

Introduction

There were 647 responses to Citizens Panel 16, a significant increase on recent surveys. The two surveys prior to this one, in July and November 2015, had received 494 and 493 responses.

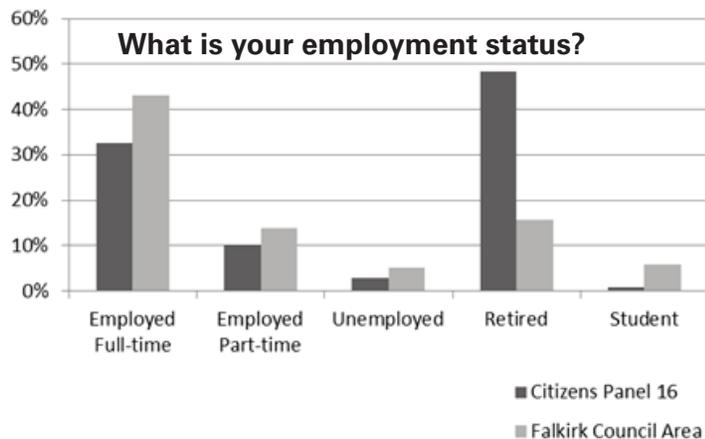
If you have any queries about the Citizens Panel questionnaire, or if you want to receive questionnaires and feedback reports in other formats (e.g. Braille, large print, a different language etc.), please contact us at citizenspanel@falkirk.gov.uk, or call 01324 506260.



Who is the Citizens Panel?

The demographic questions we ask respondents allow us to compare the make-up of the Panel with the population of the Falkirk Council area. This lets us know how representative the views of respondents are. Not everyone answers these questions. Around 10% of respondents did not answer questions on age, gender, economic activity and disability.

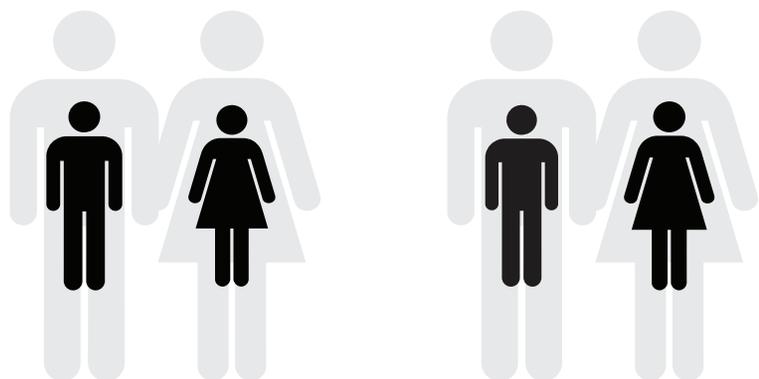
With that in mind, a third of respondents are employed full-time (33%) compared with 43% across the Council area. 48% of respondents are retired, which is three times the Council area's figure of 16%. 10% of respondents have part-time jobs, which is slightly less than 14% across the Council area. 3% of respondents are unemployed, which is less than 5% of the Council area population. Just under 1% of respondents are students, compared with 6% of the total area population.



17% of respondents to the 16th survey stated they had a disability. This compares with 30% of people across the Council area.

The proportion of men and women is slightly different when comparing Panel respondents this time to the Council area population. There is a much greater difference when we look at whether or not people identify themselves as having a disability. These comparisons are shown on the figure below.

This means that the Citizens Panel is not representative of the Council area's population. It is, however, still very valuable in helping us understand how people's lives are affected by the services we provide. This allows us to plan services better.



Citizen's Panel:
51% Male Respondants
49% Female Respondants

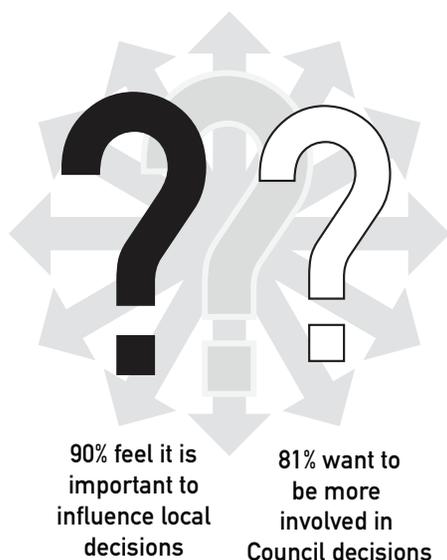
Falkirk Council Area:
49% Male
51% Female

Community Participation

We Asked: a few questions about people's views on being involved with the decision making of the Council. We asked about the importance people attached to being involved in local decisions and the decision making of the Council, how good people feel we are at consulting local people and if people had contacted the Council in the last 12 months.

You Said: We gave people a series of statements about being involved in decision making and nearly everyone (646) gave responses. Most people felt it was very important for them to have a say in decisions about their local area, 48% strongly agreed to this and 42% agreed. Only 1% disagreed. 81% wanted to be more involved in the decisions the Council takes about their local area. Only 2% did not want to be more involved. A third of respondents (33%) felt that the Council is good at consulting and involving local people, whilst 27% disagreed. A higher number 41% neither agreed nor disagreed. This is particularly telling, as people were responding in a Council survey. Around a third (32%) agreed to some extent that the Council responds to the views of local people, 29% disagreed and 41% neither agreed nor disagreed.

402 respondents stated that they had contacted a variety of public bodies about something affecting their community in the last 12 months. Two-thirds of respondents had contacted a Council office or service and 43% had been in touch with a Local Councillor. Around a fifth (27%) of respondents had contacted an MP or MSP. Fewer people had been in touch with a Community Council or Tenants and Residents Association (12% and 5%, respectively).



639 people told us how they would go about trying to influence local decisions. The most common method (68%) was through a local Councillor. 56% of respondents would contact a Council office or service. 47% would attend a public meeting, 44% would sign a petition and 43% would go to either an MP or an MSP. A quarter (25%) would go to a Council meeting. 18% would use social media and 13% would speak to the local media. Fewer people would get involved in ways that require greater time commitments. 15% would set up or join a community group and 9% would a petition, for instance.

There was a high response to the question on how influencing decisions could be made easier. 626 people answered this question. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of respondents indicated they could have more influence if they knew what issues were being considered. 58% felt they could influence decisions more if they could give their opinion online or by email. 53% felt they could have more say if the Council asked them. 25% of respondents felt they could wield more influence if they could get involved in a group making decisions about their local area. 24% felt not having enough time was a barrier.

We Did: The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 will significantly change the way that communities can influence the decision making of public authorities, including the Council. Community groups will be able to make participation requests to being involved, where reasonable, in the design and delivery of services. Local communities will be able to have a direct say in how a certain level of public money is spent through Participatory Budgeting. Local people will be consulted more through Local Community Planning. Community groups will be able to make Asset Transfer Requests to buy or lease certain properties or land owned by the Council. The Act is far-reaching and will change how you can get involved with the Council.

The Council has a dedicated page on our website for consultations. This can be found at:

<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/consultations-surveys/>. We also provide information on upcoming and open consultations in Falkirk Council News and write out to service users directly when appropriate. Open surveys are also promoted through Twitter.

Councillors all run local surgeries and there are Community Councils for most places in the Council area. There are currently 18 active Community Councils out of a possible 23. More details can be found at:

<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/people-communities/community-councils/>.

Citizens Panel Review

We Asked: for your thoughts and opinions on the Citizens Panel itself. We asked about the design of questionnaires, the frequency of surveys, how useful you find the feedback and if there were any topics you were particularly interested in.

You Said: 639 people responded to the questions on questionnaire design. 93% of respondents felt the questionnaires were easy to answer, whilst 1% disagreed. 70% felt the questionnaires are interesting, 3% disagreed and 27% sat on the fence. 81% felt the questionnaires were a good way for the Council to consult with local people, 4% disagreed and the rest were undecided.

630 people responded to the question of how often we should carry out surveys of the Citizens Panel. 79% felt 3 times a year was about right, whilst 20% felt this was too few.

220 people wrote in suggested topics for inclusion in future Citizens Panel surveys. The most common suggestions for questions included Council budgets (24%), parking and roads (19%), housing (15%), planning and environment (15%), dog fouling and littering (9%) and refuse collection (9%).

Of the 639 people who answered the question on how often they read feedback reports, 51% did so regularly. 10% never read the feedback reports and 39% did so occasionally, depending on the subjects. 568 people gave us more details on the feedback reports. 70% of them felt feedback reports always informed them of action that had been taken as a result of survey findings, with 27% undecided. 74% felt the feedback reports were easy to understand, but a smaller proportion (48%) felt the feedback showed that we listen to what you are telling us. 12% felt we do not listen to what you are telling us.

'The council choose which suits them and ignores the many people treated badly by the council, when publishing results nothing changes for the better as a result of the questionnaires or results.'

'There should be more open questions, that way you will get more candid answers. Feedback does not always reflect the information provided or discussion in full, steered towards what the Council wants to do anyway. Questions sometimes tailored to get the answer Council wants.'

'People on the citizens panel are already folk who are actively involved - so it's already biased - we're probably just a bunch of do-gooders who think we know best! not a broad cross-section of views.'

'While the feedback reports are helpful it might be useful to review what action has been taken further down the line and have this available on the council website. As saying what will be done and doing it can be two different things.'

We Did: You may have noticed some changes recently to the way that the Citizens Panel questionnaire and feedback reports are presented. For example, we have removed front and back covers and gone to a black and white design. This is to reduce the costs of printing for both ourselves Panel members who print off their own copies. We have also made some changes to question design to ensure that questions are not leading and people are offered the opportunity to make additional comments. We ask a limited number of open questions to ensure that the questionnaires take a reasonable time to complete, including too many would likely reduce the number of responses we receive. We have also tried to make questionnaires shorter, with related themes to make them easier to fill in.

We do listen to suggestions made by Panel members. For example, we now email results out Citizens Panel results to Panel members. This was a suggestion made by a Panel member in Citizens Panel 16. We will also include information on how findings have changed Council services over the longer term, as the comment above suggested. Recent questionnaires and feedback reports can be accessed online at:

<http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/consultations-surveys/citizens-panel.aspx>.

We do mail feedback reports to postal Panel members. If you have not been receiving feedback reports regularly please email me at jonny.pickering@falkirk.gov.uk or phone me on 01324 506260.

We usually use a range of methods for speaking with people. For example, in Citizens Panel 15 we asked questions to inform the Local Housing Strategy. We are also carrying out focus groups and other surveys with particular groups across the Council area. This includes young people, people from minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities.

We do not report back on every question we ask, simply because of space considerations. However, the findings we present back should be balanced. The whole point of the Citizens Panel is to inform the way we work and improve the way we design and deliver services. Sometimes we cannot take forward people's suggestions and this is typically due to financial or practical constraints. We look at the experiences and views of the public along with service users and services themselves.

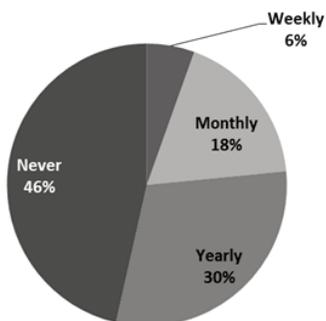
Contacting the Council

We Asked: about people's experiences of contacting the Council and how satisfactory our responses were. We asked how people contact the Council and how often. We asked how people find out about the services we provide.

You Said: 630 people told us how satisfied they were with different aspects of contacting the Council. Nearly half of the respondents were (fairly or very) satisfied with the ease of finding relevant information on the Council website (60%), the ease of finding the correct phone number to call (63%), helpfulness and courtesy of staff (71%), knowledge of staff (60%) and the overall service they received (60%). People were dissatisfied with the ease of getting through to the right person to help them (24%) and how quickly the phone was answered (22%). Between a quarter to a third of people were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their experiences of contacting the Council.

483 people said they had contacted the Council in the last twelve months. Half of the respondents called the Council Contact Centre, and around a third called a Council service directly or emailed the Council. Just over a quarter of respondents went to a One Stop Shop or Council Office. Nearly a fifth of respondents contacted the Council via its website.

How Often Respondents Visited Council Premises



406 people told us which services they had contacted. The most common service people contacted in the last 12 months was Waste Management, indicated by 146 responses. Most of these related to bin collection and/or recycling. 62 people indicated they had contacted Housing and 42 had contacted either Roads or Transport.

471 people told us the nature of their contact with the Council. Around a third (32%) of people had been in touch to request a service, such as a bulky uplift. Over a quarter of people (28%) had reported information to the Council, 24% had complained about a service, 23% had sought information, 13% had made a payment and 6% had applied for a service (e.g. a Council house). These figures taken into account the 'other' open responses people provided us with.



50% phoned a Council Service

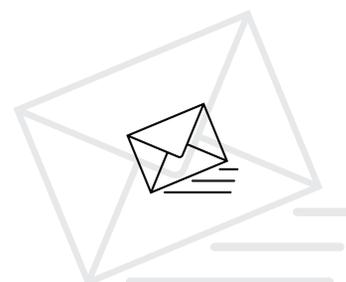
32% phoned the Council Contact Centre



18% via the Council Website



27% visited a One Stop Shop or Council Office



33% e-mailed the Council

The majority of respondents told us they had got what they were looking for and were treated well by Council staff (61%). A quarter of respondents (24%) indicated they did not get what they were looking for, but they were treated well. 9% did not get what they were looking for and felt they were not treated well. 7% felt they got what they were looking for, but felt they were not treated well. This means that 85% of respondents felt they were treated well and 68% got what they were looking for. There were 460 respondents to this question.

The most popular method of requesting a service from the Council was, in descending order: over the phone, by email, through the Council website, in person, by letter and through social media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter). 613 people reported their preferences to us here.

The majority of 609 respondents, over two-thirds (70%) found out about Council news and services through Council publications like Falkirk Council News. Two-thirds (66%) get that information through a local newspaper, 48% from word of mouth and 44% through the Council website.

Over half (57%) of 617 respondents were very interested in being informed on how the Council is performing, with over a third (39%) quite interested. 4% of respondents were not interested in being kept informed the Council's performance.

The main areas of interest people identified were the Council budget (21%), all areas of Council business (16%) and roads (11%). 398 people responded to this question.

The majority of 603 respondents, two-thirds (66%), knew how to make a complaint to the Council. A quarter (25%) did not know how to make a complaint and 9% were not sure. 196 people had previously made a complaint to the Council, with the majority of people (83%) receiving a response from us. 52% felt they had received a suitable solution to their complaint, but 48% did not.

We received further detail on specific parts of the complaint process, including the understandability of information made available, sensitivity of staff, the time taken to reach a solution, the final outcome and the overall service that was provided. Nearly half (49%) of 190 respondents were satisfied to some extent by the overall service they received during the complaints procedure, around a third (31%) were dissatisfied, more or less. The thing people most people were dissatisfied with was the final outcome they received (40%) and the thing people were most satisfied with was the sensitivity of staff (60%).

We Did: This information will be reviewed by the Corporate Complaints Group and an improvement plan will be developed to address its findings. The feedback will also be taken into account by the Scrutiny Panel of Members which is about to review the operation of the procedure.