overall satisfaction with public services in own areas

Respondents were asked about their overall satisfaction with public services in their own area (Figure 2a).



Forty-nine percent of respondents stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with public services in their own area, and this view was reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence. A much smaller proportion (23%) stated that they were either not satisfied or not at all satisfied with public services in their area.

As with satisfaction levels in NI as a whole, a substantial proportion of respondents (28%) reported that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with public services in their area. Again, this view was reflected across the sample regardless of age, gender or area of residence (Figure 2b).

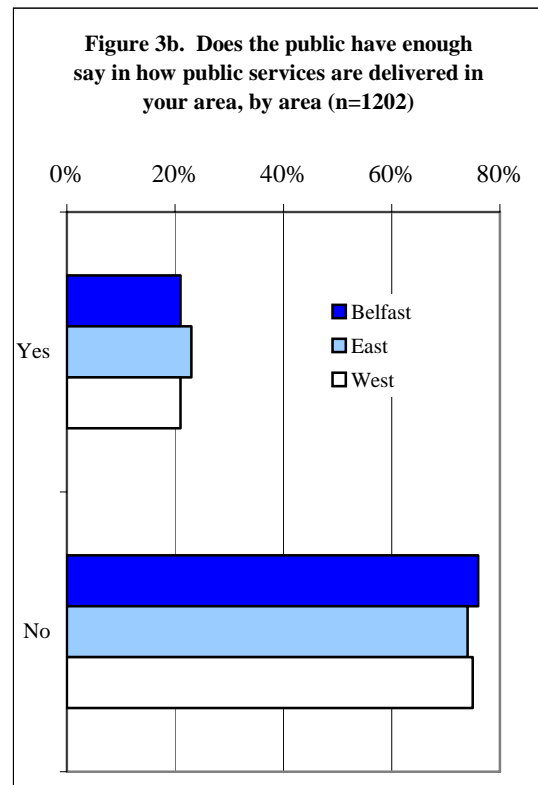


These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence (Figure 3b).

There was a significant difference in levels of satisfaction with public services in their own area among different socio-economic groups. Those respondents working in non-manual occupations (i.e. professional, managerial and skilled non-manual occupations) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with public services in their area than those working in skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled occupations.

3. Does the public have enough of a say in how public services are provided in your area?

Most respondents (74%) stated that they did not have enough of a say in how public services were provided in their area (Figure 3a), with 22% of respondents agreeing that the public did have enough say in how public services are provided.

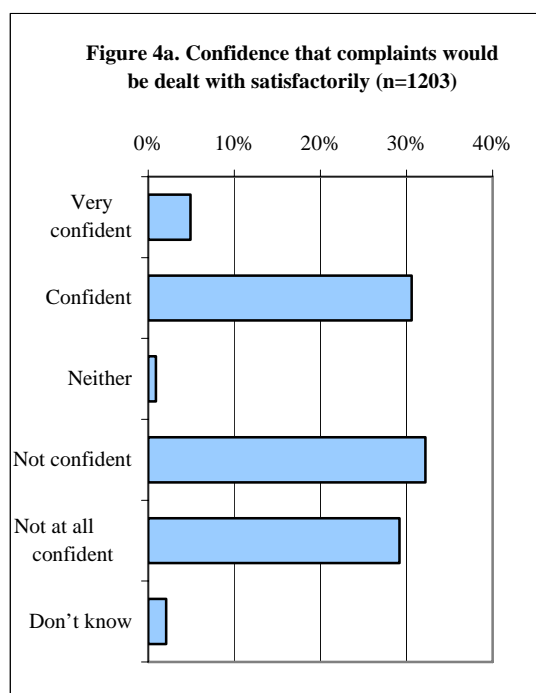


There was a significant difference across age groups in responses to this question. Older people (i.e. from 35 years of age upwards) were significantly more likely to feel that they did not have enough say in how public services were provided in their area.

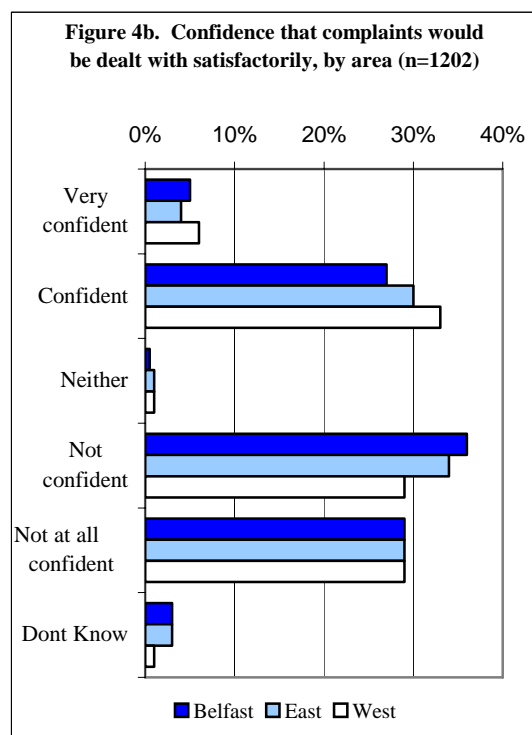
4. Complaints procedures

Respondents were presented with a hypothetical situation in which they complained about a contractor who had left a road in a mess after carrying out pipe-laying work, and were asked how confident they were that their complaint would be dealt with satisfactorily. Table 4a details the responses to this question.

The majority of respondents (61%) were either not confident or not at all confident that a complaint would be dealt with satisfactorily. Thirty-six percent of respondents were either confident or very confident that their complaint would be dealt with to their satisfaction.



These views are reflected across the sample, regardless of age, socio-economic group or area of residence (Figure 4b). Although respondents from Belfast appear to be slightly less confident than respondents from other areas, there was no significant difference in confidence with complaints across the different areas. (However, Protestants were less likely than Catholic respondents to be confident that their complaints would be dealt with satisfactorily).



5. Responsibility for public services

There is some evidence to suggest that people are unsure about which bodies are responsible for providing particular public services. Anecdotal evidence exists which shows that the vast majority of telephone calls made to local councils to complain about particular services are about services for which councils have no responsibility. Respondents were asked a question listing a number of public services and asking respondents to detail which body or bodies they believed provided that service. Table 5a details the services for which Government departments or agencies are responsible (represented by the light blue shaded cells) and those for which local councils are responsible, and in each cell the percentage of respondents who believed that those bodies were responsible for those services.

Table 5a. Percentage of respondents who stated that central or local government was responsible for particular public services (n=1203)

	Cent. Gov/ NDPBs ⁽¹⁾	Local government
Road maintenance	35%	57%
Water supply	55%	33%
Planning	39%	48%
Housing	43%	37%
Schools	96%	2%
Social services	96%	1%
Health services	96%	1%
Street lighting	24%	68%
Leisure centres	13%	77%
Building regulations	36%	49%
Dog control	7%	84%
Community relations	25%	19%
Road cleaning	11%	87%

⁽¹⁾ Non-Departmental Public Bodies (i.e. Health Boards, Health Trust Education & Library Boards, etc)

Key: Central government = ■
 Local government = ■
 Central and local government = ■

It is evident from these responses that there is a degree of uncertainty among respondents about which bodies provide some public services. Understanding about particular services, such as schools, social services, health services, leisure centres and dog control is very clear, and this is reflected across the sample regardless of age, gender or socio-economic group.

Understanding about other services is less clear-cut, such as road maintenance, where 57% of respondents believed that this is the responsibility of local government. There is a similar lack of clarity about planning, housing, street lighting and water supply. There seems to be considerable uncertainty about responsibility for community relations.

Table 5b. Percentage of respondents who stated that central or local government was responsible for particular public services; comparison of Belfast and East (n=1202)

	Belfast		East	
	CG	LG	CG	LG
Road maintenance	44%	48%	38%	54%
Water supply	60%	29%	55%	30%
Planning	37%	47%	44%	44%
Housing	48%	30%	46%	33%
Schools	99%	1%	95%	1%
Social services	96%	-	96%	<1%
Health services	96%	1%	96%	<1%
Street lighting	31%	64%	25%	66%
Leisure centres	15%	76%	12%	81%
Building regulations	37%	46%	38%	49%
Dog control	8%	77%	6%	88%
Community relations	20%	15%	26%	19%
Road cleaning	10%	88%	11%	87%

In comparison with Belfast and the East of Northern Ireland, significantly more respondents from the West of Northern Ireland believed that housing and certain utilities (road maintenance, water supply and street lighting) were the responsibility of local government (Tables 5b and 5c).

Table 5c. Percentage of respondents who stated that central or local government was responsible for particular public services; comparison of Belfast and West (n=1202)

	Belfast		West	
	CG	LG	CG	LG
Road maintenance	44%	48%	27%	66%
Water supply	60%	29%	52%	40%
Planning	37%	47%	34%	54%
Housing	48%	30%	38%	47%
Schools	99%	1%	96%	2%
Social services	96%	-	96%	1%
Health services	96%	1%	96%	1%
Street lighting	31%	64%	19%	73%
Leisure centres	15%	76%	14%	73%
Building regulations	37%	46%	34%	50%
Dog control	8%	77%	6%	84%
Community relations	20%	15%	26%	21%
Road cleaning	10%	88%	12%	87%

6. What is important to the public when they use a public service?

time and that services are delivered as efficiently as possible.

Respondents were asked to indicate from a given list the three factors which were most important to them when they used a public service (Table 6a).

Table 6a. Respondents ranking of the most important factors when using public services

	1st	2nd	3rd
Services are delivered on time	33%	14%	12%
Services are delivered as efficiently as possible	19%	27%	14%
That services are delivered which meet your needs	16%	16%	19%
You can access services when you need to	14%	19%	15%
Those responsible for the delivery of public services are held to account	7%	9%	13%
That you can go to one point for information on a range of services	4%	4%	9%
The people who deliver public services are polite	3%	7%	8%
That services are delivered from a local office	2%	2%	5%

It is clear from this table that the most important factors to the public when they use public services are that services are delivered on time, that they are delivered as efficiently as possible, that services are delivered which meet their needs and that services can be accessed when they are needed.

Of much lower importance was the politeness of staff, local delivery of services, that those responsible for public services are held to account and that information on a range of services can be obtained from one point.

These views were reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, area of residence or socio-economic group.

However, in comparison with younger respondents, a significantly greater proportion of older respondents (aged 50 and over) stated that the most important factors to them in using public services were that that services are delivered on

Technical Notes

1. The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is conducted several times each year by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of the people of Northern Ireland.
2. The Survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients. Six questions commissioned by the Review of Public Administration team were included in the September and October 2002 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. The questions asked were:

Who do you think is responsible for these public services in your area?

- Road maintenance
- Road cleaning
- Water supply
- Leisure centres
- Schools
- Social Services
- Health Services
- Building regulations
- Dog control
- Street lighting
- Planning
- Housing
- Community relations

In your opinion, what is most important to you when you use a public service? Please tell me what the three most important factors are.

- Services are delivered on time
- Services are delivered as efficiently as possible
- You can access services when you need to
- The people who deliver public services are polite
- Those responsible for the delivery of public services are held to account
- That services are delivered which meet your needs
- That they are delivered from a local office
- That you can go to one point for information on a range of services

Recently, in your street, a contractor has been digging up a road to lay pipes. After the pipe laying was finished, the contractor left the road in a mess. If you were to complain about this, how confident would you be that your complaint would be dealt with to your satisfaction?

- Very confident
- Confident
- Not confident
- Not at all confident
- Neither
- Don't know

In your opinion, does the public have enough of a say in how public services are provided in your area?

Yes/No

In your opinion, how satisfied overall are you with public services in Northern Ireland?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Neither
- Don't know

In your opinion, how satisfied are you with public services in your area?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Neither
- Don't know

3. The sample of those surveyed in the September 2002 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up-to-date listing of private households in Northern Ireland. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions – Belfast, East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland, and a random sample drawn from each region.
4. At each address, the interviewer lists all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample, i.e. all persons aged 16 or over. The interviewer's computer then randomly selects one person from each household to complete the interview. From an eligible sample of 1,904 individuals, 1,203 interviews were achieved, giving an overall response rate of 63%.
5. Selecting only one individual for interview from each address means that individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in

smaller households. The data presented in this bulletin have been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households.

6. To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the current Census of Population.
7. Statistical significance tests were carried out on a range of group differences observed in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey findings. These tests are used to establish the degree of confidence with which we can infer the observed findings as an accurate reflection of the views of the total Northern Ireland population.
8. For the purposes of this bulletin, the term “significant” is used only in the strict statistical sense. This means that if a comparison is reported as being significant (between the views of older and younger people for example) we are confident that there is a real difference between these groups in the sample and that the result has not occurred by chance. The term “significant” is not used in any other sense such as “important” or “meaningful”.
9. The area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 7. Councils listed in this table were used to form each of the three areas (Belfast, East of Northern Ireland, West of Northern Ireland) described in this bulletin.

Table 7. Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council

Area	District councils
Belfast	Belfast
East of Northern Ireland	Antrim Ards Ballymena Banbridge Carrickfergus Castlereagh Craigavon Down Larne Lisburn Newtownabbey North Down
West of Northern Ireland	Armagh Ballymoney Coleraine Cookstown Dungannon Fermanagh Limavady Derry Magherafelt Moyle Newry & Mourne Omagh Strabane

10. Due to rounding, percentages noted in figures and tables may not add to 100%.

11. The Registrar General's classification of occupations used in this bulletin groups occupations into five socio-economic classes with the implication that occupation is a meaningful indicator of social welfare.

I Professional occupations - e.g. doctors and lawyers.

II Managerial and lower professional occupations - e.g. managers and teachers.

III Non-manual skilled occupations - e.g. office workers.

IV Manual skilled occupations - e.g. bricklayers, coalminers.

V Semi-skilled occupations - e.g. postal workers.

VI Unskilled occupations - e.g. porters, dustmen.

Further information and additional copies of this bulletin can be obtained by contacting Tony O'Brien on 028 9037 8240, by fax on 028 9037 8222, or by email to tony.o'brien@rpani.gov.uk.