

Analysis of Second Customer Contact Centre Survey, December 2011-2012

Background to the Survey

During the period December 2011 – January 2012, the Customer Contact Centre undertook a survey of a sample of those who had contacted the Centre previously to assess how people preferred to do business with the Council and how often they contacted it. The survey was completed by three means:

- telephone surveys undertaken by Centre staff;
- self-completed on-line surveys; and
- self-completed paper surveys.

In total, 286 residents responded. Of these 208 were surveyed by telephone, 29 completed the web survey and 49 completed paper copies. Because the method of returning responses was thought likely to influence people's responses to the survey questions, the three groups of respondents were analysed separately.

Analysis of Responses

Preferred Way of Doing Business with the Council

Seven key reasons why people might contact the Council were considered. These were:

- to make a comment, complaint or suggestion;
- to tell the Council about changes in personal circumstances;
- to make a payment;
- to enquire about information or advice on specific Council services;
- to apply for a service, such as a disabled parking badge;
- to book a facility or make an appointment; and
- to report a fault.

Respondents were asked to indicate their preferences about how to contact the Council for each of these reasons. The methods of contact considered were:

- online;
- in writing;
- by phone; and

- face-to-face.

For each method of contact they were asked to rate the likelihood of using that method on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 denoted 'never use', 3 indicated 'sometimes' and 5 denoted 'always used'

The results for the three groups of respondents are shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3. Figure 1 relates to those surveyed by telephone, while Figures 2 and 3 relate to those responding by paper form and online respectively. In each case, the results have been expressed as a percentage of all those who responded.

In relation to those surveyed by telephone, it is clear from Figure 1 that they either never used a particular communication method (1) or always used it (5). A fairly small proportion elected intermediate scores. In terms of their responses, it would appear that, except for making payments, the telephone was by far the preferred method of contact with the Council. In regards to payments, face-to-face contacts were nearly as important as using the phone. There seemed little appetite for written communications generally and for this group online methods were only regularly used by a small percentage.

For those completing paper questionnaires, communicating online or in writing with the Council was not favoured, but there was a greater proportion, compared to those surveyed by phone, who stated that they always (5) or nearly always (4) used face-to-face meetings when contacting the Council.

The final group, namely those responding to the survey online, predictably showed a greater willingness than the other two groups to use online means for communicating with the Council, especially for making comments/complaints, enquiring about information or reporting a fault. However, the phone remained the preferred method for booking a facility.

Whether these differences truly reflect the fact that the population is made up of three different groups of people, who have different preferred methods for contacting the Council, is difficult to state. The sample sizes for the three groups are very different and there is no way of knowing whether each sample is representative. Given this, all that can be concluded is that there are people who prefer to communicate with the Council online, by phone and face-to-face. On the other hand, written communications involving letters were generally not a preferred means of communication.

Figure 1

Preferred Method of Contacting the Council for Different Issues for Those Surveyed by Telephone (Percentage of total respondents)

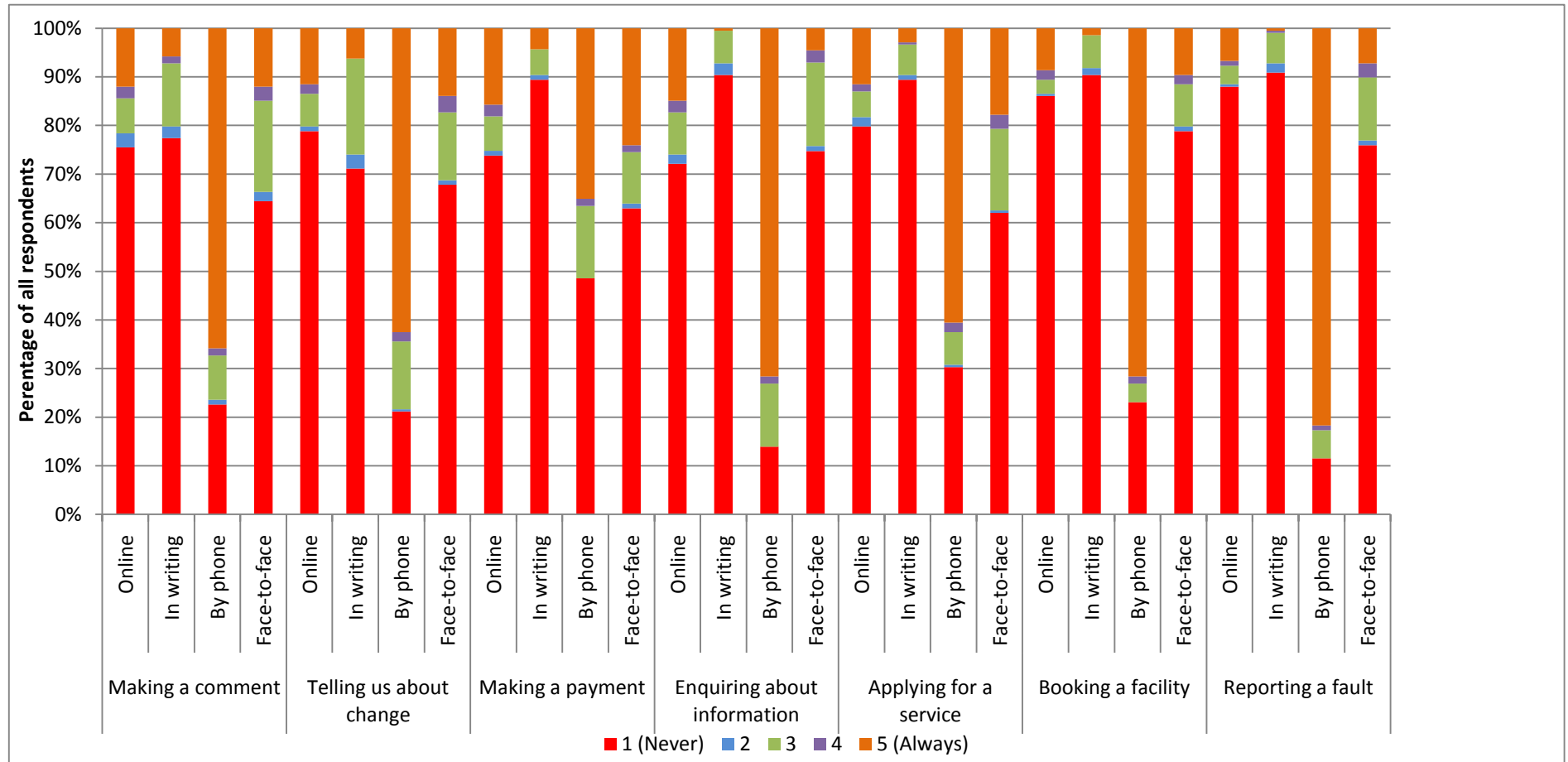


Figure 2

**Preferred Method of Contacting the Council for Different Issues for Those Self-Completing Paper Questionnaires
(Percentage of total respondents)**

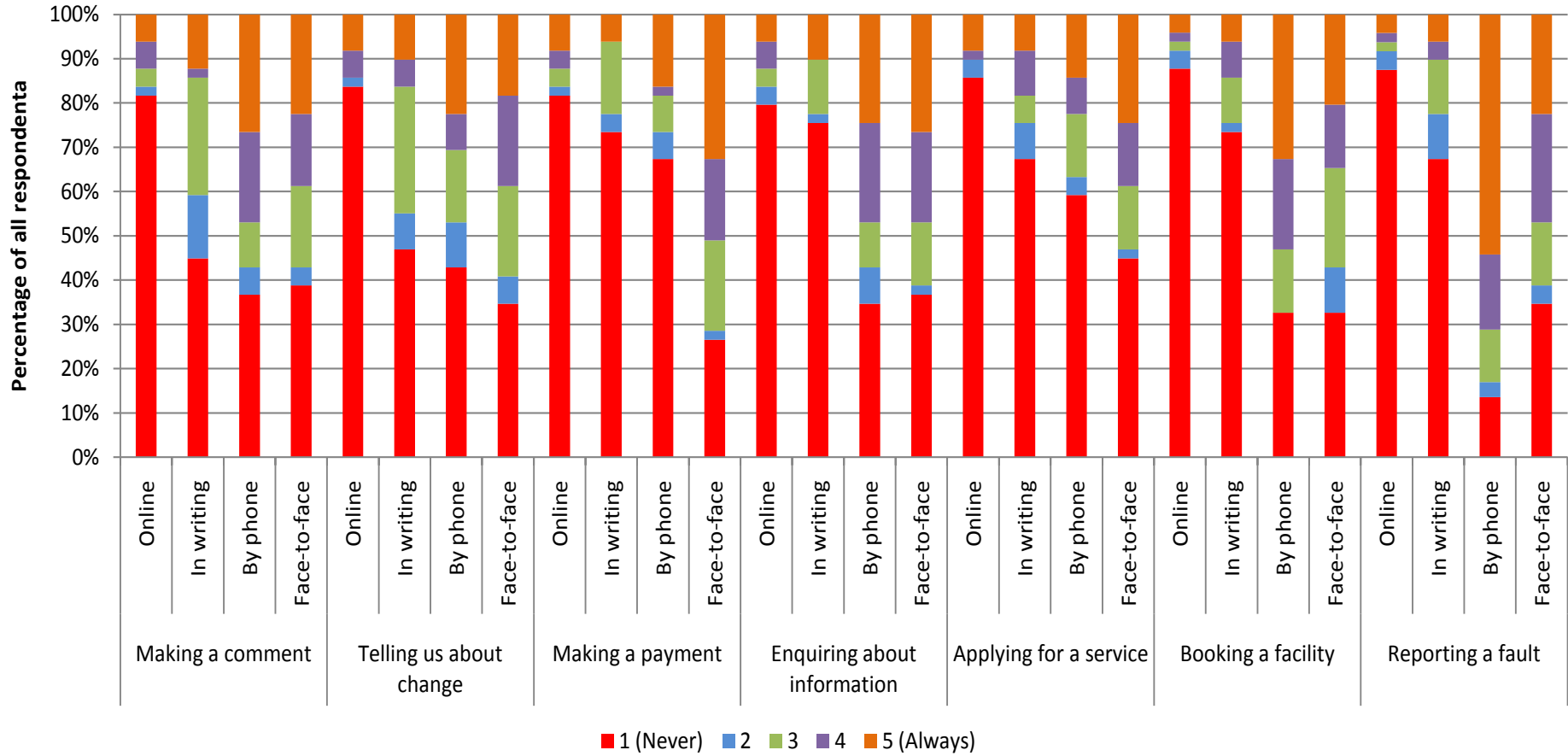
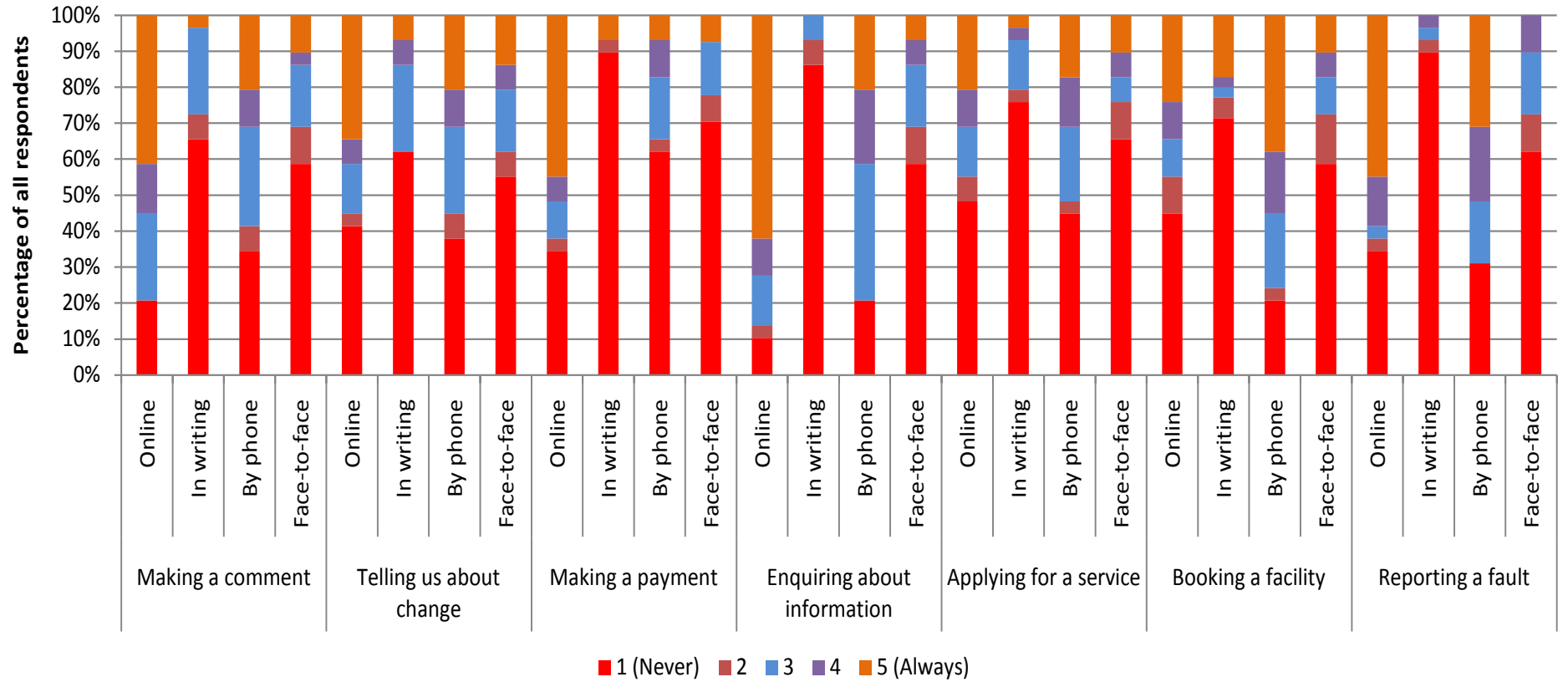


Figure 3

**Preferred Method of Contacting the Council for Different Issues for Those Completing Online Surveys
(Percentage of total respondents)**

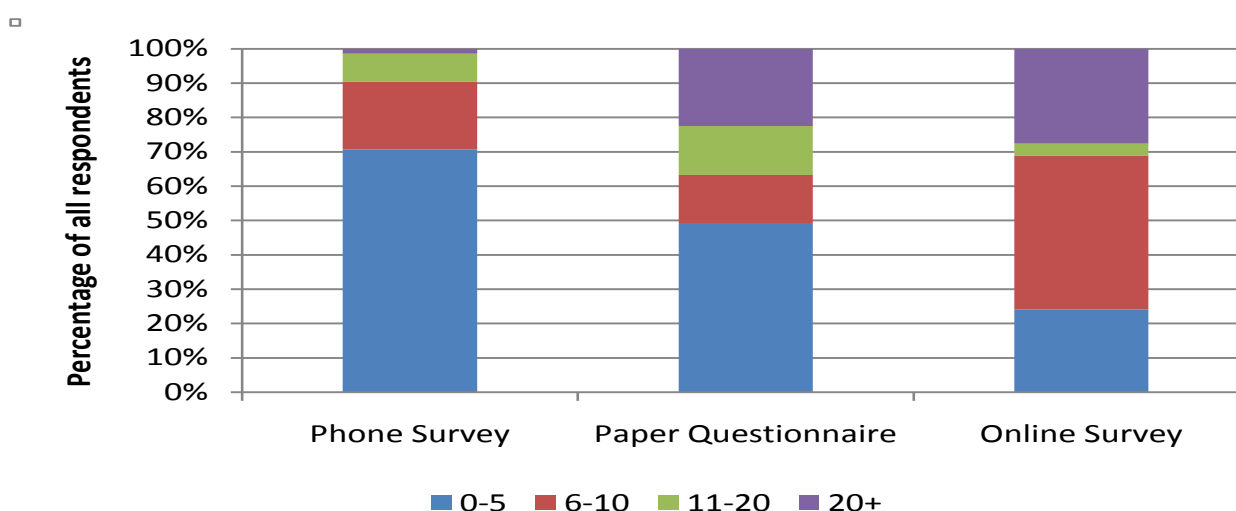


Frequency of Contact with the Council

Respondents were also asked how many times a year they accessed Council services or made contact with the Council. The results, presented in Figure 4, did suggest that there might be some basis for the view that telephone respondents represented a different 'segment' of society from those who responded on paper or online. In particular, compared to those who completed paper copies or went online, those surveyed by telephone claimed to have less frequent contact on average with the Council. Those with the highest frequency of contact were those who completed the survey online. The caveat is that the sample sizes for those responding online or by paper were much smaller than that surveyed by telephone. Nevertheless, the inference that access to and willingness to use online services increases the frequency of contact that the public has with the Council has a certain intuitive appeal.

Figure 4

Frequency of Contact with Council by Method of Survey Completion, times per year



Further Comments

Those who responded to the survey were also given the opportunity to provide further comments regarding customer service within the Council. The actual responses are provided in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 respectively for telephone, paper and online respondents respectively. Predictably, the comments given by those surveyed by telephone were much more positive than those coming from respondents using paper questionnaires or the online survey. The reluctance to be critical to the interviewer possibly accounts for this.

Of the 208 surveyed by telephone, 61 (29%) provided additional comments. As indicated the comments were generally favourable about the staff at the Contact Centre, response times and the new 0300 number. Relatively few comments were made regarding specific services, but where these occurred, the principal criticism was lack of action.

Of the 49 people who sent in paper questionnaires, 24 (49%) provided additional comments. On balance these comments were favourable in respect of the Customer Contact Centre, but there were some complaints. Where there were comments on services, then these tended to relate to Council housing repairs. This may reflect that this group of respondents appeared to contain a high proportion of Council house tenants.

Lastly, of the 29 people who responded online, 15 (52%) voiced additional comments. Almost without exception, these comments were very critical of the Customer Contact Centre and of the single contact number. This may be a reflection that those who replied online were much more comfortable using web-based services and wanted to contact the service department directly rather than going through a call centre.

Appendix 1: Comments/Further Suggestions by Telephone Respondents

It is not easy to contact the correct service. The options on the line do not make it easy to get through to the Council. People are busy and the telephone system wastes 3 or 4 minutes of their day.
No comment
The Service is very good and there is plenty of information on the web page.
All payments are made by direct debit.
There are lots of potholes on the road at Thistle Park car Park.
The Service is good.
All of the advisors are very helpful and friendly.
Payments are made by direct debit.
The service is good when using the 0300 number.
Quite satisfied.
Why do people put chewing gum on the pavement and rubbish on the ground?
The South Ayrshire Council website is very good.
Anne has been extremely helpful today
The 0300 Number is great and everything asked of South Ayrshire Council is carried out satisfactorily.
Satisfied with the service.
The 0300 number is much better.
Anne has been great and very helpful today.
Anne has been very helpful on the phone today and has given an excellent service.
It would be nice if Victoria Park was tidied up. The grass needs cut regularly and the edges need trimmed. Sweep the pavement and remove broken pieces of branches. (comment passed to neighbourhood services)
Quite happy with the service.
No issues. The staff are always very helpful.
More money should be spent on council services.
There should always be an option to speak to a person. More and more services are changing to online.
The new 0300 number is brilliant. I cannot remember the last time I got through to speak to an advisor in a Government office first time. The staff at South Ayrshire council are brilliant and I don't know how I would have coped over the last few months without their help. The staff have gone out of their way to help and this message should be passed onto all of the team.
The services are always good.
The staff are wonderful and very helpful. They are kind, patient and polite. Anne has been helpful today.
On average, Riverside house staff require customer service training as they have been impolite and don't treat customers well. Anne has been very helpful today.
Accesses the web page every day.
Has experienced difficulties with the 0300 number. The system seems to enter a loop and repeat itself. Would like to have the survey feedback via email.
The website is very good. Could there please be practical information put in the newsletter, for example, bin collections.
Very happy with the service received.
Payments made by direct debit.
Contacted Zero Waste Scotland and had to pick various options before coming through to ourselves. A direct number through to us would be helpful. The service is generally good, especially the bin men who worked on boxing day.

Payments normally made by direct debit but don't like the telephone system.
There is a problem with the automated service as it loops to the beginning of the message when trying to get through to a specific service. The music is also poor.
The changes to the domestic bin collections should have been advertised more.
Happy with the service received.
There should be more information online. There is a lack of communication between departments as there is a lack in consistency in what customers are told.
Required a new collection calendar.
Don't line the new telephone system.
The answer Machine messages are very clear. South Ayrshire Council response time is very good; the only problem is that the volume on the telephones is very low from the contact centre side.
Enjoyed taking part in the survey and found Moyra very helpful.
The staff are always helpful when I phone.
If the bins are missed for any reason a note should be put through the door.
I am quite happy with south Ayrshire council.
Thanks to Anne for her help. It is appreciated.
The cars that are parked on the street block access.
The brown bin should be reinstated over the winter months.
The staff are friendly and helpful.
The staff should not be called agents.
Very happy with the service. Very quick.
Staff should not be called agents.
The council give a fairly good service.
All staff are helpful and there is good information given.
Service is good for someone who is new to the area.
Doesn't like having to press so many options to get to speak to someone. Barbara was very helpful and dealt with the enquiry in a very efficient manner.
The council service is great; however, some departments could be improved.
The old phone system was better as you could speak to a human quicker.
The line went dead when using the phone system.
The roads are in a terrible state.
The new number is good and all the staff are nice.

Appendix 2: Comments/Further Suggestions by Those Completing Paper Questionnaires

The service is so erratic that the communication is lost between people and departments. Follow up is no better because if the work was done of satisfactory or correct.
I attend meetings regarding community care and housing etc and find the same as above.
Council services and workers are "hidden" and difficult to find what is available and who to contact. The web page helps but a face to face or single point of contact could improve this and I am looking forward to the one opening in Ayr to see if improvements will take place.
Communication between departments appears to be limited which causes increased time to resolve issues.
The council has always been there for us – out to do emergency repairs – the service is first class.
I phone quite a lot and the wait is far too long and it costs a fortune.
What I would like to see is a school crossing set so lights that can be switched on when there is a lollipop person is on duty. The number of times he has to dive out of the way of moving traffic more traffic is coming through Tarbolton because they are scared of the roundabout at Whitletts.
Develop a better housing transfer/mutual exchange service so that obtaining a house outside south Ayrshire is easier. I.e. informing potential swappers which area is required rather than having a single box on the form which says out with only.
The Tenants New does not have to be an expensive glossy brochure.
Very slow in responding to repairs and complaints and repairs are not up to standard.
Would someone please visit this place to see what I am paying for; an ant infested house which is falling to bits. Two women from the council were sent out after the ants had finished their breeding season which is in spring. (names can be supplied) I have M.S hence the bad writing. I was nearly suicidal by the end of summer. I can supply names of people who saw the ants outside not what i had to live with inside.
When council staff say they will call you back regarding serious issues it would be courteous if they did as promised so that promises are kept and council standards are kept at a higher level and not causing undue stress
The new 0300 number is time wasting and unnecessary. The rule that I cannot report a housing repair for a neighbour is bureaucracy gone mad. My neighbour has hearing difficulties. On occasion i find the staff in the Girvan office to be incompetent and downright rude.
If I have a reason to contact the council I do it through the warden on most occasions.
I would like to know that the repairs can be made and sorted much quicker than they do.
Local staff are extremely helpful, especially important when a customer has a hearing disability. They know the area well, and can understand the needs of the tenants. Face to face cannot be bettered. Leave the machines to robots! Your staff are wonderful.
Feel that reporting on time can be slow if you do not know anyone. It seems that the more people you know and the higher up they are enables complaints to be dealt with quicker.
It would help if a qualified work man sat at a desk to take your complaints and got the workman out to fix burst pipes. Not 4 days later.
Staff need to know what they are talking about I am extremely concerned at the standard of training staff will receive prior to facilities opening – previous experience with Contact Centre does not bode well.
I reported three repairs at Riverside House and they were fixed within a few days. It is a great service.
More information regarding program when work will commence on the new pool.
Repairs, Meals on Wheels, carer services, social work and the alert team are all very good.
Telephone number should have remained as before. 0300 number is too long to recall when dialling, automated service does not pick up local accent and frequently put through to incorrect extension.
The slab pavings are very much in need of bedding in. One so easily can trip. In my opinion the worst

means of paving is slabbing. One only needs to look around the town where there is slabbing in some areas would say a dangerous hazard especially on foot. With respect Janet Davidson

I do not know what services or facilities are available, how to access. The new single number should work well for me. The new service centres should make it easier to make initial enquiries.

Appendix 3: Comments/Further Suggestions by Online Respondents

<p>Hate the 0300 number. It is most unsatisfactory. You press 1 2 3 or 4 many times to get an answering machine. No accuracy in the message to say when the person is available. Some officers never listen to their answering machines so there is no point in leaving a message. To try another officer is more of the same which costs the caller a fortune. One senior officer used to give a message- this is the week beginning the 6 Nov – I am in/not in the office, Tuesday morning, Wednesday afternoon and Friday afternoon – how sensible – then you knew when you could get that person. When you phone you want to speak to a person and get you request /problem resolved immediately, not some days hence. Very often that is needed. This wonderful system was trumpeted as the best thing ever. It is a shambles – the system is totally overloaded and you keep adding other services. STOP NOW!! Stop proceeding with a useless service, go back to basics and get a decent service up and running. It is the worst thing the council has done and is most frustrating and not helpful for users.</p>
<p>The telephone system for the public contacting the Council is much more complicated and therefore much poorer than before. My experience of customer services is that it, generally, provides a poorer service than that provided before its creation and as it merely added to the existing departmental service, is an expensive and unnecessary add on.</p>
<p>I suggest that you need to be careful in interrupting this survey as the 'services' that people use and respond to you about may well be very different. The answers that I have given reflect contacts such as over a roads issue and a replacement bin – had it been about homecare or my child's education – then the answers would have been different. You haven't covered anything about satisfaction – bin replacement 10/10 – the roads issue – never heard anything more about it 0/10.</p>
<p>Your website is never up to date. The swimming pool times are usually wrong.</p>
<p>I will do anything other than use the 0300 number.</p>
<p>Customer services in Prestwick Office are not good some of staff are very helpful.</p>
<p>Letters to customers with visual impairments should be enlarged or put on a CD.</p>
<p>The standards of service are good but letter should be in large print if required. The public toilets should be re-opened. The customer service centre is a good idea if it is opened on weekends.</p>
<p>Assisted chat web service would be nice – many private sector companies now use this.</p>
<p>It's really strange to have an Irish accent on the answering machines of a council based in the west coast of Scotland. Don't we have nice accents??</p>
<p>You should be able to pay home insurance online and over the phone. Direct telephone numbers to individual departments would save call waiting times.</p>
<p>It would be good to be able to report pavement and street lighting faults out of hours and I've often forgotten by the time I get home. Please make email addresses for different departments easier to find.</p>
<p>The new 0300 number is not customer friendly. Listening to all of the options is tedious and at times the call centre staff do not know where to direct the query. The new one stop shop will help. A better website design would help.</p>
<p>I think that it would be useful to the people of South Ayrshire if the family history services were available in all libraries (e.g. access to Find My Past and vouchers for Scotland's People) Not everyone is able to travel to Ayr.</p>
<p>Anytime I have reported something such as a road fault or dog fouling, it takes a long time for anyone to respond. I have reported two incidents (one of each) on the 27th December and there was no response by email. There is poor customer service. If residents take the time to report a problem then it should be followed up.</p>