



**Northern Ireland
Review of Public Administration**

**RESEARCH BULLETIN 4
RESULTS FROM JUNE 2004 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 May and June 2004 by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). A total of 1,279 people were surveyed.

The Review of Public Administration team commissioned a series of questions to be included in this Survey (see Notes). The questions related to the public's knowledge of and views on public services in Northern Ireland, including questions on whether respondents had had difficulty in using or getting information about public services, what services that had had problems with and what these difficulties were, and on which groups in society would have most difficulty in accessing services.

KEY POINTS

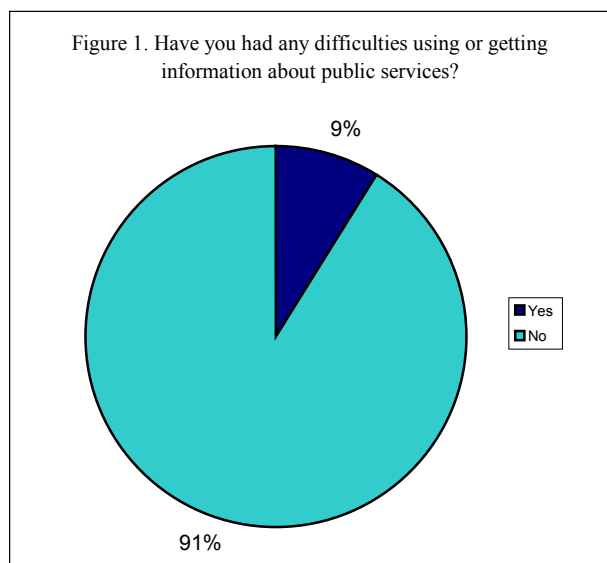
- Ninety percent of respondents had not had any difficulties in using or getting information about public services in the past year.
- Of those respondents who had experienced difficulties, the main services cited were social services (17.5%), health services (15.5%) and road cleaning (14.6%)
- The main problems experienced by respondents in using or getting information about services were not being able to reach the right person (36.3%), problems in telephoning services (14%) and difficulties in traveling to an appointment (8.8%).
- The main things which would make it easier to use public services were providing better information (32.1%), being able to talk to the right person straight away (24.2%) and making forms easier to fill in (14.8%).
- Respondents felt that older people (42.7%), people with disabilities (30.6%) and people from different racial groups (7.7%) were those most likely to experience particular difficulties in using and getting information about public services.
- Respondents felt that social services (17.4%), health services (17.1%) and housing (9.6%) were the services which should be delivered through a local office.



1. Problems using public services

Respondents were asked if they had had any difficulties using or getting information about public services in the past year.

91% of respondents had not had any difficulties in using or getting information about public services (Figure 1).



There were differences among respondents in the answers to this question in terms of socio-economic group. Respondents from manual and routine occupations were significantly ⁽¹⁾ more likely to have experienced difficulties in using or getting information about services, compared with those in non-manual occupations.

From a list supplied, respondents were asked specifically what services they had had difficulties with (Table 1). Of those who had experienced difficulties most had had difficulties with social services (11.8%), health services (10.5%) and road cleaning (9.9%).

⁽¹⁾ See Notes point 8

Table 1 - What services have you had difficulty with?

	N	%
Social Services	18	11.8%
Health Services	16	10.5%
Road cleaning	15	9.9%
Road maintenance	9	5.9%
Planning	7	4.6%
Housing	7	4.6%
Water supply	6	3.9%
Dog Control	6	3.9%
Community Relations	5	3.3%
Street Lighting	5	3.3%
Leisure centers	3	2.0%
Building Regulations	3	2.0%
Schools	2	1.3%
Other	50	32.9%
Total	152	100.0%

Among the “Other” responses to this question, respondents specified public transport, DARD services, the Inland Revenue Service and DVLNI as services with which they had experienced difficulties.

Respondents were also asked what kind of difficulties they had experienced (Table 2).

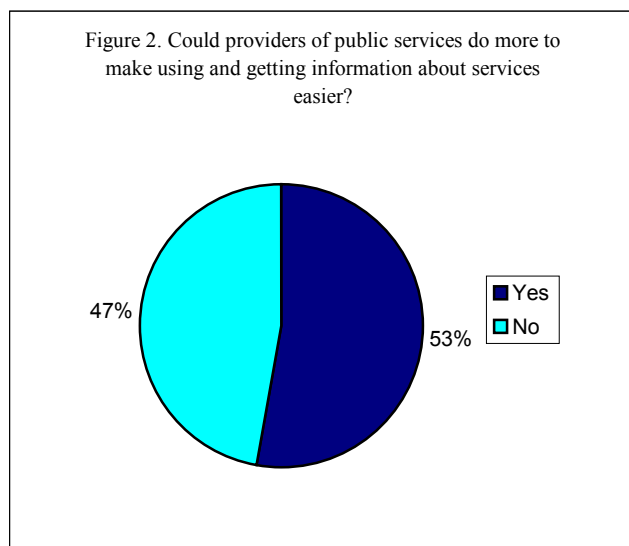
Table 2 - What problems did you have using or getting information about services?

	N	%
Not being able to reach the right person	62	36.3%
Problems in telephoning services	24	14.0%
Difficulties in traveling to an appointment	15	8.8%
Problems filling in forms	14	8.2%
Difficulties in making an appointment	14	8.2%
Not previously knowing that the service existed	10	5.8%
Other	32	18.7%
Total	171	100.0%

Of those who had experienced difficulties, most (36.3%) cited “Not being able to reach the right person” as the main difficulty that they had experienced.

2. Making services better

Respondents were asked if in their view providers of public services could do more to make using and getting information about services easier.



The majority (53%) stated that public services could do more to make using and getting information about public services easier.

Responses to this question differed significantly across age groups and across different areas of residence. Respondents aged over 25 were significantly more likely to say that providers of public services could do more, compared with those aged under 25, as were respondents living in urban areas outside Belfast and in rural areas, compared with those living in Belfast

Respondents who answered “Yes” to this question were asked what could providers of public services do better (Table 3).

Table 3 - In your view, what could providers of public services do better to make using and getting information about services easier?

	N	%
Better information	347	32.1%
Talk to the right person straight away	262	24.2%
Forms that are easier to fill in	160	14.8%
Getting help filling in forms	91	8.4%
Easier ways of making an appointment	72	6.7%
Not having to travel far to appointments	46	4.3%
Other	103	9.5%
Total	1081	100.0%

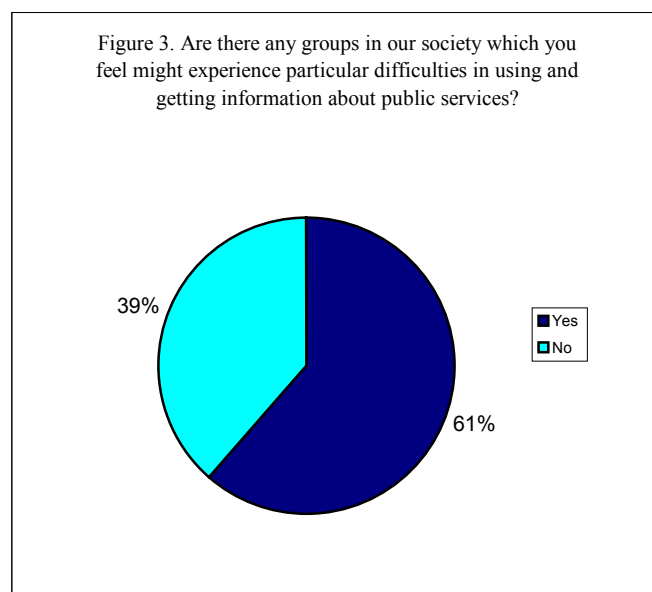
Most respondents (32.1%) stated that public services could provide better information, while a substantial proportion (24.2%) stated

that being able to talk to the right person straight away would make using public services easier.

Among “Other” responses to this question were more advertising of public services (38.5%), access to human beings rather than answering machines (13.5%), better-informed staff (6.3%) and improved staff attitude/politeness (6.3%)

3. Disadvantaged groups

When asked if there were any groups in our society which they felt experienced particular difficulties in using and getting information about public services, most respondents (61%) agreed that there were (Figure 3).



Respondents were asked specifically which groups they felt might experience particular difficulties (Table 4).

Most respondents (42.7%) stated that they felt older people would experience particular difficulties, followed by people with disabilities (30.6%) and people of different racial groups (7.7%).

Responses to this question differed significantly according to disabled status, age, socio-economic group and marital status.

People without a disability were more likely to feel that certain groups of people would

experience difficulties, compared with those people with a disability, as were people aged over 25, people working in non-manual occupations, and married people. There were no significant differences among the other groups.

Table 4 - Which groups do you think might experience difficulties?

	N	%
Older people	543	42.7%
People with disabilities	389	30.6%
People of different racial groups	98	7.7%
Children and young people	73	5.7%
People from rural communities	51	4.0%
People on low incomes	51	4.0%
Lone parent families	37	2.9%
People with dependants	15	1.2%
Men or women generally	8	0.6%
People of different marital status	4	0.3%
People of particular religious beliefs	2	0.2%
People of particular political opinion	1	0.1%
People of a different sexual orientation	1	0.1%
Total	1273	100.0%

4. Local offices

Respondents were asked which services they felt should be available through a local office (Table 5).

Table 5 - Which services should be available through a local office? ⁽²⁾

	N	%
Social services	229	17.4%
Health services	225	17.1%
Housing	126	9.6%
Road maintenance/cleaning	123	9.3%
Street lighting	119	9.0%
Schools	99	7.5%
Planning	91	6.9%
Water supply	90	6.8%
Building regulations	76	5.8%
Dog control	72	5.5%
Community relations	66	5.0%
Total	1316	100.0%

⁽²⁾ See Notes point 9

Respondents were also why they thought that these services should be available from a local office (Table 6).

Table 6 - Why do you feel these services should be available through a local office?

	N	%
Local services would know about local problems and issues	217	24.0%
Local services would be more accountable to local people	274	30.3%
Wouldn't have far to travel to access services	376	41.6%
Other	36	
Total	903	100.0%

Among the "Other" reasons cited for why services should be available from a local office were convenience (30.6%), a more personal service (25%) and that it would make it easier for disadvantaged people (19.4%).

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 May/June 2004 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. The questions asked were:
 - A. In the last year, have you had any difficulties in using or getting information about public services? If “Yes”, what service did you have difficulty with? **(NB all responses were recorded)**
 - Road maintenance
 - Road cleaning
 - Water supply
 - Leisure centers
 - Schools
 - Social Services
 - Health Services
 - Building regulations
 - Dog control
 - Street lighting
 - Planning
 - Housing
 - Community relations
 - Other (specify)
 - B. If “Yes” to question A, what problems did you have? **(NB - the following prompts were used – problems filling in forms, problems in telephoning services, not being able to reach the right person, difficulties making an appointment, difficulties in traveling to appointments, not previously knowing that the service existed. All responses were recorded)**
 - C. In your view, could providers of public services do more to make using and getting information about services easier? If “Yes”, what could they do better? **(NB – the following prompts were used – better information, forms that are easier to fill in, getting help filling in forms, being able to talk to the right person straight away, easier ways of making an appointment, not having to travel far to appointments. All responses were recorded)**
 - D. Are there any groups in our society which you feel might experience particular difficulties in using and getting information about public services? **(NB all responses were recorded)**
 - Older people
 - Children and young people
 - People from rural communities
 - People of different racial groups
 - People of particular religious beliefs
 - People of particular political opinion
 - People with disabilities
 - People of a different sexual orientation
 - People on low incomes
 - People of different marital status
 - Lone parent families
 - People with dependants
 - Men or women generally
 - Other (please specify)

E. Are there any services which should be available through a local office? If so, which ones? **(NB - the following prompts were used and all responses were recorded)**

Road maintenance/cleaning
Street lighting
Water Supply
Dog control
Planning
Building regulations
Housing
Schools
Social Services
Health services
Community relations

F. If “Yes” to Question E, why? **(NB - the following prompts were used – (i) local services would know about local problems and issues, (ii) local services would be more accountable to local people, (iii) wouldn’t have to travel far to access services or go to appointments, (iv) would know where to go. All responses were recorded)**

3. The sample of those surveyed in the June 2004 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 1,929 individuals, 1,279 interviews were achieved, giving an overall response rate of 66%.

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 totals in some tables are greater than the number of respondents because respondents were able to give multiple responses to some questions.

10. 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.

11.

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

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

13. 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 In Non-manual skilled occupations - e.g. office workers.

III m Manual skilled occupations e.g. bricklayers, coalminers

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

V Unskilled manual occupations - e.g. porters, dustmen.

For presentational purposes, in this bulletin these classifications have been grouped together as follows: I, II and III n (non-manual); III m and IV (skilled manual); V (unskilled).

Further information and additional copies of this bulletin can be obtained by contacting Tony O'Brien on 028 9027 7603, by fax on 028 9027 7610, or by email to tony.o'brien@rpani.gov.uk.