

4 Customer satisfaction

4.1 Introduction and summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were interested to hear what, if any, customer satisfaction work Local Authorities (LAs) carried out with benefits service customers. This section of questions was designed to find out about all channels of customer feedback and not just about formal structured customer surveys. LAs were also asked about the general perception of the current status of customer satisfaction amongst their benefit service customers and gave reasons for why they thought the level of satisfaction may have changed in the 12 months previous to this survey.

Monitoring complaints but also collecting and monitoring compliments were two of the most frequently used methods of collecting customer feedback (other than surveys), mentioned by 95 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. When asked about the types of customer satisfaction surveys LAs had conducted in the past years, almost four in five (78 per cent) had done some kind of survey in that time period. Postal self-completion surveys were mentioned most often by approximately three in five (58 per cent) in total.

LAs that had done surveys in the last two years were asked how they had carried out their interviewing or data collection. Responses varied depending on type of survey, with external organisations used a little more on postal self completion surveys, focus groups and face-to-face surveys, but overwhelmingly LAs have been using in house staff to facilitate interviewing and data collection.

When asked about how LAs organised the analysis of survey data, external organisations were used slightly more frequently than was the case for the collection of data. However, the pattern overall, for all types of surveys was that in the main, in house staff were the main resource for data analysis for customer satisfaction surveys carried out amongst benefit service customers.

Once a year would appear to be the most frequently recorded interval for carrying out postal self completion surveys, face-to-face surveys, and telephone surveys amongst those LAs that had carried out those types of surveys. Self completion surveys carried out at the LA, and also web based self-completion surveys, were often likely to be carried out as continuous surveys.

The majority (63 per cent) of LAs that have conducted any customer satisfaction surveys in the last two years said that they made their survey results available to the public. Those LAs that made their survey results public did so by a variety of means: three quarters (76 per cent) published survey results via the Council website, 22 per cent through a benefits newsletter, 19 per cent via the Council's annual report and 17 per cent in the Council magazine.

The vast majority (98 per cent) of the LAs that have conducted surveys with customers of the benefits service use the data to help their Benefits teams improve customer focus. Two in five (42 per cent) said they used the data to help them inform resource allocation and a similar proportion (40 per cent) said that they used the data to compare their results with other similar LAs.

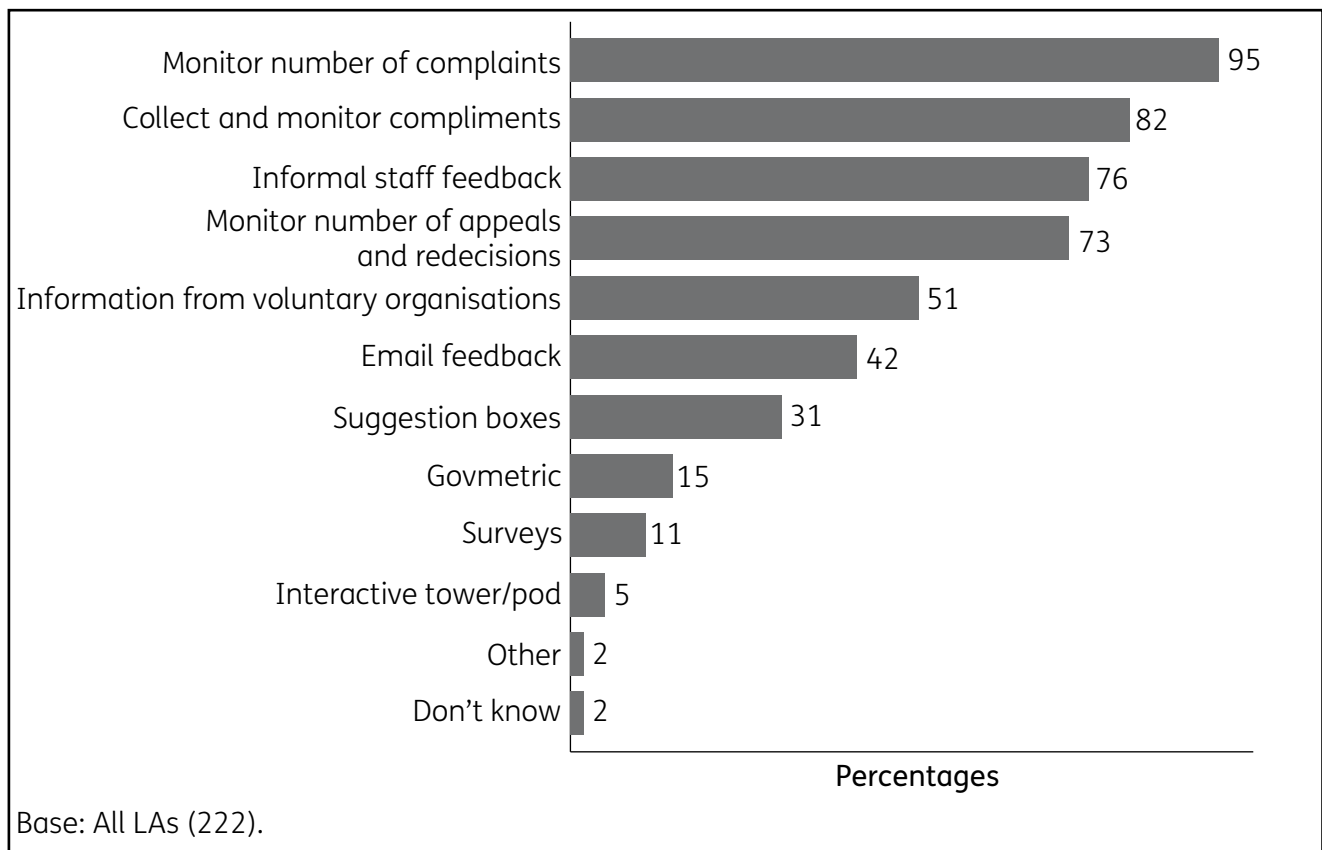
The majority of LAs thought that customer satisfaction had increased (53 per cent), three in ten (29 per cent) thought it had stayed the same and just five per cent thought it had decreased.

The group of LAs that thought satisfaction had increased in their authority were asked to state why they thought satisfaction with the benefits service had increased. The most frequently given reasons for increased customer satisfaction were the speed of processing (84 per cent) and staff improvements: both helpfulness of staff (74 per cent) and better training of staff (59 per cent).

4.2 Main findings

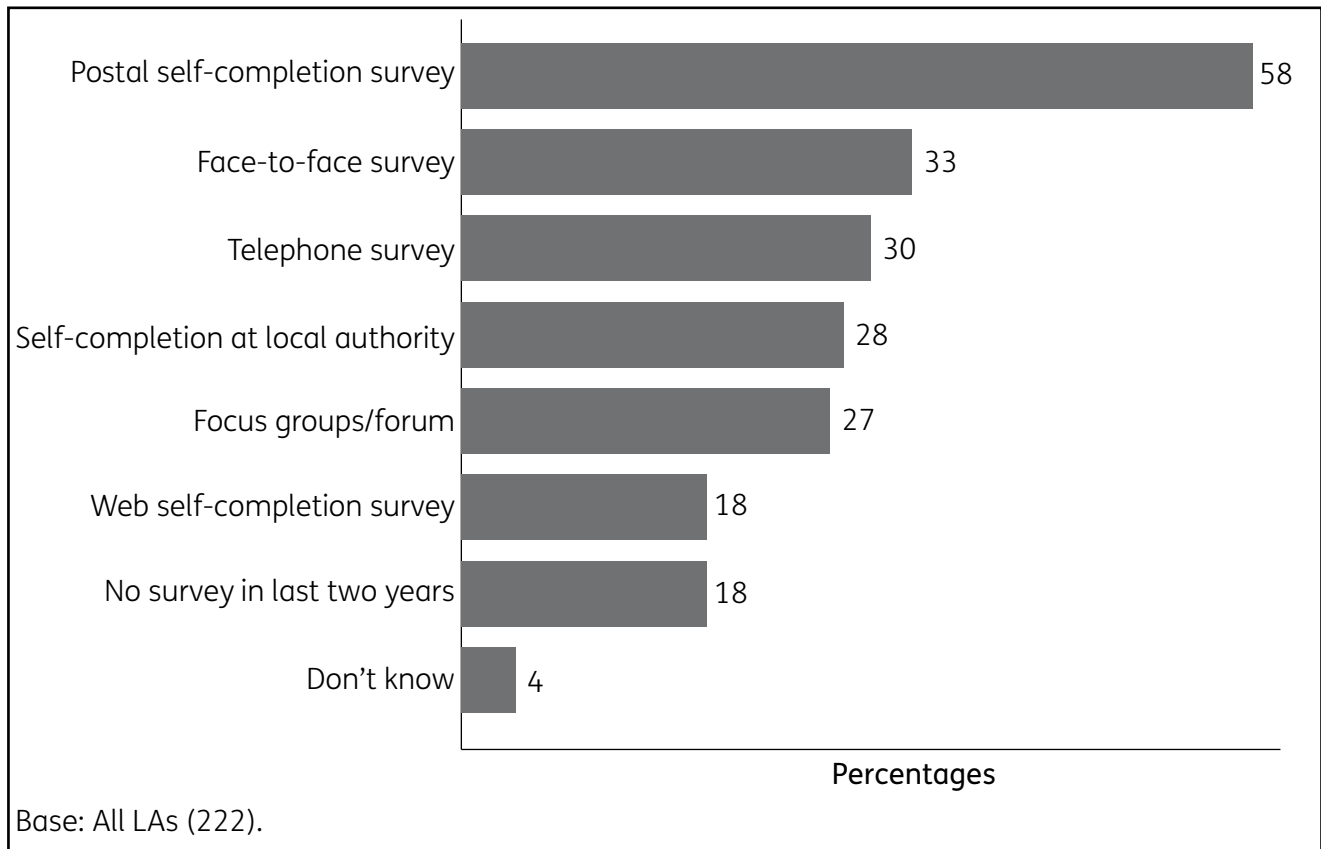
The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 4.1 Thinking firstly about the ways your LA collects customer feedback, other than by conducting customer satisfaction surveys (face-to-face, telephone, web, post, at LA, focus groups). Please indicate below which methods your authority currently uses?)



Monitoring complaints but also collecting and monitoring compliments were two of the most frequently used methods of collecting customer feedback, mentioned by 95 per cent and 82 per cent respectively. These kind of monitoring activities were more frequently carried out at LAs with high caseloads: 100 per cent of LAs with high caseloads said they monitored complaints compared with 90 per cent of LAs with low caseloads. Approximately three quarters (76 per cent) also mentioned informal staff feedback and monitoring the numbers of appeals and redeicions (73 per cent) as means of gaining customer feedback. It is interesting to note that suggestion boxes were used significantly more often by LAs with high caseloads than those with low and medium caseloads (45 per cent for high and 22 per cent and 30 per cent for low and medium respectively).

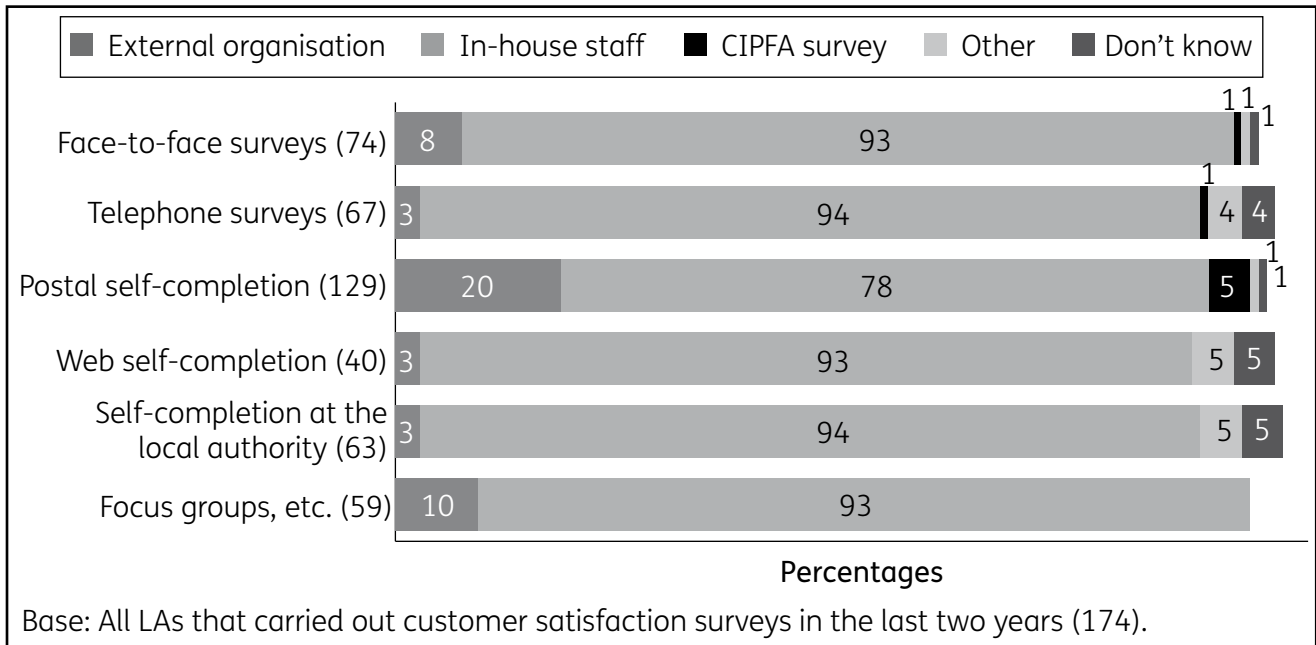
Figure 4.2 Has your authority carried out any customer satisfaction surveys to measure the effectiveness of the benefits service within the last two years? If yes, please specify whether this was face-to-face, telephone, or self completion (postal, web based survey or survey completed at LA)?



When asked about the types of customer satisfaction surveys LAs had conducted in the past years, almost four in five (78 per cent) had done some kind of survey in that time period. Postal self-completion surveys were mentioned most often by approximately three in five (58 per cent) in total, but LAs with low caseloads were less likely to have conducted this kind of survey in the last two years (44 per cent) than were their counterparts with medium and high caseloads (65 per cent and 73 per cent respectively).

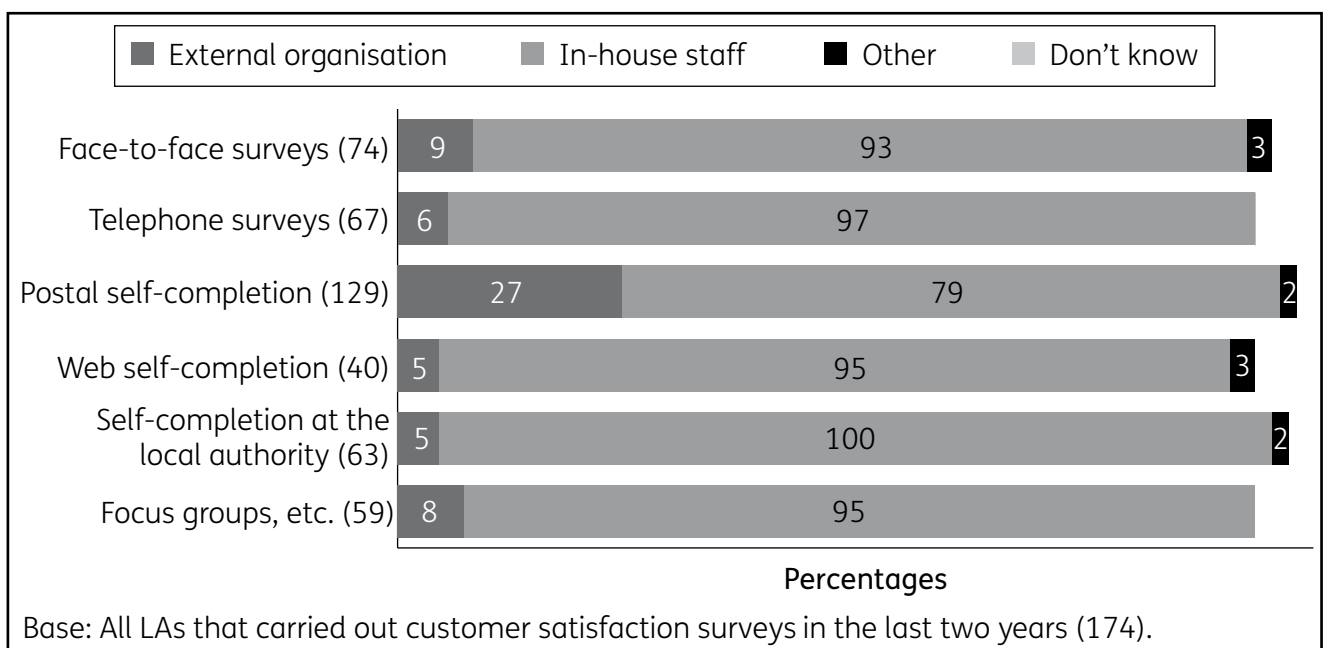
With the exception of web based self completion surveys, where no significant differences were recorded between authorities with different caseloads, there was a trend for authorities with low caseloads to be less likely to have done survey work compared to LAs with medium and high caseloads. This trend is reflected in the figures recorded for LAs doing any surveys: 68 per cent of LAs with low caseloads had done any survey work in the last two years, compared with 83 per cent of LAs with medium caseloads and 90 per cent of LAs with high caseloads.

Figure 4.3 Which of the following best describes how your authority organises its customer satisfaction surveys in terms of carrying out the interviewing/collecting responses?



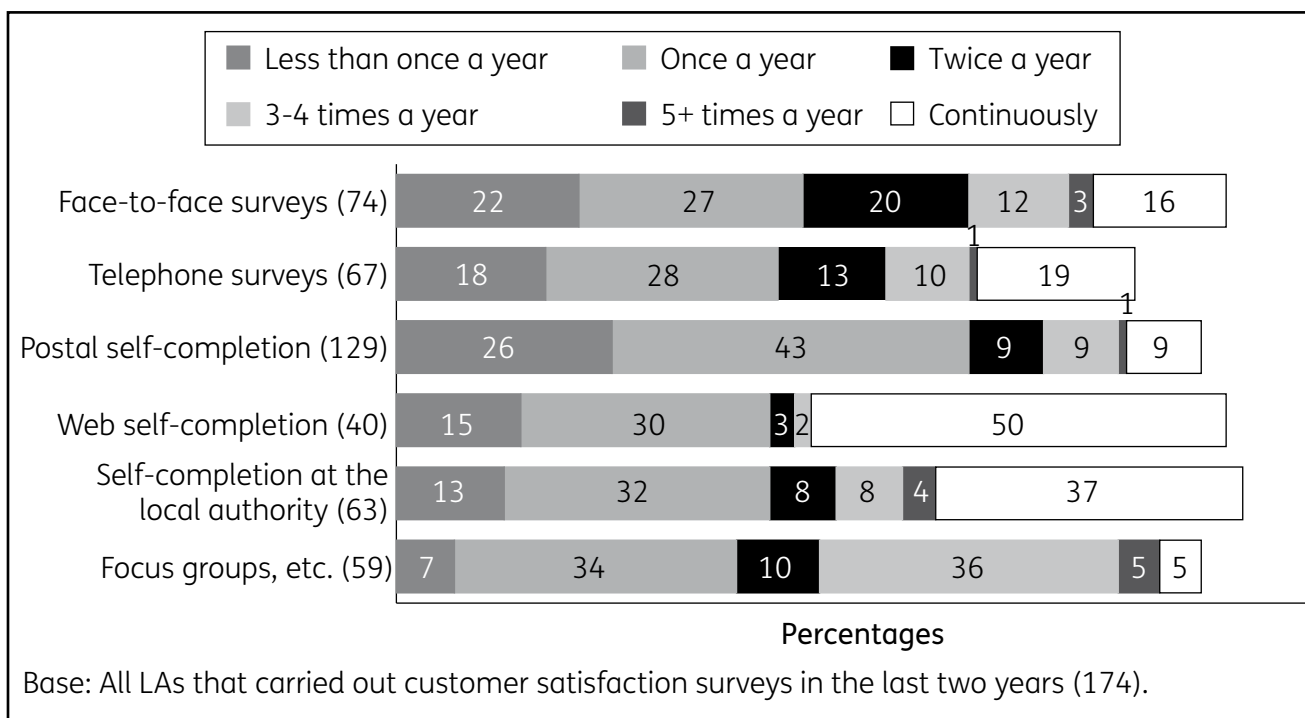
LAs that had done surveys in the last two years were asked how they had carried out their interviewing or data collection. Responses varied depending on type of survey, with external organisations used a little more on postal self completion surveys, focus groups and face-to-face surveys, but overwhelmingly LAs have been using in house staff to facilitate interviewing and data collection.

Figure 4.4 Which of the following best describes how your authority organises its customer satisfaction surveys in terms of who analyses the data?



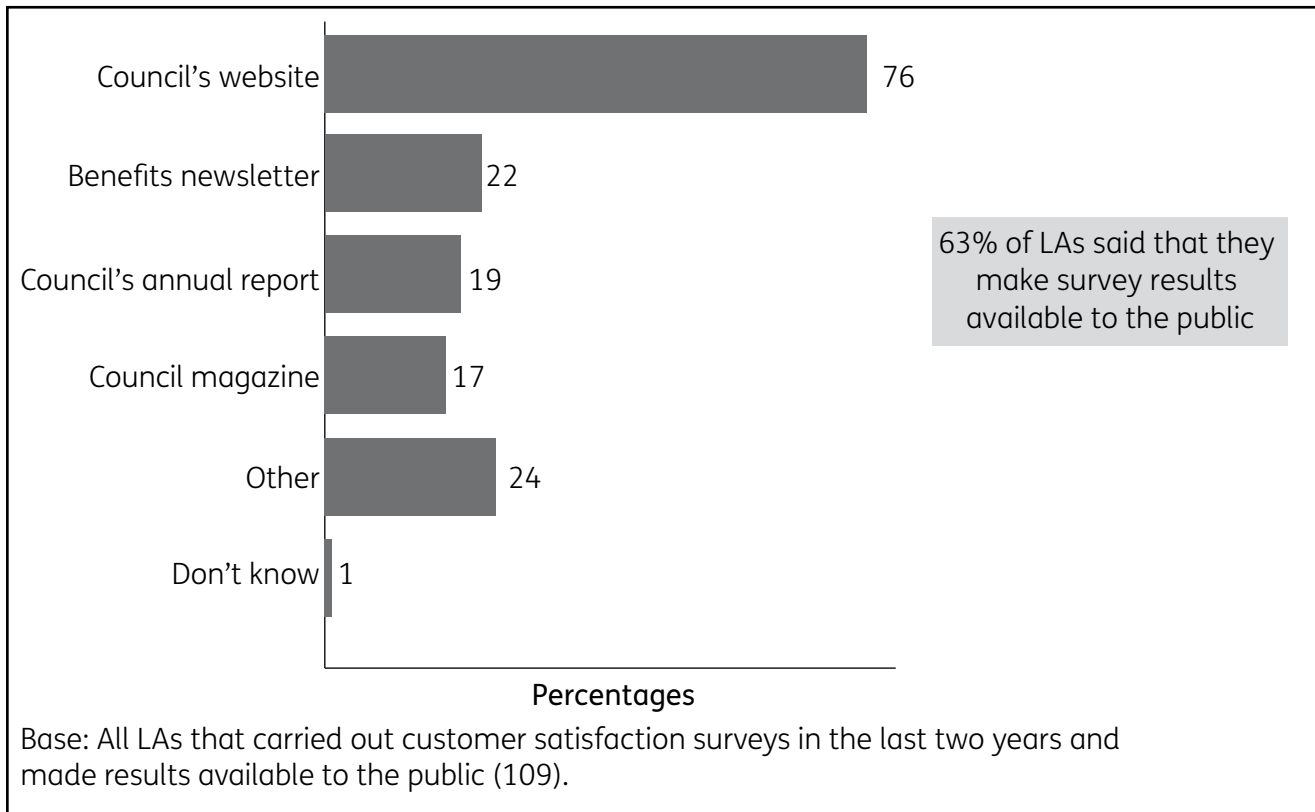
When asked about how LAs organised the analysis of survey data, external organisations were used slightly more frequently than was the case for the collection of data. This was especially the case for postal self-completion surveys where 27 per cent of LAs said that they used external organisations for the analysis of survey data. For postal self completion surveys, those authorities with a high caseload were more likely to use an external organisation for the analysis (40 per cent) than were those LAs with a low or medium caseload (16 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). However the pattern overall, for all types of surveys was that in the main, in house staff were the main resource for data analysis for customer satisfaction surveys carried out amongst benefit service customers.

Figure 4.5 How many times a year does your LA conduct these customer satisfaction surveys?



In terms of the frequency with which different types of surveys were carried out, quite an interesting pattern emerged when those LAs that had carried out surveys in the last two years were asked how often they had done those types of survey. Once a year would appear to be the most frequently recorded interval for carrying out postal self completion surveys (43 per cent), face-to-face surveys (27 per cent), and telephone surveys (28 per cent) amongst those LAs that had carried out those types of surveys. Self completion surveys carried out at the LA, and also web based self-completion surveys, were often likely to be carried out as continuous surveys. Approximately two in five (37 per cent) of LA based self-completion surveys and a half (50 per cent) of web based self-completion surveys were conducted on a continuous basis. Qualitative work appeared to be done at a more frequent interval. For instance 51 per cent of LAs that did this kind of survey work (focus groups/ forums etc. said they did so twice a year or more). It is also worth noting that 35 per cent of LAs were doing face-to-face surveys twice a year or more often, and a quarter (24 per cent) of LAs that had carried out telephone surveys had done them twice a year or more often.

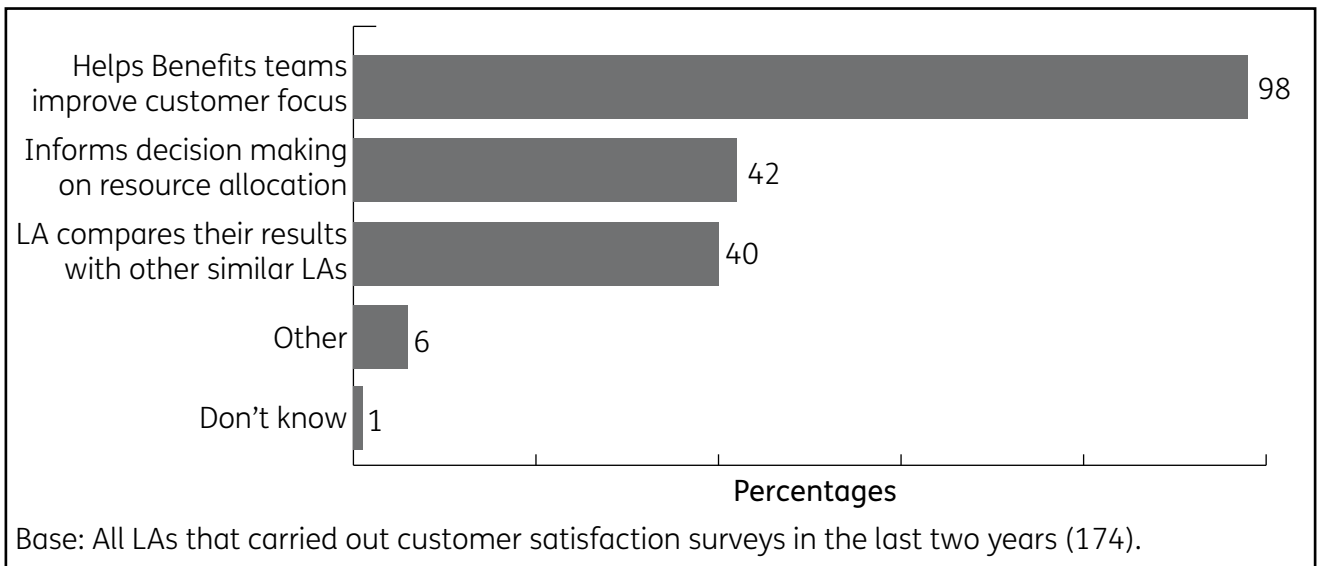
**Figure 4.6 Does your LA make the results of any of your surveys available to the public in any way?
How are the results made available to the public?**



The majority (63 per cent) of LAs that have conducted any customer satisfaction surveys in the last two years said that they made their survey results available to the public. LAs that were contracted out were more likely to make their survey results public (87 per cent) than were those LAs that were not contracted out (59 per cent).

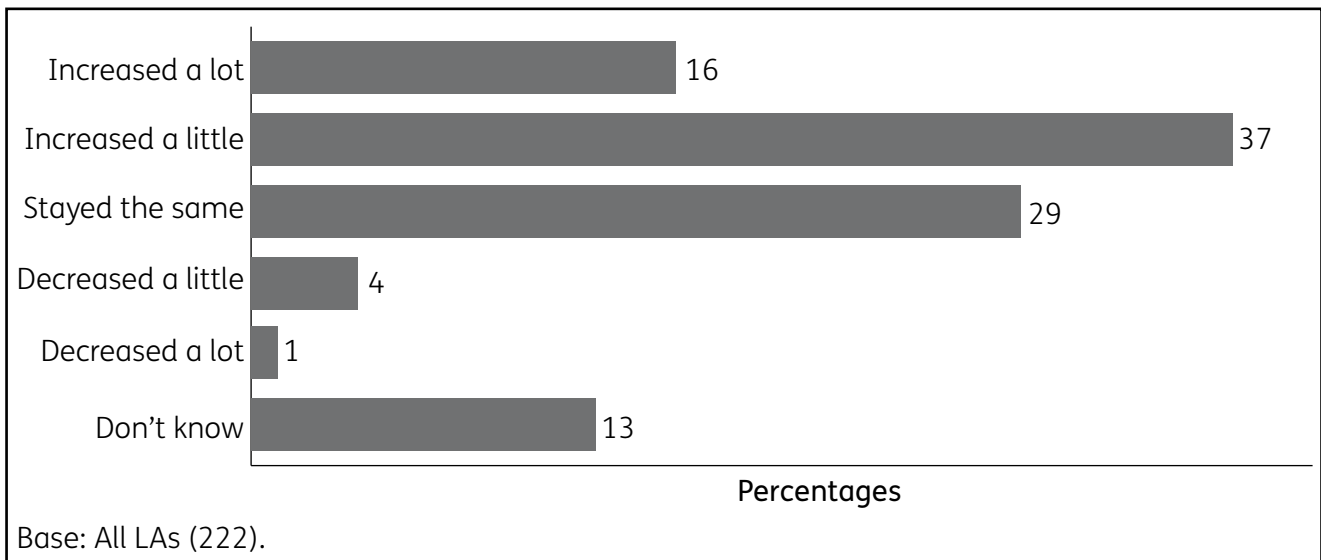
Those LAs that made their survey results public did so by a variety of means: just over three quarters (76 per cent) published survey results via the Council website, 22 per cent through a benefits newsletter, 19 per cent via the Council's annual report and 17 per cent in the Council magazine. LAs with a low caseload were significantly more likely to publish their survey results in the Council's annual report (28 per cent) than were LAs with a medium (17 per cent) or high (13 per cent) caseload.

Figure 4.7 How does your authority use data relating to customer satisfaction?



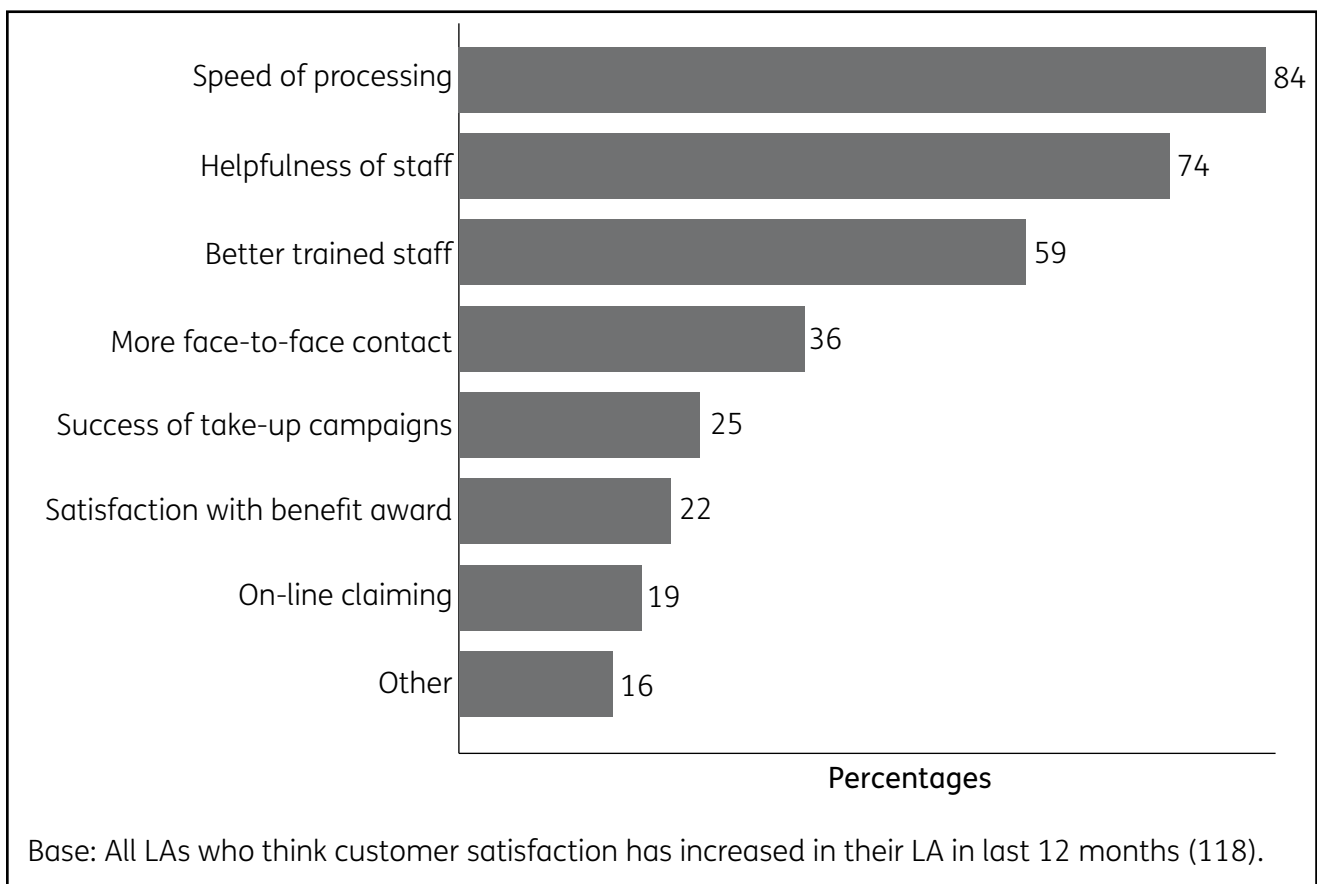
The vast majority (98 per cent) of those that have conducted surveys with customers of the benefits service use the data to help their Benefits teams improve customer focus. Two in five (42 per cent) said they used the data to help them inform resource allocation and a similar proportion (40 per cent) said that they used the data to compare their results with other similar LAs.

Figure 4.8 In your opinion, has customer satisfaction with the benefits service in your authority increased or decreased in the last 12 months?



The majority of LAs thought that customer satisfaction had increased (53 per cent), three in ten (29 per cent) thought it had stayed the same and just five per cent thought it had decreased.

Figure 4.9 Why do you think customer satisfaction has increased in your authority?

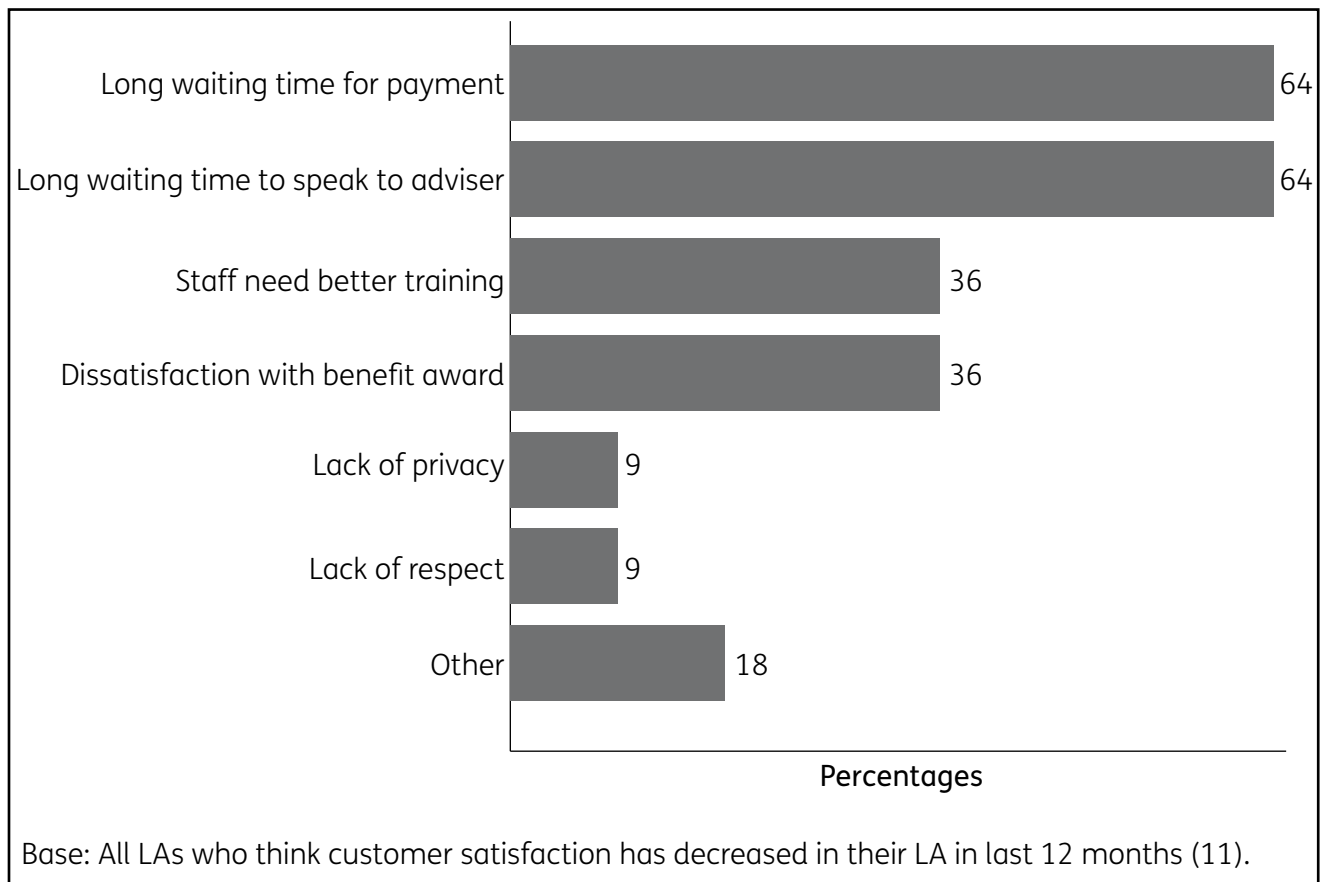


The group of LAs that thought satisfaction had increased in their authority were asked to state why they thought satisfaction with the benefits service had increased. The most frequently given reasons for increased customer satisfaction were the speed of processing (84 per cent) and staff improvements: both helpfulness of staff (74 per cent) and better training of staff (59 per cent).

More face-to-face contact was given as a reason for increased customer satisfaction for 36 per cent but this was significantly higher amongst LAs that were not contracted out (39 per cent) compared to those that were contracted out (13 per cent).

A quarter (25 per cent) of LAs that thought customer satisfaction amongst benefit service customers had increased in the last 12 months said that one of the reasons was success of take up campaigns, and this was especially the case for Welsh authorities (100 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (73 per cent).

Figure 4.10 Why do you think customer satisfaction has decreased in your authority?



Regards reasons for dissatisfaction, it must be noted that there were just eleven LAs who felt this to be the trend so the findings for this question need to be reviewed in context of the the small base size.