

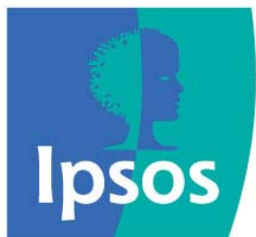
Ipsos MORI

BVPI Benefits Survey 2006/7

Research Report for the London Borough of Brent



April 2007



- Introduction
- Methodology
- Survey sample profile
- Main findings
- Summary

Introduction and Methodology

Background and objectives

This report presents the main findings from the BVPI Benefits Survey conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Brent Council.

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) are part of the performance management framework for local authorities, introduced by the Government since 1997. As part of the duty of Best Value introduced in the Local Government Act 1999, authorities are required to seek continuous improvement in their services. Best Value Performance Indicators are designed to monitor service improvement with regard to the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of service delivery.

The Government specifies that local authorities (and other best value authorities) collect and report on a number of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that explicitly reflect users' perceptions of a range of services provided. This document contains the findings of a "Benefits Survey" carried out for Brent Council.

The Government has prescribed in detail what it believes to be the minimum requirements for the conduct of the survey^[1]. This is to ensure comparability of data across authorities. The minimum requirements are specified in the Audit Commission publication *Best Value Performance Indicators for 2006/7: Guidance for undertaking the Best Value Survey*

[1] The full guidance can be downloaded from www.survey.bvpi.gov.uk

Structure of this report

After this introduction, this report includes a technical note on the methodology used, the main survey findings, and a summary. Provided separately is a marked-up questionnaire that provides quick reference to all the headline findings. Computer tables are also provided as a separate document – the tables include detailed analysis of the findings by a range of variables such as gender, age ethnicity and success of claim. In addition, this report provides technical details relating to the conduct of the survey, and statistical reliability index.

Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI would like to thank Jon Zlotnick and Vikash Mistry at Brent Council for their help in conducting this survey, as well as to those who participated in the survey.

Publication of the findings

As Brent Council has engaged Ipsos MORI to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect the interests of both organisations by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of findings. As part of our standard terms and conditions of contract, the publication of the findings of this research is therefore subject to advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

Anna Carlsson
John Kennedy
Rhonda Wake
April 2007

Methodology

A postal self-completion methodology is prescribed for all the of the 2006/7 BVPI surveys (except the library survey).

Sampling

Unlike other BVPI surveys, the benefits survey is conducted over two fieldwork periods, using sample gathered in two sampling windows. The first wave of the survey took place between August and November 2006. Ipsos MORI mailed out a questionnaire to a random sample of 800 claimants who had had a decision on their claim between **01 June and 28 July 2006**. In wave 2, running from January to march 2007, 1,150 questionnaires were mailed out to a random sample of claimants who had received a decision on their claim between **01 November and 29 December 2006**. The target number of completed questionnaires over both waves is 625 (i.e. 312 or 313 returns per wave).

The questionnaire

To meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act, CLG specified that a covering letter stating the purpose for which the data is being collected must be sent with each questionnaire. The front page of each questionnaire was branded with the Council's and Ipsos MORI logos and contained a covering letter from the Head of Benefits at Brent Council, Mr David Oates. The questionnaire itself was designed using the Benefits Survey questionnaire template provided by the Audit Commission for the collection of the BVPIs. The standardised nature of the questions was maintained in line with the requirements. The wording used in the covering letters was derived from CLG and Audit Commission guidance.

The Audit Commission and CLG prescribed that the Benefits Survey questionnaire template be used in full to collect the data. The questions set in the questionnaire are those which the Government requires each authority to ask in order to measure performance indicators. Altering the wording of questions or omitting questions was prohibited since it reduces the ability to make comparisons with other authorities using the questionnaire.

Adding questions to collect more detailed information on services and issues which are relevant was permitted, but authorities were urged to do this with caution. Brent Council asked three additional questions.

Questionnaire reminders

The guidance specifies that authorities should take all reasonable steps possible to maximise their response rates and should in no circumstances stop making efforts to boost them. For a postal survey, the guidance states that authorities should aim to maximise the response rate by sending out at least two reminder questionnaires. The covering letter has to be sent with reminders reflecting the fact that it is a reminder, while still meeting data protection requirements. All correspondence (including outer envelopes) had to include the authority logo.

Fieldwork

The Audit Commission and CLG specify that fieldwork for the first wave must start in August, with no new mailings sent out after 31 August. And fieldwork for wave 2 must commence in January 2007, with no new mailings sent after 31 January.

The survey fieldwork methodology is detailed below:

Wave 1

- **First mailout:** questionnaires posted to 800 claimants on 30 August 2006
- **First reminder questionnaire:** posted to individuals in the sample who, at the 'cut off' point for the first mailout, had not returned the questionnaire;
- **Second reminder questionnaire:** posted to individuals in the sample who, at the 'cut off' point for the first reminder mailing had not returned the questionnaire. The final 'cut-off' date for all questionnaires to be processed and uploaded was 30 November 2006.

Wave 2

- **First mailout:** questionnaires posted to 1,000 claimants on 19 January 2007
- **First reminder questionnaire:** posted to individuals in the sample who, at the 'cut off' point for the first mailout, had not returned the questionnaire;
- **Second reminder questionnaire:** posted to individuals in the sample who, at the 'cut off' point for the first reminder mailing had not returned the questionnaire. The final 'cut-off' date for all questionnaires to be processed and uploaded was 30 March 2007.

Booking in

Returned questionnaires were booked in on a daily basis. The number of valid and void (not completed) returns were recorded in our Survey Management System. This allowed for the daily calculation and monitoring of response rates and 'deadwood' in the sample.

Response rates

Results are based upon 626 completed questionnaires. This breaks down as:

- 260 wave 1 questionnaires
- 366 wave 2 questionnaires

The final adjusted response rate is **35%**.

Weighting

Data are unweighted.

Data processing

All questionnaires returned by respondents were booked in and scanned by Ipsos MORI and Data Liberation Ltd. Once captured electronically, data processing was undertaken by Ipsos MORI.

Quality control

The quality of data is assured through checks embedded in the scanning process. The software used is set up to only accept valid responses. With all tick box information, the confidence of the scanning software is set at a tested level and anything outside this confidence level is filtered through to a human verification process. In the verification process any questionable responses are highlighted and subsequently confirmed or corrected. All responses which contain text were also sent for verification.

Calculating results

In accordance with guidance, the base for questions is “valid responses” or all those providing an answer. The base size may, therefore, vary from question to question, and from the total sample size, depending on the extent of non response. Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume an asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a percent but greater than zero

Sampling tolerances

All survey results are subject to sampling tolerances. The sample tolerances that apply to the percentage results in this report are given in the table at the end of this report.

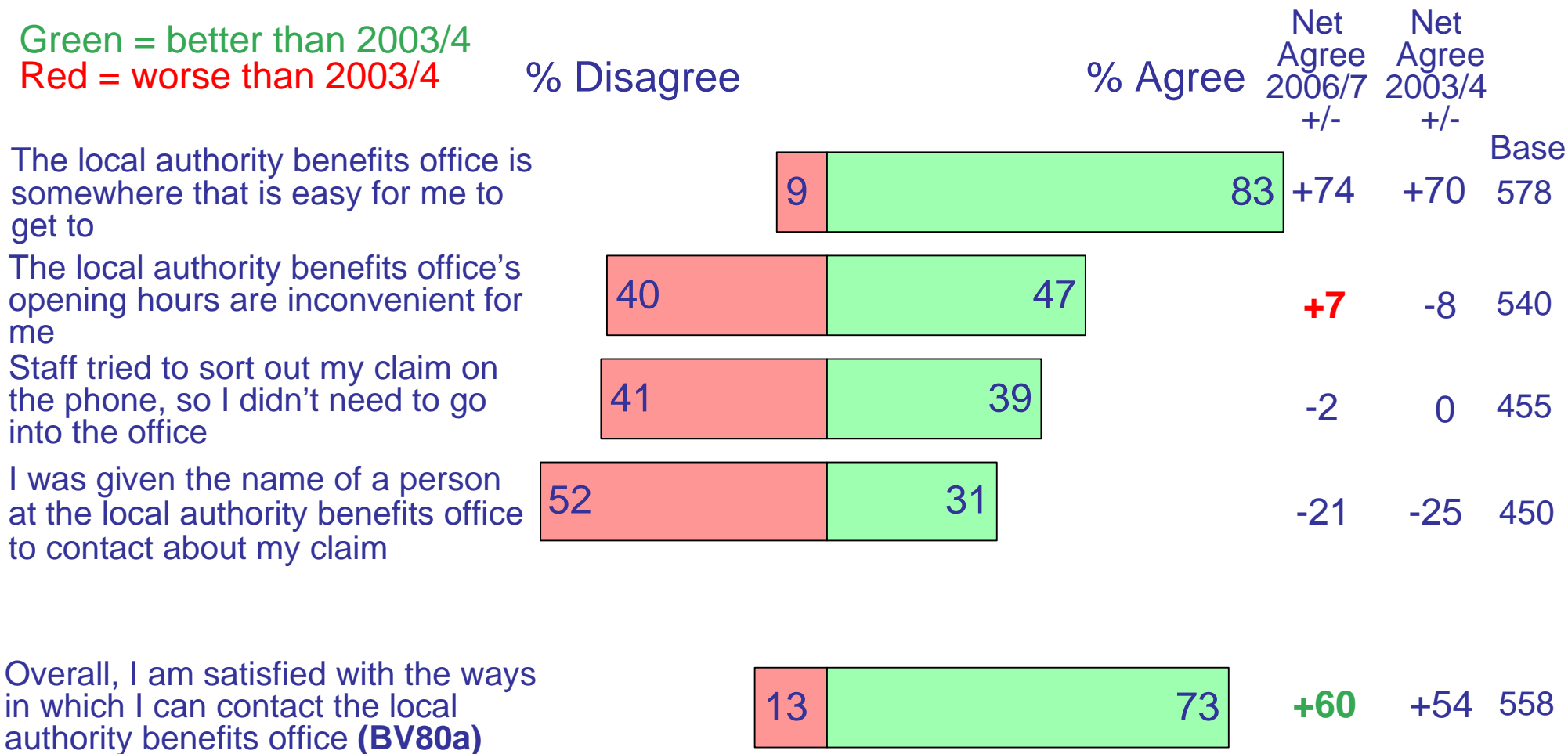
Main findings

Getting in touch with the Benefits Office

Q1 Thinking about your last Housing/Council Tax Benefit claim, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Green = better than 2003/4

Red = worse than 2003/4

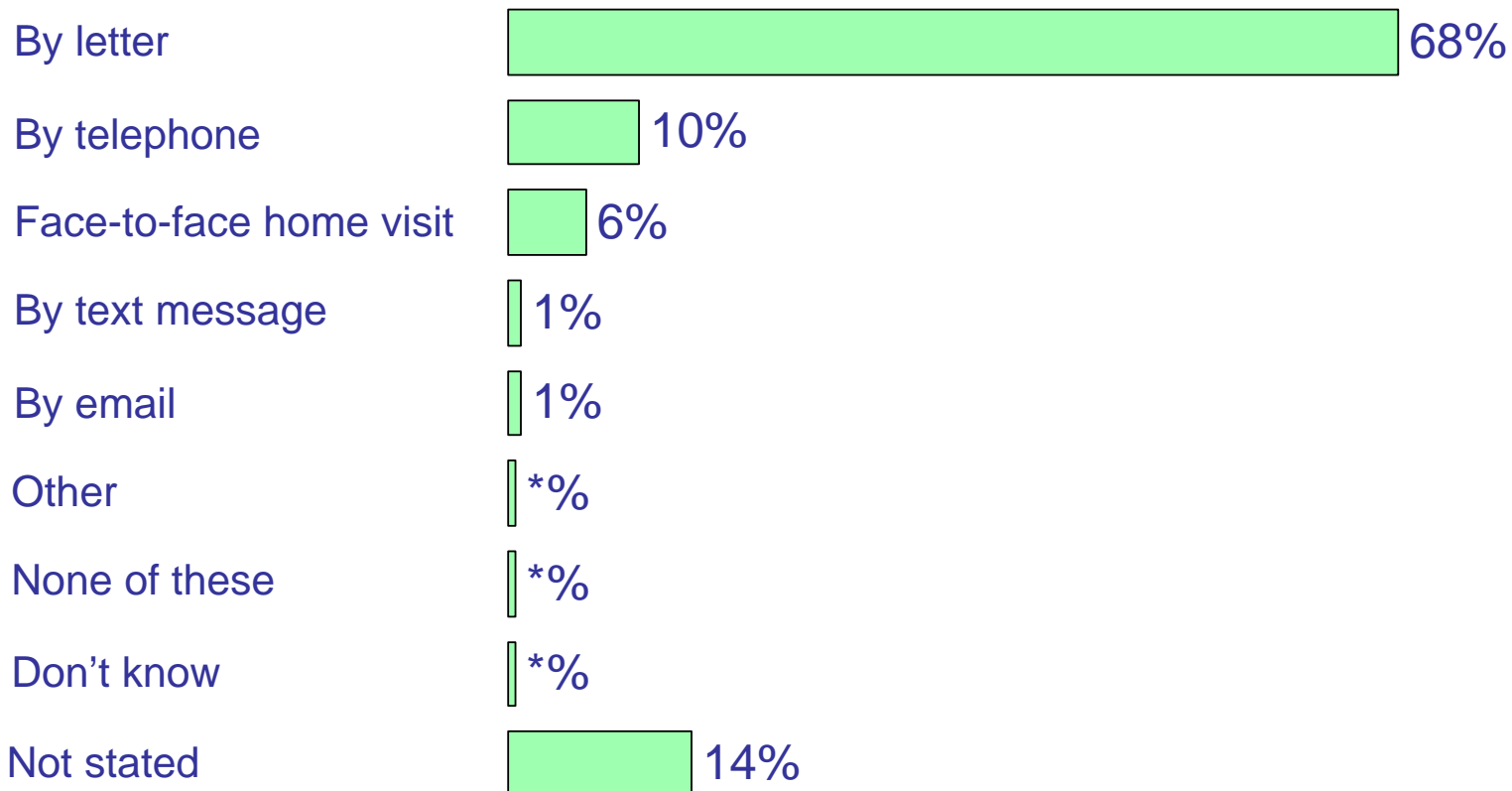


Base: Brent Council benefits applicants expressing an opinion.

Fieldwork: August to November 2006 for wave 1 and January to March for wave 2

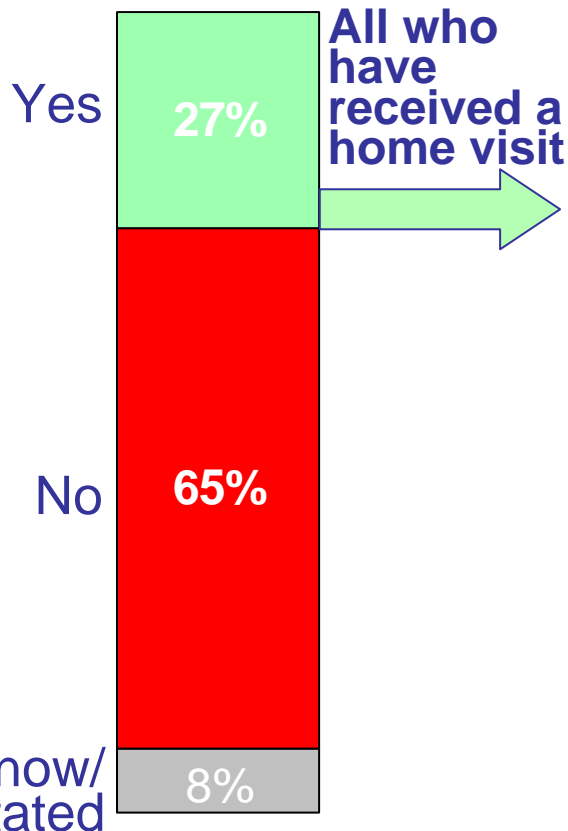
Contacting the claimant

Q2 *If the housing benefit service at Brent Council needed to contact you about your claim for benefits, which method, if any, would you most prefer to be contacted?*



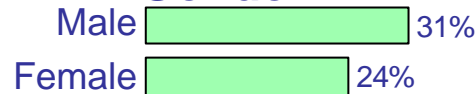
Home visits

Q3 *Have you received a home visit from Brent Council's housing benefits service in the last 12 months?*

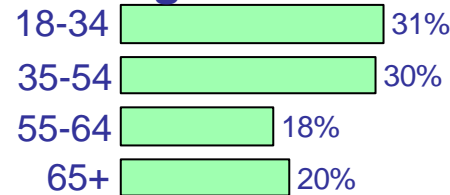


All who have received a home visit

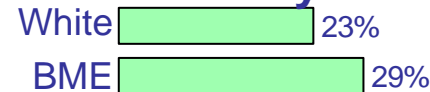
Gender



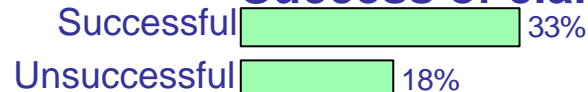
Age



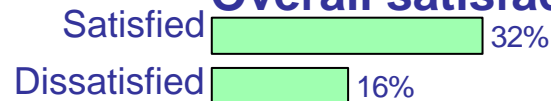
Ethnicity



Success of claim

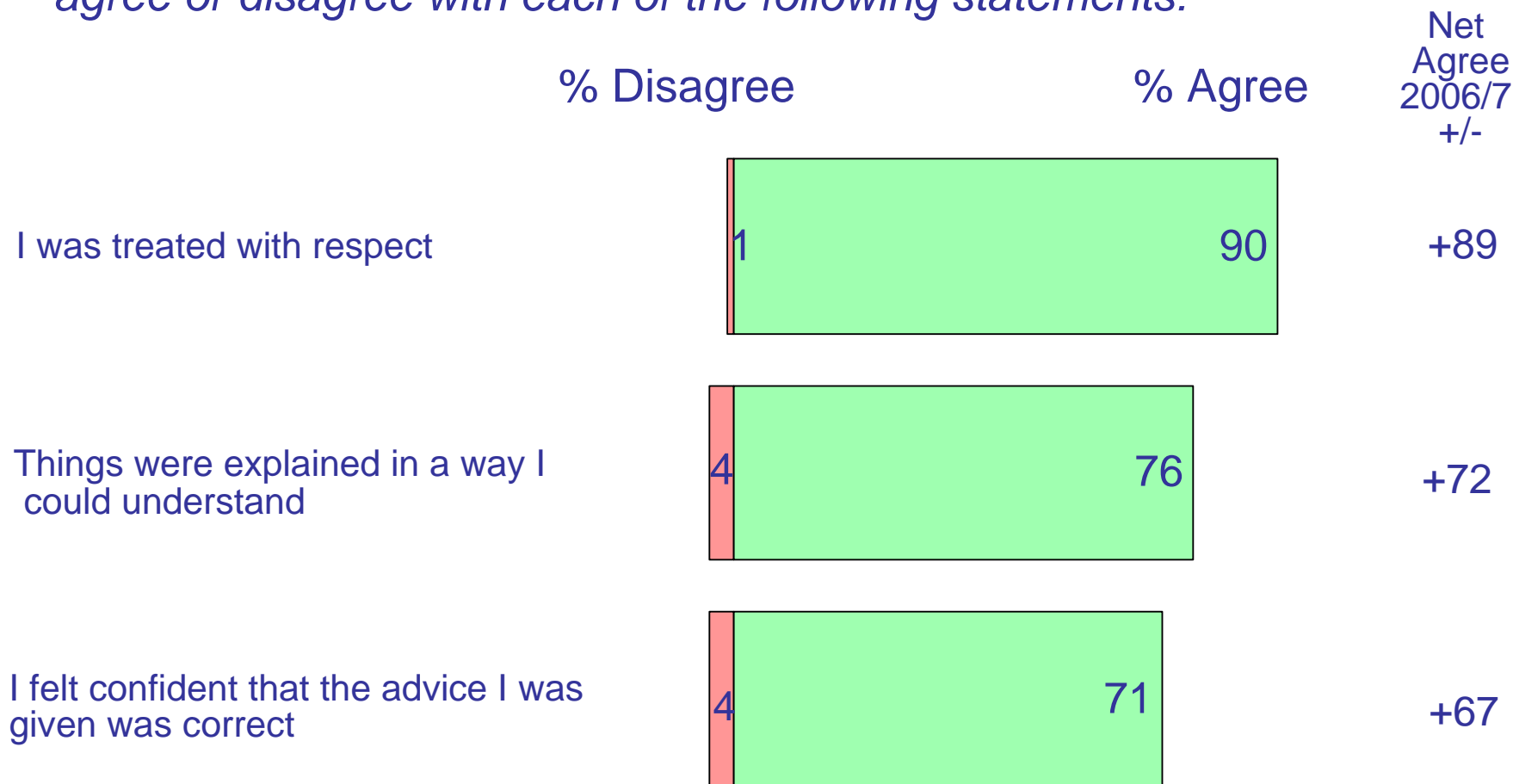


Overall satisfaction



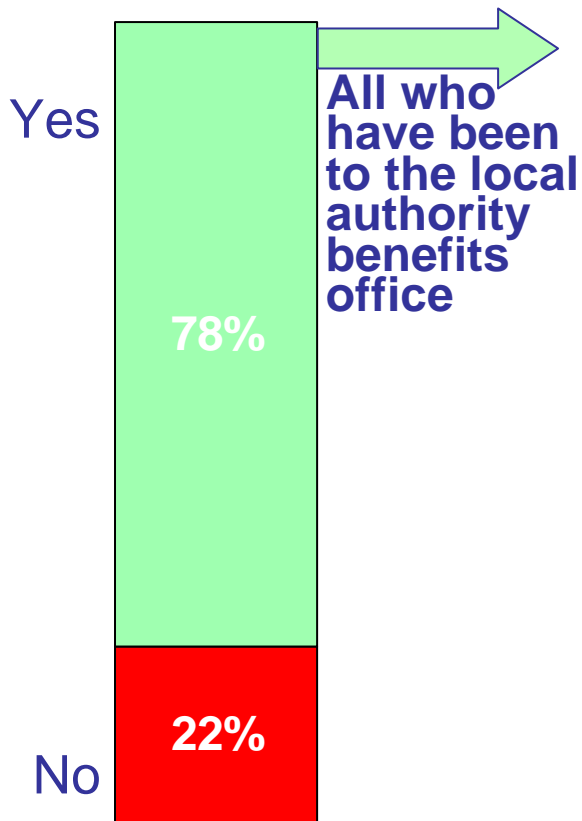
Views of the home visit

Q4 *Thinking about the last time you received a home visit from Brent Council's housing benefits service within the last 12 months, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:*

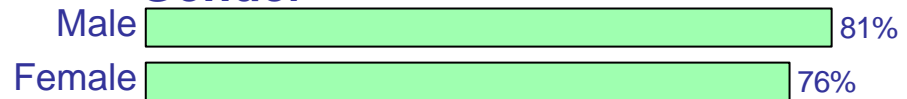


Visiting the benefits office on most recent claim

Q5 Did you go to your local authority benefits office when you made your most recent claim?



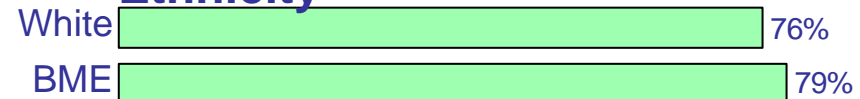
Gender



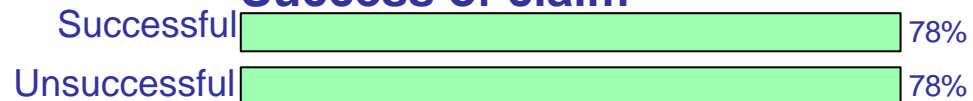
Age



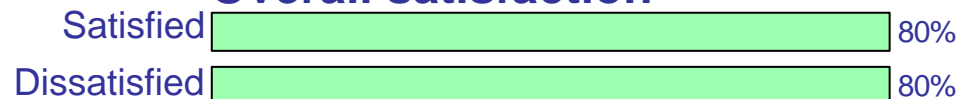
Ethnicity



Success of claim



Overall satisfaction

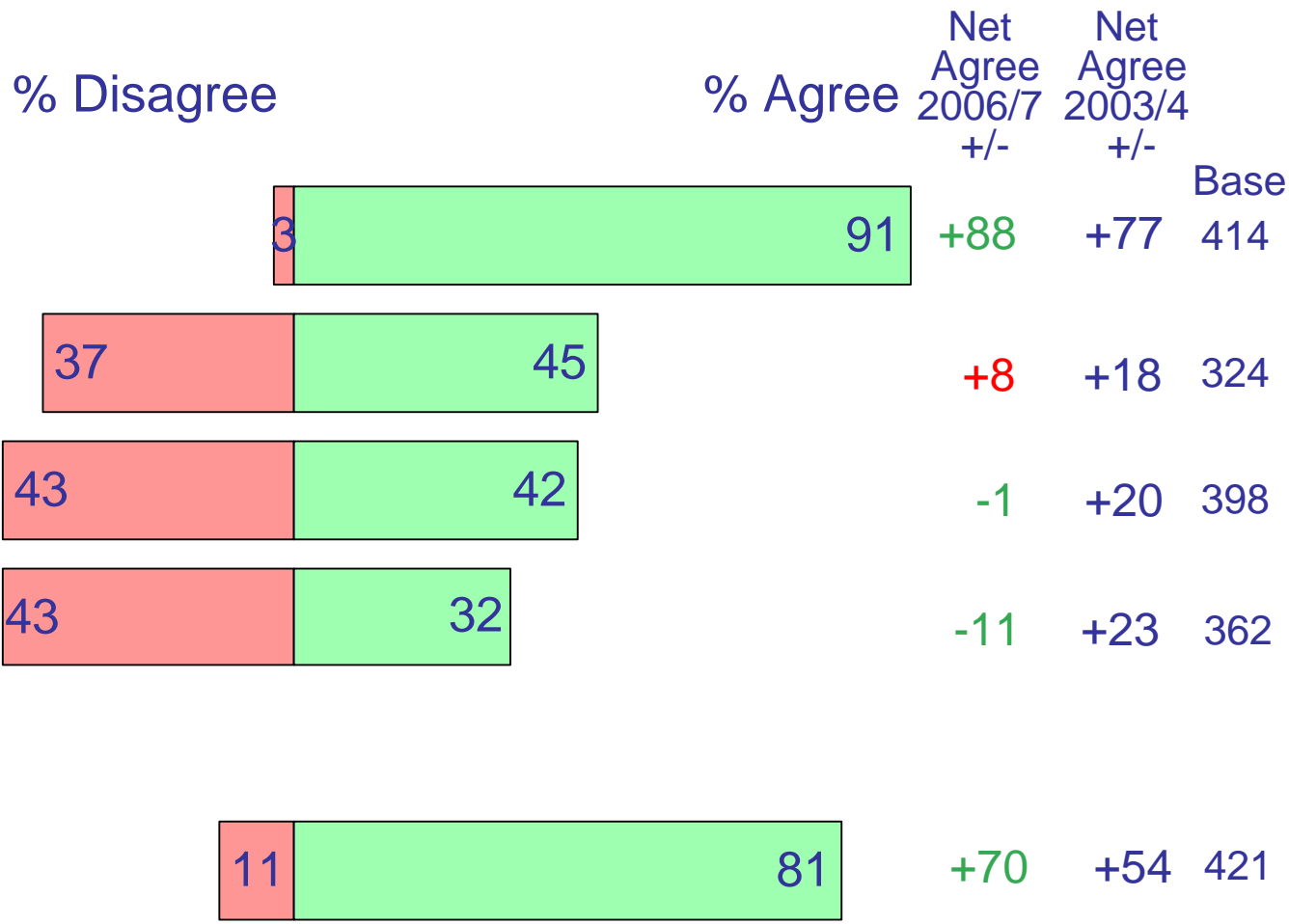


Experience of visiting the benefits office

Q6 Thinking about your last Housing/Council Tax Benefit claim, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

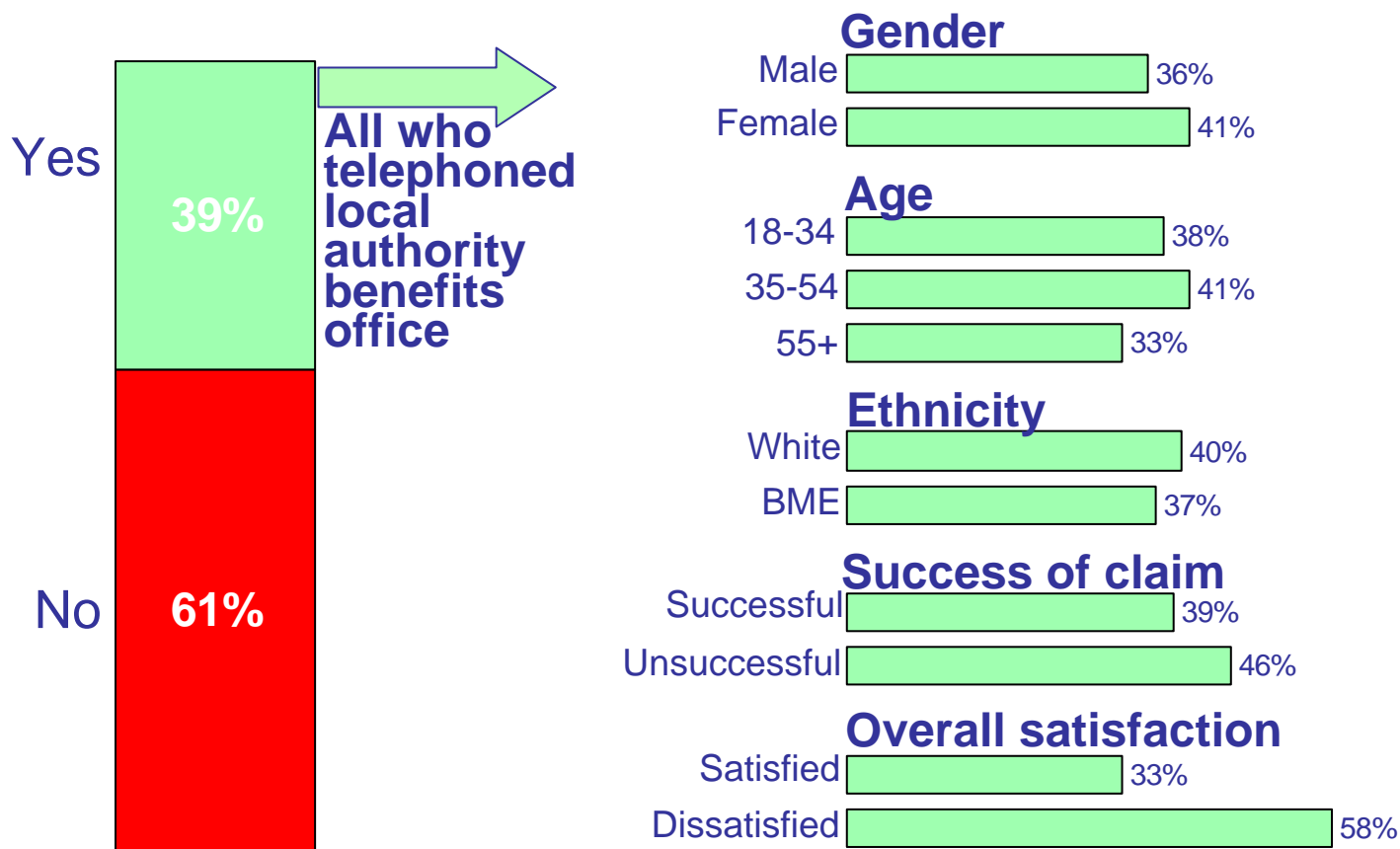
Green = better than 2003/4

Red = worse than 2003/4



Telephoning the benefits office on most recent claim

Q7 Did you telephone your local authority benefits office when you made your most recent claim?



Telephoning the benefits office

Q8 Thinking about your last Housing/Council Tax Benefit claim, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Green = better than 2003/4

Red = worse than 2003/4

% Disagree

% Agree

Net Agree
2006/7
+/-

Net Agree
2003/4
+/-

Base

The telephone call I made to the local authority benefits office was answered quickly



+35

-5

211

Once the call...had been answered, my query was dealt with swiftly



+24

+5

207

...I was transferred between several different people



-15

+1

202

...it was difficult to speak to the right member of staff



-22

-2

203

Overall, I am satisfied with the telephone service provided by my local authority benefits office
(BV80c)



+39

+14

206

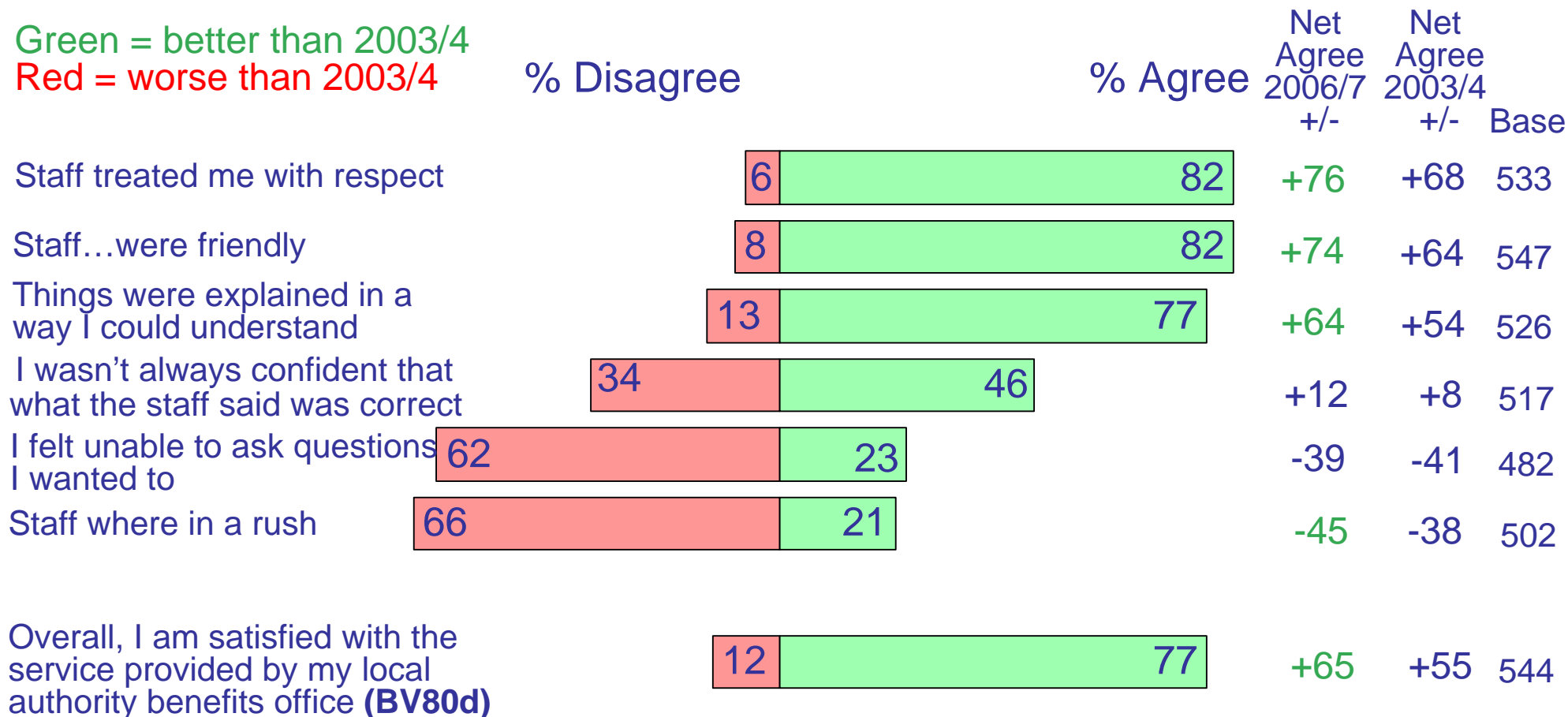
Base: Brent Council benefits applicants who telephoned their local office to make most recent claim and expressing an opinion. Fieldwork: August to November 2006 for wave 1 and January to March for wave 2

Impressions of staff in the benefits office

Q9 Thinking about your last Housing/Council Tax Benefit claim, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Green = better than 2003/4

Red = worse than 2003/4



Base: Brent Council benefits applicants expressing an opinion.

Fieldwork: August to November 2006 for wave 1 and January to March for wave 2

The benefits survey forms

Q10 Thinking about your last Housing/Council Tax Benefit claim, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Green = better than 2003/4

Red = worse than 2003/4

% Disagree

% Agree

Net Agree
2006/7
+/-

Net Agree
2003/4
+/-

Base

The information that came with the form was helpful



+64

+59

549

I could fill the form quickly

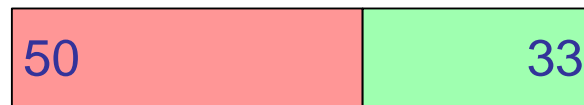


+19

+28

546

The letters sent about my claim where difficult to understand



-17

-22

550

The housing/council tax claim form was difficult to fill in



-15

-27

559

Overall, I am satisfied with the housing/council tax benefits claim form (BV80e)



+53

+52

571

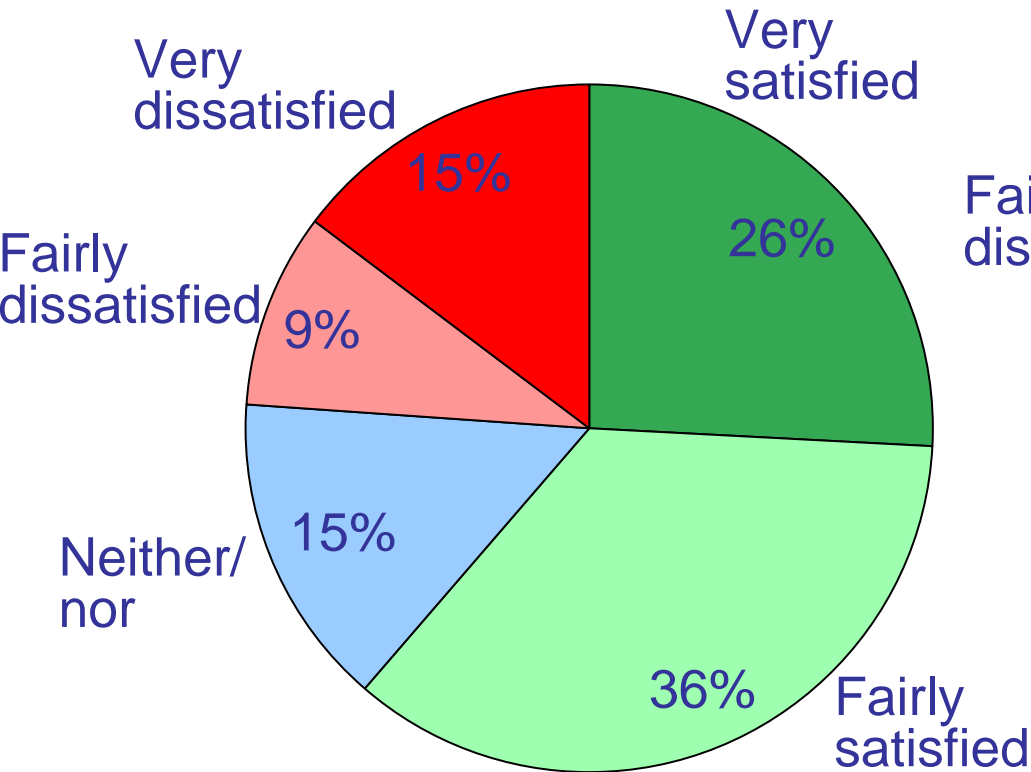
Base: Brent Council benefits applicants expressing an opinion.

Fieldwork: August to November 2006 for wave 1 and January to March for wave 2

How quickly claim was sorted (BV80f)

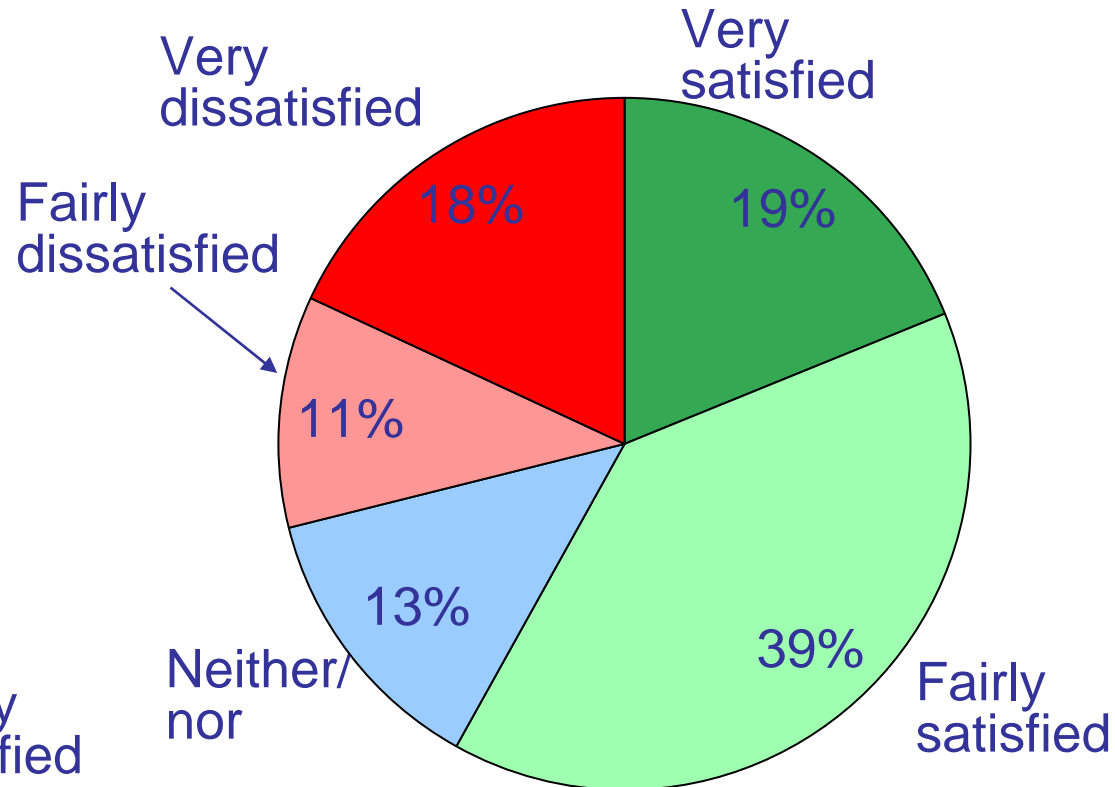
Q11 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of time it took to tell you whether your claim for housing/council tax benefits was successful or not?

2006



Net sat. score in 2006 = +37

2003

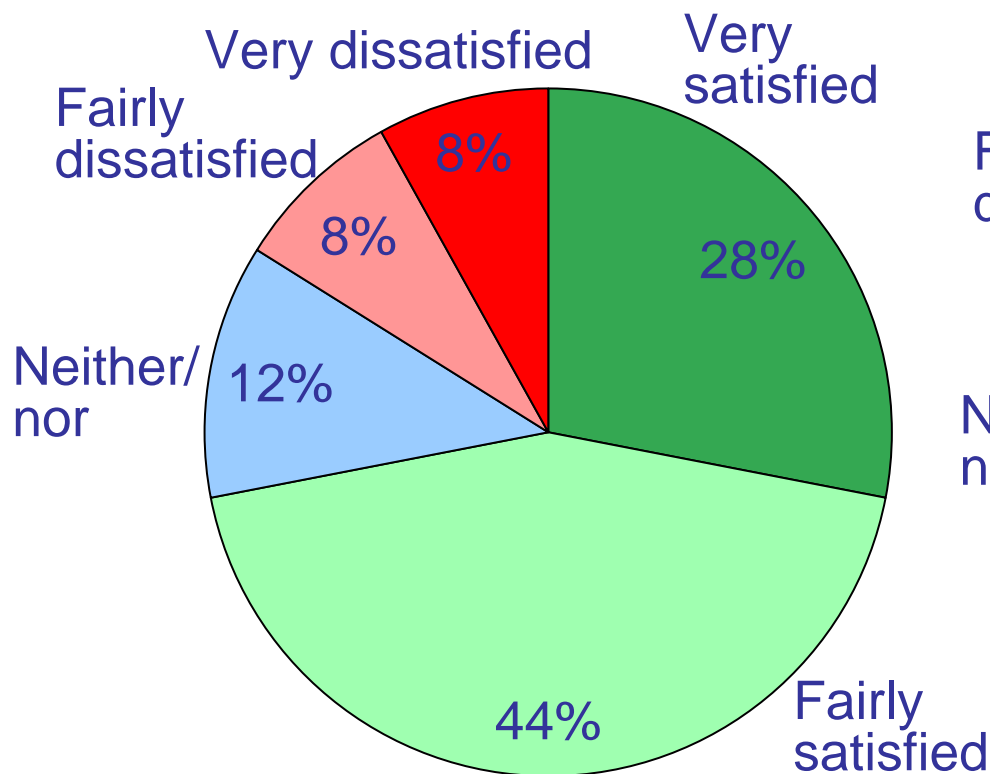


Net sat. score in 2003 = +29

Overall satisfaction (BV80g)

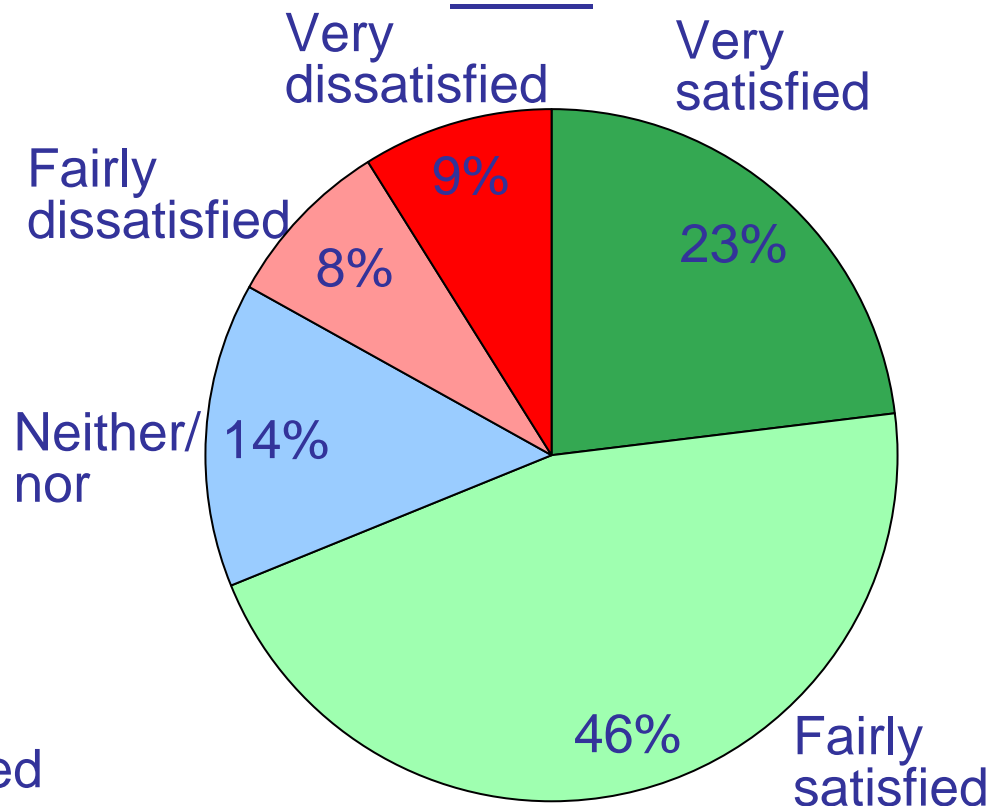
Q12 Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service you receive from the local authority benefits office?

2006



Net sat. score in 2006 = +56

2003

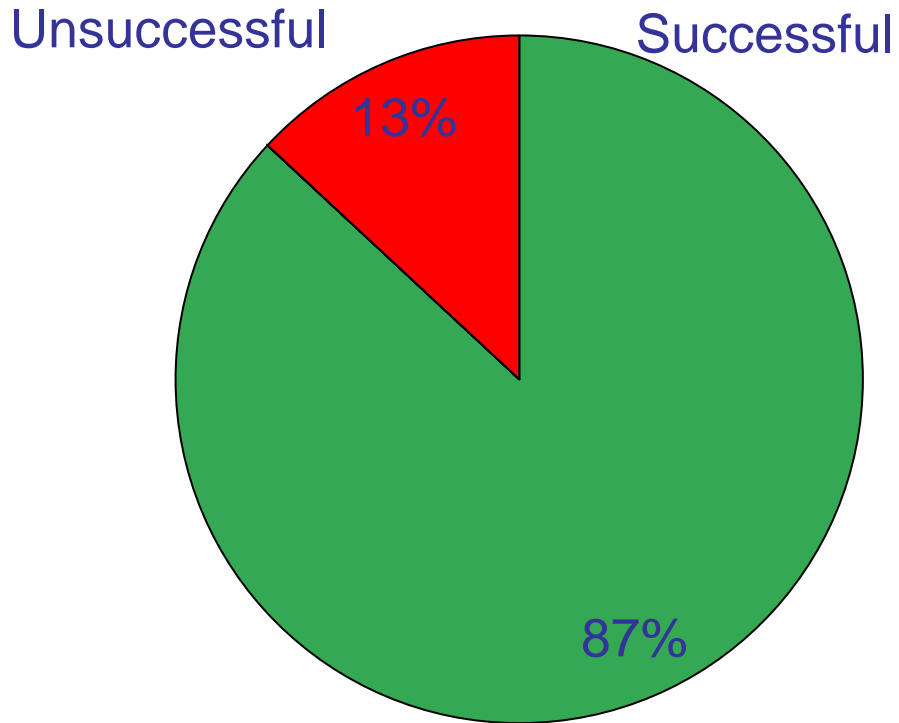


Net sat. score in 2003 = +52

Success of claim

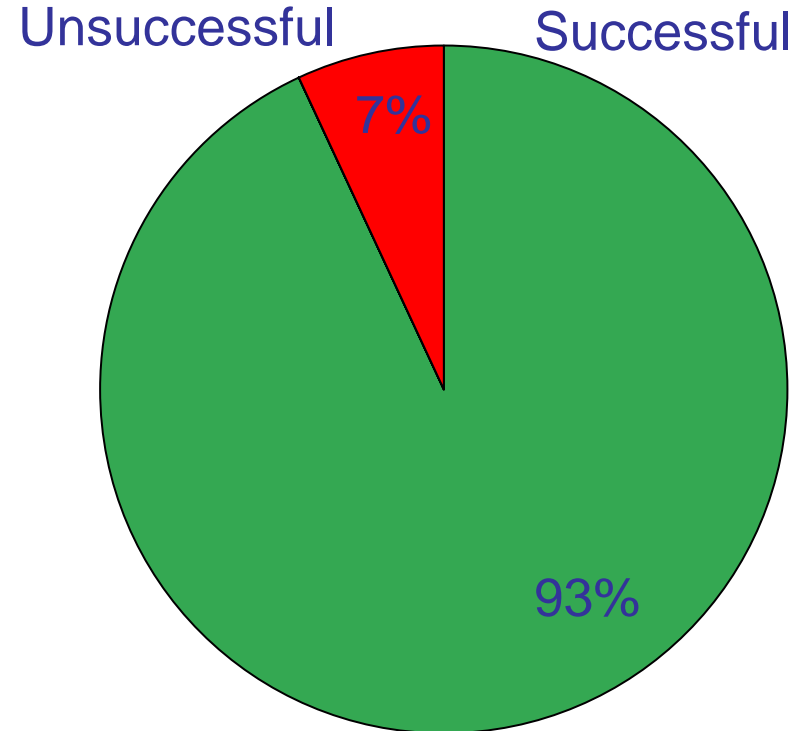
Q13 Was your claim successful or unsuccessful?

2006



Net score in 2006 = +74

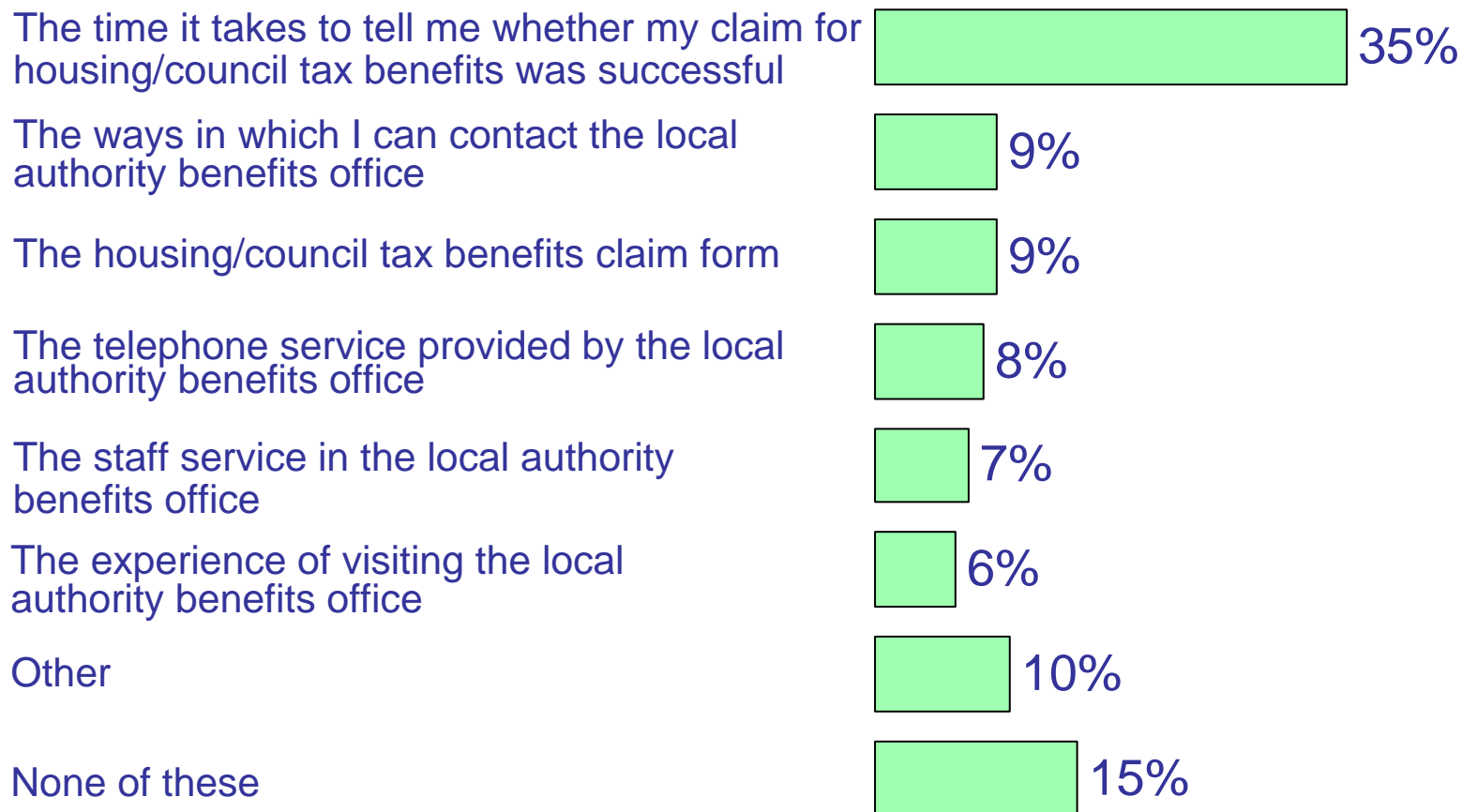
2003



Net score in 2003 = +86

What needs improving?

Q14 Thinking about the overall service you receive from the local authority benefits office, which one on the list below do you think most needs improving?



Summary

Some of the key points from the Brent Council BVPI Benefits Survey 2006 are summarised below:

- 87% of those who last made a claim for housing/council tax benefit were successful.
- Positively, those who are satisfied with the service they receive from their local benefits office, outnumber those who are dissatisfied by more than four to one (72% and 16% respectively).
- And of those who visited their local benefits office to make their most recent claim, most (81%) are satisfied with the overall experience of their visit.
- However, claimants are less positive about length of time taken for staff to deal with their claim. Of those who visited their local benefits office to make their most recent claim, as many disagree (43%) as agree (42%) that they had to wait a long time before seeing the person they needed to.

Summary

- Of those who telephoned their local benefits office to make their most recent claim, three in five (60%) agree that their telephone call was answered quickly – one in four (25%) disagree.
- However, while just over half (54%) agree that their query was dealt with swiftly, three in ten (30%) disagree.
- The time it takes to inform claimants of the outcome of their claim is the main aspect in need of improvement – a third of those who took part in the survey mention this aspect. One in seven (15%) respondents feel that there are no aspects in need of improvement.
- Overall, the majority (81%) of those who visited their local authority benefits office (to make their most recent claim) are satisfied with this experience. In contrast, just three in five (60%) of those who contacted their local authority benefits office by telephone (to make their most recent claim) are satisfied with the overall service.

■ Overall, claimants are most positive about:

- i. Most agree that the local authority benefits office is easy to get to (83% agree)
- ii. Friendly staff (82% agree)
- iii. Staff treatment of claimants with respect (82% agree)
- iv. The way staff explain things so that claimants understand (77% agree)
- v. Just a quarter (23%) felt unable to ask the questions they wanted to
- vi. And claimants are over three times more likely to disagree than agree that staff were in a rush (66% disagree and 21% agree)

■ But, claimants are most negative about:

- i. 46% are not always confident that what staff say is correct
- ii. 52% were not given the name of a person at the local authority benefits office to contact about their most recent claim
- iii. Length of time taken waiting around in office to be seen (those who visited their benefits office) and being transferred between several different people (those who phoned their benefits office)

Key BVPIs - how things have changed in three years

Improvement

- BV80c: Satisfaction with telephone service (+13 points)
- BV80b: Experience of visiting the benefits office (+12 points)
- BV80d: Satisfaction with service provided by staff (+7 points)

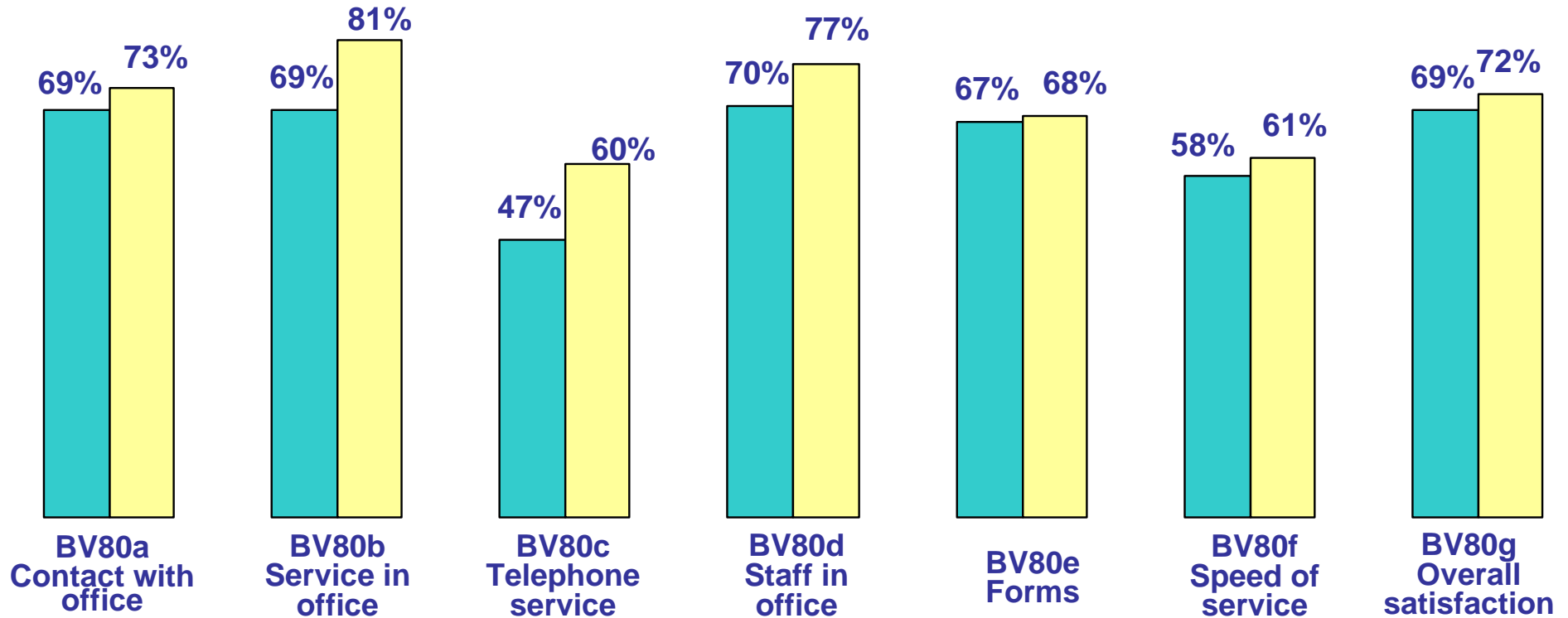
About the same

- BV80a: Satisfaction with the ways one can contact the local authority benefits office (+4 points)
- BV80g: Overall satisfaction with the benefits service (+3 points)
- BV80f: Satisfaction with time taken to tell in claim successful or not (+3 points)
- BV80e: Satisfaction with the housing/council tax claim form (+1 point)

BV Scores: 2006 compared with 2003

Brent Council between 2003 and 2006

2003 2006



Statistical reliability

- This table shows the possible variation that might be anticipated because a sample, rather than all eligible planning applicants, completed and returned a questionnaire. As indicated, sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample and the size of the percentage results. Strictly speaking, these sampling tolerances apply to only random probability sample only, and thus these should be treated as broadly indicative.
- For example, on a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 626 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary by more than 4 percentage points, plus or minus, from a complete coverage of all claimants using the same procedures.
- However, it should be noted that these margins of error apply only to representative samples.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at one or near these levels			
<i>Size of sample on which survey results is based</i>			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
100 interviews	6	9	10
200 interviews	4	6	7
300 interviews	3	5	6
500 interviews	3	4	4
626 interviews	2	4	4
1,000 interviews	2	3	3